



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 2017

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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 21st & April 18th

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 weekend 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 28th & April 25th

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. ©2017

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 508/366-2085
 Mitchell Greenblatt 508/881-2111
 Carol Cotter 774/219-7774

The chapter address is:

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

Regional Coordinator

Tom Morse
 66 Atwood Avenue
 Middleboro, MA 02346
 Phone (508) 572-3038
 tjmorse521@gmail.com

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

Mr. & Mrs. Rick Dugan in loving memory of their dear son **Larry Dugan** on his birthday April 6th.

Mrs. Phyllis Curran in loving memory of her daughter **Monica Michelle Curran**.

Mr. & Mrs. William Bardol Sr. in loving memory of their beloved son **William (Billy) H. Bardol Jr.** on Christmas.

Mr. & Mrs. Joseph K. in loving memory of their son **Kevin K.**

Carmela Bergman in loving memory of her son **Dixon Bergman**.

Mr. & Mrs. David Holland in loving memory of their son **Kevin Holland**.

Mr. Donald DiLorenzo in loving memory of his son **Christopher D. DiLorenzo** on his birthday February 23rd.

Anne Gryncel in loving memory of her daughter **Kelly Anne Davis**.

Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Jackman in loving memory of their daughter **Alicia D. Jackman** on her anniversary March 8th. "Love you and miss you, Mom and Dad."

Tracy Dullea-Juliano in loving memory of her son **Christopher Marc Dullea** on his birthday February 21st.

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Eldredge in loving memory of their son **Kevin Eldredge** on his anniversary March 24th. "We love you and will miss you always".

Mr. & Mrs. James McCusker in loving memory of their son **Ryan J. McCusker** on his birthday March 29th.

My apologies to Mrs. Joan Hennigan for the error of her son Dennis's anniversary date in the November / December newsletter. The corrected date is November 23rd.



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, 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

EVAN GEORGE REA
NICHOLAS L. BOUDREAU
JOSHUA O'DETTE
ALICIA D. JACKMAN
TIMOTHY JAMES THORSEN
PAULA BETH WATERS
STACEY ANN MAHONEY
LAURA PARADIS
KEVIN R. ELDREDGE
TYLER PARMENTER

April

JOHN GARVEY
FRANK W. TOPHAM
KELSEY MULKERRINS
TIMOTHY JOHN O'NEIL
MICHAEL J. ANDERSON
JUSTIN MAYER
KATHLEEN ANN STETSON

Birthdays

March

ALAN R. STUCHINS
IAN GREENBLATT
SHAYNE M. DESROCHES
DAVID HEMINGWAY
JORDAN C. MESNER
WILLIAM H. BARDOL Jr.
ROB McDONALD
WILLIAM NESBITT
ELAINE HUDSON-McAULIFFE
LAURENCE PONTREMOLI
RYAN J. McCUSKER

April

JOSHUA O'DETTE
LARRY DUGAN
JAMES DAVID SIMONIS
SEAN PATRICK COTTER
RACHEL O'DETTE
LAURIE SLOPEK
VICTORIA VIVEIROS
STEPHEN NIKERD
DANIEL J. SCOTT Jr.
PAULA BETH WATERS
CHRISTOPHER J. BROVELLI





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.

Dreamy Memories

Beckoning, dreamy memories
Call softly out to me,
Taking me back through the years
To the way it used to be.

Carefree and happy was our Brad,
The world was his shining toy,
Sunny days and summer nights
Two favorites of his joy.

He floated, drifting with the tide,
Never knowing care or sorrow,
Living each day as it came,
With no thoughts of tomorrow.

I shed a tear for him today,
My heart called out his name.
I longed to hold him in my arms
For a touch that never came.

I closed my eyes to see his face
And hoped to see his smile.
I waited to hear him say to me,
"I'll be back in just a while."

And then my eyes, so filled with fear,
My heart, so filled with pain,
Came back to see he wasn't here
My wishes were in vain.

