

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



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

Chapter Leaders: Joe and Melanie Ladd (615) 727-3284, email: joeandmel@comcast.net

Newsletter Editor: Melanie Ladd, (615) 513-5913, email: joeandmel@comcast.net

Treasurer: Jayne Head, (615) 264-8184, email: alanandgraysonsmom@comcast.net

Regional Coordinator: David Gibson, (615) 356-1351, email: davidg14@bellsouth.net

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.

Welcome: The Nashville chapter meets at 3:00 P.M. on the second Sunday of each month in the HCA building on Park Plaza just north of Centennial Park off of 25th Avenue, North. Inside, you will see our sign and someone will greet you. We truly regret that we have no accommodations for young children, but teenagers and older siblings are welcome to attend.

February 13 Meeting

Sharing Mementos of Our Children

We all have things that are precious to us, that either belonged to or remind us of our beloved children. At this month's meeting, we invite you to bring any one thing that can be shared briefly with the rest of the group. This memento can be something that your child treasured, something your child gave you or you gave to him, or something that simply reminds you that your child lived and was loved, even if his or her life was very short (a footprint, baby blanket, hospital bracelet, etc.) Please join us February 13 as we share sweet remembrances of our dear children. Small sharing groups will follow this program.



Attending 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.

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	Kris Thompson 931-486-9088
Suicide	Ruth Edwards 615-353-8547
Small Child	Kenneth and Kathy Hensley 615-237-9972
Alcohol/Drug Overdose	Ed Pyle 615-712-3245
Murder	Joe Ladd 615-727-3284

Borrowed Hope

*Lend me your hope for awhile,
 I seem to have mislaid mine.
 Lost and hopeless feelings accompany me daily.
 Pain and confusion are my companions.
 I know not where to turn.
 Looking ahead to the future times
 Does not bring forth images of renewed hope.
 I see mirthless times, pain-filled days, and more tragedy.
 Lend me your hope for awhile,
 I seem to have mislaid mine.
 Hold my hand and hug me,
 Listen to all my ramblings.*

*I need to unleash the pain and let it tumble out.
 Recovery seems so far distant,
 The road to healing, a long and lonely one.
 Stand by me. Offer me your presence,
 Your ears and your love.
 Acknowledge my pain, it is so real and ever present.
 I am overwhelmed with sad and conflicting thoughts.
 Lend me your hope for awhile.
 A time will come when I will heal,
 And I will lend my renewed hope to others.*

Eloise Cole
 TCF Phoenix, AZ

The letter below was received expressing gratitude for your December gifts to the children of Youth Villages:

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Thank you so much for the very generous donations of toys, clothes and gift cards from the Compassionate Friends to Youth Villages for our children again this year! This year your gifts were needed more than ever! We served over 750 children which is the most we have ever done and it's all because of your kindness and generosity that we were able to accomplish this!

Unlike years past we had many children (quite a few from large families) who came to us at the last minute without anything for Christmas. So many of you stepped up to help them after already taking several children the first time and that is truly amazing. I cannot begin to tell you how fortunate and blessed we are to have each of you as part of our family – we simply could not do it without you! In fact, because of your generosity many of our kids had Christmas gifts for the first time in their lives! This is pretty amazing when you think that the majority of kids we serve are teenagers!

If you or someone you know would like to help provide basic necessities for our children throughout the year please email me and let me know and I will be glad to put you on our Friend In Need email list. We only send the email out when the need is greatest and all donations (just like Holiday Heroes) are for local children and families in Middle Tennessee.

On behalf of all the children that we serve and the staff that serves them – Thank You! You are truly wonderful to share what you have with those who have so very little – you have truly made a difference in their lives! Have a wonderful and blessed New Year!

