



The Compassionate Friends Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

May, June & July 2019 Volume 7 Issue 3

My Waiting Room

You've spent time in a waiting room, likely in a doctor's office. Routinely, there is little to do but pick up a worn magazine knowing that reading will be cut short mid-article when your name is called. The person sitting inches from your elbow may be anxious, sitting in silence. The more outgoing people converse while waiting. Good recipes (blueberry muffins and frosted maple drops) have come my way while waiting. I have been on the receiving end of facts about fire ants and when the purple hull peas will be in. I recently received a "have a blessed day and a blessed life" after a waiting room visit.

Since the instant of my daughter Sarah's death in 2005 I have been in a waiting room of another sort. Looking back eight years on my immediate disassociation with what had been my life, the disconnect with my familiar world no longer seems odd but inevitable.

My mind conjures up a row of three glass compartments. The life I lived before Sarah's death is behind me, impenetrable but still in sight. The glass compartment ahead of me is empty, a mystery about which I can only speculate. I stand in the glass chamber between the two. My waiting room.

One early realization of my detachment occurred after I returned to work. Standing in front of a large flat eighth floor glass window, I watched moving cars and delivery vans, people walking in and out of stores and restaurants onto the sidewalks, flags flying and trees moving with the breeze. Sealed off from street noise by the window pane, there was only silence. The disconnect was jarring, but my isolation then had a description, some comparison to help me visualize.

You likely understand why I discussed my feelings of detachment with less than a few people. Why make life even more hollow by describing complex emotions over which I had no control? Maybe you have experienced or are experiencing this same detachment.

So where do we go, to whom do we turn, when bewildered by our new world, fearful of the future and the remaining years of life? We struggle to rediscover some peace and contentment following the loss of our children. The business of living is difficult on the best of days.

Philippians 3:20 says in part that our citizenship is in Heaven. We are all waiting. For the time being, we have a life filled with well-purposed work to be done. Part of our new journey, a journey not of our choosing, is the rediscovery of ourselves and our efforts to gain understanding of what we are to be doing.

Do we find answers to all of our questions? Perhaps not this side of Heaven. There is solid comfort to be found in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, **but then I shall know just as I am also known.**" It's worth the wait.

Carol Thompson, TCF Tyler, TX,
In Memory of my daughter, Sarah

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

- *Keith McFadden Memorial Golf Tournament*
May 11th, 2019
www.kmangolf.com
- *Breakfast With Dad's 5/4, 6/8, 7/13, 2019*

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

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Closure, Is It a Reality?

The use of the word “closure” is often heard in public circles or in the media especially after a tragedy and implies finality. The word comes with the sense that there will be a time, day or event like a funeral, that marks when a grieving person will be “healed” or “over it,” as though it were a disease and you could magically take a pill to be cured. There is an expectation that when the eulogies are said and the casseroles gone, magically the grief somehow goes away. *The truth is that those of us who are in TCF realize that the death of a child or sibling changes our lives forever, and we will never really truly “be over it.”* Yes, we will not have the intensity of the pain and sorrow we had at the beginning of our grief. We will go on with life and find a new normal for us, but life will never be as it was before the death, and we will not ever be fully “healed.” Sometimes those around us have attempted to comfort us by pointing to deadlines, replacements or “at least’s.” We have heard it said, “at least you have other kids,” or “you can have another baby,” or “hasn’t it been 6 months?” Many see “comfort giving” as a short term support effort, and soon we will be “over it” as we are kept busy returning to the tasks of daily living and focusing on our blessings. These comments hurt rather than provide the comfort meant to provide.

Grief follows no plan, no stages, timetable, formula, or schedule. There are no road maps; there are no absolutes. We learn in TCF that everyone grieves differently. Grief is like being lost. The familiar things we relied on to live each day are gone. We must find new anchors or stabilizers along the way and learn a new way of relating to the world and people around us. We are forced to learn to live without our child or sibling. The reality of our loss often far outweighs what we have remaining. Grief is all consuming, distorts reality, and we begin to mark time in “before or after our loved one died.” No one can hurry the process of grief; no one can do it for us. Not even our spouses, parents or other children can help us in those early days. The truth is that when our grief is new, we feel exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually. We barely have enough energy to breathe. We feel as though we have no control over our lives any more, nor do we care. We realize on some level we are helpless. We might even feel hopeless or purposeless. Some of us feel isolated, lonely and misunderstood. Some feel like everything is trivia compared to the loss we have experienced. Some feel like the world is spinning on around us, and nobody really cares that our child, sibling or grandchild died. All of these feelings are normal and part of the grieving process. *And yes, we also need to realize it is a process—a very long, gradual and difficult process.* Time does not heal all wounds, but time softens the intensity of the grief. What helps is finding those who will listen with their hearts and give us hope and understanding. Those who will spend hours, days and months with us as we retell our story over and over so we can somehow believe it ourselves. What helps is to surround ourselves with those patient people and meaningful activities that comfort and support.

