

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.

May 8 Meeting: *Honoring Our Memories*

The May meeting is an especially poignant one because it always falls on Mother’s Day, and since the June meeting is not on Father’s day, we like to give special attention to the role of both mothers and fathers in the lives of their children. If you have a special memory of a particular Mother’s Day or Father’s Day, we hope you will come prepared to share it with the group. We will honor all mothers with special readings and there will be a picture board to display your child’s photo. (Please bring a photo 5”x7” or smaller.) Keeping our tradition, each person in attendance will be given a carnation to wear in memory of their children. Regular sharing groups will follow.

This has always proved to be a very meaningful meeting—a safe place to be on a day filled with memories. We’d like to share it with you.



*The passage of time alone does not cause our grief to end,
 but its softening touch helps us to survive.*
 Wayne Loder

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.

Mother's Day

As I write this, I am very much aware that Mother's Day is coming soon. That will be a doubly difficult day in countless homes. For all the thousands of mothers who will be glowing with a radiant kind of pride and happiness on that day, there will also be those of you whose hearts are aching for that phone call that will never come, that special visit, that one Mother's Day card that will not arrive. For us, the reading and rereading of that one last card—"Mom, you are the greatest and I love you"—will have to last a lifetime. How does a mother face a lifetime of silence on "her" day? Ask those of us who have been there already, and we will tell you of lonely Mother's Day visits to spring-green cemeteries where the sweet clear notes of a single spring bird, perched nearby, float over our heads and seem surely to have been intended as divine comfort for a heart full to breaking. You will hear of yellow roses being sent to a small church—"In memory of..." and a cherished story of a kind and sensitive friend who sent a single rose that first Mother's Day "in remembrance."

Always we struggle with the eternal question—how does life in fairness exact from us the life of a beloved child in exchange for a clear bird call in a spring-green cemetery, a slender vase of rosebuds or even the kindness and sensitivity of a friend who remembered our loneliness and pain on that day? Where is the fairness and justice of such a barter?

The answer comes back again and again—life does not always bargain fairly. We are surrounded from birth to death by those things which we cannot keep, but which enrich, ennoble and endow our lives with a foretaste of Heaven because we have been privileged to behold, to experience, to wrap our arms around the joyous and the beautiful.

Can we bottle the fragrance of an April morning or the splendor of a winter's sunset and take it home with us to place on our fireplace mantel? Can we grasp and hold the blithesome charm of childhood's laughter? Can we capture within cupped hands the beauty and richness of a rainbow? Can we pluck the glitter of a million stars on a summer night or place in an alabaster box the glow and tenderness of love?

No, we cannot. But to those who have been given the splendor, the blithesome charm, the glory, the glitter, the tenderness and the love of a child who has departed, someday the pain will speak to you of enrichment, of compassion for others, of deeper sensitivity to the world about you, or a deeper joy for having known a deeper pain. Your child will not have left you completely, as you thought. But rather, you will find him or her in that first clear, sweet bird call, in those yellow rosebuds, in giving and in receiving, and in the tissue-wrapped memories that you hold forever in your heart.

Mary Wildman
TCF, Moro, IL



A Miracle in May

*Paint me a picture of love,
A miracle in May,
With tender warm colors
Of peach-pink sunsets
Reaching into soft twilight haze.
Begin with the freshness
Of a dew-touched morning,
And color it with a rainbow
after a summer's rain.*

*Paint me a picture of love,
A miracle in May—
Of violet-green meadows
And daisies growing wild—
A picnic with you, a reason to smile.
Paint me a picture of love,
And you'll paint me a picture of you.*

Debbie Dickinson
TCF, Naperville, IL

Three Roses

Danny, our only child, passed away in the summer of 1995 at the age of twelve. His death was sudden and unexpected, and the pain that it brought was almost unbearable.

We approached our first Mother's Day without Danny with much sadness and a lot of anxiety. I looked for some way to recognize the day, but at the same time acknowledge the loss and the pain in our lives. Roses have a special significance in our family. When Danny's birth turned out to be very difficult, and it involved a serious defect, I gave my wife a single red rose. When he died, we had a single rose carved on his headstone.

