



# The Compassionate Friends

**Topeka Chapter**

**Supporting Family After a Child Dies**

*Published Bimonthly by The Topeka TCF Chapter*

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The Compassionate Friends, Inc.  
National Headquarters, P. O. Box 3696  
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696  
Toll Free 877-969-0010; Fax (630) 990-0246

National TCF Website:  
[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

Topeka TCF Chapter Website:  
[www.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.org)

March ~ April 2019  
Editor: Susan Chan  
3448 S.W. Mission Ave.  
Topeka, KS 66614-3629  
(785) 272-4895

## **MARCH MEETING**

Monday, March 25, 2019  
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church  
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS  
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

**Know Me, Know My Child** - This meeting offers each of us an opportunity to share something about our child, grandchild or sibling. Plan to bring a story, a poem, some music, a piece of clothing, a book, a photograph, or a toy--anything that you would like to share that relates to your loved one. In our group we understand the importance of remembering and being able to talk about our children in a loving and supportive atmosphere of acceptance and non-judgement. As we get to know each other, let's also get to know each child's story, their likes and dislikes, their favorite thing to eat, whatever you would like to share.

## **APRIL MEETING**

Monday, April 22, 2019  
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church  
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS  
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

**What Makes Me Angry?** - Anger and Guilt are two emotions often felt by people who are bereaved. Anger at the unfairness of the death or possibly with an individual who may have contributed to the death, even anger at God. One may feel guilt that somehow they did not do all they should have to protect their child, grandchild or sibling and keep them safe. While both anger and guilt are valid emotions that need to be recognized and respected, they are also emotions that can become stumbling blocks on the road to healing. Holding on to anger and guilt - which does not change the fact that your loved one died - can make it difficult for you to do your grief work of acknowledging the reality of the death and processing the many emotions that you may experience on your journey. Let's talk about anger and guilt and discuss strategies for handling these emotions.

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:***

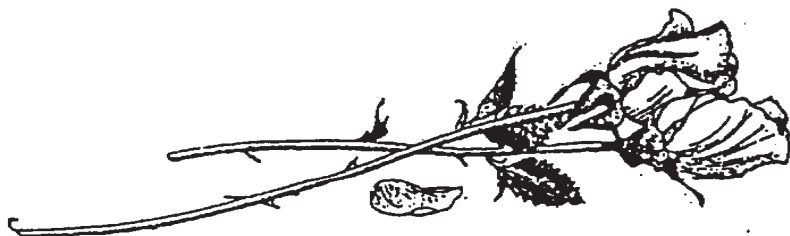
*Gary and Susan Chan in loving memory of their  
daughter Rachael Reneé Chan who died on March 17<sup>th</sup>*

*Mark and Lori Neddermeyer in loving memory of her daughter  
Madison "Maddie" Rae Naill who died on March 19<sup>th</sup>*



