



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.

November-December 2011

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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: **November 15th December 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:

November 29th December 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. ©2011

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
 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. Dori Cabral in loving memory of her daughter **Cindy Cabral-Beatson** on her anniversary September 4th.

Ms. Susan M. Dulak in loving memory of her daughter **Jillian A. Dulak**.

Mr. & Mrs. Robert King in loving memory of their daughter **Caren King-Firth**.

Mr. & Mrs. Michael Boudreau in loving memory of their son **Nicholas L. Boudreau**.

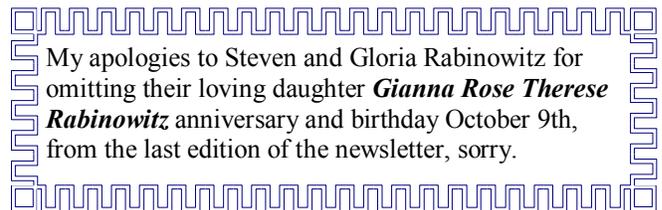
Mr. & Mrs. Leo Boghosian in loving memory of their son **Jason Boghosian** on his anniversary September 6th.

Mrs. Michele Haley in loving memory of her son **R. J. Sutherland**.

Mrs. Constance McDonough in loving memory of her daughter **Joan M. Peters**.

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Eldredge in loving memory of their son **Kevin R. Eldredge** on his birthday November 14th.

Mrs. Joan Hennigan in loving memory of her son **Dennis M. Hennigan** on his anniversary November 23ed. Greatly missed and forever loved.





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 November and December. 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

Birthdays

November

November

LISA MASTROMATTEO
KIMBERLY CERUTTI-PARDI
ALAN R. STUCHINS
ANDREW R. MILLINER
CYNTHIA ZOTTOLI
DENNIS M. HENNIGAN
DONNA ANN WOLFSON

DIXON BERGMAN
MICHAEL COUGHLIN
JOHN RYAN PIKE
ANDREW ROBERT BIBBO
KEVIN R. ELDREDGE
ALICIA D. JACKMAN
KIMBERLY CERUTTI-PARDI
CHAD ARTHUR HOLBROOK
2ND LT. USMC IAN THOMAS McVEY
ANDREW McCUSKER

December

December

CHRISTINA M. ROSSETTI
LISA MARIE SIMPSON
LARRY DUGAN
STEPHEN GRILLO
ARTHUR W. ROBINSON
CHARLES SACKLER
MICHAEL W. ALBA
JAMES S. CARPENTER VI
RYAN JOSEPH MANCINI
DANNY FERGUSON

LISA RANDALL
TIMOTHY G. RECKERT
FRANK W. TOPHAM
JOSEPH F. SALITURO
MARC R. PEARLMAN
CHRISTOPHER MESZAROS
JAMES S. CARPENTER VI
DANNY FERGUSON

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.

THE GREATEST LOVE OF ALL

I walked slowly into Philadelphia's Society Hill Playhouse. It wasn't my first time. I had been there many times before to see shows that my brother, Alan, had publicized.

This time the show would be about Alan. Until shortly before he died, Alan worked full time as a publicist for an agency for the aged. He also juggled many freelance projects simultaneously, and donated much of his free time to a variety of community organizations. He would have been shocked at the eleven obituaries that were published. Those came from two Philadelphia daily papers, two weekly papers and the others in newsletters from various organizations where Alan had volunteered.

This October night, the 26th of 1992, we returned to Philly for his memorial service. My entire family was there, except for my twin brother Alan. I was fine, until I saw the bulletin board displaying his pictures. We had asked to videotape the service but his friends said it would make them uncomfortable. We needed to have something else to remind us of Alan. So, unknown to anyone, except my family, I slipped a tape recorder under my seat.

Although Alan's friends had designed a postcard with a picture and a favorite quote, I felt he deserved a Playbill for all of the shows he had promoted. After being turned down by Playbill I designed my own program, including his biography.

Following an introduction by the master of ceremonies, my brother Joel spoke of Alan's family life. He said how 1992 was a difficult year for all of us. "The pain of losing someone who touched you so closely is just indescribable," he continued. "No one in this world was closer to Alan, closer to each other than Alan and Danny were.

"Danny, no one has felt the intensity and loss and pain that you have. On the one hand I envy you, you were the luckiest of us all. I know I am a much better person because of Alan and the way he touched my life. Danny, no one loved you more than Alan, no one was more loved by Alan than you, you are truly a very lucky man..."

