



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



NEWSLETTER

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 to help others be supportive.

March – April 2010

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YOU ARE INVITED

The Compassionate Friends - Metrowest Chapter meets twice a month. Evenings on the third Tuesday from 7:30 to 9:30 pm in the library of St. Mary's Parish Center, Route 16, Washington St., Holliston. The parish center is located between the church and the rectory. Our next two meetings will be on: **March 16th April 20th**

The **Tuesday** afternoon meetings will be held on the last Tuesday of the month next to St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Milford at the parish center. **Please call Ed or Joan Motuzas at (508) 473-4239 by the last Monday or earlier if you plan to attend.**

Directions....On Route 16 (Main St.) going north through downtown Milford (Main St.) at Tedeschi's Market on the left, take a left at the lights onto Winter St. The parish center is the last building before the church. Going south on Route 16 (East Main St.) after Sacred Heart Church on the left, bear right on Main St., continue past Dunkin' Donuts on the right, proceed to the next set of lights and take a right onto Winter St. There is parking on both sides of the street. Look for Compassionate Friends signs to meeting room. Our next two meetings will be on:

March 30th April 27th

WHO ARE WE?

The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, nonsectarian, mutual assistance, self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents and siblings.

Our primary purpose is to assist the bereaved in the positive resolution of the grief experienced upon the death of a child and to support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health.

The secondary purpose is to provide information and education about bereaved parents and siblings for those who wish to understand. Our objective is to help members of the community, including family, friends, employers, co-workers, and professionals to be supportive.

Meetings are open to all bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings. No dues or fees are required to belong to the Metrowest Chapter of The Compassionate Friends.

The Compassionate Friends Credo

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us. Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships. We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace, but whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow. We need not walk alone.

We are The Compassionate Friends. ©2010

Weather Cancellation

In the event of inclement weather on meeting days or nights, if in doubt call:

**Ed or Joan Motuzas at
(508) 473-4239**



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Chapter Information

Co-leaders

* Ed Motuzas 508/473-4239
 * Joan Motuzas 508/473-4239

Secretary

* Joan Motuzas 508/473-4239

Treasurer

* Joseph Grillo 508/473-7913

Webmaster

* Al Kennedy 508/533/9299

Librarian

Ed Motuzas 508/473/4239

Newsletter

Ed Motuzas 508/473-4239

Senior Advisors

* Rick & Peg Dugan 508/877-1363

Steering Committee *

Judy Daubney 508/529-6942
 Janice Parmenter 508/528-5715
 Linda Teres 508/620-0613
 Carmela Bergman 508/359-8902
 Mitchell Greenblatt 508/881-2111
 Judith Cherrington 508/473-4087

The chapter address is:

The Compassionate Friends
 Metrowest Chapter
 26 Simmons Dr.
 Milford, MA 01757-1265

Regional Coordinator

Rick Mirabile
 11 Ridgewood Crossing
 Hingham, MA 02043
 Phone (781) 740-1135
 Email: Rmirabile@comcast.net

The Compassionate Friends has a national office that supports and coordinates chapter activities. The national office can be reached as follows:

The Compassionate Friends
 P.O. Box 3696
 Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
 Voice Toll Free (877) 969-0010
 Fax (630) 990-0246

Web Page: www.compassionatefriends.org

Chapter Web Page
www.tcfmetrowest.com

TRIBUTES, GIFTS AND DONATIONS

There are no dues or fees to belong to *The Compassionate Friends*. Just as our chapter is run entirely by volunteers, your voluntary, tax-deductible donations enable us to send information to newly bereaved parents, purchase pamphlets and books, contribute to the national chapter and meet other chapter expenses.

THANK YOU to the friends who help keep our chapter going with their contributions.

Love Gifts

Mrs. Ruth Phillips in loving memory of her beloved son **Charles Phillips** on his anniversary January 28th.
 Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Bergeron in loving memory of their daughter **Dolores R. Bergeron**.
 Mr. Robert Hudson in loving memory of his beloved sister **Beatrice Elizabeth Hudson** on her birthday February 21st.
 Mr. & Mrs. William H. Bardol in loving memory of their son **William H. Bardol Jr.** on his birthday March 7th.
 Mrs. Shirley Fils-Amie in loving memory of her daughter **Elizabeth Ursula Martin**.
 Mrs. Helen J. Condon in loving memory of her daughter **Cynthia Lynn Coyle**.
 Mrs. Susan M. Sannicandro in loving memory of her son **Frank (Frankie) Topham**.
 Mrs. Flora Dumont in loving memory of her beloved son **Robert F. Dumont Jr.**
 Mr. & Mrs. Paul G. Gentilotti in loving memory of children **Kris D. Gentilotti** and **Debra A. Gentilotti**.
 Mr. & Mrs. Leo A. Pelletier in loving memory of their son **David Pelletier** on his birthday February 17th.
 Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Jackman and Jennifer in loving memory of their daughter and sister **Alicia D. Jackman** on her anniversary March 8th, & Pamela Jackman in loving memory of her brother **Douglas C. Curtiss**.
 Mr. & Mrs. Paul Therrien in loving memory of their beloved daughter **Dana Nicole Therrien**.
 Ms. Betty Meyers in loving memory of her beloved son **William Bruce-Tagoe**.
 Mr. & Mrs. Leo Boghosian in loving memory of their son **Jason Boghosian** on his birthday January 30th.
 Mr. Earle Watkins in loving memory of his beloved son **Jonathan W. Watkins**.
 Mr. Robert Hudson in loving memory of his beloved sister **Rita Hudson-Carney** on her birthday March 25th.
 Mr. & Mrs. Mitchell Greenblatt on loving memory of their precious son **Ian Greenblatt** on his birthday March 3rd.
 Mr. & Mrs. Robert Eldredge in loving memory of their son **Kevin Eldredge** on his anniversary March 24th.





