



# The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

*Published Quarterly by The Topeka TCF Chapter*

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

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

Oct ~ Nov ~ Dec ~ 2022

Editor: Susan Chan  
3448 S.W. Mission Ave.  
Topeka, KS 66614-3629

## OCTOBER MEETING

Monday, October 24, 2022  
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church  
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS  
7 - 8:30 p.m.

**“Will it Ever Be a Season With Joy Again? Handling the Holidays”**- Beginning with Halloween and running through Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year's, as griever's we are faced with the onslaught of holiday activities and “cheer” which we may find difficult and hard to deal with. At this meeting we will discuss some strategies for making this time of year less stressful. We will also talk about ways to include your loved ones in whatever holiday traditions you are comfortable with. Plan to share any ideas that have been helpful for you in handling the holidays. We can all learn from each other's experiences.

## NOVEMBER MEETING

Monday, November 28, 2022  
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church  
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS  
7 - 8:30 p.m.

**“I Am Thankful for...”**- Often times in the midst of the pain of our grief it is difficult to feel thankful for anything. But we need to step back a bit and focus on the things for which we can be thankful - the loving support of friends and family, the good health of our remaining family members, being part of a group that allows us to share our most deeply held inner thoughts about our child, grandchild or sibling to name a few. But perhaps one of the things we can be most thankful for is the fact that we had that child, grandchild or sibling in our lives; be thankful for the joy and memories they brought to us; thankful that we can move to a place where we remember not only that they died, but that THEY LIVED. Let's talk about “thankfulness” and how embracing it can impact our grief journey.

## DECEMBER MEETING

Monday, December 12, 2022  
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church  
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS  
7 - 8:30 p.m.

*Note Date Change!*

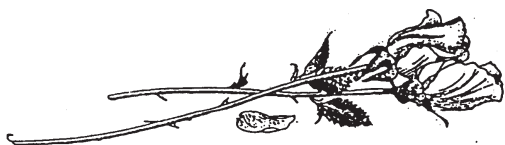
**“Memorial Candle Lighting”** - Please plan to join us for this special event to honor the lives of our children, grandchildren and siblings who “left too soon”. You are asked to bring a framed desktop photo of your loved one (if you do not have photos, plan to bring something that represents them to you). During the Candle Lighting we will share special music, poetry and each person will have an opportunity to light a votive candle in memory of that special life and place that candle by their photo/memento. You are encouraged to bring your or your child's favorite holiday treat to share with the group. Votive candles are provided. **PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE:** This event takes the place of our regular December support group meeting.

*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.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.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***

*Gary & Susan Chan in loving memory of their daughter  
Rachael Reneé Chan who was born on December 28<sup>th</sup>*

*Duane & Mary Eberhardt in loving memory of their  
son Jerry Eberhardt who died on October 25<sup>th</sup>*

*Doug & Connie Gould in loving memory of their son  
Marshall Gould who died on December 24<sup>th</sup>*

*Mark & Debi Harvey in loving memory of their son  
Nathan Harvey who was born on December 9<sup>th</sup>*

*Tom & Mary Sue Kraft in loving memory of their son  
Tyler Kraft who died on December 9<sup>th</sup>*

*Austin & Marianna Nothorn in loving memory of their  
son Brent Austin who died on December 14<sup>th</sup>*



***Please Note:***

If you wish to sponsor the next newsletter (January ~ February ~ March 2023)

we must receive your information and \$30.00 check by December 1, 2022.

Make checks payable to: Topeka TCF Chapter

**ATTENTION!!!**

***If you wish to continue to receive this  
newsletter in 2023, please fill out the yellow  
renewal form in this newsletter and return  
to the address on the form by  
November 30, 2022***

***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**

**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 [irosen@stormontvail.org](mailto: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>.



**The Compassionate Friends**  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all  
children who have died

**Worldwide  
Candle  
Lighting®**

... that their light  
may always shine.

