



The Compassionate Friends Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

Feb., March, & April 2018 Volume 6 Issue 2

The True Meaning of the Meeting

A misty, cloudy Thursday night in March found me, once again, driving to The Compassionate Friends meeting. Tonight a friend would meet me; she lost her 21 year old son seven years ago in an automobile accident. She has never sought counseling or attended a group meeting. She was always an introvert; the death of her son increased that tendency.

Together we walk to the meeting room. She's asking a few questions, but I'm doing much of the talking. A mom whose only child has been dead for 63 weeks is explaining to this woman who has endured so much for so long about coping with unimaginable loss. There's an irony here. There's also a reason.

Attending my first TCF meeting one year ago was not easy. The pain was brutally raw. The loss was unimaginable. I was reliving the death of my son in my mind, over and over and over and over. I wasn't angry. I was devastated. I wasn't blaming anyone but myself. Could I have done something differently and changed the course of events? This was my big question. My soul was an empty void, my heart broken, as another friend pushed me along into that first meeting. I'm glad she did. It made all the difference.

So tonight my friend signs in for the first time and makes a nametag. We look at the books and brochures. We talk. Melinda greets us: as always, welcoming the newcomer, extending her sincere, sweet and pure condolences to my friend. Other parents talk with us and soon the meeting begins.

Tonight's topic, ironically, is "letting go of the if only's." We all talk about our regrets, how we dwelled on them. Some are still dwelling. Others are moving away from the darkness of regret into the light of affirmation: affirmation of our love for our child, affirmation of the decision to go on and make the best life possible, affirmation to remember the life of our child and honor our child's memory.

My friend joins in, hesitant at first, but soon contributing. Talking of death, of loss, of going forward, of focusing on the positive, of not dwelling on the horror, of eliminating the negative (including people) from her life. I begin to think about her losses (there are many) and her classically introverted personality. Yet here she is openly talking about private pain. And then it hits me. She is among kindred souls in this room tonight. Each of us has had losses of a magnitude that cannot ever be measured. She is comfortable with these gentle people who weep for their dead children, whose voices break in mid-sentence, whose silences often say more than any words could possibly convey.

The meeting goes by quickly. My friend has to leave to pick up a toddler grandchild. We say quick goodbyes to the others and walk quietly to the parking lot. I mention the Mothers' Retreat, but I know she has made commitments to care for grandchildren while her daughters work. Getting here tonight required a lot of juggling, but I am glad she did it. Her lonely, private struggle has come to an end. Now she knows she is not alone, there are others just like her: kindred souls who need her as much as she needs them. We go our separate ways in the parking lot and she shouts, "I love you." I love you, too, Sherri, my kindred soul.

Annette Mennen Baldwin
TCF Katy, TX

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

- June 16th, Thor Rodenbaugh Memorial Golf Tournament @ Dub's Dred
- June 9th, Keith McFadden Memorial Golf Tournament @ Painted Hills
- July 27-29 National Conference St. Louis, Mo

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

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We Can Never Return to *Pleasantville*

When I got home today, the movie, *Pleasantville* was on the TV. It's an interesting story of a young man who finds himself magically transported into a world much like a 1950s television show. Everything is . . . pleasant. The world is laid out in "Leave It To Beaver" perfection . . . and in black and white . . . literally. There are no colors, just shades of gray. Everyone is fitted into roles and follows them nicely. There are no problems because people live their lives "properly."

The movie's hero, who finds this world enjoyable at first, soon realizes that it is all wrong. People need to experience love, anger, sorrow, depression, joy. People need colors, not black and white, to make life real.

It occurred to me while I was watching the ending of this movie, that maybe the world has us bereaved parents all backward. We are seen by many as wrapped up in "black." They chide and deride us to return to what's "normal" . . . Come back to Pleasantville. But our eyes have been opened by our children, their struggles and their deaths. We now see a wide spectrum of colors many will never experience.

We shout the reds and oranges of anger.

We feel the soft blues and pinks . . . echoes of our children's voices in our minds.

We understand the greens of quiet reflection in a crazed world rushing off to the mall looking for that one perfect gift . . . our gift is in the time and love that we spent on our kids and continue to spend on others around us.

We shed sparkling crystalline tears reflecting a pain that springs from an ocean of courage that kept us going through days, months, and years of treatments, transplants, and tragedy.

Pride for our children, all of our children, glows deeply within us like the magenta colors of the sky in a setting sun.

And on some days we experience the warm golden glow of healing flowing gently through our bodies and souls.

We can never return to the world of "Pleasantville" where hard things are hidden under a mask of unclear grays. Our eyes have been opened, not by death, but by the lives of our children.

Bill Sowers

TCF Topeka, KS

In Memory of my daughter, Rachel Sowers

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.