Wistfully my mind returns
To the present day again.
I find in pleasant sweet surprise,
His soul still lives within.

Though he may not be here now
In a body we can touch,
His memory will grow each day
In our hearts that means so much.

So now I'll say the time will come
When we will be together again.
Until that day no good - yes we'll say,
Just "We love you, God bless."

***Debbie Sadler Brown
TCF, Nashville, TN***

WHO AM I NOW?

Who am I now that my sibling has died? I have asked myself that question many times over the last four years.

When I think of my brother, Sean, I think of how things used to be. I also think of all the things he will miss. For example, my husband or my children will never know Sean. Sean will never have children. There are just so many things that he will miss.

I began to question who I was about a month after Sean died.

He and I shared a great love of music. When I think of music, I think of Sean. At first, every song I heard made me cry. After a while, though, I began to try to find a deeper meaning in the songs. I know that a lot of teenagers and young adults identify important times in their lives by music. I am one of those people.

Now, I am trying to figure out what place the music has in my life. After Sean died, music took on a new meaning for me. The music I sing and listen to is my special connection to my brother. The song "Because You Love Me" by Celine Dion was especially powerful for me. I came to realize that, through simply loving and supporting me, my brother had helped to shape the person who I was becoming and who I wanted to become. I have realized now that my life's direction has taken a slight detour. I have had to reroute my image of myself.



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When I hear music, I see my brother, and I hope that will never change. When I saw myself, in the past, I saw Sean by my side. That picture has now been altered.

The biggest part of the question, "Who am I now?" is also am I still a sister?" The answer to that is a simple yes! Sean will always be my brother and I will be his sister. Forever. Peace until next time.

**Traci Morlock
BP / USA, St. Louis**



Other Area TCF Chapters

MA/CT Border Towns Chapter (Dudley, Webster areas)

Chapter Leaders: Paul & Anne Mathieu
(508) 248-7144.....ampm1259@charter.net

South Shore Chapter (Hingham, Weymouth areas)
Martha Berman
(781) 337-8649.....mmartha1@comcast.net

Worcester Chapter
Chapter Co-Leaders: Lisa Holbrook
(774) 482-6066.....sixholes@charter.net
Mary Vautier....
(508) 393-7348.....mjvautier@msn.com

Central Middlesex Chapter (Needham, Concord)
Chapter Leader: Carol Gray-Cole
(781) 444-1091.....cgc603@aol.com



Relapse in Grief

You would think that after nearly four years, a be-reaved mother would not be suddenly overcome by the overwhelming pain and fresh sense of loss that was experienced for the first three or four months after the death of her child. You would think.

A pseudo-friend and I were discussing a matter of mutual concern about which we disagreed. There is a lot of politics in this relationship, so suffice it to say, I try to stay on subject. Out of the blue came her remark that she'd had a "dream" about my son's three daughters. Since the death of my son, the relationship with my granddaughters has been non-existent by the choice of my former daughter in law. My quasi-friend is aware of this. But this is her way of handling people: change the subject, catch someone off guard and win the minor battle.

There was nothing new in that behavior. What was new was the overwhelming sense of sorrow, the deep void, the physical pain, all of which I had experienced when my son died. Her clever remarks were the catalyst that slammed me back into the initial emotions of grief. I had not experienced a relapse this severe until that moment.

I ended the conversation with a redirection to the subject at hand. Then I sat at my desk, Kleenex in hand, wiping copious tears from my eyes and cheeks. My logical mind told me that I should not be back in this deepest state of depression, loss and anxiety. My logical mind told me that I had moved forward into a tolerable form of existence. But the emotions were overwhelming.

For over a week I was withdrawn. I snapped at my husband who was truly clueless about my setback. I kept discussions at work to a minimum. I initiated no personal conversations with friends or family. I cancelled social engagements. I was back in the deep hole of depression, pain and sorrow. My vulnerability is my child's death and the loss of his future. That is the vulnerability of each of us. Vulnerability. I had never thought of myself as vulnerable or invulnerable. But this was nothing if not vulnerability.