*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**

## From the Newsletter Editor

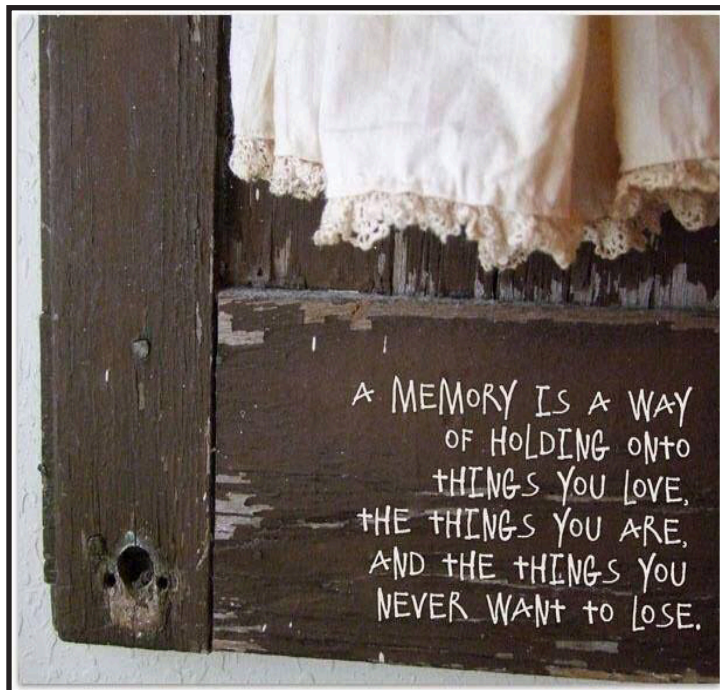
Dear Compassionate Friends Family,

**Time to Respond:** If you have not already done so, please return your Newsletter Renewal Form. If you wish to continue to receive this newsletter throughout 2019, you need to return the yellow form that was with the Jan/Feb newsletter. The form can also be found on the Topeka Chapter website ([www.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.org)) under the "Newsletter" heading in the menu bar. We certainly want everyone who wants the newsletter to receive it. This form also offers you the opportunity to choose how you wish to receive the newsletter (printed or electronically). It also gives you the choice to sponsor a newsletter in your loved one's memory, send a Love Gift in their memory, or to have them included in the We Remember portion of the newsletter in 2019.

Please keep in mind that we are a nonprofit organization and charge no dues or fees to get this newsletter, participate in both support group meetings and memorial events, or to utilize the many resources we have in our Chapter Library. We need your support to help meet the expenses of the Topeka Chapter, so we hope you will help us out. You can also help support the Chapter by using your Dillions card when you buy your groceries. It costs you nothing and does not affect your fuel points. Look for information on how this works on the opposite page.

**Nstional Conference Registration Open.** The 2019 National Compassionate Friends Conference will be held this year in Philadelphia, PA from July 19-21. The conference will offer a hundred workshops of topics related to grief and loss of a child, Sharing Sessions, wonderful Keynote Speakers, a Memorial Candle Lighting Program, and the Annual Walk to Remember. You can find information on how to register, make a hotel reservation, etc. on the National TCF website ([www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)) A TCF Conference is a wonderfully supportive and enlightening event to attend as you gather with other bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings from across the country (and sometimes from around the world) to share your experiences, your concerns, your journey and your hope. I hope many of you may be able to attend.

**Quartermania Fundraiser Planned.** Our Chapter will be hosting a Quartermania event to raise money for our ongoing expenses. It will be held Saturday, April 13, 2019 at Fairlawn Church of the Nazarene, 730 Fairlawn Rd., Topeka. Doors will open at 6:00 p.m. and bidding will start at 6:30 p.m. There is a flyer included with this newsletter that has more details including the Vendors whose items have been donated for the event. Our Topeka TCF Chapter will also be having a Bake Sale during the event to help raise additional funds, so if you would like to help out, plan to bake something and drop it off at the event at 6 p.m. Please wrap items (cookies, brownies, etc.) in small groups (2-3 items); items like breads can be left whole. We will price items when they are delivered. Several years ago when we had our first Quartermania, the Topeka Chapter realized about \$1000 from Vendor Table fees, Paddle Fees, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Round bidding fees. Additional revenue allows our Chapter to continue to reach out with First Contact Packets to newly bereaved families, provide grief topic handouts at monthly meetings, host our Memorial Events, and continue to publish this newsletter that is sent to nearly 450 families and care service professionals in northeast Kansas. Thank You in advance for your support!



**Meetings/Online Resources:** 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. 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. We also welcome suggestions on meeting topics you would like to see us explore. For those who cannot attend a regular meeting, we would encourage you to check out the TCF Private Facebook Pages or Online Communities on the National TCF website ([www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)). These Pages cover all different kinds of loss/circumstances of death, etc. Since these are "closed" Facebook pages/Online Communities, you must register and be approved to participate by the page moderator and TCF. This process insures respect for your privacy and encourages open and honest discussion.

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

~ Susan Chan, Rachael's Mom

# 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:

- ♥ *Margaret & Tad Kramar in loving memory of her son Spenser Thomas Good who died on April 30<sup>th</sup>*
- ♥ *Carolyn Cummings in loving memory of her son Patrick Cummings who was born on March 30<sup>th</sup>*

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".

**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

## An Update on the Chapter Newsletter

As I mentioned in several newsletters, we have established an electronic list of those who prefer to receive the newsletter via e-mail. If you have not requested to be on the e-newsletter list, you will continue to be mailed a hard copy of the newsletter. Remember, you can also always access the current and past issues of our newsletter on our Chapter website at [www.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.org) under "Newsletters". Those families whose loved one died in 2018 are automatically kept on the mailing list for one full year unless they request in writing to have their name removed. You are all asked to send any address changes (hard copy or e-mail) to [tcftopeka@gmail.com](mailto:tcftopeka@gmail.com)

### Upcoming Events/Dates to Remember

The 42<sup>nd</sup> TCF National Conference will be held in Philadelphia, on July 19-21, 2019. "Hope Rings in Philadelphia" is the theme of next year's event, which promises more of this year's great National Conference experience. We'll keep you updated with details here, on the Topeka Chapter website ([www.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.org)) as well as on national's TCF/USA Facebook Page and elsewhere as they become available. Plan to come and be a part of this heartwarming experience.

