



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Published Bimonthly by The Topeka TCF Chapter

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www.tcftopeka.org

July ~ August 2017
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JULY MEETING

Monday, July 24, 2017

Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

What's in a Name? - This meeting will offer each of us an opportunity to talk about our child, grandchild or siblings' name. Why was that name chosen? Does it have any particular connection with your family heritage? Were they named after a family member? Did they have a nickname? How do you feel their name may have reflected their personality? Do you have a special story about their name--how it came to be chosen, how they liked or didn't like the choice, etc. Please plan to share and enjoy the opportunity to say your loved one's name. **Please Note: Because the MPH Parish Center will be closed for maintenance during our July meeting time, we will be meeting in the St. Vincent Center south of the Parish Center and School building. Follow the signs to the entrance on the north side of the building. We will be meeting downstairs in the basement area.**

AUGUST MEETING

Monday, August 28, 2017

Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

What Do I Do With My Child's Things - Preserving Memories - Regardless of the age of the child, there are always "things" - possessions - that must be dealt with following the death. This process is different for those having lost an infant, a child who still lived at home, or an adult child who was on their own. We will discuss why this process can be difficult as well as painful in deciding what to do with possessions; why it is important not to let others pressure you into dealing with this task until you are ready; and how saving certain types of items may help you in preserving memories. We will also talk about safe ways to preserve clothing items, photos, digital media, etc.

Meetings are always held on the fourth Monday of each month unless otherwise noted. Listen to radio & TV for cancellations due to severe weather conditions.

This newsletter is sponsored by:



Brenda and the late Frank Bissey in loving memory of their daughter Robin Lyn Paulson and son-in-law Greg Lee Paulson who both died on August 27th

Penny Lumpkin in loving memory of her son William H. (Hank) Lumpkin who died on August 19th

Ralph and Judy Lundin in loving memory of their daughter Amy Lundin who died July 28th

Mark and Linda Marling in loving memory of their granddaughter Morgan Marie Pollak who was born on August 14th and died on August 27th

Tom and Barbara Rush in loving memory of their daughter Kathryn "Katie" Rush who was born on July 6th



The Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. The purposes are to promote and aid parents in the positive resolution of the grief experience following the death of a child of any age, from any cause; and to foster the physical and emotional health of all bereaved parents, grandparents and surviving siblings.

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We Need Not Walk Alone



MARK YOUR CALENDARS !

24th Annual Memorial Picnic & Dove Release
Saturday, September 23, 2017
Shelter House #6 at Lake Shawnee



**See Yellow RSVP Form in
this month's Newsletter!**

From the Newsletter Editor

Dear Compassionate Friends Family,

We are full-on into summer now and some of you may be taking your first vacation since the death of your child, grandchild or sibling. This can be a stressful situation for you and your family. You know you need to get away and have some down time as you grapple with your grief journey, but it may be difficult to 1) Be away from home, 2) Be with out-of-town relatives who might just ignore the fact of the loss or spend the entire time hovering over you, or 3) Be in a place you had always planned to go with your deceased loved one. But it is important to remember that you need to allow yourself time to let down and relax, spend time with your spouse and/or surviving children and just have time to feel. You may find that a trip to a new setting may give you some relief from the stress of being around familiar things and people all the time. It is important to remember to take good care of your physical needs, including eating right and staying hydrated, and trying to get adequate rest (don't underestimate the power of a good nap). Please do try to pace yourself so that you may hopefully enjoy some of the sites and scenery along the way. Understand that it will not be the same vacation you may have been planning, but it will hopefully offer you some respite in your first summer of grief.

I am pleased to let you know that our Chapter has received a \$250.00 donation from OneGas Foundation in recognition of the volunteer hours put in by my co-Chapter Leader Damon Tucker. We are very grateful for their support. Does the company you work for have a matching funds program? You can find out through your human resources department. Such matching funds can double the value of a donation you make to TCF in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling. The process is usually pretty simple involving turning in some forms to the company, so check it out at your workplace.

