



The Compassionate Friends Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

Nov., Dec., 2017, Jan. 2018 Volume 6 Issue 1

As the Holidays Approach

When the holidays are fast approaching, we who are bereaved always have mixed emotions about having a nice holiday when our child or loved one is no longer with us. We wonder if we will ever be as happy and if we can ever again celebrate the holidays or any meaningful family occasion, especially the first birthday, first thanksgiving, or first Christmas since our loss. We try to look ahead to how we are going to feel when the time arrives, but it is usually not as hard as we had anticipated. Still, the occasion may not be as enjoyable as we'd like it to be or as we remember it from the past.

I would like to offer a few ideas for what we can do to make our holidays a little better. Consider buying gifts for less fortunate children, adopting a child/family at Christmas time, or inviting a lonely person to share your holiday meal. Make your child's favorite foods and discuss your loved one as you share the meal. Some people like to volunteer to serve holiday dinners for the homeless. Some bereaved parents want to visit familiar places their child loved to go, while others want to travel where their child had never been.

Several of our Compassionate Friends members put a small Christmas tree at the cemetery and decorate the graves with Christmas flowers and/or a grave blanket. Making a grave blanket is very fulfilling; we did that for 10 years after our daughter Teresa died. Attending a candle light program is a wonderful way to honor your child or loved one.

These suggestions are things we feel we can still do for our child, but they are not reserved for bereaved parents only. All of them can be done for any member of a family or a friend who has died. After someone dies we must keep going and doing things that lift us up. We can't always try to please any people who feel we should act in a certain manner.

Jackie Wesley
TCF, East Central Indiana and Miami-Whitewater Chapters

**I AM HERE. LETS HEAL TOGETHER
—A FRIEND**

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

- *WyCo Candle Lighting.*
Dec. 5th, 2017
- *Worldwide Candle Lighting,*
Dec. 10th, 2017 at Advent
Lutheran Church, Olathe,
Ks

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

Barbara Starr
816-229-2640
Email: barbstarr@comcast.net
and
Gay Kahler
913-764-2669
Email: jocotcf@hotmail.com

National Office

The Compassionate Friends
PO Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
877-969-0010
nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org
www.compassionatefriends.org

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

—Cont. on page 3—

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.

—Cont. from page 2—

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

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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.

Our Children Remembered

Births

November

- 6th *Kyle Gabriel Eller, son of Jennifer & David Eller*
 11th *Gregory Bernard Dermer, son of Diane Dermer*
 16th *Brett Mitchell Hayes, son of Debbie Hayes*
 20th *Colin Scott, son of Mark & Cindy Scott*
 25th *Alex (Allie) Lahr, daughter of Amy & Bob Lahr*

December

- 8th *Steven Christopher Burns, son of Brenda & Steve Burns*
 10th *Jace Boxberger, son of Tyler & Kelli Boxberger*
 10th *Jimmy Gorman, son of Kathy Gorman*
 11th *Tori Jade Peavler, daughter of Susan & Tim Peavler*
 11th *Cody Monroe Kincheloe, son of Cherie Burnett*
 14th *Mark Skedel, son of Ralph & Laura Spillers*
 16th *Austin Hawkey, son of Kim Bergeron*
 21st *Tyler Nelson, son of Jennifer Rechsteiner*
 21st *Tyler Nelson, son of Mark & Jill Nelson*
 23rd *Augie Echeandia, son of Augie Echeandia*
 25th *Nathan James Heavilin, son of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
 25th *Ethan Thomas Heavilin, son of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
 30th *Laura Michelle Travis, daughter of Gay Kahler & Brian Janes*

January

- 4th *Misty Warren, daughter of Jamie Good and Nikki Krueger*
 7th *Fredrick O'Donnell, son of Jeannine Cordes*
 8th *Adam Ward, son of Sharon Ward*
 9th *Patrick Spaulding, son of Yvonne & Scott Spaulding*
 12th *Paul David Walter, son of Betty Walter*
 12th *Danny Poore, son of Deb & Darryl Poore*
 16th *Thor Rodenbaugh, son of Chris & Ron Rodenbaugh*
 15th *Jason Holmes, son of Karhi & Mike Holmes*
 19th *Michael Paul Early, son of Suzy Early*
 20th *Brian Cupp, son of Kathy Grassy*
 22nd *Michael James LaBarge, son of Debra LaBarge*
 23rd *Jeffrey Neil Crump, son of Paul & Ann Crump*
 25th *Jacob Madden, son of Julie Madden*
 26th *Douglas Morgan Zobkiw, son of Pam & Mike Zobkiw*
 26th *Robert "Robb" Aaron Repine, son of Kathy & Brad Brinkopf*

