



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 2012

© 2012 The Compassionate Friends, All rights Reserved Vol. 17 Issue 6

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:

Nov. 20th * Dec. 14th *****

Please note, Dec. Meeting (candle light ceremony) is on Friday at 7:30.

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 27th No December Meeting

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. ©2012

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.

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.

Mrs. Joan Hennigan in loving memory of her son **Dennis Hennigan** on his anniversary November 23rd. "Always in my mind and heart, forever greatly missed,"

Mr. & Mrs. Steven Baisley in loving memory of their daughter **Stacey Ann Mahoney**.

Mr. & Mrs. Paul Webster in loving memory of their son **Joseph Webster**.

Mrs. Tracy Juliano in loving memory of her son **Christopher Marc Dulleo**.

Ms. Betty Myers in loving memory of her son **William Bruse-Tagoe**.

Mrs. Beverly Marks in loving memory of her son **Shawn P. Marks**.

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

Mrs. Alice Horigan in loving memory of her daughter **Donna M. McHugh** on her anniversary September 18th. and her birthday October 16th.

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Shea in loving memory of their son **Christopher Shea**.

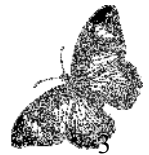
Save a tree

To all members that receive this newsletter via snail mail. If you would like to get your newsletter a week earlier thru e-mail please send me your e-mail address to: **headly@comcast.net**. This would save a tree and reduce postal cost.





THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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

November

LISA MASTROMATTEO
KIMBERLY CERUTTI-PARDI
ALAN R. STUCHINS
SEAN PATRICK COTTER
CYNTHIA ZOTTOLI
DENNIS M. HENNIGAN
DONNA ANN WOLFSON

December

CHRISTINA M. ROSSETTI
LARRY DUGAN
STEPHEN GRILLO
ARTHUR W. ROBINSON
CHARLES SACKLER
MICHAEL W. ALBA
JAMES S. CARPENTER VI
DANNY FERGUSON
JENNIFER L. GOLDSWORTHY
GERALDINE DiCARLO
JOSHUA GILBERT

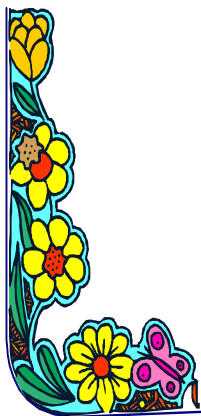
Birthdays

November

JOHN GARVEY
DIXON BERGMAN
MICHAEL COUGHLIN
ANDREW ROBERT BIBBO
KEVIN R. ELDREDGE
ALICIA D. JACKMAN
WILLIAM E. DeLORIE JR.
KIMBERLY CERUTTI-PARDI
CHAD ARTHUR HOLBROOK
2ND LT. USMC IAN THOMAS McVEY

December

LAUREN THIBEAU FLANAGAN
LISA RANDALL
TIMOTHY G. RECKERT
FRANK W. TOPHAM
JOSEPH F. SALITURO
MICHAELLA W. LIBBY
MARC R. PEARLMAN
JOHN PATRICK McGUE
JAMES S. CARPENTER VI
DANNY FERGUSON
NOELLE SARAH JOHNSON
RJ SUTHERLAND
JENNIFER L. GOLDSWORTHY



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.

What Are We Waiting For?

My brother-in-law opened the bottom drawer of my sister's bureau and lifted out a tissue-wrapped package. "This," he said, "is not a slip. This is lingerie." He discarded the tissue and handed me the slip. It was exquisite: silk, handmade, and trimmed with a cobweb of lace. The price tag with an astronomical figure was still attached. "Jan bought it the first time we went to New York eight or nine years ago. She never wore it. She was saving it for a special occasion. Well, I guess this is the special occasion."

He took the slip from me and put it on the bed with the other clothes we were taking to the funeral home. His hands lingered on the soft material for a moment. He slammed the drawer shut and turned to me. "Don't ever save anything for a special occasion. Every day you're alive is a special occasion."

I remembered those words through the funeral and the days that followed when I helped him attend to all the sad chores that follow an unexpected death. I thought about them on the plane returning home. I thought about all the things she hadn't seen or heard or done. I thought about the things that she had done without realizing that they were special.