**Sites of Future National TCF Conferences:**  
2020 ~ Atlanta, GA      2021 ~ Detroit, MI  
2022 ~ Houston, TX

**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](http://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 you 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 the printing cost of this newsletter.

**Pro Print**

**DIGITAL PRINT AND COPY SERVICES**

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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 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 and Elaine Bandstra, who was born on May 24<sup>th</sup>

Derek G. Bodeman, son of Becky S. Bodeman, who died on May 6<sup>th</sup>



Terry Edward Burns, son of Kenneth and Eleanor Burns, and brother of Kathy Kaesewurm, who died on April 15<sup>th</sup>

Teresa Jenkins Carson, daughter of Phillip and Louise Jenkins, who was born on April 7<sup>th</sup>

Carly Kathleen Cornelis, daughter of Cami Green, who was born on April 17<sup>th</sup>

Tyler Craft, son of Tom and Mary Sue Craft, who was born on April 30<sup>th</sup>

Michael Ray Donoho, son of Tammy Collins and Dennis Donoho; and stepson of Edward Collins and Debbie Donoho, who died on April 11<sup>th</sup>

Dan Evans, brother of Drew Evans, born in April and died on May 21<sup>st</sup>

Claire Elise Fisher, daughter of Debra Fisher, who was born on May 15<sup>th</sup>



Jeff Fitzgibbons, son of Bill and Jean Fitzgibbons, who died on April 8<sup>th</sup>

Randy Flanagan, son of Dennis Flanagan, who was born on May 14<sup>th</sup>

Ryan Flanagan, son of Dennis Flanagan, who was born on April 24<sup>th</sup>

Anthony James Forshee, son of Darren and Gloria Forshee, who died on May 15<sup>th</sup>

Richard Brian Gilbert, son of Rick and Carla Gilbert, who died on April 10<sup>th</sup>

Spenser Thomas Good, son of Margaret Kramar, who died on April 30<sup>th</sup>

Nathan Harvey, son of Mark and Debi Harvey; brother of Rachel, Amanda and Caleb Harvey; grandson of Velata Tibbs, who died on April 10<sup>th</sup>

Mitchell Hermreck, son of Dennis and Ann Hermreck; brother of Shelby and Raegan, who died on May 12<sup>th</sup>



Nason John Hobelman, son of Dee Hobelman, who died on May 7<sup>th</sup>

Zachary James Hudec, son of Greg and Liz Hudec, who was born on May 8<sup>th</sup>

Gabriel Kidd, son of Julie Kidd, who was born on May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Michael "Mike" Dean Kidney, son of Forrest and Susan Kidney, who died on May 2<sup>nd</sup>

Morgan Kottman, daughter of Christine Kottman, who was born on April 22<sup>nd</sup>



Tabith Krystofosky, sister of Darrell "Bo" Cremer, Jr., who was born on April 11<sup>th</sup>

Andrew Garrett Lindeen, grandson of Mary J. Lindeen, who was born on May 8<sup>th</sup>

Dennis Montgomery, grandson of Janet Hamilton, who was born in April.

Morgan Myers, daughter of Alta and Rocky Myers, who died on April 3<sup>rd</sup>

Kyle Neidigh, son of Rosemary Robledo, who was born on April 21<sup>st</sup>



Eric Alan Palmberg, son of Jim and Doris Palmberg, who was born on April 14<sup>th</sup>

Evan Michael Schuetz, son of Tom and Debbie Schuetz, who died on April 12<sup>th</sup>

Rachel Diana Sowers, daughter of Bill and Diana Sowers, who died on May 17<sup>th</sup>

Sydney Diane Tate, daughter of Jeff and Misty Tate, who was born on April 30<sup>th</sup>

Brittany Nicole Tucker, daughter of Damon and Collene Tucker, who was born on April 30<sup>th</sup>

Taylor William Clay Watson, son of Terry and Kathy Watson, who was born on April 12<sup>th</sup>

Christopher Wempe, son of Dan and JoAnn Wempe, who died on May 12<sup>th</sup>



(Use the form on opposite page 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 April and May)

## *The Sympathy Card*

She was a kind woman, patient and long-suffering, who lived by the Scriptures. Her children have related that every morning she would awaken them with, "This is the day the Lord has made," and squirming under the covers, they would answer, "Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

The sympathy card said that she had something she wanted to share with me, privately.

