



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.

September— October 2020

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YOU ARE INVITED

The Compassionate Friends Credo

The Compassionate Friends - Metrowest Chapter meets twice a month. Evenings on the third Tuesday from 7:30 to 9:00 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:

Next Meeting Will Be Announced

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.

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 last weekend or earlier if you plan to attend.***

Directions....On Route 16, going north through downtown Milford (Main St.) at the Town Hall on the right 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.

September 29th. & October 27th.

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.

WHO ARE WE?

We are The Compassionate Friends. ©2020

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 508/366-2085
 Mitchell Greenblatt 508/653-0541
 Wendy Bruno 508/429-7998
 Carol Cotter 774/219-7774

The chapter address is:

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

Regional Coordinator

Dennis Gravelle
 638 Pleasant St.
 Leominster, MA 01453-6222
 Phone (978) 537-2736
 dgctcf@aol.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.

Roberta Arena in loving memory of her son **Michael J. Smith** "Always loved, never forgotten."
 Mr. and Mrs. Rick Dugan in loving memory of their son **Larry Dugan**. Ricks sister **Fran Hallinan** and Pegs sister **Eileen Buzzanco**. "All loved and never forgotten."
 Mr. & Mrs. Richard Raymond in loving memory of their daughter **Tara M. Raymond**. "Miss you so much, every day".
 Mr. & Mrs. Steve Prouty in loving memory of their daughter **Lillian "Lilly" Prouty** "We hold you close within our hearts, always"
 Mrs. Nancy Carpenter in loving memory of her son **James S. Carpenter.VI.**"Never forgotten, always loved".
 Ms. Betty Myers in loving memory of her son **William Bruce Togoe** on his birthday September 10th.
 Mr. & Mrs. Richard Parmenter in loving memory of their son **Tyler Ray Parmenter** on his birthday September 4th.

Chapter Notice

Due to the current situation with the Coronavirus "stay at home status" the current meeting schedule is very tentative. I will be sending out a new schedule as soon as we finalize the new dates. Until we get an all clear, we will have to make due with what we can do. We will all get through this. Please note, the afternoon meetings in Milford are back to a new normal. We started back in June meeting outdoors in the church parking lot. Bring our own chairs and wearing masks. In July the St Mary Of The Assumption Parish Center allowed the group to meet indoors as long we kept the attendance to 12 or less and that we observed Social Distancing and wore our masks. So now we are back on schedule meeting on the last Tuesday of the month.



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, September October. 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

September

CHAD ARTHUR HOLBROOK
MONICA MICHELLE CURRAN
DAVID HEMINGWAY
GREG BRUNO

October

JOSHUA JAMES NOREAU
DAVID A. SCHNEGG
MARC R. PEARLMAN
CLIFFORD CROWE

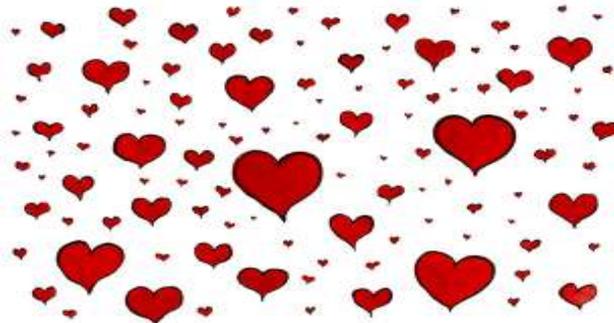
Birthdays

September

STEVEN "CHRIS" MARSHALL
TYLER PARMENTER
CONOR A. ISETTS
SAMUEL O'DEFE OTOBO
WILLIAM BRUCE-TAGOE
CHRISTOPHER THOMAS GRYNKEWICZ
RUSSELL J. TERES
JOSHUA JAMES NOREAU
AARON STEVEN GRAY
ALFRED C. MUCCI JR.

October

COREY S. VAUTIER
CHARLES J. FERRERA
DENNIS M. HENNIGAN
MICHAEL J. HAVER
COREY A. MORELLI
TIMOTHY JAMES THORSEN



My apologies to Mr. & Mrs. Keith Swindell for omitting their daughter Theresa Laurel Swindell name and to Catherine Slocum for omitting her daughters name Julie A. Slocum in the July/August 2020 Anniversary and Birthday page of the Newsletter. Also, to Roberta Arena for omitting her son Michael J. Smith Anniversary in the May June Newsletter.