I still think about his words and how they've changed my life. I read more and dust less. I sit on the deck and admire the view without fussing about the weed in the garden. I spend more time with my family and friends and less time in committee meetings. Whenever possible, life should be a pattern of experience to savor, not endure. I try to recognize those moments now and cherish them. I don't save anything. We use our good china for every special event, such as losing a pound, getting the sink unstopped, or discovering the first camellia blossom. I wear my good blazer to the market if I feel like it.

I don't save my good perfume for special parties. "Someday" and "one of these days" are losing their grip on my vocabulary. If it's worth seeing, hearing, or doing, I want to see, hear, and do it now.

I am not sure what my sister would have done had she known that she wouldn't be here for the tomorrows we all take for granted. I think she would have called family members and a few close friends. She might have called a few former friends to apologize and mend fences for past squabbles. It's these little things left undone that would make me angry if I knew my hours were limited, angry because I put off seeing good friends, angry because I hadn't written certain letters that I intend to write, angry and sorry that I didn't tell my husband and daughter often enough how much I truly love them. I am trying not to put off, hold back, or save anything that would add laughter and luster to our lives. Every morning when I open my eyes, I tell myself that it's a special day.

Ann Wells
TCF Laguna Niguel, CA
In Memory of my sister, Jan

Washing the Family Car

As the water began to bead across the hard black surface, my mind slipped into a memory. Back to a time when a smile could fix the pain and mortality was not questioned. You and I played during the dreary task of washing the family car. Rinsing turned into a water fight. Soapy sponges became weapons, and upside down buckets served as our fortress.





THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



(continued from last page)

This dull chore became an adventure, a game shared only by you and I. Drenched, the giggles slowly subsided and we turned to complete the more serious side of our labor. We began to dry off the car. As the memory faded, so did my smile. With forlorn my mind came back to the present. I had my own serious task to complete.

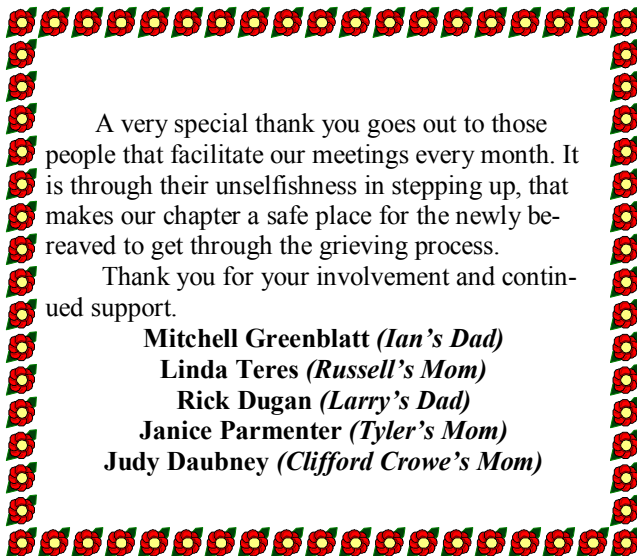
So I picked up a towel to dry off your headstone.

Adele Rosales
TCF Ventura, CA
In Memory of my sister, Anita

Grandparents Remembrance:

We are the grieving grandparents, the shepherds of our children and grandchildren's lives. Our grief is twofold and at times we feel powerless to help. We seek to comfort our children in the depths of their grief and yet we need the time and space to face our own broken hearts. We have been robbed of the special tender touch a grandparent shares with a grandchild, and we have lost a symbol of our immortality. As we walk by our child's side, we both give and draw strength. We reach into their hearts to comfort them, and when they reach out to us in their distress, we begin the journey to heal together. We continue to be their guardians. We allow traditions to change to accommodate their loss. We support the new ones, which symbolize the small steps on their journey. It is in their healing that our hearts find comfort.

Susan Mackey
TCF, Rutland, VT



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)**

Goodnight, Sweet Son

The young mother held her newborn son close to her breast and stroked the wisps of his blonde hair back from his forehead. She felt his soft, baby skin under her fingers and sang him a lullaby. "Goodnight, sweet son," she whispered. She kissed him gently on the forehead and lay him on his tummy in the crib.