She smiled on the following Sunday morning, her usual greeting. The skin crinkled around her eyes behind her glasses. On a couch in the narthex, upolstered in brocade, she delivered her mesage in a determined, even tone.

"A few weeks before Spenser died, I watched him during the time with the children."

Spenser, with the other children clustered around him, would have sat on the steps which lead to the altar during the children's sermon.

"He had a halo around his head. I have never seen anyone with that before, or since."

"A halo?"

Her earnest smile did not falter. I also have lost a child, a boy," she confessed.

"What happened to him?"

"He fell out of a tree."

She offered no other details, but remained seated in the narthex, a patient, saintly presence.

Sometimes they die. She was able to relate this incident, forty years after her child's death, with the objectivity of a news reporter, because the pain eventually subsides. The pain, which in the aftermath is incapacitating. But even this pain fades with time and must eventually be set aside, like fine china wrapped in tissue paper after the Thanksgiving meal, for there is work to be done. We who have lost children have a great deal to do to honor their memories.

*~Margaret Kramar, Topeka TCF Chapter  
from her book Searching for Spenser*

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## **A Circle of Friends**

~ Darcie Sims

Together, we shall join hearts and hands across the earth and decorate the world with hope and healing and remembered laughter. We shall remain forever linked through the love of our absent children, parents, husbands, wives, siblings, grandparents, friends - all of our loved ones who danced across the rainbow ahead of us.

We are a family circle - broken by death, mended by love. May this day, and every day, be days for us to laugh and sing, to dance and dream. May this day, and every day, be days of celebration and the chance to give one more hug, to say one more "I love you." May love be what you remember most!



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(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 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**

## 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 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month. Pozez Center (north side of Stormont Vail). Contact Information: Sandy Reams 785-249-3792 or email [TopekaHeals@gmail.com](mailto:TopekaHeals@gmail.com)

**Pregnancy and Infant Loss Group** - Meets 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto: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>.

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### **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](mailto: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.

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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.

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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/>

### **Sign up for Compassionate Friends E-Newsletter**

The Compassionate Friends National Office publishes a monthly e-newsletter designed to keep you up-to-date on what's going on with the organization and its chapters.

The e-newsletter includes information on such things as TCF National Conferences, the Walk to Remember, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, regional conferences, and other events of importance.

All you have to do to receive The Compassionate Friends e-newsletter is sign up for it online by visiting The Compassionate Friends national website at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) and filling out the request to sign-up at the bottom of the page.

### **TCF National Magazine**

#### ***We Need Not Walk Alone* Available Free Online**

The Compassionate Friends national magazine, *We Need Not Walk Alone®*, is available for free online. The magazine remains available in print free with any patron donation or when ordered by paid subscription through TCF's online store.

*We Need Not Walk Alone* provides comfort and support to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents through stories, poems, advice columns, and much more. It has been referred to as "a support group in print" and is published three times a year.

Sign-up for a free online subscription through our website, [compassionatefriends.org](http://compassionatefriends.org). It can be read online or downloaded to your computer for personal use.

## *When you are bereaved it is all right to.....*

Scream in the shower.  
Yell in the car.  
Howl at the moon.  
Cry anywhere you like.  
Misplace your glasses.  
Lose the car.  
Forget your own name.  
Put milk in the cupboard,  
Toilet paper in the refrigerator,  
And ice cream in the oven.  
Beat up a pillow.  
Stamp on the ground.  
Throw stones in a lake.  
Change grocery stores if it hurts.  
Wear one black shoe and one navy.  
Have tear stains on your tie.  
Eat French fries for breakfast, toast for lunch, and  
peanut butter for dinner (as long as you eat).  
Write him a letter.  
Bake him a cake.  
Smell his clothes.  
Celebrate his life on his birthday.  
Talk to your pets; they understand.  
Leave his room the way it is  
for as long as you like.  
Say his name just to hear the sound.  
Talk about him to others.  
Tell loved ones what you need.  
Say no when you feel like it.  
Cancel plans if you want.  
Have a bad day.  
It's all right to hurt.  
**Ane one day, when you're ready.....**  
It's all right to laugh again.  
Dance and feel pretty.  
Have a good time.  
Look forward to tomorrow.  
Sing in the shower.  
Smile at a friend's new baby.  
Wear make-up once more.  
Go for a day, a week,  
And even a month without crying.  
Celebrate the holidays.  
Forgive those who failed you.  
Learn something new.  
Look at his pictures  
And remember with happiness  
Not pain.  
Go on with your life.  
Cherish the memories.  
**And one day when it's time...**  
It's alright to love again!

