

# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



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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.

*Welcome: The Nashville chapter meets at 3:00 P.M. on the second Sunday of each month in the HCA building at 2501 Park Plaza 37203, just north of Centennial Park off of 25<sup>th</sup> 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 9 Meeting

### Sharing Mementos of Our Children and Siblings

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 9 as we share sweet remembrances of our dear children. Of course, we encourage grandparents and siblings to participate by bringing a memento of their grandchild, brother or sister. 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.

<b>Accidental Death</b> .....	Mike and Paula Childers 615-646-1333
<b>AIDS</b> .....	Joyce Soward 615-754-5210
<b>Illness</b> .....	David and Peggy Gibson 615-356-1351
<b>Infant</b> .....	Jayne Head 615-264-8184
<b>SIDS</b> .....	Kris Thompson 931-486-9088
<b>Suicide</b> .....	Ron and Darlene Henson 615-789-3613
<b>Small Child</b> .....	Kenneth and Kathy Hensley 615-237-9972
<b>Alcohol/Drug Overdose</b> .....	Ed Pyle 615-712-3245

## A Grief Journey in Review

As I write this I am listening to Johnny Horton singing "Whispering Pines." This is a melancholy song, yet a sweet one. It reminded me of the day that my son died and the journey I have taken since then.

Todd was in a car accident in mid-December....almost on the winter solstice. He died on December 19. This is significant to me. I was raised in the cold, snowy part of the country. My son was returning from that area when the accident that took his life occurred. I remember recounting the events second by second when my son died. I remember how Todd disliked the shortened daylight of winter. How ironic that his death came on what was nearly the shortest day of the year.

We have just passed summer solstice. Todd has been gone for over 4 ½ years. I still miss him, and I think about him each day. I am a different person since my son died. My life has changed dramatically. The cast of characters in my life has changed somewhat. Solitude has become an important part of living for me. I no longer weep endlessly and fall asleep from exhaustion. I no longer walk the floor at night. The periods of manic rearranging of my house have slowed to something approaching normal for me.

Somewhere on this horrible journey of grief my subconscious mind accepted the fact that I will never see Todd again. I have accepted his death. I am rarely jolted by the sudden thought that Todd is not on this plane. My beautiful child, the baby who grew to be such a special man, is gone. This is part of who I am now. I now keep Todd in my heart. I talk about him with strangers as if he were still alive. With those who know me, I speak of the loss of my only child with quiet acceptance, and I share the many joys of my child's life.

Life has begun to improve. I am even thinking of a vacation next year. I am making more plans than I have in over four years. I have accepted what I cannot change. This is a milestone for me, because I have always been able to change the variables, to make things right, to bring back normalcy. But I won't be able to change the fact that my son has died.

Along the way I have had moments of epiphany....only brief ones, but epiphanies of various sorts. Most of the change has been gradual. Talking with other parents, reading, writing, listening to music, to radio programs, to speakers, going to seminars, watching movies....all of these efforts have helped me. But it was up to me to take those first steps. It was my choice to remove the crepe and add a colorful wreath to the front door. It was my choice to reach out for help and accept what those who shared my grief journey offered.

Much has changed in my life since that first year of grief. Much will change in the future. I have learned that change is the essence of life. I have learned from wonderful people; I

have learned from negative people as well. Each person who transcends my life has taught me something about grief, about living, about moving forward into the light.

I don't know where I will be in five years or ten years. I dream about my son. We often have great conversations in those dreams. Sometimes he is a small child, sometimes a grown man. When I awaken I feel as close to Todd as I will be on this earthly plane.

Shortly after the summer solstice this year, a strange thing happened. My grandson and his girlfriend came home early which was odd because they planned to be out late. I was reading and listening to a news show. "Don't freak out, Nanny," my grandson said. "We were in an accident." I just looked at him.

Then I asked if he was hurt. "No, but the guy who was driving jumped out of the truck and ran away. He was doing 80 mph in the rain. He hit a curb, fishtailed, braked and spun around twice. Then the truck smashed into a utility pole. Annalee hit her head on the door panel. I bounced around in the back seat....I didn't have a seat belt on." The EMTs had checked them out. I did the same. Then I sat down. I smiled at him. "What?" he said.

"What have you learned tonight?" I responded.

