



Quad City Chapter



1830 6th Avenue,  
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.*

# The Quad City Chapter



April 2009, Volume XXII, Number 4

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Dear Compassionate Friends,

**This past** week Jerry and I, along with a visiting houseguest, watched a movie a friend had loaned us, *The Ultimate Gift*. Early on in the movie, I could guess from some foreshadowing that the child, who was a main character, was going to die.

There was a time when we would have tuned the movie off choosing not to relive certain memories and feelings that were too fresh. But this time we continued to watch the entire movie to the inevitable conclusion. (It is actually a good movie with a good message.)

Later, in the kitchen, putting away the dishes, we were visiting with our guest when I realized Jerry had tears in his eyes and was obviously still feeling the anguish of what we had just watched.

He commented that he continues to be surprised at the strength of grief we can still feel when we have certain memory triggers. Our daughter died 25 years ago and yet all these years later it still hurts. We have been greatly blessed to have the opportunity to encourage and mentor a number of young women over the years since our daughter died. Jerry even had the privilege of walking our niece down the aisle at her wedding in 1995, but as Jerry said the other night, “It is still not the same.”

If you or someone you know has a child who died in infancy (no matter how long ago), we encourage you to tell them about the Butterfly Blessings Memorial Gathering coming up on Saturday, April 18th.

Sincerely,  
Jerry and Carol Webb



## Helping Others Help You – 10 Rules for Self Healing

- Tell friends to call you often. Explain that after the first couple of months you'll need their calls.
- Tell your friends to make a specific date with you; none of this, "We must get together for lunch." Remind them that you're bound to have down times and their patience will be appreciated.
- Tell them to please feel free to talk about the person that has died – and don't avoid that person's name.
- It's important for friends to understand that you may appear to be doing so well but on the inside you still hurt. Grief is painful; it's tricky, and it's exhausting.
- Ask your friends to care but not to pity you.
- Make plain that friends and relatives can still treat you as a person who is still in command and can think for yourself.
- Tell you friends that it's all right to express their caring. It's OK for them to cry; crying together is better than avoiding the pain.
- Let your friends know, too, that it's all right to say nothing. A squeeze or a hug are often more important than words.
- Let people know that they can invite you to socialize, but that you might decline.
- Ask your friends to go for walks with you. You and your friends can walk off feelings. Walks promote conversation and help fight depression.

Ruth Jean Loewinsohn  
TCF, Valley Forge, PA

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### SOMETIMES

Marcia Updyke  
"Helping Each Other Through the Seasons of Grief"

Sometimes memories are like rain showers sprinkling down upon you, catching you unaware. And then they are gone, leaving you warm and refreshed.

Sometimes, memories are like thunderstorms beating down upon you, relentless in their downpour. And then they will cease, leaving you tired and bruised.

Sometimes, memories are like shadows, sneaking up behind you, following you around. Then they disappear, leaving you sad and confused.

Sometimes, memories are like comforters, surrounding you with warmth, luxuriously abundant. And sometimes they stay, wrapping you in contentment.

## Resources for Grieving Parents & Siblings

<b>The Compassionate Friends of the Quad Cities</b> <b>Monthly Meeting: April 23, 2009 at 7:00 pm</b> 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 (309.792.0529) for directions or information. (Meetings for the subsequent months: May 28th and June 25th.)	
<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 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.
<b>Rick's House of Hope</b>	Located at 4867 Forest Grove Drive in Bettendorf is a community resource 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: <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, 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.
<b>Survivors of Suicide Support Group, Fulton</b>	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.
<b>Survivors of a Suicide Loss Support Group, Moline</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 the Moline Library, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm. For details, contact Joel M. Moore 309.235.7174 or <a href="mailto:gcsos@yahoo.com">gcsos@yahoo.com</a>

## New Traditions

“Turn –turn—turn” are the words of a song that tell us there is a season for everything under the sun, “a time to be born; a time to die.” This song is based on the quote from the Bible in the book of Ecclesiastes that gives people permission to move on in life. One of the ways I’ve watched the members of TCF experience their grief is their use of the seasons to create new memories and recapture some of their favorite events with new rituals. Springtime may be a good time to think about new celebrations. Here is a list of things to think about any time of the year when you are faced with planning rituals for yourself and your family.