**Second Sunday in December  
7 PM Around the Globe**



# 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:

♥ *Bob & Kayla Dieball in loving memory of their daughter Callea Mae Breiner who died on December 19<sup>th</sup>*

♥ *Julie Diaz in loving memory of her daughter Kristi Diaz who was born on November 1<sup>st</sup>*

♥ *Doug & Connie Gould in loving memory of their son Marshall Gould who died on December 24<sup>th</sup>*

♥ *Tom & Mary Sue Kraft in loving memory of their son Tyler Kraft who died on December 9<sup>th</sup>*

♥ *Austin & Marianna Nothorn in loving memory of their son Brent Nothorn who died on December 14<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/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](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 your wish to support. **The Topeka Compassionate Friends Chapter NPO number is TC248.** Once you have done so and have a Dillons Shopper's Card, every time you make a purchase at Dillons 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.

**TCF National Office e-mail:**  
[nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org](mailto:nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org)

**Compassionate Friends web address:**  
[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

**Topeka TCF Chapter web and e-mail addresses:**  
[www.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.org)    [tcftopeka@gmail.com](mailto:tcftopeka@gmail.com)

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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 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.*

## OCTOBER~

Olivia Lynn Anderson, daughter of Suzannah Anderson; sister of Eli Anderson who was born on October 11<sup>th</sup>

Jordan Robert Barranco, son of Juan and Elizabeth Barranco, who was born on October 30<sup>th</sup>

Brian Lynn Blecha, son of Lynn and Alice Blecha, who died October 15<sup>th</sup>

Derek G. Bodeman, son of Becky S. Bodeman, born on October 29<sup>th</sup>

Monty Brentlinger, son of Don and Carolyn Brentlinger, who died on October 21<sup>st</sup>

Skylar Callahan, son of Gena Callahan, brother of Branden, Alex, Chris and Jacob, who died on October 30<sup>th</sup>

Seth Austin Carney, son of Clay and Michelle Carney, died October 13<sup>th</sup>

Kale Cauthon, son of Denise Cauthon; brother of Josh and Cam, who died on October 15<sup>th</sup>

Eric Joseph Conley, son of Tom and Barbara Conley, who was born on October 22<sup>nd</sup>

Gerald (Jerry) Eberhardt, son of Duane and Mary Eberhardt, who died on October 25<sup>th</sup>

Chazz Robert Exon, son of Stacy Mackey, who was born on October 30<sup>th</sup>

Richard Brian Gilbert, son of Rick and Carla Gilbert, who was born October 20<sup>th</sup>

Justin Grabhorn, son of Philip and Barbara Grabhorn, who was born on October 10<sup>th</sup>

Tasman McKay Grout, daughter of Pam Grout, who was born on October 8<sup>th</sup> and died on October 15<sup>th</sup>

Mitchell Hermreck, son of Dennis and Ann Hermreck; brother of Shelby and Raegan, who was born on October 14<sup>th</sup>

Abigail Hosie, daughter of Matt and Jennifer Hosie, who was born on October 30<sup>th</sup>

Gabriel Kidd, son of Julie Kidd, who died on October 1<sup>st</sup>

Mark McCullough, son of Bonnie Bennett, who was born on October 21<sup>st</sup>

Abigail Medley, daughter of Terry Medley and Jennifer Hoise, who was born on October 30<sup>th</sup>

Jessica Rae Meyer, daughter of James Robert Meyer and Jennifer Jean Meyer, and sister of Rebecca Meyer, who was born on October 27<sup>th</sup>

Janet Pace, daughter of Barbara Hale, sister of Carla Gilbert and Sara Wallo, and mother of Shauna Andersen, born October 9<sup>th</sup>

Robin Lynn Paulson, daughter of Frank and Brenda Bissey and sister of Brad Bissey, born October 8<sup>th</sup>

Sarah N. Rice, daughter of Gary and Peggy Rice, who died on October 6<sup>th</sup>

Brian Keith Robinson, son of Vernon and Pauline Robinson, born October 3<sup>rd</sup>; died October 13<sup>th</sup>

Luke Rojas, son of Wilma W. Rojas, born October 22<sup>nd</sup>; died October 29<sup>th</sup>

Abbey Rubottom, daughter of Darcey Evans, who was born on October 23<sup>rd</sup>

Jeffery Alan Steinbock, son of Joe and Anne Steinbock, died October 11<sup>th</sup>

Caldyn David Wasinger, son of Austin and Krista Wasinger, who was born on October 28<sup>th</sup>

## NOVEMBER~

Spencer O'Bleness, son of Rebecca O'Bleness, who was born on November 15<sup>th</sup> and died on November 8<sup>th</sup>

