



The Compassionate Friends Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

May, June, July 2017 Volume 5 Issue 3

THE GOOD FIGHT

Before our son's death turned our lives upside down, I cannot recall spending any time in cemeteries. One or two elderly relatives, who had lived out their span, are in cemeteries now, and their loss is felt at holiday gatherings. When I was a child, our Sunday School class took a tour of the pre-Revolutionary cemetery behind the historic old church I attended. I remember being shocked at the number of tiny markers for the very young who, our teacher said, were so susceptible to diseases in those colonial days. We were simply told that people had large families then because they knew illness would take some of the children. We were never exposed to the notion that this was a tragedy to these real people of so long ago.

Many years later, when my grandmother was in her 80's, she told me that the child born before her died at the age of 3. At the age of 13, Grandmother was stunned to find her mother caressing this child's clothing and weeping in the attic of their home in the rolling hills of Kentucky. I was a parent then and I thought, "Well, of course Grandmother's mother was sad, but she had other children." I didn't know, did I? Who among us did?

Now when I go to my son's marker, I examine the other headstones carefully. Did everyone in the family live to an acceptable age? When I find one that clearly indicates the death of a child, I study the parent's markers closely. How long did they have to live without their child? Sometimes the number of years takes my breath away. I am to learn from this. Others "made it," so can I. Without Compassionate Friends I wouldn't have had a clue as to HOW they made it, and probably would have given up the effort.

I read the inscriptions on these older markers to see if they provide any clues as to what helped those before me carry on. I found one that summed it up. It read:

**"LIVING, YOU MADE IT GOODLIER TO LIVE:
DEAD, YOU MAKE IT EASIER TO DIE"**

So—we are to endure. We do know what it was to live, but now we have the added dimensions of courage, love and steadfastness. And, though we no longer hope for our own death as a release from the pain, we, unlike most "other people," will not fear it when we have finished fighting the good fight:

—Pat Kuzela, TCF, Atlanta



40th TCF National Conference
Rays of Sunshine, Oceans of Hope
July 28-30, 2017
Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek
Orlando, Florida

WYANDOTTE COUNTY

Eisenhower Community Center
2901 North 72nd St., KCKS
Richard Moore 913-238-1890
Marlene Moore 913-238-5348

JOHNSON COUNTY

Advent Lutheran Church
11800 W. 151st St.
Olathe, Ks
Gay Kahler & Brian Janes
913-764-2669

WWW.JOCOTCF.ORG

2nd Monday @7PM

UPCOMING EVENTS

- *Keith McFadden Memorial Golf June 10th*
- *Thor Rodenbaugh Memorial Golf June 17th*
- *Pennies from Heaven in Memory of Faith Bruner*
- *Kale Stine Memorial Golf August 19th, 2017*

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A GRADUATION MOMENT

This week graduation ceremonies took place at the school where I work. Just before the program started, the wife on one of our teachers ask me how my son was doing. I had to tell her what happened, without softening the impact, that my son had died. I know she felt like crawling under my desk. Her husband, a teacher on our staff, had the same shocked and embarrassed look on his face. He said to her, "I told you." She replied, "No, you didn't." As they debated the point, I stood there, feeling really strange.

I haven't had anyone ask me that question for a long time. The wife kept apologizing. I kept saying it was all right and changed the subject, but even later on, I couldn't stop thinking about the conversation. Actually, I'm still thinking about it. I can't seem to shake the weird feeling I had and the sound of my voice saying he died. I couldn't sleep at all that night. I kept saying those two words over and over: he died, he died. At two years and four months into my grief, I found myself saying, "I can't believe this really happened."

This sadness and tidal wave of pain sometimes seems to come out of nowhere. It can be just a moment, such as graduation. It takes only one small incident to bring on an immense amount of fresh grief. You may spend a few days or weeks or months feeling okay, and then it hits, without warning, without mercy. This unsuspected grief makes you feel like you are back at the beginning again, even though you know you have made progress. Others see you as adjusted and "going on" with your life, so you keep your feelings inside. Sometimes it seems that the more time that passes, the more feelings we keep inside. Others don't know the storm raging inside of us at these times. They don't know that there will always be some clouds, even when the storm is over.

