

The Quad City Chapter



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

May 2010, Volume XXIII, Number 5

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Dear Compassionate Friends,

Alan Pedersen

is an award winning songwriter and successful recording artist and performer playing more than 100 concerts each year across the United States. A former Nashville writer, Alan has turned the focus of his music and message toward helping the bereaved find hope and healing as they navigate the valley of grief. Living in Englewood, Colorado, Alan spends most of his time on the road playing his original music and telling his story. As a writer, Alan draws on his unique journey combining his own experience with the stories of thousands of bereaved families he has met and reached out to over the years. As a performer he draws on the experience gleaned from his work as a network radio reporter, stand-up comedian, and actor. His own story was the catalyst for his shift in music and message. In 2001, Alan's only daughter Ashley was killed in an automobile accident in Colorado. This tragedy would take his life in a direction he never imagined and the pain and journey toward finding joy again have been the subject matter for three highly acclaimed CD's of original songs.

In May, Alan will be presenting two concerts fairly close to the Quad Cities (Pekin, 97 miles away and Peru, 60 miles away) in May. There is no cost. A free will offering will be taken and CD's will be available for sale.

Wednesday, May 26, 2010, Pekin Hospital, 600 S 13th Street, Pekin, IL, 7-9 pm

Thursday, May 27, 2010, St Patrick's Church, Peru, Illinois, 7-9 pm.

If anyone would like to carpool to the Wednesday Pekin concert, they can contact Rosemary Shoemaker (309-441-5586) or Michelle Cauwels (309-755-0783).

For more information you can go to Alan Pedersen's website <http://everashleymusic.com/>

To hear some of Alan's music, you can go to the following website <http://www.myspace.com/alanpedersenfan/music/playlists>

Sincerely,
Jerry and Carol Webb

You are not alone in your grief.

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.

To



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Bethany
For Children of Families

1830 6th Avenue
Moline, Illinois 61265

e-Newsletter Now Available!

An e-newsletter is now available from the National Office! The monthly e-newsletter will contain notes and happenings 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.

Thank you to **Maggie's Fund and Bethany for Children & Families** for printing this month's newsletter. If you would be willing to prepare the newsletter for the post office, please contact Jerry and Carol Webb (309) 654-2727.

National Conference

Online registration is now available on the TCF Website for the 33rd Annual TCF National Conference - July 2-4, 2010 in Arlington, Virginia. A TCF National Conference is an event unlike any other where bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents are able to share with others walking the same grief journey. This is combined with well-known speakers, great entertainment, and more than 100 workshops covering most areas of grief after the death of a child.

www.compassionatefriends.org

I had never experienced the death of a close loved one before my brother died. When David died, my world came crashing down around me, shattering me into a million pieces. My brother and I were close, but I had no suspicion that he was contemplating suicide and had been for a long time. The night my sister called to tell me he was dead is etched in my memory forever. If I shut my eyes, I can go back to that time and place almost three years ago and still hear her voice. It is a very painful memory and one that I don't call up, but it is there, nonetheless.

The overwhelming feelings of shock, disbelief, numbness, despair, and sadness are very vivid. At the same time, I was outraged at what he had done to us, to me. How dare he do this! I couldn't even begin to guess how many times I said, "I can't believe this is happening." The first six months was confusing and an emotionally draining period for me. I was obsessed with wanting to have answers, especially from him. I read many books on suicide and finally after reading the book *My Son, My Son*, written by Iris Bolton, I came to realize what she said was true: "You can ask why a million

times but you finally have to let it go, because the person you need the answers from is not here to give them to you. If only for the sake of your own sanity, you have to stop asking why." Our family drew closer together from this tragedy, and it made me more aware of how much I value and love them. I also had the support of a good friend who was willing to spend hours talking and crying with me. I still get very angry at my brother for changing our lives so irrevocably. That anger inevitably turns into sadness. I cannot see his smiling face, or hear his laughter or watch him grow into adulthood. Yes, I had dreams for him too. He was an intelligent, warm, sensitive and caring young man and I was eager to see what direction his life would take. I can't help but wonder what he would be like today. I miss him very much. I will never agree with his solution, but it was his choice to make and I have to learn to live with it. I am absolutely certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that I will see him again. Only then will I get answers to my questions. I have no choice but to wait until that time.

Nicki Wright TCF/Kansas

Reflections

With the death of my sister came some painful realizations: that life really isn't always fair or predictable; that sometimes even my best still isn't good enough; and that from the day of her death, the happy events in my life would always be tinged with sadness.

Despite the pain and loss, death has also left me with some valuable lessons and precious gifts. As a result of my sister's death, I have a greater appreciation of

life and a greater compassion for those who hurt. I have learned to be a survivor and to have a successful career and productive life in the face of tremendous grief and loss. I have been gifted with good friends and special people to help me through the rough times. But most of all I have been given the gift of time—time to heal and time to replace those painful memories of death with the priceless memories of my sister's life.

