



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

October 2008, Volume XXI, Number 9

# The Quad City Chapter

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Recently a trip I made to the doctor's office included a couple of painful outpatient procedures. The doctor was quite concerned that she was hurting me so I finally reminded her that as the mother of three children, all born before the advent of epidurals, I had experienced three "natural childbirths" – one of them lasting 32 hours. By comparison, the pain resulting from a trip to the dentist or a minor medical procedure is not such a big deal.

Our experiences as bereaved parents give us a unique perspective which is not shared by others. Early in our marriage I cried a lot – I'm not even sure about what most of the time. A number of years after Anna died, I realized how infrequently I cried anymore. I wondered if perhaps I had cried all of my tears out, but I think it was more that lesser circumstances did not seem worthy of tears after having cried for my child who had died. The terrible enormity of the death of your child puts a whole different

perspective on the day-to-day trials and tribulations at work and home. In an article titled "Perspectives," Mary Cleckley says, "Sometimes we need to stop and think when another of life's hurdles is thrown at us. We have survived and are surviving the worst. Just knowing that helps us to keep things in perspective and helps us to realize that we have developed coping skills that some people will never have. There aren't many positive sides to losing a child or children, but at least we know the difference between the worst thing that has ever happened to us as compared to the minor irritations of today's problem."

Sincerely,  
Jerry and Carol Webb

It is time to start planning the **Christmas Memorial Service**. If you are able to help with planning the evening or making some of the necessary arrangements, please contact Dave and Sharon Ulseth (309-792-0529) or Jerry and Carol Webb (309-654-2727).

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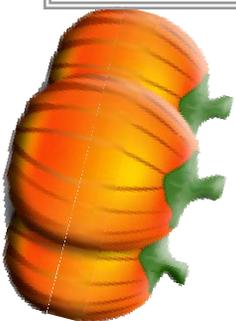
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Quad City Chapter



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Moline, Illinois 61265

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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 Meetings

**October 23, 2008 — 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm**

**Bethel Assembly of God Church**

3535 38<sup>th</sup> Ave., Rock Island, IL

From John Deere Road, turn right at 38<sup>th</sup> St. (by Kmart) and go up the hill. Turn left on 38<sup>th</sup> 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 38<sup>th</sup> St.; the church is on the west side of the road.) Call Sharon and Dave Ulseth (792-0529) for directions or information. **The meeting for November is on Thursday the 20th.**

<b>The Compassionate Friends of Muscatine</b>	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.
<b>Helping Heavy Hearts — Grief Support Group</b>	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.
<b>Mom's Group meets in Aledo</b>	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 Kay Forret at (309) 582-7789.
<b>Rick's House of Hope</b>	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 563.324.9580 or 563.421.7970. Find Rick's House of Hope on the web at <a href="http://www.genesishealth.com">www.genesishealth.com</a> — Keywords: "children and grief."
<b>Quad City SHARE</b>	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.
<b>Survivors of a Suicide Loss Support Group</b>	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 or <a href="mailto:moore-jm@sbcglobal.net">moore-jm@sbcglobal.net</a>

*Bread Crumbs continued from page 7*  
the death. What we do in Stage Two we do in our child's name. And because we do it, the world after our child died in some small way is changed forever. And when the world in some small way is changed forever, then our child's life continues to make a difference. And when our child's life continues to make a difference, he or she is never entirely gone.

Rich and his wife Kitty are founding members of the South Bay/LA Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. Son Mark died in 1992, and Rich's first book, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, is dedicated to him. His following book, *Into the Valley and Out Again*, is the story of a father's grief after the loss of his son and the changes in priorities and approaches to life that follow. Rich served on TCF's National Board of Directors for several years including as president of the board. He died in February of 2002. Kitty is the current president of TCF's National Board of Directors.

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The measure of life  
after all is not its  
duration, but its  
donation.

Dr. Peter Marshall



### 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](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

#### 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.

**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.

**T**hank you to **Bethany for Children & Families** and **Maggie's Fund** for printing and mailing 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.

## 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.

### Thanks to:

**Ken and Sandra Keller, in memory of their son, Adrian, 12/2/92—11/4/07.**  
**Jeff and Pam Shoultz, in memory of their son, Jacob, 7/1/94—7/1/94.**

**L**ove 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 attendees 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.