"I'm never riding with him again. I'm never riding with anyone who is drinking. I'm never riding with anyone who drives like a spaz or drinks," he said, summarizing the situation.

That was good. I smiled. Just shortly after summer solstice my grandson escaped death. The truck was a total loss. The driver was nowhere to be found. But Todd's son was alive, unhurt. His girlfriend was fine. I later confirmed with a deputy on the scene that it was a real miracle anyone walked away. Yet they did. They walked away from that mass of twisted steel and smashed plastic.

I like to think that my son is still on this earthly plane in some form. Watching....watching over his children. That's what he did in life.

And so my journey continues. I no longer "freak out" about the unchangeable. My child would be glad to know this. "You're acting like Dad," my grandson said. "He was always cool."

I guess I'm cool now. But there was a time..... I've changed. My perspective is the unique one of a mother who has lost her only child. And the journey continues until I, too, meet the angel of death.

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

In this universe nothing is ever wholly lost. That which is excellent remains forever a part of this universe. Human hearts are dust. But the love which moves the human heart, abides to bless the last generation.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

## It's Always Just Right There

Eleven years ago, in January, my thirteen-year-old son Jeremy lost his life in a car crash. As with all parents who jump instantly into that category we gently call 'bereaved', my life changed forever. Now over a decade has passed and I continue to reflect on the things that have indeed changed and those that have remained pretty much the same.

My reaction to other parents who have children has changed over the years. I still envy them, of course, but time has tempered my feelings. After all, Jeremy would be twenty-five this year, perhaps with a young family of his own (as his younger sister has done). Who knows? I can only imagine what he might look like now. But the sharp pain has eased a little - the realization that used to almost make me physically wince—when it would hit me that I would never see him graduate from high school or college, or walk down the aisle with his bride. I can sit through a wedding now; at first I couldn't do that.

After eleven years, though, something has remained as constant as the sun and moon in the sky. It's hard to put into words, really, but if I were a betting man I would wager that each and every grieving parent knows what I'm attempting to describe. It isn't just one feeling that we could label as pain, or grief, or loss, or even devastation. If there was a word for it, maybe the closest one would be something like ache.

We all get headaches and stomach aches and so we're all familiar with this idea on the physical level. This is different although sometimes it does feel like a tightening of my chest or my throat. But this is a deeper ache, one that sometimes grips my whole being. In the early years after Jeremy's death, I would have "grief attacks" that could range from sadness and melancholy to full-blown periods of tears, rage, and anguish. Those have subsided for the most part, but that ache always seems to be nearby.

I have a dear friend at work, also a bereaved parent, and sometimes when our eyes meet—in the cafeteria or in the hallway—I know instantly that the ache for her son is "always right there" too. There are times when I just have to give her a hug so that she knows that I know, and it helps both of us.

There is no cure for this ache. Has life gotten better? Certainly, in many ways. I have much to be thankful for and to remain the least bit sane, I need to have that "attitude of gratitude," there is no doubt about this whatsoever. But if someone told me that I will have this ache that is going to "hang around" for the remainder of my life, I wouldn't be surprised. I loved Jeremy as much as any parent could ever love a child, and now he is gone. And even after eleven years, there is a certain feeling that is always just right there.

Jon Pederson  
TCF, Sacramento Valley



### Painful Pleasure

*It hurts so much to remember,  
But to relive those moments again  
Is the closest I come to pleasure,  
Yet it's not very different from pain.  
Then why hold so hard to memories  
That are painful and make me upset?  
If I let myself stop hurting  
I'm afraid that I will forget.*

Richard Dew  
From Rachel's Cry

*An empty cradle  
An infant son gone forever  
Sadness comforts me.  
His presence lingers  
Warm tears ease my deep sorrow  
He's safe and at peace.  
My peace will come, too  
My heart will keep him forever  
For love endures all things.*

Rebecca Wisniewski  
TCF, Lowell, MA

## Be Still

*Be still, my heart, so you can remember  
that you still have life and love around you,  
that only one small part is gone;  
Be still, my grieving for that one small part.  
Yet grieve I must; for the books say  
I must go through it and not around it.*

*Be still, the bargains I made and the games I played  
(to have him back and pretend it was a mistake),  
as they are dangerous and to no avail.  
Be happy, heart, that we had him for awhile.  
Be strong, my pride,  
That I am slowly healing and loving and feeling.*

