



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Published Quarterly by The Topeka TCF Chapter

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NEWSLETTER - Volume 8, Issue 3
The Compassionate Friends, Inc.
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National TCF Website:
www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter Website:
www.tcf.topeka.org

July ~ August ~ Sept ~ 2023
Editor: Susan Chan
3448 S.W. Mission Ave.
Topeka, KS 66614-3629

JULY MEETING

Monday, July 24, 2023
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS
7 - 8:30 p.m.

*Note Location Change
for July Meeting!*

“Know Me, Know My Child” - This is an opportunity for all Chapter members to talk about their children. All are encouraged to bring a picture, poem, song, favorite toy, piece of clothing, etc. and share it with the group as they talk about their beloved child. We feel it is important to not only know me, but to know who my child was, that my child lived and made an impact and a difference. While tears may flow at this program, it offers bereaved parents a chance to do what they need most--remember and talk about their child in an atmosphere of caring and acceptance. **PLEASE NOTE:** For the July meeting, we will be meeting in a different location at Most Pure Heart. We will be meeting in the basement of the church office building which is south across the parking lot from our regular building. Please follow signs that will be posted directing you to the location.

AUGUST MEETING

Monday, August 28, 2023
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS
7 - 8:30 p.m.

“Fear and the Grief Journey” - Many parents find that how they view things and how they react (or don't react) to various situations may change following the death of their child. One thing often expressed is our sense of fear. How has this loss affected your sense of fear? What do you fear now and what do you no longer fear? Are we more realistic now about what we fear or has this loss intensified our sense of fear? This meeting will offer us the opportunity to talk about fear and how it may impact our grief journey.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

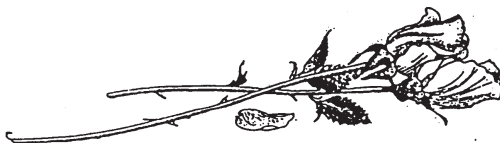
Monday, September 25, 2023
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS
7 - 8:30 p.m.

“Men to the Right, Women to the Left” - It is a well known supposition that the grieving styles of men and women can be very different. Sometimes this can cause conflict in a relationship following the death of a child. The group will meet together for preliminary announcements and introductions, and then will divide by sex to discuss topics that are gender-specific. This meeting is an opportunity to be open about your feelings and concern in not only dealing with your own grief, but also in trying to be more tolerant and supportive of the ways others in your circle may be handling their grief.

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. Always check the Topeka TCF Chapter website (www.tcf.topeka.org) under “Meetings” for latest information.

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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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.

We Need Not Walk Alone

We Would Like to Thank the Following for Sponsoring this Edition of the Newsletter

*Don & Susan Arnold in loving memory of
their son Matthew W. Arnold
who was born on July 28th*

*Penny Lumpkin in loving memory of
her son William Henry "Hank" Lumpkin
who died on August 19th*

*Mark & Linda Marling in loving memory of
their granddaughter Morgan Pollok
who was born on August 14th and died on August 25th*

*Mark & Lori Neddermeyer in loving memory of
his son Braden Neddermeyer
who died on August 18th*

*Tom & Barbara Rush in loving memory of
their daughter Kathryn (Katie) Rush
who was born on July 6th*

Please Note:

If you wish to sponsor the
next newsletter
(Oct ~ Nov ~ Dec 2023)
we must receive your information
and \$30.00 check by
September 1, 2023.
Make checks payable to:
Topeka TCF Chapter



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 6:30-8:00 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month. Pozez Center (north side of Stormont Vail). Contact Information: email TopekaHeals@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 irosen@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>.

ATTENTION!

In order to cut down on the printing and mailing costs for this newsletter, the Steering Committee encourages you to choose to receive the newsletters in PDF via your email address. If interested, please send your name and preferred email address to: Susan Chan, 3448 S.W. Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614. Your email will only be used to send the newsletter or any TCF meeting/special event notifications. You can also access past and current issues of the newsletter on our Topeka Chapter website www.tcftopeks.org

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. This month we thank the following:



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/November/December). Makes checks payable to "TCF".



Dillions Community Rewards Program Helps Fund Chapter Expenses - A REMINDER - Have you signed up for the Dillions Community Rewards Program yet? If not, we encourage you to do so as it really helps to bring income into our Chapter to help meet expenses. The more participants we have, the more income we can generate. I encourage you to go to www.dillions.com/community rewards and click on "Register" at the top of the page. When you enroll you will be asked to designate which charity your wish to support. **The Topeka Compassionate Friends Chapter NPO number is TC248.** Once you have done so and have a Dillions Shopper's Card, every time you make a purchase at Dillions a portion of your total will be donated to the Topeka TCF Chapter. Participating in this program **costs you nothing** and **does not affect your fuel points** for gasoline purchases. If you need assistance in setting up your account, call toll-free at 1-800-576-4377 and select Option 3.