I am pleased to announce that the Topeka TCF Chapter will be hosting its 24th Annual Memorial Picnic and Dove Release on Saturday, September 23, 2017 at Shelter House # 6 at Lake Shawnee. There is a yellow RSVP form included with this newsletter that you are encouraged to fill out and return by the indicated date. The form also offers you an opportunity to sponsor a dove in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling. The event will include a potluck luncheon, a memorial program with music/poems/readings, and the release of doves in loving memory of all those who "left too soon". We hope that you can join us!

Please take note of the items listed under Upcoming Events on the following page. Of special interest to those of you with younger surviving children is the Grief Camp for Kids and the Teen Retreat early next year. They are also seeking volunteers to help at the camp. If you are not attending the TCF National Conference in Orlando, FL this summer, you might think about the 2018 National Conference that will be held in Saint Louis which is a much closer and less costly destination. I will include more information on the 2018 Conference as it becomes available.

We invite you to join us at a monthly support group meeting. We always have interesting topics related to grief to talk about, provide an opportunity to share your thoughts and feelings in a safe, non judgemental setting, and a chance to talk about your child, grandchild or sibling. There is really nothing quite like being in a room with people who truly do understand what this type of loss can mean and how it can affect our lives in so many different ways. This group offers support and hope and we welcome you to join us. There is never any obligation to speak or participate in the discussion if you don't care to do so. But much can be learned by listening to others who are walking this path. There are never any dues or required fees to participate.

Until next time, be gentle with yourself and let the healing happen. Remember, You Need Not Walk Alone

~ Susan Chan, Rachael's Mom

With Apologies...The following names were inadvertently left off the May/June We Remember Listing:

Janet Pace, daughter of Barbara Hale, sister of Carla Gilbert and Sara Wallo, and mother of Shauna Andersen died on June 10th

Aurora Mae Philippi, daughter of Chris and Triste Philippi, born and died June 17th

Kasey Pike, grandson of Grace Reichle, who was born on July 3rd

Sarah N. Rice, daughter of Gary and Peggy Rice, who was born on July 19th

Kathryn (Katie) Rush, daughter of Thomas and Barbara Rush, born on July 6th

Alexis "Lexie" Diane Salmon, granddaughter of Candy Morgan and Robin Heuer, who was born on July 11th and died on June 5th

Rachel Diana Sowers, daughter of Bill and Diana Sowers, born on July 30th

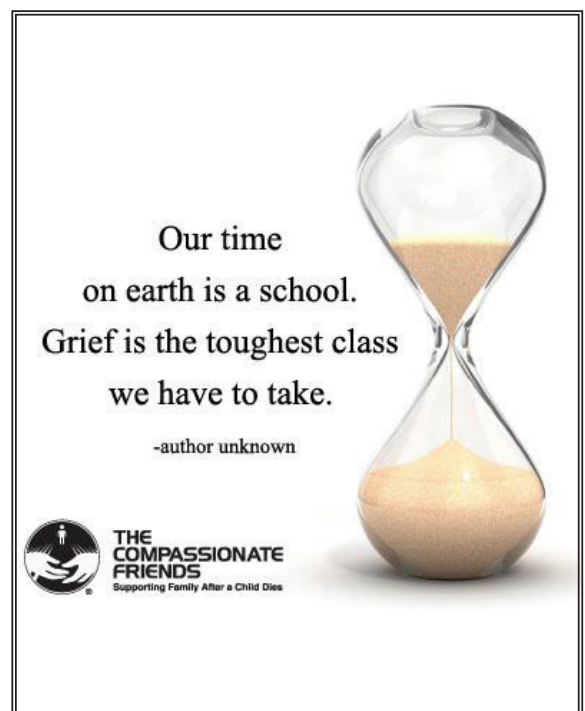
Tony Stewart, son of Barbara Stewart, who died on July 2nd