**Reflection** by Kathryn Lodato following the death of her twenty-one-year-old son Nick, who was a pedestrian and hit and killed by a car, from *The Grieving Garden*, by Suzanne Redfern and Susan K. Gilbert.

**T**he one true thing I would share is not an easy thing. It's not warm comfort. But for me, coming to realize this truth is, nonetheless, a comfort. A comfort that's hard and heavy, but bright and solid. It is this: the breathtaking, staggering intensity of the pain, the shattering, unbelievable quality of knowing that my child is gone, it doesn't go away. In some ways it doesn't even diminish. For me, as I write this, it's been nine-and-a-half years. Nine-and-a-half years since I saw Nick, heard his voice, had his living presence in my life. That searing sense of the full realization of his death I call the abyss. I can feel it, I know that it's always in me.

**T**he difference, and it's a huge difference, that time and grieving have given me is that I live the great bulk of my life at a safe distance from the edge of that abyss. Those early months, and even years, I often felt that I was right on the edge of it. Living so near to that abyss left little room in my life or my heart for anything else. And I didn't think that I would survive if I fell in. Now, while it's always in my peripheral vision, my field of awareness, I'm usually not at the edge. But I can go there. Sometimes I'm swept there unexpectedly. Other times, on anniversaries or simply on a quiet Friday afternoon, I can choose to go there and feel that primal grief, that bottomless sorrow. But here's why it's a comfort, why I wouldn't change this, why I wouldn't remove that abyss from my soul, even if I could: I know, as deeply as I'll ever know anything, that I will never forget Nick. I know that his importance in my life will never diminish, that his life and his death will never be just something that happened in the past. It is a bargain I gladly make. For me, to hold his life forever alive in me means that I must also hold his death forever alive in me. I hold it all: the gift of him, the miracle of his life and his being, and the abyss. And together, they have formed something more, some ineffable greater awareness of the beauty of life. I have had to grow my heart to be able to hold it all, to be able not only to go on living, but to go on living well. It is hard, but I owe it to Nick, and so I do it.

# TCF Bulletin Board

Contact [www.preciousparents.org](http://www.preciousparents.org) which publishes a newsletter titled HEARTLINE for parents whose infants have died.

The monthly meeting of the QC Chapter of The Compassionate Friends is on October 23rd 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](http://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 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](mailto:nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org)

Web site: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

Visit the sibling resource page at

[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

Iowa SIDS Foundation's  
**Vine and Dine**  
Wine Pairings Dinner  
and Silent Auction  
November 7, 2008  
6:00 PM  
Davenport Country Club

## THE MYTH OF CLOSURE

Ashley Davis Prend – Hospice of North Idaho

"When will I begin to feel better? When will I return to normal? When will I achieve some closure?" grievors often ask. Closure, our culture tells us, will bring about a tidy ending, a sense of completion. Some grievors hope that the desired magical closure will occur after the funeral or memorial service. Others are confident it will come once they have cleared out their loved one's room. Or maybe after a special personal ritual. Or perhaps after the first anniversary comes and goes – "surely then, we will have closure," we think. We pray.

The reason we long for closure, of course, is because we would like to neatly seal away all of this pain. We would like to close all the sad, confused desperate angry feelings out of our life. We would like to put all of this behind us.

Closure. What an odd concept really, as if we could truly close the door on pain – turn the lock and throw away the key. The truth is far more complex, of course.

Closure is for business deals. Closure is for real estate transactions. Closure is not for feelings or for people we love.

Closure simply does not exist emotionally, not in a pure sense. We cannot close the door on the past as if it didn't exist because, after losing someone dear to us, we never forget that person or the love we shared. And in some ways, we never entirely get over the loss. We learn to live with the loss, to integrate it into our new identity.

Imagine if we really could end this chapter in our life, completely. It would mean losing our memories, our connections to those we love. If we really found closure, it would ironically hurt even more because the attachment would be severed. And this attachment is vital to us – the memories are treasures to be held close, not close out.

Perhaps it is better to think in terms of healing. Yes, we can find ways to move on and channel our pain into productive activities. Yes, we can even learn to smile again. And laugh again and love again. But let's not ever think that we'll close the door completely on what this loss means for, if we did that, we would unwittingly close the door on all the love that we shared. And that would truly be a loss too terrible to bear.

