



THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS

Quad City Chapter



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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..

The Quad City Chapter



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March 2009, Volume XXII, Number 3

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Dear Compassionate Friends,

Yesterday the sun was shining and the temperature was balmy – a beautiful day with the promise of spring. However, having lived my entire life in the Midwest, I am well aware that we will see more unpleasant wintry weather. In fact, today, the weatherman has been talking snow and sleet and other discouraging things.

Grief is a wintry experience – ice hard, bone chilling, relentless, one storm after another, uncomfortable, seemingly unending, dark. But like the seasons, eventually (unfortunately measured in years not months), the deep depressing darkness of winter will begin to give way to moments of hopeful spring – times when you realize that perhaps you will not always hurt so badly – that there is a light at the end of your long dark tunnel of grief. When you are in the middle of winter it is hard to remember what spring is like.

Grief is also like the Midwestern seasons – you may think you are moving out

of winter only to unexpectedly awake to a foot of snow, below freezing temperatures, or an ice storm. Sometimes just when you think you may have turned a corner in your grief, some comment, some song, some sight or smell can throw you back into the pit. While this is not a weather related simile, grief can seem a lot like trying to climb out of a pit with walls of sand, the constant shifting of the sand beneath your weight making your efforts to crawl out seem fruitless.

We send this newsletter each month to remind you that there is hope. Someday your grief will ease – never go away – but be gentler, endurable. Your love for your child and their memory and all they meant to you will be stronger than the pain of your grief. Hang on. Spring will come. In the meanwhile, we hope it brings comfort to know that others have walked where you have walked and have survived.

Sincerely,
Jerry and Carol Webb

Parenting Through a Glass Partition: After the Death of a Child

Raising children and being bereaved makes me feel like I did when I was six years old. My red tights bagged around my ankles, I often had doggy poop on the bottom of my scuffed patent leather shoes, and I was constantly running to catch the bus. Now, as a mother of three living children and one who died, I feel overwhelmed, forgetful and, to use a word my aunt Mollie often said, discombobulated.

At the fast food restaurant, my children laugh in the play area as I sit drinking coffee behind the glass partition that separates the play area from the dining section. While I have hugged them so tightly their tonsils could pop out, I am still, much of the time, finding myself watching them from a distance. They are mine but so was Daniel, and in the course of a moment I know they could be gone, as he is.

When Rachel, 11, was late coming home from a shopping trip with her grandmother, I thought they had been tied up in traffic, but then my mind leaped off into an insane spin and I was certain she'd been in an accident. My thoughts dove into planning her funeral.

She came home without a scratch, and I gulped my worries away – for the moment.

When my children say, "I love you, Mom," and spontaneously wrap their arms around me, I'm certain this could be the end.

"So, you live in fear?" a friend asks. Well, no. I live in reality.

My reality is hearing my children call "Hi, Daniel," when we drive on Interstate 40 near Exit 270, where there's a view of Daniel's Place, what my children have named the cemetery.

Ben, at five, older than his older brother ever got to be, asks which of our toys Daniel liked to play with and with a smile on his face, listens as I share a story about Daniel and the Fisher Price fishing rod. Elizabeth, age four, tells me out of the blue that Daniel isn't dead; he lives with God. Later she hugs me and says she wishes Daniel was here. She's never been photographed with her oldest brother. She kicked in the womb as Daniel breathed his last. Three months later, this failed vasectomy child was born. I was certain she'd be severely traumatized. But so, far, at age four, she has only been known to tell the neighbor girl she doesn't like her.

My reality is that a part of my heart wanted to be childless when Daniel died so that I could have time to weep and wail without having to meet the demands of exasperated cries, without having to wipe little bottoms and without having to search for tiny shoes and socks. When infant Liz used to wake crying months after Daniel's death, I'd hold her and we'd sob together.

The hole in my heart looms large today. The new school year and Daniel's birthday are just around the corner. I finish my coffee and tell my kids it's time to attend the Open House. While grinning at my children and me, a friend exclaims, "one in

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Resources for Grieving Parents & Siblings

The Compassionate Friends of the Quad Cities Monthly Meeting: March 26, 2009 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.) Call Sharon and Dave Ulseth (309.792.0529) for directions or information. (Meetings for the subsequent months: April 23rd and May 28th.)

