

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.

September 8 Program:

Dr. Frank Lewis to speak

We are pleased to announce Dr. Frank Lewis, Pastor of First Baptist Church in downtown Nashville will be our guest speaker this month. Dr. Lewis is a bereaved sibling who has previously been associated with The Compassionate Friends in Alabama and in Nevada. Those of us who have heard him in the past have been struck by his warmth and vitality. We have found his understanding of the grief of parents as well as siblings to be right on target. Join us and help welcome him to our meeting. Regular sharing groups will follow.



Save the Date: Annual Picnic September 21!

Our annual TCF Nashville Family Picnic

at Fannie Mae Dees Park

is a wonderful time to spend together

with our families. Details on the back page.

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

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.

Olivia's Candle

My husband and I lost our baby, Olivia, during pregnancy, and having no funeral or other traditional means of finding a place for our feelings of loss and love for this cherished person, a person many believed never lived at all, we settled on burning a candle for 24 hours every time the death date passes. Beside the candle is this poem:

*To our beloved Olivia,
Whose life-light burned so briefly.
You are forever a part of us
As we remember and relive
The joy with which we discovered you and
The sadness with which we
Accepted your departure.
The light and love you lit
In us burns on.*

Patti Williams
TCF, Northeast Georgia Chapter

Learning the Hard Way

My husband, David, and I used to attend his university's semi-annual alumni meetings. There was a couple who drove in for these meetings from a town an hour and a half away. Through the years, we developed a nice friendship, often going out to dinner together after the meetings. Then one day, we heard that Fred and Jean's eleven-year-old son, Russ, had been struck and killed by a car while he was riding his bike.

Although we were terribly saddened to hear about Russ, we just never got around to doing anything to express our sympathy. Jean and Fred didn't come to the alumni meetings for a couple of years, so we simply never saw them. Finally, they came to a special function. When I saw Jean, I asked her how she was getting along, and her reply was, "I didn't know if you had heard." Typically uncomfortable, I responded by saying something like, "Yes, I knew, but I just couldn't handle it. That's why you haven't heard from us." They quit attending the meetings, so that was the last time we saw them for ten years. In the tenth year, our daughter, Paige, died following a six-month illness. We had been told from the beginning that her brain tumor was a bad one and that she would not survive. One of the things I had time to think about during this time was the awful way we had treated Fred and Jean.

Soon after Paige's death, I felt compelled to write them a long letter of apology, explaining that we now understood better what they had experienced, and that if they could "handle" the death of their child, surely we should have been able to. Immediately upon receiving my letter, Fred called to say they were on their way to Nashville to take us to dinner. We had a wonderful reunion with lots of talking and some tears. Dave asked Fred if he ever thought about Russ. Smiling, he replied, "I think about him every day. Do you want to see his picture?" And he proceeded to pull from his billfold not only his son's photograph, but the obituary as well. This was one of our first lessons about grief: it's okay to remember our child.

Jean and Fred, these kind, forgiving people, helped us to realize that if sometimes folks don't respond exactly the way we'd like for them to, it isn't a lack of love for us or our child, but simply an example of human frailty. Because of their wonderful attitude we were more able to be understanding when we failed to hear from two families in distant cities who had been longtime friends. We also found ourselves more tolerant when inappropriate remarks were made to us. Any small effort should be appreciated – and is!

Peggy Gibson
TCF Nashville, TN
In loving memory of my daughter, Paige

Brandon's Song

*A day will never pass
When I don't think fond thoughts of you
I lost a son, I lost a friend
Without you I'm lost too
You had the greatest laughter
And who could forget that smile
I feel so very honored
That God chose you as my child*

*We had our share of arguments
In those tough teenage years
But they would almost always end
With both of us in tears
A phone call never ended
Without an "I love you"
So when you're looking down on me
Remember I still do*

*There's nothing like the bond
Between a young man and his dad
The way we laughed and fussed and joked
Are what I miss so bad
I guess I'm being selfish
But I wanted you to stay
Then one night God reached down for you
And took you far away*

*Oh, where are those healing hands of time
They said would set me free
They may be helping someone
But ain't done a thing for me
There's those who say you're better off
And I guess you could be
But if I had my way you'd be
Back here with mom and me*

*A day will never pass
When I don't think fond thoughts of you
I lost a son, I lost a friend, without you I'm lost too.*

"A Tribute to my Son"
Freddy Weller
TCF Nashville, TN

Changes In Our Lives

The death of our child brings many changes to our lives and the lives of our families. The first change is death itself. Our child is dead – there is nothing we can do about that change. We mourn for this loss, saying “if only” and “why didn't we” as we struggle with acceptance of the finality of death.

Then the changes in our daily life stand out. The extra place at the table, our child's room, their possessions, their clothes, and the phone calls and letters that are no more. Each of us has experienced these agonizing and desperate changes – feeling helpless and frightened. Our anger and sense of unfairness over these changes can make our lives miserable, but we can do something about these changes.

Once you realize nothing or no one can bring you peace but yourself, you will begin to search for your personal peace. A person who needs but refuses the painful physical therapy exercise to correct an injury will remain a cripple for life. The same is true of emotional therapy. We must do some things that are painful at first, if our emotional state is to become stable again. If we avoid all situations that might be painful, we may end up as an emotional cripple. Our progress is slow and very painful but we can learn to use our grief in a positive way. Misery is optional – there is another way.