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 a portion of the printing cost of this newsletter.

New Phone Contact #
As of 1 January, 2022, the new phone contact number for the Topeka Chapter of The Compassionate Friends is:
1-785-817-1748

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

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4931 WEST 6TH ST., STE 104
LAWRENCE, KS 66049
785.842.3610

1033 SW GAGE BLVD, STE 200
TOPEKA, KS 66604
785.272.0070

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 the event. This is a directive from TCF National to protect all TCF members. Due to space constraints, only those families who remain current on our newsletter mailing database will be included in the We Remember section.

JULY ~

Erik Acheson, son of Gayle Graham, who died on July 29th

Matthew Wayne Arnold, son of Don and Susan Arnold, who was born on July 28th

Wendy J. Ash-Long, daughter of Ron and Jan Ash, who was born on July 13th

Diane Joy Bandstra, daughter of Bert and Elaine Bandstra, who died on July 28th

Matthew Brown, son of Joe and Heather Brown, who was born on July 2nd and died on July 1st

Amber Fleer, daughter of Darla Hughes and Terry Fleer, who died on July 7th

Andrew Garrett Lindeen, grandson of Mary J. Lindeen, died on July 29th

Christen (Chris) Edward Locke, son of Alfonzo E. Locke Jr. and Sheila D. Locke, who died on July 5th

Amy Lundin, daughter of Ralph and Judy Lundin, who died on July 28th

Nicolle Mowry, daughter of Annette Mowry, who died on July 22nd

Clay Meyer, son of Jim and Linda Meyer, who was born on July 26th

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

Pamela Jaye (Luthye) Rodriguez, daughter of the late Dale Luthye and Elma Luthye, who was born on July 28th

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

Amy Elliott Smith, daughter of Dick and Janie Elliott, who died on July 6th

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

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

AUGUST ~

Wendy J. Ash-Long, daughter of Ron and Jan Ash, who died on August 5th

Kevin Lee Cronister, son of Richard and Judy Cronister, who was born on August 8th

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

Kimberly Melissa Dickinson, daughter of Curtis and Debbi Dickinson, stillborn on August 25th

Caleb Zachary Engell, son of Joe & Melody Engell, who was born on August 6th and died on August 15th

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

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

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

Sharis Thompson Meyer, daughter of Gary and Margaret Thompson, who died on August 25th

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

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

Nathaniel "Nate" Self, son of Mike and Valerie Self, who died on August 10th

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

Killian Vincent, son of Levi and Alyssa Vincent, who was born on August 15th

SEPTEMBER ~

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

Christian K. Charay, son of Alfred Charay and Laurie Charay who was born on September 30th

Ashley Brooke Dickinson, daughter of Curtis and Debbi Dickinson, stillborn on September 3rd

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

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

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

Spencer Mark Hastings, son of Steve and Sue Hastings, died on September 28th

Kyle Horn, grandson of Julie Diaz, who was born on September 23rd

Tara Kelly, daughter of Carrie Kelly, who was born on September 20th

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

Mark McCullough, son of Bonnie Bennett, who died on September 5th

Sharis Thompson Meyer, daughter of Gary and Margaret Thompson, born on September 15th