The tidal wave that hits me on graduation night is still pounding at my heart. The constant choking back of tears, the questions, and the anger are all part of the grief that impacts at these moments. I bought a card with those words, "I miss you all of the time, but some days I feel it more than others. Like today, Graduation Day."

—Cindy Fisher, TCF, Fairfield, OH

Compassionate Friends Offers Grief Related Webinar Series

The Compassionate Friends is expanding its outreach to bereaved families by offering a series of free online grief related seminars on various grief topics, presented by well-known experts in the field.

Webinars have included such topics as "Handling Grief Through the Holidays," "Getting 'Stuck' and 'Unstuck,'" "Caring for Your Health While Grieving," and "Coping with Guilt During Bereavement." These webinars were recorded and are available to view on demand on TCF's national website.

TO OUR NEW COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

If you are newly bereaved and have recently attended your first meeting, you may have left the meeting feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared at meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return. We would like to let you know that these feelings are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least **three** tries before you decide whether or not the meetings are for you. You will find a network of caring and support which will help you as you travel your grief journey, and most assuredly, you will find hope along the way. We truly care about you and want to make certain that no bereaved parent ever needs to walk this path alone.

FATHERS DAY

I just finished watching another miserable cologne commercial on TV. For some reason these are the first signs of the upcoming holiday, commercials that are only shown at Christmas and Father's Day to give wives and kids some idea of what to get Dad to celebrate a gift-oriented holiday.

Like the other fathers who read this newsletter, I know the gift I'd like to get this Father's day, just as I know there is no way that it will happen. My son's life. An opportunity not to hurt when I see boys who are the age my son should be now. A chance to dream those dreams for that little boy again. But that's not going to happen. Instead I will get up on that day, having called and wished my father a happy day the night before, and go to the florist for flowers I will place on my son's grave. I will stand alone and cry for a time, then return home to my wife and our infant son. This year will have a greater measure of peace due to young Dan's arrival, but I shall always have that Alex-sized hole in my soul, a longing that I know I will have until I too die.

Like many bereaved fathers I have felt the lack of understanding of the non-bereaved on how a father should mourn his child's death, and for how long. I do not understand how a society can have such belief in the strength of maternal love, and do such a good job of ignoring intensity of paternal love. From the people whose only question at Alex's memorial service was on how my wife was dealing with this tragedy to the long-time friend who didn't understand my choking up after watching a Hallmark Card commercial last year, the majority of people around us seem to have difficulty with the thought that a father may need to grieve for his deceased child just as much as a mother might.

So that is where some support and love is needed, and needed badly. Of course we have Compassionate Friends, but something more personal and closer to home is needed. In a recent newsletter there was a note from a bereaved mother from New Jersey asking fathers and siblings to be understanding of a grieving mother's needs on Mother's Day. I agree, but I would also hope that you ladies will not forget your husbands this Father's Day as well. It is frequently said that we males don't often talk of our emotional needs, and are reluctant to show our pain, but we need love and 'warm fuzzies' when we hurt also. Please remember also that those cute little sentimental commercials that hurt you in May, take their toil on us in June. There are definitely times when I can do without Old Spice, McDonalds, Hallmark, and AT&T.

Brothers, I wish you piece, comfort, and love.

—Doug Hughes, Cincinnati TCF

AND A CHILD WILL LEAD THEM...

If you are looking for an answer on Mother's Day on why God reclaimed your child, I don't know.

I only know that thousands of mothers out there desperately need an answer as to why they were permitted to go through the elation of carrying a child and then lose it to miscarriage, accident, violence, disease or drugs.

Motherhood isn't just a series of contractions, it's a state of mind. From the moment we know life is inside us, we feel a responsibility to protect and defend that human being. It's a promise we can't keep.

We beat ourselves to death over that pledge. "If I hadn't worked through the eighth month." "If I had taken him to the doctor when he had a fever." "If I hadn't let him use the car that night." "If I hadn't been so naïve, I'd have noticed he was on drugs."

While I was writing my book *I Want to Grow Hair, I Want to Grow Up, I Want to Go to Boise*, I talked with mothers who had lost a child to cancer. Every single one said that death gave their lives new meaning and purpose. And who do you think prepared them for the rough, lonely road they had to travel? Their dying child. They pointed their mothers toward the future and told them to keep going. The children had already accepted what their mothers were fighting to reject.