After that first week, my logical mind began to work on my subconscious mind. The words of my father were as audible as if he were standing next to me. "You are steel, not butter. Adversity will strengthen you." However, we know that at some point, even steel girders will fail and collapse. We are mere mortals. No matter how strong we are, no matter our moral compass, no matter our religious beliefs, no matter our personalities, we are human, very mortal and sometimes fragile. We doubt ourselves because we understand that as humans we cannot control the events of our lives. We know this to be an indisputable fact because we have lost our precious children to death.

Looking back on that day, that specific moment, I am beginning to awaken to a different reality of grief. We don't stay in one stage of grief. Grief is a journey, and like all journeys, it winds back and forth. Occasionally we retrace our footsteps as we seek a direction. I understand now that relapses have been very common with me. This relapse was most dramatic, but it wasn't the first. And it won't be the last. I have experienced all the stages of grief in no particular order. I have returned to denial and anger. I have bargained in my mind with thoughts of "what if". I have sobbed and screamed into my pillow on more than one occasion, all of this within the past year. These episodes have passed, and I have moved on with the business of living.

The relapse that shook my soul was a wake-up call. My only child is gone. This grief is forever. My perspective on this journey of grief is an ever-changing one; life will never be the same.



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I keep my child in my mind and in my heart knowing that I will be vulnerable. Pictures, places, people, sounds, smells and a glimpse of someone who looks or walks like my child will bring a relapse. I'm never ready for the relapse, but I accept it, go with it, let it take me where it must and then I return to the business of living.

I suppose I should thank my pseudo-friend for bringing me to this new awareness. The insight gained from that brief moment of clever manipulation has made me more aware of my humanity, heightened my sensitivity to others and elevated me to a new plane of living. Grief for our lost children is a dreadful, but singularly extraordinary, teacher. I am learning.

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

PAIN

I am not a young man, and I thought I knew the meaning of pain. I have experienced pain from a toothache, arthritis, and even the loss of relatives and friends. But nothing in my fifty-four years had prepared me for the pain I experienced when we lost our son. I had no clue to real pain.

I think only a bereaved parent knows the true meaning. Not to belittle the loss of a parent or spouse, but those who have lost both tell me that it is not the same. My mother said to me at my brother's funeral, "Now I know how you feel." Even though she had lost a grandson, it was not the same.

It has been almost five years now, and there hasn't been a day go by that I don't see his picture or think of him and feel that pain. Pain for what we lost...and for what he lost. That pain is not as intense now. I have learned to tolerate it and still lead a normal life. The Compassionate Friends helped me to realize that I was not alone and that there were many others who felt that same pain. They helped me learn how to deal with it. Now it is my turn to try to help someone else.

Harold F. Underwood
TCF, Southern Maryland



On the Loss of My Son

Out of the shadows and into the light,
Daylight ascended and vanished the night.
Freed from the burden of bodily pain,
Comfort returned to my Raymond again.

Burdened with sorrow quite heavy indeed,
(I'd prayed for a healing that did not succeed),
Here on this earth I've a hole in my heart,
Mourning that Raymond so young did depart.

Safe in my memory, my Raymond's dear smile
I'll see once again when we meet in awhile.
Jesus has promised that someday we'll meet,
After my life on this earth is complete.

This gentle spirit, so loving and kind,
Filled with compassion and brilliance of mind,
Now rests with Jesus in heaven above,
Wrapped in His spirit and heavenly love.

Verna S. Hobson
Metrowest Chapter, Holliston MA.
October 10, 2016

The Choice to Heal: The Five Insights

Several years ago it became apparent to me that I was stuck in "recovering" from my son's death. Nicholas contracted leukemia in 1986 and battled the disease for nearly three years before his death in 1989.