Donald (Donnie) Warren, son of Nancy McCune, who died on June 28th

Michael Scott Watson, son of Warren and Beth Watson, who was born on June 4th

Eric Edward Gordon Wiebler, son of David and Laura Wiebler, died on July 12th

Tony Willey, son of Diana Willey, who was born on July 3rd



Love Gifts

**Your Love Gifts Help Spread
the Message of Hope & Healing ~ Won't You Help Today?**

What is a Love Gift? A Love Gift is a gift of money (or books, etc.) to The Compassionate Friends. It is usually in memory of a child, grandchild or sibling who has died, but it may be from individuals who wish to honor a relative or friend who has died, a gift of thanks that their children are alive, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help. The Compassionate Friends charges *no individual dues* or fees and depends on such Love Gifts to meet the Chapter's expenses, including the printing and mailing of this newsletter. **When you make a donation, make sure to check to see if your employer may have a "matching gifts" program** as this could double the amount of your donation. If you are not sure whether your company has such a program, check with your Personnel Department.

♥ *Mary Harrington and John Jones in loving memory of Juliet Faith Harrington who was born on September 2nd and died on August 25th; and Clara Harrington-Jones who was born and died on August 26th*

Your gifts enable us to print this newsletter and reach out to newly bereaved families. Donations are our only source of income and are **tax deductible**. If you would like to sponsor a newsletter, the cost is \$30.00. If we have more than one sponsor, we recognize all of them. If you wish to send a Love Gift, any amount is appreciated. It is whatever you feel you can give. Donations of books that you have found helpful to the Topeka Chapter Library are also greatly appreciated, and it is a nice way to remember your child or other loved one. If you would like to send a Love Gift or a Newsletter Sponsorship, you may do so by sending it to: The Compassionate Friends, c/o Susan Chan, 3448 SW Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. For Newsletter Sponsorships, please indicate which issue you wish to sponsor (Jan/Feb, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, or November/December). Makes checks payable to "TCF".

Upcoming Events/Dates to Remember

July 28-30, 2017 - The 40th National Compassionate Friends Conference will be held in Orlando, FL. Will include over 100 workshops, keynote speakers, Memorial Candle Lighting Ceremony and the 2017 Walk to Remember. For further information, go to the National TCF website at www.compassionatefriends.org

August 25-27, 2017 - The Compassionate Friends of Canada will hold their National Gathering in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Theme for this conference is "Sharing Hope". For further info see tcfcanda.net/event

September 23, 2017 - Topeka TCF Chapter's 24th Annual Memorial Picnic and Dove Release at Shelter House #6 at Lake Shawnee. Look for the yellow RSVP Form in this newsletter which also offers you the opportunity to sponsor a dove in memory of your loved one.

September 30 - Oct. 1, 2017 - Grief Camp for Kids (6-12) sponsored by the Center for Hope and Healing of Midland Hospice Care. To be held at campsite near Harveyville. For further info contact Suz McIver at 785-221-7359.

October 20-12, 2017 - Regional TCF Conference in Nashville, TN. Theme is "Memories of Love/Melodies of Hope in Music City". Registration is \$75 and includes Friday dinner/Candle Lighting, Saturday Continental breakfast and lunch. For further info see TCF National Website under "Events" at www.compassionatefriends.org

January 19 & 20, 2018 - Teen Grief Retreat (ages 12-18) also sponsored by the Center for Hope and Healing. For further info, contact Suz McIver at 785-221-7359.

TCF National Office e-mail:

nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Compassionate Friends web address:

www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter web and e-mail addresses:

www.tcftopeka.org tcftopeka@gmail.com

Kansas Regional Coordinator:

Marty & Renda Weaver - (785) 823-7191
mweaver@cox.net

A Word on our Photo Wall - I also wanted to remind you that we maintain a photo gallery of our beloved children, grandchild and siblings that is displayed at every meeting. If you would like your loved one represented, send in a 4 x 6 inch photo (vertical or horizontal presentation) along with their full name, their birth and death dates and your name. You can send these to me at my address on the front page of the newsletter. You may also request that your child's photo become a part of our annual Photo Tribute video that is shared at the December Memorial Candle Lighting Program.

Our Thanks to: Midland Care Connection for giving us a mailbox and Most Pure Heart of Mary Church for allowing us to meet at their facility. A special Thank You to ProPrint for helping to underwrite the printing cost of this newsletter.