Softly...may peace replace heartache and cherished memories remain with you always on your child's birthday.



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.

Compassion vs. Comparison

The other day I was brought into a discussion by a father and daughter about whose loss is "greater" surrounding the death of his 21-year-old son and her brother. As I listened to the father defend his position that the death of a child is the absolute worst loss ever, I watched his daughter become frustrated and sensed her feelings of marginalization about her grief. They both wanted my opinion, and so I gave it to them.

I asked them both to imagine a scenario, one in which the father had tripped and fallen and badly scraped both of his knees, and the girl had fallen and badly scraped both of her elbows. I said, "now both of you are in pain, which of your injuries is the worse"? They both looked at me awkwardly. I asked the father, "looking at your daughters scraped-up elbows does it make you want to reach out and help her?" He of course said "yes". I asked the daughter, "looking at your father and his scraped-up knees does it make you want to reach out and help him?" She of course said "yes".

I went a step further and asked the father, "would your scraped-up knees allow you to know exactly how painful your daughters scraped up elbows are"? He said "no, but I am sure I could relate to her pain even though it isn't exactly like mine". I then asked him, "if your knees hurt slightly more or slightly less than your daughter's elbows would it make her pain any less, would it make your pain any greater than it already is"?

As simple as this analogy is, both the father and daughter quickly realized that there is no up-side to comparing losses. Unfortunately, I see people comparing losses often and find it to be very unfortunate. What most of us have learned through our grief experience, is that grief hurts the most when it is our pain. Comparing losses causes us to minimize our compassion for others whose pain is very real and difficult for them.

Sometimes we marginalize our own loss when we see someone whose loss seems so much greater than ours. Unfortunately, this does nothing to help us either. If I had 2 wisdom teeth pulled, and you had one wisdom tooth pulled, would your comparison of how lucky you are to have had only one tooth removed lessen the pain in your mouth?

One of the things I enjoy about traveling the country and speaking and doing workshops is that so many of the people who attend are part of grief support groups. As facilitators and those who want to support others going through a similar loss it is extremely important that we don't give into comparison of losses and instead always extend compassion. It is not up to any of us to define another's loss, or to measure the depths of their pain based on our own loss.

Compassion brings us together, comparison breaks us apart.

Blessings, Alan Pederson



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I stand with other parents and notice that they, too, are watching the balloons until they disappear into the heavens. I am imagining my son plucking his balloon from the heavens and reading my message. Other parents are imagining this, too. Our communication to our child will be understood.

As parents who have lost children to death, we face new ceremonies and new traditions. As the years roll by, many of us will cling to those ceremonies and traditions. We are forced to replace the traditions of the past, before our child died, with new, fitting tributes that acknowledge our child's life and the meaning of that life to us. The Compassionate Friends provides us this opportunity to share our feelings and our need to honor our child in the company of others who understand us and encourage us to speak openly about our child and our sorrow. This tribute to our child has deep meaning and touches our souls with its simplicity and grace.

Our ceremony is brief by most standards, but meaningful beyond words. No speaker could reach us as this ceremony does. For a small window in time, we are reaching out to our children, honoring them, remembering them openly and communicating with them. Tears are shed. Hugs are shared. Memories form a kaleidoscope in each parent's mind as we watch our balloon join with the others on its journey to our children.

This tribute and message to our children is one of two ceremonial gatherings that we, as Compassionate Friends, share each year. Remember. Always we remember our children. Others may wish to forget, put the unpleasantness behind them, but we, the parents of children whose lives were too short, will never forget. We have established our traditions and we look to each other for hope and support as we walk this lonely road.

And so, as our balloons completely disappear into the heavens, we are immersed in peace and serenity, and we share a light meal and memories of our children with our Compassionate Friends.