Nicolle Mowry, daughter of Annette Mowry, who was born on September 22nd

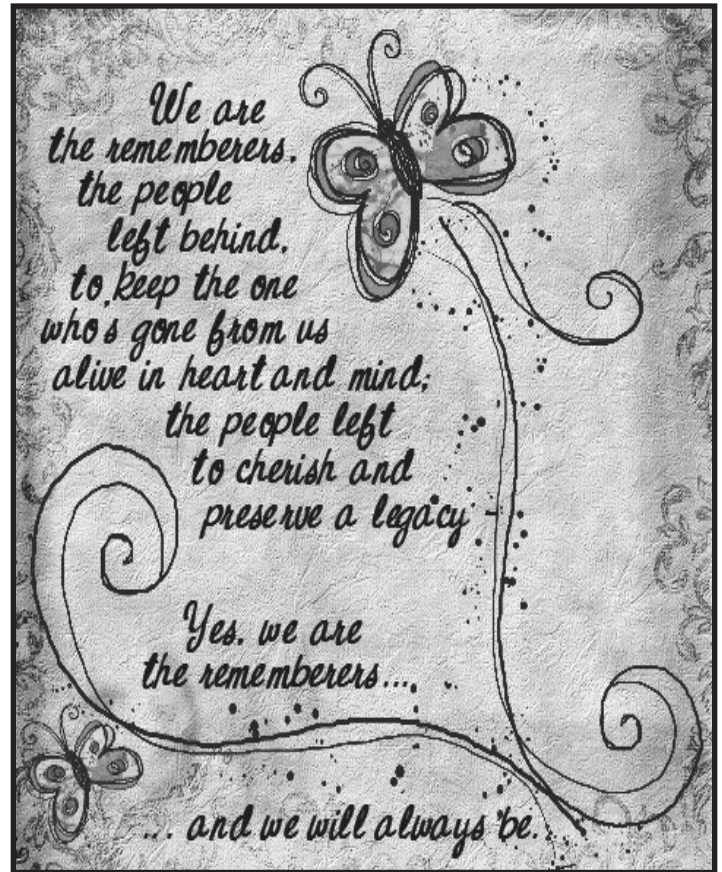
Gregg W. Scott, son of Garry and Jo Scott, born on September 11th

Amy Elliott Smith, daughter of Dick and Janie Elliott, who was born on September 18th

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

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.)*

And We Remember - If you wish your child, grandchild or sibling included in this section, please fill out the form below and return to: Susan Chan, 3448 S.W. Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may also email to chanx2@cox.net < We do not automatically list your information just because you are receiving this newsletter. We only list information for those requesting it. **Please type or print clearly.**

Child's Name _____

Son ___ Daughter ___ Grandson ___ Grandaughter ___ Brother ___ Sister ___

Date of Birth _____

Date of Death _____

Father _____

Mother _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Note: Please list address and phone #. 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

Closure Isn't a Thing in Grief and That's Okay

By Eleanor Haley, whatsyourgrief.com

Hello, grief friends, new friends, old friends, friends of friends, you know... all the friend categories. Today we have a quick post aimed at dispelling one of the most exasperating myths in grief.

There are a handful of reasons why people expect closure in grief. For much of our history, grief theory models have given people the impression that grief follows a set of stages or tasks. So, many people think grief is a finite process with a beginning and an end.

For example, if you were to poll random people on the street and ask them what they know about grief, I bet things like denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance would be at the top of the list. This is because most of our society has heard of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' 'Five Stages of Grief' and believed it to be a literal description.

People think that completing a set of stages or tasks, or just letting time pass in general, will lead to closure in grief. However, this is a misconception, and I'm sorry to say, this isn't how grief works... at all.

Another reason why some seek closure in grief is the belief that grief is synonymous only with things that are distressing, painful, and bad. Experiencing the death of a loved one is a nightmare. So when I say "Grief never ends," many people hear that as "The nightmare never ends," which seems unfathomable.

Like most living organisms, we are pain averse. The idea of living with ongoing pain without eventually finding relief goes against our instincts. But, grief is far more nuanced and complex than people understand until they've experienced it for themselves.

Most grieving people will tell you that the ache never goes away; the love you have for that person never goes away. Grief means learning to love someone despite their physical absence. To quote Dr. Thomas Attig, who has written extensively on grief,

"When we learn to love in separation, we fulfill our deep desire to continue loving and to feel our loved ones' love for us. And we fulfill their deep desires to be remembered and cherished for what they have given and continue to give even after they've died."

Grief is inherent in loving someone you can't be close to or reunited with. So, even years later, we are likely to feel things like longing, aching, and yearning at times.

Source: www.whatsyourgrief.com Buried Heart

THE BURIED HEART

By Karen Howe

*~ Posted on March 13th, 2023
www.compassionatefriends.org*

My heart stopped the day you died

I put it away in a heavy, metal box

Away from laughter and sunlight

I buried the box

**Beneath guilt, regrets and the pain of not saying
goodbye**

Deeply buried under the pain of missing you

I went searching for you

In forests, mountains and jungles

In deserts, meadows and beaches

Searching for a look, a trace, a glimpse of you

But you came looking for me

In strange, unexpected places

**You'd show up for a brief moment when least
expected**

Bringing me a bird, a song, a sign

Unmistakably you

To show your love for me

To comfort me

To sustain me until we embrace again



Another Death Anniversary

It has been three years since my son died. On the anniversary of his death, I went through the morning saying very little. In the afternoon I left work and went for a drive. I drove past the park we used to love for those special talks and special events. I drove past the high school he attended. I drove around the neighborhood thinking of him peddling his heavy-duty bike as he delivered his papers seven days a week. I remembered the good times and some of the “teaching moments”. I drove past the first house that he bought and remembered how proud he was of his purchase and all the work he did making that house a home for his child and wife.