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 12:30 on the third Saturday of the month at the Happy Joe's in Aledo. For directions or more information, call Kay Forret at (309)582-7789.
Rick's House of Hope	Located at 4867 Forest Grove Drive in Bettendorf is a 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 Director Carol Kelly at 563 324-9580 or 563-421-7970. Find Rick's House of Hope on the web: www.genesishealth.com — keywords "children and grief."
Quad City SHARE	A support group for parents who have lost a child through miscarriage, still-birth, 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 Suicide Support Group, Fulton	Location: Second Reformed Church, 703 14th Ave., Fulton, Illinois This support group meets the second Monday of each month and is open to anyone who has lost a loved one through suicide, it's a safe place where survivors share their experiences and support each other. The group is completely free and light refreshments will be served. For more information, call 589-3425.
Survivors of a Suicide Loss Support Group, Moline	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 the Moline Library, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm. For details, contact Joel M. Moore 309.235.7174 or gcsos@yahoo.com

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she didn't feel like it. They will learn life is tough and even when the storms hit the hardest; it is possible to live through them.

Believe your surviving children will be all right even as they see you suffering and as they face their own monumental pain. In time, they may learn a deeper sensitivity. Perhaps they will become more compassionate because of their experiences. You can guarantee they're more realistic. Your son or daughter might even become a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. We can still dream, can't we?"

I have to remember that although once laid-back, I was never the perfect parent before Daniel died. I had vices and virtues then, just as I have now. Perhaps grief has helped us become better aware of what we are all about. Listen. There are many negatives, but there is much to smile about now, too. Devotion made us caring and loving parents before, and it can carry us through during this rocky road of bereavement. There is the ability to parent effectively through the glass partition.

Alice Wisler. TCF/Wake County, NC

Even though it's almost a year now, it's felt like it happened yesterday, and also it feels like I've been feeling like this for my entire life.

We can't undo what was done, and we can stand and be just heartbroken for the rest of our lives about it, but I want to do something.

Eric Mace, father of Ryanne Mace, who was killed at Northern Illinois University, 2/14/2008, from an interview in the Northwest Herald 2/14/2009.

The Promise of Spring

When February comes, there is finally an end in sight to the long winter. Sometimes melting snow reveals the green tips of an early crocus or even the exquisite blossom itself, a soft flower of hope invading a harsh landscape of graying snow and biting wind and ominous sky – a small promise of new life to come.

My heart, grieving for my son who died, was like that image of winter. For somehow, even during the darkest, coldest moments, an unexpected sign of hope would intrude. And as the hours and days and months dragged on, my heart finally learned once again to be open to the promise of new life. Painful memories melted into loving ones. Life that seemed forever dormant once again sprang forth from my heart.

In living hopefully and lovingly, the season of the heart can change. The loving memories of your child, like the flower in the snow, can be the beginning of the end of winter.

Maryann Kramer



Infertility and Miscarriage

I really feel that a miscarriage for anyone is an extremely difficult experience, never to be underestimated, but having the added burden of infertility greatly increases the pain and suffering a woman experiences. We are often left wondering if this pregnancy was our "only chance" at a baby. How long will it take us to fall pregnant again when we want to try for another baby? Years??? Only to lose another? You see, women who suffer from infertility know that making babies isn't as easy as some people think. Often it's not as simple as two people sharing an intimate moment in the privacy of their home.

When a woman suffers from infertility and miscarriage...after she has begun her long road to trying to reclaim her life and build up the courage to start her painful journey again, she is disheartened whenever she discovers she is not pregnant with each cycle. She grieves for her future pregnancy and is constantly haunted by the loss of her previous one. Each time she experiences a failed attempt at pregnancy, she suffers from days of despair and distress...sometimes up to a week. Then builds herself up toward the time of ovulation and hopes are renewed. Then there's a long daunting two weeks between ovulation and a period wondering if she is pregnant...having a body (or mind) trick her into thinking she is. Sometimes convinced

she's pregnant...only to have her reproductive and emotional cycle restart over and over again. Living life on a Roller Coaster. Some people say "just forget about it" or "don't stress over it and it will happen," ironic really, people who give advice like that are usually people who fall pregnant on a first or second attempt and would have no idea what it's like to experience infertility and miscarriage.

