



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

February 2008, Volume XXI, Number 2

The Quad City Chapter

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Over the past couple of months we have received a number of phone calls from bereaved parents looking for information and support as they face their grief. While we wish we had some magic pill that could ease the pain, put it all in perspective, and bring immediate healing, we know too well the impossibility of that wish. We can listen, send them the newsletter, and encourage them to go to TCF meetings. I do tell people that attending a meeting usually does not lead to an easing of their pain – at least not for a while – but in the telling and retelling of their story and their journey and listening to the stories of other grieving parents, there is growth, movement forward, learning to live with the new normal.

We have printed this month an article by Nancy Ronquillo in which she talks about the life cycle of butterflies.

I could strongly identify with the picture she paints of the caterpillar going into its chrysalis (unwilling perhaps) and in the darkness being annihilated and then transformed. For me it seems like an apt analogy for the grief process. Back before my child died, I suspect I would have been willing to stay a caterpillar, but I hope in at the at least partial annihilation of who I was before Anna that God has used my days of darkness to make me more like a butterfly.

Sincerely,
Jerry and Carol Webb



Thank you to Bethany for Children & Families and Maggie's Fund for Children in Need for printing this month's newsletter. If you are able to assist in the final preparation for mailing of the newsletter in any given month, please contact Jerry and Carol Webb at (309)654-2727.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

«WholeName»
«Street»
«City», «State» «ZipCode»



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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 February 28, 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@sbcglobal.net

Just For Today

Just for today, I will try to live through the next 24 hours and not expect to get over my child's death, but instead learn to live with it just one day at a time.

Just for today, I will remember my child's life, not his death, and bask in the comfort of all those treasured days and moments we shared.

Just for today, I will forgive all the family and friends who didn't help or comfort me the way I needed them to. They truly did not know how.

Just for today, I will smile no matter how much I hurt on the inside, for maybe if I smile a little, my heart will soften and I will begin to heal.

Just for today, I will reach out to comfort a relative or friend of my child, for they are hurting too, and perhaps we can comfort each other.

Just for today, I will free myself from my self-inflicted burden of guilt, for deep in my heart I know if there was anything I could have done to save my child from death, I would have done it.

Just for today, I will honor my child's memory by doing something with another child because I know that would have made my own child proud.

Just for today, I will offer my hand in friendship to another bereaved parent, for I do know how they feel.

Just for today, when my heart feels like breaking, I will stop and remember that grief is the price we pay for loving, and the only reason I hurt is because I had the privilege of loving so much.

Just for today, I will not compare myself with others. I am fortunate to be who I am and to have had my child for as long as I did.

Just for today, I will accept that I did not die when my child died. My life did go on and I am the only one who can make that life worthwhile once more.

Vicky Tuhingham - TCF/Brandon



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.

Love Gifts

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:

David and Anna Hansen,
In memory of their son, Daniel — 10/10/84—4/20/2005
Bill and Laurie Steinhauser,
In memory of their daughter, Maggie — 1/08/1999—2/17/2005

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 One Day At A Time

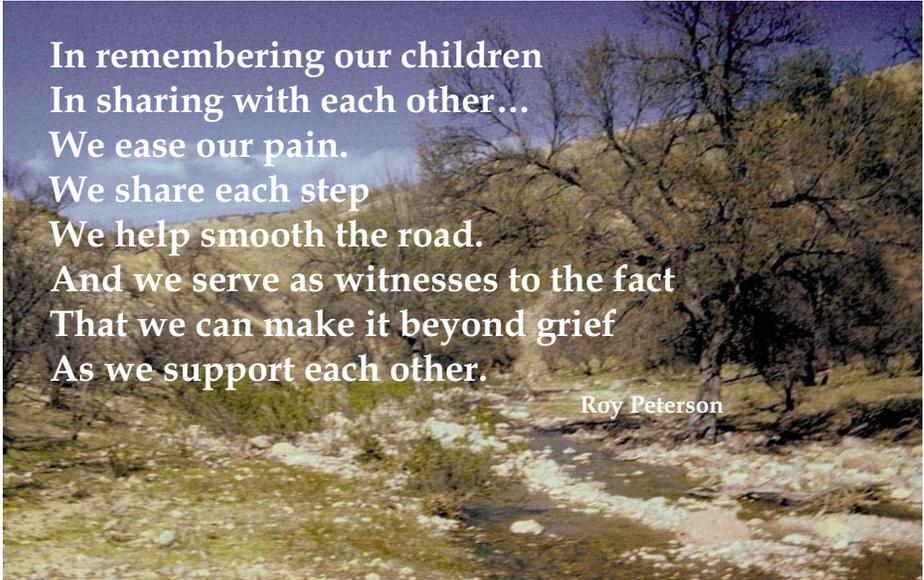
Memories – tender, loving, bittersweet.
They can never be taken from you
Nothing can detract from the joy
And the beauty you and your loved one shared.