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

Vulnerable

I have found in the years that have passed that **I am most vulnerable at times of remembrance.** The word "Anniversary" no longer holds a promise of celebration. Instead, holidays and birthdays, family gatherings and otherwise joyous occasions contain an undertow of sorrow. If I get caught up in it, I quickly get pulled under and wind up gasping for breath. It is ironic that the presence of the absence can be so emotionally devastating.

You'll excuse me if the bounce is gone from my step. Or the depth of my laughter has changed. Issues that were once monumental, now seem insignificant. Please excuse me if I don't commiserate that your car needs repair or the faucet leaks. My focus on life has forever changed.

You'll excuse me if my spirit seems lost during holidays of any kind. They are now days "to bear", rather than days to share and enjoy.

You'll pardon me if I bring you down or make you feel discomfort, and **I'll pardon you** for not understanding that my life will never be the same; that although I'll survive, there will always be sorrow.

*Joan Fischer
TCF, Nassau County Chapter, NY*

Rosebush Full of Blooms

On a rosebush full of blooms, there is occasionally one rose more fragile than the rest. Nobody knows why. The rose receives the same amounts of rain and sun as its

neighboring blooms: it receives the same amounts of food and water from the earth, of clipping and tending and gentle encouragement from the gardener. Its time on earth is neither more nor less significant than that of the other blooms alongside it. It has all the necessary components to become what it is intended to be: a beautiful flower, fully open, spreading its petals and fragrance and color for the world to see.



But for some reason, once in a while, a single rose doesn't reach maturity. It's not the gardener's fault, nor the fault of the rose. So it is that sometimes, despite the best growing conditions, the best efforts of the gardener, the best possibilities for a glorious blooming season, a particularly fragile rose will share its growth for awhile, then fade and die. And the gardener and the rosebush and the earth and all around grieve.

We are never ready for a loss, not for the loss of a promising rosebud, whose life appears ready to unfold with brilliant color and fulfillment, in the midst of our grieving, we can remember the glimpses of color and fragrance and growth that was shared. We can love the fragile rose and the fragile soul for the valiant battles won and the blooming that was done. And as our own petals unfold, we can remember the softness and beauty of those who touched us along the way.

*Ernestine Clark
TCF, Oklahoma City, OK*



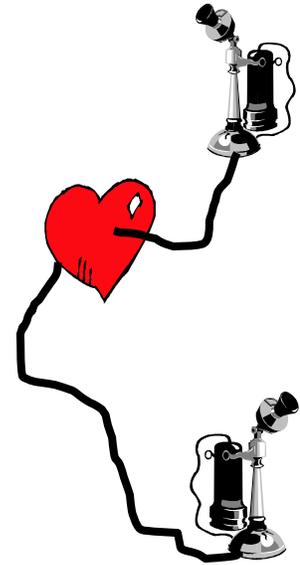
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



Phone Friends

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

- Ed & Joan Motuzas, ...**Scott**, age 31, Kidney and Liver Failure,(508)473-4239
- Janice Parmenter,**Tyler**, age 29, Chronic Addiction,(508)528-5715
- Judy Daubney,**Clifford**, age 27, Suicide,(508)529-6942
- Linda Teres,.....**Russell**, age 19, Automobile Accident,(508)366-2085
- Mitchell Greenblatt,...**Ian**, age 18, Automobile Accident,..... (508)881-2111
- Sandra Richiazzi.....**Bryan**, age 17, Automobile Accident,.....(508)877-8106
- Sarah Commerford....**Timothy**, age 21, Homicide.....(508)429-9230



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.

THE DIVORCE MYTH

Some months ago I saw Dead Man Walking, a movie about a young man who murders two teenagers and is sentenced to die. In one scene, one of the bereaved fathers leaves a support group for parents whose children have been murdered, and he turns to Sister Helen and says, "Most folks who lose a kid split up...70% or so."

Three days later I was at a hair salon and picked up a magazine to pass the time while waiting my turn. Cindy Crawford was the cover story of Cosmopolitan, January, 1996. This is what I read in her question and answer interview:

Question: Things haven't always been easy for you. Your brother died of leukemia when you were ten, and later, your parents got divorced. How did all that affect you?

Answer: They are separate events in my head, although there is some research indicating that 75% of couples who have lost a child end up getting a divorce. So they are probably more related than I like to think....