As I drove, I felt the deep burning in my eyes of tears so long repressed. Has it really been three years since he left us? I remembered the day he died, the days that followed his death and months of withdrawal after his memorial service. I remembered all the firsts....the first Christmas, the first Easter, the first Mother’s Day, the first birthday, the first Thanksgiving and the first anniversary of his death. I remembered the agony, the heartache, the gut churning shock of losing my child to death. How did I survive this? I wondered why I am still here.

How can any mother whose only child has died begin to get a grip on sanity? Have I gotten a grip on sanity? How could I accept losing my son’s daughters to the long-term, seething hatred of my husband and me by my former daughter-in-law? How did I endure the protracted pain of the wrongful death suit she filed against my husband and me in the accidental death of my child? What did I say in all those depositions? Who were those lawyers? Were they thinking of my child or just the money they would receive? How can I help my child’s son as he moves forward into adulthood? How do I take the endless days of longing for my child’s voice, his hug, his special “I love you, mom”? How can I stand hearing other parents talk about taking flowers to their children’s grave or putting candles next to their child’s urn, when I don’t even know what my former daughter-in-law did with my son’s cremated remains?

The answer is not simple, yet it is not complex, either. The answer is in honoring my child in a way that exemplifies his life – gently, persistently and without reservation. The twisting road to this discovery has been made much smoother with the help of my Compassionate Friends group. I listen. They talk. They listen. I talk. The dialogue has grown to be part of who I am now. The conversations help me to chart my way on this stormy sea that is now my life. Without these gentle, understanding parents, I probably would have lost my mind. But they are there for me, month after month. They are there daily if I need them. They help me, and I help them. Each of us does our best in the hope of giving and gaining peace and solace.

I finished the anniversary day by purchasing a small wind chime. I took it to the little bench and marker that are surrounded by a small garden which our Compassionate Friends group maintains in memory of our beautiful children. When I hung it on the branch of a bush, I *listened as* the chimes sang their beautiful song.....a song for my child. Briefly I thought that someone might take it. But then I thought, I don’t care. This is for today. This is my way of reaching out to my son today....on the third anniversary of his death. If it’s gone next week, I will be sorry, but it won’t matter. I have honored my son on this sad day. The gentle song of these chimes will float upwards and reach him today. That is what matters. It is in this little garden that I visit my son today. This is where a little bit of peace touches my soul. Once again, I thank my Compassionate Friends for providing an answer.

~ Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX

Butterfly Wings, Bricks and Lead

When I saw her load of grief, it looked to me to be merely a light load of butterfly wings, as compared to my full load of heavy bricks. Then I saw another man, and he seemed to be carrying a small load of lead. But as I watched her step on the scales bearing her load of butterfly wings, the scales read “one ton.” When he stepped on the scales with his load of lead, the scales also read “one ton.” I knew my grief-load of bricks would weigh more, but those scales read for me, “one ton.” Our loads of butterfly wings, lead and bricks weighed exactly the same to the one carrying that particular load of grief.

We bereaved parents often feel resentment when a non-bereaved person speaks about our child’s death. HOW can THAT PERSON know or even dream of how I feel or what I am going through? These feelings may be justified. But when we begin to feel resentment toward another bereaved parent “That child’s death was easy compared to my child’s death,” “I have suffered more than she/he ever did” —we should remember that each of our grief-loads weighs two thousand pounds to the one under it. Compared to Rose Kennedy, who had one child in a mental institution, and lost one daughter and three sons in violent deaths, my grief-load begins to look as if it were made of gossamer soap bubbles, but when I again step on that scale, it still reads, “one ton.”

Our grief-loads may appear to weigh less because we who are under them have grown stronger through time and grief process maturation. The load actually weighs no less; it is we who have grown stronger and can carry it more easily. Sometimes we can even completely ignore the weight that is still there. Always be careful in judging another’s grief-load. Remember the lead, butterfly wings and those bricks, and how they all weigh the same to the one under that load of grief.

Tom Crouthamel
TCF, Sarasota, FL

Online Support Communities: An Important Way That We're Here for our TCF Family.