Gradually the cold darkness of grief begins to give way to the warmth of the memories, acceptance, purpose, and reinvestment in life. We learn to speak of our loved one without crying and we begin to accept that what ever time we had with him or her, we would have taken even if just but a moment. We learn that grief is the price we pay for loving our child or sibling so much, and we wouldn’t want it any other way. Our relationships with family, friends and yes, even God can be strengthened or challenged as we look for new ways to connect with them. We may lose old friends who don’t really understand. We learn that problems in life are not overwhelming. We are handling the worst thing that can happen to us; what else can happen? We learn to more deeply cherish those we love. We help others in grief without batting an eye. Sometimes we pick up “gifts” along the way by becoming more caring, compassionate toward others, and appreciative for what is important in life. New strengths can develop as we find our new selves along the way. Life will be different as we learn to cope, but still have meaning.

For those of you who are new in your loss, we hope that you will continue to share your sorrow with us and learn from those further ahead on the path of grief. Someday it won’t hurt as much as it does, and you won’t always feel “this elephant on your chest.” We encourage you to ask the family and friends around you for what you need and tell them when their expectations for you are too high. We hope you will explain to them that your grief is not on a timetable and will probably not ever reach what society calls “closure.” Explain to them that you will always miss your child or sibling but you will learn to live with a broken heart. We hope you will inform them that the mention of your child’s name is music to your ears and it’s OK to talk about him or her. Your TCF friends will be with you and hold your hand every step of the way.

Carole Dyck, CF Verdugo Hills, CA

Daisies in Huge Handfuls

"Pick more daisies" was the most popular expression in our family. I picked it up from a magazine article about a 94 year old lady in Kentucky who, when asked what she would do differently if she had her life to live over, responded "I would take more chances; I would eat more ice cream and less beans; I would have more real troubles but fewer imaginary ones; I would climb more mountains; I would swim more rivers, and I would pick more daisies."

Our son, Mark, seized the daisy expression as the theme both for his life and his entrance exam essay at UCLA. It helped him live his brief 18 years; his essay helped him get an academic scholarship.

Daisies became our family flower. They marked our attitude about living. And they marked our son's memorial service. After it was over, his friends and fraternity brothers each threw a daisy into the ocean. Daisies still mark his grave every week. It has taken me almost two years to return to really thinking about daisies and what that quote by a 94-year-old lady really means. During that time I made a pretty big mess of things. I did the best I could, but I was often going through the motions outside, but empty inside.

To me, what this quote means is we really do have to pull ourselves together again and go on. Dr. Charles Heuser, a former pastor at our church, notes "going through the steps of grief is like walking through the valley and shadow of death. Keep walking, but don't camp there."

Our children would not want us to "camp there," but to go pick more daisies—to somehow live an even more meaningful life in their name. As I go on I am truly a different person. I don't suffer fools or superficiality very well any more. As one of my best friends said..."I get tired of beige people." Yet, I will drop everything to help another bereaved parent. I certainly have more "real troubles and fewer imaginary ones." But it's OK—I like myself better that way.

And I am returning to embrace life each day again. But this time I am following my heart instead of my expected career. I am taking more chances, climbing more unfamiliar mountains, and picking daisies in huge handfuls.

Mark would want it so.

Rich Edler
TCF South Bay, CA
In Memory of my son Mark Edler



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**May**

- 1st** *Landon Daniel, son of LeeAnn Daniel*
- 1st** *Daniel Shore, son of Gisele Shore*
- 6th** *James Brandt Heavilin, son of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
- 7th** *John Reynolds, son of Glenda & Bob Holman*
- 29th** *James Ernest Watkins III, son of Arlene & Jim Watkins*

June

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

July

- 1st** *Vincent Boos, son of John & Rochelle Boos, (Mariah, sister)*
- 1st** *Travis Findley, son of Chuck Findley*
- 27th** *Austin Newell, son of Tracie Newell*

Deaths**May**

- 1st** *Danny Poore, son of Deb & Darryl Poore*
- 21st** *Gus Girardi, son of Debbie Hestand*
- 28th** *Andy Shields, son of Linda Schoonover*

June

- 13th** *Allison Michelle Fisher, daughter of Kelly & Kyle Fisher*
- 19th** *John Reynolds, son of Glenda & Bob Holman*
- 20th** *Augie Echeandia, son of Augie Echeandia*
- 22nd** *Keith McFadden, son of Buddy & Debbie McFadden*
- 25th** *James Brandt Heavilin, son of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
- 28th** *Craig Howlett, son of David & Elaine Howlett*

July

- 6th** *Dana Jeanne McCollam-Allison, daughter of Cathy Caplan*
- 19th** *Landon Daniel, son of LeeAnn Daniel*
- 20th** *Tori Jade Peavler, daughter of Susan & Tim Peavler*
- 27th** *Patrick Spaulding, son of Yvonne & Scott Spaulding*

Glimpses of an Angel

Every year I looked forward to school pictures, which chronicle how much our children grow and change from year to year. As I viewed the pictures, sometimes I wished that my son Spenser had worn a shirt of another color, or someone would have combed his hair after recess. One year I cracked a smile at how the camera had captured his mischievous grin.

