

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.

July 14 Meeting brings National Speakers

David and Nancy Guthrie

David and Nancy Guthrie have buried two of their three children, a daughter, Hope, and a son, Gabriel, who were each born with a metabolic disorder and lived for six months. Since the publication of Nancy's 2002 book, *Holding On to Hope* , David and Nancy have shared what they've learned from their experience in numerous ways, including speaking around the country, through their book, *When Your Family's Lost a Loved One* , and serving as co-hosts for the GriefSharevideo series, which is used by thousands of grief groups held weekly in churches across the country. David and Nancy host a weekend retreat called Respite Retreat for couples who have faced the death of a child. You can find more information about the Guthries at www.nancyguthrie.com.

David and Nancy will speak on the subject "What's It Going to Take to Get Through This Grief?"

Please join us at 3:00 pm as they share their story. Regular sharing groups will follow.



*Life's unfairness is not irrevocable;
we can help balance the scales for others, if not always for ourselves.*

Hubert H. Humphrey

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**.....Ron and Darlene Henson
615-789-3613
- Small Child**.....Kenneth and Kathy Hensley
615-237-9972
- Alcohol/Drug Overdose**.....Ed Pyle
615-712-3245

The feelings bereaved parents share have not changed over the centuries. A month after he lost his daughter, Tullia, in February, 45 B.C., Cicero wrote his friend, Atticus:

“It is like you to want me to recover from my grief, but you are my witness that I have not been remiss on my own behalf. Nothing has been written by any author on the alleviation of grief which I did not read....But my sorrow is stronger than any consolation. I have even done something which I imagine no one has ever done before, consoled myself in a literary composition. I can assure you there is no consolation as effective as this. I write all day long, not that I do myself any real good, but just for the time being it distracts me—not indeed enough, for grief is powerful and importunate; still it brings a respite. And I try all I know to bring my face if not my heart back to composure...you will not be able to feel towards me as in the past. The things you liked in me are gone for good.”

The Healing Aspect of Writing

After my little Jenny died in 1987, writing helped me to hold onto my sanity and work toward recovery....

Journaling is the first step. First get a notebook. Common scribblers will do. I find I relax more with ordinary scribblers than with fancy journals, but you choose what's best for you. You can even use scrap paper and rip it up afterwards if you're afraid of people finding what you write.

The main thing is to make writing a regular part of your day. Either write for a certain length of time or try to fill a set number of pages. Let your feelings pour onto the pages. Be as honest as you can. Don't worry about making sense, being grammatically correct or cheerful. Start where you are—even if it's cranky, grouchy, weepy or vengeful. I've had to admit murderous rage sometimes, but it's better that the page absorbs my anger, so I get a chance to think it through.

“Clustering” is an excellent way to get ideas for your writing. Put your child's name in a circle in the middle of the page. If you could only use one word to describe your child, what would that be? Put that word in the circle with the name. Now think of physical attributes, incidents, and personal characteristics to group around the center circle. When you have put enough ideas down, write a paragraph or two about your child. For more details about clustering, look for *Writing the Natural Way* by Gabrielle Rico...(you can order it from bookstores.)

If you're wanting to write a booklet—or even a book—about your child's life and death, may I suggest a way to get going? Try asking yourself, “What incident or experience or memory do I feel like writing about today?” and do it. The next time you sit down to write, ask the same question. This “write-what-you-feel-like-writing” method is the opposite of making an outline. Many people are intimidated if they think they have to make a formal outline and stick to it. If you use the spontaneous method, then at least you get started. You can make an outline later on, or simply put your pieces in some kind of order and fill in the gaps to make your book.

Anna Olson
TCF, Winnipeg

What Might Have Been ... What Is

I want what might have been...

And I want what is.

I want the child I do not have,

And I want the child that has come after.

I cannot choose

One or the other,

My heart wants both.

What might have been,

A sturdy lad,

Baseball bats,

Football helmets,

Squiggly worms on hooks

Dirt and mud and

Burps and booms.

What is now,

A charming girl,

Raggedy Anne,

Stuffed bears,

Curls and ribbons on hair

Tea and cookies and

Squeals and giggles.

How can I choose

From two blessings,

One gone too soon,

One here by a miracle?

I cannot ...

But if I could...

I would want both ...

What might have been ...

And what is.

Lisa Sculley
In memory of Joey Sculley

Origins

Origins are important- they give us a sense of our heritage. I was thinking about the origin of the butterfly as the symbol of The Compassionate Friends, and I heard or read somewhere that the butterfly was selected because it was often used in artwork by children in concentration camps in Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II. Upon doing a little internet research, I discovered the book, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*. It was a fascinating and painful book to read, as I had never studied much about the events of the Holocaust. The book contained a collection of drawings and writings, mostly poetry, of children who passed through the ghetto of Terezin (Theresienstadt) near Prague between 1942 and 1944. Terezin was a German propaganda "model city" built to house deported Jewish citizens and convince the world that the German treatment of Jews was humane. What the world did not know was that Terezin was only a stopover, and the ultimate destination of the occupants temporarily housed there were the gas chambers and furnaces at Auschwitz and other death camps. More than 141,000 Jews passed through Terezin during the time of its use as a concentration camp. The book says, "A total of 15,000 children under the age of 15 passed through the Terezin Concentration Camp between the years of 1942 and 1944; less than 100 survived." It is a horror so evil, that there are no words to describe it.