After 15 Years

I often hear, "Why do you still go to Compassionate Friends, why are you still involved with that group, it has been 15 years after all, aren't you beyond that now?"

I no longer judge these people, I forgive them, for they simply cannot understand, in the multitude of ways, how The Compassionate Friends has helped me to heal, and continues to help.

I remember after Danny died wondering how I would live one minute, one hour, one day without him. Where would my next breath come from? I would see others at the meetings beyond five years and say, that won't be me, I can't live that long without my son. But I did. And I did it with the help of TCF. They gave me hope.

The people who attended the meetings were authentic, freely and openly sharing their feelings and I knew it was a place I could share Danny and share my inner turmoil and fears without judgment.

Fifteen years later I can say that my grief has changed. I equate my grief to a pendulum—as my Danny said, "life is a pendulum." My grief pendulum no longer swings violently left and right without rhythm. My pendulum for the most has a soft rhythmic swing. Certainly, there are times when a memory or reflection of what was and what will never be enters my thoughts and the pendulum swings without care.

But, there is one thing I have learned that is true, it passes. My grief pendulum will return to a soft rhythmic swing once again. What does not pass, is the light and love between mother and son. I hold on dearly to that truth when the chaos comes, yes after 15 years there are still times of chaos. I know it will be this way for the rest of my life. Grief will always be my constant companion, as will the love I have for my son.

I am able to find moments and times of joy and happiness, sometimes bittersweet, but the times are there. I value and appreciate and enjoy them at a much deeper level today. At first I was afraid to love again, for fear of being hurt, but today, I love more deeply.

May your grief pendulum swing a soft, rhythmic swing, and may you always remember the love and light never goes away.

Carol Moss

TCF Reno, NV

In Memory of my son, Danny Harper

Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape.

~ from A Grief Observed by C. S. Lewis

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

February

- 11th Christopher Michael Lutz, son of Kevin & Nancy Lutz
 12th Zachary Wallace, son of Sandy & Doug Wallace
 13th Craig Howlett, son of Davie & Elaine Howlett
 15th Brian Hicks, son of Barbara Hicks
 20th Amy Batson, daughter of Barbara & Don Batson
 21st Braiden Andres Lopez, grandson of Jamie Good & Nikki Krueger
 22nd Matthew Stipancich, son of Angie Pahal
 27th Peter Daniel Downey, son of David & Christine Downey
 27th Derek Zarda, son of Kathy & Dennis Zarda

March

- 1st Denny Apple, son of Dennis & Buelah Apple
 9th Jana Elizabeth Pinker, daughter of Bob & Rebecca Pinker
 10th Joel Streufert, son of Sherry Streufert
 11th Kane Nagy, son of Robin Nagy
 12th Kevin Babson, son of Rick & Susan Babson
 18th Anthony Michael "Tony Mike" Bowers, son of Janet & Jimmy Bowers
 18th Jacob Gromly, son of Dana Gromly
 24th Mario Wards, son of Leah Wards
 25th Israel Adams, son of Dan & Leanne Adams
 26th Steven Bradford, son of Nancy Bradford, grandson of Barbara Ackerman
 28th Becca Menzel, daughter of David & Robin Menzel

April

- 1st Jessica Tracey Thomas Scott, daughter of Randy & Millie Thomas, Erin Vargas, sister
 4th Shane Day, son of Melody Gau
 17th Elisabeth Legrande, daughter of Rick & Cheryl Shook
 18th Ben Link, son of Maggie Link

Deaths

February

- 1st Tanner Lewis, son of Hayley Lewis
 1st Nathan Giron, son of Lynn Giron
 6th Denny Apple, son of Dennis & Buelah Apple
 10th Nathan James Heavilin, son of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin
 10th Curtis M.G. Gilmore, son of Anita Gordon-Gilmore
 12th Erika Jaremko, daughter of Stephanie Post

March

- 4th Peter Daniel Downey, son of David & Christine Downey
 8th Ryan O'Connell, son of Pat O'Connell
 10th Becca Menzel, daughter of David & Robin Menzel
 11th Gregory B. Dermer, son of Diane L. Dermer
 11th Kane Nagy, son of Robin Nagy
 13th Collin Scott, son of Mark & Cindy Scott
 14th Steven Bradford, son of Nancy Bradford, grandson of Barbara Ackerman
 15th Helena Grace Melo, daughter of Pam & Rudy Melo
 19th Sarah Batson, daughter of Barbara & Don Batson
 19th David Goodwin, son of Shirley Goodwin

April

- 3rd** Jason Holmes, son of Kathi & Mike Holmes
8th Robert "Robb" Aaron Repine, son of Kathy & Brad Brinkopf
9th Adam Ward, son of Sharon Ward
10th Harrison Rupp, son of Seth Rupp
15th Brian Cupp, son of Kathy Grassy
16th Ian Matches, son of Terri Matches
18th Michael James LaBarge, son of Debra LaBarge
22nd Laura Michelle Travis, daughter of Gay Kahler & Brian Janes
24th Dalton Hawkins, son of Shawn & Rhonda Hawkins
25th Bryan Bandera, son of Janet Bravo (Alexa, sister)
28th Sam Delay, son of Kathy Coggins
28th Jace Boxberger, son of Tyler & Kelli Boxberger

Wyandotte & Johnson County

Events for our Children

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

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 held on June 16th, 2018. For more information please contact Chris 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 will be June 9th, 2018.

