



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 2014

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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 18th December 16th

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 25th December 30th

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. ©2014

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

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Ed Motuzas 508/473-4239

Senior Advisors

* Rick & Peg Dugan 508/877-1363

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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
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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.

- Mrs. Sue Sannicandro in loving memory of her son **Frank E. Topham**
- Mr. & Mrs. George Calimeris in loving memory of their son **Gregory P. Calimeris** on his birthday September 23rd.
- Mr. & Mrs. Charles Clarke Sr. in loving memory of their daughter **Cynthia A. Renaud** on her birthday September 13th and in loving memory of their son **Charles M. Clarke Jr.**
- Mrs. Tracy Dulleo-Juliano in loving memory of her son **Christopher Marc Dulleo** as his daughter begins First Grade.
- Mr. & Mrs. Michael Boudreau in loving memory of their son **Nicholas L. Boudreau**.
- Mr. & Mrs. Earl Pearlman in loving memory of their son **Marc R. Pearlman** on his birthday December 14th.
- Mr. & Mrs. Harold Murphy in loving memory of their son **Michael Patrick Murphy**.
- Mrs. Joan Hennigan in loving memory of her son **Dennis M. Hennigan** on his anniversary November 23rd, who is greatly missed and forever loved.
- Mr. & Mrs. Robert Eldredge in loving memory of their son **Kevin R. Eldredge** on his birthday November 14th. "Love you and miss you every day."
- Alice Horrigan in loving memory of her daughter **Donna M. McHugh** on her birthday October 16th.
- Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Lovejoy in loving memory of their son **Jonathan Bret Lovejoy** on his birthday November 17th.





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

- LEAH CATHERINE TEPPER
- MATTHEW ALLEN BERTULLI
- KRISTIN L. McGRATH
- ERICA BLEAKNEY
- ALAN R. STUCHINS
- LAURENCE PONTREMOLI
- SEAN PATRICK COTTER
- CYNTHIA ZOTTOLI
- CHRISTOPHER STEVENS
- CHRISTOPHER JAKSTIS
- MICHAEL P. McLAUGHLIN
- DENNIS M. HENNIGAN
- KAI PARKER REZENDES
- DONNA ANN WOLFSON

December

- CHRISTINA M. ROSSETTI
- LARRY DUGAN
- STEPHEN GRILLO
- AARON STEVEN GRAY
- JAMES S. CARPENTER VI
- KEVIN HOLLAND
- DANNY FERGUSON
- JENNIFER L. GOLDSWORTHY
- GERALDINE DiCARLO

Birthdays

November

- JOHN GARVEY
- SCOTT A. LAMONT
- DIXON BERGMAN
- MICHAEL BARRY
- KEVIN R. ELDRIDGE
- ALICIA D. JACKMAN
- JONATHAN BRET LOVEJOY
- HOLLY L. MACKENZIE
- CHAD ARTHUR HOLBROOK

December

- LAUREN THIBEAU FLANAGAN
- LISA RANDALL
- PETER W. DALEY
- MARC R. PEARLMAN
- RYAN SEAN BARTLETT
- KEVIN S. JOHNSON
- JAMES S. CARPENTER VI
- DANNY FERGUSON
- R.J. SUTHERLAND
- WANDA KATRINA LUCAS





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.

A YEAR AGO MY BROTHER DIED

The ground lays bare, the snow descends, could it be that life now ends? Oh, no my friend, for nature knows that winter snows hold the promise of spring.

N. Haley

My brother, Bob, died on January 24 last year. At times, I wish I could just forget his death because of the pain I experience; and yet I know how important it is to feel all of my emotions. The memory of Bob, who he was and our relationship, is an important part of my life. I cannot change the fact that he is dead, but I can keep the memory of him close to me now and in the years to come. Acknowledging this has helped me through the stages of grieving, especially in the past few weeks as the anniversary of his death was approaching. So I dedicate this in memory of Bob, a very special brother.

In reviewing the literature of grief and loss, I was surprised to find how little has been written about the loss of a sibling. The death of a brother or sister is a major loss as this relationship is most often the longest and closest relationship in our lives.