After his speech Joel recited something I had written, but was too heartbroken to read. It is called, "I remember" and contains some of the highlights of my life with Alan. This is only a small portion of it:

I remember playing in the sandbox with our matchbox cars.

I remember getting up early on Sundays to walk to the bakery for chocolate chip cookies.

I remember our walks back to Alan's apartment after the movies.

I remember our trip to Hershey by bus, at age 14.

I remember staying up late to help Alan get his mailings finished.

I remember when we would go to see Grandma Sloane, sometimes at 2AM.

I remember how Alan would give me support when I was worried about him.

The memorial service continued, with a total of five friends talking about different aspects of his life. A wonderful singer, Kathy Sledge (of the group Sister Sledge), sang "I'll Be Seeing You" and "Goodbye Old Friend". When the microphone was open to anyone, we heard from many, each person recalling the fond moments they had with Alan. For months after, I would listen to the recording. It was often difficult to hear, due to footsteps and my loud sobs but it helped me when I needed to cry.



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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My twin brother Alan, who died of AIDS on June 25, 1992, knew that his illness was terminal but managed to enjoy life to the fullest. I have chosen to remember him this way, enjoying life as best I can, and getting involved, as he did.

Daniel Yoffee's twin brother died in 1992. Helping with two TCF chapters, Daniel does newsletter layout for the Bergen-Passaic, NJ TCF chapter and is treasurer of the Rockland County, NY TCF chapter, and is on the steering committees for both chapters. He is also involved with an AIDS service provider in Rockland County assisting with fund raising, as well as being newsletter editor and creating a web page.

Candles in the Night

A heart broken by the death of a child can never be healed.

As parents, we try every way that can be thought of to cope with the loss, but the void will always be there. At first that emptiness seems to take your breath away and most times we wish it would.

This becomes different with the passage of time. It never goes away, but at some point, we learn to live with it and, in fact, this horrible feeling becomes a lifeline of sorts. One of our biggest fears is to forget our children. Forget how they looked or how their voice sounded. The smiles and tears that blur together to make a child. This emptiness in effect becomes a constant yearning to remember our children.

Our hearts force us to find ways to fill that void to maintain our role as parents. Some are as simple as visiting the cemetery and some as complex as changing our entire lives, dedicated to the memory of our child. In between are the many rituals we create or borrow from others to honor the memories and to keep our child's name alive.

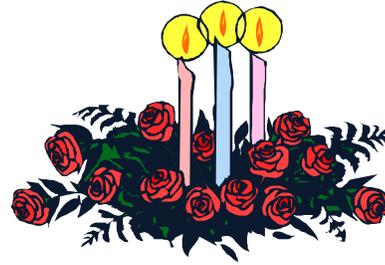
Lighting a candle and saying a child's name keeps the memory burning bright. It means we are struggling to cope with this unwanted role of bereaved parent in the only positive manner we can. We will most certainly shed tears every time and we will still miss our child, but we are doing something that allows the world to hear our child's name and for that one moment, the candle means, oh, so much more than anyone else could ever understand.

For a fleeting second that is our universe and every memory we have comes flooding to us as we see the flame through tears, distorting into something magical.

A tiny flickering flame can warm the heart and it's nice to think that perhaps they can feel us also. It's a beacon, our light in the window, a shining star in the darkness. It's an opening of our hearts and a way to share our grief.

Jim Lowery

TCF, Sugar Land, SW Houston Chapter



Thanksgiving Memory Is a Treasure

The last time I saw my son was on November 30, 2002. It was a warm, clear Saturday and he and his family had gathered with us at a friend's home for a relaxing Saturday afternoon.

Todd had arrived in Houston on Wednesday, stopped at my office to finish some work and later came home. His daughters and wife were in a different car and had gone to spend the weekend at her parents' house.

Thanksgiving dinner was at our home that year. After dinner, Todd and his family went to the in-laws for dessert. When he and his son came back home about nine, Todd and I sat and talked for hours. We talked about the many problems he was facing, the many problems I was facing. We discussed options, solutions, children, his plan for the next two years and much more. We reminisced about past holidays, the history of our family and what contributed to a good childhood. He wanted the same childhood experience for his children that he had; this touched my heart. Most mothers tell their children "someday you'll thank me," but I was able to hear it from my son's heart.

