**April 2017 The Compassionate Friends Volume 31● Number 4**

 ***THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS***

 **P. O. Box 50833 • Nashville, TN 37205 • (615) 356-4TCF(4823) •Nashville Website: www.tcfnashville.org**

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The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief

following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

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*Welcome: The Nashville chapter meets at 3:00 p.m. on the second Sunday of each month in the American Builders & Contractors (ABC) Building, 1604 Elm Hill Pike, Nashville, TN 37210 . Park and enter at the rear of the building.*

*We truly regret that we have no accommodations for young children, but teenagers and older siblings are welcome to attend.*

**April 9 Meeting:**

**Phone Friends**

We have all experienced the pain of losing a child. We understand and would like to listen. If you can’t reach one of us, feel free to call another person on this list.

**Accidental Death** ………...Mike and Paula Childers

615-646-1333

**AIDS**………………….….…….….......Joyce Soward

615-754-5210

**Illness**………….…………..David and Peggy Gibson

615-356-1351

**Infant**…………………..……………..…Jayne Head

 615-264-8184

**SIDS**………….…………..…….……KrisThompson

 931-486-9088

**Suicide**…….……………….Ron and Darlene Henson

 615-789-3613

**Small Child**….……........Kenneth and Kathy Hensley

 615-237-9972

**Alcohol/Drug Overdose**......…...............……Ed Pyle

 615-712-3245

**I Remember By**

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pril’s program will be a sharing of ways we have memorialized

our children, grandchildren and siblings.  Please bring something

tangible such as photos, scrapbooks, or other mementos, or simply

share what you have done to honor and remember the special

life and love of your child.  Some of our regulars will be asked to

prepare, but everyone will have the chance to share in the large

group or the small sharing circles. Ways to memorialize our loved

ones vary widely and include stories of glow-in-the -dark

headstones, birthday parties at the cemetery, scholarships,

food drives, balloon releases, and more.  Please join us April 9.

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ttending your first TCF meeting can be difficult. Feelings can be overwhelming. We have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Please attend two or three meetings before deciding if TCF is right for you. There are no dues or fees. If you choose, you need not speak a word at a meeting. We are an international, non-denominational group, offering support and information to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents. We need not walk alone.

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National Office P. O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, Illinois 60522-3696—Phone 630 990-0010 or Toll free: 1-877 969-0010

TCF Website: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) National Office email:nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

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**On the Tenth Anniversary**

M

arch 24th was the 10th anniversary of my only child’s death. If Drew were still counting birthdays, the next would be his 36th. It’s hard to believe it was that long ago, yet, I know it’s so. There are still days when I feel the accumulated loss of every moment of the last ten years.

Love combined with loss equals grief, in the same amount and at the same depth as was the love. Grief never truly leaves you, and birthdays and anniversaries reignite the pain. On the other hand, it’s also possible to learn to lean toward the light. Always I feel Drew with me. Sometimes my unconscious mind soothes me into feeling he’s away on a long trip and I’m simply waiting for his return. Some days it’s as if he’s still here, but just out of sight. I might hear a voice saying “Mama,” the rumble of a motorcycle or tuneless whistling — and I know he’s there. Occasionally, we meld minds, and he sends me a practical reminder to change the oil and rotate the tires. Or I might have a thought encouraging me to give that annoying someone the benefit of the doubt, and I know it came from him. I hear a song he liked on the radio or laugh out loud at a joke I know he would have loved. I see his photo on the mantle or his guitar in the closet, and my heart is gladdened.

I say these things to offer you comfort and maybe a little hope. Eventually, like me, you may realize, to your astonishment, that you have survived what you thought you couldn’t. No matter how bad a particular day may be, you can realize that survival will continue, because you’re stronger now and because that’s what your child would have wanted for you. Instead of making the hole in your heart bigger, the thought of your child can make you smile. It can remind you to be thankful for the love and happiness she or he brought you. It can make you realize that you are all the better — more kind, more patient, more empathetic, more sensitive — for having borne them and loved them, and even having lost them.

Shari Tipton

TCF Nashville

# PLAN NOW TO ATTEND:

# https://www.compassionatefriends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2017-conference-bg-800x533.jpg

# THE 40TH TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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he Compassionate Friends is pleased to announce that Orlando, Florida, will be the site of the 40th TCF National Conference on July 28-30, 2017. “Rays of Sunshine, Oceans of Hope” is the theme of this year’s event. The 2017 Conference will be held at the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek. Details will be updated on the national website, www.compassionatefriends.org, as well as on our TCF/USA Facebook Page as they become available.

Plan to come and be a part of this heartwarming experience.

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**The Sign**

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s a little boy Jody loved to pick Black-eyed Susans. He’d pick those wild flowers and bring them to me with such love and pride in presentation. The last bunch he picked for me was on my birthday before his death.