Issues relating to the loss of a previous baby resurface to live over and over again when a woman finds out she's not pregnant. Finding themselves wondering if this nightmare is ever going to end. It's actually really difficult to imagine she will ever have a baby in her arms. Surely life wasn't meant to be this difficult? Wasn't losing a baby bad enough?

It is painful to see women neglect their children, pregnant women smoking or drinking, or women smoking in cars whilst driving around with innocent lungs in the back. It hurts because these women know they would make a good mother. They have a lot of love to give a child and yearn so much for a family. They feel a great sense of injustice when there are other women abuse the wonderful gift they have been given.

From:

<http://geocities.com/babiesinheaven/index.htm>

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.

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

The monthly meeting of the QC Chapter of The Compassionate Friends is on March 26th 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.

Looking for more articles or previous copies of this newsletter? Go to www.Bethany-qc.org for copies of the last four years of The Quad City Chapter of The Compassionate Friends Newsletter. They are download-able in Adobe Acrobat format.

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:

♥ John and Brenda Warner, in memory of their daughter, Shelly Bridgewater, 8/31/1979-1/16/2005

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 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.

Strength Born of Pain

I would say to those who mourn . . . look upon each day that comes as a challenge, a test of courage.
The pain will come in waves, some days worse than others, for no apparent reason.
Accept the pain. Do not suppress it. Never attempt to hide grief from yourself. Little by little, just as the deaf, the blind, the handicapped develop with time an extra sense to balance disability, so the bereaved will find new strength, new vision, born of the very pain and loneliness which seem at first, impossible to master.

Daphne Dumarier,
The Rebecca Notebook



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

Mission Statement

The mission of the Compassionate Friends (TCF) is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child at any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

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.

Seeds to Grow

Spring is when we think of things growing. We see a rebirth of the barren trees and we watch the grass getting greener. Some of the perennial flowers start to bloom. It makes me wonder just what happens to life. This is also when many of us think of planting some form of garden.

May is the birth month of my first son. He loved flowers, but not gardening. It was a chore to get him to help with yard work, but he would often ask me the names of different flowers. Roses were his favorite. Somehow all this led me to thinking about our grief when a child dies.

After my children died, I was aware that seeds had been planted and were growing within me. The first seed was anger. I was angry with my youngest son for being careless with his precious life and angry with God for not taking better care of him. I was bitter because I would not experience events in my life that others would have: graduations, weddings, Sunday dinners and Little League games for my grandchildren. Nor would I have anyone to whom I could pass down family heirlooms and traditions.

But, there were other kinds of seeds growing too. There were caring and kind friends who tried to help or say the right thing. Many were mere acquaintances who went out of their way to show caring and concern. Gradually, I became aware of compassion growing in me. It is the kind of compassion that comes from knowing the pain and sorrow that someone else is experiencing.

There are no words that can express this

kind of compassion. I look at obituary columns and when the one listed is young, immediately my thoughts are of the parents. I know their soul racking pain and I spend a moment in prayer for them, hoping to help them through an awful time. This compassion takes the form of not expecting others whose children have died to be able to function well for a very long time. This compassion has grown out of my own pain, and out of the love I have for children.

Sometimes, I'm aware of the struggle these seedlings have within me. Which of them will become strong and survive? I try to fertilize the gentle, caring and compassionate seedlings, but sometimes, like weeds in a garden, the bitterness and anger creep in and all but choke the other seedlings. It seems I have to be vigilant in nurturing the seedlings I want to represent the effect my children's lives have had on me.

In their memory, I will continue to weed out the anger, bitterness, impatience and intolerance. I will do this to show them my undying love.