Thanks again,

Greg Schott
 Development Manager
 Youth Villages

Named one of the 50 Best Nonprofits to Work For by the Nonprofit Times in 2010

You can help. Please give, volunteer, mentor, foster or adopt.

www.youthvillages.org

Long Hard Climb

*Numbness was the feeling
When the doctors came to me
Your son's no longer with us,
I thought, How can that be?*

*There was that fog-like feeling
As I sat in disbelief.
I thought I'd soon be wakened
From that awful dream-like state.*

*I thought I'd hear him calling,
Come running down the hall.
My mind was playing tricks on me,
He hadn't died at all.*

*God, how could this thing happen?
I ached, I cried, I screamed.
My body quaked with anger
As I looked to place the blame.*

*I tried to look to others,
It's your fault, no, it's me.
I'm the one who let him die
Because I went to sleep.*

*Guilt—yes, guilt, it riddled me,
Until I came to see
Moms can't always make it better,
No matter what we think.*

*I did not choose for him to die
And no one could have known
That he would leave me on that night
And I would be alone.*

*There was that time of darkness,
When I could not see the light.
My heart, it felt so heavy,
There was no end in sight.*

*But I've fought hard to clamber back,
I'm heading toward the light.
My heart is feeling lighter now,
As I continue with my climb.*

*Still, I trip, I stumble,
Sometimes I even fall.
Then there are times when I slip back,
But that's not bad at all.*

*It's lonely here without him,
And it's a hard thing that I do,
But I'm gonna make it up that hill,
And you, my friend, can too.*

*I'll extend my hand to you,
I'll help you gain some ground,
And step by step we'll take it slow,
We'll make that long, hard climb.*

Valerie Baltzer
TCF Ventura, CA

(At the January meeting one of our sharing groups discussed the use of letter writing in grief. We thank Janice for sharing her letter of many years ago. Her letter is a wonderful example of a tool that may be helpful for grieving parents, siblings, and grandparents.)

Dear Mike,

It's Christmas time and after that comes your birthday. This will be the eighth one I have celebrated without you. Do you remember the year Kim and I made the birthday cake and came to the cemetery? It was so cold, but I was playing the radio as loud as it would go. "Would you know me?" was playing. We cut the cake and we even cut a piece for you and left it on your grave for the birds to enjoy. I just knew if anyone came by, they would think I was crazy. But then I realized if anyone came by, they were there for the same reason. Because someone they loved and lost was there. And maybe they would understand our birthday party. Now I usually come alone and bring new flowers and we have a "heart-to-heart" talk that only I can understand.

I wonder what you would look like all grown up. I have a picture in my mind of a young man who had lived through some hard times and came out on the other side to be a happy healthy young man. He might have a wife and maybe a child. I think of that for just a little while, but then I must return to reality and remember what a horrible death you died at the hands of someone else. But I let the anger go finally. It was so hard and it took so much work, but I had to let it go. It was "killing" me. And I want you to know that letting the anger go doesn't mean you got what you deserved. No one deserves to die like you did. I'm not demeaning your death in any way. It still hurts in the pit of my stomach when I think of how you died, but the anger had to go so I could try to live a "normal" life.

So Happy Birthday my son, my memories of you will always be fond ones. And every now and then, I'll let my mind wander to that "imaginary family."

Love,
Mother

Janice O'Neal
TCF Nashville, TN

"How can one endure in the face of tragedy? People have asked me. And surely I have often had reason to ask myself. Joe (Sr.) was right in his words: 'Carry on...take care of the living...there is a lot of work to be done.' And right in his instinctive and immediate recognition that in sorrow we must look outward rather than inward and thus can come peace of mind and peace of spirit."

Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy

Anniversary Reaction

Every year there is an anniversary of your child's death, and every year you react to it. It doesn't make any difference if it's the first or the twenty-first. You *know* the date is approaching. Strangely, sometimes you will be deeply disturbed for weeks before the actual date. Other times the fact that an anniversary is nearing won't seem to bother you much at all. The only thing consistent in the anniversary reaction is that you *will* react.

For years after Arthur was killed, I would begin my anniversary reaction around Easter time. Easter Sunday, 1971, was the last "holiday" that we were together as a family. For many years, Easter Sunday was the starting date for reliving that terrible Friday and the days following. For a number of years I experienced painful anniversary reactions, but generally, the farther I get from Arthur's death, the less painful it is.

But, circumstances or events can make it painful, even years later. For example, on the eleventh anniversary, I was also grieving the death of my granddaughter. At that time Emily hadn't been dead a year yet. I saw the pain my daughter was experiencing and because I couldn't "kiss it and make it better" for *my* child, I hurt even more.