Our Children Remembered

As a regular feature, the newsletter acknowledges anniversaries of the deaths of our children/siblings and their birthdays. This issue covers the months of March and April. If information about your loved one is missing, incorrect or our chapter files are in error, please send the correct data, including your name, address, and telephone number, the name of your loved one and the birthday and date and cause of death to the newsletter editor, Ed Motuzas, 26 Simmons Dr., Milford, MA 01757-1265.

Anniversaries

March

ASHLEY MORGAN MAHONEY
ALICIA D. JACKMAN
BRIAN D. CONNORS
STEPHANIE LAUREN COLLETT
KEVIN R. ELDREDGE
MICHAEL J. PAULHUS
TYLER PARMENTER
SCOTT M. BULOCK
CHRISTOPHER SHEA

April

CHRISTIAN ALBEE
BENJAMIN GIOVANGELO
KRIS DANIEL GENTILOTTI
KELSEY MULKERRINS
FRANK W. TOPHAM
JUSTIN MAYER
KAREN SWYMER – SHANAHAN
JENNA L. PASQUINO
ANDREW P. BEACH

Birthdays

March

ALAN R. STUCHINS
IAN GREENBLATT
MICHAEL HEARNS
WILLIAM H. BARDOL JR.
ANDREW B. MILLINER
ALLISON BETH MURPHY
KEVIN WASHBURN
WILLIAM BENJAMIN HUMPHREY
LISA MASTROMATTEO

April

DANIEL COLUMBO
DONALD ROY SANBORN
LARRY DUGAN
RYAN JOSEPH MANCINI
BENJAMIN GOIVANGELO
LAURIE SLOPEK
GERRY LAPIERRE
MICHAEL CHINAPPI



CHAPTER TID-BITS

Al Kennedy has graciously volunteered to make up picture buttons of our loved ones. The buttons are 2 1/4 inch diameter. If you have a photo of your child, you can e-mail it as an attachment to aksound@comcast.net or bring it to the next meeting. Al has a tool that will cut out the 2 1/4 inch diameter picture to fit it in the button. The circle is an approx. diameter of the button. A special thanks to *Al Kennedy*.





THE SIBLING CORNER



This page is dedicated to siblings together adjusting to grief thru encouragement & sharing

"Siblings Walking Together." We are the surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends. We are brought together by the deaths of our brothers and sisters. Open your hearts to us, but have patience with us. Sometimes we will need the support of our friends. At other times we need our families to be there. Sometimes we must walk alone, taking our memories with us, continuing to become the individuals we want to be. We cannot be our dead brother or sister; however, a special part of them lives on with us.

When our brothers and sisters died, our lives changed. We are living a life very different from what we envisioned, and we feel the responsibility to be strong even when we feel weak. Yet we can go on because we understand better than many others the value of family and the precious gift of life. Our goal is not to be the forgotten mourners that we sometimes are, but to walk together to face our tomorrows as surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends.

AS I REMEMBER HIM

Whenever I answer an email from a newly bereaved sibling I say "My twin brother Alan passed away of AIDS on June 25th, 1992. There isn't a day in which I don't think of him."

The greatest joy in my life was being Alan's twin brother. The worst time since Alan's death was turning 40. As the ninth anniversary approached last year I was very anxious. I had thought I was doing much better and couldn't understand why I was unable to decide what I should do. Afterward, I was still nervous, as I am each year between June and August, our birthday month, but last year was worse.

As my birthday neared I realized that would be my first "milestone" birthday without Alan. I decided I wanted to go to Philly, Alan's town. To me it would be easier than being with all of the family, all except Alan. I had figured out my family was planning a surprise party. One morning before work, I became physically sick. Even though I had survived without Alan for nine years I now realized that I couldn't continue without help. Twice a week for the two weeks before my birthday I received counseling. I had decided I would have a birthday party if I could make the guest list. It turns out everyone I would have wanted was already invited. Many didn't speak of Alan but they could see his picture button while speaking to me. Thoughts of Alan were never far and as I walked the last friend to his car I realized that it was an enjoyable day but each milestone would be an adjustment.



As I approach my 41st birthday, the tenth without Alan, I have had his initials put on my car's license plate. Each trip to a diner, I order Jell-O after a meal; each new state I visit I get a miniature license plate with his name. I gave his clothes to friends and charity, designed his headstone and developed a program for his memorial service. I started a scholarship, created an AIDS quilt, web page and a backyard garden. I devoted a room, "Alan's room", with posters and articles by and about him. I donate items for AIDS & TCF auctions, write articles and volunteer for TCF, all in Alan's memory. As long as I live I will continue to find ways to honor his memory as I remember him.