Our pastor told us that yellow is the color of life. What then could be more fitting than yellow roses? In order to ensure that we'd have these symbols of life for years to come, I bought a small rose bush for my wife. After all, she was still Danny's mom and needed more than ever to be reminded of that.

I planted the bush on Mother's Day. On the day before Father's Day, the roses bloomed—three of them, to be exact. They were arranged in size order, just as our family had been in life. When I had bought the bush, there were no buds, no way to know that there were to be only three roses.

I have no doubt that this was a sign from Danny. He wanted us to know that he still lives, and that there are still three roses.

Thanks, Dan.

John W. Carlsen
TCF, Massapequa Park, New York

River Reflections

I just got back from a river rafting trip, where I found myself thinking about my brother a lot. He died 16 months ago of an overdose of morphine. I don't know why it happened; it happened. I didn't see the beginning of his life—he was three years older, but I saw the end. I can look at it now and see it in its entirety—his 33 years of living that I so much counted on and expected to last another 70 or 80 years. I thought I would always have him to talk to—about life, about family, and about ourselves.

The river was a meditative place for me. The rhythm of the oars, the gentle motion of the raft, the shore gliding by, the gurgle of the water as it seeped into and back out of our raft—all of this provided just enough stimulation and was hypnotic enough that I didn't want to do anything but sit and think. For a few days on the river, I floated without any of my day-to-day concerns, without the usual level of tension standing behind me.

What rose to the surface, visible in the clear water of my mind after the silt of all my worries sank to the bottom, were thoughts of my brother. Nat would have liked this trip. The rough beauty of the terrain and the quiet power of the water would not have been lost on him. He would have noticed the beauty of the full moon and the light on the canyon walls as the sun rose and set.

I have felt a lot of anger at him for dying, for taking his own life, for engaging in an activity so dangerous, for playing Russian roulette, for committing suicide. He left no note, he didn't say good-bye; he left a wife and two sons whom he

loved very much but who, like me, were not enough to keep him alive.

It wasn't the anger, though, that I felt on the river. I just remembered him. Grief is at its sharpest when, after a death, he all of a sudden flashes into focus so real and so present that I can hear his voice as if he has just spoken to me. I can imagine the scent of his hair, remember the texture of his face as I touch it, and I can see him walking and talking as if he were only there a moment ago. At these times, the grief flares up; the wound feels fresh and sharp with memories of the love, the charm, and the grace. I realize both with gratitude and with anguish for the wound this reality carries, that he is not someone I can let go.

These memories will come to me for the rest of my life. He is truly a part of me. He is mixed up in my blood and my bones and the electrical impulses of my brain. And in whatever way all of these things go together to form a soul, he is a part of that too. There is no escaping him. This is the gift and the price of love—it doesn't end. My brother was there in the river's sand and mud, in the full moon, the constantly flowing cold water, the clear dry air, the red canyon walls, and the blue sky. And he was there in me.

And I was there, alive and more appreciative than I would have been before he died. I was more aware of my connection to my surroundings—that one day my body will be river mud, water, and bones like driftwood. What form my love will take then, I don't know. Maybe if there is a river and desert light offering delight to someone's senses, that will be enough. I don't know.

Emily Moore
TCF, Los Angeles, California

A View From a Parent's Heart

When I began working with a children's grief group, I was reawakened to the fact that young people are many times forgotten in the midst of grief. Their feelings and pain are often put on the back burner until we can emotionally deal with them ourselves.

I found myself going back to the time when my daughter died, and wondering if I had given enough attention to my surviving three children in their own grief. As a grieving parent, I might have neglected at times to include these "forgotten mourners" in my sadness and pain. I hoped that I had given their grief the attention it so desperately needed.

Grieving children need to be allowed to mourn with us and among us. They need to share our pain and their own. For if they are not given the opportunity to work through the myriad feelings they are encountering, they will most likely bottle those feelings up inside, never knowing exactly what to do with them.

