



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

January 2008, Volume XXI, Number 1

The Quad City

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Thank you to all who contributed to making the Christmas Memorial Service a special time. It was a good evening in spite of the snow. We were surprised at how many braved the winter weather to be part of the evening. Kay McDaniel, founder of the Quad City Chapter of The Compassionate Friends, attended as we recognized our chapter for serving bereaved families in the Quad City area for the last 20 years.

You Can't Win with Me
By Jane Warland, 1996

If you say to me, "How are you doing?" with such sympathy and meaning in your voice, I reply, "I'm fine," and brush you off, because to talk about my loss with you is just too painful.

If you see me and don't mention the loss that is consuming my thoughts, I think you don't care enough or are too scared to mention it for fear that you might upset me.

You can't win with me. If you say, "I'm sorry your baby died," it is hard for me to reply to that. What do you expect me to say?

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Many people have invested time and energy into Compassionate Friends over the years to enable the group to continue its outreach to bereaved families. If you would like to help in some way such as providing refreshments for a meeting, planning a program for one of the monthly meetings, or helping with a special event such as the May balloon launch or the Christmas service, or if you have an idea of ways we can better meet the needs of grieving parents, please let us or Dave and Sharon Ulseth know.

Sincerely,
Jerry and Carol Webb

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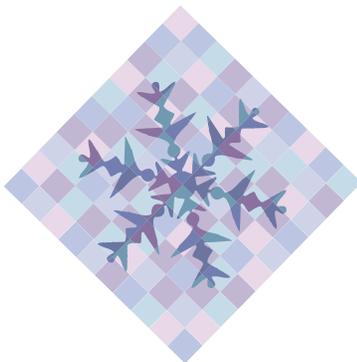
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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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PORT BYRON, IL
61275

Quad City Chapter
Messiah Lutheran Church
302 11th St. N.
Port Byron, IL 61275



To those who are receiving our newsletter for the first time, we wish you were not eligible to belong to this group, but we want you to know that your family and you have many friends. We who have received love and compassion from others in our time of deep sorrow now wish to offer the same support and understanding to you. Please know we understand, we care, and we want to help.

You are not alone in your grief.

Resources for Grieving Parents & Siblings

The Compassionate Friends of the Quad Cities Chapter Meeting

January 24, 2008 at 7:00 PM

Bethel Assembly of God Church

3535 38th Ave., Rock Island, IL

From John Deere Road, turn right at 38th St. (by Kmart) and go up the hill. Turn left on 38th Ave. The church will be on your right. We meet in the downstairs fellowship hall. (Or you can turn into the church driveway off of 38th St.; the church is on the west side of the road.)

The Compassionate Friends of Muscatine

Meets the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 at the George M. Wittich-Lewis Funeral Home, 2907 Mulberry, Muscatine, Iowa. Chapter Leaders are Linda and Bill McCracken. You can call them at (563)263-2737 for directions or information.

Helping Heavy Hearts — Grief Support Group

Meets the second Tuesday each month at 7:00 pm in the office of Family Resources located in Building 9 of the Annie Wittenmeyer Complex off Eastern Avenue in Davenport. For more information, contact Dave Happ at (563)785-6133.

Mom's Group meets in Aledo

A group of moms who have had children die meet once a month in Aledo to support and encourage one another as they go through the grief process. You are invited to join them at the Happy Joe's in Aledo. For directions or more information, call Kathy Matkovic at (309)314-2485 or Kay Forret at (309)582-7789.

Rick's House of Hope

Located at 4867 Forest Grove Drive in Bettendorf, this community resource is for children and adolescents dealing with grief. "Children and adolescents experiencing grief and trauma often need a safe place to express their feelings. They need companions for the journey of grief who are outside their family and not themselves grieving." The volunteer mentors at Rick's House of Hope provide this for young people and their families during painful and confusing times of grief. There is no fee for services. For more information, call Denise Tatoian at 563.324.9580 or 563.421.7970. Find Rick's House of Hope on the web at www.genesishealth.com — Keywords: "children and grief."

Quad City SHARE

A support group for parents who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death. SHARE meets the third Thursday of each month at Grace Lutheran Church, 1140 East High Street, Davenport, Iowa. For more information, call (309)792-7808.