Friday morning found Todd and John changing the oil in the Durango. Todd planned for his son, Clay, to stay and learn to do this chore, but he was overruled by his wife. I could see the pain on Todd's face when she insisted that Clay spend that time with her parents. He wanted a teaching moment with his child; he wanted to spend time building memories that they both would share. Later my husband and Todd went to the annual car show in Houston which was their Friday after Thanksgiving tradition. When they came home, Todd and I spent hours talking. It was wonderful to talk to my grown child as a peer.



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**, age 17, Automobile Accident,.....(508)877-8106
- Linda Schafer.....**Kimberly Ann**, age 16, Now Childless,.....(508)393-4448

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.



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SOME SUGGESTIONS:

It is important to realize that while holidays and special days are traditionally a time of festivity, they can also be a time of frantic busyness and resultant fatigue. Don't set unrealistic expectations for yourself to be joyful. As grieving persons we must recognize that we may simply be unable to function at our usual pace. We may need to break things down into smaller, more manageable chunks, goals we can achieve. Fatigue can be deadly and lead to feelings of depression under the best of circumstances. Don't overextend, don't over commit. Eliminate the unnecessary and reduce the pressure on yourself and others. By talking over what is really important with family members, priorities can be set, tasks shared, and plans made to accomplish those things considered essential. Decide what you can handle comfortably and let your needs be known to friends and relatives.

If your faith has been an important part of your life, allow time for its expression during these holidays and special days. If it has not, this may be a fitting time to approach the clergy person or church of your choice. In either case, you may find that by enriching and deepening your religious experience, you have added a new dimension to your life.

Our lives have changed. Our holidays will be different. It's not a choice of pain or no pain, but how we manage the pain we feel. The important thing to remember is to do what is comfortable for you and your family. It may help to know what those of us who have been through these holidays and special days before have found: Anticipation is frequently worse than the day itself.

Know when your holidays are

- Holidays are not just at Thanksgiving, Chanukah, Christmas, or New Year's.
- Holidays are those times when family and friends get together for fun. It may or may not be associated with one of the traditional days of celebration.
- Mark on your calendar the months during which your family's holidays occur.
- Begin early to plan your coping strategies.

Be intentional about how you plan your holiday. Together, as a family, examine the events and tasks of the celebration and ask the following questions:

- Do we really enjoy doing this? Is it done out of habit, free choice, or obligation?
- Is this a task that can be shared?
- WOULD THE HOLIDAY BE THE SAME WITHOUT IT?

Decide what you can handle comfortably.

- Whether we are open to talk about our child.
- Whether we feel able to send holiday cards this year.
- Whether we can handle the responsibility of the family dinner, holiday parties, etc. or if we wish someone else to take over some of these traditions this year.
- Whether we will stay at home for the holidays or choose a different environment.
- Shopping is definitely easier if you make the entire list out ahead of time. Then when one of the "good days" comes along, you can get your shopping done quickly and with less confusion. Shopping by phone or from catalogs can also help.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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GIFTS OF LOVE

Don't be afraid to make changes. It can really make things less painful.

- Let the children take over decorating the tree or invite friends in to help.
- Open presents the night before the holiday instead of in the morning.
- Have dinner at a different time. Change the seating arrangement.
- Burn a special candle to quietly include your absent son or daughter.

Our greatest comfort may come in doing something for others.

- Giving a gift in memory of our child to a meaningful charity.
- Adopting a needy family for the holidays.
- Inviting a guest (foreign student, senior citizen, someone who would otherwise be alone) to share the festivities.

Evaluate your coping plans.

- Do your plans isolate you from those who love and support you best?
- Do your plans allow for meaningful expression and celebration of what the particular holiday means for you?

Let your plans and limits be known.

- Write or phone family and friends to let them know of any intended changes.
- Share with friends and family how you plan to approach the holiday and how they can best help you.

Don't be afraid to have fun.

- Enjoyment, laughter, and pleasure are not experiences in which you abandon your lost child. You have not forgotten him/her. Your child would not want you to be forever sad; you need not feel guilty over any enjoyment you may experience.
- Give yourself and members of your family permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holiday.

Last and most important: Take time to love and let yourself be loved, for this is the real gift of the holiday season.