You Can Shed Tears

You can shed tears that she is gone, or you can smile because she has lived. You can close your eyes and pray that she'll come back or you can open your eyes and see all she's left. Your heart can be empty because you can't see her, or you can be full of the love you shared. You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday, or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday. You can remember her and only that she's gone, or you can cherish her memory and let it live on. You can cry and close your mind, be empty, and turn your back, or you can do what she'd want: smile, open your eyes, love, and go on.

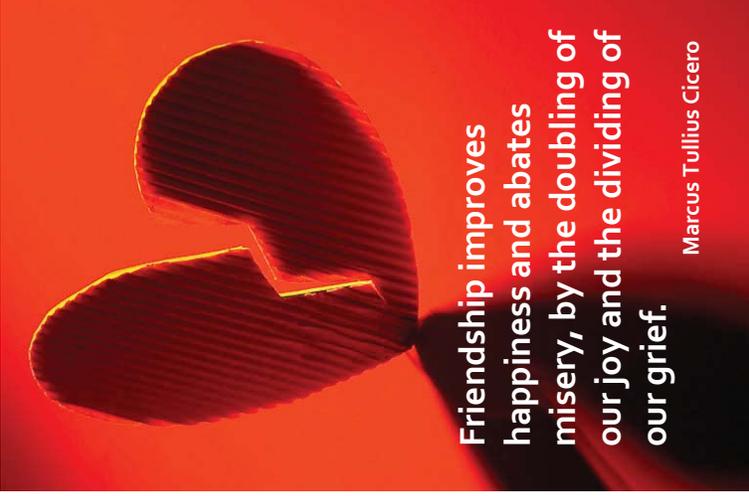
David Harkins

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.



Friendship improves happiness and abates misery, by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief.

Marcus Tullius Cicero

The first of The Compassionate Friends' Seven Principles states, "TCF offers friendship and understanding to bereaved parents." There are no qualifiers in that principle – no exceptions. TCF is committed to all bereaved parents. Parents whose children die from AIDS, suicide, in a drug or alcohol related incident, autoerotic asphyxiation, miscarriage, abortion, or infant death should expect to receive the same love, understanding, and compassion we extend to all parents we serve. We are committed as an organization to all bereaved parents. We do not make judgments about the kinds of losses we help parents to cope with, any more that we suggest that there are correct or incorrect ways to grieve. There is enough love in TCF to share with all bereaved parents.

Montgomery, Alabama/ TCF Chapter Newsletter

There's a Hole in Me

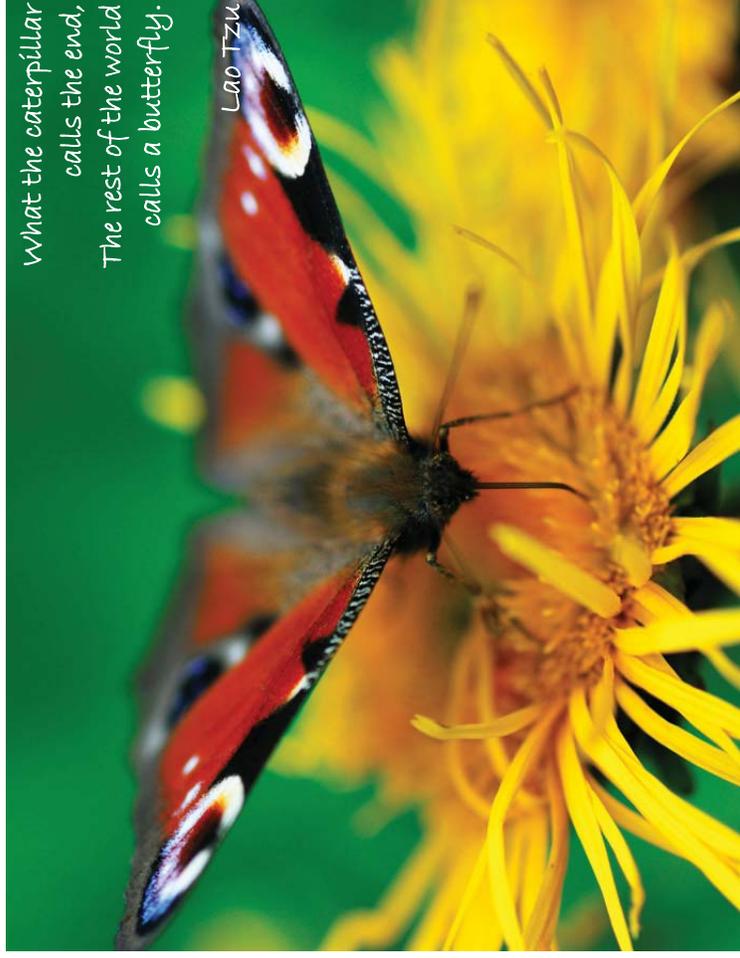
There's a hole in me. You see, a part of me is missing. I keep looking for my son, and all I find are bits and pieces of him – something he wrote, a picture he took, a book he read, a tape he made, something he drew – but there is an emptiness in me that these bits and pieces cannot fill, that nothing will ever fill. I wander around, and sometimes without realizing I am doing it, I shake my head in disbelief, thinking it can't be true. But I know it is. My son is gone and he is not coming back. I will have to go to him and someday I will.

