



The Compassionate Friends Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

August, September, October, 2020 Volume 8 Issue 4

The Sounds of Silence

The sounds of silence are everywhere—it is the silent pain of the loss of our son Andy, it is the silence of our home because one of our children is gone, and it is the silence of the sudden quiet that comes over people when we mention Andy.

We have become both better and worse in the six years since Andy died of cancer at the age of 22. We are better because we are able to get on with our lives and even enjoy ourselves occasionally. We have gotten worse because, as the years go by, we feel his loss more deeply.

We feel his loss every time we participate in a celebration marking some milestone of our friends and relatives or their children. We feel the loss because any celebrations of our own will always be incomplete—one person will always be absent and not there to celebrate with us or to enjoy his own milestones. The pain of his absence is always present at these events.

When Andy died, the pain of his loss was a sharp acute screaming pain that tore a hole inside of us. Now, the pain is a silent quiet steady pain. The hole is still inside us, covered by a scar, but it is still there. It doesn't scream out loud any more but instead just remains as a quiet steady and never-ending ache and sadness—a silent pain.

The silence of our home is a different kind of quiet. By now, if Andy had lived, he probably would have been out on his own. We would have been "empty nesters" anyway. But, when a home becomes empty because of the death of a child, it is a different kind of empty nest. Our daughter Lesley is married and out on her own, the way it should be. But, Andy is gone for a different reason.

So, the silence of our empty nest is not the silence of knowing we raised two children and now they are both out leading their own lives. Instead it is the silence of a home that is empty because one child is gone forever—of having to deal with the reality that phone calls only come from one child, not two; that only one child stops by for a visit, not two; that one child is forever gone from the nest. There is a silence in our home that often seems to pervade every space. It is a sad silence, not the temporary quiet of a happy home.

And then, there is the silence of relatives and friends when we talk about Andy—not about his death but about the things he did while alive. It is as if Andy has become a forbidden topic because he died, as if his death wiped out the 22 years he did live. It occurs when a relative whispers that our son died when someone asked how old he was—like his life and what happened to him was a big secret. It occurs when people suddenly get a funny look on their faces and don't know what to say next when you mention something about Andy. It occurs when you get the feeling that people want to avoid you because you remind them of a horror that could happen to anyone. It is a silence that reminds you that your emotions and feelings are different from that of others and that you will always have to live with the sounds of silence resulting from your son's death.

Mel Winer

In Memory of my son Andy

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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

JOCO TCF—Zoom meetings will be held monthly until we can safely meet in person.

WyCp has resumed their regular meetings at the address listed above.

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Thoughts from the Editor...

We Get By With A Little Help from Our Friends...

I realize that the title of this essay, modified from an old Beatle's tune, definitely dates me, but it really says it all. When I was much younger, a few years after this song was popular in the late 60's, and feathering my nest, I used to religiously read, "Hints from Heloise". She was the lady who would give you all kinds of helpful advice on how to maintain your household; like the best way to get a spot out of the carpeting, or get crayon off the wall or gum out of your child's hair, etc. I believed that she had the answers that would establish me as "Susie Homemaker". Of course, that was back in the days when it was of paramount importance that my house was the cleanest one on the block, where I lived in mortal fear that someone would drop over and find it less than perfect and whatever would they think of me??? Now it sounds so shallow and insignificant to the point of embarrassment. But that was before my daughter Nina died, and the tidy little world I lived in came crashing down around me and ceased to exist.

Once I started to thaw out from the shock and disbelief, it sunk in that I was truly and sadly a bereaved parent, that there was no going back, and no magic words that would whisk me away from this horrific nightmare I was now living, I wondered where were the helpful hints on how to survive being a bereaved parent. Where was the Heloise of Bereavement who was going to have some answers for me? I wanted step-by-step guidelines on how to help myself and reassurances that I wasn't losing my mind. I needed someone or something to give me permission to grieve for my daughter in whatever way felt right for me.

I would like to share an abridged version of a handful of hints that I and other TCF members I have met on this journey over the years have used to get through the day the best we can:

1) If you can possibly do so, get an answering machine or voicemail. Just because the phone rings doesn't mean you have to answer it. There are so many times when you just don't have the energy to even talk on the phone. Most often people are calling to tell you they care and are thinking about you, which you need to hear, so let them leave you a message, and when you feel able then you can give them a call back if you want.