Survivors of a Suicide Loss Support Group

For those who have lost someone to suicide, this group, facilitated by a peer survivor and a professional, meets the third Monday of the month in Moline, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm. For details, contact Joel M. Moore (309)737-1363. moore-jm@sbccglobal.net

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I want to say, "I'm, sorry too!" Or "It's Awful!" I want to scream, "It's not fair!!" But I won't. Because I don't want to upset myself today, not in front of you. So I reply, "Thank you."

That thanks means so much more than that. It means thanks for caring, thanks for trying to help, thanks for realizing that I'm still in pain.

If you don't know what to say to me, that's okay because I don't know what to say to you either. If you see me smile or laugh don't assume I must have forgotten my baby for the moment.

Tell me that I look good today. I will know what you mean. I'm getting good at picking up unspoken cues from you.

If you see me and think I look upset or sad, you are probably right. Today might be an anniversary day for me, or some event might have triggered a wave of grief in me.

If you don't say anything, I'll think you don't care about me, but if you do say something, it might make me feel worse.

You could try asking if I want to talk, but don't be surprised if I say no. You can't win with me.

Don't give up on me. Please don't give up. I need your attempts however feeble. I need your thoughts. I need your prayers. I need your love. I need your persistence.

I need all that, but most of all I need to be treated normally like it used to be, before all of this happened. But I know it's impossible.

That carefree, naïve person is gone forever, And I am mourning that loss too. So you can't win with me.



What's it all about?

The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child. The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families in the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child and to provide information and education to help others be supportive.

Founded in England in 1969, the first U.S. chapter was organized in 1972. Since then, 635 chapters have been established. The current Quad City Chapter was formed in 1987.

TCF National Office

P.O. Box 3696
Oak Brook, Illinois 60522-3696
Toll Free - (877)-969-0010
TCF National Web site - www.compassionatefriends.org

Quad City Chapter

Messiah Lutheran Church
302 11th St. N.
Port Byron, IL 61275

The Quad City Area Chapter of The Compassionate Friends

meets bi-monthly on the fourth Thursday of the month in Rock Island, Illinois. See the newsletter for schedule.

Quad City Chapter Newsletter Editors

Jerry and Carol Webb
Box 71, Cordova, IL 61242

e-newsletter is now available from the National Office! The monthly e-newsletter will contain notes and happening of interest to all TCFers. To subscribe to the e-newsletter, visit the TCF National Web site home page and click on the Register for TCF e-Newsletter Link. This newsletter is available to everyone.

There are no dues or fees to belong to TCF. As parents and other family members find healing and hope within the group or from the newsletter, they often wish to make a Love Gift to help with the work of our chapter. This is a meaningful way to remember a beloved child.

THANK YOU TO:

**Ron and Joanne Dixon, in memory of their son,
Patrick – 6/13/69-5/31/07**

**Clifford and Barbara Fields, in memory of their son,
Bryan Michael – 3/25/56-1/22/89**

**Kay McDaniel, in memory of her children,
Kent – (life dates unavailable) Kimberly – 1/23/65-3/27/65**

**George Mech, in memory of his daughter,
Sara – 6/4/80-11/5/03**

**Rebecca Ripka, in memory of her son,
Chase – 5/18/88-12/16/06**

**Ron and Debbie Root, in memory of their son,
Brian – 3/23/85-2/22/06**

**Richard and Carol Watters, in memory of their son,
Robert – 6/4/80-1/1/07**

Love gifts are used to provide postage for the newsletter and mailings to newly bereaved families. Some of the love gifts are used for materials to share with first time attenders at our meetings or to purchase books for our library. Our thanks to the many families who provide love gifts so that the work of reaching out to bereaved parents and families can continue. If you would like to send a love gift, please send it to our treasurers, Larry and Joyce Molitor, P.O. Box 191, Cordova, Illinois 61242. Checks can be made out to *The Compassionate Friends*. Your gifts are tax deductible.

If you read or write an article or poem which might be helpful to other bereaved parents, please share them with us, Jerry and Carol Webb, Box 71, Cordova, Illinois 61242.

If you move and would like to continue receiving the newsletter, please send us your new address. Because we send the newsletter bulk rate, the post office will not forward it.

If you know someone you think would benefit from receiving the newsletter, we would be happy to add them to our mailing list.

If you prefer to no longer receive the newsletter, we would appreciate you letting us know. Thanks. Jerry and Carol Webb (Editors), Box 71, Cordova, Illinois 61242, (309)654-2727.