The children in the bombed-out nursery in Oklahoma City have touched more lives than they will ever know. Workers who had probably given their kids a mechanical pat on the head without thinking that morning we making calls home during the day to their children to say, "I love you."

This may seem like a strange column when joy and life should abound for the millions of mothers throughout the country. But Mother's Day also is a day of appreciation and respect. I can think of no mothers who deserve it more than those who had to give a child back.

In the face of adversity we are not permitted to ask, "Why me?" You can ask, but you won't get an answer. Maybe you are the instrument who is left behind to perpetuate the life that was lost and appreciate the time you had with it.

—Erma Bombeck

JOHNSON COUNTY
OUR CHILDREN & SIBLINGS REMEMBERED

Births

May

- 6th **James Brandt Heavilin, son of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin**
7th **John Reynolds, son of Glenda & Bob Holman**
26th **Stephanie Gray, daughter of Steve Gray**

June

- 14th **Lara Rogers, daughter of Tim & Janet Rogers**
19th **Tanner Lewis, son of Hayley Lewis**
24th **Dana Jeanne McCollam-Allison, daughter of Cathy Caplan**
26th **Erika Jaremko, daughter of Stephanie Post**

July

- 1st **Vincent Boos, son of John & Rochelle Boos, (Mariah, sister)**
2nd **James Collins, son of Shelley Collins**
8th **Jenna Good-Lopez, daughter of Jamie Good and Nikki Krueger**
20th **Sara Doss, daughter of Allie & Jason Doss**
26th **Ryan O'Connell, son of Pat O'Connell**
26th **Lincoln William Hurst, son of Tracie & Will Hurst**
29th **Sgt. Chad Allen O'Leary, brother of Mary Jackson**

Deaths

May

- 1st **Danny Poore, son of Deb & Darryl Poore**
11th **Braiden Andres Lopez, Grandson of Jamie Good & Nikki Krueger**
19th **Steven Christopher Burns, son of Brenda & Steve Burns**
24th **Annie Reed, daughter of Ginger Sparks**
28th **Andy Shields, son of Linda Schoonover**

June

- 7th **Leo Sorrentino, son of Giovana Dubinski**
7th **Jacob Gromly, son of Dana Gromly**
13th **Allison Michelle Fisher, daughter of Kelly & Kyle Fisher**
19th **John Reynolds, son of Glenda & Bob Holman**
20th **Augie Echeandia, son of Augie Echeandia**
22nd **Keith McFadden, son of Buddy & Debbie McFadden**
25th **James Brandt Heavilin, son of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin**
26th **Douglas Morgan Zobkiw, son of Pam & Mike Zobkiw**
27th **Jenna Good-Lopez, daughter of Jamie Good & Nikki Krueger**
28th **Craig Howlett, son of David & Elaine Howlett**

July

- 3rd **Robert Damian Barrett, son of Mary Barrett**
6th **Dana Jeanne McCollam-Allison, daughter of Cathy Caplan**
7th **James Collins, son of Shelley Collins**
15th **Zachary Wallace, son of Sandy & Doug Wallace**
19th **Kathleen Kifka, daughter of Kathy Kifka**
20th **Tori Jade Peavler, daughter of Susan & Tim Peavler**
26th **Lincoln William Hurst, son of Tracie & Will Hurst**
27th **Patrick Spaulding, son of Yvonne & Scott Spaulding**
30th **Sara Doss, daughter of Allie & Jason Doss**

Upcoming Meetings

May 8th

M&M Game

June 12th

*Men & Women meet
separately*

July 10th

Meet My Child

Events for our Children Wyandotte & Johnson County

Please let me know if you would like your event added to this listing.

The Jana E. Pinker Memorial Foundation - Daughter of Rebecca and Bob Pinker
Jana died at age 19 from liver cancer. Every year there is a 5k Run/Walk on the 1st Saturday in March called the Truffle Shuffle. It is held at Johnson County Community College. Please go to www.janaepinker.org to see all the organizations that benefit from this foundation. This year the event was held March 4th, 2017

Faith's Pennies From Heaven - Granddaughter of Nela Bruner
Faith died from cancer at 5 years old. Money is raised year round with different events such as, donation jars at local businesses, cold water challenges, car washes, and t-shirts. Nela is ready and willing to try new things to benefit The Dream Factory and to keep her granddaughters memory alive. You can contact Nela at bruners05@aol.com.

