



**THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS**  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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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 COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS**  
**QUAD CITY AREA CHAPTER**  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

July-August 2012—Volume XXV, Number 7

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Dear Compassionate Friends,

**I**t started out as a casual conversation at the edge of the baseball diamond following a T-ball game. I was being told that a small boy, enrolled in my preschool program for fall, was going to be far more challenging than his two siblings who had attended in previous years. I commented that my youngest son had given me a run for my money. "Was he your third too?" they asked. With barely an outward pause, I replied, "Yes." He was our third child. No need to mention that we only raised two children as his older sister died before he was born. But no need to deny even in a casual conversation that I am the mother of three children.

"How many children do you have?" How many times are we asked that question during our adult life? What a challenging question it can be for bereaved parents. Do you include the child who died but then have the potential for a discussion about your bereavement with perhaps a total stranger? Do you not include the child who has died but feel a stab of pain, judging you are betraying your beloved child? How you answer the question may change as the years pass. Early on, it seemed as though the words, "My child died." was tattooed on my forehead. I needed to talk about my daughter reassuring myself that even though she had died, she was still part of who I was. Many years have now passed since our daughter died and now it is much easier to pick and choose if we will share that part of who we are and with whom. But there are times like that moment on the ball field where the right thing for me is to say, "Yes, he is my third."

Sincerely,  
Jerry and Carol Webb

## The Gap...

The gap between those of us who have lost children and those who have not is profoundly difficult to bridge.

No one whose children are well and intact, can be expected to understand what parents who have lost children have absorbed and what they bear. Our children come to us through every blade of grass, every crack in the sidewalk, every bowl of breakfast cereal. We seek contact with their atoms, their hairbrush, their toothbrush, their clothing. We reach for what was integrally woven into the fabric of our lives, now torn and shredded. A black hole has been blown through our souls and, indeed, it often does not allow the light to escape. It is a difficult place. For us to enter there is to be cut deeply, and torn anew, each time we go there, by the jagged edges of our loss. Yet we return, again and again, for that is where our children now reside. This will be so for years to come, and it will change us profoundly. At some point in the distant future, the edges of that hole will have tempered and softened, but the empty space will remain – a life sentence.

Our friends will change through this. There is no avoiding it. We grieve for our children, in part, through talking about them and our feelings for having lost them. Some go there with us; others cannot, and, through their denial, add a further measure, however unwittingly, to an already heavy burden. Assuming that we may be feeling "better" six months later is simply "They do not get it." The excruciating and isolating reality that bereaved parents feel is hermetically sealed from the nature of any other human experience. Thus it is a trap – those whose compassion and insight we most need are those for whom we harbor the experience that would allow them that sensitivity and capacity. And yet, some-

how there are those, each in their own fashion, who have found a way to reach us and stay, to our comfort. They have understood, again each in their own way, that our children remain our children through our memory of them. Their memory is sustained through speaking about them and our feelings about their death. Deny this, and you deny their life. Deny their life, and you no longer have a place in ours. We recognize that we have moved to an emotional place where it is often very difficult to reach us. Our attempts to be normal are painful and the day-to-day carries a silent, screaming anguish that accompanies us, sometimes from moment to moment. Were we to give it its own voice, we fear we would become truly unreachable, and so we remain "strong" for a host of reasons even as the strength saps our energy and drains our will. Were we to act out our true feelings, we would be impossible to be with. We resent having to act normal, yet we dare not do otherwise. People who understand this dynamic are our gold standard. Working our way through this over the years will change us, as does every experience – and extreme experience changes one extremely. We know we will have recovered when, as we have read, it is no longer so painful to be normal. We do not know who we will be at that point, or who will still be with us.

We have read that the gap is so difficult that, often, bereaved parents must attempt to reach out to friends and relatives or risk losing them. This is our attempt. For those untarnished by such events, who wish to know in some way what they, thankfully, do not know, read this. It may provide a window that is helpful for people on both sides of the gap.

Central Iowa TCF Chapter Newsletter  
September 2011



**THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS**  
**QUAD CITY AREA CHAPTER**  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

The mission of The Compassionate Friends Quad City Area Chapter is when a child dies at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

### Vision Statement

The vision statement of The Compassionate Friends is that everyone who needs us will find us and everyone who finds us will be helped.

## A FOREVER BABY

At quiet times, when there is just me, I find myself dreaming and planning for the three of us. Then I am brought back to reality and realize that for now there are just two of us. I wonder what am I to do with all the hopes, plans, and dreams I had for you, for the family we would have been.