Our love for the person and his or her love for you
Cannot be altered by time or circumstance.

The memories are yours to keep.
Yesterday has ended, though you store it
In the treasure house of the past.

And tomorrow?
How can you face its awesome problems and challenges?
It's far beyond your mastery as is your ability to control
yesterday.
Journey one day at a time!!
Don't try to solve all the problems of your life at once.
Each day's survival is a triumph.

Earl Grollman,
from *Living When a Loved One Has Died*



In remembering our children
In sharing with each other...
We ease our pain.
We share each step
We help smooth the road.
And we serve as witnesses to the fact
That we can make it beyond grief
As we support each other.

Roy Peterson

TCF Bulletin Board

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

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.

The February Meeting of the QC Chapter of The Compassionate Friends is on February 28th at 7:00 PM at the Bethel Assembly of God Church in Rock Island.

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 to all purchases, not just books, made from the Amazon.com site.

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

Presidents' Day
February 18, 2008



Do It Your Way

I think it's only fair to tell you—there is no bereaved person of the month award, no award for a stiff upper lip. In fact, rather than being rewarded for trying to be the most stoic, brave and strong, the one who seems to be doing too well will suffer the consequences.

Losing someone very important to you without feeling the pain of deep grief is impossible. Many non-bereaved people will encourage you to play an old game. The rules are simple. If you'll pretend you're okay and it's not really so bad, we'll let you come and play with us. But, if you're going to cry and talk about your dead loved one, then you can't play.

However, this is one time in your life when you don't have to meet anyone else's standard. Nothing is more unique about you than the way you express your grief. And, you have the right to express it your way. Generally you will cope with your grief much like you have handled problems in the past.

So, if someone tries to encourage you to play the old game by rewarding you with attention because "You're doing so well," tell them you're not doing well. Tell them that your loved one died and you're hurting. Let them know that pretending everything's okay does not help. Do whatever you need to do to survive this trauma and don't worry about whether it pleases or displeases other people. Do it your way!!

Mary Cleckely, TCF/Atlanta GA

What To Do With The Void

The death of a child creates in the parents a wound that is almost always described as a void. This fact is almost universally accepted. Where there is a great deal of disagreement is on what to do with the void. Some people try to shut it out by becoming so busy after the death of their child that they fill their lives up hoping that they can push the void into the background. They hope the new experiences will fill their lives and quiet the void. This generally works for a while. Eventually, the overwhelming power of the void pushes itself back into the forefront of our thoughts, demanding to be dealt with. All of a sudden the parents find themselves back at square one in dealing with the void.

Another popular way of dealing with the void is to realize that the void will always be with you and you learn to live with it. People are able to call on personal strength in a time of crisis and learn to work around and in spite of the void. This is very heroic, but it doesn't solve the void problem. The void is still there. The only way to settle completely the void issue is to remove the void, change it into something else that is full of peace, love, and is whole and complete. Impossible you say!!!! Well, I think not. Read the book of Genesis in the Bible, the first and second chapters, and read carefully the parts about the creation of the Garden of Eden. It was created out of what was once a void (Genesis 1:2). The most beautiful, perfect place ever created was created out of what was once a void. God did it once. He can do it again. However, if we keep running around saying that the void will always be with us, then it WILL!! If we keep saying that we have to learn to work around the void, we WILL have to. But, if we seek the God of the universe, we will find that He is still in the "void changing business." You see, God never changes (Hebrews 13:6). Take God at His word and see your void changed within you into something that is beautiful, perfect, and full of peace. I've had my void changed, who's next?

David Weaver – TCF/Valley Forge, PA

Continued from page 5

was a mess. I was sure I would never be able to live a normal pain-free life again. My family tried to be supportive, but I was not very responsive to their efforts.

This time, the impending move has us packing up or throwing away years of accumulated “stuff.” I sit in my home office boxing up current letters, bills, and assorted paperwork. When I clear my desk at last, I turn to find a single piece of stationery lying facedown right in the middle of my desk. It is a letter written to me 23 years ago. It tells me to have faith in my recovery. It tells me how much I am loved and how the family is pulling for me. It tells me the writer understands my pain and depression, but it would pass...and it is signed...“your loving daughter, Margie.”