Thor Rodenbaugh Memorial Golf Tournament - Son of Chris and Ron Rodenbaugh
Thor died at age 37 during a surgical procedure. He left a wife and 3 daughters, though he was never able to meet his 3rd daughter. Every year a golf tournament is put on to raise money for his daughter's college fund. The event is usually held in early summer at Dub's Dread Golf Club, KCKS. This year the tournament will be June 17th, 2017. For more information please contact Christ at 816-679-8678. www.ask4thor.com

Keith McFadden Memorial Golf Tournament - Son of Debbie & Buddy McFadden
Keith died at age 28 from a brain tumor. Every year they do a golf tournament to raise money for brain cancer research. All proceeds go to Head for the Cure Foundation which partners with MD Anderson in Houston, Tx. The tournament is held in June every year at Painted Hills Golf Course, KCKS. For more information you can go to www.kmangolf.com. This year the tournament is set for June 10, 2017.

Kale Stine Memorial Golf Tournament—son of Melva Stine
Kale died from Colon Cancer at the age of 39. Every year they have a golf tournament to raise money for the University of Kansas Colon Cancer Research. The tournament is held at Sunflower Hills Golf Course in Bonner Springs, Ks. This years event is August 19th, 2017. For more information or to register please contact Steamboat Maurin (913) 638-1760—paulmaurin76@yahoo.com or Tim Linqvist (913) 927-4792 — tlindy15@gmail.com

FAMILY TIES

Every time a new person is added to the family by birth, marriage, adoption, etc., everyone begins to readjust and reorganize to new roles they must assume. Husband and wife work out the give and take necessary to establish a family system. Mothers and fathers find new roles when children enter the picture, and adjust their sleeping, eating, loving, working and being. Brothers and sisters truly learn what sharing and change are all about when a new member is added.

Everyone, in fact becomes a changed individual in this new system. New patterns of trusting and communicating are established. Like the mobile we hang above the crib, the family works toward establishing stability; each part balances the whole.

This family mobile is susceptible to many forces of change: winds from outside and within. But blown and disturbed, each piece moves and sways until eventually the mobile becomes stabilized once again.

When one of the parts is suddenly removed, as in the death of a child, the very core is threatened. Cut off one of the parts of the mobile and it becomes frenzied, looking for stability and lost balance. It sways to and fro, bobbing and weaving, tilting up and down.

When our child dies, we are inevitably faced with this chaos in the system. How can we seek to balance our ship of life when we, as a part of that system, feel pain, confusion and imbalance? If we were the anchor before, we find ourselves adrift, unable to hold in the current. If we were the steering wheel, we begin to spin uncontrollably. The propeller shaft is bent; the spare oar is missing; there aren't enough life preservers to go around. How do you save the ship—the mobile—the family?

1. Recognize the part you as an individual play in the family and work on resolving your own losses
2. Encourage the expressing of feelings in yourself and others. Know that each person grieves in his own way and at his own pace, and give them permission to do so.
3. Understand that sometimes a system cannot rebalance without professional help, and seek this help if needed.
4. Watch for obsessive behaviors in your family, i.e. overprotectiveness, overeating, undereating, alcohol and/or drug abuse, rage and violence, etc., and offer support, sharing and help for the pain—*not the behaviors*.

How tragic it is when the ultimate loss, the death of a child, leads to an even greater loss: the breakdown of the family, the marriage, the individual. You, as part of the family can work to make sure this doesn't happen.

—From Neenah, WI, TCF Newsletter

Self Help

For many of us, the monthly meeting of our Compassionate Friends Group is the only real healing time we give to ourselves. Helping ourselves on a daily basis is critical to our journey in the grieving process.

Many of us find solace in books. Others find it in movies, music, time with friends, meditation or intense spiritual conviction. Each day we should take some time to center ourselves, to find a place of peace.

If you haven't already done so, start with a quiet time of reflection and search your soul for the key to your own solace. There will still be bad, even terrible, days. The effort to help ourselves begins with knowing ourselves and finding the unique activity that soothes our broken hearts for just a little while.