Bridie Tracy, North Branford, CT
Bereavement Magazine

*Our children were
still are
and always will be
part of who we are
what we are
and what we do
today
tomorrow
and forever.*

Ken Pinch, TCF/Canada

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middle school, one in kindergarten, and one in preschool! You will be busy." I paste on a phony smile and think, *Not busy enough. I need my fourth grader.* But Daniel, my would-be nine-year-old died four years ago before completing a year of preschool.

When we arrive home from the Open House, Ben trips onto the pavement while playing ball and I hold him as he cries and his knee bleeds. Whispering, I assure him, "It is going to be okay." What a luxury to be able to tell my children this line of comfort. For Daniel, with the cancer treatments he had to go through, it was not "okay." Although I prayed daily he'd be cured, it was beyond my control. A scraped knee will heal.

How do we do it? How do we continue living the role of the nurturing and loving parent with the enormous responsibilities, when at times, we can barely put one foot in front of the other?

Here are some tips that have worked for fellow bereaved parents and me:

- ☼ **Take breaks.** This is easier said than done, I know. But I believe you need more breaks than before the death of your child. Your energy for living has been depleted. If you're home all day with the demands of little ones as I have been, you need time alone. If your spouse is at home all day with the children, he or she needs a break.
- ☼ **Let anger out in a constructive way.** When you find you're constantly yelling at the kids, it's time to figure out another release for anger. Play basketball, go on a walk or bike ride. Shut yourself in a room and write. Use your pent-up frustration to pull weeds in the garden or sweep the garage.
- ☼ **Learn to apologize** – often. When you do find yourself unreasonably upset

with your children, apologize for your reactions. Grief can make you irrational

- ☼ **Hug your kids more** Even if the older ones whine and don't want you to. They know now as we do how important hugs and showing our affection really are.
- ☼ **Talk it out.** Tell your children why you are feeling sad or discouraged. If you're having a frustrating day, let them know. Even my little ones could understand that "Mommy or Daddy is sad because she/he misses Daniel."
- ☼ **Spend time with kids** – one on one – if possible. Just you and your daughter can go shopping or out for ice cream. Don't force talk of her dead brother or sister. Just be together for the sake of spending time together. We focus a lot on our deceased children; our living children need to feel valued, too.
- ☼ **Don't stifle your children** as they grow and grieve in their own ways.
- ☼ **Write love letters to your surviving children.** Sometimes it is easier to convey feelings on paper. Give the letters to your kids or keep them to reread later.
- ☼ **Share your child who died.** He is a part of the family and his story needs to be told.

Don't fear your glass partition view of parenting. As with other phases and experiences of grief, honor it, and don't fight it.

You are modeling survival. Even as your tears flow and you are overcome with sorrow, your children can learn this is okay. They will also reflect (although it may be years later) that Mom got out of bed, made us breakfast, shopped for school supplies, and went to our soccer games even when

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On February 19, 1977, our 20-year-old son, Mitch, shot himself in his bedroom of our home with two revolvers. He was determined not to fail in the last act of his life. Apparently he felt he had failed to reach the goals of perfection he set up for himself. I believe he saw his death as a release from failure, loneliness and hopelessness.

The afternoon of Mitch's death, a psychotherapist came to our home, and what he said had a profound effect on me personally. The first thing he advised was to use the upcoming days and weeks to bring our family closer in a way that is not possible under normal circumstances. He said, "Never close the door to your children or make decisions without including them." He suggested we be honest with each other; share our feelings, both positive and negative, about Mitch. He also said, "There is a gift in his death if you can find it. It won't jump out at you, but if you look for it, you will find it." My husband, Jack, heard his words and said they had no meaning for him. But I knew instantly that some day I would find the meaning of his words, and I have. I knew also that Jack and I would grieve differently, and that difference must be honored and accepted.

Ultimately you must go through your grief alone, but it can bring you and other family members closer if you choose to do part of it together. It is easy and natural to blame yourself, your spouse, or anyone else at this time, but to do so can be destructive and helps no one. Be careful not to blame in an effort to explain why this happened. It is hard to help your other children with their pain when your own is so enormous. But they need to

know that it wasn't their fault, and it wasn't anything that they said or didn't say to the sibling that caused his death.