Skylar Callahan, son of Gena Callahan, brother of Branden, Alex, Chris and Jacob, who was born on November 4<sup>th</sup>

Kristi Diaz, daughter of Julie Diaz, born November 7<sup>th</sup>

Jeffrey Hoium, son of Mel and Helen Hoium, who died on November 12<sup>th</sup>

Karen Kay Karnes, daughter of Wilson and Maxine Karnes, died November 19<sup>th</sup>

Morgan Kottman, daughter of Christine Kottman, who died on November 21<sup>st</sup>

Tabitha Krystofosky, sister of Darrell "Bo" Cremer, Jr., who died on November 27<sup>th</sup>

Ben Lake, grandson of Patty Lake, who died on November 29<sup>th</sup>

Christen (Chris) Edward Locke, son of Alfonzo E. Locke Jr. and Sheila D. Locke, who was born on November 29<sup>th</sup>

Phylles McCarthy, daughter of Janet Hamilton who was born in November.

Jessica Rae Meyer, daughter of James Robert Meyer and Jennifer Jean Meyer, and sister of Rebecca Meyer, who died on November 16<sup>th</sup>

Kyle Neighigh, son of Rosemary Robledo, who died on November 19<sup>th</sup>

Kiley Ramey, daughter of Gary and Linda Ramey, died November 24<sup>th</sup>

Adam J. Reams, son of Gene and Sandy Reams; brother of Nick Reams, born on November 24<sup>th</sup>

Jason R. VanDam, son of Will and Kay Hasty, who died on November 5<sup>th</sup>

Donald (Donnie) Warren, son of Nancy McCune, who was born on November 26<sup>th</sup>

Eric Edward Gordon Wiebler, son of David and Laura Wiebler, who was born on November 15<sup>th</sup>

Kenneth Williams, son of Clayton and Sharon Williams, who was born on November 14<sup>th</sup> and died on November 21<sup>st</sup>

## DECEMBER ~

Carlie Almond, daughter of Brad and Amy Almond, who died on December 3<sup>rd</sup>

Kyle Bartley, son of Susan Bartley, brother of Cody Bartley, who died on December 23<sup>rd</sup>

Lori Ann Becerra, daughter of Mike and Ginny Becerra, born on December 15<sup>th</sup> and died on December 15<sup>th</sup>

Ryan Broxterman, son of Kevin and Susan Broxterman, who died on December 6<sup>th</sup>

Kristy Burton, daughter of Bonnie Bennett, who was born on December 22<sup>nd</sup>

Rachael Reneé Chan, daughter of Gary and Susan Chan, born on December 28<sup>th</sup>

Tyler Kraft, son of Tom and Mary Sue Kraft, who died on December 9<sup>th</sup>

Kevin Lee Cronister, son of Richard and Judy Cronister, who died on December 10<sup>th</sup>

Curtis Junior Dickinson, son of Curtis and Debbi Dickinson, stillborn on December 24<sup>th</sup>

Callea Breiner, daughter of Bob and Kayla Dieball, who who died on December 19<sup>th</sup>

Angel Winter Dawn Dickinson, daughter of Curtis and Debbi Dickinson, stillborn on December 25<sup>th</sup>

Phylles McCarthy, daughter of Janet Hamilton who died in December

Marshall Gould, son of Doug and Connie Gould, who was born on December 27<sup>th</sup> and died on December 24<sup>th</sup>

John Carl Harrington, son of Mary Harrington, born on December 15<sup>th</sup>

Nathan Harvey, son of Mark and Debi Harvey; brother of Rachel, Amanda and Caleb Harvey; grandson of Velata Tibbs, born on December 9<sup>th</sup>

Shawn Michael Hatfield, son of Hank and Cathy Harman, who died on December 5<sup>th</sup>

Austin Tyler Miller, grandson of Earl and Linda Frey, stillborn on December 3<sup>rd</sup>

David D. Morris, son of Merwin (Bud) and Velma C. Morris, born on December 18<sup>th</sup>

Krystil M. Pearson, daughter of Patti Cox and sister of Kendall Pressler, who was born on December 24<sup>th</sup>