My reaction to both of these incidents was one of frustration. I want to tell you why. From the time our son died in 1985, to the time I became a Chapter Leader in 1987; I read many books on grief. Repeatedly I read the divorce rate of 70-80% among bereaved parents. Because these books were so comforting and truthful in other ways, I



As a Chapter Leader I thought it was my duty to warn newly bereaved parents of this high divorce rate. So, I repeated it in my opening remarks. Imagine being a newly bereaved parent and hearing this at your first meeting.

Four years later I was asked to present a workshop at the TCF National Conference. By then I seriously questioned the statistic. I told my audience that I had over 300 people on my chapter newsletter mailing list and had phone or personal contact with many of these parents. I felt confident stating that the high divorce statistic was false.

After my workshop, I reviewed the evaluations of my audience. One person wrote that he had attended a workshop prior to mine and that the presenter stated that the divorce rate was definitely 70% or more. This person suggested we "get it together" and agree on the facts.

At the Annual Meeting, I approached the other presenter, a former TCF Board President, who had quoted the 70% statistic. After a brief discussion with him, it was apparent that we did not agree. According to the order of business, I awaited my two-minute turn at the microphone. I implored the Board to become responsible for the perpetuation of a "supposed" statistic that only causes more pain to newly bereaved parents. I requested that TCF stop repeating this "supposed" statistic in workshops, chapter meetings, or in new literature until research proved its validity.

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Under the auspices of The Grief Center of Texas, a non-profit organization I co-founded in Houston in 1990, my partner and I invited Susan Kutzner, Ph.D., at Baylor College of Medicine, to help us research marital satisfaction in marriages before and after the death of a child.

As a first step, the literature was reviewed to find the origin of the divorce statistic. While we found prevalent comments regarding the 70-80% divorce rate, we found no research to substantiate these comments. Harriet Sarnoff Schiff's, *The Bereaved Parent* (1977), stated that "as high as 90% of all bereaved couples are in serious marital difficulty within months after the death of their child."

During the next 20 years this concept was stretched to divorce, and the myth began a life of its own. Here are some of the vague comments we found in literature:

"Our guess is that many marriages do end after the death of a child;"

"Some professionals working with families who have experienced SIDS guess the divorce rate to be 40 to 70 percent;"

"We suspect the marriages of many of those who lose a baby suddenly and without apparent reason end in divorce;"

Dr. Catherine Sanders (1992) in her book, *The Loss of a Child*, states "that...from 75 to 80 percent of all married couples have serious problems after their child dies" without reference to any specific research. Early in her book, she refers to her personal life experience which resulted in divorce. Later in the book she states that her divorce was 20 years after the death of her son. She continues, "a marriage that loses a child is seriously jeopardized." worst of all, she states, "...estimates suggest anywhere from 50%-75% of all marriages, in which there has been child loss, end in divorce."

The Grief Center of Texas interviewed 54 parents whose children died. Part of the survey included this question: Do you feel that your marriage has changed since your child died? Can you describe how the marriage has changed? Space limits the number of responses that could be included in this article. Nearly all the responses shared the tone of those listed below:

"We have been together for 13 years and losing our first born child bonded us together in a way we never anticipated. We are both wary of what the future holds, but are committed to our union."

"Our marriage feels stronger than ever, and I think we've become closer and more understanding of each other's feelings and needs."

"After the hurt and devastation of the loss of a child, we don't want to do anything to cause any pain for each other."

"Our marriage has improved, due to the closeness and openness that we never took the time for. (Before the death) you get busy and have stupid priorities that mean nothing in the long run."

"We communicate more openly and really listen to what each other is saying. We are both more compassionate and understanding of each other and others."

"We were at mid-life crisis time when she died. Mid-life crises disappeared with this crisis. We've worked hard to renew communication. We have inevitably changed, mostly better...working to survive

physically, spiritually and emotionally. We need each other. We laugh and cry together and love and try and succeed and fail."

Until grant money with the cooperation of TCF

members, or similar organizations, undertake valid research, I hope all of us will do our part to stop this myth. Let us encourage our members and remind them that they will survive physically, spiritually, and emotionally. As the respondent above states, "We need each other...to laugh and to cry and to love and to try."