Parents, share your grief with your children. They need to know it is a normal occurrence following the death of a loved one. Allow them to share their feelings even when you believe your own pain is overwhelming you. They are hurting, too. Yes, it will be difficult, but you and your children will benefit from it.

These "forgotten mourners" come to my grief group confused and in pain because they have not been able to grieve the loss of a loved one. Talking about their feelings, shedding tears, and realizing that things will get better can make a world of difference for them.

Almost sounds like any grieving adult, doesn't it? I guess we just have to remember these children are feeling the same things we are, only in smaller bodies. But they have BIG hearts and BIG hugs! So share your grief today with your children. Make them an important part of your grieving process. You'll both be better for it!

Cathy Heider
TCF, Algona, IL

Her Mother

*Despite her death
I'm still her mother.
Through all my days
This will be.*

*Now in my life
Where there are shadows,
Her love shines down...
And so I see.*

Genessee Bourdeau Gentry
From *Catching the Light*

Believe

*Crocuses poke their heads through the crusted snow
to let us know the long, bleak winter is ending
and spring will come again.*

*So, too, the long bleak winter of your aching,
breaking heart will end and spring will come
again one day.*

*Be patient – but believe it.
Your spring will come again.*

Betty Stevens
TCF, Baltimore, MD

A Letter to Anderson

How do I continue on my path? In reality, I was most happy with my role as mother. That was all I knew for the first 17 years of your life. I was joyous in that space and time. After the initial shock of losing a child, after walking around in a daze not remembering details of daily life, you reach an impasse where you remember with laughter times you shared that were funny and can actually bring a smile to your face. There are still those “dark night of the soul” moments when you curse the Universe and don’t know how to lift yourself out of this despair, but then I remember something you said or your dancing around the room, and my heart is lifted up with love and laughter.

So, there will be moments where we mourn the passing of that loved one, but can we deny them? My life is so much richer having spent 22 years with him than to have not had that space and time. What gifts I have received. Thank you, Anderson.

In closing, ‘why’ I ask? You are not my child. You are spirit that came to spread joy and love. It is now up to me to continue that task, that mission. You taught me that well, because I have experienced this so unconditionally. I know and understand in my heart what this feels like; therefore, because of it being forever etched there I can share this love and have great empathy with others. Anderson comes and speaks, “*Madre, you reach out with true empathy because you understand. I am the joy, compassion and love you share. I will be with you in all interactions with others; I am but a thought away.*”

Goodbye – But not so Goodbye: I mourn your nearness on the physical but who can know of the experience of life after death? I feel that I know your function was complete, and I marvel at the gifts you left us with on Planet Earth. It is these gifts, which I hold true to my heart, that allow me to move forward. The darkness is lifted as I embrace, with gratitude, your essence and luminous light.

Goodbye: Looking back over our last night together if I knew that I was to say goodbye, what would I say? So here goes... You were as close to God as I have come to experience on this physical plane. The joy and love that I felt with you has to be that all-encompassing Love of God. Certainly a part of the God Essence living through you. You lived it everyday, and I felt it. Thank you for enriching my days, and thank you for allowing me to be your mother. You chose me and I am blessed.

Lucy Skaggs
Extracted from *Anderson Speaks*

Why Attend a National TCF Conference?

The 2011 national conference is only three months away. You may be asking yourself why anyone should attend a conference for people whose children and siblings have died, but be assured, it is truly a wonderful experience. You will come away with an incredible sense of healing. It is an awesome fellowship that creates an instant bond between total strangers.

The feeling of love that permeates the hotel is difficult to describe; it ranges from riding in an elevator with people who talk to each other instead of watching the floors go by to receiving help and comfort from other conference attendees, through a variety of beneficial workshops, and from inspirational speakers.

This year’s national conference will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota July 15-17. Registration forms are available on the TCF Web site: www.compassionatefriends.org.

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 second Sunday 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.