But I remember one year, when Spenser was about five, that I stopped in my tracks when I pulled the pictures from the envelope. He had the same blonde hair and green hazel eyes, but somehow, he looked like an angel. His countenance seemed ethereal, heavenly, holy. It's difficult to describe, but this picture was different from the rest.

Of course, he was not always an angel. As a toddler, one day he pulled my favorite bowl out of the cupboard and it smashed into pieces on the floor.

Yet after he died, a friend from church had a similar experience. Her sympathy card said that she had something she wanted to share with me, privately.

She smiled on the following Sunday morning, her usual greeting. The skin crinkled around her eyes behind her glasses. On a couch in the narthex, upholstered in brocade, she delivered her message in a determined, even tone.

"A few weeks before Spenser died, I watched him during the time with the children."

Spenser, with the other children clustered around him, would have sat on the steps which lead to the altar during the children's sermon.

"He had a halo around his head. I have never seen anyone with that before, or since."

"A halo?"

Her earnest smile did not falter. "I also have lost a child, a boy," she confessed.

"What happened to him?"

"He fell out of a tree."

She offered no other details, but remained seated in the narthex, a patient, saintly presence.

Sometimes they die. She was able to relate this incident, forty years after her child's death, with the objectivity of a news reporter, because the pain eventually subsides. The pain, which in the aftermath is incapacitating. But even this pain fades with time and must eventually be set aside, like fine china wrapped in tissue paper after the Thanksgiving meal, for there is work to be done. We who have lost children have a great deal to do to honor their memories.

Engraved on Spenser's tombstone is the figure of an angel. She hovers over a child, who also has wings, with a protective hand resting on his head. Spenser might not have chosen this for his grave, because he considered himself to be a big boy who liked action figures. But of course he is now our angel, and it is his hand that is guiding and watching over us.

This is an excerpt from *Searching for Spenser*, a memoir by Margaret Kramar, about the death of her disabled son, published by Anamcara Press in November, 2018. She is a member of The Topeka Compassionate Friends

Margaret Kramar

Grief and Marriage

When our son was killed, I remember thinking through the haze of pain that this most horrifying of life experiences would somehow bring us closer. Sharing the loss of a child created and loved by both of us for twenty years would surely deepen the bond between us. I was in for a surprise.

We clung almost blindly to each other until the shock began to give way to ugly reality. As we each moved to our individual pattern of grieving, differences began to emerge. I felt like a time bomb about to explode. I needed desperately to talk about our son. My husband refused to verbalize his feelings and became angry at my overtures. I stopped trying to communicate.

This was beyond my comprehension. Where was my helpmate, my best friend? I felt rejected, unloved and terribly alone. Anger overwhelmed me as I bitterly realized that I wasn't going to be able to share my grieving with the person who meant the most to me in the world. I knew that many marriages fail after the death of a child. Dear God, how could we possibly survive an additional tragedy?

We attended a few Compassionate Friends meetings, and then I continued alone. The gentle acceptance of others who had lost children permitted me to talk or cry without guilt. Our problem was definitely not unique; many other parents expressed similar frustrations. So many couples experience marital difficulties after the death of a child that it is now considered the norm. We weren't going crazy; and just because our grieving styles were different didn't mean that our whole marriage would fall apart. My anger began to dissipate as I slowly faced the fact that I had been placing unrealistic expectations on my husband. Hurting at least as much as I, he simply could not meet my needs for support.

Much later, the knowledge that support had been there all along from my friends—if I had only asked for it—saddened me. I had to admit that I simply had been too proud to reveal myself as a suffering person in need of help. I will be forever grateful to Compassionate Friends for being there with loving, open arms.

We began to have some honest discussions, agreeing that we needed each other's nurturing in order to survive and find meaning in life. We learned to respect each other's feelings. We tried to please each other in little ways: a hug, a special meal, anything that expressed caring. Patience with each other smoothed over many rough moments. Time spent alone together was very healing. It took a conscious decision from both of us to try harder. Some days, we didn't have any energy left when grief was particularly painful. It wasn't always easy as we couldn't talk about our son for a long time.

