



The Compassionate Friends

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

Nov., Dec., 2018, Jan. 2019 Volume 7 Issue 1

The Fourth Christmas

As I walked into a large store last Saturday to pick up some gardening ornaments and pots, I was hit by the reality that this Christmas will be the fourth one without my child. Yes, it's late summer as I write this, but some retailers are already hyping the Christmas merchandise. A weakness swept over me; I didn't think I'd have to deal with Christmas so soon. But here it was.....color coordinated Christmas trees, thematic trees, wreaths, decorations, paper. I felt like screaming and shoving the shopping cart into a display.

I remember the first Christmas after my son died. He was killed in an accident six days before Christmas. The day after Todd was killed my cousin came to the house and asked what she could do. We had to shop for Todd's children; they couldn't quite decide what they wanted until a week before Christmas. So here we were, 5 days before Christmas, one day after my son died, shopping for my son's children. I don't remember what we purchased. I was still in shock as my cousin continued to push along. Never much of a shopper, I was totally lost on that day; I followed my cousin's green jacket around the stores. We got it done, and my cousin did all the wrapping while I sat and stared blankly at the activity.

This year will be the fourth Christmas without my child.....even though he's been gone for 2 years and 8 months, I dread facing another Christmas. His death anniversary is on the 19th of December.

Seeing this materialistic Christmas outrage in August set me back. My husband was with me; we bought what we needed and left. We went to the grocery store; when we came out, we found that I had left the keys in the car door. This was not a good sign.

"That's it", I told my husband. "What's it"?, he asked. "I'm not going into another store until January unless I have no choice." He reminded me that I didn't do much shopping anyway, so that shouldn't be too difficult. I laughed because he is right; I avoid retail stores and malls when I can.

In my rational mind I know that I overreacted to the Christmas display. In my emotional mind I know that this is my reality. Since my son's death I have avoided Christmas. I hang one wreath on the door. I started putting a candle in the window on the first anniversary of Todd's death, and I light it every night as it now remains in the window all year.

We each find our own methods of coping. We each re-experience the shock, horror and helplessness of our children's death with personal triggers-smells, sights, sounds, seasons. We must train our minds to expect the unexpected from ourselves. We must learn to accept our reactions. We must understand this is our normalcy.

If I stop reacting to certain events and dreading other events, if unexpected tears stop rolling down my cheeks, I might be considered normal by some. But, I know in my heart of hearts that these reactions will stop on the day that I die. The duration and frequency have been reduced. But, no, I'll not stop reacting. My mind tells me that to "get on" with it is to repress a big part of who I am: Todd's mom. My son lived, loved, laughed, cried, learned and taught. He was my singular pure joy. No, I won't erase him. I won't erase the memories because the memories are as much a part of me as my heart.

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

WYANDOTTE COUNTY

Eisenhower Community Center

2901 North 72nd St., KCKS

Richard Moore 913-238-1890

Marlene Moore 913-238-5348

1st Tuesday @ 7PM

JOHNSON COUNTY

Advent Lutheran Church

11800 W. 151st St.

Olathe, Ks

Gay Kahler & Brian Janes

913-764-2669

WWW.JOCOTCF.ORG

UPCOMING EVENTS

- December 4th, WyCo Chapter Candle Lighting
- December 9th, Worldwide Candle Lighting

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

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Light Rekindled

Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into a flame by another human being. Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who rekindle this light.—Albert Schweitzer

This quote was recently in the daily newsletter at the hospital where I work. Having just returned home from my ninth National Conference of The Compassionate Friends, it really hit home and made sense to me regarding my journey “through the valley.”

Our family had experienced grief in several forms in the years prior to our daughter Anna’s death. However, at this particular time in our life, everything was moving along smoothly. Life was full of hopes and dreams for the future. Then the unthinkable happened. Anna’s “sinus headaches” became so severe that she became incapacitated. Over the next few weeks the doctors struggled to establish the right diagnosis, finally providing us confirmation of the worst of their considerations. Anna had several horrible, malignant brain tumors. In forty-nine days from the diagnosis our “light went out” as our precious child breathed her last breath.