The baby grew to boyhood and played little league baseball. He was catcher for his team and loved the mask and kneepads he had to wear. The baseball gear made him feel "in charge" of the team. He felt good that he could throw the baseball to anyone on the team and get it directly to that player. When his mother tucked him into bed at night, he told her all about the game and relived the thrill of it all again. This little blonde haired boy was his mother's youngest son. He had two older brothers, and a younger sister. His mother stroked back the hair on his forehead from his boyish face. She kissed him softly on his white brow and whispered, "Goodnight, sweet son."

He joined Boy Scouts and worked hard to earn all the merit badges he could. He and his brothers competed to see who would get his badge first. He was proud when his mother pinned the badges onto his shirt at the Boy Scout banquet. He was so excited and loved telling his mother about the adventures as she tucked him into bed. His mother stroked his forehead, now changing from childhood to teenager. She kissed him and said, "Goodnight, sweet son."

In high school, the young man played tennis. He was good at it. He loved the game and won the tennis championship for his district.

He asked his mother one night, "Can you stroke my hair like you did when I was little?" She sat beside him, listening to his dreams about tennis and life. She stroked his hair from the forehead as she had done so many times before, and noticed beginning hints of a beard forming. "Goodnight, sweet son," she whispered, and kissed him good night on his cheek.

Some years later, the son was in a bad automobile accident. About five years following the accident, he got very sick. He developed a disease there is no cure for. He came home for his mother to take care of him. Each night, she tucked him in just like she had done all his life. She pushed back the hair that had begun to fall out. When she stroked his forehead, it was hot and dry and the disease had made his skin wrinkled, and look like the skin of a 70 year old person, not the 28 year old man that he was. She kissed his cheek and whispered, "Goodnight, sweet son."

He grew too sick to stay at home. The ambulance took him to the hospital. One cold, grey, December day, a few days before Christmas, he got very sick. His mother was at his bedside and helped him get out of bed one last time.

(continued on next page)



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



(continued from last page)

He wanted to show her he could do it. Then she tucked him in and stroked back his few wisps of remaining hair as she sang to him. He closed his eyes as she stroked his forehead. She kissed his cheek and whispered, "Goodnight, sweet son." He died about thirty minutes later.

At the funeral service in the church, the mother rose up to see him one last time. She leaned over the coffin, stroked back his hair, kissed his cheek and whispered, "Goodnight, sweet son."

*Antoinette S. Murphy
TCF, Sugar Land, SW Houston, TX*

HOLIDAY HOPE

I have now survived over a decade of Thanksgivings and Christmases since my daughter Nina's death in 1995. It feels surreal that it has been that long since my dark-haired angel has not been present to share her infectious enthusiasm for the holidays. Admittedly, if not for my journaling, I have little recollection of the first two. Writing allows me to see how far I have come since the bleakness of my soul those first early holidays. In the midst of a "grief storm", when I feel that I have taken one step forward and two steps back, I only need to read what I have written to see that I have made much progress, something that in early grief I did not believe was possible. When in such a dark abyss, it is almost impossible to imagine that there is even a glimmer of hope and light.

The first Thanksgiving is a blur. Whether we went out for dinner or spent it with family or nuked a frozen dinner, I haven't a clue. As no one else seems to remember, I would surmise that it was the same for everyone else as well. The first Christmas without Nina was spent trying desperately to make sure that nothing was going to change. The trees would be decorated, cards would be sent, gifts bought, I believed that my daughter would not want us to be sad and that the holiday should and would play out as usual. It almost worked. But the effort of trying to achieve such an impossible task took its toll; coming home from my parents' home Christmas Day evening, the sight from the rearview mirror of the empty spot in the back seat next to my son where Nina should have been playfully sparring with her brother, was too much to bear. I spent weeks recovering from such an exhausting charade.



I learned a lesson that first Christmas because the second Christmas "after" I gave into the emptiness and pain that I felt. The artificial tree sat forlornly unadorned right where it was assembled in the middle of the living room; it seemed to symbolize the somber mood of that second holiday season. I vocalized to my family and friends that year about what I could and could not do, would and would not do, I used what I called the "five-minute rule", which meant however I felt five minutes before a holiday happening would be the deciding factor whether I attended or not. The respect for my feelings they showed me that year was the best gift they could ever have given me.