There's Help—The Power of Positive Thinking

One of the most valuable things you can do is to talk it out with a good listener. We now know that the stress level of bereaved people can be cut in half when they talk about the death to someone who does not judge or advise them. Having someone as a backboard to hear your thoughts bounced off is the greatest gift you can receive. Too often, everyone wants to make you feel better, so they try to advise rather than listen.

Remember, repeating your story is healthy. Talking about your loved one, the illness and/or death, works like a sponge. Each time you talk, a little more of the pain is squeezed out and the need to talk about the incident becomes less. It's as if your story is being framed within your mind. Soon you can hang it on the wall. You'll always have it there to look at whenever you want, but you no longer have to carry the whole thing around with you and be burdened and controlled by the past.

There will be times when no one is around to listen. You'll need to do something different. Talk into a tape recorder. Keep a journal to write down your thoughts and feelings. Buy a journal for this purpose. Select a color that you like and write when there's no one around and you need to talk. Talk out loud as you write if it makes you feel better.

Write a letter to your loved one who died. This can be a very powerful process. Share your thoughts and feelings. Pour them out on paper. You may feel emotionally drained afterwards. If so, nurture yourself. Examples: wrap yourself in a blanket and take a nap, watch a movie, or hold or pet the family pet. You may even find it helpful to write a letter back from the person who died.

Others have found that just talking aloud or into a tape recorder was helpful. Some stand in front of the mirror to talk. As a friend once said to me, "Don't worry about talking out loud to yourself. It's good to have a conversation with an intelligent person."

However you do it, remember: "Talking it out is one of the best medicines of all."

While some people won't want to listen to you, you'll also find they can say some really stupid things. Offer them suggestions for kinder, more compassionate words they can use with bereaved people. It will help them to help you and others more effectively because some people really want to help, but just do not know how.

You will find others who understand when you go to a support group. You will meet other mourners with similar feelings and problems. They can provide tremendous emotional affirmations. Why not come to the next meeting? This group of bereaved parents listens, even to those who say nothing. Share if you want to, receive love and compassion. You do not have to walk alone. Come walk with us.

Kelly Osmont MSW, TCF, Portland, OR
 Extracted from *More Than Surviving—
 Caring for Yourself While You Grieve*

Blessings Inside Sorrow

There are blessings inside sorrow, or so I have been told. I am not sure I always agree. At times I can see the gifts I have been given. Love—without measure—fills my heart when I think of you. But I love you then too, when you were in my arms, not in my heart. And I miss you now. The emptiness you left can never be filled, not by any blessings I might receive from sorrow.

And yet, still, I wonder. Are there blessings? Would I have known how much I care for you — for your brothers, for your dad, were it not for your coming, and so suddenly, softly leaving, without a good-bye? Would I treasure the life I have remaining if it weren't for your loss? Certainly I loved, and treasured before you left, but hasn't my sorrow caused me to express that love and to treasure more highly those around me? I KNOW I can't take for granted that they will always be.

In the aftermath of losing you, when life lay crumbled around me—still, was there not a glimmer of hope? That life would go on, and somehow, we would survive, and build on the ashes of our broken hearts. Building somehow in spite of our pain. Mixing the cement of our love with tears, we bound ourselves together even more tightly than ever before. And our love grows stronger. And we have not forgotten.

What a bitter lesson! And still, the emptiness will never be filled. There yet remains a hole in my heart—and in all our hearts. Dear son, we will never forget you. The blessings inside our sorrow will never fill the hole you left in the fabric of our lives. It remains open, a testament that you mattered, and that your coming and soft going made a difference. And in that difference lies the blessing inside our sorrow. We were blessed to have held you for a time, even though you could not stay. And even through our tears, we smile at the memories. And we know that you are not completely gone. You shadow our lives, affecting them in big ways and small. And though I would trade these blessings in a minute just to have you back in my arms, I am indeed grateful for the blessings inside sorrow.

Lisa Scully
 TCF, Jacksonville/Orange Park