~Vicki Tushingham

## Still Standing

~ Julie Short  
TCF Southeastern Illinois Chapter

People say  
"Oh, you are doing so well,  
you are so strong,  
you are inspirational!  
We do not feel strong.  
We feel shaken to the core,  
Saddened beyond belief,  
pain beyond comprehension,  
forever changed.  
What do they see that we cannot see?  
"That a horrible storm  
unexpectedly ripped through  
our lives and we are  
still standing"  
They are amazed.  
We are paralyzed -  
Still Standing.



## What is a Memory?

It is the faculty of beholding the golden  
rays of the sunset, after the night has fallen.

It is the ability to bear in mind the sweet  
melody after the instruments have ceased  
playing. It is a conversation with someone  
who can no longer speak.....  
and seeing a smile on a face no longer here.

~ Karen Russell



## Becoming Stronger at the Broken Places

"If I am what I do, and I don't then I'm not." These words have been spinning around in my head ever since I heard someone comment on how we tend to define ourselves by what we do, rather than by who we are. I thought about those words incessantly, almost to the point where they became nonsensical. But they aren't.

Until April 25<sup>th</sup>, the day of my son Bryan's death, I'm afraid I was guilty of defining myself by my roles in life: computer marketeer, husband, father - and without really being aware of it, most often in that order. I was caught up with "bringing home the bacon," "making a name for myself," and the tunnel vision that goes with all that. My sense of self-worth was wrapped up with these things.

One of my colleagues used to call me "Rapid Robert" because of my pace in going places - or was it a treadmill? I was a workaholic, and only too often by the time I'd gotten around to family matters, I'd run out of steam.

Then my son died. The superficiality of my life smashed headlong into a brick wall. For months I felt I was sitting in the middle of a field scattered with pieces of my life; job pieces askew here, family relationships trailing off there, dreams piled akimbo over here, hopes rent asunder over there.

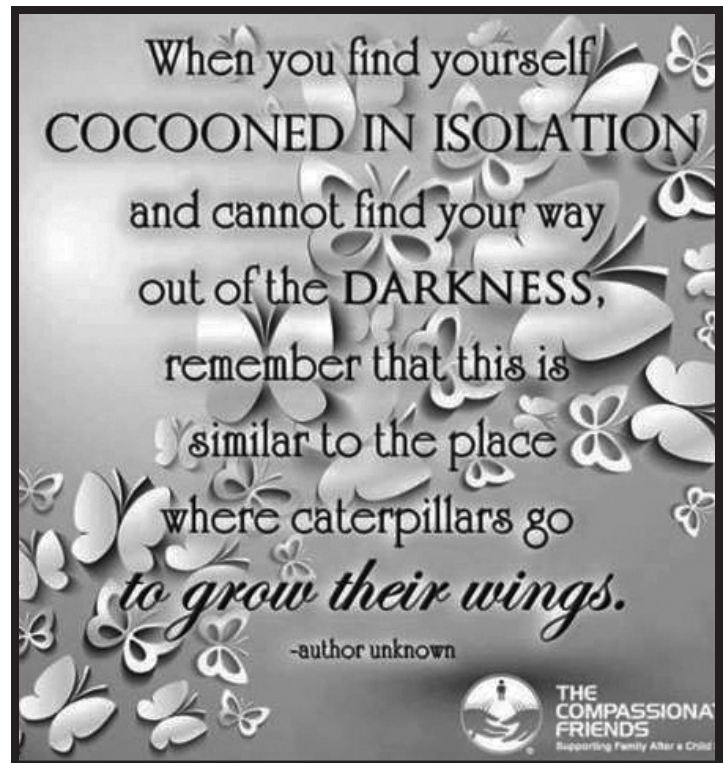
As I listened to my son's friends at the two remembrances for him, it dawned on me that at nineteen a young man doesn't have a long list of credits and accomplishments. Bryan hadn't "made a name for himself." Bryan was Bryan, no more, no less. His many friends loved him for who he was, not what he was.