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 18th at 1PM. For more information or to register please contact Steamboat Maurin (913) 638-1760—paulmaurin76@yahoo.com or Tim Linquist (913) 927-4792 — tlindy15@gmail.com

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 Deere 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 to 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 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

On Picking Up the Pieces

A few months after my son died someone said to me she was glad to see I was "picking up the pieces and going on". Well, I was picking up the pieces all right, but what she didn't know was they were almost a whole set of new pieces. I haven't been able to go on as though nothing about me has changed since my child died. I'm a different me now and I am still learning how the new me reacts to old situations. I have found the new pieces don't exactly fit together all nice and neat like a jigsaw puzzle because some of the old pieces are hanging in there and they don't quite mesh with the newer ones. I am and have been in the process of grinding off the edges, hoping for a better fit, one I could live with more comfortably. Time, patience and hard work are helping me accomplish this.

How are the rough edges on your new pieces coming along?

—Mary Cleckley

SIBLING GRIEF

THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED

On February 3, 1959, parents would lose children, siblings would lose brothers and grandchildren would die. This was the day a plane crash took the lives of singers J.P. Richardson (The Big Bopper), 28, Buddy Holly, 22 and Ritchie Valens, 17. Since all three were so prominent at the time, February 3, 1959, became known as "The Day The Music Died."

At the time of his death Ritchie Valens was a young man with superstar potential who, even though was still in his first year as a recording artist, had already made a name for himself in the music industry.

Growing up music would become a large part of my twin brother Alan's life. His interest in "The Wizard of Oz" would lead to an admiration of Judy Garland and in time Liza Minelli. He had seen many of Liza's concerts often sending her mail-grams of well wishes much to my mother's disapproval. It was her fear that he would get arrested for harassment. We would travel often to other concerts as well including Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, Diana Ross, Whitney Houston, Kenny G and even Yanni.

Alan's interest in music and the arts began in high school with the artistic productions. After graduation from Temple University he would become entrenched in the Philadelphia cultural scene. Much of his free time was spent volunteering for arts, dance and theatre organizations. His name would be listed in the credits of many artistic productions. He, like Ritchie Valens, was just starting to realize his dreams. Then came June 25, 1992. Alan had died of an AIDS-related brain tumor that had started not more than two months earlier. This was-for me-the day the music died.

Don McLean immortalized the February 1959 tragedy with his 1972 hit "American Pie", a song that took Alan and I years to understand and memorize. I would mark my personal tragedy by constantly changing the radio station. So much that I thought I would break the buttons. A break-up song would remind me too much of my loss. While in a friend's car I had him turn off the radio rather than risk crying.

Then one day a few years later, upon leaving the cemetery, on the radio I heard Whitney Houston's "The Greatest Love of All." Alan and I had recorded an awful rendition at a Hershey, PA amusement park recording studio. We agreed that no one else would hear the dreadful outcome. I switched stations twice only to hear the song two more times. It was my reflection that Alan was telling me to enjoy the music once again. To take pleasure in life and to do what we enjoyed doing together. I hear Alan's voice saying the words inscribed on Ritchie Valens grave "Come On, Let's Go."

Daniel Yoffee
In Memory of my brother, Alan

Daniel Yoffee, TCF Board of Directors Sibling Representative. Reprinted from the summer edition 2003 of *We Need Not Walk Alone* – The national magazine of The Compassionate Friends.

What do we live for if not to make life less difficult for each other? ~

George Eliot



**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.

The Morning After Death

The morning after death, the silent time,
The time that crawls if time moves on at all.
I walk on tiptoe into the kitchen,
meeting Truth. I beckon to a time of living.

Grief descends; it settles on the table,
chairs, and all around the kitchen.
How can I make the tea or toast the bread
with sadness all around me?

What was once vibrant has gone.
Only memory brings brightness, and I fear memory will fade.
How can I be left alone standing by the stove?
She left me, and I am here.

Making breakfast food
In the morning's dawn.
But the tea is flat; the toast is burnt,
And I inhale the grief.

—Rebecca Pinker
Jana's Mom

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.

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