



The Compassionate Friends

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

August, September & October, 2019 Volume 7 Issue 4

Being Public Takes Its Toll

When one is pretending, the entire body revolts.—

Anais Nin

As we attempt to return to our jobs or our social life, or just to leave the house to do errands, we may feel that we must hold our heads up and keep acting brave. So we talk about things that don't interest us instead of talking about what plagues our heart and mind. We reluctantly agree to do things in which we do not have the slightest bit of interest.

All of this takes a tremendous amount of energy. But it does something else, too. Our bodies are under a great deal of stress as we work through our child's death. Trying to create and maintain an artificial front contributes to that stress. And stress, of course, manifests itself in many ways throughout the body - in headaches, rashes, insomnia, digestive disturbances, the inability to concentrate, and the impulse to fidget or be on the move. We may also have more colds and flues as well as unexplained pains in various parts of our bodies.

One of the kindest things we can do for ourselves is to behave, as much as is possible and reasonable, in accordance with our deepest needs and desires. We can greatly reduce the amount of time and effort we put into doing what only seems socially required.

I will not push myself into false situations or require myself to perform in a way that differs significantly from my truest self. I will take care of myself by not forcing certain actions or responses, regardless of the pressure put on me to do so. My self, my body comes first, and I need to remember that my body will revolt against pretending.

Carol Staudacher
From *A Time to Grieve*

Newly Bereaved . . . Time will ease the hurt

The sadness of the present days is locked and set in time, and moving to the future is a slow and painful climb.

But all the feelings that are now so vivid and so real can't hold their fresh intensity as time begins to heal.

No wound so deep will ever go away, yet every hurt becomes a little less from day to day.

Nothing can erase the painful imprints on your mind; but there are softer memories that time, will let you find.

Though your heart won't let the sadness simply slide away, the echoes will diminish even though the memories stay.

Bruce Wilmer-TCF/NJ newsletter

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

- *Breakfast With Dad's*
8/10, 9/14, 10/12
- *WyCo Balloon Launch-*
September 3rd.

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

Barbara Starr
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Heritage-Memories Story

Our Story:

Jim & I have always valued family and family history. We proudly welcomed a son, James Ernest Watkins, III, on May 29th 1980. And were blessed two and a half years later with a daughter, Jennifer Erin Watkins. The perfect family we had always dreamed of.

We took lots of pictures as our children grew up. Every activity; all kinds of sports, church, school, scouting and family activity recorded on slides. However, with all this activity, I never thought about the importance of recording these memories in text - writing family stories. Plus I failed to keep things organized, forgot to write dates on many cards and kids notes that I saved.

Many years ago, Jim began to research the family genealogy; but life got busy, and the project went on hold. Preserving history took on a whole new meaning when our son lost a five year battle with cancer in 2015. Now each item, every memory, paper, card, picture or video is so precious; nothing dare stand in the way of keeping his memory alive.

Recently, I added a service to our business called Heritage-Memories (a service of Heritage Computer Consulting & Services, Inc.).

Heritage-Memories was born to fulfill the mission of preserving family history. We want to help people understand how to permanently preserve a lifetime of memories safely on-line where it can be shared with family and friends; protected from hurricanes, tornados, floods and fire.

Workshops: This fall we will be offering free workshops. We'll share ideas on organizing memorabilia, digital and paper scrapbooking, converting paper scrapbooks and memories from VHS and other media to digital. Scanning pictures, slides and documents; plus much, much more! We will invite you to share methods you use to store and enjoy your family history.

Unfortunately, we are not walking this grief journey alone. A grief so fresh, so deep; for all of us that we needed to find a way preserve our child's memory for the future generations.

Please let us know your interest in attending a workshop by e-mailing awatkins@heritage-memories.com.

Contact: Arlene Watkins

Phone: 913-529-4227

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 heave 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.

The Magic Light of Day

Often, when I think of you it's in the morning light. Or other times, I find that it is in the soft twilight. Somehow in those early hours or in the dusk of day – I feel our connection soundly, from your place so far away.

There's something very special about soft and dim sunlight that lets me know you're by my side and everything's alright. Not many would believe it's true, for heaven is far away. But all I know is – there you are, with me every day. You walk with me and comfort me, and somehow let me know. You'll guide the way along my life and meet me when I go.

Kathie Winkler
TCF Middleburg Heights, OH

The Breakfast Cup

Yesterday we had breakfast, a small group of men whose common distinction was that we had each lost a child or young son or daughter to death. Talk ranged around the table, mixed with pride, love, regret, and questions: What now? How do we move forward in life a little less than we were? Why was I unable to protect my child? How can I honor his or her memory? How can I be a better man because of this precious gift given me?