I wonder about you. I try to picture you in my mind. When I do, my eyes sting, my throat gets tight, and I know all I want is to have and hold you. Then I am brought back to reality and realize now I can only hold you in my mind and heart.

I have many feelings inside, some I share, others I hide, but they are mine. They are okay. They are about you. At times I wonder why instead of being a baby in our lives and the world, you were chosen to be a FOREVER baby in a life and world of eternity. It is hard for me to understand why. In fact, I don't.

At times life seems difficult and even unfair, and pulling through seems like an impossible task. But when we do, our sense of accomplishment is great. It gives us hope and courage to go on with life. I am finding hope, courage, and strength in God to carry on and to try to handle whatever lies ahead. I will never forget the precious and powerful way you entered and left my life in only a moment of time. I love you even though you could not stay.

Elena Baker TCF/Pottstown, PA

## CHALKBOARD REFLECTIONS

When grief goes on,  
It teaches you endurance.

When grief grows up,  
It shows you how to heal.  
Sascha Wagner

Tears are words the heart  
can't express.

Sign on a gas station

### Islands

Look for  
the small,  
quiet islands of peace  
that arise  
unexpectedly  
from out of  
the greater sea  
of your sorrow.

Sascha Wagner

## 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.



### 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.

**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.

### Amazon.com

When making a purchase from Amazon.com, enter through the link on the home page of The Compassionate Friends national website, and a portion of the purchase price is donated to further the mission of TCF. This donation applies to all purchases, not just books, made from the Amazon.com site.

## 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.

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.

Thank you to **Bethany for Children & Families and Maggie's Fund** 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.

**Alive Alone** provides bereaved parents whose only or all children are deceased. This is a self-help network and publications including a bi-monthly newsletter to promote communication and healing.

Email: [alvealone@bright.net](mailto:alvealone@bright.net)  
Website: [www.alvealone.org](http://www.alvealone.org)

Alive Alone, Inc.  
11115 Dull Robinson Road  
Van Wert, Ohio 45891

Life is circular. It does not end. It is not linear. Just look at the obvious in front of our nose. The sun sets and rises again. Energy never gets "lost," but just changes form. Seeds become plants. Leaves do not die – they decay, become fertilizer for seeds, and are reborn again. Clouds become rain, become ocean, evaporate and rise, and become clouds again. Parents lead their children. Then children become parents. Nothing in nature just stops. Life everywhere goes on.

From *Into the Valley and Out Again*,  
Rich Edler  
TCF/South Bay/Los Angeles

## Go ahead ...

and mention my child.

The one that died, you know.

Don't worry about hurting me further.

The depth of my pain doesn't show.

Don't worry about making me cry.

I'm already crying inside.

Help me to heal by releasing

The tears that I try to hide.

I'm hurt when you just keep silent,

Pretending he didn't exist.

I'd rather you mention my child,

Knowing that he has been missed.

You asked me how I was doing.

I say "pretty good" or "fine."

But healing is something ongoing.

I feel it will take a lifetime.

Elizabeth Dent

## IT'S MY CHOICE: To be a survivor or be a victim

As a bereaved person, I have choices in how I will cope with my grief. I can choose –

TO seek out people and resources who will listen and care when I need support.

OR retreat from life and isolate myself from sources of support.

TO search for meaningful things to give my life a sense of purpose.

OR decide I have no hope or purpose in life and that I have nothing to live for.

TO realize that loss is only one of the many factors in my life.

OR see myself only as a bereaved person primarily, and allow my having experienced the death to blacken and disrupt all aspects of my life.

TO communicate with family and friends when I need information and help.

OR wait for others to discover what I need, get angry, and pity myself when they don't.

TO accept what is gone, or not within my control and take action on what I CAN do.

OR constantly pity myself over what has been changed, and what I CAN'T do.

TO try to understand how my family feels, that they hurt too.

OR feel that absolutely no one can understand me and what I am going through.

TO look for ways to FIGHT BACK against negative feelings.

OR feel that I am helpless and at the mercy of fate.

TO talk about fears with someone I trust.

OR bottle up fears and horrors that are unexpressed and let them have a lot of power over me.

TO accept my grief as a necessary process in my recovery from loss.

OR be ashamed of my grief and pretend all is well, to protect the discomfort of others.

TO be angry at the circumstances of the death and seek comfort and strength from God.

OR blame God for my circumstances and become angry, bitter, and alienated from Him.