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

Sibling Grief

A First-Timer's Perspective: *Thoughts on the 2005 National Conference*

When my father began going to the national Compassionate Friends meetings several years ago, I thought it was wonderful. When my mother joined him a few years later, I was ecstatic. The idea of the two of them being surrounded by other bereaved parents in an environment that allowed them to share their experiences seemed nothing short of brilliant. My sister Lynn and I agreed that it showed definite progress on their part in dealing with the loss of our older brother Rich. We were their cheerleaders, taking care of the house and the dogs while they did their thing in Atlanta, Salt Lake City, and Hollywood, CA. For our part, we wanted nothing to do with it. We always managed to find an excuse not to attend...the meetings were too far away. We had to work that weekend. We just weren't ready to go yet. Last summer we learned that the 2005 National Conference was to be held in Boston...a mere twenty minutes from our house. We were stuck; we had to go.

If I had been hesitant to attend the other conferences, the sudden death of my sister this past November did nothing to increase my desire to go. I had no problem helping in *preparation* for the conference, but I tried to think of every possible way out of actually going. However, the bottom line was that Lynn and I had agreed to go—if for no other reason than to support our parents—and so I went. Alone. And it was scary.

Having had literally no exposure to Compassionate Friends meetings, I didn't know quite what to expect. I knew that the men and women who flocked to our house in late November were extraordinary. They felt the pain of my parents as we stumbled blindly through Thanksgiving night and Christmas morning; they looked at me saw the pain of their surviving sons and daughters who had lost their brothers and sisters. I could take them in small doses, but disregarded them in part because they were there for my parents. No one really knew what it was like to lose a brother or a sister...let alone both. I dreaded going to the conference because I didn't want to deal with the consequences of opening the door. I worried that once I started dealing with all my grief I wouldn't be able to stop. And I was right. From the outset of the conference, I was overcome with sorrow and sadness for all the people who had suffered losses as bad, if not worse than my own. I couldn't see past the sadness and senselessness of all the loved ones who had been lost.

As the weekend progressed, however, I came to see that while it is indeed overwhelming, the very essence of this beautiful support system is found in its awe inspiring numbers. While the workshops I attended ranged from slightly boring to extremely stirring and inspiring, no part of the weekend moved me as much as the Candle Lighting ceremony and the Walk to Remember. These two events embodied the TCF belief "We need not walk alone". Looking around the room at the hundreds and hundreds of candles that were lit in honor of those we have lost roused a feeling like no other I have ever experienced. It was sad and tragic, yet beautiful in the communality of the pain we all shared. Walking among the mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters, down the beautiful streets of Boston on Sunday morning was amazing. Each person displayed names and pictures of those they had lost, proud to have their loved ones be known. Perhaps most satisfying of all was to take part in this walk, not as the lonely trio my parents and I have become, but as part of a larger family. To see my father walking with his new friends, my mother a short distance behind with others she had recently met, and even me...walking not with my sister and brother as I would've liked, but rather *for* them, beside my new friend as well.

Throughout the weekend, I heard it said many times that TCF is a family, and though it's a family no one would ever choose to be part of, it is remarkable nonetheless. Are the conferences for everyone? No. I didn't want to go because I was scared and it was inconvenient. The truth is, there is no convenient time to fall apart. You will always be able to come up with an excuse that prevents you from dealing with things. While the weekend was hard at times and left me utterly exhausted at the end, it was worth it. For those of you who are too busy/too tired/too anxious to go to a conference, I hope for your sake you "get stuck" going like I did. It's an experience you'll never forget and one that cannot be conveyed through words.

Libby Mirabile
In Memory of my brother, Rich and my sister, Lynn



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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JOHNSON COUNTY WEBSITE
www.tcfkc.org

The mission of The Compassionate Friends: When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

LOVE LIVES ON

Love lives on, my son.
It lives on in the lives of those you touched.
We found, at last, your music tapes, my son,
And hearing you again, our hearts rejoiced.
The ached I felt to think I'd never hear you play again was eased.
The phone rings—a voice from far away—"Is Bryan home?"
Two times in just two days.
My heart stops—and I feel it break again.
I have to tell them "Yes, he has gone home."
And then a friend, someone I did not know, says,
"I was blessed to know Bryan"
Once more the pain was eased, and I realize again,
How many lives your life has touched.
Yes, Bryan, love lives on.

—Written by Carolyn Jackson, Independence, Mo, TCF.
Her son Bryan (4/1/62-12/28/92), who died in an accident,
was a gifted musician to played guitar and piano.

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.

TCF, Inc. 2007