The answers, if there were many, varied, and incomplete. As a result of these young lives we considered have come many acts of kindness and faith shared. Growing from their loss is a deepening sense of appreciation for our wives, and our children. There is also an unwanted, yet greater understanding of meaning of death. Who we are as husbands and fathers has changed—even though we can't fully comprehend how these roles have been altered. Aaron, Mark, Mike, Wayne, and Jan...five guys sitting around a table sharing a meal, sipping coffee, and talking about our children, our hopes, our dreams, our disappointment, our loss, and our next steps.

We have been handed a cup of grief which we cannot refuse. We each take it unwillingly, but take it we must. Its effect is catastrophic and causes us to weep with regret and guilt. The cup has stolen time and love. The cup has altered our course, our walk and in a bizarre way, the cup has led us to a path nearer to God. As men, we desire to fix and solve our family's problems. We cannot overcome this cup. We can only hold out our trembling hands, raise the cup to our lips, and whisper a silent, aching prayer, "Lord, you will not take this sorrow from us, so help us to honor our children, Carl, Travis, Katie, Kate, and Brian. By Your will, with Your mercy and grace we drink. We share our children with the One who gives us hope and life. Hug them for us today, please. Amen"

Jan Owens
TCF Visalia, CA

Breakfast With Dads

A breakfast for men started several months ago and has been very well received by the men who have attended. It's scheduled for the 1st Saturday of the month (subject to change) at Buddy McFadden's house, 8625 Baska Ct., Lenexa, Ks

Starting in June, 2019 we will meet on the Second Saturday of the month.

The men sign up to bring a casserole or some breakfast dish, fruit, rolls, etc.

The time is from 8:30-10:30

If you are interested and would like to be added to the e-mail group for updates to the meetings,

Please contact Buddy at 913-481-9581 or Chuck Findley at 913-302-2954

Johnson County Information
Our Children & Siblings; Loved & Remembered

Births

August

- 3rd** *Sterling Franzwa, son of Fred & Sandy Franzwa*
- 13th** *Dalton Hawkins, son of Shawn & Rhonda Hawkins*
- 23rd** *Sam Delay, son of Kathy Coggins*
- 29th** *Andy Shields, son of Linda Schoonover*

September

- 6th** *Nathen Krasnopoler, son of Michael Krasnopoler & Susan Cohen*
- 7th** *Kyle Bunselmeyer, son of Suzette Bunselmeyer*
- 18th** *Katie Reynolds, daughter of Mark & Liz Reynolds*
- 20th** *Keith McFadden, son of Buddy & Debbie McFadden*
- 21st** *Jack Polson, son of Doug and Pam Polson*
- 22nd** *Bryan Bandera, son of Janet Bravo, brother to Alexa*

October

- 3rd** *Sarah Batson, daughter of Barbara & Don Batson*
- 7th** *Curtis M.G. Gilmore, son of Anita Gordon-Gilmore*
- 10th** *Ian Matches, son of Terri Matches*
- 16th** *Allison Michelle Fisher, daughter of Kelly & Kyle Fisher*
- 18th** *Tom Nesbihal, son of Jane Zaccardi*
- 18th** *Alan Maxville, son of Marty & Beth Maxville*
- 31st** *Jake Findley, son of Chuck Findley*

Deaths

August

- 1st** *Michael Silverio, son of Dana Bamberger*
- 3rd** *Tom Nesbihal, son of Jane Zaccardi*
- 10th** *Nathan Krasnopoler, son of Mitchell Krasnopoler & Susan Cohen*
- 16th** *Alan Maxville, son of Marty & Beth Maxville*
- 23rd** *Jack Polson, son of Doug & Pam Polson*

September

- 30th** *Alex (Allie) Lahr, daughter of Amy & Rob Lahr*
- 30th** *Austin Newell, son of Tracie Newell*

October

- 22nd** *Hunter Krentz, son of Ron & Ginger Adams*
- 23rd** *Jeffrey Neil Crump, son of Paul & Ann Crump*
- 29th** *Elisabeth Legrande, daughter of Rick & Cheryl Shook*

A STEPPARENT'S THOUGHTS

I am a bereaved stepparent – *Stepfather* to be exact. Robin Ann Craney, my stepdaughter, was killed at the hands of a drunk driver on June 8, 2001. She was 17 years old.