Cissy Lowe Dickson

Former Bay Area, Chapter Leader and SE Texas, Regional Coordinator

Reprinted from Friends, Caring and Sharing, the national in-house newsletter for chapter leaders and newsletter editors

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)
Janice Parmenter (Tyler's Mom)
Judy Daubney (Clifford Crowe's Mom)



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



My Waiting Room

You've spent time in a waiting room, likely in a doctor's office. Routinely, there is little to do but pick up a worn magazine knowing that reading will be cut short mid-article when your name is called. The person sitting inches from your elbow may be anxious, sitting in silence. The more outgoing people converse while waiting. Good recipes (blueberry muffins and frosted maple drops) have come my way while waiting. I have been on the receiving end of facts about fire ants and when the purple hull peas will be in. I recently received a "have a blessed day and a blessed life" after a waiting room visit.



Since the instant of my daughter Sarah's death in 2005 I have been in a waiting room of another sort. Looking back eight years on my immediate disassociation with what had been my life, the disconnect with my familiar world no longer seems odd but inevitable.

My mind conjures up a row of three glass compartments. The life I lived before Sarah's death is behind me, impenetrable but still in sight. The glass compartment ahead of me is empty, a mystery about which I can only speculate. I stand in the glass chamber between the two. My waiting room.

One early realization of my detachment occurred after I returned to work. Standing in front of a large flat eighth floor glass window, I watched moving cars and delivery vans, people walking in and out of stores and restaurants onto the sidewalks, flags flying and trees moving with the breeze. Sealed off from street noise by the window pane, there was only silence. The disconnect was jarring, but my isolation then had a description, some comparison to help me visualize.



You likely understand why I discussed my feelings of detachment with less than a few people. Why make life even more hollow by describing complex emotions over which I had no control? Maybe you have experienced or are experiencing this same detachment.

So where do we go, to whom do we turn, when bewildered by our new world, fearful of the future and the remaining years of life? We struggle to rediscover some peace and contentment following the loss of our children. The business of living is difficult on the best of days.

Philippians 3:20 says in part that our citizenship is in Heaven. We are all waiting. For the time being, we have a life filled with well-purposed work to be done. Part of our new journey, a journey not of our choosing, is the rediscovery of ourselves and our efforts to gain understanding of what we are to be doing.

Do we find answers to all of our questions? Perhaps not this side of Heaven. There is solid comfort to be found in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, **but then I shall know just as I am also known.**" It's worth the wait.

*Carol Thompson
TCF, Tyler, TX*

In Memory of my daughter, Sarah

To the Newly Bereaved Attending Your First Meeting

Evening. Notice I left off the "Good."

Sorry you are here tonight.

My excuse for not attending this evening's Piedmont TCF meeting to lend a shoulder and an ear is that Pam and I have theater tickets already purchased for a romantic comedy at UVA.

Crazy how life has a way of going on, isn't it? It's a very tough lesson that follows the death of a child (or a sibling). I wish you strength and patience.

For you newly bereaved sitting crumpled, stunned, and exhausted around the table this evening, and despite what you believe at this point, it is possible to survive the death of a child. We are just one example that proves this seeming impossibility.

Our healthy, 21-month old daughter Emily died October 30, 1993, found by her mother at dawn dead in her crib of a "cardiac arrhythmia of undetermined origin." Autopsy reports can be deathly cold.

So, cry. Like we did — and do.

Hang in there.

Cry.

Talk about your child.

Cry.

And, oh, by the way, be prepared for emotional land mines that can detonate anywhere and everywhere at any time, in the toy store, at the soccer field, down the grocery aisle, at a restaurant, upon seeing your child's friends, while driving to work, while driving home from work.

Little tip here: have some tissues within reach on the front seat of your car. It's not raining; your windshield wipers won't clear your vision.

But cry anyway.

The calendar won't necessarily be your best friend when it flips over to another significant date or memory, regardless of your child's birthday, graduation date, anniversary date, death date, age at death or cause of death. But it's certainly all right to let all those pesky calendars remind you to talk and to share anything and everything about your child at any time.