Jamie Lynn Russell, daughter of John and Elaine Chandler, who died on December 29<sup>th</sup>

Patrick Sprowl, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sprowl, who died on December 10<sup>th</sup>

Jeffery Alan Steinbock, son of Joe and Anne Steinbock, who was born on December 13<sup>th</sup>

Nicholas Swanson, son of Candi Kuipers; brother of Tayla and Jaythan, who died on December 23<sup>rd</sup>

Caldyn David Wasinger, son of Austin and Krista Wasinger, who died on December 1<sup>st</sup>

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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 this section, please fill out the form below and return to: Susan Chan, 3448 S.W. Mission Avee., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may also email to [chanx2@cox.net](mailto: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**

# Halloween Memories

Most children enjoy Halloween, the costumes, the candy, the parties, trick or treat, the decorations and so much more. My son looked forward to Halloween with great anticipation. Until he reached the fourth grade, Todd was happy to pick out a costume at the discount store....usually the current movie or television monster.

He came home from school in fourth grade and told me that there was going to be a costume contest and he really wanted to have a unique costume. I asked him what he wanted to be, and I will never forget his response: "I want to be a vampire, Mom. A really cool vampire." So, I talked to a friend of mine who was into stage production, and we went to her house the night before the contest.

She had a vampire cape, a vampire body suit, a vampire collar and great makeup. Todd loved it. My friend stopped at the house early the next morning and applied the makeup and did the finishing touches on Todd's costume. He looked just like the vampires in the movies, He was so pleased. He really wanted to win first place in his class. I dropped him at school and told him to have a wonderful time. He was elated.

As the day progressed, I wondered how he was doing. He had never wanted to win a prize before; what if he didn't get first place in his class? I worried about him, knowing that his feelings were easily hurt by cruel children and sometimes by cruel teachers. He called me at 3:30 to let me know he was home. I could hear excitement in his voice, and I asked him how he did.

"Mom, you won't believe this", he said in a serious, low toned voice. "What happened?", I asked, now wondering about the day's events. "I won first place, Mom. First place in the whole school. I can't wait for Halloween. Wait till Grandpa sees me. He won't even recognize me. I even got a certificate for first place....I'm putting it up in my room." I was so happy that tears welled in my eyes. My son had tried his best, and he had won. He had put himself out there and he wasn't disappointed, disillusioned or discouraged.

That was the first of many accomplishments in my son's life. He went on to win in track in high school, restore a 1965 GTO from the ground up and receive numerous trophies and awards. He attained his BS and MBA and was successful and respected in business. He was a great father to his children, and his love for them was very deep. He never hesitated to tell them he loved them and how proud he was of them. He was a wonderful parent. He was always an amazing son. His death left a scar on my soul and a hole in my heart.

But his first success is forever in my mind. The little certificate which he brought home and hung on his bedroom wall is a treasure of his wonderful childhood. Halloween is still a happy holiday, and it is one of the few which I enjoy. I thank my son for that and for all the joy he gave me in his short 35 years of life.



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

## One Foot in Yesterday

Yesterday my child was here, on this planet, alive. Yesterday life looked promising. Yesterday morning I woke up looking forward to the day. Today I awake peacefully and then I remember my child is dead, and I cannot breathe. I am jolted from head to toe. My child has been dead for a day. I wonder what my child was thinking in the last moments. I remember all the wonderful times. I remember the joy. I think of my child's life and how his life changed me forever. I remember the last time I saw my child. I remember the last goodbye. I sob and breathe.

I am lost for days. Final arrangements are made. The platitudes float past me.....these words have no meaning. A memorial service for my child. People with sad faces. Hugs, words, tears, head shaking. I can see it in their eyes.....they are thankful it isn't their child. They are uncomfortable. Time heals, they say. There's a plan, there's a reason. I cannot respond. They understand. No, they don't. My child is dead. This is not my parent, my husband, my sibling. This is my child. My child was supposed to outlive me. I thank them for their good intentions. I have no interest in their words. A few friends say nothing. This is the better choice, the wiser action. Be there, be there for me. Understand my unspoken words. See my broken heart. Understand. Listen to my story, a story of my child. Remember his life, remember his death.