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And We Remember.....

*Because of the potential for the hurtful crime of identity theft, TCF Chapter Newsletters will now only publish the date of a child's birth or death without listing the year of each event. This is a directive from the National TCF Office to protect all TCF members. **Due to space constraints, only those families who remain current on our newsletter mailing list will be included in the We Remember section***

Diane Joy Bandstra, daughter of Bert Eugene Bandstra, died on July 28th

Jon Bieher, brother of Andrea Smith, born on August 5th

Terry Edward Burns, son of Kenneth and Eleanor Burns, and brother of Kathy Kaesewurm, born on September 17th

Aaron M. Campbell, son of Marilyn Campbell, who was born on September 6th



Rebecca Lynne Smith Crismas, daughter of BobbyJean Smith, who was born on August 13th

Wendi Sue Cushing, daughter of Scott and Denise Cushing; sister of Deana and Dylan Cushing, died on August 9th

Jeffrey Darrell Darting, son of Gerry and Judy Darting and brother of Sara Escobar and Jenny Darting, died on August 29th

Gerald (Jerry) Eberhardt, son of Duane and Mary Eberhardt, who was born on September 1st

Amber Fleeer, daughter of Darla Hughes and Terry Fleeer, who was born on September 21st



Jeremy Scott Goehl, son of Danny and Kim Goehl; brother of Jason Goehl, who was born on August 29th

Tyler Grame, son of Amanda Grame and brother of Brendan and Jacob Grame, who was born on August 9th and died on August 18th

Juliet Faith Harrington, daughter of Mary Harrington, born on September 2nd; died on August 25th

Clara Harrington Jones, daughter of Mary Harrington and John Jones, born and died on August 26th

Jonathan Kaspar, son of Jeffrey and Susan Kaspar; sister of Jen Kaspar, who was born on September 17th

Michael "Mike" Dean Kidney, son of Forrest and Susan Kidney, born on September 14th

Joel Andrew Knight, son of Jim and Gloria Knight, died on August 23rd

William Henry "Hank" Lumpkin, son of Joe and Penny Lumpkin, who died on August 19th

Nicholas Artck McCarthy, son of Sabrina Cruz, who died on August 19th

Belinda Meier, daughter of Maggie Walshire, who was born on September 14th

Sharis Thompson Meyer, daughter of Gary and Margaret Thompson, who was born on September 15th; died on August 25th

Morgan Myers, daughter of Alta and Rocky Myers, who was born on August 20th



Robin Lynn Paulson, daughter of Frank and Brenda Bissey and sister of Brad Bissey, and Greg Lee Paulson, son-in-law of Frank and Brenda Bissey and brother-in-law of Brad Bissey, both died on August 27th

Krystil M. Pearson, daughter of Patti Cox and sister of Kendall Pressler, who died on September 24th

Kasey Pike, grandson of Grace Reichle, who died on August 7th

Morgan Marie Pollak, daughter of David and Shelley Pollak; granddaughter of Mark and Linda Marling, born on August 14th and died on August 27th

Abbey Rubottom, daughter of Darcey Evans, who died on September 15th

Gregg W. Scott, son of Garry and Jo Scott, born on September 11th

Cory Sprecker, brother of Chelsea Sprecker, who died on September 26th

Keith Strathman, son of Don and Julie Strathman, brother of Becky Strathman, born on September 10th

Brandon Toler, son of Marty Tyson, who was born on August 18th

Dawn Lee Wilson, daughter of Don J. and Dixie Lee Wilson, born on September 19th



(Use the form below to submit your listing if you have not already done so. Once you have submitted your listing you **do not** have to do so every year as long as you remain active on our mailing list. Your child's name and dates will remain on the We Remember database unless you request their removal or choose to discontinue receiving this newsletter. This month's listing includes birth and death anniversary dates for August and September.