***Daniel Yoffee
August 4, 2002***

TO MY SISTER

By Cindy Keltz ~Arlington Heights, IL

You touched us all, you loved us all,
Forever giving, forever caring,
Forever forgiving.
Never wanting in return.

Blessed are those who shared your life
Rich are those who carry your memories.
Please rest now; your chores we will finish.
'Til we meet again . . .



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Another Death Anniversary

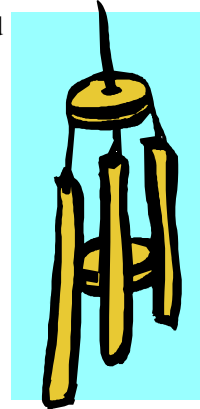
It has been three years since my son died. On the anniversary of his death, I went through the morning saying very little. In the afternoon I left work and went for a drive. I drove past the park we used to love for those special talks and special events. I drove past the high school he attended. I drove around the neighborhood thinking of him peddling his heavy-duty bike as he delivered his papers seven days a week. I remembered the good times and some of the “teaching moments”. I drove past the first house that he bought and remembered how proud he was of his purchase and all the work he did making that house a home for his child and wife.

As I drove, I felt the deep burning in my eyes of tears so long repressed. Has it really been three years since he left us? I remembered the day he died, the days that followed his death and months of withdrawal after his memorial service. I remembered all the firsts...the first Christmas, the first Easter, the first Mother’s Day, the first birthday, the first Thanksgiving and the first anniversary of his death. I remembered the agony, the heartache, the gut churning shock of losing my child to death. How did I survive this? I wondered why I am still here.

How can any mother whose only child has died begin to get a grip on sanity? Have I gotten a grip on sanity? How could I accept losing my son’s daughters to the long-term, seething hatred of my husband and me by my former daughter-in-law? How did I endure the protracted pain of the wrongful death suit she filed against my husband and me in the accidental death of my child? What did I say in all those depositions? Who were those lawyers? Were they thinking of my child or just the money they would receive? How can I help my child’s son as he moves forward into adulthood? How do I take the endless days of longing for my child’s voice, his hug, his special “I love you, Mom”? How can I stand hearing other parents talk about taking flowers to their children’s grave or putting candles next to their child’s urn, when I don’t even know what my former daughter-in-law did with my son’s cremated remains?

The answer is not simple, yet it is not complex, either. The answer is in honoring my child in a way that exemplifies his life, gently, persistently and without reservation. The twisting road to this discovery has been made much smoother with the help of my Compassionate Friends group. I listen. They talk. They listen. I talk. The dialogue has grown to be part of who I am now. The conversations help me to chart my way on this stormy sea that is now my life. Without these gentle, understanding parents, I probably would have lost my mind. But they are there for me, month after month. They are there daily if I need them. They help me, and I help them. Each of us does our best in the hope of giving and gaining peace and solace.

I finished the anniversary day by purchasing a small wind chime. I took it to the little bench and marker that are surrounded by a small garden which our Compassionate Friends group maintains in memory of our beautiful children. When I hung it on the branch of a bush, I listened as the chimes sang their beautiful song, a song for my child. Briefly I thought that someone might take it. But then I thought, I don’t care. This is for today. This is my way of reaching out to my son today, on the third anniversary of his death. If it’s gone next week, I will be sorry, but it won’t matter. I have honored my son on this sad day. The gentle song of these chimes will float upwards and reach him today. That is what matters. It is in this little garden that I visit my son today. This is where a little bit of peace touches my soul. Once again, I thank my Compassionate Friends for providing an answer.



Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX
December 19, 2005

“...a bear wedged in great tightness.”

“In a tape called, ‘To Touch a Grieving Heart’ there is a wonderful little reminder of the *Winnie the Pooh* story by A. A. Milne. You may recall that Winnie goes to visit Rabbit and eats too much honey. Coming out of Rabbit’s hole, he gets stuck tight, so tight he can’t even sigh. He asks his friends to stay with him, read him a story, and offer words of comfort...and thus to help ‘a bear wedged in great tightness.’

“Notice that Pooh does not ask to be pulled out of the hole, he asks only for company so he is not alone. I think Grief is like being ‘a bear wedged in great tightness.’ And, while we cannot make the grief go away for each other, The Compassionate Friends starts and stops with the core idea that we will be there for each other; that ‘we need not walk alone.’”

Opening remarks of the late
Richard Edler’s keynote speech at the
1996 TCF National Conference



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest

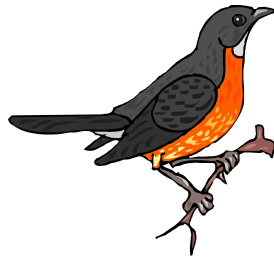


The Robin's Song

It's spring once again. Our part of the world is turning back towards the sun; trees are leafing out; wildflowers are blooming. Robins are again singing to one another. And, I believe, also singing to those who are grieving.

Before my daughter Lori died in the summer of 1991, I was under the misperception that only the English robin had a glorious song. That smaller, red-breasted scalawag of a bird delights all who hear it, and I had felt that we in the United States had been short-changed when they'd misnamed its larger, boring, American cousin the same sweet name. All I'd ever heard our robins do was cheep!

