



The Compassionate Friends

Quad City Area Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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Moline, Illinois 61265

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To those who are receiving our newsletter for the first time, we wish you were not eligible to belong to this group, but we want you to know that your family and you have many friends. We who have received love and compassion from others in our time of deep sorrow now wish to offer the same support and understanding to you. Please know we understand, we care, and we want to help.

You are not alone in your grief.



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February 2014

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Dear Compassionate Friends,

When Jerry and I are riding together in the car he usually drives, and I read out loud to him. Recently in the book we were reading, a memoir of missionaries in China, the couple's only child died. As the story of their daughter's illness and death unfolded, I read with tight throat, throbbing head, my tears close to the surface. Our response to such a story is forever impacted because we too have held our child in death. We are never left unmoved when we hear or read the sharing of a bereaved parent and such sharings have helped us over the years to process our own grief.

In this month's newsletter we share the written grief journey of Rosemary Shoemaker. Rosemary has been serving as one of our chapter leaders for a number of years. Her compassion, fueled by the death of her son, has reached out to many bereaved parents. Just as sharing her story has helped Rosemary process her grief, we believe that as you read her grief story you will also be encouraged in your own grief journey.

Sincerely,
Jerry and Carol Webb

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National Conference

Chicago, Illinois, will be the site of the 37th TCF National Conference on July 11-13, 2014. "Miles of Compassion through The Winds of Hope" is the theme of this year's event which will be held at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Rosemont, just minutes from the airport.

Early registration for the conference will be \$90.00 for adults, \$40.00 for children (9-17), and \$40.00 for full-time college students.

The Hyatt Regency O'Hare is now accepting reservations for the National Conference. Reservations can be made by calling the hotel directly at 888.421.1442. Please mention The Compassionate Friends when reserving your room. Please visit Rosemont's website, www.rosemont.com, for information on local area dining and activities.

Volunteers are needed for this very special conference. If you would like to volunteer, please call the National Office at 877.969.0010. Sponsorships are available. For additional information, please contact the National Office. On the National conference can you add the sentence Online registration begins March 1st.

Reflections About Time and Change

I often wonder what people are thinking when they say, "You'll get over it." Sometimes, it sounds to me as if they are talking about a case of mumps or my despair at income tax time. But what can they mean when they say it about my grief? Maybe they mean that grief is just an interruption of life. Their theory seems to be that life is basically happy – buying stuff, working, watching TV – and that a time of death and grief is an unnatural sad time in that happy life. I cannot agree with that view.

Time can lessen the hurt; the empty place we have can seem smaller as other things and experiences fill our life; we can forget for periods and feel as if our child didn't die; we can find sense in the death and understand that perhaps this death does fit into a bigger design in the world; we can learn to remember the good and hold on to that.

But we can't "get over it," because to get over it would mean we were not changed by the experience. It would mean we did not grow by the experience. It would mean that our child's death made no difference in our life.

There is an interesting discussion in the Talmud, an ancient Jewish writing. Those Jews had the custom of rending their garments – literally tearing their clothes – to symbolize the ripping apart that death brings. But the question was raised, after the period of mourning, could you sew the garment up and use it



again? The teachers answered yes, but when you mend it, you should not tuck the edges under so it would look as if it has never been torn. This symbolized the fact that life after grief is not the same as before. The rent will show. The next question was, can you sell that garment? The teachers answered no. The rending and mending of our life is ours and others cannot wear it.

No, we don't get over it. We change and grow. Our life has a difference, which is ours alone. Perhaps as compassionate friends we can help each other make that difference, the kind of difference that increases the world's supply of compassion, love and healing.

Dennis Klass, St. Louis, MO

CHALKBOARD REFLECTIONS

Someday

Someday, it won't hurt so bad and I'll be able to smile again,
Someday, the tears won't flow quite as freely whenever I think of what might have been,
Someday, the answers to "why" and "what if" won't be quite as important,
Someday, I'll be able to use what your death has taught me to help others with their grief,
Someday, I'll be healed enough to celebrate your life as much as I now dwell on your death,
And someday, maybe tomorrow, I'll learn to accept the things I cannot change.
But, for today...I think I'll just be sad.