Seven years later, in 1996 it seemed there was no place for me to go with the continued feelings of grief—feelings which included sadness, frustration, and guilt. This was not my daily experience, but it came on periodically and occasionally crippled my ability to engage in life and work. While this was taking place I was also studying about family emotional systems process with Rabbi Ed Friedman and so I presented him with this problem. His immediate response was to suggest that I enter more deeply into my family, and somewhere in my family I would find the direction to move so I would no longer be stuck in my grief.

Armed with this conviction, my wife and I headed to Florida in March of 1996 for several days of golf and fun with my parents. In the seven years since Nicholas had died, no one in our circle of family and friends took his death as hard as my parents. They continuously called Zachary, our second son, "Nicholas" and struggled to move forward, themselves, with this tragic loss.

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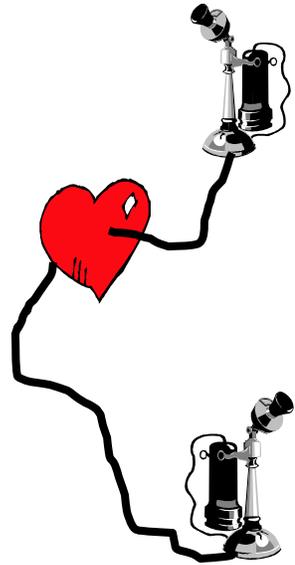
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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)366-2085
Mitchell Greenblatt,...**Ian**, age 18, Automobile Accident,..... (508)881-2111
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.

Support Resources

TCF Online Chat Groups:

WWW.compassionatefriends.org/resources/online_Support.aspx

- For questions, please contact Diana Jorden, 925-432-3854, who moderates the general grief and suicide loss rooms on Friday nights and Sunday. TCF online offers several specialized chat rooms, all moderated by moms who have been in chat for at least 2 years or more. We offer a sibling-only chat, loss under 1 year, loss over 2 years, loss of only child, suicide survivor, infant/pregnancy loss, and every night (and Monday mornings) there is a general loss room open to parents, step and grand, and siblings.
- You can sign up for the online TCF National newsletter at www.compassionatefriends.org
- You can reach our TCF National Facebook page through the link on the same home page of our national website. You will be asked to join Facebook if you are not already a member, and we hope you'll find our Facebook page as interesting as do the more than 11,000 fans who have already found us!

Other Grief Support Websites

- agast.org - for grandparents
- alivealone.org
- aliveinmemory.org
- angelmoms.com
- babysteps.com
- bereavedparentsusa.org
- beyondindigo.com
- childloss.com
- goodgriefresources.com
- parmenter.org - children's bereavement
- griefhealingblog.com
- griefwatch.com
- GriefNet.org
- healingafterloss.org
- Jeff's Place-www.jeffsplacemetrowest.org
- opentohope.com
- pomc.com - families of murder victims
- save.org
- survivorsofsuicide.com
- Taps.org - military death
- webhealing.com
- Griefshare.org



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My decision was made; I'd talk to my Dad. So on the golf course one day, enjoying the beautiful sunshine and warm temperatures, I shared my struggle with him and asked how he dealt with Nick's death. His answer surprised me, but also became the cornerstone on which I continue to deal with Nick's death today. "Son," he said, "I get up each morning, sit down at my desk, and open the drawer where I have a picture of Nick. I say, 'you bugger.' I think of how much I miss him, how grateful I am for him, and then I give him into God's hands...every day." His comment afforded me one of those moments in grief recovery where insight leads to deeper healing.

The first insight was this: I was stuck because I held to the belief that grieving has a finish line while we are alive. In reality, the only end to the pain we feel over the death of our children is our own death. The intensity subsides over time, as do other characteristics of grieving, but there is no day on which we can say we are done grieving the death of our children. While we hold to the joyful memories of our children who died, we also hold to the pain of the loss that comes from the fact that they died. Efforts to live outside that pain prove futile and frustrating. Even when you and I have worked our way through the pain to the "other side," the path we traveled leaves a clear road mark and an indelible imprint on our psychological, intellectual, emotional and spiritual memory.