Then one spring day in the year after Lori died, during one of the darkest times of my grief, my ears and heart flew open with surprise at a song I heard outside my window. I distinctly heard, in the midst of my pain, a bird singing loudly and clearly, "Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio! . . . Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio!" I went outside to see what marvelous bird might have been sent to sing to me. I could barely see the bird at the top of the neighbor's poplar tree, so, while hoping this exotic, magical bird wouldn't fly away while I was gone, I went to find our binoculars.



Rushing back, I could hear the bird from each room in the house. After adjusting the binoculars, I was truly amazed to see one of our "boring" American robins come clearly into view! As he continued singing clear as day, "Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio!" I marveled at this special message and wondered if my robin was the only one who sang these words. So I looked it up in my *Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds* and found that my robin was not an anomaly, but that robins are considered the true harbinger of spring, singing "Cheer-up, cheer-up, cheerily."

I stood there that day filled with wonder. I wasn't hearing things; there it was in the bird book: "Cheer-up, cheer-up, cheerily." I thought to myself, "Cheerily . . . No, that isn't what I hear." We had lived in England for a year and our family, especially Lori, who loved to put on an English accent, often said "Cheerio!" to one another when we meant, "Goodbye" or "See you later!" There was no doubt in my mind as I stood there listening. It was cheerio. Lori could have found no more perfect way to try to cheer me up AND say "hello"!

Nine springs have passed since then, and although I will always deeply miss Lori's physical presence in my life, those darkest of times are thankfully now mostly in the past. It is spring once again and as I hear the robin singing so hopefully in the highest branches, it takes me back to that first spring song, and I smile, remembering. And I think of all those who are now in the darkest depths of their own grief and pray they too will hear this lovely song.

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry
TCF, Marin & San Francisco, CA
Author of Stars in the Deepest Night – After the Death of a Child

NOTE: Genesse would like to collect bird stories from other bereaved family members who would like to share them. Contact her at GBGentry@aol.com.

The Stress Test

On my desk is a little card that measures stress. It is similar to the "mood rings" of the 1970s in nature. If I am having a good day, the color is green. If I am particularly serene, the color is blue. Sometimes the color is black or red. . . . these are the bad days. Black equals stress; red equals tense.

If only our real emotions were that easy to measure and quantify. If only we could touch a card or a stone and find out if we are angry, sad, depressed, withdrawn, happy, balanced or "normal". But, this does not exist.

Instead we must rely on our subjective minds to analyze what should be a very objective situation: where are we now? Only parents who have lost a child can relate to this statement. Where am I now? Yesterday seemed good, but today is terrible. I don't even want to get out of bed.

Then the guilt sets in: it is the American way to "get on with it". The work ethic is part of the fabric of most of our lives. Be productive. Have accomplishments. Do things, tackle projects, keep on moving, moving, moving.

Sometimes that moving is really running: running from our demons. Can we analyze this for what it is? Can we ask ourselves what those demons might be? Can we go into the dark recesses of our minds and pull out the offensive demon and throw it into the stratosphere? Actually, we can.

I have done this many times. Some people do this with prayer, some with yoga, some with exercise, some with meditation, some with medication, some with reading, some with professional therapy, some with sheer willpower.

We each search for ways to deal with our grief, to analyze each phase of our grieving process, to help ourselves to help ourselves.



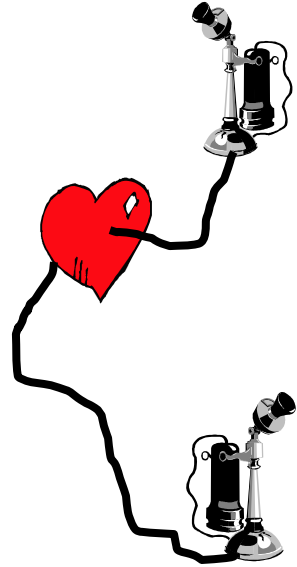
The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Phone Friends

Sometimes it helps to just be able to talk to someone; maybe at a time when pain or stress seems too much to bear. We maintain a list of Telephone Friends; people who are willing to listen, to commiserate, to give whatever support they can. In a time of need, feel free to call one of our Telephone Friends.

- Ed & Joan Motuzas, ...**Scott**, age 31, Kidney and Liver Failure,(508)473-4239
- Janice Parmenter,**Tyler**, age 29, Chronic Addiction,(508)528-5715
- Judy Daubney,**Clifford**, age 27, Suicide,(508)529-6942.
- Linda Teres,.....**Russell**, age 19, Automobile Accident,(508)620-0613
- Mitchell Greenblatt,...**Ian**, age 18, Automobile Accident,..... (508)881-2111
- Judith Cherrington,....**Jeffrey**, age 48, Cancer,(508)473-4087
- Gloria Rabinowitz....**Gianna Rose Therese**, Still Born.....(774)287-6497
- Sandra Richiazzi.....**Bryan C. Plunkett**, Automobile Accident,.....(508)877-8106



It is always useful to have more Telephone Friends; individuals who are willing to provide support and comfort via the telephone. The chapter provides guidance for those who want to help. When you listen and talk to the bereaved, you make a difference. A longer list of Telephone Friends increases the likelihood that someone will be available when needed. Call Ed Motuzas at (508) 473-4239 if you would like to be a Telephone Friend.