Steven L. Channing - TCF/Winnipeg, MB

Had you been old I might be reconciled
To see you gathered to the silent wild,
Were your days darkened, weary, shattered, told,
Had life with disillusioned been defiled,
And grief poured on your head its molten gold -
Had you been old -
But you were young: your faith a fire unshaken,
Your hair bright tossed with wind, your breath swift taken
With dear delights of earth, with arms out-flung
To joy. Just then, just then to be forsaken
Of breath! To leave the melody unsung,
When you were young!

Elizabeth Frost

Continued from page 9

before and after Brad's death, I found some that I want to share. Because I chose to believe that God was with me on this journey, I paid attention to things some might dismiss....

- ♥ A few years after Brad died I found a yellow wooden rose with the word "mom" on it.
- ♥ Two summers ago I won a watercolor painting of a yellow rose.
- ♥ I had saved an answering machine recording of Brad's adult voice from about nine years before he died. It is the only recording of his adult voice that I have.
- ♥ I made a tape of Brad singing about three songs when he was about five years old and one of him talking to his brother Tim when he was about 10. They are a comfort to me now.
- ♥ Alan and I placed a cross at the crash site in Texas and thanks to modern technology, I can view it on Google Earth's site.
- ♥ I arranged for Brad and Tim to be together on a trip to the state of Washington just a month prior to Brad's death, a close time for just the two of them.
- ♥ I was at a gift shop and coincidentally there were two statues, one of a left-handed baseball player pitching and one of him batting. Brad loved baseball and was left-handed.
- ♥ Dreams are rare but they feel like visits from him.



I continue to look for signs that God is with me and that Brad is okay. Meanwhile I try to see life as a gift to be treasured...

Wintersun

There are those days in winter when your world is frozen into a vision of eternal ice, when earth and air are strangers to each other, when sound and color seem forever gone. There are those days in winter when you feel like dying, when life itself surrenders you to anguish, to total mourning and to endless grief. And then it happens: from the bitter sky, a timid sun strides to his silent battle against the gray and hostile universe - it changes ice to roses, sky to song. And then it happens that your heart recalls some distant joy, a gladness from the past. A slender light at first, then larger, braver, until your mind returns to hope and peace. Let memories be beauty in your life, like song and roses in the wintersun.

Sascha Wagner



Love Gifts

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.

Thank you to:

Glen Just, in memory of his son, Shawn.

Bill Steinhauser and Laurie Boyce-Steinhauser, in memory of their daughter, Maggie, and in memory of Betsy Kennel Williams, daughter of Russ and Linda Kennel.

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.



The Compassionate Friends
Quad City Area Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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. Founded in England in 1969, the first U.S. chapter was organized in 1972. Since then, 650 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 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.

Recognizing Unsuccessful Grief

All of us who have searched for healing following the death of a child, grandchild or sibling know the roller coaster of emotions that are part of our grief process. We know there is no “quick fix” that magically lets us get on with our lives, and grief can be physically exhausting. We cannot go back to what was! And time, in and of itself, does not heal.

Although there is no set schedule for grieving and there will always be a hole in our hearts, many of us in TCF have found that within a year to 18 months, we are beginning to make some progress – granted the progress may seem minute to the bereaved. Grief therapists have learned that if death is from prolonged or serious illness there is grieving during the illness. The second year of grief may be as intense or even more emotionally devastating than the first year. However, no two people have the same grief timetable. If we feel that we are not making progress, is there some way to determine whether or not we may need professional help or evaluation or at least reassurance? The following considerations may help you decide:

- Extended withdrawal from the world around you and prolonged inability to accomplish normal tasks or participate in every day activities.
- Self-imposed isolation where you do not want to be around anyone – friends, family or others.
- Becoming too scared to be alone. You must have someone around all the time.
- Anger or guilt that (a) is out of proportion, (b) does not fit the circumstances, (c) extends for a long time

without retreating, or (d) may be directed toward or imposed on others close to you.

- Depression that is exaggerated, unremitting, prolonged and occurs in original intensity years after the loss.
- Anxiety that interferes with going away from home.
- Dependence on alcohol or medications to cope or forget.
- An emotional “logjam” resulting from an accumulation of losses over the years.
- Contemplating or attempting suicide to “get away from it all” or to join your child.
- Self-caused illness or physical health problems that do not go away, or the inability to separate the real from the imagined. This kind of illness is different from the “ailments” that many of us experience during the anniversary of our loved one’s death.
- Placing your child on a pedestal and forgetting his/her imperfections; or being unable to redirect your activities or to shift your focus, so that you can honor your child in a positive way.
- An absence of grief or a numbness, anxiety, sadness, or any kind of overall attitude that negatively affects others around you, including over-protectiveness of your loved ones.
- Converting all emotions into one or two favorite or “safe” emotions – like anger, boredom, or despair – which become all you are feeling, taking the place of grief.
- When talking does not seem to help or there is no one able to listen.