There will be times when the coming of an anniversary will fill you with fear and pain. Other years it will come with just a ripple in your heart. Some years will be very hard, other years won't be. Accept it as normal. Know that however you feel is right for you. Be kind to yourself. You may need a lot of care at that time. For the times that you don't hurt deeply, be thankful that some of the pain has gone.

The time will come when you no longer hurt so much because X number of years ago your child died. Be glad of that. What won't go away until you die will be the lack of history continuing past their death date. You will be aware that your child isn't graduating from high school, or being married, or having your grandchildren and that will hurt. There will always be questions: What would they look like? What would they be doing now? These thoughts and questions will forever be unanswered.

You will always react to your child's death date, because you will always love your child, and they will always be in your heart and mind. But then, the anniversary will be over and life will take on sunshine again. How ever old your child was when they died is the mental picture you will have of them. And, Oh! what a beautiful picture it is.

Margaret Gerner
TCF St. Louis, MO

Falling Apart

*I seem to be falling apart,
My attention span can be measured
in seconds,
My patience in minutes.
I cry at the drop of a hat.
I forget things constantly.
The morning toast burns daily.
I forget to sign checks.*

*Half of everything in the house is misplaced.
Anxiety and restlessness are my
constant companions.
Rainy days seem extra dreary;
Sunny days seem an outrage.
Other people's pain and frustration seem
insignificant.
Laughing, happy people seem out of place
in my world.
It has become routine to feel half crazy.
I am normal, I am told.
I am a newly grieving person.*

Eloise Cole
TCF Phoenix, AZ

Oracle

*Your child has died
and only this is certain:
that you will never be
the same again –
not what you were –
not what you might have been.*

*Your child has died
and grief may touch your vision
with new and restless lights,
with want and pain
where once your life
found reason, strength and peace.*

*Your child has died,
The face of god is changing.
It may be closer
and more careful now
or may seem cold
and cruel, far away.*

*So trust your soul
(however bright or somber
however calm or fierce).
Trust in your soul:
it will declare
your answer and your hope.*

In time...

Sascha

Beyond Reality

I once knew a young woman who had her goals and dreams set firmly in mind. She grew up in a loving family and imagined creating that kind of family of her own. She did not want to amass millions of dollars or become a beauty queen, movie star or executive. She did not dream of new cars or palaces or jewels. This young woman's main goal in life was to become a loving wife and mother. She talked about having children from a very early age. She chose names, filled a cedar chest with tiny handcrafted outfits and began a "Baby Album" years before a child ever blessed her life.

Then, reality struck. My friend married at a young age and after many miscarriages and the birth of a healthy son, the decision was made to sever the marriage relationship. After a painful divorce, and in the years that followed, tragedy upon tragedy beat her to a pulp: her father died from suicide, and two grandfathers died. Then a full-term daughter died after 44 hours of life from a congenital heart defect and finally her mother died of a rare blood disorder.

When the baby died, hope was nearly lost. I watched in dismay as she planned her own death, barely able to pull her back from the dark abyss she so longed to plunge into. Her twisted murmurings inundated my ears as she yearned for the mindless seclusion and security of some obscure mental institution.

She wandered through each day, a mere image of the person I once knew. She rarely smiled and, for awhile, seemed unable to find little distinction between reality and fantasy.

"Did my baby really die?" she would often ask. "Or is she still inside me somewhere, yet to be born?"

Guilt overshadowed her every waking moment: "Did I murder her?" she wondered. Everything she ever dreamed of and valued passed away.

Still, my friend hung on to even the smallest glimmer of hope. In a way, she amazed me and I was very proud of her. Somehow, some way, she continued to reach for the childhood dream that simply HAD to come true. Maybe next time. Maybe next time.

Amid the tragedies that beset her life, she married a man who resurrected her from the hell her life had become. Together, they have shared the joy of childbirth, the agony of child-death, and are now raising two healthy little girls. Time has moved on. Good things are beginning to happen again, and I am becoming reacquainted with that young woman I remember from so long ago.