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

## *Some Suggestions for Thanksgiving*

Throughout our lives, expectations of things to come are based upon past experiences. If, in the past, you had set a glorious table and were the perfect host or hostess, it is very possible that friends and family will expect more of the same this year. They may not be aware that you are not looking toward the holidays with a fun and games attitude.

They probably do not know that in anticipation of Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukkah, you may feel anxiety and fear. They are probably thinking this year will be different and some sadness will accompany it, but I don't think they are aware of your anguish, especially if it's been "awhile."

I would like to suggest to you that in fairness to yourself you need to be honest about your feelings and, just as important, you need to communicate these feelings to those around you. I really don't think it is necessary for you to believe that because you set a tradition and always made the turkey, fried the latkes, and always had the family over, you need to feel obligated to do it again this year. Perhaps you would like to tell everyone:

- \* Someone else will have to do dinner this year.
- \* You want to make dinner in your home, but you need lots of help because you don't have the energy to do it.
- \* You want to go to the parties, but you are afraid you may break down and cry and you want them to know in advance this is really okay.
- \* You want to tell them it's okay to talk about your child. Not to, makes it very uncomfortable.

The list goes on, but the point is that to pretend everything is "just fine" is a lie, and that's not fair to you or to the people who you love.

~ Diane Zarnkoff  
TCF, Simi Valley, CA



## **THANKSGIVING PRAYER**

I'm thankful this Thanksgiving  
That my grief is not so new.  
Last year it was so painful  
To think of losing you.  
Death can't claim my love for you  
Tho we are far apart,  
Sweet memories will always be  
Engraved upon my heart.  
Time can never bring you back.  
But it can help me be  
Thankful for the years of joy  
You brought our family.  
To all the parents with grief so new  
I share your loss and sorrow.  
I pray you find with faith and time  
The blessings of each tomorrow.

~ Charlotte Irick  
TCF, Idaho Falls, ID

## ***First Thanksgiving***

The thought of being thankful  
fills my heart with dread.  
They'll all be feigning gladness,  
not a word about her said.  
These heavy shrouds of blackness  
enveloping my soul,  
pervasive, throat-catching,  
writhe in me, and coil.

I must, I must acknowledge,  
just express her name,  
so all sitting at the table,  
know I'm thankful that she came.

Though she's gone from us forever  
and we mourn to see her face,  
not one minute of her living,  
would her death ever replace.

So I stop the cheerful gathering,  
though my voice quivers, quakes,  
make a toast to all her living.  
That small tribute's all it takes.

~ Genesee Bourdeau Gentry  
from *Stars in the Deepest – After the Death of a Child*

# The Magic of Christmas

The magic of Christmas, it's contagious. You can't help but get caught up in the joy with the barrage of holiday festivities. We are surrounded with commercials for the perfect gift, the anticipated smells from the kitchen, the Santa's in the Mall with the line of children waiting to ask for their most desired gifts. Your heart can't help but beat a little faster. The houses decorated to express the joy of the season, inside and out, demand your attention. The twinkling lights draw your eye. You can't help but feel the magic of Christmas.

I had my own collection of decorations that occupied a special space in the attic, carefully wrapped and packed away from last year. The collection of ornaments that had been objects of careful selection each year was a prized possession. The other decorations such as sleighs, bells, angels, holly, statues had always bejeweled the house to shout out the joy, magic and anticipation of the season.

My own childhood memories of Christmas' past were precious and served as a starting point to create memories for my own children. Soon after the turkey carcass was thrown out from Thanksgiving, up to the attic we would go and drag the boxes down the narrow attic stairs. "Be sure and get the box with the green lid" I would shout up the stairs, "but be careful. That one contains the glass ornament collection."

The boys would be so excited as their Christmas season began. Their house would be transformed into a winter wonderland all in a day. The season would officially begin as soon as the stockings were hung on the fireplace and the Christmas lists would be started. Catalogs were leafed through and advertisements taken seriously. There was no limit to the lists. The sky was the limit on dreams they were encouraged to dream.

Something happened after losing my son, Rick. The magic is gone, the thrill forgotten. The decorations are no longer in the attic but were given away the first Christmas after Rick died. How could I possibly gather the strength or will to put on such a show? There is no enjoyment, only memories of a joy that once was. The collection of glass ornaments are still wrapped in their tissue in the box with the green lid.