However, Christmas #3 seemed to mark a turning point. The visible evidence involved my Christmas Village. Though an inexpensive Department 59 wannabe, it was loved by my children, especially Nina. From the time she was very young, she imaginatively played with the ceramic people for hours at a time. Even as a teenager, she wanted to know when I would be putting up the Village, as it was her favorite part of our holiday décor.

The first two Christmases, I made a decision to never put up our Christmas Village again. The memory of Nina's interactions with the Village was too painful to comprehend. However, that third Christmas, as I was unpacking the few holiday items that I would display, I came upon the boxes holding the Village. I



slowly opened the containers of precious memories and one by one removed and unwrapped each piece. Visions of Christmases past raced through my mind. This year, the images of Nina's wide-eyed childlike wonder and excitement each time the Village came out of its year-long resting place brought a genuine smile to my face.

I brought the Village upstairs and arranged it on the ledge of the bay window, where it always had been. I sat in the dark next to the lit village houses and watched the mechanical skaters on the make-believe pond twirl and glide on the mirrored "ice". Even through my tears, I felt the warm glow of beautiful one-of-a-kind memories resurface. I realized at that moment that a corner had been turned. Whereas the first two Christmases I was unable to set up the Christmas Village because of the memories, I was now setting it up for the same reason—the memories! But with a twist this year, what I had once perceived as a painful memory, with time had become a precious memory as I remembered the delight and joy the Village brought to Nina each Christmas of her life.

(continued on next page)



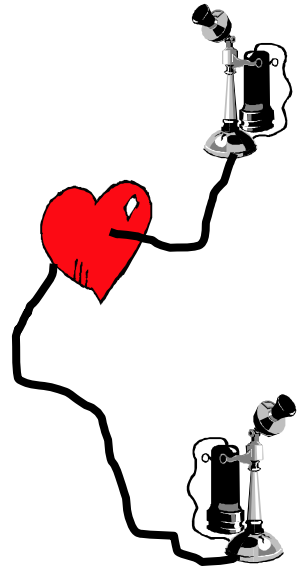
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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.

(continued from last page)

The Just-Right Gift

Each holiday season following the third one has been gentler. We have gradually brought back some of our old traditions intermingled with the new. Though we are sadly aware that someone so loved is missing from our family gatherings, the beauty of the season can now overshadow some of the sorrow. We will never forget Nina and she will forever be included in our holiday celebrations. I put up a special little tree to exclusively hold the ornaments I bought each of the 15 years of her life; mixed in with the angel and butterfly ornaments I have since bought symbolizing her “eternal life”. We light a candle and set her picture beside it, and we speak freely of our memories of her. The TCF Worldwide Candle Lighting program our chapter has each year is an especially important time for us to step away from the hubbub of the season, to reflect, remember, and bring Nina’s spirit with us into the holidays.

Though the holidays can never be as they were, we who are further along in our grief journey can offer the gift of hope with the knowledge that with time, patience, support and compassionate friendship, you will find new ways (when you are ready) to bring a measure of joy and light back into the holiday season again. Wishing you peace, hope, solace and understanding...

With gentle thoughts,

Cathy L. Seehuetter
TCF, St. Paul, MN
In Memory of my daughter, Nina

Have you ever tried to wrap a present? I don’t mean one of those nice, neat, square boxes with something inside it. I mean, a present, one of those oddly shaped, too expensive, but “just right” things that leaps off the shelf and into your arms in the middle of August!

How come the just right things are never easy to wrap? They have odd little corners or big, poky edges that peek through the paper or start little tears that eventually become big rips and you have to start all over again. They have slippery sides and the paper wiggles around and the ends don’t meet no matter how large I cut the paper. The tape won’t stick to those weird-shaped places that I think tape needs to go, and no one can disguise the shapes on those just right presents.



Presents are very special in our family. They are the source of much discussion, stress and anguish. They are also a wonderful source of joy. Years ago, our family was normal in our pursuit of the just right gift for each member of the household. We would spend the prerequisite number of days dashing from store to store, in search of the just-right gift, the one where the recipients name just seemed to be “written on it.”

Some of us were more creative than others, and some of the gifts reflected not only the love with which they were given, but a sense of style, creativity or humor.

(continued on next page)



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



(continued from last page)

Those gifts were easily wrapped and were often so beautifully gift wrapped that no one wanted to tear into them.