2) Have a supply of Kleenex always handy, in every room in the house, in the car, and, for the ladies, in their purses (also a helpful aside for the ladies, two words to remember, an absolute necessity: Waterproof Mascara!). I was lucky enough to have a bereaved parent friend who knew that I had a knack for forgetting to put Kleenex in my purse so she would carry an extra purse-size packet for me too. You just never know when a grief storm will hit and it's good to be prepared. And if you can find them, preferably get ones with Aloe in them.

3) If you want to go to the cemetery multiple times a day, or you like to take a lawn chair and a book and sit at your child's grave site for quiet reflection, go right ahead. Some people will discourage you from this and tell you that it is unnatural and unhealthy to do this. I was five minutes away from the cemetery and in my early grief if the need hit me I could and would go out there whenever I wanted, and that may have been one time or five times in a day, even at midnight. Gradually, without consciously realizing it, my need to be at the cemetery daily became less and less as time went on. I stopped thinking of Nina as being there and more about my belief that wherever I was she was there also.

4) Do whatever you need to do (short of harming yourself or anyone else, of course!) to get through the especially tough times; whether it is the major holidays just around the corner, the first day of school, the change of seasons, or seeing your child's friend graduate/get married/become a parent, or any of the other milestones in life that you weren't privileged to see them accomplish. The best helpful hint here is to do what feels right for you. That can mean that you decide 5 minutes beforehand whether you want to go to an event/celebration or not, and then change your mind again if you need to. And if you find yourself at that event/celebration, feel free to sit close to an exit door or have an escape route so that if you feel you just can't stay then you can leave quickly and quietly. You don't need to explain or make excuses; you have every right in the world to feel how you feel, and do what is best for you. You are truly the only person who knows what that is.

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5) Turn to the invaluable voices of experience. For me, I was lucky to have a caring funeral director point me in the direction of The Compassionate Friends, and attending the meetings where I listened to others with a similar loss became a lifeline for me. Here is where I learned about the “new normal” and found people who could relate to my grief experiences. These same wonderful people told me that I could talk about Nina all I wanted no matter others reactions. They told me that I never had to “let go” of her memory and that they too bristled at the word “closure” just as I did. Realizing that support groups aren’t for everyone, staying in touch through the newsletter and other grief resources gives you another valuable connection.

Like the above “helpful hints for the bereaved”, I have learned so many things from those I have met from TCF since the unthinkable tragedy of May 11, 1995. Nothing “little” about it, I am eternally grateful for the “...help from my friends.”

Cathy L. Seehuetter
TCF St. Paul, MN
In Memory of my daughter, Nina

Shrines

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People have amassed shrines for years. In Prague there is a wall dedicated to John Lennon; flowers and photos adorn the gates of Princess Diana’s home in London; an eternal flame shines for the unknown soldier; Shinto shrines celebrate wind, rain, mountains, trees and rivers; we bury our dead and mark the grave with a headstone...we want a marker of those things valuable and important to us. That is how we feel about our dead children; we don’t want our children to be forgotten, we must remember them, others must remember them.

My son’s boots are my shrine to him.

His boots are the only thing left from his accident. They sit there, worn but whole, and I see him, I think of him, I remember him, I love him. His boots do that for me...they create an instant recall of him, his person, his character, his life.

Don’t tell me to put the boots away, don’t tell me that it is unhealthy to hold on to things that recall his memory...it is the purpose of the shrine, and yes, I want to remember my son. I want you to remember my son. He had value. He had purpose. He was good and right...recall that gift every time you see his boots. Revel in his glory, laugh with him, smile with him, embrace his life and take him with you, his memory is valuable, he is valuable. Say his name.