When a young child suffers the loss of a sister or brother, it is often confusing and mysterious. Sometimes the child experiences feelings of guilt that he caused the death. Sibling rivalry is a recognized fact of the human existence, and it is not uncommon for the child to wish for the death of a sister or brother, or at least their permanent departure from the family. In cases of accidental death, the child might feel that they should have died instead. The parents, often feeling consumed with their own grief, might be unaware of these fears or concerns. It is important to explore all of the positive and negative feelings a child might have toward the deceased sibling

For an adult, death of a sibling can have an emotional impact that takes a variety of forms. In many family situations today, adult siblings' lives have taken them in different directions, and the early childhood connections may fade. In other families, the ties have remained close.

There is, however, a profound feeling of sadness when an adult brother or sister dies, as if one has lost a part of himself. The loss encompasses a connection to the past, of common experiences, of parents and childhood memories. As adults, siblings often find how different their interests and personalities may be. Regardless of these differences, the connecting bonds of parents and childhood experiences remain. Loss of a brother or sister also is an inescapable reminder of one's own vulnerability and of the fragile gift of one's own life. If parents are alive at the time one loses an adult sibling, grief may be diverted to concern for the parents' well-being. This might delay the grieving process and its healing effect.

In looking back over the past year, I recognize the stages of grieving I have experienced as those defined in the study of loss. The time is described, in general, as one of emotional turmoil and confusion. I recall days I would feel particularly good and there would be a sudden onset of intense sadness, tears and other overwhelming feelings, which seemed to come out of the blue. As the intensity subsides, depression follows as the realization sets in that death is final and irreversible. Acceptance eventually comes, and the pain begins to diminish. I have experienced so many feelings and have found myself querying the way I feel, looking for answers, as I don't always understand why I feel the way I do. Having experienced this deep personal loss, I also have been acutely aware of the importance of other parts of my life, my family, my work, all of which, in some unexplainable way have provided a sense of balance and restoration of order.

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Bob was a bright, funny and loving brother. I will always miss him. In closing, I share the words of Helen Keller that have been of special importance to me at this time.

“What we have once enjoyed we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.”

***Bud Coglianesse
Burr Ridge, IL***

Suicide: Changing the Language

Once in a while I write a post regarding the language of suicide. I really hope that people will read it because it is very important for us to spread the word on how we speak of suicide. I've been thinking about it a lot again lately, especially since the two-year anniversary of my stepson's suicide was just on June 2nd, and wanted to share my thoughts in the hope that someone will read it and that that someone will also educate someone, when given the chance, to help us with the mission to change how we say it:

SUICIDE: It is a death that has so many layers and agendas that it adds another whole level of difficulty to an already terrible loss. Using the word "committed" before suicide is like fingernails down a chalkboard to someone who has lost a loved one to suicide. We are trying to change the language around suicide and no longer say "committed", and I don't care for "completed" suicide myself (we wouldn't say that someone "completed" cancer or "completed" a car accident). The reason that "committed" is a difficult term for the survivors left behind after a suicide has occurred is that "committed" generally indicates that what happened was a crime...from back in the Dark Ages when families were even imprisoned when a family member died of suicide (the stigma that still remains following a death by suicide is difficult enough and I pray one day there will be more understanding and education surrounding that as well).

Death by suicide occurs usually by a person who is in so much pain emotionally and sometimes physically that they see that as the only option left to end that unbearable pain. And they truly believe in their heart that they are helping their families by leaving this world, that their loved ones are better off without them. It is not the "coward's way out", it is a pain that those of us without that level of hopelessness and darkness cannot begin to comprehend.

Died "by" suicide. Died "of" suicide. Died "as a result of" suicide. Died "from" suicide. "Lost to" suicide; and even "took their own life" (because that is a reality) but, please, never "committed". Help those who have suffered this unthinkable loss by changing the way you and others say it. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for reading this.

***Cathy Seehuetter
TCF, St. Paul, MN***

Halloween Memories

Most children enjoy Halloween, the costumes, the candy, the parties, trick or treat, the decorations and so much more. My son looked forward to Halloween with great anticipation. Until he reached the fourth grade, Todd was happy to pick out a costume at the discount store, usually the current movie or television monster.