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Before I forget, did I mention "cry?"

Unfortunately, Pam and I have learned that time can't fix what happened. But time does help. Give yourselves time. You're changed. But you won't forget. You won't love your child any less just because he or she is gone.

The fact that I can sit here at my kitchen table without flooding my laptop keyboard with tears is proof that bereaved parents can survive the death of their child, for at least 21 years and 9 months in our case, and still go to the theater for a laugh.

You have my compassion, the best and the most that I can give.

Gary Grant
TCF Piedmont Chapter, VA
In Memory of my daughter Emily

The Truth

What does one do with "the truth?" When I am asked, "How are you? How are you really?" my **true** answer would be "I wish I were dead." Such a response, however true it may be, is a conversation stopper of epic proportions.

If the conversation doesn't end immediately, then I have to be prepared for a barrage of "You don't mean that! You can't mean that! What about your husband and daughter? Jordan would not want for you to feel that way!" And so on. While I know people probably mean well, it is not helpful to require me to lie.

When Jordan was in his mid-teens, we made it compulsory for him to attend confirmation classes at our church. When the classes were concluded, he advised us that he was not ready to be confirmed. My husband, a "cradle Episcopalian," was horrified and planned to demand that Jordan go through with confirmation. One of the youth ministers took Jeff aside and advised, "You do realize you're requiring him to stand up in front of the whole church and lie?" So, we stayed home that day. We didn't require him to lie; we were sad, we were disappointed. We missed out on a rite of passage that had mattered to us. But how could you require someone you love to lie?

Is this something we're promoting as a culture? We're lied to regularly by elected officials, by business leaders, by institutions of higher education...usually with money and power as the motivation. So, is that why our culture is okay with expecting bereaved parents to lie about how we feel? We're certainly not motivated by money or power.

But how do I answer the "How are you?" question? I answer, "I'm okay." At least the conversation doesn't stop. At least I'm not further isolated.

Peggi Johnson¹⁰
TCF, Piedmont Chapter, VA

Halloween . . . Still a Holiday to Remember

Two Halloweens have now passed since my 8-year-old Stephanie and 5-year-old Stephen left us to live with God.

Even before the kids were old enough to go trick or treating, I still recall their delight at the costumes worn by all the neighborhood kids who came to the door. I still remember how thrilled Stephen was to be handing out the candy when he was only one and half years old. We still have a picture of him holding the plate of goodies. If you look close, you can see where he took a bite out of one of the candy bars (with the wrapper on) and set it back on the plate.

I can still remember the all too few times I was able to take my children out trick-or-treating. I remember my daughter dressed up as a nurse, offering to "fix-up" all those other trick or treaters who were obviously hurting with all that fake blood they were wearing.

I remember Stephen wearing his great pumpkin outfit. We stuffed it so full of padding that when he fell down, not only did he not get hurt, he had to be physically picked up because he was flailing his arms around like a beetle on its back.

I can still see Stef holding Stephen's little hand and patiently leading him up the walkway and helping him hold open his bag so that the candy would find its mark. She always made certain he said thank you for the candy. It usually came out "thank-woo."



The first Halloween following their deaths I remember driving home with tears streaming down my face as I watched the other trick-or-treaters roaming up and down the streets. My wife and I fled our home, depositing bags of candy for our next door neighbors to hand out for us. Last year we found the courage to stick around and greet the ghosts and goblins who found their way to our door. The funny thing was, we felt as dressed up as the trick-or-treaters. We were wearing our "happy face" masks.

The memories are now starting to fade of the Halloweens before our children died. It won't be too long and I'll be leading Christopher, our new son who is now a year old, up those driveways just like I did before. I feel sad that Stef and Steve can't be there. But you know, I have a feeling that if I hold out my hands and close my eyes, two little gloved hands will slip into mine and I'll again hear in unison, "Just one more house Daddy!"