It appears that visits come in different forms.

From We Need Not Walk Alone, 2007

Design Editor's note: Prior to living in our last home, my wife and I would claim that tales of ghostly spirits were bunk — the tall tales of gullible folks. Before moving here to the Quad Cities, we owned a 100 year old home on Chicago's southside. Shortly after moving in, we discovered the presence of “spirits” who dwelled in the house with us. We were able to deduce through conversations with the neighbors who it was visiting us on various occasions: in the basement was the previous owner of our home who had passed away in the house — he would whistle one of his tunes if one of us touched his tools or jars of screws and nuts; on the second floor was the spirit a young mother who passed away six months after giving birth to her daughter — we think she became confused when we brought home our first baby boy from the hospital — and then again when our second son was born, she would walk the

halls looking for her baby. In the basement at other times were the giggles of school-aged children who were playing near the door that led to the backyard — it often confused us because we thought neighborhood kids were in our backyard playing hooky from school — but we never found even one truant child when we went to investigate.

Our daughter, Maggie, died suddenly three years ago this month of an intracranial hemorrhage that slowly initiated while she sat in Kindergarten that day after Valentine's.

In the three years that have passed since Maggie died, I have had but one dream of her. In my vivid dream, I am back at our old house in Chicago working in the basement. As I leave the basement to go into the backyard, I duck low so I don't hit my head on the low doorway that was a transformed storm cellar door, and I hear the giggle of kids playing outside in the driveway. As I come up the basement stairs to ground level, I spied my daughter in full flight being chased by another dark-haired little girl, both of them laughing at their play and rushing down the stairs into the basement. As Maggie passed me, she flashed her “Got you!” smile, as if she knew something I didn't. Behind her came the other little girl who I finally recognized as Maggie's cousin, Beth, who had died at the age of six — the same as Maggie, but thirteen years before my daughter was even born. The two running little girls dashed into the basement and from behind me came the same giggling that I had not heard since I last lived in that house. My daughter always had a flair for the dramatic in life, and she apparently hasn't lost her knack for it. Akin to Professor LeVant, I am of the mind that visits come in different forms, but they do come—and I cherish the one I was given.

Bill Steinhauser

The Visit

By Howard LeVant

Flying home from Dulles airport, I feel strangely hopeful. The week following our 37-year old daughter Margie's bizarre death during childbirth has been the worst week of my life. She had died suddenly, going from a healthy expectant mother to death in less than twenty minutes. The following day the baby died. The pain and anguish are beyond belief.

I think somewhere in the back of my mind I am ready to believe that when I get off the plane everything will be back to normal. She was dead in Virginia, but not here in Rochester.

That feeling doesn't last. The oppressive pall of the past week is here too. I am alone, having left my wife behind in Virginia to help arrange support for our son-in-law and our four-year-old grandson.

By the fifth night home alone, I am very edgy. I awaken at 3:00 a.m. with a major panic attack. It is hard to breathe, hard to stop crying, and impossible to sleep. In my pain and anger, I have expressed a lack of belief in any higher order and any thought of the hereafter, but if that is so, then my daughter no longer exists at all, and I cannot deal with that concept.

The next night I hear the sound of a choking cough in the house. It sounds like what my wife said she heard when Margie was dying. I run into the hall calling her name, but there is no one there. For lack of anything else to do, I go back to bed and lie there trying to watch TV.

There is a mirror at the foot of our bed that reflects the bedroom door into the darkened hallway. Something moves in the reflection. I freeze, because the nebulous vision in the mirror is familiar. A faint gray wisp of light that I have seen before. Thirty-seven years were suddenly

enclosed in a circle of events.

The year Margie was born, we had moved into a new apartment in Cleveland. For years, I had told friends that the apartment was haunted. Many nights, while sitting alone in the living room, I saw a faint gray apparition standing in the doorway to the darkened dining room. When I tuned to look, I sensed it was a female, and she darted away out of sight. Ghost stories have always made me uncomfortable, but I never felt frightened or threatened by this apparition.

Tonight a warm and calming feeling washes over me. It all becomes obvious. Believing that time is only linear in our reality, I feel I know who that apparition of 37 years ago was. It was Margie returning to the place of her birth for a last look around. And tonight, sensing the pain her father was in, she has come here to set my mind at ease. Crazy? A self-delusion that allows me to deal with my loss? I don't think so.