And We Remember - If you wish your child, grandchild or sibling included in the We Remember section of this newsletter, please fill out the form below and return to: Susan Chan, 3448 S.W. Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may also email the information to chanx2@cox.net< We do not automatically list your information just because you are receiving this newsletter. We only list information for those parents requesting it. If you have previously submitted your child's information and it has appeared in the newsletter during the past year, you **do not** need to resubmit it. If you have just begun receiving this newsletter, or have never submitted this information, you will need to do so in order for it to be included. **Please type or print clearly.**

Child's Name _____ Son _____ Daughter _____ Grandchild _____ Brother _____ Sister _____

Date of Birth _____ Date of Death _____

Father _____ Mother _____

Note: Please list your address and phone number. You will only be contacted if there is a question about your listing.

Is this a change of address for you? (please circle) YES NO

Helping Others Help You - Ten Rules for Self-Healing

1. Tell friends to call you often. Explain that after the first couple of months you'll need their calls.
2. Tell your friends to make a specific date with you; none of this "we must get together for lunch". Remind them that you're bound to have "down" times and their patience would be appreciated.
3. Tell them to please feel free to talk about the person that has died — and don't avoid that person's name.
4. It's important for friends to understand that you may appear to be "doing so well" but on the inside you still hurt. Grief is painful, it's tricky and it's exhausting.
5. Ask your friends to care but not to pity you.
6. Make plain that friends and relatives can still treat you as a person who is still in command and can think for yourself.
7. Tell your friends that it's all right to express their caring. It's OK for them to cry; crying together is better than avoiding the pain.
8. Let your friends know too, that it's all right to say nothing. A squeeze or a hug are often more important than words.
9. Let people know that they can invite you to socialize, but that you might decline.
10. Ask your friends to go for walks with you. You and your friends can "walk off" feelings. Walks promote conversation and help fight depression.

~ Ruth Jean Loewinsohn

MY CHILD DID EXIST

I've lost a child, I hear myself say,
And the person I'm talking to just turns away.
Now why did I tell them, I don't understand.
It wasn't for sympathy or to get a helping hand.
I just want them to know I've lost something dear,
I want them to know my child was here.
My child left something behind which no one can see,
So, if I've upset you, I'm sorry as can be.
You'll have to forgive me, I could not resist.
I just want you to know that my child did exist.

Reflections of a Father and the Impact of TCF on His Grief Journey

We live in a quick-fix society. Books and talk shows promote neatly set out steps to achieve goals from losing weight to quitting smoking. These programs often have time frames a person moves through with expected levels of achievement and rewards. In a land where winning is everything the winner's crown goes to those who work through their problems in a cool, calculating manner and walk away from tragedy with a smile and a victory lap around the track.

My daughter, Rachel, died over seven years ago and yet once a month Diana and I still attend a Compassionate Friends meeting. We sit on our chapter board, run the chapter library and this past summer attended our first national TCF convention.

People who don't know us might see us as "stuck." They'd wonder why we haven't worked through our grief and moved on. People who do know us probably scratch their heads as well because, as far as they're concerned, we "have" moved on. We enjoy life, belong to other organizations, see friends and participate in the world around us. We are not that shell-shocked couple who groped through each day trying to find some meaning to life any more.

Why go to TCF?

Years later I show up at TCF meetings because I still need that touchstone. I need to remember why every now and then I still get knocked down by a song on the radio, a little girl riding by on her bike or the wind blowing through a Kansas field. I need to say her name aloud in front of others. I need to tell them that I loved her and I need to tell them that she died ... and in doing so remind myself that she lived and touched me in ways that still reverberate through my life. I was changed and am still changing because Rachel Sowers lived and once a month I announce this to the world, almost a ritualistic "Holy Communion" with that person who changed me and those around me who understand that connection.

I also attend these meetings because I know that my presence is a help to others, especially the newly bereaved. I first came to TCF so utterly wounded and angry. One of my earliest memories was listening to a smiling face telling me that I would never "get over it" but would eventually find some peace and yes, even joy. As much as I resented hearing this at the time I have come to appreciate that face and am glad that person was there to listen to me and let me cry.

The world cannot understand why I still show up at these meetings because a grief journey does not fit into a time frame of months or even years. It is a lifetime of tears, laughter, good and bad memories and hands held out to support others on a similar journey. It is where I say her name aloud and know that she lived and I am changed because of her. For me, it ain't over 'til it's over.