Live NOW

Margaret Gerner
BP/USA St. Louis MO Chapter

THE HOLIDAYS ARE OVER! We have survived one more hurdle. Now a whole year faces us. 365 days. It's rather frightening, isn't it? Would it be less frightening if I suggested you have only one day to face: It's true. ALL YOU HAVE TO FACE IS TODAY - THIS 24 HOURS.

There isn't much we can't do if we only have to do it for 24 hours. Even the torment of our grief can be handled for 24 hours. We can get through the next 365 days, one day at a time.

In order to take one day at a time, we must learn to keep ourselves in the NOW. When our minds start wandering back to yesterday and the painful yesterdays before that, we need to make every effort to consider that yesterday, with its pains, hurts, and yes, even its mistakes, is gone now and there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. When our minds wander to tomorrow and we begin to panic at the thought of another day of torment, we can block out those thoughts too. We can bring ourselves back to the NOW by paying strict attention to what is going on in the immediate present.

What if our responsibilities right now won't allow us to give in to our pain? Our other children need our attention or our job demands our attention? Then we must focus ourselves only on what we have to do at that moment. We can only think of one thing at a time.

What if we are having one of those moments of enjoying ourselves? Then we should enjoy. We deserve it. Emotionally we have been battered. It is essential to have a few moments of relief occasionally. By laughing and having a few forgetful seconds, surely we aren't really betraying our child.

And what if we are just having a crazy, mixed up, hurting, enjoying, crying, laughing, getting things done in the morning, getting nothing done in the afternoon kind of day? So what! Maybe the next 24 hours will be different.

By concentrating on the NOW, we add up the minutes and the hours. Eventually we complete a day. Days become weeks, then months. Then one day we realize, GEE, I'm feeling a little bit better! A whole lot better! By taking one day at a time, living in the present, I guarantee that life will take on meaning once again.

TCF Bulletin Board

Contact www.preciousparents.org which publishes a newsletter titled HEARTLINE for parents whose infants have died.

The January Meeting of the QC Chapter of The Compassionate Friends is on January 24th at 7:00 PM at the Bethel Assembly of God Church in Rock Island.

GRIEF MATERIALS

Looking for a particular grief book? Look no further than the Centering Corporation, the official recommended grief resource center of The Compassionate Friends. With the largest selection of grief-related resources in the United States, Centering Corporation will probably have just about anything you're looking for – or they'll be able to tell you where to find it. Call Centering Corporation for a catalog at (402)553-1200 or visit their Web site at www.centering.org. When ordering, be sure to mention you are with The Compassionate Friends and all shipping charges will be waived.

Our Newsletter

For parents who have experienced the death or deaths of multiple birth children during pregnancy, at birth, in infancy, or in childhood, contact Jean Kollantai at P.O. Box 91377, Anchorage, AK 99509.

Amazon. Com

When making a purchase from Amazon.com, enter through the link on the home page of The Compassionate Friends national Web site, and a portion of the purchase price will be donated to further the mission of TCF. This donation applies

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day,
January 21, 2008

We Need Not Walk Alone

The Compassionate Friends National Newsletter
One complimentary copy is sent to bereaved families that
contact the national office.

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.
P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696 — (877)969-0010

Email: nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Web site: www.compassionatefriends.org

Visit the [sibling resource](#) page at

www.compassionatefriends.org



Starting Our New Normal

How do we get back on our knees and learn to crawl again after having been crushed by the terror of our child's death? What can we do to learn how to live again, which is exactly what we try to do? We've begun a new life, a new normal, where we look different, we act different, and we communicate differently than we did in our past life. Most bereaved parents will tell you we now live in terms of before and after our child died. All events are measured in terms of the instant they passed away. When a neighbor tells us they went on vacation last year, we think, *My child would still have been alive for another six months*. Or, we figure exactly how many days, weeks, months, or years they would have already been gone. It's an automatic calculation.

My first baby step to my new normal came with the acknowledgment of our son Brendon's death. March 16, 1998, at 4:15 p.m. through a phone call from my wife, Kathy, was how I first learned that Bren had been murdered. Nine months later, sitting at my desk at our photo studio, the realization that Bren's physical body was never coming back washed over me. It was still a while before that acknowledgment completely lived in me, but it was a small first step to my new normal. When I was able to say, and believe, that Bren's body was never coming back, I began to heal ever so slightly.