There's a hole in me, and it hurts terribly,

Johnie Maxwell, TCF/Lake Jackson, TX

Many days I have such peace about you and your new life, and many days I am completely overwhelmed with the loss of you.

From the Harold E Mitchell/Albany TCF Chapter Newsletter



What the caterpillar calls the end, The rest of the world calls a butterfly.

Lao Tzu

Laugh Lines

Can you really think of anyone who deserves happiness more than a bereaved parent? I can't! Yet, after your child dies, you find yourself feeling guilty when you laugh or are diverted for a moment from your pain. It's as though there's an unwritten rule that says a parent's depth of grief and love will be measured in direct proportion to the lack of joy and the inability to take pleasure in any part of life again.

Laughter is as important to your recovery as tears. It is as vital as the bee to the blossom. It provides a balance that you need in your life right now. Many people have survived by finding something funny and thus relieving and releasing some of the stress involved when coping with life's tragedies.

If you are able to find something you can laugh about, do it! It doesn't mean you don't love, care, or miss, nor that you have forgotten. It just means you know not to

judge your depth of feeling by whether or not you can smile. Grief changes as we go along and it is okay to let go of some of the symptoms of early grief when you are able. To do so in no way insults the memory of your child.

Some are afraid to let go of anything for fear they will forget. It is important for you to know that option is not available to you. You will always remember your child. The fact that he or she lived and died is a part of who and what you have been, are, and will be.

Most try to be good to themselves by eating the right foods and exercising, with the hope that the end result will be trim bodies and unlined faces. Those things are well and good, but it turns out that the kindest thing you can do for yourself is to develop some lines in your face – laugh lines – for as someone once said, "He who laughs, lasts," and he also survives in a better way.

Mary Cleckley



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 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.

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.

Grief is like wearing invisible clothing. No one else can see it, and only I can feel it.

Some days it is heavy, some days it is light, But I know it will be with me for the rest of my life.

Andre Pathamovich
from *We Need Not Walk Alone* - Summer 2009

TCF Bulletin Board

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

The next monthly meeting of the QC Chapter of The Compassionate Friends is on May 27th at 6:30 pm at the Bethel Assembly of God Church in Rock Island. The June meeting is on the 24th.

GRIEF MATERIALS

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

Our Newsletter

For parents who have experienced the death or deaths of multiple birth children during pregnancy, at birth, in infancy, or in childhood, contact Jean Kollantai at P.O. Box 91577, 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.

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 Compassionate Friends of the Quad Cities

Monthly Meeting: May 27, 2010, at 6:30 pm

"Facets of Grief" - from the DVD *Space Between Breaths* (rescheduled from April)

Bethel Assembly of God Church, 3535 38th Ave., Rock Island, Illinois

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.) Alan and Rosemary Shoemaker — 309-441-5586, or Michelle Cauwels — 309-755-0783 for directions or information. Next month: June 24, 2010, at 6:30 pm.

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 Kirby White at (563)271-5908.

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 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 Chalyn Fornero-Green at (309)496-2568.

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 are 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.

Summertime

is here and along with it you may be planning a vacation. If you have recently suffered the death of your child, that first vacation can be very difficult. Here are some suggestions to help you through your first vacation and to help you plan around your grief:

- Be gentle with yourself. Don't expect too much on your first vacation. Remember, as bereaved parents, the first time we do anything without our kids is tough whether it be going to the movies, shopping or on a vacation.
- Plan to do some grief work because you will, planned or not. Give yourself time enough on the trip if you have a bad day so that you can just do what you feel like doing.
- Know your child will be on your mind day and night, just as he or she is at home. Our grief goes with us.
- Plan to do something your child would have loved to do, but did not get a chance. Plan this in his or her memory.
- If you plan to visit relatives for the first time since your child's death, remember they mean well, even if they seem insensitive with their remarks. They have not lost a child and can't see through your eyes.
- If you have other children, remember them. They are also having a hard time coping on this vacation. Plan some activities that will be especially for them.
- Be especially careful to communicate with your spouse. Plan a vacation that is suitable for both of your needs. Remember you are both grieving for the same child, but we all grieve differently and in our own way.
- If you have been maintaining your child's gravesite and feel guilty about leaving it unattended, let a family member or friend see to it while you are away. You need not feel guilty and it could fill a need for one of your family members or friends, allowing them to help.