*He died on the first day of summer.  
Summer's heat came and went,  
Fall's colors came and went,  
Winter's snow came and went,  
and now spring has come again;  
It seems the world is going on,  
And so should I.*

*I am lucky to have borne you;  
I am richer for having shared your dreams.  
I am sadder but stronger for having lost you;  
I'll always love you, Jimmy -  
Good-bye.*

Claire Moore  
TCF, Parma, OH

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*Friend,*

*I may not know your name—  
nor have I seen your face.  
We have not spoken.*

*Friend,*

*yet, I know you well,  
because we share an heirloom,  
you and I,  
an heirloom cast by grief  
into the shape of love  
and care  
and understanding.  
It has a name:*

COMPASSION

Sascha

## A Poem for My Friends

*I asked you not to grieve with me  
For my loss you cannot know.  
And please don't tell me how you understand  
But this is just how some things go.*

*I ask you not to know my pain  
Or tell me it was God's will.  
And please don't tell me how another child  
Will my ache and my need fulfill.*

*There are times when words are void of meaning  
There is nothing that anyone can say.  
Just hold my hand and sit with me  
Till I can cope in a better way.*

*Pray for me and the child we lost  
Help me believe in a better day.  
Help me to hope and to somehow know  
I'll survive this all some way.*

*And when I mention Lindsay's name  
Please try not to look ashamed.  
For I loved her more than life itself  
And I will always speak her name.*

*Do not tell me it should be over now  
And we cannot change the past.  
You cannot understand, my friend,  
This grief does not leave when asked!*

*Just bear with me, in my grief  
And the turmoil of my mind.  
And pray that on some future day  
I'll not comfort you in kind.*

Corry Roach  
TCF, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

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*You gave them the gift of life  
and they gave you the gift of love in return.  
Nothing can deny that gift exchange.*

TCF, Portland, OR

## **CHAPTER INFORMATION**

### **Are you Moving?**

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 on time. You may call, write or email the chapter leaders or the newsletter editor. This information is at the top of page 1. 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. We truly regret that we have no accommodations for young children, but teenagers and older siblings are welcome to attend.

### **Newsletter Deadlines**

In order for donations, articles, poems and other material to be included in the newsletter, we must receive them by the meeting day 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, 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.

### **Alive Hospice Support Group for Bereaved Parents**

A support group for bereaved parents meets at Alive Hospice. For details, please call John Baker at 963-4674. Diane Castellano, LCSW is a grief counselor there for children and their families. Call her at [615 327-1085](tel:6153271085).

### **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.

## Fifty Year Vigil of the Grave

Ten years ago, a grave in the cemetery caught my wife's attention. It was close to the grave we visited. My wife read the inscription. It was the grave of a little girl named Marjorie. She was only three years old when she died in 1935. My wife's name is Marjorie also, and that may have been a small reason for our interest. But it was the date that struck us. Although the child had died in 1935, 42 years later there were still lovely tended flowers growing there. A three-year-old girl was still alive in someone's memory.

Whenever we went to the cemetery we visited this little grave. We saw flowers growing there every summer for the next eight years. We never saw the person who tended them, but we guessed it was her mom, whose date of death was yet unwritten on the family stone. The flowers appeared until 1985, fifty years after the child had died. That summer there were no flowers and a date of death appeared on the mother's headstone.

Anthony Von Eisen



### The Four Candles

The four candles burned slowly. Their ambience was so soft you could hear them speak...

The first candle said, "I am Peace, but these days, nobody wants to keep me lit." then Peace's flame slowly diminishes and goes out completely.

The second candle said, "I am Faith, but these days, I am no longer indispensable: Then Faith's flame slowly diminishes and goes out completely.

Sadly the third candle spoke, "I am Love and I haven't the strength to stay lit any longer. People put me aside and don't understand my importance. They even forget to love those who are nearest to them." And waiting no longer, Love goes out completely.

Suddenly...a child enters the room and sees the three candles no longer burning. The child begins to cry, "Why are you not burning? You are supposed to stay lit until the end."

The fourth candle spoke gently to the child, "Don't be afraid, for I am Hope," and while I still burn, we can re-light the other candles."

Never let the flame of Hope go out of your life. With Hope, no matter how bad things look and are...Peace, Faith and Love can shine brightly in our lives.