*Strange the lessons fathers learn from sons -  
to care, to share, to be there. . .*

I wrote these words blinded by pain, and I could sense what it was that brought together people from all over in a common bond of shared grief - Bryan cared about them. I wondered if I were to die suddenly, after more than fifty years of life, how would I be eulogized? "A real professional, a true marketeer, a dedicated employee. . . ? I'd settle for two words: "He cared."

I've tried to put the pieces of my life back together again, but I've tried to be selective. I've left many pieces lying in that field because they don't fit anymore. And I've fashioned new pieces. Some pieces no longer fit. As bereaved parents we have a choice: we can fixate on the death or we can affirm life. I know which my son would have wanted for me.

*~ Bob Rosenberger, TCF, Burke, VA*



## GRIEF IS LIKE A RIVER

My grief is like a river -  
I have to let it flow,  
but I myself determine  
just where the banks will go.  
Some days the current takes me  
in waves of guilt and pain,  
But there are always quiet pools  
where I can rest again.  
I crash on rocks of anger -  
my faith seems faint indeed -  
but there are other swimmers  
who know that what I need;  
they are loving hands to hold me  
when the waters are too swift,  
and someone kind to listen  
when I just seem to drift.  
Grief's river is like a process  
of relinquishing the past.  
By swimming in Hope's channel,  
I'll reach the shore at last.

*~ Cynthia G. Kelley, TCF/Cincinnati*



# The Month of March

March is a month of renewal. The dormant trees begin to stir; the birds optimistically sing of Spring; the winds, sometimes violent, wake us up; perhaps we need a "shake" out of our winter lethargy; an awakening.

There is that urge to plant, to nourish, to grow a tree or a flower. There is the primordial urge to feel your hands digging in the warm earth. Perhaps we plant because we know someone will see the result, as we have enjoyed the results of others' work. It could be called a debt of renewal, a repayment for that which we have enjoyed. As we nourish small seedlings, we visualize the end result. That tree may die, as our children did. That tree may flourish beautifully, or it may meet ultimate disaster, but if that tree does well, it could be a source of great pleasure and of beauty for many coming years. We can believe that Spring will be a glorious tree enjoyed by many. It's a nice dream.

"To all things there is a season," and as life goes by, we simply cannot afford to miss the seasons, the renewals, the chances for new growth. Regardless of our griefs and regrets, life goes on, and we must try not to miss a season. Life simply **will be**, whether we participate or not. Someone will benefit from constructive growth, if we can find the energy to make the effort.

Severe grief, for a time, reduces our interest and our ability to participate fully in life. With a low energy level and little initiative and with our hopes for the future severely damaged, it requires great effort for the bereaved to learn to again enjoy the small things that make up most of our lives. Our hopes for the future are so damaged that there is little incentive to work today for the future. The things that exist today comprise the basics of our future. We run a risk and a danger of missing the good things that are to be, because we do not have the wish to participate in the things that are today.

Although we need a time of withdrawal, some time to ponder the unanswered questions, some time to heal, we also need to be aware of the lives that are passing. Regardless of our grief, life simply goes on, and there is much good that we risk losing, if we stay too long in a state of suspense of the present and a sad review of the past. A part of learning to "accept the unacceptable" is to learn to make the effort to sort out the good memories and take them with us into a future that will be happy again.

There comes a time when the harsh winter of our damaging grief will give way to some awakening; a

time when we, like nature, can shake off some of the lethargy and see and feel the renewals life offers. Our choice is to remember that we could not control the advent of disaster. We can only control our response. Our choice is now only in the way we respond to the necessity to pick up the threads of our life and go on.

We owe it to ourselves, Compassionate Friends, to make a positive effort. We can hope that those buffeting winds of March can help us awaken to the renewals of Spring and put the "winter of our discontent" in its place, now a part of our **ongoing lives**.



## A Prayer for Spring

Like Springtime, let me unfold  
and grow fresh and anew,  
from this cocoon of grief  
that has been spun around me.

Help me face the harsh reality of  
sunshine and renewed life,  
as my bones still creak from  
the winter of my grief.  
Life has dared to go around me.  
And as I recover from the insult  
of life's continuance,  
I readjust my focus to  
include recovery and growth  
as a possibility in my future.