He came home from school in fourth grade and told me that there was going to be a costume contest and he really wanted to have a unique costume. I asked him what he wanted to be, and I will never forget his response: "I want to be a vampire, Mom. A really cool vampire." So, I talked to a friend of mine who was into stage production, and we went to her house the night before the contest.

She had a vampire cape, a vampire body suit, a vampire collar and great makeup. Todd loved it. My friend stopped at the house early the next morning and applied the makeup and did the finishing touches on Todd's costume. He looked just like the vampires in the movies. He was so pleased. He really wanted to win first place in his class. I dropped him at school and told him to have a wonderful time. He was elated.

As the day progressed, I wondered how he was doing. He had never wanted to win a prize before; what if he didn't get first place in his class? I worried about him, knowing that his feelings were easily hurt by cruel children and sometimes by cruel teachers. He called me at 3:30 to let me know he was home. I could hear excitement in his voice, and I asked him how he did.

"Mom, you won't believe this," he said in a serious, low toned voice. "What happened?" I asked, now wondering about the day's events. "I won first place, Mom. First place in the whole school. I can't wait for Halloween. Wait till Grandpa sees me. He won't even recognize me. I even got a certificate for first place. I'm putting it up in my room." I was so happy that tears welled in my eyes. My son had tried his best, and he had won. He had put himself out there and he wasn't disappointed, disillusioned or discouraged.

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That was the first of many accomplishments in my son's life. He went on to win in track in high school, restore a 1965 GTO from the ground up and receive numerous trophies and awards. He attained his BS and MBA and was successful and respected in business. He was a great father to his children, and his love for them was very deep. He never hesitated to tell them he loved them and how proud he was of them. He was a wonderful parent. He was always an amazing son. His death left a scar on my soul and a hole in my heart.



But his first success is forever in my mind. The little certificate which he brought home and hung on his bedroom wall is a treasure of his wonderful childhood. Halloween is still a happy holiday, and it is one of the few which I enjoy. I thank my son for that and for all the joy he gave me in his short 35 years of life.

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

And For This I Give Thanks

I am acutely aware that autumn is here. As I write this, the air coming through my window is crisper and the leaves are taking on the golden and scarlet hues of the season. The shorts and tee shirts, which were the summer mainstay of the neighborhood children, are being replaced by sweats and flannels. Pumpkins are replacing pink flamingos as lawn ornaments. The beauty of nature is at its most spectacular. It is unmistakably here, welcome or not...



This will be my fifth autumn, to be followed by my fifth holiday season without my daughter Nina. I find that I am far enough along in my grief to find memories to smile about now, but still close enough to remember those first few years and the piercing stab of pain in my heart that went along with them. Halloween, with memories of the costume party she threw when she was 10 years old, the major production she made out of what she would wear as a trick-or-treater, and as she got older, her enjoyment in passing out candy to neighborhood goblins. Then came Thanksgiving, one of my favorites. I liked the idea of family and friends gathering together with no other purpose other than eating until you nearly exploded and being thankful for each other and the blessings of the past year.

No presents required, just the joy of family togetherness and the knowledge that my children were here, all of them. On that first Thanksgiving the empty chair and place at the table seemed to scream out at me that someone precious was missing. And the message of this particular holiday was thankfulness? What on earth could I ever find to be thankful for?



Some TCF parents have memories of being unable to choke down any morsel of food because they were continually trying to choke back tears that first Thanksgiving. Just wanting to curl up in a ball, pull the covers over their heads, and wake up some time in January after the last remnants of the holidays were cleared away. In all honesty, I cannot tell you even one detail of that first one: where I spent it, who was present, where I was, if I cried all day. I remember nothing.

I do remember three months after Nina had died, though. On a visit to my neurologist I tearfully told him of my depression over her death. His response to me was "Why don't you count your blessings rather than your sorrows? Think happy thoughts and maybe you won't feel so sad." I, of course, asked him if he had ever lost a child. He had not obviously. Only someone uneducated in the school of grief would say something like that.

Almost five Thanksgiving's later, have I found reasons to be thankful? I asked myself this question and decided to put pen to paper. I was surprised to say the list was quite lengthy, so I will only share a few of them. I am thankful for:

My loving family, and the welcomed joyful additions in the last few years.