Libbyrose D. Clark
TCF/Deep East Texas
From information provided by Vera Baron,
LPC and Ray Johnson, CSW

Continued from page 7

I was captivated by their playfulness. Soon I realized that this was a gift to me to remind me that life was a gift.

Not only did I feel better for the gift of the birds, but mostly for the gift of knowing that God was taking care of my needs. It was as if He were saying to me that there was still much about my life to enjoy. I still have my spouse, my son Tim, family and friends.

Driving home from work I saw a sign on a church’s marquee that said, “Life is Worth Living, People are worth loving and God is worth trusting.” To me this was another message for me. I heard a song once on the radio when I was driving to work and feeling bad. It is called “I Hope You Dance” – another message reminding me that life was still a gift to be enjoyed. Alan and I saw Northern lights for the first time ever. We see what we call surround sunsets, beautiful colors all around the horizon wherever you look. My workload became miraculously lighter for a time and a very compassionate listener was transferred to my work area. I remember spontaneously talking about Brad as I remembered this or that, or talking about my grief, etc., and she would be so gracious as to stop her work and listen to me. I thanked her then and still do for the time she gave me to talk and not to turn away and change the subject. She was like an angel. Bereaved parents love to hear their child’s name and to talk about them. Your child continues to live in your heart. His physical presence is gone but not him. To break the bond of love is not possible. You learn to live with the physical absence of the one you love. You don’t stop loving your child when he is away from home and you don’t stop when he or she dies.

About three months after Brad was killed, I wrote in my journal that I needed a sign that he was okay. Like any mom you wonder where exactly your child is and what he is doing. After deciding on a sign I told no one. I asked for yellow roses. It was something that couldn’t be seen as typical for Christmas time. If I got them I thought I could be more confident that God was letting me know that my first born was okay.

Soon I started to fret that I had set myself up for disappointment, so I put no time restraints on this request and no limits on what form the sign would take. I started to say to myself that they didn’t have to be real flowers and that I would consider it a sign if I saw yellow roses on a card, napkin, picture or whatever.

After work the next day, I came home and walked through the breezeway quickly. Alan met me and asked if I had seen what was there. I thought that he must have seen his Christmas present that I had ordered on Amazon. He just told me to go and see. When I saw the vase of yellow roses my eyes filled with tears. That is when I told Alan about what the roses meant to me. They were my sign that Brad was okay. The actual roses turned out to be from Brad’s friends, but the sign was heaven sent.

I trust that God is with me in this journey that continues. He has brought me to a place where I can minister to other bereaved parents. Because I trust that God is with me I expect that a suggested book, event, outing, etc., is for my benefit or for the benefit of other bereaved parents.

As I looked through some of the recordings in my journal of “coincidences,” both

Support Groups for Grieving Parents & Siblings

The Compassionate Friends, Quad City Chapter

Monthly Meeting: Thursday, February 27, 2014, at 6:30 pm

Bethany for Children & Families 1830 6th Avenue, Moline, Illinois, 61265

Call Rosemary Shoemaker, 309.945.6738, for information and directions. Next meeting: March 27, 2014, 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 563.260.3626 for directions or information, or contact them at linmac67@machlink.com .
Helping Heavy Hearts—Grief Support Group	We are a support group for people who have suffered a tragic loss of life whether a child, sibling, or other. We are great at listening and offer tender shoulders when you contact us. We are flexible to meet any time of day or night. Death needs no appointment and neither do you. We are not professional counselors, but we do have a degree in life experiences. Please contact Kirby White at 563.271.5908 or kombo100@msn.com
Rick's House of Hope	This is a community resource for children and adolescents dealing with grief. There is no fee for services. Groups meet on Monday and Tuesday nights. The group for 14 year olds and older meets Sunday from 3:00 pm until 5:00 pm. All meetings are held at 5022 Northwest Boulevard, Davenport, IA 52806. For more information, call Emily Gordon, Program Director at 563.324.9580, or (egordon@rhoh.org) or go to www.rhoh.org .
MJL Foundation Suicide Grief Support (DeWitt)	A peer group for suicide grief support meets on the third Friday of every month, 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm at the Frances Banta Waggnor Library, 505 10th Street, DeWitt, Iowa 54742. Contact Betsy Loehr, 563.843.3655 or at there.is.hope@hotmail.com — http://www.mjlfoundation.org .
MJL Foundation Suicide Grief Support (Fulton)	Survivors of Suicide Support Group Meets on second Monday of each month in Fulton, Illinois, at the Second Reformed Church, 703 - 14th Avenue, Fulton, Illinois 61252, from 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Contact: Laura Wessels, 815.589.3425 or laura@secondreformedchurch.net .
SHARE	A support group for parents who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death. SHARE meets 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 chalyn@shareqc.com or www.shareqc.com .