*Adapted from Positive Patterns of Survival, a segment of the "I Can Cope" Course.*

## The Wounded Heart

Children have preceded their parents in death for eons of time. We are not the first, nor will we be the last, to enter the realm of Bereaved Parents. But for now, right now, it is OUR HEARTS that are freshly wounded and OUR HEARTS in need of mending. Wounded hearts must be allowed to mourn and lament their loss; to pour out their pain, agony, sadness, hurt and anger; and to release their well of tears. Wounded hearts need to be wrapped in quietness, gentleness, and compassion, away from the turmoil of daily life.

A wounded heart, not allowed to mend from the depth of its agony, will be as an abscess to swell and undermine, erupting at a distant time. Or suppressed, will slowly choke the spirit of its host. Only the bearer will know when his heart has healed. The wounded heart, encouraged and given the time and freedom to mend, will carry in its chambers the memory and shared love of a precious child.

Nancy Green, TCF, Livonia, MI

## Resources for Grieving Parents & Siblings

### The Compassionate Friends of the Quad Cities

**Monthly Meeting: Thursday, July 26, 2012, 6:30 pm**

Bethel Assembly of God Church, 3535 38<sup>th</sup> Ave., Rock Island, IL

Call Rosemary Shoemaker (309.441.5586) or Michelle Curtis (309.644.0486) for information and directions.

From John Deere Road – follow the signs to Rock Island, 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 is 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.) Next meeting: August 23, 2012, at 6:30 pm.

**Quad City Chapter Website:** <http://www.orgsites.com/il/tcfquadcityareachapter/index.html>

**Previous editions of this newsletter are found at:** <http://www.bethany-qc.org/docs>

<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)260-3626 for directions or information, or contact them at <a href="mailto:linmac67@machlink.com">linmac67@machlink.com</a>
<b>Helping Heavy Hearts — Grief Support Group</b>	Meets the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00 pm in HomeRidge Inn Suites in Bettendorf east of the Bennigan's Restaurant. Please check at the front desk for room location. Please contact Kirby White ahead of time to verify the meeting location; <a href="mailto:kombo100@msn.com">kombo100@msn.com</a> or (563)271-5908.
<b>Mom's Group meets in Aledo</b>	A group of moms whose child(ren) have died 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 403 SW 10th Avenue, Aledo. For directions or more information, call Kay Forret at (309)582-7789.
<b>Rick's House of Hope</b>	This 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. Groups meet on Monday and Tuesday nights. For more information call Emily Gordon, program director, by phone (563-324-9580) or email ( <a href="mailto:egordon@rhoh.org">egordon@rhoh.org</a> ) or go to <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 first Thursday of each month, 6:30 pm, in the Wallen Room at the Larson Center next to Illini Hospital, 855 Illini Drive, Silvis, IL, and the third Thursday at 6:30 pm in the Adler Room # 1 in the lower level of Genesis Heart Institute, 1236 East Rusholme Street, Davenport, Iowa. Questions? Contact Chalyn Fornero-Green at (309)373-2568 or <a href="mailto:chalyn@shareqc.com">chalyn@shareqc.com</a> or <a href="http://www.shareqc.com">www.shareqc.com</a>
<b>MJL Foundation Suicide Grief Support</b>	A peer group for suicide grief support that meets on the third Friday of every month, 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm at the Frances Banta Wagnor Library, 505 10th Street, DeWitt, Iowa 54742. Contact Betsy Loehr, (563)843-3655, <a href="mailto:there.is.hope@hotmail.com">there.is.hope@hotmail.com</a> — <a href="http://www.mjlfoundation.org">http://www.mjlfoundation.org</a>



## 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 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 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.



## Angel of Hope

Lisa Ornelis, an East Moline bereaved mother of two children, is earnestly pursuing the creation of a local memorial garden that will include the Angel of Hope statue. The Angel of Hope, an exact replica of the Christmas Box Angel statue located in Salt Lake City, Utah, stands as a symbol of hope for all parents who have experienced the death of a child. Right now the nearest statues are in Rockford and Coal City, Illinois; and Iowa City, Iowa. Peoria is in the early stages of obtaining a statue.

Lisa welcomes any help or input at this time and would like to have a committee to work towards this common goal. Please contact Rosemary Shoemaker (309.441.5586) for more information.