So, gift-giving became a long and tedious affair at our house. No paper could be torn as one unwrapped one's gift. We would "oooh" and "aaahh" as each present made its debut, and then the paper would be carefully smoothed, folded and put away for the next gift giving occasion. (Some would call this cheap, but we preferred to think of it as recycling.)

Gift wrap wasn't the only thing that had to be handled gently, however. Ribbon was also a source of ritual in our house. Once everyone had admired them, bows were simply plucked off the packages and stored in a zip-locked bag. Most of the bows still had the original sticky-back label on them, we simply double folded tape on the back. These bows were still in their original condition!

Boxes, too, had their custom. Long before recycling became popular, our family simply used and reused the same boxes year after year. After awhile, you couldn't believe anything you read on any box! I once got really excited about receiving a blender only to discover my mother had packed a year's supply of new underwear inside. Shoe boxes were particularly popular although no one in our family had received shoes as a gift for years! Shoeboxes can hold all sorts of oddly shaped presents, and they are pretty easy to wrap, even for the butterfingers in the family.

But then one holiday season, no one thought much about gifts. We could barely breathe, let alone go shopping. The thought of being happy was beyond us. Our family had become lost in the despair of new grief and the only thing that sparkled that year were the tears in our eyes. Gifts? Who could think of gifts when the only thing we wanted was a return to yesterday. If you couldn't give us that, then don't bother! From pumpkin time on, we could not bear the thought of surviving the holidays. How could we possibly endure the empty chair, the empty space, the emptiness? What gifts could possibly ease that kind of pain?

We tried. We tried to go shopping, but all we saw were things we didn't need to buy anymore. Everywhere we looked, we saw only what we didn't have. The emptiness and sadness echoed in every store, in every window, in every face. Everyone else looked happy! And that seemed to hurt us even more. Why couldn't we find that aisle marked "Happiness?" Where were the good times? How could we wrap those and keep them alive forever?

That first holiday season wasn't so great. We did manage to stuff a turkey (I don't remember with what, however!) and I think we did decorate something.

We dreaded the annual family gift exchange, though. How would we keep from sobbing and ruining the gift wrap? Who cared about gifts and turkeys and traditions when ours were gone!

It was that first holiday in "the valley," however, when we discovered the importance and endurance of love. Lost forever, or so it seemed, love came back as we struggled to survive. Unable to think clearly or rationally, unable to survive more than a few minutes at the malls, we did our gift giving differently.

As we sat together at the family gathering, we began to remember. Memories came painfully at first, but slowly as the tears trickled down our faces, they turned from painful ones to the funny one... to the look we loved so well, to the stupid remarks once said, to the silly things once done. Words and memories came cascading out of our hearts, all shared within the family circle. We laughed. We cried. We remembered and we shared.

The next season still found us almost unable to shop carefully. We would still forget where we parked the car and nothing on the shelves seemed quite right. How long does grief last? Were we doomed to suffer forever the pains and sadness of death? **Would we ever be happy again?**

That holiday, the gifts and the givers began to change. No longer able to face the world and its concerns, we turned inward and fought to find some internal peace. In that search, the just right gifts began to emerge.

We found a table centerpiece that would be just right for my sister and her husband. They entertained a great deal and this would be perfect! It was a plastic-pineapple lamp, battery operated and surrounded by tiny fruits with little twinkle lights inside. When turned on, it glowed with a wondrous light, casting shadows of its leaves on the wall! It was so bad that it was just right! It seemed to "speak" to us and we couldn't resist its call. It seemed to sum up everything we felt, plastic, ridiculous, hopeless and out of place. We bought it.

Wrapping it gave us one of our first real laughs. We couldn't find a box for it. We couldn't find any appropriate paper either, and what color ribbon does one put on a plastic-pineapple lamp? We ended up putting it in a brown-paper sack and tied it with a string. So much for tradition.

It was the hit of the holiday season, and it still graces their table now and then. No one understands the significance of that awful plastic but our family remembers it as the first source flight in our newly reclaimed life. We know heavens are enjoying it as much as we do! And now, we have a new tradition. It has become a wonderful game for all of us.

(continued on next page)



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



(continued from last page)

We search all year round for the just right gift for each other, the one that says, "I thought enough to send the very weirdest, awfulest, strangest, tackiest gift I could find." We love each other and know that no earthly gift can ever match the gift of caring and love that we share with each other.