My memory, because now the painful memories are, more often than not, replaced with the beautiful memories of the past, and they were such beautiful memories.

My life, for who else will keep Nina's memory alive? Of course, my family, but they have lives, as they should. I am the self-appointed keeper of my daughter's memory. Nina. The joy of loving her, the privilege of being her mother. Though I wish it had been much longer, I wouldn't trade those 15 ½ years for anything.

Smiling a genuine smile, laughing a hardy laugh, and finding my sense of humor again. I sincerely believe that Nina likes to hear me laugh and that she would want me to find humor in life again.

My sight, because I commented (for the first time in five autumns) on the magnificent colors of the autumn foliage and the grandness of Minnesota's most sumptuous season. I didn't think I'd ever notice again. But I did.





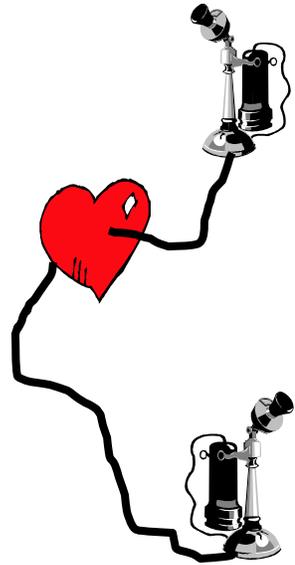
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Phone Friends

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
- 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
- bereavedparents.org
- beyondindigo.com
- childloss.com
- goodgriefresources.com
- griefwatch.com
- GriefNet.org
- healingafterloss.org
- opentohope.com
- pomc.com - *families of murder victims*
- save.org
- survivorsofsuicide.com
- Taps.org - *military death*
- webhealing.com



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The Compassionate Friends, who showed me there is life after the death of a child; who allowed me to express my emotions, listened patiently, understood my pain, and welcomed me into their hearts. They helped salvage what remained of my sanity and I will be eternally grateful.

The opportunity to give back, through TCF meetings and this newsletter. To bring hope to the newly bereaved in the knowledge that it won't always hurt this bad, and that you will make it with the love and support of family and your Compassionate Friends. And, that there will come a time that you too will find things to be thankful for again.

I am told, by those who know, that peace and acceptance are that light we are searching for at the end of the tunnel. Though I find myself still looking for it at times, those further down the grief road have reassured me it will come. Maybe not this Thanksgiving or next, but that it will. And I believe them.

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

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)



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 your e-mail address to: **headly@comcast.net**. This would save a tree and reduce postal cost.

Thanks for the Little While

It was a long time ago, our first holiday season with the empty chair. It was dark and cold, but everything was ready. The table was set, the turkey cooked, the candles lit and the seats filled - except one. I stood at the kitchen sink and wondered how I was going to act as the cheery hostess to family and friends who had gathered to celebrate Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving! What was there to be thankful for this year?! It had been a year of struggle, each day being worse than the last until they all had just blurred into a nightmare. Whoever said, "Time heals all wounds" had never been as mortally wounded as I had! Time had healed nothing! In fact, I think I was suffering more as the weeks and months went by. It was as if I had been frozen in the early days and weeks after the death and only now, months later, was I beginning to thaw. And as I began to defrost out of my icy numbness, it only seemed to hurt more. That didn't make sense, but it was true.

And now, the holiday season had arrived and that only served to send me deeper into the gloom. I found myself wanting to hide, to cancel family gatherings. I wanted to run away. I did not want to shop for gifts, and I certainly did not want to send holiday greetings. A snarl or a frown swept over my face more often than a cheery holiday hello.

I kept thinking of all the things I would never enjoy again: the smell of Mom's pumpkin pie, the happy chatter around the table as Dad carved the turkey, the sweet silliness of his happy grin. The list of what I was missing grew longer and longer each day that I survived. Every day brought new discoveries of the most painful kind.

I kept seeing empty spaces at the table and feeling empty places in my heart. It seemed to hurt more now than it did earlier in my grief. Surely I must be slipping into insanity! I thought it was supposed to get better, not worse!