- ☼ Plan ahead; don’t let the day just happen; be specific.
- ☼ Write down the feelings associated with the special times.
- ☼ Reach out to other family members and friends.
- ☼ Save some time alone to read, walk, listen to music, etc.
- ☼ Plan some time to laugh and have fun with others.
- ☼ Create a new ritual by using candles, balloons, stories, religious ceremonies, gifts for others.
- ☼ Memorials, contributions, scholarships, TCF donations, flowers given in memory of your child are good ways to handle special days.
- ☼ Take trips; visit with family members; find new places to see.
- ☼ Start special collections. Bring photos, ornaments, scrapbooks and other mementos to share with family members.

Starting new rituals takes planning. It’s important to consider other family members’ feelings, too, and include them in the planning. Explain why you are doing things differently and talk about your feelings on these special occasions. Traditions start the first time you plan a ritual that can be performed over and over without too much change. Start with very simple activities and add to them as your healing starts and when it feels right to do so.

Therese Goodrich - Past Executive Director TCF, Inc.

## Terry: My Daughter’s Life-and-Death Struggle with Alcoholism

by George McGovern

Why did it take her death to trigger this search for understanding of the affliction that scarred her troubled life and in the end brought her to an untimely grave? Why couldn’t I have gained my present knowledge and understanding of my daughter and her disease in time to have helped her more effectively than I did?

I can’t give satisfying answers to these questions. What I can tell you is that the sorrow of losing one of your children is almost unbearable. It is sad beyond any measure that I had imagined.

If you have a troubled or addicted daughter or son, do not ever imagine that you or your child might be better off if death were to steal her or him away. Death is devastating and final and agonizing for a parent. There is no way you can avoid a full measure of painful regrets and might-have-beens.

Your friends and counselors will tell you: “Don’t blame yourself. It’s not your fault – you did the best you could.” This advice is well meant and may even be true. It doesn’t help you much. You’ll be sad, and you will hurt when you lie down to sleep, when you awake in the night, when you rise in the morning, when you go to a beach where she swam, when you drive past her school, when you hear her children laughing, when you see a Christmas tree, or whenever you recall her dancing eyes, her lingering embrace, her glorious smile when she saw you at the airport – or her anguish when she fell from intoxication. I’m especially sad on June 10 – her birthday – and on December 13 – when she died in the snow.

## Butterfly Blessings

### A Memorial Gathering

Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2:00-3:00 pm

Trinity Medical Center, West Campus  
2701 17<sup>th</sup> St., Rock Island  
Jardine Auditorium

Butterfly Blessings is an annual gathering of individuals and families who have been affected by the death of an infant before or shortly after birth. The event includes personal stories, music, candle lighting ceremony and a simple craft project made in remembrance of the baby. For information or to register, please call Brooke at 309.779.2989.

Helping others ... as we help ourselves.

Healing others ... as we heal ourselves.

Touching others ... as our children touched us.

Sharing our pain ... as our pain makes us strong.

Remember our joys ... as our joys help us to endure.

And  
life  
goes  
on...

Julie Samples  
TCF/Louisville, KY

**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 him/her 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.

# 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 April 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)

Looking for more articles or previous copies of this newsletter? Go to [www.Bethany-qc.org](http://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.

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.

## B E L I E V E

### Believe.

Crocuses poke their heads through the crusty snow to let us know the long, bleak winter is ending and spring will come again.

So, too, the long, bleak winter of your aching, breaking heart will end and spring will come again one day.

Be patient – but believe it – your spring will come again.

Betty Stevens  
TCF/Baltimore, MD



## 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)

### 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.

## Challenge and Change

As I look back over the past six years since our son died, I realize how much I have changed. When we talk about grieving, we often forget to mention that we grieve too, for the person we were before our child died. We might have been energetic and fun-loving, but now are serious and absorbed.

Our friends and family miss the old us, too, and their comments show it. “Don’t you think it’s time to return to normal?”

“You don’t laugh as much as you used to.” They are grieving for the person who will never be the same again.

Like the caterpillar that shrouds itself in a cocoon, we shroud ourselves in grief when a child dies. We wonder, our families wonder, when will we come out of it? Will we make it through the long sleep? What hues will we show when we emerge? If you’ve ever watched a butterfly struggle from the safety of the cocoon, you’ll know that the change is not as quick or easy – but worth the effort!