Once upon a time, I knew her quite well, but we lost touch with one another. Somewhere along our friendship line she

moved beyond the point of recognition. It has been a long, hard journey for her, but I believe she is going to make it! Her laughter is genuine now; she is playing the piano and singing again. She is dreaming of "family" again, much different than she ever expected, but there is hope again. I remember her so well from before because that woman used to be me. She is the girl I was before the tornadoes of death whirled through my life.

I am not sure whether I am a new person now or simply more of who I always was. Did these death experiences turn me into someone else? Or were hidden aspects of my former self merely brought out into the open with more purpose, more force, more focus? These are the things I wonder now. My goals have changed. I will never have the laughter of many children to fill my household, but I do have the joy of two. I don't want my experiences to negatively affect my surviving children, and yet they do have a healthy understanding of death, and I love them all the more for it. I have learned to be a more compassionate friend, although I wonder why it is sometimes easier for me to share another's sorrows rather than their joys. I have learned to accept certain realities in life, and yet I haven't forgotten the dreams of that young girl I knew so well in high school. I have decided NOT to let Lindsay's death or the miscarriages drive me to craziness, although I think a madness of sorts will be with me always. A very pure and beautiful madness.

My overwhelming feeling right now as I share these thoughts with you is not one of waiting for the nightmares to be repeated but of calm acceptance. It has been nearly seven years since death last took a child from our home. It surprises me to realize we have been lulled into a certain kind of comfort around here.

I do not wake up EVERY morning with the thought of Lindsay, or the miscarried babies, or death possibly snatching another one of my children. My nighttime dreams can be filled with colors and merriment again. I spend many waking hours inventing new traditions, new resolutions, new reinvestments and new directions for our family.

Some folks may view our decision to include our "Heavenly Children" along with our "Earthly Children" as a sign of mental instability. We who know understand this is not so. Perhaps this is the greatest lesson of all (a legacy beautifully exemplified by my own parents): to love ALL our children unconditionally as they are, wherever they are. My heart still beats for them.

Dana Gensler
TCF of South Central Kentucky

*In one of the stars
I shall be living
In one of them
I shall be laughing*

*And so it will be
As if all the stars
were laughing
When you look
At the sky at night.*

*The Little Prince
Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

CHAPTER INFORMATION

Are you Moving?

Each time a newsletter is returned to us with an incorrect address, it costs us 44 cents to retrieve it in order to find out where you've moved; then we pay another 44 cents to mail it back to you. This is in addition to the original bulk mail cost. It would help a great deal in both time and money if you would notify us immediately of any address change so your newsletter can reach you right away. You may call, write or email the chapter leaders or the newsletter editor. Thanks for your help.

PLEASE NOTE: Children at TCF Meetings

It is always painful for newly bereaved parents to be with babies and small children, but it is even more difficult to see them at a TCF meeting where grief is heightened. The presence of a baby can be very disturbing and distracting to others, especially to those who have themselves lost one, and a TCF meeting is not an appropriate place for youngsters where they see visible pain in their parents and other members. We want you to be with us, but since we promise each parent who has lost a child a safe place at our meetings, we urge you to make other arrangements for your little ones.

Newsletter Deadlines

In order for donations, articles, poems and other material to be included in the newsletter, we must receive them by the 15th of the month prior to publication. We welcome original material as well as copyrighted pieces; however, no material may be used without giving complete credit to the author. Please keep in mind the fact that space is limited. Also, since TCF espouses no specific religious or philosophical ideology, we ask that in your writing, you show respect for others whose beliefs might be different from your own.



BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

Survivors of Suicide

There is a caring SOS group in Nashville. For information about meetings and receiving their helpful newsletter, you may call the Crisis Center at 615 244-7444.

Sharing

SHARING is a community organization interested in helping parents who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a newborn infant. SHARING meets the second and fourth Thursday evenings of each month at 7 p.m. in the Administrative Board Room at The Women's Hospital at Centennial Medical Center located at 2221 Murphy Avenue (between 22nd and 23rd Ave). The phone number is 615 342-8899.

Alive Hospice Support Group for Bereaved Parents

A support group for bereaved parents meets at Alive Hospice. For details, please call John Baker at 615 963-4674.

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 and click on chapter locator.