Michael has been robbed of his innocence surrounding Christmas but more than that he was robbed of his brother and future memories. My heart hurts when my mind captures the full scope of my new life. That's when I shut the door on that room in my mind to be visited when I have more strength. But in the meantime another Christmas will come and go.

We have found a new way to observe Christmas. We use that day to honor life and the blessings that are bestowed upon us. We now appreciate family so much more and those in it. We celebrate our family, friends and the love of Christ. We have found that Christmas is not about the decorations, the food, or the gifts. To us Christmas is about the three of us rejoicing in our memories and the love we have in our lives now.

Even as I write this poignant story I do want to express my sincere appreciation for the precious memories that we had as a family when Rick was still here, when his gifts had their own place under the tree, his stocking had a place on the fireplace

next to Michael's. The tack hole is still there as a reminder; "He was here".

I'm so thankful for the pictures in my mind and in the photo albums to remind me of the happiness that once was. I'm grateful for the time I had as a mother of young children during the magic of Christmas. Their exhilaration was priceless. I was witness to the sparkle in their eyes and their shivering of excitement on Christmas morning. I was able to go to them on Christmas morning and say, "Santa came." Christmas morning was the ultimate climax of the entire season and it was always as thrilling as promised. I will have these memories for the rest of my life and for that I'm thankful.

*~ Dana Rogers, TCF Galveston County, TX  
In Memory of my son, Rick  
Mother to Michael*

## Looking for Your Gift

Bereaved families often face the holidays with fear and trepidation. Just the fact, holidays continue to go on, can cause outrage. Our sadness is monumental, and causes our bodies to resist moving on. We need to be gentle with ourselves; we are going through an emotional rehabilitation. Holidays often renew our grief, even if we are a distance from fresh grief.

We need to selectively choose what traditions are important to our family. If we over commit, we set our selves up for a let down when we cannot meet our goals. If you have some traditions that are very important and you are not physically up to doing them, you will find friends and extended family will feel honored if you ask for their help. Most people want to help you get through the holidays, but don't know what to do. Give them the opportunity to feel they are helpful in your healing.



Grieving cannot be put on the shelf until the holidays are over. We need to take time to feel our grief, and express our sadness. We also need to take time to try and put a bit of normality in our lives. We must remember it is not disrespectful to laugh. I'm sure our loved one would want us to surround ourselves with caring people who can help us through the holidays. A caring supportive person is one who encourages us to be the best we can be, not one who expects us to be as we used to be.

Our healing will eventually cause our pain to move out and make room for our loved ones memories. We learn to make a new life for ourselves. Holidays get better and we learn how to live again.

We tend to think of life's richest moments as being the joyous, fun filled, carefree days prior to losing our children and siblings. But, as I search for the most meaningful things that have given me strength and a real appreciation for life, they certainly do include the pain, overcoming my despair, losing

my son, grandson, and six siblings. We cherish the friendships that doesn't always demand a smiling face, and those with the warm touch that says, "share your pain, let me be a part of your grief, don't worry about making us uneasy with tears, we have all been there." Much healing can take place through sharing as we learn to be very honest and courageous with our feelings, which helps us to find hope. Hope helps to restore our love for life, and gives us the strength to survive.

This holiday we will all miss our loved ones, who are no longer with us. Though it has been through much pain, you probably have never been so close to your child or sibling, or shared such a large part of your life with them. We hope the memories that ache with pain, can also bring you thoughts of love. For those of us who are further removed from our early grief, who can look back and appreciate the strength for our struggle, the compassion from seeing other's pain, wanting to become functional human beings again so we can contribute to making a better world, are gifts our children and siblings have given to us for our survival. These gifts are greater than any fancy bow tied box can contain. Look for your gifts and cherish them.