What I have found to be most helpful in analyzing each phase of “demon purging” is the exponential value of talking with others who are also in grief. Asking questions of them will often answer questions of my own. I move forward one step after each Compassionate Friends meeting. It is a difficult step, a tearful, emotional step, a step that slides sideways and backwards and forwards and then finally settles. But it is the next step on the road of grief. I take that step and its lesson and I apply it for the next month.

The meter of measurement is what I tell myself before I go to sleep each night. Today was good because..... Tomorrow will be good because.....

Where did I learn this technique? I invented it 38 years ago. I invented it for my child. Each night before he fell asleep, we would read a book. Then, we would talk about his day. What was bad? How can you change it? What was good? How did it make you feel? What are you looking forward to tomorrow? Think about that while you fall asleep, I would tell him. Tomorrow will be a good day filled with whatever positive event he had mentioned. He would recite all the good things from his day and everything positive about tomorrow.

Even as a teenager and later as an adult, my child and I would have these late night conversations. Our final night conversation was just 6 hours before he died. He was thinking positive, anticipating the good.

So now I continue the tradition. What was good today? What was bad? What am I looking forward to for tomorrow? There is always something positive. I analyze the things that went wrong and “sleep on” a solution.

So this is my stress test –not very complicated– something like a prayer for enlightenment and positive feelings. I discover my yo-yo emotions, my grief, my sadness and yet I remember the happiness and the hope. It helps me to sleep each night. Tomorrow will be better.

*In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
Annette Mennen Baldwin*

Lest we forget

It is not how our child died, but they have died. The grief does not change if our child died by accident, illness or they choose to end their life by suicide. The grief is the same and we all have to find our way through it.

The intensity of grief is not predicated on how we lost our child but in fact, that we lost our child, and the grief is the same. If we look at it as if we are all on this lifeboat surrounded by a sea of grief, we have no choice but to help one another.

*Ed Motuzas
TCF, Metrowest, Holliston, MA*



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



My April Child

When our daughters were growing up the arrival of springtime was a favorite time of the year, filled with anticipation of the coming of special days of family fun. The freshness of the air, the brilliant colors of spring-time trees and flowers, and the song of the birds returned from their winter retreat resounded the message of hope and that life was good. We had survived another cold, snowy Michigan winter and were soon to be rewarded with blue sky, sunshine and temperatures well above freezing!

Birthdays in our family were a time of celebration together. Each year Larry, Anna, Debbie and I, and perhaps a friend or two, would celebrate Anna's April birthday by dining at her favorite Mexican restaurant. There would be lots of silliness and laughter. During her teenage years, Anna would always forewarn us not to have the staff come to our table to sing their crazy birthday song. Of course, since we always insisted that our role as parents was to embarrass our children, her threats and warnings could not stop our tomfoolery. I believe she secretly enjoyed the attention.

As Mother's Day approached, we looked forward again to spending the day together as a family. We would attend church, go out for my favorite brunch, have lots of conversation, fill our bellies to the max, laugh until we cried, be silly, make memories... That was before...

Then the unthinkable happened. My April child died. How could those special days of love and togetherness, laughter and fun become among the most dreaded days a mother must face? How could those days that we had once anticipated with joy and excitement bring such unbelievable heartache and confusion, loneliness and tears?

During those first few years we were simply lost. This was new, undesired, and certainly not requested, territory that we had been forced to enter. What were we supposed to do? How were we supposed to act? I just wanted to run away on her birthday. For several years we did just that. With hearts filled with the numbness of fresh grief, our restructured family of three would hop in the car and head out of town. We would spend the day busying ourselves with whatever it took to survive. We would laugh half-heartedly, share memories, or cry together as we struggled to discover our new identity as a family without Anna's physical presence.

As always, only a few short weeks following Anna's birthday Mother's Day would arrive right on schedule. The traditions we had come to love and enjoy became intensely painful. It became an impossible task to attend church services or go out for brunch. Seeing families enjoying their togetherness pierced my heart with an endless ache. My tear-filled eyes burned at the thought of being surrounded by "intact" families. Feelings of anger and resentment overwhelmed my heart.

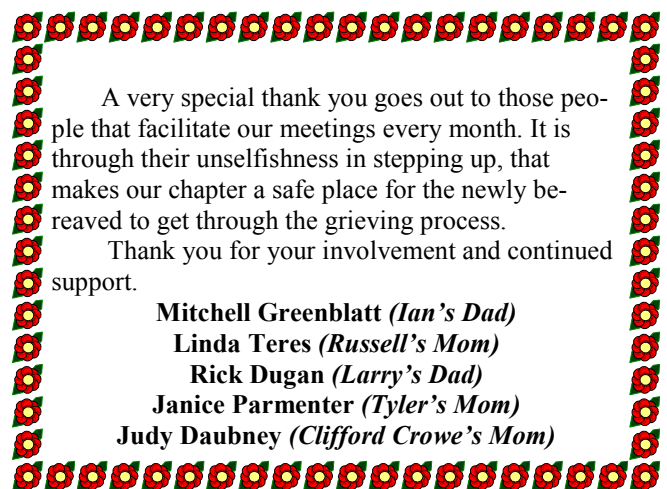
On the inside I wanted to lash out at all those mothers and fathers who were surrounded by all of their children and those sisters and brothers who had no clue what it would be like to lose a sibling. As the day drew to a close I felt tremendous relief that it was over. Exhausted, I would lay silently with my head on my pillow as quiet tears lulled me to sleep.

