

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 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.

TCF Video To Be Shown January 8

The Compassionate Friends helps us to cope with the death of a child. It is a place where one can turn for support when the devastation of the loss seems overwhelming. The Compassionate Friends has produced a short video in which bereaved parents and siblings discuss their own grief experiences and what helped them. Among those who speak are the TCF national executive director, members of the board, chapter leaders and siblings. This video will be shown at this month's meeting, and regular sharing groups will follow. Please join us.



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

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.

Remember Me

*Remember me in quiet days
When raindrops whisper on your pane,
But in your memories have not grief
Let just the joy we know remain.*

*Remember me when evening stars
Look down on you with steadfast eyes;
And when your thoughts do turn to me,
Know that I would not have you cry;*

*But live for me and laugh for me —
When you are happy, so am I.*

*Remember an old joke we shared;
Remember me when spring walks by;
Think of me when you are glad,
And while you live, I shall not die.*

Lyn Bryant, Sibling
TCF, Baytown, TX

Snow

Every snowflake that falls is unique and has its own individual design. There are beautiful patterns in each snowflake and even the tiniest of flakes have their own markings. These patterns change again and again—even after the flake touches the ground. Each snowflake is a cause for wonder, each flake is one of a kind. No two are exactly alike.

Like the snowflake, our beautiful children were each unique and special; some we only dreamed about and some danced upon the earth. They filled our lives with wonder and transformed our world. We held them too briefly, but we will hold them in our hearts forever. We shall remember them always.

At this time of remembering, it may help to reflect upon how our lives have been enriched by the love we have given and the love we have received from our children. Our children leave treasures behind that time can never take away.

Denise Falzone
TCF, Lake Area, MI

Another Year

This is another year just beginning—afresh with new days, new opportunities, new challenges. It occurs to me, however, that it is a very difficult task to keep from concentrating on past years and the sadness we endure just because it is a new year and the calendar has flipped the page.

Moving on to a brighter tomorrow and letting go of the pain of yesterday is a gradual process. We cross that threshold one step at a time—a small one at first, faltering and stumbling—but somehow getting there. With patience, effort, and persistence, once again we will be able to celebrate life as the year stretches on before us, putting behind us our sadness, our guilts and failures and our pain.

We will be able to smile again. We will be able to remember our precious children in life rather than death. We will recognize in our days many little blessings and will be able to share our joys with others.

Whenever that “New Year” begins for you, I celebrate with you that marvelous accomplishment, and wish you great peace, courage, and comfort. HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Alice Weening
TCF, Cincinnati, OH

Wish

*I wish you gentle days
and quiet nights.
I wish you memories
to keep you strong.*

*I wish you time to smile
and time for song.*

*And then I wish you friends
to give you love,
when you are hurt and lost
and life is blind.*

*I wish you friends and love
and peace of mind.*

Sascha

“Death forces a grace period on all of us. The dying offer the living a final chance to be the best that they can be. We must take our cues from them, value the moments that lead up to and follow their departure, and work toward acceptance after they are gone. This is a vow as sacred as any we will make over the course of our lifetimes.”

From *In Lieu of Flowers*
Nancy Cobb
Pantheon Books

Letting Go

“All I want to be able to do is talk about my little boy, but I have nobody to talk to. My family seems to think I ‘should be over it’ and says that I should ‘let him go.’ But how can I let him go? He was my little boy.”

These were the words of a beautiful young mother as she spoke to me recently. And she was right. How could she let him go, indeed, and why should people try to force such a thing on her? For my own part, I can remember a time when I became aware of the fact that I had “let my little boy go,” but this wasn’t until nearly three years after he had died. It is hard to explain to someone who has not experienced this just what I mean, but I shall try. I guess it was really accepting, deep down, that he is really dead and that all my longing, yearning and thinking about him will never bring him back. Strangely, I found that once having “let him go,” I then got him back again in a much more beautiful way. It wasn’t in a tight, hang-on-or-you-will-forget-him sort of way, but in a gentle, peaceful sort of way. I felt relaxed about my whole situation. I might go for days without consciously thinking of him, and then some memory of Chris would come flooding back in a much more realistic way than it had before. I guess, too, I was able to get my life back into perspective.

I hesitated to write about these things because I felt there could be a few dangers associated with it. One was that some of you may not have had this experience and might think there is something wrong with you if you haven’t. Please don’t feel that way. It is very important for each of you to travel the road of grief in your own way and in your own time. If we can learn from another’s experience or another’s writings, that is good; but above all, I feel the most important thing is for each parent to allow himself to feel just the way he wants to feel, not the way others tell him to feel and act, but the way he wants to feel and act. If others can’t or won’t understand it and tell you so, then just tell them very gently, “Look, I’m sorry. I know you think you are doing the right thing by saying that, but please just let me grieve for my child in my own way.”