I had tried to cancel the family celebration, but they wouldn't hear of it! "Oh No!" they said. "We can't miss _____ (whatever I had suggested not doing)." "It wouldn't be the holidays without _____." That was exactly my point! I didn't want the holidays to be here, and I certainly did not want to celebrate anything!

I tried passing off certain family "chores" to other members and once in a while that worked. I decided not to send holiday greetings to anyone, and my gift shopping was limited to catalog browsing and telephone ordering. I couldn't bear the mall crowds, the noise and that horrible, happy holiday music everywhere! Every time I went out, I felt as though I had been assaulted by the Holiday Spirit,



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The only thing that seemed to sparkle for me were the tears that left little icy streaks across my cheek once in awhile.

I even tried to move, but the family voted to come to my house for the turkey dinner, and so, now, they were gathering in the dining room, waiting for the festivities to begin. The turkey was stuffed, the pies baked, the gravy lump free as best I could without Mother's gentle guidance. But, there was little Thanksgiving or holiday spirit within me. Thank heavens I didn't have to come up with a blessing to say this day!



It is a tradition in our family for the youngest at the table to say the blessing. And so it fell to our six-year-old daughter, now an "only child," to find some words of thanksgiving to share with the ever-growing-smaller family around the table. She refused, of course, adding more stress to an already impossible day.

No amount of yelling, coaxing, bribing, pleading or threatening had inspired her to serve as the family spokesman. It had become a battle of wills between a mother and a daughter, something similar to several "engagements" that my mother and I had endured.

Finally, at the last moment, alone with me in our kitchen, she sighed and relented. "But I will only say grace at dessert," she said.



"Good enough," I said with relief. I had always been thankful for dessert - just like my dad, her grandpa!

It was a quiet meal, filled with awkward moments and many sniffled tears. After the pie was served, our daughter asked us to join hands in a circle (ala Walton style) and she looked around the table, giving each one of us a full moment of her gaze. Then, she drew a long breath and said, in her small, but clear, child voice, "Thanks for the little while.. ."

Ahhhh! What other words could have said so much! It took a child to remind us of the moments we did have!

We each loved someone, and someone loved us. Find those memories and cherish them. Remember first that they lived, not that they died. I want to remember the life, not just the death!

Live through the hurt so that joy can return to warm your heart. No matter which holiday it is for you, and no matter the season of your grief, say thank you for a life well lived and loved. It wasn't long enough - it never would have been. But it was a little while. They lived.

We loved them. We still do. Thanks for the little while.

Darcie Sims

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Finding the Magic

Once again, it's that time of year. Will this year be different from the last seven? Will I find the magic again? Wait. Let me revise that question: Did I ever feel the magic?

As a bereaved parent, I have experienced only two holiday seasons. While I have physically lived through 49 hell-idays, emotionally, there have been only two types: the ones before and the ones after Jason's death. The two categories are distinctly different.

If memory serves me correctly, which it doesn't always do, I spent the first 42 years focused on material issues. First as a child... What would I get?... What did I want?... What would make me the happiest child in the whole wide world? As I grew older and had my own little family, I spent the next 22 years asking myself what I would get them. What did they want? What would make them love me more? How would I manage to pay for all of it? I always felt there was something missing... but I didn't really have the time or interest to find that missing something. Besides, why borrow trouble? Each year, by the time I realized that something was missing, the decorations were packed in their boxes and the kids had gone back to school. I could always find the magic next year.

In 1996, Jason died. Suddenly, my life ended its forward march, and everything I had ever regarded as important became nonsense. My heart was not simply broken-it was ripped into shreds, emptied of what had fueled it over the span of my life. I had no hope of waiting for it to heal and had to face the reality that only a total reconstruction would suffice. I would have to create a new heart... from scratch.



The first fall was difficult. I was still numb, still cushioned from reality, but the pain of Jason's death was beginning to seep in.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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Then it was Halloween, and the horror of what had happened was upon me. Thanksgiving came with Christmas on its tail, bringing an empty chair, an unbroken wishbone, and silence where laughter had once prevailed.

I was sure it could not get any worse, but life always surprises us. The holidays of 1997 and 1998 were devastating. The numbness that had protected me that first season was gone. Reality had arrived, and I could not escape it. I would never again see Jason walk through our front door with that grin that always made me nervous, tracking snow across my “freshly waxed for the holidays” floor. I was sure I would never again buy two of everything for Jason and his twin brother. I would never again enjoy the holidays...or life.