~ Bill Sowers dad to Rachel 1992-2000
Topeka TCF Chapter, Topeka, KS

A Special and Important Message to Our New Compassionate Friends

If you are newly bereaved and have recently attended your first Compassionate Friends meeting, you may have left the meeting feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared at meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return. We would like to let you know that these feelings are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least **three** tries before you decide whether or not the meetings are for you. You will find a network of caring and support which will help you as you travel your grief journey, and most assuredly, you will find hope along the way. We truly care about you and want to make certain that no bereaved parent ever needs to walk this path alone.

---Topeka TCF Chapter Steering Committee

Additional Support Group Resources

HEALs - Healing after loss of suicide offers support to all survivors affected by the loss of a loved one to suicide. Meetings are at 7 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month. Pozez Center (north side of Stormont Vail). Contact Information: Sandy Reams 785-249-3792 or email sreams67@gmail.com

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Group - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month from 6-8 p.m. at the Pozez Education Center. The group, which has regular meetings to share information and experiences, also has a blog for members that offers communication, resources and support. If you are interested in learning more about the blog, please email lrosen@stormontvail.org. For information call (785) 354-5225.

From Victims to Survivors - Support group for families who have had a loved one murdered. The group meets the fourth or last Wednesday of each month at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 4775 S.W. 21st. For more information, call Bill Lucero at 232-5958 or see <http://fromvictimstosurvivors.com>.

FREE online subscription of TCF's national magazine, *We Need Not Walk Alone*, now available

The Compassionate Friends national magazine *We Need Not Walk Alone* is now available free through an online subscription. TCF is also archiving past editions at TCF National Magazine and Archive. Those who do not wish to subscribe can view the magazine in the archive once the next issue has been published. Past issues of *We Need Not Walk Alone*, starting with Winter/Spring 2011-2012, are available in the archive. On the home page (www.compassionatefriends.org), click on Find Support, then Online Community, then Sign Up for National Publications. You can also sign up for the TCF E-Newsletter at this site to keep up with all that is happening in the organization.

TCF Mission Statement: When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.



Find us on:
facebook®

TCF National Page (open group)

<https://www.facebook.com/TCFUSA/>

Los Amigos Compasivos/USA

<https://www.facebook.com/LACUSA/>

TCF Private Facebook Groups

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/private-facebook-groups/>

Loss of a Child

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/407123299460580/>

Sounds of the Siblings (bereaved siblings only)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/21358475781/>

Loss of a Grandchild

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/421759177998317/>

New College Age Support Resource

There is a new nonprofit organization called **Actively Moving Forward** dedicated to supporting your adults grieving the illness or death of a loved one. The organization accomplishes its mission by creating **Actively Moving Forward Campus Chapters** on college campuses nationwide that connect and empower grieving college students to support one another and participate in community service in memory of their deceased loved ones, raising awareness about the needs of grieving young adults. You can check it out at www.activelymovingforward.org<

Another online resource for grieving siblings is called "Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins" where teenagers can share their stories, illustrations, help items and other information through this online journal. You can check it out at <http://fireinmyheartjournal.com/> This site is under the auspices of Centering Corporation of Omaha, NE. There is also a **Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins Facebook page**.

TCF Suicide Survivors Facebook Page

Compassionate Friends has a new Facebook page: **TCF - Loss to Suicide**. This page is open to parents, grandparents and siblings who have lost loved ones to suicide. There is no good way to lose a loved one; different causes create specific pain that can be eased sharing with another experiencing a similar loss. Co-moderators, Cathy Seehuetter and Donna Adams welcome you to this special closed page. To join you may go to http://www.compassionatefriends.org/Online_Support/survivors_of_suicide.aspx

What I Learned About Losing a Step-Child

By Keli-Ann Pye-Beshara

The title of this article by Paula Stephens "What I Wish More People Understood About Losing a Child" quickly caught my attention on my friend, Lisa Payne's Facebook page the other day. With the article, Lisa posted "I haven't lost a child. I know people who have...While I felt the article was well-written and insightful, I do not know if it accurately depicts the feelings of those who have suffered this type of loss..."