Gifts have ranged from a twenty-five-pound, green cement alligator to a stuffed, pink pig that oinks "Jingle Bells." We have searched until we have found a shell lamp that sings, a pitcher shaped like a radish and a flock of pink flamingos. Each gift reflects our family philosophy of pure, honest joy. While we used to search for a gift that impressed, now we know that a gift of love and laughter outlasts the sadness.

You can choose joy again. We can remember all the awfulness, the pain, the hurt, the emptiness of a loved one's death. Or, we can choose to celebrate the joy and the light they brought to our lives. We can count what we no longer have or cherish the wonder of the love we once knew. When we choose joy, we celebrate the love.

So, if you cannot face gift-giving this holiday season, try the simple gift of memory. And once you are comfortable with memories, enjoy them.

Joy is everywhere and so is sadness. They do not cancel each other, but rather enhance the light. There is no light without shadow, but no shadow can happen without the light.

Wrap that up...and save the paper, the ribbon and the box for next year.

Darcie Sims

This article was reprinted from "Bereavement and the Holidays", a "Best of Bereavement" compilation containing stories, articles and poems about coping with grief during the holidays.

Excerpted from Bereavement Magazine 1987 - 2000, published by Bereavement Publishing Inc.

Butterflies in November

Thanksgiving was Chad's favorite holiday. He loved the food and the football games without the hassle of all the Christmas goings on. I have so many memories of Thanksgivings past. I remember the last Thanksgiving we were together. Chad called me from Alabama and said he and Mandy were on their way to Atlanta and to please save him something to eat. I said "Of course I will save you something to eat, but I thought you were eating with Mandy's family?" Chad said "Mom, I think they make their stuffing with GRITS....need I say more? Just save me some."

That really made me feel good. He loved my Southern Cornbread Dressing, turkey, ham, and all the fixins.

We enjoyed so much just being together and preparing the dinner and enjoying the meal.

Chad died in September of 1996. Thanksgiving came way too fast. For those who have gone through their first Thanksgiving you know the feelings I am describing. Everything seems to go in slow motion with the inability to move forward....the heaviness and the physical and mental fatigue....the pain in your heart, the lump in your throat and the tears in your eyes. No, I did not want Thanksgiving to come this year or ever again. My daughter was away at school and I knew she would be coming home. My mother was struggling with lung cancer and I knew there would not be many more Thanksgivings with her. What do I do? I think we all decided that if we could just go through the motions it would be better than doing nothing and I think we all did it for each other.

I cried the whole time I was preparing the meal. I do not remember anything other than the tears. Several friends wanted to join us for Thanksgiving that year and they volunteered to bring a turkey and dessert. I readily accepted their offer.

We gathered together at noon, my husband said the blessing (which I really had a hard time with) and then I wanted to read a poem in Chad's memory. I asked everyone if they would bear with me as I read this. Several times I could not speak. The words would not come, but I was determined that I was going to read this poem. When I neared the end of the poem I felt the lump in my throat and I knew I was going to start crying out loud. As soon as I finished I got up from the table and left the room.

There was dead silence. No one spoke a word. Then I heard one of our friends say "Look at that butterfly. I can't believe there is a butterfly this time of year. And he looks as though he wants to come in. He is hitting himself against the glass door."

My tears turned from sadness to tears of joy. I knew that was Chad. I knew he had come to get some of my Cornbread Dressing. The only regret that I have is that I did not let him come in. I knew if I went back to the dining room and told my friends that was Chad they really would think I was crazy. If I had to do it over again....it wouldn't matter, but at that time I had not gotten involved with TCF or did not know another bereaved parent....so to me my "crazy thoughts" were just that and I thought they probably were not normal.

We do not have butterflies in Atlanta in late November. I choose to believe it was a sign from my son. This will be our fifth Thanksgiving without him. The pain has softened. My tears do not come as often. The memories are sweeter. My heart is a little lighter. My love for my son is as strong as ever. I feel his presence in everything I do. I do not fear I will forget anymore. I know he is with me.