Deaths

November

- 4th *Ben Link, son of Maggie Link*
 5th *Kevin Babson, son of Rick & Sue Babson*
 5th *Houston St. John, son of David & Theresa St. John*
 6th *Brett Mitchell Hayes, son of Debbie Hayes*
 11th *Thor Rodenbaugh, son of Chris & Ron Rodenbaugh*
 13th *Brandon Warren, son of Debby Atkinson*
 17th *Angela Schofield, daughter of Joe & Julie James*

- 18th *Stephanie Gray, daughter of Steve Gray*
- 22nd *ChristopherMichael Lutz, son of Kevin & Nancy Lutz*
- 23rd *Jana Elizabeth Pinker, daughter of Bob & Rebecca Pinker*
- 29th *Kyle Gabriel Eller, son of Jennifer & David Eller*
- 29th *Elisabeth Legrande, daughter of Rick & Cheryl Shook*

December

- 4th *Ashton Brunmeier, son of Todd & Julie Brunmeier*
- 7th *Mark Skedel, son of Ralph & Laura Spillers*
- 11th *Tyler Nelson, son of Jennifer Rechsteiner*
- 11th *Tyler Nelson, son of Mark & Jill Nelson*
- 12th *Jacob Madden, son of Julie Madden*
- 13th *Grace Maryalyce Deck, daughter of Shawna & Joseph Deck*
- 14th *Laine Goff, child of Becky Thurlow*
- 16th *Sterling Franzwa, son of Fred & Sandy Franzwa*
- 20th *Dayton Porter, son of Kami Porter*
- 26th *Austin Hawkey, son of Kim Bergeron*
- 26th *Brian Hicks, son of Barbara Hicks*
- 31st *Joel Streufert, son of Sherry Streufert*

January

- 1st *Jessica Tracey Thomas Scott, daughter of Randy & Millie Thomas (Erin Vargas, sister)*
- 5th *Ethan Thomas Heavilin, son of Marilyn and Glen Heavilin*
- 5th *Lara Rogers, daughter of Tim & Janet Rogers*
- 5th *Kyle Bunselmeyer, son of Suzette Bunselmeyer*
- 7th *Frederick O'Donnell, son of Jeannine Cordes*
- 9th *Anthony Michael "Tony Mike" Bowers, son of Janet & Jimmy Bowers*
- 12th *Amy Batson, daughter of Barbara & Don Batson*
- 12th *Shane Day, son of Melody Gau*
- 18th *Cody Monroe Kincheloe, son of Cherie Burnett*
- 21ST *Vincent Boos, son of John & Rochelle Boos, (Mariah, sister)*
- 30th *Derek Zarda, son of Kathy & Dennis Zarda*



Upcoming Meetings

November 13th, 2017

Social and Sharing of things we've made in memory of our children

December 11th, 2017

Holidays

January 8th, 2018

Recognizing Unsuccessful Grief

All of us who have searched for healing following the death of a child, grandchild or sibling know the roller coaster of emotions that are part of our grief process. We know there is no "quick fix" that magically lets us get on with our lives, and grief can be physically exhausting. We cannot go back to what was! And time, in and of itself, does not heal.

Although there is no set schedule for grieving and there will always be a hole in our hearts, many of us in TCF have found that within a year to 18 months, we are beginning to make some progress—granted the progress may seem minute to the bereaved. Grief therapists have learned that if death is from prolonged or serious illness there is grieving during the illness. The second year of grief may be as intense or even more emotionally devastating than the first year. However, no two people have the same grief timetable. If we feel that we are not making progress, is there some way to determine whether or not we may need professional help or evaluation or at least reassurance?

The following considerations may help you decide:

Extended withdrawal from the world around you and prolonged inability to accomplish normal tasks or participate in everyday activities.

Self-imposed isolation where you do not want to be around anyone—friends, family or others.

Becoming too scared to be alone. You must have someone around all the time.