As I look back, I see that ignorance of grief and the impact it can have on a marriage was the basis for our problems. But in retrospect, how could we possibly have been prepared for the onslaught of paralyzing emotions that overwhelmed us? Anguish of this intensity can reveal a spouse you've never seen before. Deeply wounded, both of you will be inevitably changed from the experience of losing a child. Back then, understanding these simple facts would have immeasurably helped us.

Pat Retzliff
TCF Oshkosh, WI

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.

My Sister

I am not sure where to start. My older sister, Lezlie, died on October 1, 1997. It has been a little more than four months and I still catch my breath and start to tear up when someone mentions her name. I am a private griever, I guess. When I heard the news that she was in the ER, I fell to my knees and prayed to God. I told Him I was going to put this in His hands and that it was up to Him now – as if it was not earlier. “She did not make it.” These are the words that I heard my father say through a cloud of tears and pain. While holding my mother, he explained that she was gone. My immediate reaction was to cry. I really did not know what this would mean. I am slowly finding out just what it does.

What do we do now? I wanted to take immediate action, calling relatives, the minister, and helping in a time when my parents needed someone to lean on. I was bound and determined to be the strong one for a while. And I was.

As we made funeral arrangements and memorials plans, I, like the rest of them, sat in silence as the tears and pain flowed from my eyes. It hurt. But I was determined to remain strong for my children and for my family who seemed to be crumbling right before my very eyes. A very difficult thing to do for a little girl who thinks her daddy is the strongest person she has ever known.

I dreaded the viewing at the funeral home. I did not want to go to the funeral home and see her like that, not even one last time. My parents insisted it would be a good thing for all of us. As the time approached, I was more and more frustrated at the prospect of falling apart upon seeing her. However, as we entered the funeral home and went into the room where her body lay at rest, something happened. I could not shed a tear. It was as if my brain and body (and soul, for that matter) went on autopilot. I sat quietly on the first row watching my father fall to his knees and sob. My mother could not speak. My baby sister holding on to them both, in tears. I was on the outside looking in on the strangest and yet saddest heartbreaking moment of my life. But that’s just it: I was on the outside looking in. I was the strong one, but not by choice. I did not consciously decide to lock out my feelings and, yet, the entire episode was painful. I can’t explain my reaction.

I went through the memorial service with minimal tears. I greeted those wishing to personally offer condolences because I know my family was struggling with having to look them in the eyes and share their pain along with their own. But then I saw my friend, Julie. Julie has survived through the same experience I am going through. The key word is survived. As I hugged her, my strength lapsed and I started to cry, sort of uncontrollably. This was good.

Julie told me that “things are never going to get better.” I thought to myself, what a terrible thing to say to someone in my circumstance, but she was right. Her honesty now is appreciated. She was right. Things will never get better, we just learn to handle and cope. I am grateful for her kindness and friendship. We belong to a club that I hope no one will ever have to join. We have lost a piece of ourselves and our family will never be the same. This is a permanent state.

I still cry. I am able to get through a conversation using her name without crying – well, at least sometimes. But there are times; I call them “moments of truth,” that I am starting to experience. The first occurred on December 1, 1997. I was sitting having lunch with my coworkers. We were not talking about anything related to my loss but all of a sudden, I blurted out, “Oh, my God, it’s been two months since my sister died.” I had to get up and run. It’s odd I seem to have this need to get up and bolt frequently. I mostly control it and move on to something else, but the urge is still present and strong.

There are songs, music, books, and a little newsletter published by The Compassionate Friends that will bring me to uncontrolled grieving. I sit and hold my children as I totally let go of all the pent-up pain and sadness. It’s funny, I have remained strong for them and in my weakest moments they are all I hold on to.

Anyway, these “moments of truth” come frequently.

The closest analogy I can think of to explain this whole experience is that I am like a child whose nose is pressed up against the window pane of life when all of a sudden, the window shatters. I am so busy trying to pick up the pieces to protect the others and insure that no one else gets hurt that I do not realize until much later that my arms and hands are bleeding heavily. I can finally see the devastation and now feel the pain.

Kim Bernal
In Memory of my sister, Lezlie Dyane Davis
TCF Sugar Land-Southwest Houston, TX



**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.

JEWELS

My daughters were such girly girls, Loved pink and shiny things And the older they became Their tastes expensive, like jeweled rings.	The girls would scrap, pretend to fight, Over who would get each family piece. Grandma's giant diamond necklace, Or MY wedding rings when I'm Deceased
A gold and opal bezel set Was Sarah's grad ring gift. An amethyst collection was giv'n On Amy's birthday Pittsburgh trip.	And now, with both my daughters gone, As I look 'round at this "stuff" It's just leftover memories Of my precious jewels above.
Each Christmas or vacation, New jewels for each event. Not always pricey or refined But special 'cause of what each meant.	-Barbara Batson JoCo TCF

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