We begin to mark our struggle from the cocoon of grief when we begin to live with the new us. When our priorities become different and people become more important than things; when we grasp a hand that reaches and reach in turn to pull another from the cocoon, when we embrace the change and turn the change into a challenge, then we can say proudly: “I have survived against overwhelming odds.” Even though my child’s death is not worth the change in and of itself, the changes and the challenges give me hope that I can be happy. I can be fulfilled again. I can love again.

**Sherry Mutchler**  
TCF/Appleton, WI



After the death of a child, it becomes  
crystal clear.  
We humans are capable of enduring much  
more than we can ever imagine.  
Knowing that doesn’t make grief  
one bit easier.  
The painful truth is that we simply  
do what we must do.  
We do the unthinkable – day after day.

**Carol Clum**  
from the Central Iowa TCF Newsletter

## from *A Broken Heart Still Beats*

by Anne McCracken

A nobleman once asked a Chinese philosopher to grant his family a blessing. The famous scholar thought for a moment, then said, “Grandfather dies, father dies, son dies.” The nobleman was horrified, but the philosopher shrugged his shoulders. “What other way would you have it?” he said.

None.

And the sense of wrongness when it’s otherwise, when a child dies before its parents and grandparents, seems to be at the core of our early guilt. Children shouldn’t die, and when they do, it must be someone’s fault. Who better to blame than we who brought them here?

I should know. I spent a year working hard to hang Jake’s death on my door.

This is the heart talking, not reason. Yes, I do hear how childish, how crazy even, my “if onlys” sound: If only I had pulled out of my mother’s driveway five minutes earlier, if only I’d gone home the day before, if only I’d not made the trip at all. Well, of course.

Still, the wrong person died. It should have been me. That’s how it feels. No matter that a stranger crossed the median strip and drove straight into me. No matter that police said my skid marks told the tale: I did everything I could. I had nowhere else to go. No matter. I was Jake’s mother. My job was to protect him. I failed him. In my car, the wrong person died.

I wanted, I needed to blame myself. I needed to make sure that there wasn’t something I could have done to avoid the accident. And I needed to learn, really learn, how small I was.

Adults forget how awful it feels to be small and helpless. Certainly life reminds us

periodically, delivering those inevitable encounters that temporarily diminish us. We do know that horrible things happen to other people – and that they could happen to us. But young children see their parents as big, and we feel big around them. It is, in fact, our responsibility to them to be capable and strong. It is also, of course, part illusion: we can be every bit as powerless as they. That is the frightening truth no one wants to face. For me though, it was only when I did face it – when I began to question the exaggerated sense of power I’d always thought I’d held – that I could start loosening the grip on my guilt. How had I ever convinced myself that I was big enough to protect my children from death?

At this point, and not a moment before, I was open to hearing a friend’s wise summation: “If you’d known you were heading into an accident, you would have done anything to avoid it. You didn’t know. If you’d been given the chance, you would have traded your life in a second for Jake’s. You would have. But you weren’t given that chance...”

But there it is. Some things just feel unjust. They defy reason. I no longer feel that by taking Jake to visit his grandmother, I killed him. I no longer castigate myself for surviving the accident that he didn’t. I now know the humbling truth: I had a minor role in this script – a bit part, with pitifully few lines.

I am still left with guilt, but it’s something else now... I don’t reject life’s pleasures just because Jake can’t enjoy them. I walk the beach, sail the boat, pet the dog, ride the bike he would have loved. But Jake got a dirty deal. Some things just feel forever wrong. And none more than the ruthless scrambling of the correct sequence: “Grandfather dies, father dies, son dies.”

# The Well of Sorrow and Joy

Nancy Ronquillo (Matt's Mom) TCF /Chicago

When I was in high school I came across the book, *The Prophet*. It might've been something that I was assigned to read for religion class. It was the late sixties, Pope John XXIII convened Vatican II and "opened the windows of the Catholic Church," encouraging ecumenical exchange, building bridges between different cultures and spiritual thinkers.

*The Prophet* was published in 1923. The author, Kahlil Gibran, grew up in the Middle East at the turn of the century. His book would have something to teach me when I was a teenager, and then again when I was a middle-aged grieving mother. This small book was written sixty years before my son Matt was born, and eighty years before he died. My son's death was linked to his experience as a soldier in the Middle East during the Iraq War.