Loving Listeners	If you need someone who understands and will listen, feel free to call or email (if address is given): Michelle Curtis 309.644.0486 Judy Delvecchio 563.349.8895 or delvecchiojudy@hotmail.com Kay Miller 309.738.4915 Kirby White 563.271.5908 or kombo100@msn.com
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Printed Resources for Grieving Parents & Siblings

TCF Online Support Community	TCF's national website offers "virtual chapters" through an Online Support Community (live chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child. The sessions last an hour and have trained moderators present. For more information, visit www.compassionatefriends.org and click "Online Support" in the "Resources" column.
Understanding Suicide	ASAP (Awareness, Support, Action, Prevention): A confidential group that meets biweekly to serve individuals who have contemplated or attempted suicide and those coping with the suicide of a loved ones. Christian Care, 2209 3rd Avenue, Rock Island – first and third Wednesdays, 4:00-5:30 pm.
TCF's Grief Related Webinars	Held monthly, the webinars are on various grief topics with well-known experts in the field. To reserve a seat for the next webinar (or to view the previous month's webinar), go to http://www.compassionatefriends.org/News_Events/Special-Events/Webinars.aspx . Webinars are being archived in TCF's Webinar Library, accessible from the webinar page.
TCF National Magazine	<i>We Need Not Walk Alone</i> is available to read online without charge. Go to www.compassionatefriends.org and review the options at the top of the page. TCF e-newsletter is also available from the National Office -- to subscribe to the e-newsletter, visit the TCF National Website home page and click on the Register for TCF e-newsletter link.
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 website 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 91377, Anchorage, AK 99509.
Amazon.com	When making a purchase from Amazon.com enter through the link on the home page of TCF national website and a portion of the purchase price is donated to further the mission of TCF. This donation applies to all purchases made at Amazon.com.
Previous Newsletter Editions	Looking for more articles or previous copies of this newsletter? Go to www.bethany-qc.org for copies of the last several years of The Quad City Chapter of TCF-QC Chapter Newsletter in Adobe Acrobat format.
Alive Alone	A newsletter for bereaved parents whose only or all children are deceased. A self-help network and publication to promote healing and communication can be reached at www.alivealone.org or alivealone@bright.net .
Bereaved Parents' Magazine	Online articles and poems. Reminder emails are sent notifying readers when new issues are available. http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org/BP_NatlNews.htm .

Please contact the editors, Jerry and Carol Webb, Box 71, Cordova, Illinois 61242

- ☼ If you read or write an article or poem which might be helpful to other bereaved parents and would like to share it.
- ☼ If you move and would like to continue receiving the newsletter, send us your new address.
- ☼ If you know someone you think would benefit from receiving the newsletter, send his/her/ their name and address.
- ☼ If you prefer to no longer receive the newsletter.
- ☼ If you prefer to receive this newsletter via email.

My son Brad was

killed in a car accident in 2004. He was 29 years old and living in Houston Texas. When the phone rang moments before I was to awaken for work, I wasn't concerned at all. I didn't have the thought "My goodness who could be calling at this hour?" I picked up the phone and received the news that would later be referred to as the nightmare call that all parents don't even want to think about. The first words caused shock and shaking. "This is the medical examiner from Spring Valley Texas," he said. I cannot tell you all the thoughts that went through my mind. I felt my legs shaking uncontrollably as he talked. I just listened, not interrupting at all. When he confirmed how I was related to Brad, he proceeded to inform me of the details. It was only after he gave me all the details that he asked if I had any questions. I did not. He said I could call back if I did.