Leaning on those who are willing to support our lifelong journey can help build our new normal. For me, that person has been my sister Marcia. Her unconditional love in the face of my anger, confusion, and irrational behavior has kept me from falling. She could not understand my pain over the murder of her nephew, and never professed to, but she has understood and accepted an emotional turmoil in me that she can relate to. She was grieving her loss, too, but still has reached out to me on

many, many levels.

The single most powerful factor in starting my new normal has been the realization that death did not take all of my child. Brendon's death did not take all of his life. His spirit and life live on through my memories. Everything I had with Bren when he was alive still lives in me. Every hug, every kiss, every laugh, and every tear will always be a part of my life. I certainly wish there had been many more memories to be made, but that decision was not mine to make. In the beginning, the memories I had were mostly about what I lost. I thought Bren was gone forever and I would experience his life again only when I died and we were reunited. Now, most of my memories are more about what I had, and still have, with him. The good times, the bad times – all the times are special and treasured moments that I hold closely and am very grateful for. It's very painful to have lost our son, but we have not lost all of him. His life force and wonderful spirit shines in our lives.

My realization about Bren's life was not something I consciously decided to feel. I didn't go to the healing store and buy it off the shelf. Through my grief work, and leaving myself open to all possibilities of healing, I was able to bring Bren's life back into mine. Frankly, I don't think we have all that much control over our grief. It just kind of drags us along. What we can control is how we do our grief work and our attitude toward our healing. I believe the terms "grieving" and "healing" are synonymous. As we grieve, we heal.

We must never stop fighting for our children. Their lives are out there waiting for us to bring them back into ours. This is a rough, rough journey, but if we travel it side by side, hand in hand with our kids' lives, it can make our path a bit easier.

By Rob Anderson,
from *We Need Not Walk Alone*

FOOTPRINTS

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times of my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Mary Stevenson

Hopeful Coping

The other thing I think Jesus would have us to see is that life and everything we possess is truly a gift and not a possession. I had the great misfortune many years ago of losing my only daughter to leukemia. Right after she died I was so filled with sadness. I went down one night to my study, and took down from my shelf a copy of a commentary on the book of Genesis. I turned to the twenty-second chapter of Genesis which tells the story of Abraham being asked to offer his little boy, Isaac. I never understood that story, but that night through the teachings of this particular interpreter, he helped me to see that the issue at work here was whether or not Abraham remembered where Isaac had come from. Did he remember that life is a gift, that birth is windfall, that everything comes to us through a graciousness that is utterly beyond us? As I sat there in the middle of the night listening to those images out of the book of Genesis, it dawned on me that my daughter was a gift and not a possession; therefore, I had the sense that I could take the road of gratitude rather than the road of resentment out of the valley of the shadow of grief. I began to realize that my choice was mine to make, either living my life with my fist in the face of God or being grateful she had ever been given at all.

Dr. John Claypool

Dear readers: Even though the holiday season is past, I thought the following article had year round relevance, and I did not want to wait a year to share it with you. Carol Webb

My Present to You

This is gift giving time, and I want to give you a present – a new concept that has been a comfort to me. I discovered it in a book on language.

The author said that we experience God without knowing it, but our language limits what we attribute to him. In other words, if all we call Him is God, we may see Him only as a remote and omnipotent being. But if we identify God by what He does, we begin to see the role that He plays in our lives and to understand how He reaches out to us.

I asked myself, "How has He related to me as a bereaved parent?" and here are the ways I thought about:

- As the Maker of friendships that have sustained me through my deepest grief
- As the strength that has enabled me to keep on going when I didn't know how I could possibly get through another painful moment.
- As the Listener who has heard every anguished word I've uttered, as well as all my unspoken thoughts.
- As the Silent Voice that reminded me others were hurting, too, when I thought I was all alone.
- As the Comforter who caused my friend to call when I needed help and couldn't ask for it.
- As THE Compassionate Friend who knows how I feel.

This concept can become a living, growing present if you add to the list yourself.

Judy Osgood – TCF, Indianapolis, IN

I never believed I would see another season change with gladness.

I never believed I would see the world again without the haze of tears.

I never expected to actually laugh again. I never felt my smile would return and feel natural on my face.

I never hoped for another day when I would not want to die.

I never envisioned a world that could again be bright and full of promise.