Those children left behind more than 5,000 drawings and many poems which were preserved. A poem written by Pavel Freidman dated June 4, 1942 was part of the legacy. Pavel was deported to Terezin in 1942 and perished in Auschwitz in 1944. The poem was called "The Butterfly," Pavel was only 23 years old when he died.



The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzling yellow

Perhaps if the sun's tears
Would sing against a white stone
Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly 'way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished to
Kiss the world goodbye.

For seven weeks I've lived here,
Pinned up inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the
court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto.

Pavel Freidman

Article composed and poem submitted by Lamar Bradley, TCF Nashville. Thanks for your insight.

Grief is a great teacher when it sends us back to serve and bless the living. We learn how to counsel and comfort those who, like ourselves, are bowed with sorrow.

We learn when to keep silent in their presence, and when a word will assure them of our love and concern.

From *Gates of Prayer*
Reform Judaism Prayer Book

Death Ended Your Child's Life, But Not His or Her Relationship to the Family

In 1983, I wrote a two-part article for the [National TCF] Newsletter called "Commitment to Survival" in which I described parent bereavement as a complex process that includes mothers and fathers maintaining a relationship with their dead child. Specifically, I wrote: "Death ended your child's life but not his or her relationship to the family" and "You give up the old person who was physically connected to a now deceased child and make different connections with your child who has died."

I received many letters describing how bereaved parents had been criticized and even ridiculed by others for expressing their continuing love and connection to their dead child. You told me you copied the articles and sent them to friends, relatives and people in the work place to let them know that it was "normal" to want to talk about your child. You also told me that in your opinion, maintaining a sacred bond to your dead child was vital to your well being.

From 1983 to the present, I have conducted a number of studies with both bereaved parents and siblings. Findings from these studies indicate the ongoing connection you have to your dead child is a catalyst and an enduring energy which sustains one through the most intense time of grief and gives survivors the courage to face loss that bereaved parents and their living children must endure. The deep pain of grief comes with a deep introspective searching for answers to agonizing questions about why your child's death had to be part of your life and about your shattered dreams.

Research shows that this period of grief is characterized by feelings of hopelessness, profound sadness, aching loneliness and a belief that you will not and cannot ever be happy again. Physical reaction may include fast heartbeats, shortness of breath, and a sense of fear or panic that more bad things will happen to other loved ones. Many bereaved parents expressed feeling angry, blaming themselves and others for their child's death. You spoke of being preoccupied with endless thoughts and feelings about the circumstances surrounding his or her death and the difficulty of coping and adapting to your new, permanently changed lives. You said that this was a time of "feeling confusion about who you were, not knowing yourself anymore and feeling detached from others" and how these thoughts and feelings demanded and used up the little bit of energy you had each morning.

Grief work is infinitely private, painful work. Part of you died with your child and now you must struggle with letting go of your old self as you endure the unknown of who you will become. One newly bereaved parent described this process by saying, "I liked who I was before my child died. I don't like who I am now. I barely know myself."

In the beginning of grief you were consumed with the myriad reminders of your child's life and death. As time passed, you found occasional peaceful respites from grief as the episodes of deep grieving gradually became less frequent and intense. Finally, you described knowing you were having more good days than bad. This marked the beginning of leaving behind some of the suffering and sorrow of intense grief and having the energy available for keeping and cherishing the love and connection you have to your dead child. Surviving the struggle with death and finding life again renews energy and is manifest in your becoming stronger and better able to cope with your loss. You gain a realization of having become more tolerant of yourself and others and becoming a part of life again.

The hardest work of becoming a survivor is learning to live without the physical presence of your dead child while simultaneously learning to live with his or her emotional and spiritual presence. You find that meaning in your life is derived from your relationship to those you love, including your dead child. The legacy your child has left is a love that transcends time and space.

Nancy S. Hogan, RN, PhD
Dr. Hogan is an Associate Professor at the University of Miami
(Reprinted from the *TCF National Newsletter*)

Last Moments

*Last moments
Snatches of conversation
That echo across all decades ...
Priceless words
Indelibly etched on the heart.*

*Sometimes
Thoughts were never spoken
But unexpected sentiment—
A quick embrace, a silly smirk,
Or joyous laughter—
Reaches through the pain
And warms the heart.*

*We came too soon to understand
The folly of harsh words
Or neglected touch,
For who can know which
Taken-for-granted event
Will become
A last moment?*

Diane Fields
TCF, Westmoreland, PA

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, will 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

In order to meet printing deadlines, all donations and original poems or articles must be received by the meeting day of the preceding month to be published in the next issue of the TCF Nashville newsletter. All donations and submissions are greatly appreciated.



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). Call 615 342-8899 to confirm dates and times.

Alive Hospice Support Group for Bereaved Parents and Children

A support group for bereaved parents meets at Alive Hospice. Call John Baker at [615 963-4674](tel:6159634674) for details. 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 and click on chapter locator.