(continued on next page)



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



(continued from last page)

Getting Through the Holidays

This Thanksgiving my plan is to make a large pan of my southern cornbread dressing along with Chad's favorite ham recipe and take these to the hospital to share with my daughter, who is an RN, and all the staff in the PICU at Children's Hospital-Egleston Campus and the parents who are spending Thanksgiving with their children in the Intensive Care Unit. For some, this will be their last Thanksgiving with their own children.

The staff at the Children's Hospital work very long and stressful hours. They are away from their own families on this holiday to take care of the children who are in the hospital. I feel this is a way I can help others and also include some precious memories of my Thanksgivings past with my own son and daughter. I am looking forward to this very much and I am thankful I can be with my daughter.

I wish for those of you who are facing your First Thanksgiving that you can read this and know that it will get better. You will find joy again. There is hope. The love will always remain and your child will always be with you. Of course, it is not like we hoped it would be but it can be good. Our children will always be a "present" part of our lives....they will not be forgotten.

I pray you find peace this holiday season. I pray your sorrows will soften and your memories bring smiles. I pray you will be able to enjoy your other family members. I pray you know you are not alone.

**Jayne Newton
TCF, Atlanta, GA
In Memory of my son,
Chad Gordon 5/21/72 - 9/3/96 and All Our
Children**

Bereaved parents and their children have fundamentally different ways of anticipating and getting through the holidays. These differences can lead to misunderstandings for both parents and their children which can result in additional burdens for already overwhelmed family members. By understanding these differences parents and their children can find ways to help each other as they all struggle to find their way after a child's death.

Parents, particularly in the first years following their child's death, dread facing the holidays. Grieving consumes their energy leaving them with little available for usual, daily events and even less for the extraordinary efforts necessary to prepare for and go through the holidays. Parents see and hear reminders of upcoming events which continuously remind them how much they have lost with the death of their child. It is difficult for parents to go on with the usual "normal" family rituals like Christmas when there is so little "normalcy" in their lives.

Many parents would like to simply skip the holidays. They grieve for their dead child and for the life that is permanently changed by the death. They anticipate with anxiety how they will get through the upcoming Christmas and how they will be able to provide love and support for their surviving children and for each other. They are preoccupied with how tragically their life has changed. During this time parents take little comfort in hearing that holidays will get easier with passing years or that their fears about the holidays will likely be worse than the reality of living through the events.

In contrast to their parents, children grieve intermittently. They go through moments of intense grieving in which they miss and long for their dead sibling. These periods of grief are followed by intervals of relief. Unlike their parents, children look for tangible signs and symbols that signify that the family will survive in spite of their sibling's death. They need evidence that their family will survive. Tangible markers such as celebrating Christmas and birthdays, and having presents to touch and hold onto are the kinds of things that help children maintain hope that their family will grow strong again.

There are ways parents can plan to get through holidays and help their surviving children to be an important part of creating new family traditions. What can you do to help yourself and your family to get through the holiday season? First it is important to focus on how you can be spared from unnecessary stress, while at the same time providing your surviving children with hope for a time when your family can find meaning, purpose and periods of happiness again. You can do this by keeping some of the old traditions and by creating new ones that embrace the memory of your dead child or sibling. You need to determine what is essential to do and to eliminate unnecessary holiday rituals.

Other Area TCF Chapters

- MA/CT Border Towns Chapter (Dudley, Webster areas)
- Chapter Leaders: Paul & Anne Mathieu
- (508) 248-7144.....ampm@charter.net
- ...
- South Shore Chapter (Hingham, Weymouth areas)
- Martha Berman
- (781) 337-8649.....mmartha1@comcast.net
- Worcester Chapter
- Chapter Leader: Phyllis Simas
- (508) 845-1462.....mrspbs1@verizon.net
- ...
- Central Middlesex Chapter (Needham, Concord)
- Chapter Leader: Carol Gray-Cole
- (781) 444-1091.....cgc603@aol.com



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



(continued from last page)

For some of you this means forgoing sending cards this year. Other parents may use the act of writing a holiday letter to inform friends of their family tragedy.

It helps to talk with other bereaved parents who are farther along in their grief about things that helped them get through the holidays and how this struggle changed over time. For instance, some of you may find comfort in going away during holidays, while others of you will find comfort in staying home. You may find using catalogs for Christmas shopping works well. During this time, don't hesitate to ask for help from friends and neighbors with tasks like getting a tree, trimming it and wrapping gifts. Baby sitters can help with these tasks and involve the children who benefit from the physical acts of preparing for Christmas.