## HOW LONG?

How long does it take to put yourself back together? That's one of the questions in the early days of bereavement. There's no answer that's always right. It's not  $64 + 36 = 100$ . It all depends. Maybe the sun is shining. Maybe a flower blooms. Maybe something is funny and you laugh. Maybe the storm ends with a rainbow. But there are also days when none of those cheering things happen.

Do you really have to be 100% every day? Be reasonable with yourself. You knew your child would stumble now and then when he learned to walk. Figure that you have to do the same as you try to learn to walk without him.

Take just one step at a time. It will help you to walk through one hour at a time, and one day at a time.

As the days go by, perhaps into the thousands, you'll realize you have some energy. Your act has some semblance of shape. Not the way it used to be; but better than it has been. Some things seem to get done; surprising, and pleasant.

Remember, there will be down days. Nothing goes right; nothing gets finished. If you do demand of yourself some daily success, a small list of mindless jobs for those days might be useful. Mine includes pulling weeds (yard looks a lot better this summer!), washing floors or windows, polishing silver or copper pans. You probably have some good ideas to add.

The point is to be reasonable. Set no goal. One week pulled, one pot polished—that is an accomplishment.

You don't need to meet someone else's standard.

**Joan Schmidt - TCF/Central Jersey**

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### “A Moving Experience,” continued from page 5

Six years later, I am not anxious about leaving home; I don't worry that I might miss a visit. The shock and disbelief of early grief has passed away and the reality of Aaron's death has settled on my soul. Though I know that I will never again see my son walk through the door, I also know that I know—I will never leave Aaron behind. He goes where I go. Still, I will be leaving a piece of my heart in the old house. Should you visit, listen for the gentle beat. You might sense its rhythm somewhere about—gazing out a tree-shaded window, lingering over a bloom in the garden, or drifting gently across the sky. And you will know that a house holds more than the stuff of memories. A house can hold a heart.

**Frankie Wilford,  
TCF/Carrollton-Farmers Branch, TX**

We are sorting through and packing up for a move. It's worse than your usual move from one home of ten years to another; the house we live in now is the last one we shared with our son, Aaron. We are sorting through and packing up memories, along with the tools, dishes, and books.

I have heard other bereaved parents talk about moving after their child died. For some, it was too painful to stay in a house that held so many images. They spoke of not being able to get away from the sorrow, of running into the pain every time they walked through the door. We never felt that way about our home. This was a place Aaron loved, and we have been very happy here—the last earthly house that Aaron knew.

I know that we will be happy in our new home as well, but *that* house won't hold a breath of him, as this one does. Now, I can walk out onto the patio and still see him in my mind's eye, drifting across the pool on a raft. I can easily imagine him coming out of his bedroom door, calling *Mom...* as he so often did. The new house won't have any history with Aaron, and so there is a feeling of loss in leaving this old place.

I know that Aaron goes where I go; he is a part of me always and forever. Nonetheless, I will miss walking familiar streets where once he walked. I will miss the feeling of connection as I lie on the side of the hill at the park and watch the clouds drift by. I will miss the scent of his closet and the view from his window. There are stories in these rooms and this neighborhood, stories woven from the fabric of my son's life. I may carry the stories with me, but I am leaving behind the props.

We have packed up his baby book, the special school projects, and the box of cards we received when he died. Hannah still has his treasured rocks in her room, and the boxes of comic books so carefully preserved and alphabetized are ready for transport. Paul is going through the collections of action figures and baseball cards to determine what can be sold or given away, and I expect that his raggedy old “bud” from infancy, No-Way Noah will take up residence somewhere in the new house.

But how do you pack up his passion for life? I know what to do about things I can hold in my hands; what I want to know is – how am I to carry his heart?