The Black-eyed Susan is an independent wild flower that cannot be forced to grow out of season. The growing period for these wild flowers is the middle of June to the middle of August. But there, the first of September in the year of my son’s death, in the center of Jody’s grave, was a single perfectly formed Black-eyed Susan. It stood with strength and reassurance. It was all alone in the still, unsettled dirt covering the grave. There was not even a blade of grass or a single weed around.

I wept with mixed emotions of intense loss and love, feeling both distance and closeness, sadness and sudden relief. I saw it as a sign from my darling Jody. It spoke to me words from my dead child. “Do not cry. Do not despair. I love you and never intended for you to suffer so much. Please forgive me, and please be happy with the rest of your life. Please believe that I’m okay and at peace.”

Whether it was a sign from Jody or from God, perhaps a bird dropped a Black-eyed Susan seed on the fresh grave, it brought me relief. I felt that my son wasn’t so far away, and that his spirit would always be with me.

If nothing more, it helped me to begin to think of Jody there at the gravesite. He was dead, and I began to accept that. I started to realize that I would never again see his form as I had known it. But his spirit would be close and would guide me. I would not forget him and what we shared. He would always be special. What we gave to one another, what we had meant to each other, would not die or diminish with the passage of years, and it has not.

Each year since Jody’s death, a single Black-eyed Susan has grown on his grave. It is a comfort and a joy. It is a remarkable phenomenon that now makes me smile rather than cry. Jody was a kid who never forgot my birthday, and never outgrew giving his mom flowers. I choose to believe he still hasn’t. There are many mysteries in life and death that can’t be explained, and I think shouldn’t be, just accepted.

Susan White-Bowden

 “From a Healing Heart”

***The Child That’s Not There***

*The child that’s not there*

*Takes up every piece of me.*

*The child that’s not there*

*Consumes my every thought.*

*The child that’s not there*

*Makes me feel like I failed.*

*The child that’s not there*

*Took away a main reason for being.*

*But*

*The children that are there*

*Still somehow bring me joy.*

*The children that are there*

*Still need my love.*

*The children that are there*

*Don’t need any more grief.*

*The children that are there*

*Force me to go on.*

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Tricia Palmer

TCF, Tidewater, VA

***Fleeting pictures cross my mind***

*Fleeting pictures cross my mind
Your smile imprinted on my heart
So very long since I heard your voice…
You would be 21 today.
What would you do, where would we celebrate?
The early piercing agony of losing you is different
Replaced by a yearning so deep and a longing so strong
To hold you in my arms,
Cradle your head on my chest
And whisper
“Happy birthday my darlin’,
I miss you.”*

Charisse Smith

TCF Tyler, TX

We quickly find there are no words to describe the experience of losing a child.

For those who have not lost a child, no explanation will do.

For those who have, no explanation is necessary.

Mary Lingle

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**My April Child**

W

hen 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 spring time trees and flowers, and the song of the 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 rewarded 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 of 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 again 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, 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 intensely painful. It became an impossible task to attend church services or go out for 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 sisters and brothers who had no clue what it would be like to lose a sibling. As the day drew to a close I felt tremendous relief that it was over. Exhausted, I would lie 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 Mothers’ Days since Anna 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 always will be Anna’s Mom. May the warmth and brilliance of springtime fill your hearts with times of peace and hope and love.

*“In the midst of winter I found within myself an invincible summer.” Albert Camus*

Paula Funk

TCF Safe Harbor Chapter, MI

**Nashville Regional Conference**

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ur Steering Committee has approved moving forward with a Regional Conference in Nashville October 20 and 21, 2017.

 If you have the time and desire to help with this program, please reach out to Roy Davies, 615-604-2087 or by email at TCFRoyandBarbara@yahoo.com.  Be sure to provide your contact information to become part of our Conference Committee.

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**Does Hope Still Live Here**

W

hen Disbelief knocked at my door and Sadness bolted in, Objectivity tip toed out and Sorrow became my constant tomorrow. Tears were my nightly companion. Sadness was the alarm clock without a snooze option and Anxiety dressed me a lot of mornings. Questions, Anger, Denial, Regret, and Depression occupied my day. Numbness and Nothingness bombarded my thoughts. Something within whispered, “Does Hope still live here? “ I tried to ignore the whisper, but it spoke at uninvited and unexpected times, louder and more frequently, “Does Hope still live here?”

Forgiveness echoed, “You need me.” Comfort would repeatedly show up, “Receive me.” Kindness said, “I’m here.”

I quietly told Caution to sit down, wait a minute but don’t leave just yet. Comfort and Kindness kept popping in unannounced. They’d hug, smile, wink, invade my space and interrupt my thoughts. Again the whisper, “Does Hope still live here?”