Like others who have experienced the death of a child, our lives were turned upside down without our permission. It all happened so quickly that we were spinning out of control, functioning on auto-pilot, relying on friends to perform many daily tasks. As we now look back, we realize that the numbness that we felt during those first days and weeks following her death was truly a gift. Surely no one could survive this overwhelming, gut-wrenching pain if the reality of it hit all at once. The reality comes soon enough as the intensity of grief seeps into our entire being. As life goes on for everyone around us, we are left to deal with our shattered world and wade into the mucky waters of grief.

Fortunately my husband and I became aware of The Compassionate Friends. We attended national conferences and soaked up all the information, support and hugs that were offered. We soon were committed to starting a chapter in our area, but the exhaustion of grieving prevented us from moving forward with this plan for four years.

Today, through the support of family, loyal friends in our church who allowed us to lean on their faith and hope when ours was weak, and with the new friends we have made through The Compassionate Friends, we have found our way to “the other side of grief.” It has not been an easy road, but it was one that we had to travel in order to discover wholeness and find the “new normal” that defines the rest of our lives.

Yes, this was the ninth conference we have attended. People ask “why?” “Why do you continue to be part of The Compassionate Friends?” The answer is easy. The people are fabulous. No one cares what kind of house you live in or what kind of work you do. They care about YOU and the grief you bare. They want to HEAR your story and KNOW YOUR CHILD and SEE his/her picture on the picture board. Their compassion is genuine. They ask how you are because they really want to know. The world tells us to “be over it.” The Compassionate Friends, whether it is a local meeting or national conference, affirms and validates YOUR unique grief. TCF is a safe place where you can say anything, cry or not cry, laugh or not laugh, do whatever you want (without causing harm to self or others) without explanation. In addition, the workshops are excellent. The speakers are phenomenal. As hospital and hospice chaplains we have benefited in recent years from the professional day workshops, where we have learned new ways to bring hope to those who have experienced the death of a child of any age.

Ten years after Anna’s death, we continue to attend the National Conference. A high percentage of those who attend are quite newly bereaved, two years or less. On the final evening as we are gathered together in the banquet hall, I look around the room at the hundreds of people in attendance. There is an overwhelming amount of pain in that huge room. Yet, as one by one the candles are lit during the service of remembrance, there is also an enormous amount of hope. Within this family of The Compassionate Friends, bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents find assurance that their child will remain in their hearts forever and that one day life can be good again.

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All of my Compassionate Friends are high on my list of those to whom I express my deepest thanks for helping to rekindle the light that went out for me the day my daughter died. It is the vision of The Compassionate Friends that “everyone who needs us will find us, and everyone who finds us will be helped.” Won’t you please give us a try—no matter the age of your child or cause of death or how long it has been, we want you to know that “you need not walk alone” on this life-long journey, and that your child is forever loved and remembered.

Paula Funk
TCF Safe Harbor Chapter, MI
In loving memory of my daughter, Anna

Reflections on a New Year

We begin a new year, one that many of us enter with reluctance. After all, it means another year away from our child and another year to be lived without the physical presence of the one we have lost. Apprehensive about any new challenges that we may be called upon to face in our broken condition, we call out, “Wait, I’m not ready yet!”

The death of our child changed the course of our life; nothing will be the same again. But it also has shaped us into who we are today. And it will continue to do so as we learn to incorporate this loss into who we are to become.

Have you found that you have already begun to live differently? Compassion toward others is more profound. Trivial things are no longer important. Appreciation for life, and those in our lives, is paramount. We’re living the same life—differently.

Tragedies, disappointments, and heartaches combine with beauty, love, and joy to fashion our life. These are all a part of life, and our challenge is to incorporate them into our world. The difference that our child’s life has had upon the world continues through us.