Give me strength to break out of  
the cocoon of my grief.  
But may I never forget it is  
the place where I grew my wings,  
becoming a new person  
because of my loss.

~ Janis Heil, SHARE, 2/86 Newsletter



## *My April Child*

When our daughters were growing up the arrival of Springtime was a favorite time of the year, filled with anticipation of the coming of special days of family fun. The freshness of the air, the brilliant colors of springtime trees and flowers, and the songs of birds returned from their winter retreat resounded the message of hope and that life was good. We had survived another cold, snowy Michigan winter and were soon to be renewed with blue sky, sunshine and temperatures well above freezing!

Birthdays in our family were a time of celebration together. Each year Larry, Anna, Debbie and I, and perhaps a friend or two, would celebrate Anna's April birthday by dining at her favorite Mexican restaurant. There would be lots silliness and laughter. During her teenage years, Anna would always forewarn us not to have the staff come to our table to sing their crazy birthday song. Of course, since we always insisted that our role as parents was to embarrass our children, her threats and warnings could not stop our tomfoolery. I believe she secretly enjoyed the attention.

As Mother's Day approached, we looked forward to spending the day together as a family. We would attend church, go out for my favorite brunch, have lots of conversation, fill our bellies to the max, laugh until we cried, be silly, and make memories. That was before... Then the unthinkable happened. My April child died. How could those special days of love and togetherness, laughter and fun become among the most dreaded days a mother must face? How could those days, that we had once anticipated with joy and excitement bring such unbelievable heartache and confusion, loneliness and tears?

During those first few years we were simply lost. This was new, undesired, and certainly not requested, territory that we had been forced to enter. What were we supposed to do? How were we supposed to act? I just wanted to run away on her birthday. For several years, we did just that. With hearts filled with the numbness of fresh grief, our restructured family of three would hop in the car and head out of town. We would spend the day busying ourselves with whatever it took to survive. We would laugh, half-heartedly, share memories, or cry together as we struggled to discover our new identity as a family without Anna's physical presence.

As always, only a few short weeks following Anna's birthday Mother's Day would arrive right on schedule.

The traditions we had come to love and enjoy became intently painful. It became an impossible task to attend church services or go out to brunch. Seeing families enjoying their togetherness pierced my heart with an endless ache. My tear-filled eyes burned at the thought of being surrounded by "intact" families. Feelings of anger and resentment overwhelmed my heart. On the inside I wanted to lash out at all those mothers and fathers who were surrounded by all of their children and those brothers and sisters who had no clue what it would be like to lose a sibling. As the day drew to a close, I felt a tremendous relief that it was over. Exhausted, I would lay silently with my head on my pillow as quiet tears lulled me to sleep.

It seems impossible that it has been nine birthdays and nine Mother's Days since Anna's died. In my heart it was only yesterday. I can still see her smile and hear her laugh. I can feel the warmth of a quick hug as she heads out the door. With each passing year comes a new reality of what it means to be a bereaved parent, of what it means to find a new normal for our lives. The pain continues to occasionally catch me off guard, but it is softer now. The tears still come, but less frequently. Warm memories bring joyful moments to the emptiness. I smile quietly to myself, reassured that Anna lives on in our hearts and lives, as well as in the hearts and lives of those around us. Once again each April we celebrate the day of her birth, for her life has been a gift of unimaginable joy. Our traditional Mother's Day rituals have changed to new ones. There is more laughter now, fewer painful tears. I rejoice that I can celebrate that I am Debbie's Mom, and now Scott's mother-in-law, as well! Life is good.

The winter has been long and cold, as has been the winter of our grief. Springtime has arrived. The sunshine and blue sky, the purple crocus and yellow daffodils pushing through the warming earth bring hope of renewal and reassurance that life continues. Although there is an irreparable hole in my soul and an emptiness in my heart that will never leave, I am forever grateful that Anna lived with us for 23 years. I am eternally thankful that I am and I will always be Anna's Mom. May the warmth and brilliance of Springtime fill your hearts with times of peace and hope and love.

*~ Paula Funk, TCF Petoskey, MI*



# What Now?

By Carl Yorke, Palo Alto, CA

If you are reading this because your child died, I am very sorry. If you are anything like me, you ask yourself regularly, “What Now?”

When my son, Wilem, died in 1994, my world turned upside down. Simple, daily routines became baffling and overwhelming. All the color went out of my life. I had trouble sleeping. I had trouble eating. I had trouble leaving the house. I cried all the time at sad things, at happy things, at nothing. People tried to help, but they didn’t know how. They didn’t know what to say, and some of the things they did say made me feel worse.