Perhaps the last thing I should say is that, if there are some of you who are standing on the threshold of letting go and just feel that you can’t, maybe you feel afraid or disloyal to your dead child. Let me assure you that this “letting go” will give you a whole new lease on life, and your dead child will be a very special, but not obsessive, memory. Can’t you almost hear him or her say, “That’s good, Mum,” or “That’s good, Dad — that’s the way it should be.”

Diane and Brian Dunbar
TCF, Sidney, Australia

Anniversaries of the Heart

“The holiest of all holidays are those
Kept by ourselves silent and apart;
The secret anniversaries of the heart.”

Henry W. Longfellow

With these words, the poet describes the universal human experience of the deeply moving events that occur in our lives; for me, and I suspect for you, the words apply most often to the times of loss or sorrow or grief. Those days should be and, indeed shall be, secret and honored anniversaries of the heart—not to be abandoned nor dismissed as though they were just another day, which they can never be.

But there are other days as well which are holy holidays—days which only we celebrate because they are secret from or unrevealed to most. They are the days of firsts, the days of achievement, the days of graduation, the days of recognition, the days of laughter and joy, the days of hugs, and maybe even the days of happy tears.

Thankfully, they can be just as special as the others. None replaces another as no day in our lives replaces any other but each takes its proper place in the whole cloth which is ours. For some, the fabric is tightly woven like canvas with the threads of myriad events crammed close together while for others who live to be quite old...the threads are looser like burlap. But for each, our days are woven together—the weak with the strong, the bright and the dull, the beautiful and the painful—to make the tapestry of our existence.

Like every thread is important to the strength and usefulness and beauty of the cloth, so is every day, every secret anniversary of our hearts, to the calendar of our lives.

Dr. James W. Clark
Friend of TCF, Nashville, TN

(Note: This moving essay was written and presented by Dr. Clark to good friends of his on the fourth anniversary of the death of their daughter, whose funeral he had conducted.)

Personal Reflections

After the death of a child, how many of us, as bereaved parents, might say to ourselves, "How can I ever smile again?" I know I felt that way following the death of my son. I have heard bereaved parents, especially during the early days after the loss, say, "I suddenly found myself laughing at work. How could I have done that?"

After my son died, I went back to work one week after the funeral, and one of the first things I had to do was attend a department meeting. At one point, someone made a humorous remark. Everyone laughed, except me. One of my co-workers, seeing my poker face, called across the table, "Come on, don't look so sad." There were other times, too, when people thought I shouldn't be so glum, that I should be smiling or laughing. Once, while riding in my carpool, the driver turned around to me after observing my mask-like expression in the rear-view mirror, and exclaimed, "Smile!" I remember retorting with some acerbity, "You smile."

But in time I did smile. I did laugh. It must be the subconscious guilt within ourselves that denies us the right to smile or laugh. It happened—I don't remember how long it was—at least several months, I think. I have seen parents at a TCF meeting, whose loss is recent, with tear-stained faces, smile when someone at the meeting says something that tickles the funny bone.

How many of us have heard our non-bereaved friends say to us, "How can you go to that support group? It's all sadness and gloom." *How wrong they are!* Of course, we cry at TCF, but there are moments of laughter, too. Crying and laughter, after all, are often interchangeable, such as crying at weddings or graduations and giggling inappropriately at the sight of someone taking an un-ceremonious pratfall on a slippery sidewalk.

Perhaps laughter is also the beginning of Nature's way of mending, of healing us.

Dave Ziv
TCF, Bucks, Montana

Jacquelyn M. Comeaux
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Dancing in the Flame

*Though I am tired and weary,
My eyes continue to weep,
And my heart denies me the comfort,
That I find only in my sleep.*

*So I sit alone in the darkness,
Before the firelight,
And stare into the flames,
On this dark and moonless night.*

*As the flames leap and dance,
I am surrounded by an eerie sight,
That evokes haunting memories,
Brought to life by the fire's light.*

*My thoughts take me back,
To a time when you were here,
To times when laughter filled my heart,
Times lost forever, I fear.*

*In the flames, I see your face,
Your sweet and loving smile.
And I know that we will meet again,
But I must wait a while.*

*These quiet moments of reverie,
Bring comfort to my aching heart,
And tell me that you and I,
Are never far apart.*

*Now my heart begins to lighten,
As sleep arrives to claim,
The pain I felt just moments ago,
Before I saw you dancing in the flame.*

Our December Memorial

Nashville Compassionate Friends' families came together Sunday, December 11, for another beautiful Candlelight Service to remember our beloved children. As 133 beautiful faces were shown on the big screen one by one in the newly decorated auditorium, and the candles placed before their framed photos, hurting hearts were opened to some healing. Our candles were lit for the children named aloud and for all the children remembered by Nashville's TCF families throughout the years. The little flames shone brightly with the love we will always have for these precious ones. They will never be forgotten. After the service, the cafeteria was filled with the fellowship of all young and old travelling the path of grief. With understanding words and hugs, these fellow travelers forged and strengthened friendships to help each other find some peace in the New Year. It was a lovely evening. If you were unable to attend, we hope you can be with us next year.