Wayne Loder,
TCF, Lakes Area, MI
In Memory of Stephanie and Stephen Loder



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



Big Plans

Before my daughter died I had big plans. I was an avid gardener. Every chance I got I was out in the yard. My entire back yard was a butterfly, hummingbird garden. It was a certified backyard habitat registered by the National Wildlife Association and a certified Monarch butterfly way station registered with National Monarch Society. If I wasn't riding my John Deer mower in the front yard, I was probably planting or pruning in the back. I was taking classes to receive my organic gardening license and my husband and I even bought a lovely little 13 acre vegetable farm in Comfort, TX, complete with a homestead on it from the 1920's and a year-round, spring fed creek. I was going to retire in Comfort and raise and sell organic vegetables.

Then Angela died. I thought I was going to die. I lay on the couch for a year. I screamed, I cried, I went to counseling and to TCF meetings. Slowly, I tried to get back into the rhythm of life. My back yard was a mess due to lack of maintenance. My front yard didn't look much better. I half heartedly tried do my gardening. I didn't have the energy or the enthusiasm I once did. Things weren't as beautiful as they once were. The colors of the flowers weren't as vivid as they once were not nor did they smell as sweet. When I planted, the earth didn't feel good in between my fingers like it once did. I started getting horrible headaches every time I tried to work outside. It felt like the back of my head was coming off. I thought that it was either stress or perhaps allergies. I came down with one sinus infection after another. I finally went to a specialist. I needed sinus surgery to correct my abnormally small sinus passages. After all these years I spent loving the outdoors and gardening, I now needed sinus surgery? It didn't make a lot of sense to me at the time. I now believe that somehow the grievous loss of my daughter was such a blow to me physically that it weakened my defenses and my precarious sinus condition manifested itself.

Take good care of yourself. The loss of a child is the worst blow a person can suffer. When we lose a child we are encouraged to reach out for help through family, friends, clergy, professional counseling, support groups, etc. All of these outlets can be invaluable in helping us as bereaved parents to survive the impossible. One important aspect of dealing with loss that is often overlooked is our physical health.



The physical effect that the loss of a child has on our bodies can be just as real and devastating as the impact that it has on us spiritually, mentally and psychologically. Make sure that your doctor is aware of what you are going through. Be careful not to miss your annual checkups. Try to get enough sleep and if you can take a walk and get some fresh air. Come to TCF meetings. You will find empathy and understanding. And most of all, try to keep on loving yourself.

Janet G. Reyes

TCF, Alamo Area Chapter, TX

Gifts from Amy

I recently had to take part in the one-year anniversary of my precious daughter Amy's death, a day that we as parents never want to take part in. I was distressed as it really sank in that this was real and very final. Last year at this time I had been in such a state of shock that now, looking back, I began to realize the daze I was in for several months. This year I was in no such daze—the pain was all too real.

What could I do with this day? How could I make it through? In my pain I remembered one of the first things I had said when Amy died. I had expressed thankfulness for all the things she had taught me by being in my life. As I thought of this now, I began to write down all the many things. Soon I found I was taking my list a step further and listing all the things I had learned since Amy's death, I began to see my list as a list of gifts from Amy. Before Amy's death I had thought of myself as a religious person, going to church, believing in God, even knowing several Bible verses by heart. I was wrong. I have only now begun to see the difference in religious and spiritual. Only now, after Amy's death, have I embarked on my very own spiritual path. What greater gift could my child have left me!



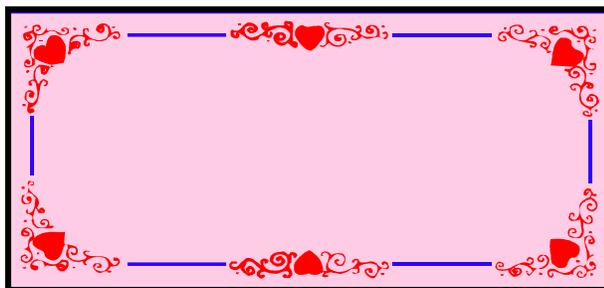
I took my list and put it in a box, wrapped it up and tied it with a bow. I put the box in my closet. This time next year I will open the box and celebrate all the wonderful gifts my daughter has given to me. And I'm sure I will add more as the years go by.

Suzanne Owens

TCF, West Columbia, SC

In Memory of my daughter Amy

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TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

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



TO OUR OLD MEMBERS

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