In our own family, we included our children and Mitch's girlfriend in immediate decisions that needed to be made. We talked about Mitch's good qualities and also about the times he overwhelmed us with his antics or his selfishness. Remembering him realistically helped us all, and our family togetherness gave us much needed nurturing and support at that time.

It is important to experience the pain and get it out. People release their emotions in different ways. Crying is helpful and necessary. Sometimes it is helpful to talk about how you feel to your spouse or a friend. The world we live in does not support your hurting. Well-meaning friends may offer you a drink or a tranquilizer and say, "Don't feel bad, take the pill...have a drink." I believe that in this tragedy, as in so many others, you have to hurt and allow yourself to hurt without judgment, in order to someday get beyond the intensity of the pain. I believe I will not get beyond it until I go straight through it. There is no way to go around it. To be with your feelings, to make no apologies for your emotions, is a very necessary part of the process. Then one day, you will know that your healing has begun.

Many of our feelings may frighten us, but know that all feelings are normal, natural, and to be expected. You may think that you are losing your mind, but even that thought is normal. So is feeling nothing, feeling hopeless, or having thoughts of wanting to die.

It is important to know that survivors
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of a suicide often do not want to go on living for a time and feel overwhelmed by these thoughts. This soon passes as the healing begins. Experiencing a sense of shame is common. For a few weeks, I felt "foul" – to myself, to my family, and to the center where I worked. But in time, I realized that I was still me; I had the same values, morals, and principles. I was the same person... but I was different too. I would never be the same, but I had the choice of surviving or not.

I have been a counselor at THE LINK for nine years and have helped parents allow their kids to make choices and take responsibility for those choices. I have suggested that we as parents can only guide, advise, suggest, inform, persuade. We can only offer ourselves, our humanness – our best selves and sometimes our worst selves. What our child does with that is his responsibility and his alone. We cannot ensure that our child will have our values, morals, or goals. Ultimately it is the child's decision regarding what he does with what we offered him. He was responsible for his life and I am responsible for my life. I must stay aware of that fact.

I can grow with this event and survive, or I can go down with it and destroy my own life. It is my choice, and I have chosen to survive. So has my husband, Jack, and so have my three other boys. We have chosen to get beyond the pain by going through it and somehow making meaning out of its meaninglessness.

Iris Bolton is a bereaved parent, a TCF chapter founder in Atlanta, GA, suicidologist, author, and Director Emeritus of THE LINK Counseling Center.

The Journey is a publication of The National Resource Center for those who have suffered a loss by suicide. If you would like to be on our mailing list, call 404-256-2919. *The Journey* is also available on the website: http://www.thelink.org/national_resource_center.htm#

Oh, the Things People Say

I don't guess many bereaved parents have escaped some of the things that the nonbereaved say that come under the category of "Dumb Things to Say." Probably the most common faux pas have to do with the comparison of the grief for a child as compared with the grief experienced at the loss of a much-loved pet. "I know how you feel; my dog (or cat, or parakeet, or possum or aardvark) died" are words that echo in our ears!

Bereaved parents may not say anything in response, but they certainly do respond in another way: They become angry. But, the truth is, if the worse thing that has ever happened to them was to have their aardvark die, then that's what they associate with the pain of grief.

People are often awkward in their efforts to comfort the bereaved. They use comparisons that boggle the minds of those of us who know what pain is really all about. We know there are things and people in this world who can be replaced, and some that cannot, but survival without them is not as gut wrenching as survival without one of your children. But, how can they know? Did you know about the depths of pain you were to plumb after your child's death? I guess it's just as well. Advance knowledge about the pain of grief offers no solace.

So, if you come upon someone who is grieving about something you now know is inconsequential, be gentle with them, and you may even envy them. Their possum or aardvark may have died, and they are lucky enough not to know yet that it's not the worse thing that can happen.

Mary Cleckley - TCF/ Atlanta GA