From an article by **Dianna Hammock TCF/Central Coast, CA**



When a storm of grief grows in the heart,
Reach back for yesterday
To catch onto your memories.

The storm will calm, and for a brief moment
The lost feeling of happiness
Will shine through and through.

**Lori Pollard TCF,
Montgomery, AL**

HOMELESS PEOPLE

I expected that I would be a changed person after my son Matt was killed. Grief was so all consuming, obliterating and the reality of death's finality-- its silence, it's thick unscalable walls so forbidding, I realized that one way grief might change me was to unravel anything inside me that was good and positive and loving. I realized that I might lose my ability to be alive when I learned that my son was no longer alive. I had no idea exactly how grief would change me; I just was certain that it would.

One of grief's first lessons was that I was not in control of my life. All the things I might have been working on, setting about to accomplish, my constant striving, goal setting, it all turned to ash and scattered in the wind, having only been a mirage all along. Before my son died I thought I was in charge of my life—in charge of who I was or would be—but the instant I realized he was gone I felt that somebody else was in charge—or it was also possible that nobody was in charge.

I tried to stay anchored to things that still mattered to me, primarily my surviving sons and the other people in my life whom I loved. I'd lost other family members when I was younger—my dad and youngest brother, two unborn children through miscarriage, grandparents. None of those losses shattered me in the way that my son's death did. My feeble efforts to function were propped up by my stubborn streak, to do what I could to protect my living sons from further pain though I'd failed completely to protect my son Matt from dying in a car crash. The tattered remains of my maternal instincts hauled me out of bed in the morning, helped me shuffle through some hygiene regimen. Some days I'd find myself calculating if I could

cents or whatever paltry amount I would pull from my pockets. I didn't want to enable the person to get booze or drugs and be somehow responsible for creating more suffering. I was aware of social service agencies that helped alcoholics and drug addicts and the mentally ill to heal from their illnesses and that I felt I should avoid responding to their call for help because it would only delay their "hitting bottom." That's the place where they'd come to grips with their problems and accept the help that was there for them all along.

With my son dead and buried I felt like I'd been skinned alive. I had no protective layers to screen out the suffering that existed in the world. My grief was so raw and unrelenting I saw with new eyes that suffering was all around me. I'd wonder as I sat on the commuter train about how many other commuters were simmering in these same waters of pain and sorrow that threatened to drown me. I asked myself how many people were putting on masks of normalcy to be able to move through time and the demands of daily living all the while shouldering the crushing weight of loss.

Matt's death made me aware of my mortality, not in the way where I'm afraid to die. In that regard I was grateful, relieved to know that this thing called life was going to come to an end for me. I did not know how it would be possible to enjoy life again, the grief and longing was so overwhelming. What I realized was that there is only so much time each of us is allotted to love and that we should not ever, ever pass up a chance to be loving to anyone. Not to our families, who sometimes are the hardest folks in our lives to love or to strangers on the street. The homeless people who ask me for some spare change so that they could get a meal; these are people asking out loud

for love. It strikes me as an amazing paradox that these poor, forgotten, disconnected people are among the most openly loving people that I come into contact with in my everyday work-a-day life. Some of the most warm and caring moments I experienced in a day were the few words and gazes exchanged with the homeless people.

I'm aware as time has gone by and I am not so debilitated by my grief that I am not talking to the homeless people as often as I did in the first year after Matt's death. My mind prattles on about how I'm in too much of a hurry, I'll miss my train or be late for my meeting, or my hands are full with my brief case and shoulder bag and all other manner of stuff and I can't stop to dig around for a few nickels. Or I might think this particular man looks dangerous and it's dark and if I stop he might grab my purse and then I'll be robbed. And I feel sorry later that I thought I was in too much of a hurry to be human, to release my fear and my judgment.

There was one man I'd come to recognize. A thin black man, his eyes were yellow and red-rimmed. Yet he sang songs, his voice clear with a wonderful range, a haunting song, maybe a religious hymn. Sometimes he'd be sitting on the sidewalk, other times standing against the wall in a slumped, wobbly sort of way. He stationed himself outside the donut shop I frequented to get some caffeine and chocolate to get me through the morning. I'd given him money a few times and he came to recognize me as I approached the shop. I tossed some change into his dented Styrofoam cup and told him that he had a beautiful voice and that he should keep singing his song. He smiled showing off his yellow broken teeth and blessed me.

Nancy Ronquillo – Chicago

Continued next page