There is no going back—but there is no finish line either. The experience, with all its emotional components, remains with us all our lives. So, instead of looking for a finish line, I adopted my dad's strategy and looked at recovery from Nick's death as a 24-hour experience. There was no knowing what I'd be like three days, three months or three years from then. In fact, the future looked overwhelming. Instead, I started putting Nick in God's keeping for another day—and only one day. As I gave Nick to God, so I gave my grief to God, thereby inviting healing. Whether God is or is not in the equation for you, the key for me was realizing recovery was a 24-hour experience and when broken into daily bites became manageable.

The second insight was this: I was stuck because of holding to the belief that acceptance meant that the experience of Nicholas would make rational sense. It didn't then and it doesn't now. Nearly 11 years later, the death of a child still does not make sense to me. But the reality of children dying isn't for me to understand: it is for me to accept. Acceptance does not mean there is a rational explanation for why a child dies nor that I must like the reality. It simply means that the death of a child is a part of life and a part of my life. Acceptance means that the events of this fine boy's life actually did take place and I was a participant and witness to them.

Acceptance means that life has moved on and will continue to move on with or without me. Acceptance means that no, time does not stop when our world comes shattering down from the death of a child. O that it would, but it does not. Acceptance is looking back and embracing what happened in order to look forward and move on.

The third insight was this: the fact the picture was in a place that my dad visited every day inspired me to keep pictures of Nicholas in a place where I would remember him every day...and enjoy remembering him. We can keep our departed children close through the wonder of photography and other items that remind us of them. My dad struck a unique balance between those who set aside large spaces for remembrance and those who set aside no space for remembrance at all. If needed, he knew where to go in his house to be close to Nick and, therefore, to a package of complete memories. Nick had and still has a place in his emotional and spiritual home. This is highlighted daily by being able to look at his picture. Not only does Nick have a physical space, but also a space in memory. We become unstuck when we structure the means to keep the memory of our departed children close. This varies from person to person, but keeping physical reminders nearby encourages us to keep emotional, spiritual and mental image memories nearby and accessible as well.

The fourth insight was this: gratitude for the life of Nicholas helped muster movement against the forces of being stuck in grief. John Claypool tells a story in his book Mending the Heart about the time in his life six weeks after the death of his daughter from leukemia. He could not sleep, got up and went to read the story in Genesis 22 about Abraham and Isaac. As he read the commentary he was amazed to learn that this story of Abraham and Isaac was a story of God reminding Abraham of the gift he had received and from whom the gift came. Claypool says that from that night forward he came to see his daughter's life, though shorter than he wished, as a gift which he did not deserve and for which he desired to give gratitude. Gratitude is difficult in the midst of feeling cheated and deprived by death. However, gratitude overcomes tremendous pain and can move even the most stuck bereaved parent to new places of recovery and joy.

The final insight was this: healing and recovery call for us to make a decision, to answer the question, "Do I want to get better or not?" One can argue that grief recovery is more complicated than answering this question. But grief recovery concerns the direction we point ourselves day in and day out.