~ Marie Hofmockel, TCF Valley Forge, PA

## Remembrance

*What do we do when we love someone  
But they have gone away  
When all our days of bright sunlight  
Have turned to shades of gray?*

*What do we say when no comfort comes  
From words of love and hope  
When efforts made seem pointless  
As we fight each day to cope?*

*How do we act when we hear their name  
And we cannot help but cry  
This isn't fair, they were barely here  
It's not time to say goodbye!*

*We promise them that they have made  
A place within our hearts  
Where they will live forever  
Though we are far apart*

*We call upon the memories  
As time allowed and then  
Tuck them safely in our minds  
To visit now and again*

*We cherish them as best we can  
Each smile, each word, each look  
We write the story they want told  
On the pages of life's book*

*For most important is the vow  
We honor when they're gone  
Of sharing all they've given us  
From that moment on*

~ Donna Gerrior, TCF Pasco County, FL  
In Memory of Rob

## Christmas Eve



*Silent  
Night, holy  
Night ~*

*"It's about time,"  
he says quietly.*

*Deliberately, wordlessly,  
they gather the materials  
carefully put away last year,  
the matches, candle, candle jar  
to fend off the harsh winter wind.*

*Tis the season to be jolly ~*

*Slowly they drive toward the town's edge,  
past homes with bright, blinking bulbs.*

*Cars of faraway relatives fill the drives.*

*Happy, laughing families, children home from school  
pass on the way to midnight Mass.*

*It's the most wonderful time of the year ~*

*At last, town lights left far behind, they sit mute,  
each wrapped in private cocoons of memories of  
Christmas past, excited whispers from their room,  
silly giggles, fervent good-night kisses, anticipation of morning.*

*On a cold winter's night that was so deep ~*

*Through the gate, down the drive, engine killed,  
frozen grass crunching underfoot, hand-in-hand  
they walk up the hill to the familiar moonlit stone. With  
practiced hands they brush it clean, then prepare their votive Noel.*

*The world in solemn stillness lay ~*

*Lumps in throat, arm-in-arm, candles lit, they stand and weep,  
But not so bitter as in years past. The pain's as deep but not so long,  
as once again they dream of things that should have been but never were.*

*The stars in the sky look down where he lay ~*

*"Let's go," he says. She nods assent. They leave,  
though turn back once to see  
the lonely flame of their lost child gleaming peacefully  
through the dark.*

*He whispers softly, his visit done -*

*"Merry Christmas and  
good-night, my child.*

*~ Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace ~*

By Richard A. Dew, MD, TCF Knoxville, TN

## 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. If you have chosen the e-newsletter option, please keep me aware of any email address changes.

# The Surprising Truth About Ritual and Grief

By Litsa Williams, Program Director and Co-Founder of [whatsyourgrief.com](http://whatsyourgrief.com)

Ritual. When you read the word, what comes to mind? If I were to take a guess, I'd say maybe a religious ceremony. Possibly a wedding, baptism, or funeral? Perhaps a graduation or military ceremony. It isn't that there aren't small, private, everyday rituals we all practice. But often when we hear the words "ritual and grief", we think of things that are:

- Public
- Communal
- Fixed/consistent
- Religious

Rituals that fall into those categories, they can be an important part of grief and mourning. Heck, they can be an important part of life in general. Whether it is sitting Shiva, attending a funeral, holding a remembrance ceremony, or even an annual memorial golf tournament or 5k, these rituals serve many important purposes including (but not limited) to:

- Bringing together people who loved and cared about the person.
- Allowing a sense of purpose, control and distraction immediately following the death.
- Providing spiritual connection and comfort.
- Creating intergenerational and ancestral ties.
- Providing ongoing time and space come together to remember.

Funny thing is, with all the wonderful things about those type of rituals, sometimes they aren't what you want or need at a given moment. There can be countless reasons for this, everything from feeling overwhelmed by grieving and mourning with others, to feeling alienated from formal traditions, or exhausted by the prospect of planning.

When you participate in a ritual and it isn't what you want or need at that moment, you can feel like you're grieving "wrong". You feel like you should have found comfort at a funeral or memorial, but you didn't. You feel like you should have felt supported by the many friends and family grieving with you, when you just felt alone. Today we're here to fill you in on a little secret: these traditional, public and communal rituals are not the only meaningful rituals in grief, not by a long shot! That's good news for all grievers, but especially those of us who don't love public, traditional rituals. So settle on in for some thoughts on ritual, even if you don't think of yourself as a ritual person.