So, rather than being fearful of the challenges that lie ahead, perhaps a better question to consider at this time might be: What opportunities will present themselves in the coming year to honor this loss that is already a part of our life? Our child has become more integrally entwined into our being than ever before. We bring him or her to every situation that we encounter. How can we make that situation better because of this bond?

The start of a new calendar year is a good time to remember that we are in the midst of life. It is not perfect. Nor is it one that we might have chosen. But, our struggles do not put life “on hold.” Rather they are a part of life itself! Our life is ours to make the most of, with many gifts that we can share with others. There is no better time than the present to gather up the pieces and recognize the uniqueness that we each call “me”—a uniqueness made more wonderful because of our child’s presence in the life we choose to live.

Paula Stasiunas Schultz
In Memory of Melissa and Jeff

Author biography, 2002: Paula and her husband Bob live in Chicago, Illinois., where Paula serves as co-editor of the South Suburban Chapter newsletter. Their son, Jeff Schultz, is currently a student at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. Their daughter, Melissa Schultz Cleaves, and her husband, Jeff Cleaves, had been married seven weeks when they died in a car accident on Thanksgiving weekend, 1999.

Our Children Remembered

Births

November

- 6th Kyle Gabriel Eller, son of Jennifer & David Eller
- 11th Gregory Bernard Dermer, son of Diane Dermer
- 11th Teddy Breidenthal, son of Joni & Ted Breidenthal
- 16th Brett Mitchell Hayes, son of Debbie Hayes
- 19th Drew Bodenhausen, son of Lisa & Brian Bodenhausen
- 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 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
- 7th Deana L. Kaitala, daughter of Rochelle A. Kaitala-Jones
- 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
- 13th Max Michael Galloway, son of Shannon Galloway
- 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 Joshua Wilson, son of Wayne and Kelley Wilson
- 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 Robert "Robb" Aaron Repine, son of Kathy & Brad Brinkopf

Our Children Remembered

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
- 18th Stephanie Gray, daughter of Steve Gray
- 22nd Christopher Michael Lutz, son of Kevin & Nancy Lutz
- 23rd Jana Elizabeth Pinker, daughter of Bob & Rebecca Pinker
- 29th Kyle Gabriel Eller, son of Jennifer & David Eller

December

- 4th Ashton Brunmeier, son of Todd & Julie Brunmeier
- 7th Mark Skedel, son of Ralph & Laura Spillers
- 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)
- 3rd Jackson Moore, son of Nick Moore
- 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
- 7th Deana L. Kaitala, daughter of Rochelle A. Kaitala-Jones
- 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

Ideas for Writing Your Story or Journal

Recently, several new TCF members have asked me for suggestions about what they can do at the early stages of grief and what helped me in my experience in those earlier days of grief when my son, Bobby, died. In thinking about that, I remember my *journal* and what a meaningful and effective way of venting that was for me. As you may know, very often our close friends think we should be “moving on with life” or “letting go,” etc. Unfortunately, for me, they just didn't get it. So, I looked back through some past newsletter issues and found an article on ideas for writing your story or journal – I hope you find it helpful: Bereaved parents who have written about their loss unanimously agree that writing unleashes enormous stress and pain. In my own experience, I recall one night when I locked myself in the bathroom and wrote a long letter to my son, Bobby. It was my chance to express my feelings without having them diminished by well meaning and caring people around me trying to be helpful. I will never forget the pressure that letter released for me. Although the letter was not saved, the positive result was everlasting. Have you ever thought of writing your story or keeping a journal? You may find it helpful to clarify your thoughts about your child by recording your feelings in the form of a letter. Write a letter to your child, expressing your thoughts and feelings about the following:

- ◆ A special memory that I have about you.
- ◆ What I miss the most about you and our relationship.
- ◆ What I wish I'd said or hadn't said.
- ◆ What I'd like to ask you.
- ◆ What I wish we'd done or hadn't done.
- ◆ What I've had the hardest time dealing with.
- ◆ Ways in which you will continue to live on in me.
- ◆ Special ways I have for keeping my memories of you alive.