I've had a vision of these rooms, empty of all our things: I am doing one last walk through, taking one last look, saying one final goodbye. It is a scene that brings with it a gentle sorrow, and though I know we are moving forward and that all is well, in my heart there is a sense that I am somehow leaving Aaron behind. It makes me think back to those first months when I could not leave the house, even overnight. I told Paul, *I know this sounds crazy, but I feel that if I leave I might come home and find a note on the door that says: “Hi, Mom! Sorry I missed you. Catch you later. Love, Aaron.”*

*Continued, page 8*



## Bread Crumbs — Finding Our Way Back By Rich Edler

Bread crumbs are all we have. They are what is left behind after the death of our child. They are our memories and our mementos. A bread crumb is the little answering machine cassette tape that says “Hi, it’s me. Leave a message at the beep.” We may be the only people with a cassette tape in our safe deposit box. It’s not much, a few quick words, but it’s his voice—a small crumb from the original. A bread crumb is his favorite shirt that I still can’t part with, so I wear it for good luck on special days. A bread crumb is the last Father’s Day card he wrote in his own hand before he went off to college. *Thanks for everything Dad, especially the \$. My years at home were better than words can say and I never took anything for granted. I’ve had the best childhood anyone could have. Thank you for the ideas and opportunities I grew up with. I love you. Mark.*

I call these things crumbs because they are a disappointing piece of the real thing, but treasured because they are all we have. I also think there is a second way of looking at this. Bread crumbs are a part of children’s stories symbolizing sign posts along the way to help lead us out of the forest—to find our way back to the land of the living, at least if the birds don’t eat them. I like to think that the return from grief is like finding our own way out of the forest. The way is marked by great changes or signposts if we will only follow the bread crumbs. I think of them as gifts left behind by our children. They change us and they lead us out of the forest—but at a very different place than we first went in. Here are three I have found. Maybe you will find others.

**Crumb One:** We pick up a new sense of what is important and what is not. We suffer fools, superficial cocktail parties, and convenience friends poorly. We seem to develop an immediate impatience for the meaningless and the trivial. On the other hand, we pick up an incredible sensitivity to the world around us that we did not have before. We watch the news differently. We value people more than things. We live more in the moment and less in the future because we know that sometimes “tomorrow doesn’t come.”

**Crumb Two:** We find our real self on the road back. After the loss of a child and a period of emptiness, we do eventually come back. But we come back differently—and I believe better—than the person that entered that awful forest. With our new understanding of priorities, we listen again to “that still small voice” that we silenced in the race to climb the career ladder or have the “perfect life” or do what our parents or teachers thought we “should” do. We find new courage to be the person we really are. We begin living from the inside out instead of the other way around—from a sense of what

is important, not what is expected. From a life of “What’s in it for me?” to “How can I help you?” We discover new and compassionate friends, and sometimes drift away from old ones. We go from a thousand name Rolodex of contacts to a handful of people we love. We often also find our spiritual center and an inner peace. We become unafraid to die at the same time we are beginning to live again.

**Crumb Three:** We pick up one more gift that I have noticed. We seem to get anointed with an ability to help someone else. You know what I mean. We didn’t want it. We didn’t ask for it. But we got it anyway. It’s almost like a giant invisible radar screen gets mounted on our head and we now pick up vibrations from other people in need. And we find that we really can help. People seek us out. People who don’t know what to say when a child dies call us and ask: “Could you please go over?” We know we can and will, if only to listen

I am reminded of the story of a little boy who arrived home late from school. “Where have you been?” his mother asked. “I was helping Timmy who broke his bike,” the child answered. “But, Honey,” the mother said. “You don’t even know how to fix a bike.” “I know Mom,” came the reply, “But I was just helping him cry.” Sometimes we can just help someone else cry, and that is enough. Unlike most other people, we can walk directly up to a bereaved parent or sibling, look them in the eye, and say, “I know how you feel.” That is what TCF is all about. And in helping another person, we help ourselves heal too. So, what do we do with these new gifts or bread crumbs left along the way for us? New priorities. A new sense of self. And the ability to help someone else. These are definitely good things. They did not come from the death of our child. Nothing good comes from the death of a child. As Rabbi Harold Kushner said in Seattle: “There is no silver lining.” But there is change. These changes come after the death, when we recognize that we can’t change what happened, but we can change what we do about it.

One day our surviving son, Rick, put his arms around us in a family hug and said, “Okay Mom and Dad, now that we are a family of three instead of four, we each have to live our lives one-third better.” That, more than any other moment in our grief, marked our turning point. My wife has a reoccurring dream. She is in Heaven many years from now and she greets our son. “Okay, Mom,” Mark says, “So tell me everything you did after I died?” On that day she will be proud to answer: “I lived the rest of my life one-third better in your name.” I suspect most bereaved parents divide their lives into those two distinct stages of time: before and after

*continued on page 11*