It seems impossible that it has been nine birthdays and nine Mother's Days since Anna died. In my heart it was only yesterday. I can still see her smile and hear her laugh. I can feel the warmth of a quick hug as she heads out the door. With each passing year comes a new reality of what it means to be a bereaved parent, of what it means to find a new normal for our lives. The pain continues to occasionally catch me off guard, but it is softer now. The tears still come, but less frequently. Warm memories bring joyful moments to the emptiness. I smile quietly to myself, reassured that Anna lives on in our hearts and lives, as well as in the hearts and lives of those around us. Once again each April we celebrate the day of her birth, for her life has been a gift of unimaginable joy. Our traditional Mother's Day rituals have changed to new ones. There is more laughter now, fewer painful tears. I rejoice that I can celebrate that I am Debbie's mom, and now Scott's mother-in-law, as well! Life is good.

The winter has been long and cold, as has been the winter of our grief. Springtime has arrived. The sunshine and blue sky, the purple crocus and yellow daffodils pushing through the warming earth bring hope of renewal and reassurance that life continues. Although there is an irreparable hole in my soul and an emptiness in my heart that will never leave, I am forever grateful that Anna lived with us for 23 years. I am eternally thankful that I am and I always will be Anna's mom. May the warmth and brilliance of springtime fill your hearts with times of peace and hope and love.

**Paula Funk
TCF, Petoskey, MI**

"In the midst of winter I found within myself an invincible summer." Albert Camus



A very special thank you goes out to those people that facilitate our meetings every month. It is through their unselfishness in stepping up, that makes our chapter a safe place for the newly bereaved to get through the grieving process.

Thank you for your involvement and continued support.

Mitchell Greenblatt (Ian's Dad)

Linda Teres (Russell's Mom)

Rick Dugan (Larry's Dad)

Janice Parmenter (Tyler's Mom)

Judy Daubney (Clifford Crowe's Mom)



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Dear Friends:

I get migraine headaches. Every migraine-sufferer knows these are not the “take two” kind of headaches. They are more like the “lie-down-in-a-dark-room-and-hope-you-die” kind.

People who have never experienced migraines often cannot understand this excruciating ordeal. If their own headaches are just the nuisance variety, they may even be impatient and unforgiving. As in most things, understanding is generally defined by personal experience. These people don’t mean to be cruel, they just can’t empathize with anything they haven’t gone through themselves.

Grief is like that too. Just as there are different kinds of physical pain, there are different degrees of grieving. People who have experienced only mild grief may be intolerant of grief that is disabling. (I won’t try to give examples of “mild grief” here or I’ll get in big trouble with somebody!) Believing that they handled their own problem, they tend to think that others should do the same, just as easily.

In my years of connection to the world of the grieving, I’ve seen a lot of people (myself included) who have spent an inordinate amount of time trying to “win over” the uninitiated.

We beg their pardons, we excuse ourselves for being a bother to them, we strain our minds and hearts trying to find ways to help them understand us, we try to follow their advice; and when it all fails, we build on our foundations of guilt, because we believe it must have been all our fault for being bereaved in the first place!

This might make sense to somebody, but when I thought it through, it seemed to me that the shoe was on the wrong foot. I’m not mad at “them” anymore. I realize now that it’s awfully difficult to describe a sunset to someone who was born blind.

On the other hand, I need to keep in mind that I have no right to expect those who do not share my suffering to automatically know my needs.

Now, when I encounter people who “brush off” grief and who are critical of those who can’t, I ask them to share with me their deepest sorrow. If the only death they’ve suffered through is that of their car battery, I simply tell them I don’t expect them to understand. If they haven’t experienced grief on a deeper level, there’s no way they can imagine it, so they needn’t even try.

I do, however, expect - even demand - that they believe me when I tell them what it’s like. I not only require that they take my word for how it is, I’ve liberated myself from being apologetic if I can’t take their advice. Never again will I permit myself to become a pitiable victim who is counseled, guided and instructed by the uninformed.

We who grieve intensely don’t need pity, we need understanding. If we can’t get that, we can at least refuse to bend our backs to the whips of pragmatism. We can grieve with dignity and self respect.

In the end, “they” will like us better, and we will like us better too.

Andrea Gambill

Reprinted from Bereavement Magazine

Mar/Apr 1990

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Life is a cycle - part of a whole, and death is part of life.

Nature can be very healing for our spirits and souls. Many of us have had experiences that draw us closer to nature for healing. It seems so much easier to feel closer to God in the great outdoors. In the days after my son's death, I found myself drawn to the outdoors by digging and cleaning the flowerbeds and feeling the moist fragrant earth beneath my fingers. It seemed to ease my intense pain and shock. Others viewed my behavior as strange, but at this point I realized that my healing would come from Nature. I needed the assurance that life does renew itself even in the face of death.

That summer I found myself hiking on the Colorado Monument every chance that I had. I would lie on the rocks and feel the heat come up through my body and warm me. That winter I would cross-country ski on the top of the Grand Mesa. The quietness was almost deafening and the only sound was the singing of the birds as they perched on the bare branches of the trees. The snow glistened in the sun and felt crisp beneath our skis. The stillness and openness would work its magic on my tortured soul and a peace would fill me.