One of the most far-reaching and valuable ways that we offer support to TCF members is through our online chat and private Facebook groups. With over 286,000 followers on our main Compassionate Friends USA Facebook page, we also offer over 40 different private Facebook groups serving 102,000 members collectively. Additionally, TCF offers chat rooms that provide a space for bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings to meet every day to connect, share, and support each other. To find support via an online group of The Compassionate Friends, please visit <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/.../online-communities/>.

How To Access To Compassionate Friends Facebook Groups

For the national TCF Facebook page go to Facebook and enter Compassionate Friends USA.

For individual groups within Facebook, please go to [compassionatefriends.org](https://www.compassionatefriends.org) or use key word "Compassionate Friends". Click on Find Support then click On-Line Communities then click on View Groups or click on Resources then click on 24/7 Private Facebook Groups. The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private Facebook Groups. These pages are moderated by bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, and may not be accessed unless a request to join is approved by a moderator. Please click on the link next to the group you wish to join and answer the screening questions so we can confirm your request. If you are waiting approval, please message one of the administrators. Join requests to our Facebook groups must be requested personally, therefore when you wish to share the group with someone please pass along the link to the group.

Accessing Brochures/E-Newsletter

To access various brochures on dealing with various aspects of grief go to [compassionatefriends.org](https://www.compassionatefriends.org) or use key word "Compassionate Friends." Click on Resources then click Brochures Available. You can also register for the national e-newsletter at this site also.

Are You Moving?

If you move, please let us know your new address so you can continue to receive this newsletter. It costs the Chapter 71 cents every time a newsletter is returned by the Post Office with an outdated address. Please send address changes to: Susan Chan, 3448 SW Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may email address changes to chanx2@cox.net. We appreciate your cooperation as this will save the Chapter money which can be better spent on bereavement outreach. If, for any reason, you wish to have your name removed from our mailing list, please drop me a note or email and I will take your name off the list. If you have chosen the e-newsletter option, please keep me aware of any email address changes.

When Someone Has Gone

When someone has gone
you can bring them back, for just a little
while,
by talking them into life.
By painting a picture with your memories
and your words, breathing their essence
back into existence, for just a few
moments.

When someone is gone,
you can see them again, for a minute or
two,
by being all the things they once were.
By allowing their best traits to filter
through you,
shaping your words, your thoughts and
your deeds, back out into this world.

When someone has gone,
you can feel them again, for just a moment,
by playing their music and singing their
favourite songs. By giving yourself up to
the notes that brought them alive once
upon a time, it will again.

When someone has gone,
you can keep a part of them alive,
by giving the love you had for them a
forever place in your life, a forever seat
at your table and a glorious chapter in your
book.

Stories never die, and boy did they make stories.

Tell them

*~Donna Ashworth
From "I Wish I Knew"*

Is it Time to Forgive Yourself?

Posted on October 3, 2012 by Rob Anderson

Each year, I'm invited to an Alumni Night by my support group. Every year, I go to let the newly bereaved know that (if they are willing to work on it) they can survive the deaths of their children and lead good lives again. Now, close to fourteen years down the road, my smile and the life of my son came back to me years ago.

Near the end of the meeting, as questions and answers went back and forth, a bereaved father said quietly under his breath, "I wonder what more we could have done? What decisions should we have made differently?" There was pain in his voice and he had tears in his eyes. I suspect there was guilt in his heart, too. His daughter had died from complications brought on by diabetes. Then, someone else spoke quickly and we never got back to him. On my way home, I started thinking about self forgiveness and what a great benefit it can be on the journey to a better life.

Those feelings of guilt associated with, "If only..." or, "Why didn't..." or, "Should we have..." are common. We think back and ruminate over and over about the decisions we made (or didn't make). We try to figure out how it all went wrong when our child died. It's easy to beat ourselves up with, "What if?"

When we make a decision, we think it's the correct decision at that time. If we think it's wrong, we don't decide to move forward. Before we make a decision, we use the information available to us based on our past experiences, advice from others and our best judgment. We mix some, or all, of those together and sometimes it's just a "best guess," but when we do it, we always, always, think it's the right thing to do.

Even the person who gets upset with the boss and yells at him decided at some point that yelling at the boss was the right thing to do. As he was yelling, he may have thought, "This is wrong," but he went ahead anyway because he had previously decided it was right. In hindsight, it probably wasn't the right thing to do, but at the moment it was chosen, it felt right. That's why second guessing can be so destructive. "Why did I decide to yell at my boss? That was really dumb." It only was dumb because at the choice point it lacked information. Hindsight is always 20/20!