(Note: A lovely ring was found after the service. Please call if you are missing a ring.)

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.

The “Children Remembered” Listings

At your first TCF meeting you are asked to sign a registration card that gives us permission to add your child to the We Remember Them list on page 3 in the monthly newsletter. If you are unable to attend TCF meetings and would like for your child to be listed, please let us know, printing the exact way you'd like the child's name to appear, the child's birth and death dates, and the parents' names as they should be listed. You may call the database manager at 615 356-1351, drop us a note at TCF, P.O. Box 50833, Nashville, TN 37205, or email us at davidg14@bellsouth.net, We'll be glad to include them. You need to contact us only once, unless any of your information changes.

We Need Your Help

If you know a family outside the immediate Nashville area who has experienced the death of a child, regardless of age or cause of death, and you have access to the address (and phone number) of the parents, it would be most helpful if you would call us with that information. Our mission is to reach every bereaved family in Middle Tennessee, but we have to know about them in order to give them the support we ourselves have received. If you know the child's name, birth date, date of death and cause of death, so much the better. Our outreach chairperson will send a warm letter of sympathy and information about TCF along with appropriate brochures and articles. There will be no harassment, no phone calls, and no demands made upon the parents, and the information you provide is strictly confidential.



BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

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.

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.

Survivors of Suicide

There is a caring SOS group in Nashville. For information about meetings, you may call Samantha Owen at 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.

TCF Web site —A Treasure for You

When you log onto the TCF Web site at www.compassionatefriends.org you will find a wealth of information about TCF and grief—poetry and articles, chat rooms, grief in the news, other chapter Web sites and numerous other resources. Check it out.

What Is New About the New Year?

There is a lot of silliness about ringing in the New Year, and I have never been able to enter into the spirit with noisemakers, funny hats and loud hurrahs. Since the death of my son, I especially find myself wondering what this is all about. I think some of the partying and celebrating are motivated by a deep desire for a new start in our lives; a desire to leave behind some of the problems, sorrows, worries and pain of the year just ending. The short, sunless days and long, dark nights make us want something to cheer us. So we give the New Year's Eve party a try.

But it really doesn't work for most of us; we see now that we are just the same and the heaviness in our hearts, as we continue with the struggle to cope with the loss of our child, remains with us. Can we find new ways to live our lives in the New Year?

I'd like to suggest a few things we can try. Let's make an effort to find new friends. A good place to start this is at Compassionate Friends meetings. Here you are with a group of people who care about each other in special ways. We understand the pain and anger, the confusion and the inertia suffered by bereaved parents.

In the New Year, let's also find new ways to be close to the family that we have left. We feel regrets about hugs not given, letters not written, "I love you's" not said often enough. We can do all these things now. We can establish new memories with the family we have right now.

Another way to move into this New Year with a better feeling is to think about what we can do for others, because that is truly a way to help ourselves, too. If we can reach out to other sorrowing families, give a gift of our time, a note of love, a listening ear, or a shoulder to lean on, we'll grow stronger ourselves.

For those parents who are suffering the deep pain of the newly bereaved, none of the things I've mentioned may be possible yet. For you, I hold out the hope that soon your days will be just a bit better, your sorrow a little lighter, your tears healing, your friends strengthening and your memories filled more with the good times and less with the unhappiness of your grief.

Dory Rooker
TCF Upper Valley, VT

Don't Look For Me Among the Tombs

*Don't look for me among the tombs,
My life has just begun.
But raise your eyes to the endless skies,
You'll see me in the sun.*

*Hear me in every robin's song,
The rustle of the leaves.
My smile will be in every rose,
My song the summer breeze.*

*I'll be the nodding daffodil
That ushers in the spring.
I'll kiss the earth in summer
With every gentle rain.*

*In every sparkling dewdrop,
In every grain of sand,
Every velvet snowflake,
In every mother's hand.*

*For I am LIFE and LOVE unchained
Where God and I are one.
Don't look for me among the tombs,
My life has just begun.*

Susan Vaughn
TCF, Nashville, TN

Some Day

*Pain like this, I never knew existed
until one fateful day,
Life so cruelly and unfairly insisted
without giving me any say.*

*Derek, Cody, and Taylor, you were the loves of my life.
You gave me such joy and laughter.
My heart is broken, cut by the sharpest knife.
I no longer have my babies to look after.*

*They say time heals so I'm trying to go on,
with your memories etched in my heart.
Your pictures I so longingly look upon,
to sustain me while we're apart.*

*I hope to see you again some day,
I have to believe it's true.
That day, when upon you, my eyes lay,
this pain I endure will finally be through.*

I love you my angels.

Always and forever your mommy

Teresa Delgado
TCF, Nashville, TN