Choose one or several ideas that have significance for you or start at the top of the list and work your way down. These topics may serve to help you come up with your own ideas, specific to your situation and relationship. Give yourself this exercise as a gift. If you would like to share your writing at a TCF meeting, please do. You never know how many other parents will be touched and benefit from your experience.

Pat Akery, Chapter Leader,
In memory of Bobby

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.

SIBLING GRIEF**FOREVER ON MY MIND**

When I attended my first meeting of the Bergen-Passaic Compassionate Friends, it was the day after my fifth birthday without my twin brother Alan. Up to then I was working nights and unable to attend meetings. Nine months later, May 1998 at a chapter meeting someone in the circle spoke of the tenth anniversary of his or her child's death. They said they no longer think of their child everyday and it didn't bother them. This was shocking to me, not to mention upsetting. I couldn't imagine living a day without thoughts of him – both happy and sad. I went home very upset.

Even after five years I always thought of him each and everyday. To this day I will lick the bowl of frosting and think of the times we fought over the bowl. After a snowstorm I write his initials in the snow. When I hear something funny I think of him. But I also think of all that he has missed. He would have gotten to know his six, soon to be seven nieces and nephews. We would have been able to enjoy many vacations together.

This June will be the ninth anniversary of his death. With the passing of time I have adjusted to not talking to him everyday (we both had 800#'s at work). I do think of what he would say when I have a problem to work out. I think the part of the old me is returning. I have started to exercise again. This is something I used to love to do before Alan got sick. I have taken steps to advance my career, something I was planning at the time of his death. I also think I took on some of his traits like becoming a better writer and not emptying the laundry basket after each wash.

There are now many more good days than bad. But almost nine years after Alan's death, I am probably the only adult male to cry at a children's movie. In "Rugrats in Paris" Chucky's father remarries sometime after his mother's death. Tommy is thrilled that he will have two mommies, one on earth and one in heaven. I am forced to remember that I can't have another Alan.

I have given myself a job that I love: The job of keeping Alan's memory alive. I do this by putting this newsletter together, collecting license plates, with his name, for each new state that I visit, donating to his scholarship fund and in many other ways.

When "Phantom of the Opera" opened on Broadway I had no desire to see it. That was until it opened in Philadelphia, after Alan's death. Alan was a publicist in Philly and the show was playing at the only theatre where I had not seen something Alan had publicized. One of the songs has a line "There will never be a day in which I won't think of you." I think this will be true for a long time to come.

Daniel Yoffee, Reprinted by permission of author In Memory of my brother, Alan

TCF "ONLINE SUPPORT COMMUNITY" OFFERS**OPPORTUNITY FOR GRIEF SHARING**

The Compassionate Friends national website offers "virtual chapters" through an Online Support Community (live chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child. The rooms supply support, encouragement, and friendship. The friendly atmosphere encourages conversation among friends; friends who understand the emotions you're experiencing. There are general bereavement sessions as well as more specific sessions.

The sessions last an hour and have trained moderators present. For more information, visit www.compassionatefriends.org and click "Online Support" listed under the Find Support menu.



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

The Compassionate Friends
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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.

First Thanksgiving

The thought of being thankful
fills my heart with dread.
They'll all be feigning gladness,
not a word about her said.

These heavy shrouds of blackness
enveloping my soul,
pervasive, throat-catching,
writhe in me, and coil.

I must, I must acknowledge,
just express her name,
so all sitting at the table,
know I'm thankful that she came.

Though she's gone from us forever
and we mourn to see her face,
not one minute of her living,
would her death ever replace.

So I stop the cheerful gathering,
though my voice quivers, quakes,
make a toast to all her living.
That small tribute's all it takes.

Genesee Bourdeau Gentry
from *Stars in the Deepest – After the Death of a Child*

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