Some decisions work out, and some don't. If it turns out the decision you made was wrong or not even made (which is a decision too), you then use that experience to make a better decision next time. Perfect doesn't visit us all that often. We can make a perfectly round tire or find a perfect answer to a math problem, but "humans" and "perfect" and "emotions" just don't go together too frequently.

Any decisions we made in regard to our children, were made in the best way we could with the information available to us at that time. We did what we thought was right. If we hadn't thought it was right, we wouldn't have made it! What's been done can't be undone, only learned from. Even if we later say, "I could have done better," there was no way for us to know it at that time. "I could have done better," is second guessing, and it's not healthy or productive.

Let's say your child died in a car accident after you gave him the car keys and you're now saying, "If I hadn't given him the keys, he wouldn't have died." You had no way of knowing he

was going to have an accident and die. If you had thought he was going to die, you certainly wouldn't have given him the keys.

For those parents whose child completed suicide, you may be saying, "How could we have missed the signs? Why were we so stupid?" You didn't see the signs because that information wasn't available to you yet. If you'd seen them, you would have certainly acted differently.

For the man who thinks maybe they could have done more for their diabetic daughter, he may be saying, "Was there another test or another medicine or another therapy that could have helped her live?" Even if there had been, he had no way of knowing it. Perhaps a medication was still being formulated, but it was never seen by him. He couldn't have done anything different than what he did. He did his best.

What do we do with the guilt when we find that the decision we thought was right turned out to be wrong? (Or, if we didn't make any decision at all?) If we even occasionally say, "What if, what if, what if," our guilt, and the horrible emotions that brings might never leave. They can abuse us and tear us apart, and they have the potential to destroy our relationships with others.

First of all, feel the guilt and try to understand why you have the guilt. Don't run from it, deny it or try to hide it. Investigate it and learn from it. Do your best to express it in positive ways by talking or writing about it, beating up a pillow, crying or any other way that works for you. Let the guilt in, experience it. Let it out through positive expression, and then do your best to let it go. Let it in, let it out, let it go. There's no upside to guilt if it creates an ongoing disturbance in your life, in the relationship with your child, or with others in your life.

To move forward in your journey, try this to see if it can help. If you say, "I did the best I could at the time with the information I had and I forgive myself for any mistakes I may have made," and if you truly believe that, the guilt can disappear and be gone forever.

One way that can facilitate letting go of your guilt is to speak, or write, an apology to your child and to ask for their forgiveness. They will surely give their forgiveness! They know you did the best you could at the time you made your decisions. You believed your choices were correct or you wouldn't have made them. Even if you now believe you could have done better, you did the best you could based on what you knew at the time.

By speaking your request out loud, or writing it down, you give it a voice. It's no longer hidden in an unspoken thought or action. The guilt is being released from your inner prison, and once it's out, it can leave. If it's never out, it can never leave. When it's gone, you can work at forgiving yourself. Forgiving yourself can be a significant step forward in finding your smile and finding the blessing in the life of your child. You did the best you could; try and forgive yourself.

*"Reprinted with permission from Grief Digest.
Centering Corporation, Omaha, Nebraska, 866-218-0101."*

About the Author: Rob Anderson is a bereaved father and the author of a book titled, "Dads in Grief – Grief in Dads --- A survival guide for dads after the death of their child." He also is a frequent speaker and workshop presenter at many TCF National Conferences.

Top Ten List – From all grieving parents

Bereaved parents – know that you are not alone when you experience the following comments. This may be a good list to share with family and friends.

1. “I know how you feel.” Are you serious? Do you really know what it is to lose a child? Do you know what it is like to lose the most precious thing you have ever held in your arms? Maybe you have lost a mother and/or father, even a sibling. But as we all know, that fails in comparison to the loss of a child. We don’t even know how we feel much of the time. Between the grief, the crying, the constant struggle to get out of bed every morning, we are at a loss for feelings much of the time. Please, no one really knows how we feel but ourselves.

2. “He/She is in a better place now.” Really? Do you feel that our children that have been taken from us are in a better place now? Do you think they are better off there than here next to us? And I quote this from another grieving mother – “then tell me which one of your children would like to go to this better place tomorrow and be with my son.” I know it sounds a little harsh, but if my son is in a better place now, as some people believe, then is there a child of yours that you would want to join them? There is no better place than right here, right next to me, right in my arms, right here sleeping in his bed every night instead of where he is now.