I started feeling different, isolated, and hopeless. I didn’t want to live and I didn’t want to die. I just wanted the pain to stop. But it didn’t stop, not for a long time. Day after day, I asked “Now What?”

Over time, I found some answers to this question. Here are some things I did to get through life one day at a time until I could live again.

**1. Stay sober.** This might be the most important thing I did. The death of a child leaves you particularly vulnerable to becoming dependent on alcohol, prescription drugs, and other mind-altering substances. This makes things worse, not better.

Grieving means feeling the grief. If you numb yourself, you only postpone the feelings. Also, drinking can lead to isolation. I needed other people to help me heal, and other people, like my surviving child, needed me.

**2. Tell yourself you’re not crazy; you’re just out of your mind.** Burying your child doesn’t make sense. Our children are supposed to outlive us. Trying to make sense of something that doesn’t make sense can make you feel crazy, and perhaps some people actually do go crazy. It’s awfully hard to comprehend what has happened to our children and our lives. When our minds can’t supply an answer that makes sense, we don’t stop searching. So we have to “go out of our minds” to find an answer.

I went outside of my mind in search of better minds. I investigated spiritual matters, grieving processes, and I went to a therapist. All of these helped. I also talked to a lot of other bereaved parents. I don’t feel like I’m out of my mind anymore.

**3. Remind yourself that you don’t have to go to social events, or if you do, you can always leave early, and you don’t owe anyone an explanation.** This is particularly good information during the holidays, and around family events like birthdays and anniversaries. I had a hard time being in groups of people, especially when a good time was supposed to be had by all. Often, when I declined an invitation, or tried to leave a gathering early, people wanted an explanation, as if the death of my child wasn’t a self-evident excuse. Some of your friends and family may want you at a gathering because they think it’s good for you to get out. That’s for you to decide, not them.

**4. Find a support group, or don’t.** Everyone grieves in his or her own way. There is no correct way to grieve, but there are things that help. Support groups can be uncomfortable, even painful, before they help you feel better, and it’s up to you to decide how far you can go. If you are a group person, find a support group.

I went to The Compassionate Friends where I met other people whose children had died. I got real information about the grieving process, and a place to talk about how I felt where no one judged me or tried to change the way I felt. There are a number of other support groups for bereaved parents as well. If you don’t see yourself as a group person, you don’t have to put yourself through it. However, I do recommend that you find someone to talk to. Holding on to the pain can affect your health and make things worse.

**5. Pain isn’t always your enemy; and pleasure isn’t always your friend.** Sometimes, there is no choice but to hurt. And any search for pleasure just postpones the pain. I came across a Turkish saying I like. Share the pain, it halves the pain. Share the joy. It doubles the joy.

**6. Write.** Get a notebook and start a journal. Write every day. Don’t read what you write, just keep writing. Write to everyone who sent you a condolence card and thank them. Get into online chat rooms and write to other people who are grieving. Write poems, especially if you are not a poet. I’m not a poet, but here’s a poem I wrote:

## *The Weight*

*A big load  
for such a little boy  
you carried us all to your grave.  
Strange place to come on your birthday  
I bring a balloon and flowers  
I polish your marker  
try to wipe off the years  
the sun flashes dull on the aging bronze  
-no vacancy, no vacancy.  
My heart so full  
my world so empty  
I dangle  
in the hollow space between*

**7. Do something mundane in your child’s name, and don’t tell anybody.** We are all familiar with public displays such as planting trees and creating foundations in the names of our children. These are important acknowledgements of their lives.

You can’t plant a tree every day. But you do think of your child every day. You don’t have to make a public statement to honor your child. Most of your grief is private and mundane.

Sometimes it’s hard to get out of bed and go to work. But you can do it in your child’s name. It’s easy to get angry when someone tries to squeeze into your lane in traffic. I’ll often let someone in while saying aloud, “Willie, that one’s for you.” Live your life in your child’s name. But don’t tell anyone.

These seven suggestions came to me over time, and they worked for me over time. They are a compilation of experience shared freely with me by other people, who, in their grief, found compassion. And in their compassion they found it useful, sometimes necessary, to pass on what they had learned. I hope these tips help you, and if they do, that you find someone to whom you can pass them on.

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# **The Compassionate Friends**

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

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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.