When we moved from Colorado to North Carolina, my black lab and I took many enjoyable walks in the numerous rural parks. Having always lived in the West with its desert terrain and scarcity of trees and greenery, the abundance of trees and greenness was overwhelming and stifling until we became accustomed to it. While walking through a dense ceiling of branches, we came upon an area where the trees had been cleared. On one side was a fenced area and as we approached, I saw many graves. Some had headstones and many just had large rocks with writing on them. On closer inspection, I realized that this was a cemetery for the children of two families in the 1800s. The ages ranged from infants to 18 years of age and there were over a dozen. I remember that it gave me such a feeling of sadness and grief, but also of being connected, as I felt such a bond with these parents who had also suffered the loss of children. This somehow lessened my own loneliness and I realized that life was indeed a cycle and that we are all part of the whole.



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Life does keep renewing itself. Think of all the children who had been born since these had died.

Life is constantly renewing itself. The tender new leaves on the barren trees, the crocus, tulips and daffodils poking up through the earth represent new life and Springtime. My son died in the Spring, but it is still my favorite time of year and in the succeeding years I have learned that Life does indeed renew itself each Spring regardless of how dead and lifeless I may be feeling.

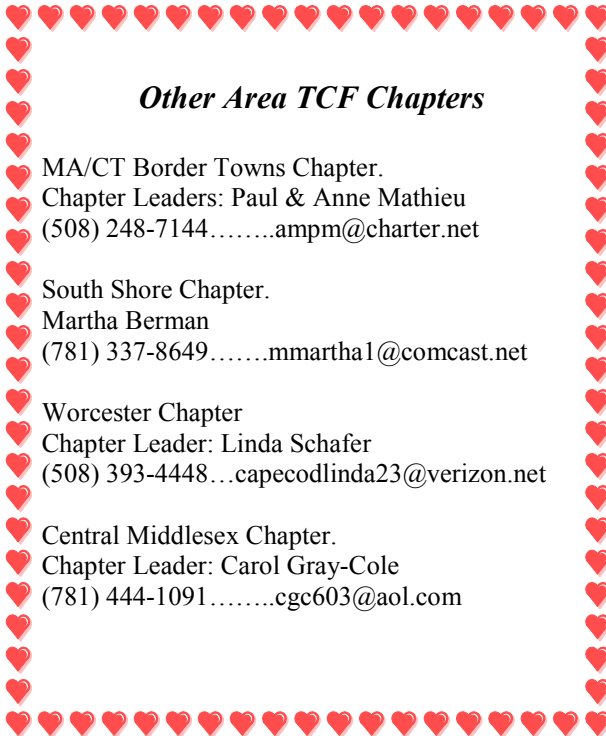
*By Rene'e Little
TCF, SLC*

Although there are similarities, to my thinking, grief is an affliction rather than an addiction. However, just as the alcoholic is an alcoholic for the remainder of his life regardless of how long he has gone without drinking, so too for the bereaved parent. For as long as I live I will be a bereaved mother. The loss of my son will never be separated from me. The part of my heart that is tinged with sadness will always belong to Jonathan, no matter what twists and turns my life should take in years to come. What I must strive for in my quest as a bereaved parent is to enter and remain in the "recovery" stage, just like those individuals who suffer from alcoholism and drug addiction. To me, this bereavement recovery stage is a release from the overwhelming, all-consuming grief that initially occurs at the death of a beloved child. The ache of missing the child certainly remains but the intense physical distress abates. Coping skills improve and life begins to regain some sense of normalcy under totally abnormal circumstances.

Bereavement is an affliction that is thrust upon every parent who has lost a child. Unlike addiction, it does not happen slowly over a period of time. Because there is no cure, the healing will never be complete. The best that can be desired is that the recovery stage occurs and is maintained. As in addiction, bereaved parents must work hard to stay on this "recovery wagon" for the remainder of our lives.

Care must be given that parental grief does not grow into an addiction. In the beginning it is necessary to lean into the grief and let it run its natural course. However, severe grief can be insidious sometimes encompassing us to the point that it is difficult to function. At times it seems easier to allow ourselves to become somewhat drugged by its crutch-like façade than to face head-on the cause of our grief. We become enfolded, as we would in a soft, warm cape, wrapping our grief around us until such time that we feel it may be possible to slowly undo our tight grip. Allowing ourselves to lessen our grief grip in no way intimates that we no longer miss our children. This letting go of the intense grief does not happen quickly. Leaving any cocoon is never an easy task. There are always risks, whether real or imagined.

Although I believe that time is perhaps the most important element in a bereaved parent's transition into the recovery stage, unlike many, I do not adhere to the adage that "time heals all wounds". The death of a child is a wound that will never heal and one from which we can never expect complete recovery. The passage of time simply allows us to move at our own pace from the intense, overwhelming mourning period into the recovery stage. Along with time, bereaved parents must learn to be both patient with and kind to themselves. Expecting too much from ourselves and those closest to us is a common pitfall. On many occasions we are truly our own worst enemies.