3. “G-d only gives a person what they can handle.” I am not really sure what this means, or is meant to mean when it is said to someone. Most people can “handle” the loss of their child, as most people can handle just about anything. But to think that one person can handle the death of their child better than another, or that G-d makes a conscious decision that this person is stronger and can handle such a devastating loss is just nuts. We are not “handling” the loss of our children, we are simply living and dealing with it the best we can. When a devastating flood hits a certain region of the country, does G-d do that because those people can “handle” it better? Probably not. And we don’t handle it well. We cry, many of us stop working, most of us stop living our lives – that is not handling it. That is surviving.

4. “At least you have other children.” So the child that was taken from me was of less value, less love than the children I have left? I should be grateful that I still have my daughter and that minimizes the loss of my son? I know grieving parents that lost one of their three or four children, and it hurts just as much as the parent that lost their only child. You cannot put a value on each child, and when one is taken, the value of the remaining children goes up to compensate for the lost child? It does not work that way unfortunately. We love each and every one of our children, as everyone does, equally. We treat them the same, we love them the same, we try to make each of their lives unique. When one is taken it is devastating, and it actually hurts the other children that remain behind more than you can imagine.

5. “Everything happens for a reason.” Everything happens. Period. Is there a reason why it happens? Probably not. When the father of a family of four dies in a car crash, or the doctor working on a cure for cancer dies, is there a reason? Is the reason that our children died part of some divine plan? How about when someone loses their job and their life is ruined – is there a reason for that? There is no reason my son died – or none that I can accept. It was an accident, and that’s it. For someone to say that there was a reason behind it hurts. How would you feel sitting in the hospital with a broken back and someone comes in and tells you that your fall happened for a reason? How would you feel?

6. “You’re so strong.” No, Not really. We are not that strong. We are surviving. That’s it. We cry every day, usually more than once. We see our children’s rooms and their prized possessions and our knees give out and we lean against the wall for support. We rely on

the calls and e-mails and the support of other grieving parents to get us to keep moving forward in our lives. When we smile, we are trying to be happy. When we laugh, which is rare, we are laughing because our children want us to laugh. When we are with others and appear to have a good time with them, we do so because we know our children would want us to have a good time. Then we leave, and cry in the car the whole way home because our children are not here with us.

7. “You made it through the first year – the worst is over.” And your basis for knowing this pearl of wisdom is what? You’ve gone through the loss of a child and have some insight that we do not have, or that other grieving parents do not have? As a matter of fact, the second year is worse than the first – or so we hear from so many in our situation. The one year mark is a milestone. We have had the first Thanksgiving without our child. We have had the first New Years Eve, a night we have always spent together, without our child by our sides. We have celebrated his birthday last year with our friends and family, but our child was not there. And you know something? We are going to celebrate it this year as well. We are going to toast him on New Years Eve, and we are going to miss him at Passover reading the four questions. All this is in year two, as it was in year one, and it will be just as hard, if not harder. And in year three and four and five. Yeah, we made it through the first year, but the worst is yet to be.

8. “Are you better now?” Actually no. I will never be “better.” I will move ahead with my life, I will work when I can, I will one day go out and have a good time – but I will never be better. I lost my son, how can I ever really be better? I might be good one day, the hole in my heart will be bearable to live with, but it will always be there. I will never be the person I was before I lost my child. None of us will ever be better. We have all changed. This goes the same with “are you over your grief now?” No, we are never over our grief. Our children are gone, forever. We will never be over grieving for them.

9. “I didn’t want to bring up your son/daughter because I didn’t want to remind you of him/her.” Please, don’t worry about reminding us of our children. They are on our minds from when we wake in the morning with a tear in our eyes to when we fall asleep crying at night. We think about them when we sit at our desks, when we are at breakfast and when we eat without them at dinnertime. They are always on our minds – more than anything else, ever. What would be nice is if you did talk about our children – if you are comfortable and strong enough to do that, we would like that. It shows us that you care, that you are our friend, that you, too, miss our children. My closest friends talk about our child with us all the time, and mostly in the present tense. They help us remember him and remind us that he will never be forgotten by anyone.

10. “I don’t deal well with death.” Neither do we. We hate the fact that we have to deal with the death of our children, but we have to. We deal with it every day. We know there are many people who don’t deal well with death. They will come to the funeral, come sit shiva, go to a wake. But then they disappear because they can’t deal with death. Maybe they are afraid that it will affect their children, maybe they are afraid to be uncomfortable during a conversation, I don’t know. Some people don’t deal well with hospitals and won’t visit friends when they are in the hospital. Maybe because of infections or because they can’t look at sick or ill people. That is pretty understandable. . . almost. But not having the ability to overcome your fear of dealing with death to comfort and help a friend who desperately needs it in their time of sorrow? There are still friends of ours who we have not spoken to much, if at all. Now a year later, because we are told that they can’t deal with death. We’re sorry that the death of our child makes you uncomfortable.