As I type this, it is the day after Thanksgiving. People in the retail business say that it is the biggest shopping day of the year. Before Nina died, I was one of those crazy shoppers who on that day sat out in the parking lot of whatever store that opened at 6 a.m. waiting for them to open their doors so I could shove my way into whatever “blue light special” was being offered. My children’s wish list in hand, I was ready to power shop ‘til I dropped. But that was then, and this is now. Five Christmas shopping seasons later, my life, as all of our lives, has changed irrevocably. As one precious child is no longer on that shopping list.

Not too long ago, I was in a fitting room trying on some clothes when I overheard the conversation between mother and teenage daughter in the room next to me. There was a volatile exchange of words between the two of them as the mother was trying to hustle her daughter along. She kept saying to her, “You know, I don’t have all day to waste because you can’t make up your mind.” The heated discussion continued and concluded with the girl’s mother saying, “That’s it! I am never taking you shopping again!” That phrase sent a chill down my spine. It took everything in my power to keep from bursting from my fitting room and admonish that mother; tell her that I would give anything to have my daughter alive so that she could cause that so-called “inconvenience” that obviously hers was causing her. I then realized that in this woman’s agitated state it would only fall on deaf ears.

It has been four and a half years since my daughter died and I still go into the shops that we frequented and see some adorable outfit hanging on one of the mannequins and think, “Nina would have loved that.”

She was my shopping buddy. She could never say no to an invitation to go shopping. And it wasn’t just shopping for herself that she loved. From the time she was very young, she loved buying gifts for others. She would scrape whatever money she had saved from birthdays, etc. to buy a small gift for each of us.

Interestingly, the gift she gave me our last Christmas together was an angel. At that time I had not even started the angel collection that I have now since she died.

Be prepared to find “gifts” from your children when you unpack your Christmas decorations for the first time. It seemed as if each box I opened there was something left there from her, something that I had long forgotten about: one box contained a picture of her in a Santa hat...smiling that brilliant braces-laden grin, another her carefully crafted handmade ornaments, another one a hand-written card in her justlearn-ing-to-print handwriting, and on and on...so many memories.



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



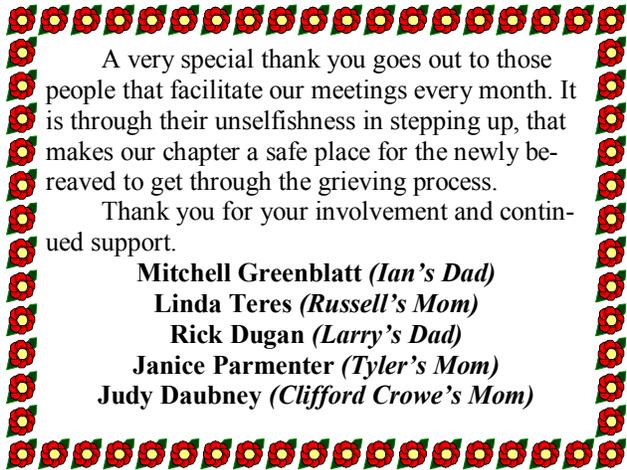
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I realized that in a sense, these were Nina's gifts to me now that she wasn't physically here. She was giving me the gifts of memories...beautiful memories that were given in love. Those memories will only increase in value as the years go on. They are invaluable because they are yours and yours alone...no one can ever take those priceless memories away.

Though they may hurt now and probably always will but not as intensely, give yourself a gift...the gift of emotion and allow those healing tears to fall. Give yourself time to grieve.

If I could give each of you a gift I would want to give you the gift of peace, as much peace as you can possibly find. And the hope that you can remember some of the joy and love that was yours from Christmases past.

*With gentle thoughts,
Cathy Seehuetter
TCF, St. Paul, MN*



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 Empty Chair

by Darcie Sims

There's an empty chair in our house and I am not sure what to do with it. It's been empty a long time, and though we've moved more than a few times since it became empty, we still haul it around with us. It's not a particularly classic chair or even a very pretty one, and it is empty all the time. Whenever we move, I never really know which room to put it in, but once it has found its place, I've noticed that it simply stays there. No one moves it, no one suggests putting it away. No one sits in it. It's just an empty chair.



My husband's military career took him away for many months at a time, and his chair was often empty. Then, when our daughter was commissioned in the military, we knew her chair would also be empty sometimes. So empty chairs at our house are not an uncommon thing, but this chair...this chair should never have been empty.