Other Area TCF Chapters

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- South Shore Chapter.
Martha Berman
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- Worcester Chapter
Chapter Leader: Linda Schafer
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- Central Middlesex Chapter.
Chapter Leader: Carol Gray-Cole
(781) 444-1091.....cgc603@aol.com

BEREAVEMENT: AFFLICTION VS. ADDICTION

Since my son, Jonathan, was killed seven years ago, I've spent a great deal of time alone with my thoughts. Countless hours have been spent dissecting the various aspects and stages of grief. My diagnosis is a life of being a bereaved parent, and to my knowledge, there seems to be no cure. My prognosis, however, is self-determined.

Unlike alcohol addiction, there is no 12-step bereavement program in which to enroll. For some bereaved parents, only a few steps are needed to move forward. For others, the number of steps may seem insurmountable. Grief is such personal emotion that attempting to pinpoint timeframes is impossible.



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



(continued from last page)

Looking to and learning from other bereaved parents, who are much farther along on grief's journey, can be a valuable experience. Many times these individuals have been down the paths we are traveling and are aware of the subtle obstacles that will impede our journey. Participating in groups such as The Compassionate Friends can be a source of support that is beyond measure. In many cases, the sharing of feelings and emotions enables us to hone our coping skills, which in turn, allows us to progress to or remain in the recovery stage.

Since I am destined to be a bereaved parent for the rest of my life, it is my wish that my grief affliction will remain in recovery. I understand that there will always be "difficult Jonathan days" when I will need to pull the grief cape just a little tighter around myself for comfort, but hopefully as the years progress, these sad days will not be as frequent or last as long as before. I will love and miss my sweet boy forever but I will strive to spend the remainder of my life in recovery by borrowing from Jonathan just a pinch of his zest for living!

*Christine McGowan
TCF, Abington, PA*

A SURVIVOR'S ALPHABET: EMPATHY

"Where were you when I needed you?" Ever find yourself saying words like that? Ever look for comfort at a point of greatest need and wonder why it doesn't come or help? Family and friends try their best to let us know they care. It never seems enough for just what we need at the critical moment.

What's going on? Family and friends, in expressing their sincere words of comfort and love, are relieving their own anxiety. In their attempts they often bypass our more critical need. It's like two trains passing each other in the night. They meet but quickly go their separate ways.

What we have received is sympathy which, by itself, gives temporary comfort and relief but has little long lasting effect. It may or may not touch the point of hurting with enough impact to relieve. What is better is a sensitivity to hurt where it is and a response to that hurt that mirrors the crisis itself. What is needed is not sympathy but empathy.

Empathy is made up of the following:

Listening. What do you hear when you hear? Isn't it amazing how often we hear but we do not listen. You and I hear the concert while the violinist listens for pitch and tone. We tell a mechanic the engine runs "rough" while he listens and notes that something is wrong with the valves.

Developing the skill of listening enables us to be more sensitive to actual need where it occurs. A cry for help may be more, or less, than what we think we hear. Someone is hurting and needs relief, now. Being with that person we listen and are given clues of what to say and do that will bring the greatest relief. It's not for us to set the agenda; the other person in their hurt and pain does.

Understanding. By careful listening it's amazing what we can learn that we only surmised before. We learn that our agenda can be put "on hold" while the hurting person is considered as top priority. We learn that words do not always have the weight we give to them; a touch will do far more. Maybe just being there without thinking that we have to do something helps. Whatever it is, we are there for the other person and they know it; they are given just what they need at that given moment.

Value. This tacit understanding gives strength for building trust. A bond is created whose value will be noted long after the crisis is over. Friendships are developed that are long lasting. New understanding between family members creates a climate of love. Personal self esteem is given a boost which has a value of its own. We understand others and they understand us and a network is established of support and caring.

Empathy is "LUV" actively supporting and sustaining to develop strength for times of crisis. It goes beyond in creating long lasting relationships that give personal vitality to each of us.

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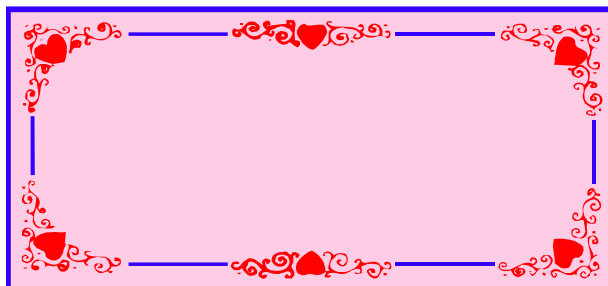
Jesse Baker is a retired minister of The United Methodist Church. He and his wife Fay live in Port Orange, FL.

They became bereaved parents when their daughter Vera was murdered in November, 1984.

An important way to cope with grief is having an outlet, be it interpersonal, be it artistic, that will allow you to not have to contain your grief, but will give you an opportunity to express it, to externalize it to some degree.

*R. Benjamin Cirlin,
Grief counselor*

The Compassionate Friends
Metrowest Chapter
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TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. The second, third, or fourth meeting might be the time you will find the right person - or just the right words said that will help you in your grief work.



TO OUR OLD MEMBERS

*We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick. Each meeting we have new parents. **THINK BACK...** what would it have been like for you if there had not been any “oldies” to welcome you, share your grief, and encourage you? It was from them you heard, “your pain will not always be this bad; it really does get softer.”*