## SOME WAYS TO HELP A GRIEVING SPOUSE

- Assign top priority to your marriage relationship.
- Cultivate transparency, openness, and honesty.
- Accept the pain you feel. Be willing to share it and listen to your spouse's expression of the pain he or she is feeling.
- Be patient with your spouse and with yourself. Recognize that your spouse is probably not at the same place in the grief process as you, and that is okay.
- Don't expect your spouse to be your only source of healing.
- Keep working at communicating.
- Give special attention to your affections for each other. Learn and practice the gestures of love. Remember to stay in touch physically; the importance of human touching and hugging is hard to overestimate.
- Allow or create space in your relationship. Everyone is entitled to a degree of privacy with his feelings, including his grief.
- Allow yourselves to enjoy life and each other. Be willing to laugh together, as well as cry together. Work at finding some fun things to do together.
- Help each other to remember that life is more than this child who has died. As important as this child is to you, and as much as you feel pain over his or her death, your marriage relationship involves far more than this child.

Howard Cupp, TCF/Norman, OK

### Suicide

Once you were rich with life,  
you were self-confident  
and filled with beauty.

Until a darkness came  
to seize your mind,  
a force from out of silence,  
an ache without a reason,  
a pain without a name.

What was this darkness that

would not be conquered?  
What force,  
what reason,  
what pain without a name  
would use your hands  
to take your life away?

Once you were rich with life,  
you were self-confident  
and filled with beauty.  
Now we are left alone  
without an answer.

Sascha Wagner

## Grief, Healing, and Time

Today someone I loved died. I can't believe it. I don't believe it. Family comes. Friends come. The phone keeps ringing. The doorbell rings again and again. The ringing seems far away. I hear it, but I seem unable to answer. My legs won't move. My feet won't move. I am glued to the chair. Others answer for me. They seem to know I don't remember how.

Tomorrow comes. I didn't want it to ever come. I wanted to go back to the time before you died. There, I said it. You died. Does that make it true? There must be some mistake, I tell myself. Maybe this is just a bad dream I need to wake up from. If only someone would wake me up. When people ask me what they can do for me, I try to tell them the only thing I want is you. They look sad, they gently shake their head, they hug me, and still you're not here.

Your funeral is over. Everyone says I did so well. I hardly cried. Don't they see I can't cry, not yet. I am in shock. I hear someone else say, "Give her time, that's all she needs." I wonder: Can it really be that simple? If it is, I just want to run through time, however much it takes to get to the place where I don't hurt so bad, don't miss you so much. But no, I can't do that. Even if I could, I would only be farther from you. My heart cannot bear that.

Days pass. Tomorrow will be one month since you died. I wonder how I can just skip that day. I am afraid of it; of reliving every single detail of your death, knowing that one month ago you were here with me and my world was okay. Now I have no world. Everyone keeps telling me I just need to make a new world. But I liked my old one. I never asked to have it taken from me. Even if I wanted to, I don't know how to start over. I don't know where the beginning of that world is or how to get there. Everything is so hard and makes me so tired. I just want to stay in bed.

Days pass and turn into weeks. I am stuck in a world foreign to me, wondering where it is that you are and how you could

have left me.

I force myself to go through the motions of living and caring for others. They don't seem to notice it's just pretend and I am staring in the hardest role of my life. If only they had just an inkling of the place that I am in, of my fractured and broken heart.

I never used to read the obituaries. Now I feel compelled to do so. I feel like a kindred spirit to others who must also travel the road I am on. I still feel so alone. Now they will feel alone, too. I feel like I should say something to them, but I do not know them; I only know their pain.

Months continue to pass. I am back at work back in church, getting my hair done. It all still seems strange, different, and doesn't matter like it used to. Friends call. Sometimes I say, "Yes, I will go to dinner." Other times I say, "Thanks for calling, but not today." Many days it is still easier to just be alone where I don't have to hide my tears when they come, where I can talk to you and not feel strange, where I can just be however I am that day and not try to fit into the place others have carved out for me.

Finally, one day I surprise myself. I am humming a tune. For a little while, I feel lighter. I almost smile. I begin to judge myself. *What's the matter with me? How can I be even a little happy when you're not here?* But then I hear your voice in my head-or is it my heart, the place where you live-saying you are glad that I am humming, glad I can smile, encouraging me to live again. I don't know whether to laugh or cry, so I do both. But later that day I find myself humming again, and I smile and I know that I am going to be okay.

**Deb Kosmer has worked in hospice for the past eleven years as a bereavement coordinator and social worker. She is the bereaved mother of a son and a stepdaughter, and is a bereaved sibling. From *We Need Not Walk Alone*.**