We have experienced not only death, but also life. Death has brought us closer to life and more aware of living. This awareness of living makes us aware of the needs of others. Our compassion is expanded, our understanding of life is changed and given time, we reach out to others in their time of need. We cannot have coped with such a devastating loss and not be changed.

Betty Stigelmeier
TCF, Colorado Springs, CO



On Memory

When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you, that I have left some mark of who I am on who you are. It means that you can summon me back to your mind even though countless years and miles may stand between us. It means that if we meet again, you will know me, and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart. For as long as you remember me, I am not entirely lost.

Frederick Buechner - theologian

A Stepparent's Thoughts

I am a bereaved stepparent – *Stepfather* to be exact. Robin Ann Craney, my stepdaughter, was killed at the hands of a drunk driver on June 8, 2001. She was 17 years old.

I have a son named Greg. His Mom remarried so I saw him on weekends, did the trips, and long summer visits as many divorced parents do. I did not get the chance to be a part of his life and see him every day. I got to hear about his activities and accomplishments *all* after the fact. When you marry someone with kids, you get another chance.

After several months of dating my (now) wife Cindy, I finally met her kids, Chris and Robin. Robin was almost 7 years old at the time. I remember that first meeting clearly because she wasn't feeling so good. She ended up getting sick and had to go home. What a first meeting that was!

After that, I became totally involved in the lives and activities of both of the children. I remember one of those nights well! Cindy and I attended parent-teacher conferences for both kids, a Cub Scout Pack Meeting and a Girl Scout Brownie Meeting...not bad for a single guy, who had been unmarried for 13 years!

Over the years, I got to know Robin's likes, dislikes, and all of her friends – *and she had a lot of friends!* I attended and participated in all of Robin's activities, supporting her in her many endeavors – including gymnastics (her favorite). I was there when she had migraine headaches, running her to the doctor when her Mother couldn't, encouraging her, supporting her – all the things Dads do for their kids. I want to tell you in no uncertain terms, being a stepparent is so much harder. You get the responsibility and, often times it seems, none of the respect. "Mom said I could so I don't have to listen to you" or "You can't tell me what to do, you are not my dad" and so forth. I tolerated and dealt with her emotional outbursts when she became incensed at anything (sometimes it seemed everything) during the teen years. All *Dads* know how trying those times can be!

Now I am a bereaved stepparent...the one in a kind of "no man's land." I am not biologically connected to Robin; I sometimes feel like an outsider around people who were *once* a family - Mother, Father, Son, and Daughter. Many of our friends have worried about Cindy and Chris. They often ask me "How is Cindy doing?" or "Is Chris OK?" Although I knew and lived with Robin for 10 years, very few ask, "How are *you* doing?" I am only the *stepparent*. The idea that this tragedy cannot be as devastating to me as it is to Robin's "real family" is incomprehensible.

One definition for the word father is "father figure: one often of particular power or influence who serves as an emotional substitute for a father." This is what I was for Robin. She loved to push my buttons – but that was part of our relationship – as frustrating as it could be. Robin is the only daughter I will ever have. I was every bit a *father* to her. I love her and I miss her.

We, the stepparents of children who have died, grieve for our children too. *Only* society puts the "Step" in the name. *Parent* is still the biggest part of who we are. We hurt because they were our children too - often without the support and understanding that is demonstrated towards the biologically connected parents. These beautiful children with whom we developed emotional bonds are now gone out of our lives; and we, too, endure the same feelings of loss and sadness.

Tony Cinocco
In memory of Robin Ann Craney
TCF, Denver, CO

It's Over

And it's over!

Finally everyone has gone away.

To turn their lives back on again

Like radios.

Leaving us to talk too loudly

Trying to soak up the silence.

Sometimes I see you turn away

So that I won't see your tears.

And we build this incredible wall

Of grief

First started with her empty chair.

I can't believe that I could ever be

So alone with you.

Each of us guarding our pain

Jealously.

As the last thing to hold on to.

And people said,

"You're so lucky to have each other."

Sue Borrowman
TCF, Winnipeg, Canada

CHAPTER INFORMATION

The “Children Remembered” Listings

If you are unable to attend TCF meetings and would like for your child to be listed on page 3 in The Children Remembered list, 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.

Picture Name Tags

If you will bring a clear picture of your child, wallet size or larger, to a TCF meeting, Lamar Bradley will make a beautiful permanent name tag with your child's picture on it for you to use each month. You will also have an opportunity to select your own butterfly to accompany the photograph. The original photo will be completely safe with Lamar and will be returned to you at the following meeting. The best part of this is that there is no charge. A big thank you goes to Lamar for unselfishly giving his time and talent.

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 demands made upon the parents, and the information you provide is strictly confidential.

TCF Nashville Sibling Support

We encourage siblings from teens to adults to come support one another at our monthly chapter meetings. Siblings face a unique and complicated grief journey and are finding hope and healing through our Sibling Sharing Groups.



BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

Alive Alone

Alive Alone is an organization to benefit parents whose only child or all children have died. Visit their website at www.alivealone.org.

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).

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.

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.

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.