## The Ritual Research

A few years back some researchers from an institution you just may have heard of before, Harvard University, were interested in learning more about ritual. Michael Norton and Francesca Gino studied grievers, looking at how ritual impacted them in their grief. When they started their research they expected to learn about public rituals, interested how

these might impact those coping with loss. What they found was unexpected. When surveying grievers they found the majority of them did not cite public or communal rituals as the most meaningful in their grief at all. What they found instead was:

- Only 10 percent of the rituals people cited as meaningful were public
- Only 5 percent of the rituals people cited as meaningful were religious
- Only 5 percent of rituals were performed communally

Interesting, right? That means 90% were private, 95% were secular, and 95% were done individually (I know, I know . . . you can all do math too). To quote Norton and Gino's study, most of the meaningful rituals people described, "were private, "everyday" rituals that were unique to an individual – as opposed to publicly performed, commonly-utilized rituals."

Researchers allowed participants to self-define rituals, and the examples people shared of everyday rituals ran the gamut. They included things you might expect, like lighting a candle on the anniversary of a loved one's death, to more specific and personal rituals. Participants said things like, "I washed his car every week as he used to do" and, "in these fifteen years, I have been going to hairdressers to cut my hair every first Saturday of the month as we used to do together". What they found far less frequently were descriptions of rituals like funerals and memorials.

## So What?

We get it that research doesn't always feel the most helpful or relevant. In fact, especially early in grief, it can feel a little obnoxious to imagine some detached researchers sitting around studying grievers like a bunch of guinea pigs. But some really useful stuff does come from the ivory towers of academia every now and then. We think this is one of those times. This research can be a very validating reminder that those quirky personal grief rituals you have, that you may have thought were a little weird, are actually very normal and healthy! Some of the takeaway reminders from the initial and follow-up research that we find pretty helpful are:

***Public and private rituals are helpful.*** Why? According to Norton and Gino, they give a sense of control in situations that are totally outside of one's control. One isn't better than the other, so find what works for you. Sometimes a public ritual is just what you need, other times it is the stuff you do solo.

***Rituals don't have to be fixed.*** Sometimes a ritual done just once can create a sense of comfort and control. As a griever you might decide to repeat a ritual, not repeat it, or adapt it over time. All normal and all can be helpful.

***Rituals that seem can seem like they would make people sad actually bring comfort.*** So next time someone makes you

feel like your ritual is a downer, you can feel good knowing Norton and Gino's follow-up research found greater comfort among those who practiced ritual than those who didn't.

Ritual can occasionally become problematic. If you are someone who struggles with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Gino and Norton note that rituals can be a little risky. If you realize that a ritual is starting to feel like an obsession or compulsion (it is hard to keep yourself from doing it and/or you are doing it when it interferes with or negatively impacts your life in some way) you should talk to a mental health professional for support keeping things in check.

### ***Embracing Personal Rituals***

A while back we asked WYG readers to share their personal rituals on our Facebook page. We got so many amazing responses, things that speak to the unique and individual nature of the rituals that mean something to us. I've got lots of little ones, like the fact that I never turn down a piece of coconut cake. Whether it's at a restaurant or a coffee shop, if it's on the menu I order it. Because coconut cake always reminds me of my dad and family and childhood (even though I didn't really like coconut cake then) so it is my own little private ritual, that can happen almost anywhere.

Source: What's Your Grief, May 31, 2017  
[www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com)

(Editor's Note: Once again I would highly recommend this website as a great place to find resources, share your grief journey and find support online. Lots of good articles to read.)



## ***A Ritual for Gatherings with Family or Friends***

Invite your family and/or friends to do a mourning ritual with you.

Gather around a table with a candle in the center

After the candle is lit, everyone thinks about two things to share out loud with the rest

The first is a ***poignant memory*** to pour out of your heart

Or something that still worries  
you about the death

The second thing to think about and share is a ***happy memory*** about the one who died

Something that will always make you happy or  
laugh when you think about it

When everyone is ready with their two memories or thoughts to share, take turns telling what they are

After everyone is finished talking

Decide on someone (or more than one) to blow out the candle

As the smoke begins to rise, read the following:

As the smoke rises from this candle, we celebrate  
(Name of person being remembered)

Thank you for being a part of our memories.  
We will carry you in our hearts as we go through this holiday season (or whatever the occasion)  
You are a part of our family yesterday, today and forever

We love you

(Author Unknown)

Posted on December 24, 2019 posted on TCF website by Cathy Seehuetter

## **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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## **TCF Credo**

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.