I have a son named Greg. His Mom remarried so I saw him on weekends, did the trips, and long summer visits as many divorced parents do. I did not get the chance to be a part of his life and see him every day. I got to hear about his activities and accomplishments *all* after the fact. When you marry someone with kids, you get another chance.

After several months of dating my (now) wife Cindy, I finally met her kids, Chris and Robin. Robin was almost 7 years old at the time. I remember that first meeting clearly because she wasn't feeling so good. She ended up getting sick and had to go home. What a first meeting that was!

After that, I became totally involved in the lives and activities of both of the children. I remember one of those nights well! Cindy and I attended parent-teacher conferences for both kids, a Cub Scout Pack Meeting and a Girl Scout Brownie Meeting...not bad for a single guy, who had been unmarried for 13 years!

Over the years, I got to know Robin's likes, dislikes, and all of her friends – *and she had a lot of friends!* I attended and participated in all of Robin's activities, supporting her in her many endeavors – including gymnastics (her favorite). I was there when she had migraine headaches, running her to the doctor when her Mother couldn't, encouraging her, supporting her – all the things Dads do for their kids. I want to tell you in no uncertain terms, being a stepparent is so much harder. You get the responsibility and, often times it seems, none of the respect. "Mom said I could so I don't have to listen to you" or "You can't tell me what to do, you are not my dad" and so forth. I tolerated and dealt with her emotional outbursts when she became incensed at anything (sometimes it seemed everything) during the teen years. *All Dads* know how trying those times can be!

Now I am a bereaved stepparent...the one in a kind of "no man's land." I am not biologically connected to Robin; I sometimes feel like an outsider around people who were *once* a family - Mother, Father, Son, and Daughter. Many of our friends have worried about Cindy and Chris. They often ask me "How is Cindy doing?" or "Is Chris OK?" Although I knew and lived with Robin for 10 years, very few ask, "How are *you* doing?" I am only the *stepparent*. The idea that this tragedy cannot be as devastating to me as it is to Robin's "real family" is incomprehensible.

One definition for the word father is "father figure: one often of particular power or influence who serves as an emotional substitute for a father." This is what I was for Robin. She loved to push my buttons – but that was part of our relationship – as frustrating as it could be. Robin is the only daughter I will ever have. I was every bit a *father* to her. I love her and I miss her.

We, the stepparents of children who have died, grieve for our children too. *Only* society puts the "Step" in the name. *Parent* is still the biggest part of who we are. We hurt because they were our children too - often without the support and understanding that is demonstrated towards the biologically connected parents. These beautiful children with whom we developed emotional bonds are now gone out of our lives; and we, too, endure the same feelings of loss and sadness.

Tony Cinocco
In memory of Robin Ann Craney
TCF, Denver, CO

Bread Crumbs—Finding Our Way Back

Bread crumbs are all we have.

They are what is left behind after the death of our child. They are our memories and our mementos.

A bread crumb is the little answering machine cassette tape that says “Hi, it’s me. Leave a message at the beep.” We may be the only people with a cassette tape in our safe deposit box. It’s not much, a few quick words, but it’s his voice—a small crumb from the original.

A bread crumb is his favorite shirt that I still can’t part with, so I wear it for good luck on special days. A bread crumb is the last Father’s Day card he wrote in his own hand before he went off to college.

Thanks for everything Dad, especially the \$. My years at home were better than words can say and I never took anything for granted. I’ve had the best childhood anyone could have. Thank you for the ideas and opportunities I grew up with. I love you. Mark

I call these things crumbs because they are a disappointing piece of the real thing, but treasured because they are all we have.

I also think there is a second way of looking at this. Bread crumbs are a part of children’s stories symbolizing signposts along the way to help lead us out of the forest—to find our way back to the land of the living, at least if the birds don’t eat them

I like to think that the return from grief is like finding our own way out of the forest. The way is marked by great changes or signposts if we will only follow the bread crumbs. I think of them as gifts left behind by our children. They change us and they lead us out of the forest—but at a very different place than we first went in. Here are three I have found. Maybe you will find others.

Crumb One

We pick up a new sense of what is important and what is not. We suffer fools, superficial cocktail parties, and convenience friends poorly. We seem to develop an immediate impatience for the meaningless and the trivial. On the other hand, we pick up an incredible sensitivity to the world around us that we did not have before. We watch the news differently. We value people more than things. We live more in the moment and less in the future because we know that sometimes “tomorrow doesn’t come.”