One passage in this book made a deep impression on me when I first read it forty years ago. There's a particular story about a woman posing a question to the Prophet. It goes like this:

"Then a woman said, 'Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.' And he answered:

'Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

'And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

'And how else can it be?

'The deeper sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.'"

When I first read this passage about the connection between joy and sorrow, I didn't want to believe it. It scared me because there were many joyful parts in my life. I used to be afraid of dying because I enjoyed life so much. I didn't want to think I was going to have an

equal measure of sorrow. I grew up in a family that lived under the shadow of alcoholism and abuse. My father and my youngest brother died young, slowly poisoned by drinking. I lost two babies to miscarriage. I learned that I would not have a life that was free from sadness, but I did not know how bottomless sorrow could be until my son died. When Matt was killed, my anguish was blistering, indescribable, unrelenting and, I presumed, endless. From the day of his death until the end of my time, I expected my crushing grief would go unchanged.

When Matt died, I cried more than I thought was possible. I didn't know I could shed so many tears. Sometimes the tears would rush to my eyes, unbidden and without warning. Sometimes I felt the tears standing, waiting for a signal, for permission to be released... like when I visited my son's grave alone. I would lie down on his grave and wail, giving myself over to grief, my face awash with tears, my wails lost in the wind. I imagine my keening calls for Matt echoing in the well, calling out my son's name, asking him where he is, begging him to help me find him, when really it is me that is lost.

The prophet says that sorrow carves into your being. That seems exactly right. Grief hollowed me out. I've been emptied, gutted. My stomach muscles would ache from the heaving of my wails and screams.

I imagined the "selfsame well" from the Prophet's story as circular, made from hand-hewn flat grey rocks fitting together in some ancient-lost-art kind of way. The well is deep and cloaked in darkness. The smooth walls are moist even where the water is not standing, waiting to be called up to the earth's surface to nourish and

refresh. The cool water at the well's bottom is not visible in the black shadows. Only when the sun or moon travels directly overhead, then the water reflects a holy light on its calm surface. It might be possible to catch a glimpse of your face, or perhaps your silhouette, if you happened to look into the well at just the right moment.

I know very little about wells, their history in the place of human communities. What I know links the ideas of survival and mystery. People carved these deep vertical tunnels to ensure that their needs for water would be met even in times of drought, when the life-giving rivers dried up and the rains ceased. The well that the Prophet describes is a well constructed in our souls, our psyches... a necessary element for the experience of human life.

As I grieve, I want to believe that something good, beyond the annihilation of my being, was taking place, although the depth of pain made that seem both unlikely and cruel. The idea of transformation that is offered as a comfort for the grief-stricken seems to me to be a terrible price, an unwanted bargain that life imposes.

Now I understand that I have two choices. Neither of the choices will give my son back to me the way I want him, physically alive, laughing, warm, filling up my arms. I can choose to stop living, not so much the suicide option, though I'd calmly considered that idea, but the living-dead option, turning from life and love, hunkering down next to my grief and waiting out the days or years that are left to me, holding tight to the grief in all its anguished intensity, feeling that's the closest I can get to Matt while I still draw breath. Or I can choose transformation, reach for, stumble around trying to find my way back to living fully again. Making

myself do things, be with people, be outdoors, take in nature's beauty, pay attention to the good moments, however fleeting or mundane.

So far, I have chosen the path pointed toward living mostly because I don't want my surviving sons burdened with more loss and pain. But I also feel a small spark, a willingness to find out who I will be, having lived the life I've been given where I gave birth to and raised three wonderful sons and then buried one of my boys. I want to see who might be looking back at me from the mirror at the bottom of the well, someone who knows there can be light and life beyond the blackness... to see if my laughter will rise up from the deepest place that my tears have come from.

Just as my young mind could not quite accept that the sorrow in my life would match my happiness, as a bereaved mother I doubted that I could ever feel joy again, much less a joy that could match the depth of my sorrow. There's a place of knowing inside each of us, some people think of it as the soul, that recognizes the words written in *The Prophet* are true... and that it takes a lifetime of living to learn this wisdom. I am hoping that it is true, because if it is, then the joy that is still possible in my life will be staggering, spectacular, indescribable, and enduring.