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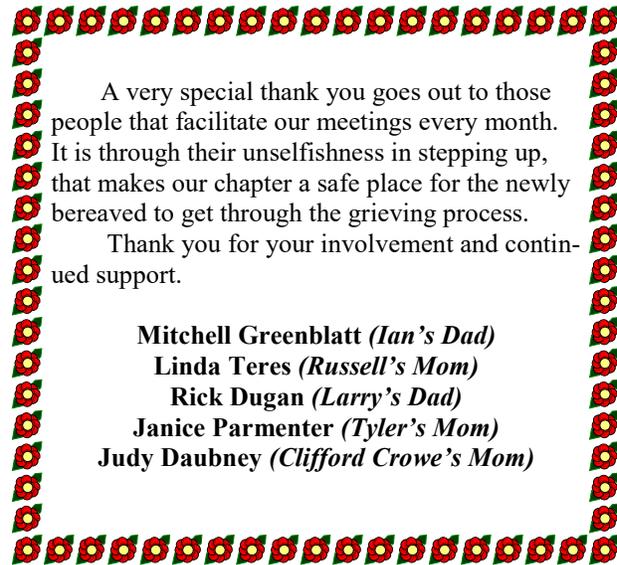
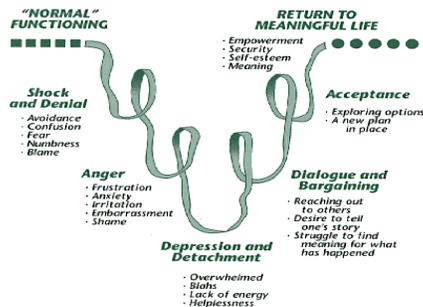
If we wish to get better we need to encourage ourselves and point ourselves that way every day; we need to surround ourselves with bereaved parents who have healed and found meaning in life again; we need to realize that no one can point us towards the healing we desire except ourselves. Ironically, the times in our lives when we least feel like making decisions are the times when we need to make them: Seek healing? Stay stuck? Recover? Die ourselves? Sometimes it does come to such simple decisions as these.

When I studied churches that had experienced trauma, those that recovered had one principle characteristic in common: someone stood up and, from a position of leadership said, "We are going to heal and grow from this experience and embrace a new future." Most often the leader said this before knowing what direction recovery would go nor whom would help. They sought, as best they could, to point the ship in a direction that gave them the best chance of re-engaging life; choosing to get better.

Of all the insights given to me by my dad that day, this last one continues to be the most effective. Grief stays with us for a lifetime...as long as we have our minds we cannot escape from the experience of what took place. However, each day we can point ourselves towards the vision we hold of recovery and have the faith that one day we will get there.

Fr. Alvin Johnson has served as an Episcopal Priest for over 20 years. In 1989 he and his wife Vickie became bereaved parents when their first child, Nicholas, died after a long battle with leukemia. Nicholas is survived by a sister Hannah and a brother Zachary. Fr. Johnson currently serves as Rector of St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Barrington, Illinois. He recently received his Doctor of Ministry degree in Congregational Studies focusing on the comparisons between how congregations and families recover from trauma. Fr. Johnson has spoken often at Compassionate Friends meetings and was a keynote speaker at the 23rd national TCF conference held in Chicago.

Alvin C. Johnson, Jr. In Memory of my son Nicholas



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 Language of Grief

Once I lived the American Dream. We were a happy family, military by career, parents by choice. And with the birth of our son, our family was to have been complete. We were the American Dream, at least for a little while.

And then, as it happened to us and to so many, it all ended. We learned you couldn't paint a rainbow on the wall and expect it to stay. The dream came to pieces and we were shattered. No longer the American Dream, we became the American Nightmare. We were bereaved.

We had entered a world we knew nothing about. Suddenly we were strangers in a strange land. We needed help. We needed understanding. We needed someone who could speak *our language...the language of grief.*

We discovered we were grieving, not only the death of our child, but the loss of close friendships, self-esteem and self-identity as well. We were **SO** alone...left untouched by those around us who must have been afraid, too. Perhaps **Death** is "catching," or maybe no one knew what to say. I didn't know what to hear. But, as the months passed, it only grew darker and we began to wonder if we would ever know peace, joy or love again.

Eventually, we began to wander and found a few support systems (Thank heavens for TCF!). The Compassionate Friends became a *lifeline* for us. We found we were not as alone as we feared and we began to struggle through the valley of grief. But as the years went by, I noticed that we and all the other bereaved people we began to know were still struggling with *something*. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, until one day, I listened to the words we were all using to describe our grief journey.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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As I listened to my own words and those of fellow strugglers, I began to realize it was not the journey we were having trouble with...it was the language we used.