I believed that all that had passed from me the day he died and went away, never to return. But I was wrong and I know that in the fullness of your grieving, you too will come to understand that life goes on... that it can still have meaning.. that even joy can touch your life once more.

Don Hackett - Hingham, MA TCF

In praise of healers...

I shuffled into the tiny little room, two chairs, a single low lit lamp placed on the corner of a desk, I was holding the shattered pieces of my heart...my smashed and splintered soul. My eyes were hollowed out from the river torrent of tears. My shoulders were bent from the brutal beating of grief. I could barely stand, much less stand up straight. I brought this anguish and more into the tiny little room, where a person stood, greeted me warmly and welcomed me in. As I walked in, I thought, "This room isn't big enough to hold all this pain."

I was astounded by this person's courage to show up for the appointment, to be present. The choice this human being had made to step into my realm of despair. Willingly. Consciously. This stranger had chosen to face down the monstrous grief that had come to dwell inside me.

The stranger issued an invitation. "Please tell me about your son. What happened?" These first words gave me the first sweet breath of relief that I had experienced since my son's death. "It's OK to talk about this?" I thought. Not only was it OK, but this was the essential purpose of our time together. "Permission to speak freely?" Granted.

The halting words and heaving sobs issued forth and I spoiled my sorrow.

Disgorging the twisted, anguished keening. And he sat and listened and acknowledged the horrible reality, honored my disheveled, disoriented, despondent state.

The tragic event that brought me to the threshold of the therapy room is one of life's cruelest experiences, the death of a child. And in this experience, there is pain enough to endure. In going through the therapy process – in contemplating this loss and my ability to endure it, to accept it – many other wounds would be exposed. Ugliness, abuse, disappointment, burdens that at one time in my life were bearable, but now, coupled with my son's death, these hardships exacted a deeper toll.

The therapist-healer called all of my life trials forward, to be spoken, to be witnessed, to be acknowledged, to be understood, to be healed.

I did not go very often, maybe once a month. As I approached the day and time, the appointed hour for the conversation, the "session," I wondered, "What is it I will talk about? Which aspect of this mind fogging experience do I want to focus on? Will the counselor know where to go? Have a direction to suggest?"

My grief robbed me of my "take charge" capabilities and I was floundering in a state of paralysis. When I was a college student studying psychology, I remembered

hearing a description of the catatonic state, "waxy flexibility." A fair description of how I was functioning. Slow motion. Decision-impaired. (Which kind of shampoo to buy? Whose turn is it at the four way stop? Who cares?)

I found myself mystified to encounter a human being who wakes up in the morning and plans to invite into their life, invite into their experience, the personal and intimate exposure to the pain and the heartbreak of grief-laden, suffering people. Someone who will not only witness the gore and dismemberment of a stricken soul, but will reach out into the mess and start working to sustain life and hope. Clamp the bleeding, bind the wound, clear away infectious materials, check for vitals. (Ask, "Are you sleeping? Eating?")

I've never witnessed the work of a hospital burn unit. I only know of an aspect of the work because my husband described a little of it to me. He had worked in the medical profession and he had also had a close friend, a comrade in combat who received a serious burn when a mine blew up in his face. My husband went to visit his injured team member in the burn unit. The patients were receiving their treatments. Nurses were scouring off the burnt skin, essentially skinning the patients alive. The screams, he said were horrific, beyond imagining. If the damaged skin was not removed, the patient

would not survive. If too much pain killing medication was used, the patient might succumb to death. So the healers would wake up each morning knowing that in the course of their day, they would subject the burn victims to excruciating pain. It is essential to heal.

Heal or die. Live or go on as a zombie, breathing, but not living life. These are the choices for the wounded.

Therapists, healers, these are brave people, doctors, nurses, aides, clinicians. They possess a faith in the goodness of life, beyond the pain, to the fullness of healing. They hold a wisdom that teaches pain has a purpose and that grief and loss and heartbreak are possible to survive. They make themselves available, so that the suffering might find pathways to a new way of being. They understand the shadow side of this truth, which is to deny pain is to invite sickness and greater anguish and darkness, death. To shrink from the work of healing is to turn away from life, to stop living, even though you may still draw breath.

There are all manner of therapists and healing people. I offer my gratitude and honor their courage. And my son Matt thanks you: I know he wants his mom to be OK.

Nancy Ronquillo
TCF South Suburban Chicago –
November 2007