As the holidays approach, I am always faced with the task of deciding what to do with our empty chair. Should we put it away for the season? Should we decorate it or should we just ignore it? One year we did decide to put it away, but even though it was an empty chair, it left an even bigger empty space when we moved it to another, less occupied place. How can that be? How can something that is empty leave a bigger empty space when it's gone?!

We've tried to ignore it, but its emptiness is very loud, and it is hard to miss an empty chair in a room filled with people sitting in all the other chairs. And even when we could manage to ignore it, others could not, and they always commented on it. An empty chair is not invisible.

Then, one year, we decided to simply include it in our holiday decorating scheme and that was the cause of some interesting discussions. Should we put a special holiday pillow on it? What about tossing a colorful quilt or afghan over the back! Should we put something on the chair so it wasn't empty! Now that was a novel idea! But nothing we tried could fill the emptiness of that chair. It just sat silent like a sentinel, waiting for something...or someone.

It took us many years of living with that empty chair, day in and day out, to finally figure out what to do with it. When we serve our meals, those chairs that would have been occupied by the assigned person (yes, we do assigned seating at our house) can be filled by other family members or guests. You get to use the sterling silver napkin ring with that person's name on it, and if you are lucky, that person has not lost a knife or fork or spoon over the years, so you will have a complete place setting of silverware. You must endure listening to tales about the person whose chair you are occupying.

It makes for some lively conversations and that way, even though you may not be with us for this occasion, your presence is still in our life. That works for our empty chair as well. It is a military custom to always set a place at the table for those who are not with us at this time, but whose lives are still within our hearts. So, we have a place setting, complete with silverware (all 6 pieces), dishes, crystal goblet and napkin ring. Our empty chair is pulled up to the table and a single rose is placed on the plate, a symbol of ever lasting love.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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We join hands in thanksgiving, completing the circle with the empty chair within our family circle, for even though death may have come, love never goes away. That empty chair now represents all of us who are not with us for this occasion but who live within our hearts forever. It is not a sad sight, because we know that empty chair represents a love we have known and shared, and with that gift, our family is forever blessed.

So, if your holiday table will have an empty chair this year, remember that it is not truly an empty space. That place is still occupied by the love and joy of the one who sat in it. Don't hide that chair away. You may not wish to bring it to the table as we do, but take time this holiday season to remember the laughter, the joy, the love, the light of those who are no longer within hug's reach, but whose love still fills us with gratitude. Join hands around your table, however small, and say a prayer of thanksgiving...for the love you have known and still hold deep within your heart. You are rich beyond measure for having had a chair fulfilled. Don't let death rob you of the heart space that love keeps.

No one has sat in our little empty chair for twenty-five years...until this season. The table is still set with a place for all of those who are not with us on this occasion, but the empty chair at our house has been filled with the tiny spirit of a new life as she found that chair to be, "just the right size, Grandma." We are a family circle, some chairs filled and others not, broken by death, but mended by love. ~reprinted with permission to TCF by Bereavement Magazine Nov/Dec 2001 edition www.bereavementmag.com

The Myth of Managing Grief

Not long ago, a friend in New York said that she often feels cut off from the rest of the country because Sept. 11 is still so much with most New Yorkers.

"We've all gotten on with our lives, and if you don't go down to the (World Trade Center) site, there are no visible traces," she said. "But there's still so much grief and sadness hanging in the air."

People outside of New York can't really understand, said my friend.

"You talk with them and, if you didn't lose someone directly in the twin towers, it's like their tone says, 'Hey, shouldn't you be moving on?' They don't get that there's a collective grief. I actually prefer it when people don't even ask how it's going. It's easier."

Our American culture boasts many virtues and several strong suits, but grieving - collectively or individually - isn't one of them.

Unlike older societies, we have few formal grieving rituals in place to guide us. So, we try to tackle grief in our typical American way - as if it's a problem to be solved, an illness to be cured, an unnatural, machine-gumming breakdown that needs to be fixed, ASAP.

Perhaps more phobic about suffering than any society in history, Americans tend to start the clock ticking early in "managing" grief. While solicitous and caring of the newly bereaved, we encourage heartbroken mates and parents to medicate themselves so they can "keep it together" through the funeral.

This ignores the fact that wailing and keening and "losing it" are a pretty accurate rendering of what humans inside feel like when someone we love dies or leaves us. But, in our culture, public wailing and keening are considered bad forms; they are seen as unwelcome reminders of pathology among "healthy" people.