So, I want to create a **NEW LANGUAGE!** Can we speak in terms of **HOPE** instead of sorrow? I want to create a new language where **Denial** is a river in Egypt, not a sin in grieving. Maybe denial isn't really denial but **Postponement**. Sometimes I'm just not ready to deal with reality. Before you can deny anything, you have to **acknowledge** it and once you acknowledge it, then you can postpone it until you are ready or able to cope. **Postponement** just seems to be a more accurate and usable word.

Perhaps we can replace **Acceptance** and **Acknowledgement**. Acceptance, to me, means **agree with** and **I Will Never Agree** with what has happened to us! But I can work towards **Acknowledgement** of what has happened.

Maybe we can change the words we use. **Change the Language of Grief** into the **Language of Hope**. Let's get rid of the word **LOST** and find the word **FOUND**. People die, but we do not lose them. They are forever **threads in our fabric, memories in our heart, love in our being. They are now and always will be a living and loving part of who we are.**

And then, perhaps we can change one more word in the **Language of Grief**. Can we use the word **Healing** instead of Recovery? Recovery is a medical word, designed to describe broken bones, not hearts. We recover from a broken arm or the chicken pox. But recover or get over the death of someone I love...? We don't **Get Over** the death of someone we love! We get **THROUGH IT**, one moment, one hour, one day, one hurt at a time. **Healing is a hopeful word** and I want to be hopeful in my journey.

And let's get rid of **Closure** as well! There is no such thing as closure! **YOU DON'T STOP LOVING SOMEONE JUST BECAUSE THEY DIED.** We grieve because we loved someone! And we **WILL CONTINUE TO LOVE THEM FOREVER!**

If I could just see **HOPE**. I kept looking for the aisle marked happiness. I thought it was a place. I kept waiting for it to get better and it only grew darker. If I could just see hope...

Hope isn't a place or a thing. Hope isn't the absence of pain, fear or sadness. Hope is the possibility of renewed joy. It is the memory of love given and received. Hope is you and me and the person next to you and across the room, down the street and in your dreams.

We are each other's hope and we need a new language to reflect our hopefulness, not our despair. If we could just change these few words, I believe we might be able to make some progress towards healing.

I am tired of struggling to accept when acknowledgment is more honest. I am tired of being in denial when I know exactly what it is I want to deny, so how can you say I am denying anything? I just want to postpone it for awhile. When I feel more capable, less tired and have some skills and tools, then I will work on my "denial."

And nothing, nothing closes at the funeral except the casket! I will have an ongoing and continuing relationship with him until I can once again hold him in my arms. If that is "crazy", then yes, I am! As a psychotherapist and a bereaved mom, I believe it is my right to continue to love my child forever and loving your child should not be considered as mentally unhealthy. Good-bye? You want me to say good-bye? **I wasn't through saying Hello!** I want a new language, a **language of hope and healing** instead of denial and death. I want to remember my child's LIFE first! And that is the new language of love!

May love be what you remember the most!

**Darcie D. Sims, Ph.D., GMS,
CGC,CHT**

This Mixed-up Grief

Have you ever noticed the many mixed-up, confusing emotions involved in grieving?

On the one hand, you feel restless; on the other hand, you feel like you don't want to move at all. You feel desperately alone, yet you don't want anyone around. You feel scatterbrained, forgetful, and yet frantically meticulous. You feel like crying at nothing, and sometimes laughing at anything. (Or do I have that backwards?) Being in a crowd of people is fine as long as they don't talk to you. And yet, if they don't talk to you, you feel as if nobody cares. You want so desperately for someone to mention your child, to remember the life that once was. And yet it can make you furious if ALL they want to talk about is the dead one, and never even mention the living ones.

Grief settles over you like a hot blanket. You're as cold as the winter snow. Grief presses on you like a steamroller. You're floating in a bubble above yourself. Grief boxes you in on four sides and introduces you to a pain no one should have to know.