Unfortunately, I know this type of loss...from a different angle. The perspective I am about to share with you is from a unique position – the step-parent.

My tendency is to begin with "My husband, Besh, lost his son in 2012 due to a motorbike accident" but what I'd really like to say, for the purpose of this article, is "I lost my 30-year-old step-son, Carl Beshara, in 2012."

Since that awful day in September I have been on the wildest roller coaster ride of my life. I know I will never be able to completely get over the shock and Besh will never be the same again. The "new normal" as they call it...and that's the closest description there is.

I wasn't fond of the term "step-parent" from the minute I married into my two "kids", Carl (21) and Tiffany (17) – flashbacks to Disney movies with evil step-mothers or something. I had always said I wanted kids who were already born, could take care of themselves and we could hang around, have a drink and a laugh. And that's exactly what I got. These kids were already cool independent people who didn't need a step-mother and I wasn't looking to be a mother either so it was a perfect match!

So for almost 10 years, these two kids became a big part of my life equation without me even realizing what had developed along the way.

Then when we got the call late one Saturday night on Labor Day weekend, I automatically and instinctively went into support mode for Besh and Tiffany. I just needed to make sure they were okay. That was all I could concentrate on and that was my sole purpose through all this. It helped me survive the shock, I realize now.

As I said to Lisa on Facebook "The hardest part is to just be with someone while they're falling apart without trying to make them better."

I hadn't noticed that in this process I had put my own feelings of loss on the back burner. This was the 'for better or for worse' situation at its finest. I needed to be strong. How could I be a wreck on a day where Besh was feeling good? I just couldn't do it to him...or me. Those happy moments are so precious after a life shock that we have to let them happen as long as they can...before reality and sadness hits again.

That being said, I still had/have my moments of tears and Besh has said many times, "It's okay for you to be sad too." And I know it's true but it's still difficult sometimes. I have cried and do cry, but it would usually be while I was talking

about Besh and Tiffany's loss. Their loss makes me the saddest – even more than my own.

The awareness of my unique position came to me awhile after Carl passed away when my longtime friend, Carolyn, asked me one day how Besh was doing and out of my mouth fired "What about how I'm doing?" I shocked myself! Her eyes filled up with tears because she realized she hadn't even asked about me all this time. We both cried and I talked about how hard it is to juggle all these things at once – being strong, holding the space, hoping with all my heart that Besh is going to survive this and practically praying for Tiffany to find her happiness and live a good life...and experiencing my personal loss.

Sometimes I felt guilty talking about my grief even when the time was right. I thought 'How can you talk about your pain when it wasn't even your son?' It was a self-imposed comparative dialogue in my head that I just couldn't shake.

Two and a half years later, having done a lot of inner work and accepting that Besh and Tiffany are okay and they will survive, I'm finding I can feel and talk about my own pain a little more, with less guilt and hesitation. I believe that if they can survive this then I certainly can too.

What I have also learned through this process is that the grief of a step-parent is under-acknowledged and has to wait its turn sometimes. It's just the way it is and it makes sense.

So my advice for those of you who know a step-parent who has lost one of their kids – from time to time, ask them how they are doing and just let them cry and spill when they break down in front of you. Stay with them knowing there is nothing you can do to make them feel better but just asking them how they are doing acknowledges their loss too. And that helps to mend the wound.

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A life is like a song we write
In our own tone and key,
Each life we touch reflects a note
That forms the melody.
We choose the theme and chorus
Of the song to bear our name,
And each will have a special sound
No two can be the same.
So when someone we love departs,
In memory we find
Their song plays on within the hearts
Of those they leave behind.



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter, c/o Midland Hospice Care., Inc.
200 S.W. Frazier Circle, Topeka, KS 66606-2800

**A self-help organization offering friendship and
understanding to bereaved parents and siblings.**

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We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.
We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us.
Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances.
We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships.
We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief,
but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers.
Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace.
But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share,
just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together.
We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace,
share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.