There are things that exist of which we have no concrete knowledge. Is there a hereafter where time doesn't exist as we know it? Where whatever happened in any time is available at all time? I have seen that type of theory proposed in books on science, science fiction, theology, and the occult. It has worked so far for me, and I am willing to accept the unknown as a very strong possibility.

It has been seven years since Margie died. I have been waiting for another visit, but maybe one is all I get.

My life is currently in turmoil. I am recovering from a very painful, debilitating orthopedic surgery and at the same time we are moving from our house of 27 years into an apartment. I find myself frustrated and depressed with the pain and lack of mobility. It reminds me of another such surgery 23 years ago. I

Continued on page 8

What is the heart of the story of my son's death?

All of these questions about the story, the narrative befuddle me. I don't know where to start, or how to perceive the gaps in the story because I'm living my life, and I'm a part of Matt's life and I can't seem to detect a particular pattern or thread that defines or frames my thoughts and feelings. I have this torrent of thoughts, this jumble of feelings bouncing all over and detecting order or pattern in what seems to be random, chaotic mystery is elusive if not impossible.

One thought I have is about butterflies. I am deeply drawn to butterflies now and find them to be one of God's most magical creatures. I've resisted writing about his because I worry that it seems too schmaltzy, too saccharine and sentimental.

Nonetheless I am drawn to these creatures and to their life cycle and when I look at them I feel they can help to heal my grief. When I see a butterfly now, I see a message from Matt.

The intense beauty of a butterfly is alluring for most everyone I suspect. For me the pull has to do with the chrysalis, the stage of their life when they are nothing but liquid goo.

I am no scientist. In fact, I find science

one of those subjects that is unknowable by definition. I successfully avoided most of the hard science subjects in high school like chemistry and physics. I liked math, including algebra. But geometry broke my confidence in my ability to learn through sheer willpower. I signed up for a science requirement in college entitled Physics for Poets, the dumbed down version for us liberal arts majors. I couldn't get past the chapter one concept of the ball rolling down the incline as the earth rotated on its axis. I had to drop the course. I ended up taking Earth Science where I could pass by memorizing the names of different kinds of rocks.

I know there is a lot of scientific data on the life cycle of butterflies and I intend to learn about it someday. What little I know is that once the caterpillar is ready for its transformation, it spins this cocoon, this chrysalis and submits itself to total annihilation. Every furry fiber of its being, every one of its little legs, its eyes and feet, all gone, moosh, melted. And somehow, in time, with a little DNA map, a few weeks later a being of beauty and flight emerges.

I read somewhere that scientists have tested chrysalides for sound waves, and what's been detected is something akin to screams. This makes sense to

me. That even caterpillars don't go willingly into that dark night...rage, rage.

One day, there's a furry creature, probably black and orange, loping along, finding tasty leaves to munch on—and then time calls this humble tiny creature to spin itself into a little cave. And within this cave, this dark place of stillness, all that was, dissolves.

I know that the Compassionate Friends organization uses the butterfly as one of its symbols of hope. I look at the butterfly, but I'm thinking about the chrysalis, the place where it is dark, uncertain, but also holding potential... a bit of hope.

What is the heart of this story?

Matt, my Matt.

My hope that his life and spirit is living on in some magical way, spiritual way. That this story would be part of that, Matt living on in this world, so I can stand living in it too, find the way to fly in it – and not just crawl around chewing leaves, wondering what happens next.

Nancy Ronquillo, lucky to be Matt's Mom
TCF/South Suburban Chicago,
November 2007

and thoughts from others

I had to realize that people are not mind readers. It's painful when old friends just don't seem to understand, all the time; so we look for other areas and some new friends who do understand. I found my needs met through those new friends, but I still consider the "old friends," friends. I have grown a great deal in my long journey through grief. I think it has made me a better person. I hope others think so, too.

Eunice Brown
TCF/South Bay, Los Angeles, CA

One must grieve, and one must go through periods of numbness that are harder to bear than grief. Otherwise, scar tissue will seal off the wound and no growth will follow. To grow, to be reborn, one must remain vulnerable – open to love but also hideously open to the possibility of more suffering.

Anne Morrow Lindberg

Grief has tremendous power over our lives. The pain of anger or guilt or a need for revenge is a perfectly natural response to death, especially in the early weeks and months afterwards. But when those feelings persist they block our ability to heal. Writing in *Seventy Times Seven* about living through a horrible, painful experience like the death of a child, Christoph Arnold suggests that peace of heart cannot be found until we can experience forgiveness – of ourselves and of others.

From an address
by Madeleine Hill,
4/13/98