With very little emotion I told my spouse, Alan, what the coroner had said about our son. I cannot remember doing anything but being stunned for two hours before deciding to make the calls we needed to make. To Tim, Brad's brother, who lived in Chicago, to one of my sisters who lived in East Moline and to the funeral home.

I seemed to be more normal than I ever thought I would be in such circumstances. I hadn't allowed myself to ever consider the possibility that I might lose a child to death. When the thought came to me on occasion, I quickly expelled it with the prayer that I could not handle it, therefore it couldn't happen to me. Only people who are very strong get such challeng-

es. I admired them very much and said that there was no way I could handle it – as if that idea might spare me.

Now it is eight years later and I realize that it was a combination of things that has brought me to where I am today. I accepted the help and support of others, and that is a choice. I really think I was in shock. How else can you bury your child? Mercifully I think shock is a good thing. It helped me get through those early days, weeks and even months.

I think it was a slow process of assimilating this news into my being. That is why it was so important for me to talk about it to others. I was actually talking to myself trying to make it seem real. It didn't feel real and I didn't want it to be real, but the more I told people that Brad had died it slowly became my "new normal." I am now a mother of a child who has died. I would wake up and for the first seconds not realize that fact, and then it would hit me. I would say to myself I cannot believe it, but Brad is gone from my life. I will never hear his voice again. I will never feel his embrace. I will never hear his opinions and his jokes. I will never see his children. I will never see him marry. It takes a very long time to make this your new reality.

I cannot remember the first time I realized that Brad was not my first thought of the day. It caused a guilty feeling because it had been so gradual. So many things take time.

I am now the chapter leader for a local support group called The Compassionate Friends. It is actually an international organization started in England in the late 60s when a newly ordained hospital chaplain realized he was not prepared to deal with two sets of newly bereaved parents.

Praying for one child at his deathbed, he also prayed for another boy dying of cancer in another ward of the hospital. The parents met and in their shared grief formed a friendship and bond of support. The priest sent others to their shared meetings and the rest is history. The slogan for TCF is "We need not walk alone."

I didn't walk alone on this journey and I pray no one else does. Early on in my grief I asked God to please give me strength for this journey. I trusted that He would provide it and I chose to look for those times. When my sister-in-law was able to get a last minute ticket for Tim, our only surviving child, on our planned trip to Rome, we decided that the trip was meant to be. We left on that trip four days after we buried Brad. The grace we received in Rome was noticed by all three of us. Everything went smoothly. We were definitely being supported on this trip. I looked at it as a chance to be together as a family in a place of many churches. We did not race through the city as tourists, but as family members supporting one another in this journey of healing. I actually thought grieving was easy at first because of this trip, but realized that it was more of what I refer to as a distraction. Some family and friends would have me be distracted, but the bottom line is that I had to feel the pain and grief or it would resurface for sure.

On returning to the house still full of flowers from the funeral, I continued the grief journey in an "in-your-face" kind of way. I had to make choices like what to do with Brad's apartment in Texas and what to do with his things. I had to decide when to go back to work. I chose to find others who had walked this similar journey so I read books, etc., that other bereaved parents had written. I have read many books and learned so much on this journey. I am not

alone. At first it was very difficult to concentrate, but eventually I wanted to read anything I could get my hands on that other bereaved parents had written. I could relate to them. My heart connected with theirs. I rejected any books written by "experts" who had not lost a child. I don't want to let others feel alone if I can help it. I have purchased books for the church library, the public library and the chapter's library so that others can read other parent's stories and know they are not alone and that some of the crazy things they do are not all that unusual.

I tried to be gentle with myself. Rest was important and I made sure that happened. For a short time I accepted the help of medication prescribed by my doctor for sleep. I let myself cry when I needed to. Most of the time it was when I was alone, but sometimes the tears just came and I did not stop them. I wrote letters to Brad. I remember succumbing to my grief once in the laundry room as I sat on the floor. After I had cried for what seemed like a very long time, I thought to myself that I would cry no matter what I was doing, so I might as well carry on with my work through the tears. So I put a load of clothes in the washer as I continued to cry.

Early in my grief I chose to journal my feelings and I can now look back and read about all of the ways God reminded me that He was with me. Once when I was at the cemetery feeling particularly distraught that I would never again have joy, I turned from the grave and saw hundreds of robins. Some were flapping around in the puddles of rainwater, some were flying about and some were perched in trees.

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