Crumb Two

We find our real self on the road back. After the loss of a child and a period of emptiness, we do eventually come back. But we come back differently—and I believe better—than the person that entered that awful forest. With our new understanding of priorities, we listen again to “that still small voice” that we silenced in the race to climb the career ladder or have the “perfect life” or do what our parents or teachers thought we “should” do. We find new courage to be the person we really are.

We begin living from the inside out instead of the other way around—from a sense of what is important, not what is expected. From a life of “what’s in it for me?” to “how can I help you?” We discover new and compassionate friends, and sometimes drift away from old ones. We go from a thousand name Rolodex of contacts to a handful of people we love.

We often also find our spiritual center and an inner peace. We become unafraid to die, at the same time we are beginning to live again.

Crumb Three

We pick up one more gift that I have noticed. We seem to get anointed with an ability to help someone else. You know what I mean. We didn’t want it. We didn’t ask for it. But we got it, anyway. It’s almost like a giant invisible radar screen gets mounted on our head and we now pick up vibrations from other people in need. And we find that we really can help. People seek us out. People who don’t know what to say when a child dies call us and ask: “Could you please go over?” We know we can and will, if only to listen

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I am reminded of the story of a little boy who arrived home late from school. "Where have you been?" his mother asked. "I was helping Timmy who broke his bike," the child answered. "But, Honey," the mother said. "You don't even know how to fix a bike." "I know Mom," came the reply, "But I was just helping him cry."

Sometimes we can just help someone else cry, and that is enough. Unlike most other people, we can walk directly up to a bereaved parent or sibling, look them in the eye, and say, "I know how you feel." That is what TCF is all about. And in helping another person, we help ourselves heal too.

So, what do we do with these new gifts or bread crumbs left along the way for us? New priorities. A new sense of self. And the ability to help someone else.

These are definitely good things. They did not come *from* the death of our child. Nothing good comes from the death of a child. As Rabbi Harold Kushner said in Seattle: "there is no silver lining." But there is change. These changes come *after* the death, when we recognize that we can't change what happened, but we can change what we do about it.

One day our surviving son, Rick, put his arms around us in a family hug and said: "Okay Mom and Dad, now that we are a family of three instead of four, we each have to live our lives one-third better." That, more than any other moment in our grief, marked our turning point.

My wife has a reoccurring dream. She is in Heaven many years from now and she greets our son. "Okay, Mom," Mark says, "So tell me everything you did after I died?" On that day she will be proud to answer: "I lived the rest of my life one-third better in your name."

I suspect most bereaved parents divide their lives into those two distinct stages of time: before and after the death. What we do in State Two we do in our child's name.

And because we do it, the world after our child died in some small way is changed forever. And when the world in some small way is changed forever, then our child's life continues to make a difference.

And when our child's life continues to make a difference, he or she is never entirely gone.

Rich Edler
In Memory of my son, Mark

Rich and his wife Kitty are founding members of the South Bay/LA Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. Son Mark died in 1992 and Rich's first book "If I Knew Then What I Know Now" is dedicated to him. His following book, "Into the Valley and Out Again" is the story of a father's grief after the loss of his son and the changes in priorities and approaches to life that follow." Rich served on TCF's National Board of Directors for several years as has his wife, Kitty. He died in February of 2002.

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Vulnerable

I have found in the years that have passed that **I am most vulnerable at times of remembrance.**

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

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

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

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

-Joan Fischer, TCF Nassau County Chapter, NY



**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.

WISH YOU WERE HERE

You'd be nineteen if you were here
But why you're gone still isn't clear.
Your things are still all in your room
As if you'd be returning soon.
Spongebob waits there by the door.
Your shoes are still there on the floor.
Your friends are all young women now.
They're working jobs or college bound.
Sometimes we see them and they say
We miss her so, wish she had stayed.
Your boyfriend's in the Army too
And by the way, he still loves you.
You thought his love was not so true
And that some other girl he'd choose.
But near two years have passed on by
Still to your grave he goes to cry.
Your niece and nephews miss you too,
And talk of the things you used to do.
Your Mother's going to be alright

And doesn't cry so much at night.
She puts the flowers on your grave,
And scrapbook pictures tries to save.
And me, I'm still the same old Dad,
The same old routine like I had.
I work real hard to make a way
To pay some bills and pass the day.
I'm not as funny as before
My world's not happy anymore.
I don't let on the pain I feel
But deep inside the hurt is real.
Time passes by year after year,
Life goes on with seldom a tear.
One wish I have, a wish so clear
My wish most of all, I wish you were
here.

-Dad-Steve Tutt
TCF Tyler, TX

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