Even the most devastating loss - that of a child by a parent - seems to carry an unwritten statute of limitations on grief, something I learned several years ago when I reported on an international organization called Compassionate Friends.

Founded in England in the late 1960s, the massive support network's chapters provide something that bereaved parents and siblings can't get from the rest of the world: "unconditional love and understanding" (as its informal credo states) with no expiration date.

As one member told me, she knew that a Compassionate Friends meeting was the one place she could go and never hear the unintentionally accusing question, "How many years ago did you say your child died?" Grief is not like an illness, to be fought and cured with medicine or chemotherapy and radiation.

Generalizations can be made about human behavioral tendencies, and time lines can be drawn for predicted "healing," but each person's grieving process is unique.

Some people never "get better." And nobody survives grief unchanged.

As Stephanie Ericsson wrote in "Companion Through the Darkness," grief is "a tidal wave that overtakes you, smashes

down upon you with unimaginable force, sweeps you up into its darkness, where you tumble and crash against unidentifiable surfaces only to be thrown out on an unknown beach, bruised, reshaped."

Or, as a man who lost his 7-year-old son once confided, "I'd always thought of myself as a happy man, but that's gone now. We have moments of happiness, some of them long and filled with laughter, but the sense of what is lost is never far away."





THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



(continued from last page)

To Our Family and Friends

In her book, Stephanie Ericsson also warned: "Grief makes what others think of you moot. It shears away the masks of normal life and forces brutal honesty out of your mouth before propriety can stop you. It shoves away friends and scares away so-called friends and re-writes your address book for you."

Stephanie Salter

*San Francisco Chronicle - Sunday April 7, 2002
(Reprint permission to TCF, with proper acknowledgment)*

DIMMING LIGHTS

For most Chanukah is a joyous time
With dreidals, gifts and latkes
 We once had....
But since you have died,
My heart is heavy and sad....

Wherever you are my dear son...
I pray you are at peace....
Seeing the menorah lights
Giving me strength to get
Through these dim and dark
Eight days....

Outwardly the Chanukah candles
Are glimmering bright.....
But inside of me burns only
A shimmer of blurred light

Ceil Katz

**Southampton Chapter
TCF, Powell River, BC**



happy 
hanukkah

The "Holiday Season" is a time of family – festive gatherings, worshiping together, sharing love and gifts, and cherished memories. For the bereaved parent, these aspects of the season are precisely what makes us dread its arrival.

The absence of our child when the "whole family" gathers seems to accentuate our incomplete family. We are sorely reminded of "how it used to be" and don't want to accept what is now. We need patience and understanding of our family and friends to help us through the holidays as best we can.

We may want to change the way we spend Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Hanukkah. If the family traditionally gathers at one house, perhaps the gathering place could be changed, especially if the gathering home is that of the bereaved. If we do prepare the meal, be aware that we may not have the energy we have had in the past and will need a lot of help.



Perhaps we'll try to avoid the holiday altogether by going away for a few days. Whatever our thoughts are for coping with the day, please take our feelings into consideration when you make your plans.

For some of us shopping for gifts is a painful experience. The stores' festive decorations and music belie our mood, as we feel forced into participating in the "season." We think longingly about that special gift we won't be buying this year. Again, our depression saps us of the energy to do the things we have done in the past, and we need your understanding for the things that remain undone.

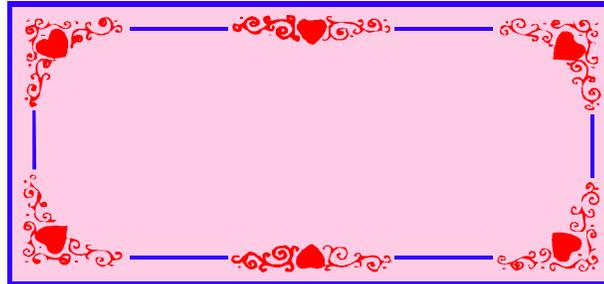
Perhaps the single most helpful thing you can do for us is to include our child in the holidays. We want to hear his/her name, to have you recall fond memories of their lives, to know that you, too, are feeling their absence and remembering them with love.



Getting through the holidays is a rough task for bereaved parents. We need to handle them in a way that we feel is best for ourselves and our families. We ask for your love and support during this especially difficult time.

**Marge Henning
TCF, West Orange, NJ**

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



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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all
children who have died

**Worldwide
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*... that their light
may always shine.*

**Second Sunday in December
7 PM Around the Globe**