If preparing the Christmas dinner requires too much concentration and planning, find restaurants or markets that sell cooked turkeys with all the trimmings. One phone call can relieve you from worrying needlessly about how to do it all. Some families have special candles they keep and light each year to represent the spirit of the dead child. Other families hang all of the children's stockings to signify the child's permanent place in the family. Children enjoy choosing a book or toy for children in hospitals, day care centers or schools as a way of bringing some happiness to others in their brother or sister's name. I have found that bereaved children often have wonderful and original ways of remembering their sibling. Invite them to help create new traditions in the family. While it is impossible to "get back to normal" because that "normal" ended with your child's death, it is possible and necessary to create a "new normal" that will become familiar and comforting as time goes on.

Nancy S. Hogan, PH. D.

Nancy Hogan RN, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at the University of Miami School of Nursing where she teaches, conducts research and publishes on the parent and sibling bereavement process. Since the mid 1970s she has worked with TCF parent and sibling bereavement groups. She authored the TCF tape "Impact of Grief on Marriage" in 1981, and has spoken at many national and international bereavement conferences. Dr. Hogan conducts research aimed at understanding the uniquely similar and different ways bereaved parents become survivors following a child's death. She is inviting TCF parents to contact her for more information about a parental bereavement study she is conducting. She can be reached at University of Miami, School of Nursing, 5801 Red Road, Coral Gables, FL 305-284-1922, Fax 305-284-5686, e-mail NSH6761@aol.com.

The Gate to Tomorrow

There is a gate that each of us has unknowingly passed through. This gate opens only one way.....once we have passed through this gate we cannot return to the other side. Each of us stepped through the gate at a different time and in a different way. This gate opens to the world of parents whose children have died; it is their gate to every tomorrow.

There is no other place that compares with life in this world beyond the gate; there is no sorrow like the sorrow inside the gate. The numbing pain and perpetual agony we experience when first stepping through this gate are so overwhelming that we often don't immediately realize that there will be no return. But we will never return to life before the gate.

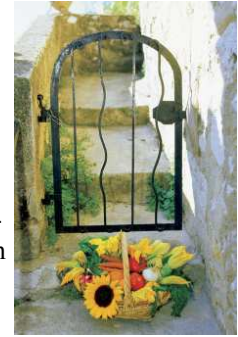
The new world inside the gate is populated with friends who are strangers and strangers who are friends.

Our perspective on life has changed forever. Few of our friends from life before the gate will linger with us now; these people are now the strangers. Our pain is all encompassing; they have lives to live, things to do, plans to make, happiness to capture. We are no longer part of their picture. Rare is the friend who stands by us inside the gate.....stands by us until one of us dies and leaves the world inside the gate.

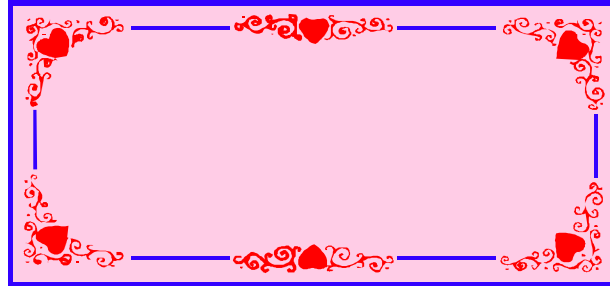
The strangers who are now friends live inside the gate with us. Some have just come through the gate; others have been here a long, long time. But these strangers who are now friends share our experience; they understand our need to talk about our children, each life and each death. They applaud our tiny advances toward acceptance and serenity and peace. Although we can never go back to life before the gate, we now have our compassionate friends.....once strangers but now kindred souls who share our lives and our world.

Life will not be the same again, yet life can be good again. Inside the gate we will each find ourselves with the help of our compassionate friends. They listen carefully to stories about our child. They know our child's name better than they know our name. And that's how we want it to be....remember our children. Remember with us.

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



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



*This newsletter is printed
through the generosity of
The Copy Stop
Milford, MA*



Light a candle for all
children who have died

**Worldwide
Candle
Lighting®**

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

Second Sunday in December
7 PM Around the Globe

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