Years four through seven, we bought gifts for needy families, hung Jason’s stocking right beside the rest of ours, illuminated special candles to include him in our celebrations, and smiled cheerfully at everyone who offered us their joy-filled “Merry Christmas.” And as I spread my Christmas cheer and goodwill toward men, I had only one thought in my mind. It became my mantra: *If I can just make it through December, I will be okay.* I was no longer focused on the material side of the season. I was no longer focused on the season at all. I wanted it over.



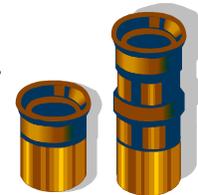
And now, here I am, at year eight. My eighth season of joy, my eighth year of decking the halls, my eighth year of Jason’s physical absence. You probably think I am going to tell you that this year will be no different from the last seven. You might even anticipate that I am going to tell you that it never gets better, that there is no such thing as healing, and that grieving parents will always be bitter and angry, especially during the times when families everywhere celebrate the season of giving. Wrong. But don’t feel bad; this revelation has totally shocked me also.

A few days ago, I woke up and was amazed to see that it was snowing. Overnight, the world had gone from brown to pure glistening white. It was beautiful. Later that day, I heard someone in my home actually humming Christmas carols. How dare they! But...I was alone. It was me. That evening, I spent an hour printing up a beautiful green and red Christmas “wish list” with graphics! That was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Suddenly, it hit me. And no matter how guilty I feel in acknowledging it, I have to tell you: I am looking forward to the holidays. How can this be? Why is this happening?



Well, after much pondering, I think I know why. I think I spent 42 holidays looking through a lens that focused only on black and white, on the physical, on that which can be seen and physically felt. The lavishly wrapped gifts, excessive food, amount of money spent, and glittering (sometimes gaudy) lights on the tree. The next seven were spent looking through a lens that was distorted and scarred by grief. I focused on what was missing rather than on what was still here. I think I wanted it that way.

But now, I feel I’ve learned how not only to endure—but to enjoy—a memory that can be defined only as bittersweet. I’ve come to appreciate that feeling emotional is really about feeling impassioned. And I think this year, as the songs start to play on the radio and the cards begin filling our mailbox, I will choose a different lens, a lens that captures what we cannot see or physically touch. A lens that goes beyond.



Not everything will change. I will still hang Jason’s stocking beside ours, buy gifts for the needy, light candles in his memory, and all of the other things that have made the last seven years bearable. But this year, I hope to do these things with joy rather than with bitterness and sorrow. This year, I want to grasp the hand of a homeless mother, kiss the cheek of a newborn baby, and hold a sleeping kitten while it plays in its dreams. I want to watch Santa as he holds wiggly toddlers on his lap. I want to sing “Silent Night” on a snowy night in mid-December when it feels as if all the world is sleeping. I want to feel the Christmas that we cannot see.

This year, I want to remember who I really am. I want to enjoy the months ahead. Not because I need to or because someone says it’s time to—but because—well, because I can. This year, I want to find the magic before it is time to put away the boxes. And I won’t stop searching until I find it.

Merry Christmas to you and yours.

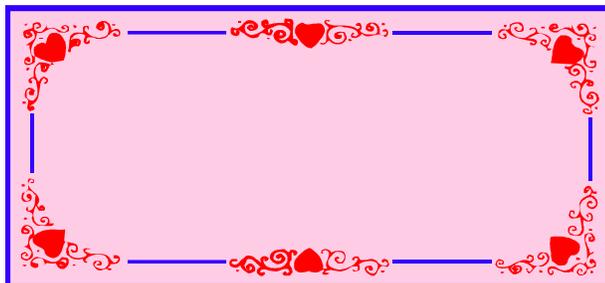
Believe in magic
And always...expect miracles.

**Sandy Goodman
In Memory of Jason**

Sandy Goodman is the author of Love Never Dies: A Mother’s Journey from Loss to Love (Jodere, 2002). You can learn more about Sandy, her journey, and her book by visiting her Web site at <http://www.loveneverdies.net>



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