But then, once again, you begin to feel compassion. You relate to other parents who have had an experience similar to your own.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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And eventually, with a light as sharp as a sunburst, you hear yourself saying your child's name with an unfamiliar smile on your face. You remember some of the funny times and feel laughter building in your throat. One morning you notice the sun is shining. Many days, months, and possibly years have passed unnoticed, and somehow, you are still here. Even though your child is still, there. You feel your heart swell with a love you never even knew could exist. And you find a place in your life for something called (dare I say) peace.

And then, ever so gently, the memories enfold you in a warmth as soothing as a cool shower on a hot summer day, so you find you WANT to remember. And tender memories of Love lift you to unreachable heights, to the brightest of stars, to the loveliest touch of your child.

**Dana Gensler
TCF, Louisville, KY**

The Fear of Forgetting

When my daughter died just after turning four years old, one of my biggest fears has been that she will be forgotten. But lately, I've been asking myself what does that really mean? What am I really scared of?

The idea that she will be forgotten is actually two separate fears. The first is that due to the notion of "out of sight, out of mind," friends and even family will stop thinking of her and, in essence, "forget her." In reality, this is the natural course of life. I have beloved relatives and dear friends who have passed, and yet I rarely think of them. Does it mean they didn't exist, or had any less impact on my life? No. Nor does it mean I love them any less. What it does represent is that life goes on, and current matters occupy our minds.

I think my fear is actually rooted in the reality of family and friends no longer talking about my daughter or – from my perspective – thinking of her, which feels as though it further isolates me from the "normal" world. It has been years since she died, and yet the pain is ever present and my daily thoughts are still filled with memories and longing for my daughter. Other than the news sensationalizing death and destruction to grab our attention for ratings, our society tends to not want to talk about grief or the lingering pain of loss after the funeral is over. So I go about my business and lead two lives: the "normal" one that goes about living a "normal" life, and the "private" one where I still struggle to figure out how to work through the pain of grief while learning to once again embrace the love, joy, and adventures that surround me.

The second part of my fear has to do with me and my memory. With my daughter no longer physically here, memories of her have become precious commodities. Those few memories of specific moments captured in time allow me to momentarily remember not just who she was, but remember life before the pain of her death forever changed me and my world. But with every passing day, and with all the new information coming in, those memories tend to get crowded out and forgotten. All those everyday moments that I took for granted at the time have already faded into the abyss of memories lost to time. It makes me sad that her older brothers say that they have very few specific memories of her. It makes me sadder that her baby brother never had the chance to meet her, and will have to rely on our stories and descriptions of her if he ever wants to get to know her.

To combat this fear, I have tried to write down as many memories as I can – even if they are mundane. I keep them in a journal, and some I post to www.aliveinmemory.org to share them with others. This way I can refer back to them and share them with whoever is interested in reading them. Her brothers can read them and share them with their eventual families.

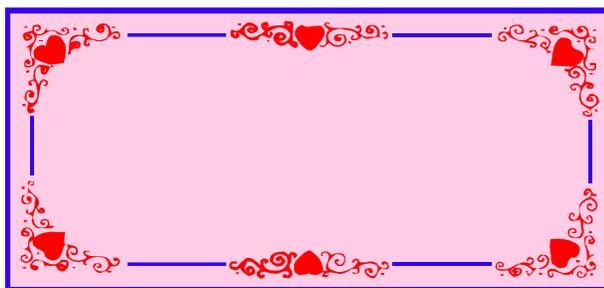


But lately, I wonder is my fear of forgetting my memories really necessary? Does it make me a bad mother that I can't remember more moments I shared with her? Of course not. Does it mean my love for her will fade with the memories? Absolutely not. While I wish I could remember more specific memories of time that I shared with her, I will try to be content knowing that I will never forget how much I love my daughter, or how much she means to me. I will never forget her personality quirks, her vivid imagination, and endless creativity. And I will never forget how her life – and her death – have helped me grow tremendously in my understanding of this life and how best to live it.

**Maria Kubitz
TCF, Contra Costa County, CA
In Memory of my daughter, Margareta**



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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.”*