Then came Compassion. He was bold. He would not wait for an invitation as he chided, “By the way, I’ve brought a few friends. Let me introduce them you to: Time, Prayer, Counseling, Tenderness, Laughter, Memories, and Special Moments.” And once again the whisper, the contemplative thought, “Does Hope still live here?”

Trust did not wait for my reply. He spoke, “Open your heart again. Give me a chance. Open your heart again. Let the healing began.” I stumbled upon a waterfall of exhausting, empty, baffling tears. But Love held my hand and I choked and confided, “I don’t know if I can.” Love stroked my cheeks, kissed my forehead, and squeezed my right hand. His thundering voice lit up my heart. His calm voice soothed my broken heart. His words were clear and penetrating, “I will be with you always.”

And I remembered. I understood and I accepted and acknowledged that Hope still resides at this address.

***HOPE STILL LIVES HERE.***

Pamela Hagens

TCF Nashville, TN

***Treasured Gifts***

*Did I ever thank you, children,*

*For the gifts you gave to me:*

*The joyous sound of laughter*

*As I bounced you on my knee?*

*The wobbly steps—the first one, then two*

*Then many more followed.*

*The chubby cheeks all stained with sauce*

*From spaghetti never swallowed.*

*The movie house where lights grew dim*

*When you were barely two.*

*Your tiny voice echoed loud and clear,*

*“Daddy, I love you!”*

*The weak bouquets picked just for me*

*And tied with ribbons blue.*

*Dandelions dressed in Queen Anne’s lace,*

*(A special gift from you.)*

*The digging in the garden,*

*A three-year-old’s delight,*

*Your can of worms (each named George)*

*Were honored guests that night.*

*A lopsided heart stitched by tiny hands*

*Still causes me to laugh,*

*But your masterpiece, I fear remains*

*The portrait of a “pregnant giraffe.”*

*The ornaments you made with love*

*Still grace our Christmas tree.*

*The angel choir still sings its song*

*Silently, for Dad and me.*

*These gifts you gave are treasures rare*

*Locked safely in my heart.*

*I take them out, from time to time,*

*To share the joy they still impart.*

Ann Stansell

TCF, Fresno, CA

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**CHAPTER INFORMATION**

**The Birthday Table**

In the month of your child’s birthday, a table will be provided at our meeting where you can share photographs, mementos, your child’s favorite snack or a birthday cake, a bouquet of flowers—anything you’d like to bring. We want to know your child better, so please take advantage of this opportunity to celebrate the wonderful day of your child’s birth and for us to become better acquainted.

**What is the Yellow Slip?**

Please return your yellow renewal slip. After a year on the newsletter mailing list, those names that were added in that month of a previous year, may receive a yellow half-sheet asking that their subscription be renewed. This is simply to keep our mailing list and the information in it current. If you do not send the yellow slip back, we must assume that you no longer want the newsletter. Although you are given an opportunity to make a voluntary donation, there is no cost involved in your subscription. The newsletter is our gift to you for as long as you wish to receive it. You may request that your name be returned to the active list at any time simply by calling 615-356-4TCF (4823).

**Religion and TCF**

The Principles of The Compassionate Friends state that TCF reaches out to all bereaved parents across the artificial barriers of religion, race, economic class, or ethnic group. Further, TCF espouses no specific religious or philosophical ideology. Despite our nondenominational status, many writers indicate that they have found comfort in their faith, and some have shared their anger and loss of faith. The opinions and beliefs expressed in letters, articles and poetry are those of the contributors.

**Newsletter Deadline**

All donations and original poems or articles for the TCF Nashville newsletter must be received by the meeting day of the month preceding the publication month. All donations and submissions are greatly appreciated.

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**BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES**

**Survivors of Suicide**

There is a caring SOS group in Nashville. For information about meetings, you may call 615 244-7444, or go to the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network at TSPN.org, and you will find a list of all Tennessee SOS locations.

**Sharing**

SHARING is a community organization interested in helping parents who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a newborn infant. Call 615 342-8899 to confirm dates and times of meetings. See www.nationalshare.org.

**Alive Hospice Support Group for Bereaved Parents**

For general information about Grief Support Services at Alive Hospice, please call the main number: 615 963-4732 or email griefsupport@alivehospice.org. Diane Castellano, LCSW is a grief counselor there for children and their families. Call her at 615-346-8554. Contact John Baker at 615-346-8364 for bereaved parent support or individual counseling.

**Other TCF Chapters**

There are several other chapters of The Compassionate Friends you might want to know about. Anytime you are in their vicinity or feel the need to talk with other bereaved parents, feel free to attend their meetings. Also, when you personally know a newly bereaved family in one of these towns, please call the chapter number and give them the information so they can make contact with the family. To locate a chapter, you may call the TCF National Office at 1-877 969-0010, or go to [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) and click on chapter locator.