Anger or guilt that (a) is out of proportion, (b) does not fit the circumstances, (c) extends for a long time without retreating, or (d) may be directed toward or imposed on others close to you.

Depression that is exaggerated, unremitting, prolonged and occurs in original intensity years after the loss.

Anxiety that interferes with going away from home.

Dependence on alcohol or medications to cope or forget.

An emotional "logjam" resulting from an accumulation of losses over the years.

Contemplating or attempting suicide to "get away from it all" or to join your child.

Self-caused illness or physical health problems that do not go away, or the inability to separate the real from the imagined. This kind of illness is different from the "ailments" that most of us experience during the anniversary of our loved one's death.

Placing your child on a pedestal and forgetting his/her imperfections; or being unable to redirect your activities or to shift your focus, so that you can honor your child in a positive way.

An absence of grief or a numbness, anxiety, sadness, or any kind of overall attitude that negatively affects others around you, including over-protectiveness of your loved ones.

Converting all emotions into one or two favorite or "safe" emotions—like anger, boredom, or despair—which become all you are feeling, taking the place of grief.

When talking does not seem to help or there is no one able to listen.

Libbyrose D. Clark
TCF, Deep East Texas

From information provided by Vera Baron, LPC, and Ray Johnson, CSW

SIBLING GRIEF**A Holiday To Do List:**

As a reflection back on the past 13 (Wow! has it really been that long?!) Christmases, I would like to share some ways that I have handled the holidays, as well as some additional thoughts. This time of the year is bittersweet for me now, as opposed to the first Christmas without my older brother, David. That was the worst.

At any rate, I can handle November and December much better now. I suppose I've learned a little along the way, and gained strength each year. Nonetheless, the anniversary of his death always gets to me. Unfortunately, it falls between Thanksgiving and Christmas on December 9th. Here's my list of suggestions for honoring a sibling whom you have lost, and on simply making it through yourself:

Hang that stocking. Go ahead. Put up your sibling's stocking. It isn't as though your brother or sister never existed, and isn't still a part of your life.

Write a poem or letter to your sibling and put it in the stocking.

Put up a tree, or continue with your holiday traditions. Yes, this is VERY difficult. But for most of our siblings, this was their favorite time of year. Celebrate how blessed you have been to have had your sister or brother for holidays past. Decorate the way THEY would have wanted to, instead of the way you would do it.

Create a "memory" box. This is simply a box of belongings from your sibling, or pictures of your sibling, etc. Wrap it in festive holiday paper, and put it under your tree if you have one.

Buy a gift for your sibling. Maybe it is something they truly would have wanted for the holidays, maybe it's something the two of you would have enjoyed together or gotten a good laugh out of. This can be VERY therapeutic.

Go somewhere that your sibling would have wanted to go--the beach, a movie they would have liked, a favorite restaurant, wherever. "Share" this time with your sibling. This is also good on their birthday. Celebrate that they had a life and that they are a part of yours!

Bake a favorite holiday goody of your sibling's.

Get together with your family and cry (and LAUGH – it's OK to do this) at some great family memories from years past that involved your sibling. Share thoughts on great places you may have visited for the holidays, or anecdotes of you and your sibling trying to peek at what your gifts were ahead of time.

Put together a photo album of your sibling. This could be of your sibling's life in general, or of a specific subject, like the sport your sibling played, or holidays past.

Give your album to your parents. Cry (and LAUGH!) at the pictures and the memories they generate.

I hope that you are blessed this holiday season, and that my suggestions are helpful. Please know that the holidays get easier with time, and that you WILL make it through, even though it may seem impossible.

Amy Baker Ferry
TCF Heart of Florida Chapter
In loving memory of my brother, David



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

The Compassionate Friends
Debbie McFadden, editor
14726 W. 50th St.
Shawnee, Ks 66216

Phone : 913-636-4990
E-Mail: bdmcfadden@gmail.com

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.

Circle

How do you bear it all?

The cry came from a mother

Whose son had died only weeks before.

We were in a circle, looking at her,

Looking around, looking away,

Tears in our hearts, in our eyes.

How do we bear it?

I don't know,

But the circle helps.

Eva Lager
TCF/Western Australia
(Eve's daughter Milya Claudia Lager died by suicide on 4 March 1990.)

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