*Source: South Suburban Chapter Newsletter September–October 2015
Evergreen Park, IL*

Defining Moments

By Pat Loder, Linden, MI

A birth. A graduation. Learning to drive. A new job. A milestone birthday. A move across the country. Going off to college. An illness. An operation. A wedding. A divorce.

These are all defining moments.

But is there any moment in a bereaved parent's or family member's life like the defining moment that came as a result of a knock at the door, the call in the middle of the night, the doctor's eyes that elude theirs, or perhaps there was a military vehicle that pulled up to the curb and a soldier and chaplain started toward the door.

Every other defining moment pales in comparison to hearing the news that a child in our family has died. We know that it does not matter if our child was young or old, a babe not yet born, or a child with grandchildren of their own. They were OUR children, they died, and our life was, is, and will be forever shaped by THAT moment in time.

When we are new in our grief we find that our lives are trapped in THAT day, THAT moment. It is the defining moment by which all time is measured from that point on. For years we talk in terms of whether something happened before or after the death.

We are sad, we are angry, we are traumatized. We're at war with ourselves and, it seems, everyone around us. We want time to move backward so that our defining moment never happened, or when that isn't possible at least move at warp speed as far from that defining moment as possible. Are we scared? YES. We are scared of forgetting, scared of letting go, and even scared of moving past THE defining moment.

The good part, the part that I've learned from fellow Compassionate Friends, is that yes, it is the most defining moment in our lives, but it doesn't have to be the thing we remember most. We are connected by a love for our children that goes beyond the defining moment. We can reach back and remember wonderful memories and a love so special that it will not let go. EVER!!

More than 18 years have now passed since my children were killed in a car accident. Time has seen me through the anger, the sadness, the pain, and the brokenness that came from dealing with their deaths. It has been a long journey, a journey of the heart. As Douglas Wood wrote in the book *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*-those who take great journeys of the heart are changed.

I admit it. I am forever changed by that defining moment, but the important thing I also realize is that my great journey of the heart really began when Stephanie and Stephen graced my life. It wasn't long enough-not nearly long enough. But we shared a love so special, so sweet, so enduring that it will forever be what I choose to remember the most.

I choose not to remember that they died or how they died. I choose to remember they lived and how they lived. They were special. They were beautiful. They were silly. They were loving. And they were wonderful!

It took a lot of time on my journey for me to reach this point and it wasn't without struggles and doubts. There were days when just getting out of bed and facing a day without them took all the courage I could muster. But I did it. Sometimes it was necessary to deal with their deaths on a one day at a time basis, and sometimes one moment at a time. But I continued on my journey because I refused to let a terrible day be what I remembered most about two really terrific kids.

Yes, it is indeed the most defining moment for bereaved parents and family members. We're different people when we walk through the fog of grief. The important thing is we walk through the fog to the other side where sunsets are once again beautiful and we are struck by the brightness of the stars.

Is there any better way to honor all our terrific kids than to marvel at the beauty of the world once again?

PLEASE BE GENTLE

An Afterloss Creed

*By Jill Englar
Westminster, Maryland*

Please be gentle with me, for I am grieving. The sea I swim in is a lonely one, and the shore seems miles away. Waves of despair numb my soul as I struggle through each day. My heart is heavy with sorrow.

I want to shout and scream and repeatedly ask, "Why?" At times, my grief overwhelms me, and I weep bitterly, so great is my loss.

Please don't turn away or tell me to move on with my life. I must embrace my pain before I can begin to heal. Companion me through my tears and sit with me in loving silence. Honor where I am in my journey, not where you think I should be.

Listen patiently to my story. I may need to tell it over and over again. It's how I begin to grasp the enormity of my loss. Nurture me through the weeks and months ahead. Forgive me when I seem distant and inconsolable.

A small flame still burns within my heart, and shared memories may trigger both laughter and tears. I need your support and understanding. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. I must find my own path.

Please, will you walk beside me?

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5125 N. Union Blvd., Suite #4, Colorado Springs, CO 80918
Phone (719) 266-0006*

Braden Mark Neddermeyer 1992-2021



Braden,

We all miss you and the energy you provided to any room, your sense of humor, and the odd attire you selected at times for special events! We especially miss seeing you interact with Kayson.

Love, Dad, Lori, Mom, Ken, Cale, Allie, Madison, Kayson,
your extended family, and so many of your friends
and co-workers. Nothing here will be the same again
without you.



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, grandparents 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.