Marian Lambeth
TCF Tallahassee, FL
In Memory of my son Wyatt Lambeth

Breakfast With Dad’s

The Saturday morning meetings for Dad’s has resumed outside at Buddy McFadden’s house. The meetings are the 1st Saturday of the Month. The time has been changed to 8:30-10:00 due to the hot weather. **Feel free to bring whatever you want to drink or eat. We will not be sharing any homemade items.**
Any questions please contact Buddy 913-481-9581 or Chuck 913-302-2954

Johnson County Information
Our Children & Siblings; Loved & Remembered

Births

August

- 3rd** *Sterling Franzwa, child of Fred & Sandy Franzwa*
13th *Dalton Hawkins, child of Shawn & Rhonda Hawkins*
20th *Terri Barker, child of Lori Barker*
23rd *Sam Delay, child of Kathy Coggins*
28th *Angie Wieskamp, child of Dee Gavin*
29th *Andy Shields, child of Linda Schoonover*

September

- 1st** *Kyle Wiley, child of Deanna Wiley*
6th *Nathen Krasnopoler, child of Michael Krasnopoler & Susan Cohen*
7th *Kyle Bunselmeyer, child of Suzette Bunselmeyer*
18th *Katie Reynolds, child of Mark & Liz Reynolds*
20th *Keith McFadden, child of Buddy & Debbie McFadden*
21st *Jack Polson, child of Doug and Pam Polson*
22nd *Bryan Bandera, child of Janet Bravo, brother to Alexa*
24th *Ashley Holliday, child of Brad & Nancy Holliday*

October

- 3rd** *Sarah Batson, child of Barbara & Don Batson*
7th *Curtis M.G. Gilmore, child of Anita Gordon-Gilmore*
7th *Johnathon Anders, child of Jim & Megan Anders*
10th *Ian Matches, child of Terri Matches*
16th *Allison Michelle Fisher, child of Kelly & Kyle Fisher*
18th *Tom Nesbihal, child of Jane Zaccardi*
18th *Alan Maxville, child of Marty & Beth Maxville*
22nd *Chris Thornton, child of Linda & Jerry Thornton*
31st *Jake Findley, child of Chuck Findley*

Deaths

August

- 1st** *Michael Silverio, child of Dana Bamberger*
3rd *Tom Nesbihal, child of Jane Zaccardi*
10th *Nathan Krasnopoler, child of Mitchell Krasnopoler & Susan Cohen*
11th *Ariana Leigh Caraway, child of Shera McClelland*
16th *Alan Maxville, child of Marty & Beth Maxville*
16th *Terri Barker, child of Lori Barker*
23rd *Jack Polson, child of Doug & Pam Polson*

September

- 20th** *Kyle Wiley, child of Deanna Wiley*
30th *Alex (Allie) Lahr, child of Amy & Rob Lahr*
30th *Austin Newell, child of Tracie Newell*

October

- 6th** *Israel Thomas Adams, Child of Dan & Leann Adams*
22nd *Hunter Krentz, child of Ron & Ginger Adams*
23rd *Jeffrey Neil Crump, child of Paul & Ann Crump*
29th *Elisabeth Legrande, child of Rick & Cheryl Shook*

Autumn Memories

My son and I always enjoyed the autumn season. Yes, when we lived in the cold zone, we knew that winter's winds and snows were on the way. But, yet, we took time to enjoy the beautiful array of colors that nature gave us as a final salute to the growing season.

Todd and I raked leaves in the autumn. I had purchased a home in a town on the Mississippi River bluffs; the home had been built in the 1860s and I am sure some of the trees were well over 50 years old. The leaves would fall and we would rake. We made a game of it. Sometimes his best friend, Allen, would come over and help. The boys would jump into the piles and laugh with delight. We'd create a big pile and rake it to the concrete so that it could be burned. I can still see Todd laughing and dancing around that fire. His pure childhood joy was contagious.

Todd and I loved to look at the changing leaves along the bluffs of the river. We would drive on weekends and find the best view. Then we'd park and marvel at nature's wonder. The big bluffs, the turning leaves, the eagles soaring above us. Ducks flying south....even the occasional group of geese overhead...honking, honking as they journeyed to a warmer climate.

The light is different in the autumn...it's diffused somehow. It's different than the light in any other season. Autumn sun was our favorite light. It seemed less harsh, more forgiving, gentler in a strange sort of way. That was another time and another place.

Now in the autumn I remember all the special times I shared with my child. Looking at leaves, collecting leaves, raking leaves.....we did this together, just the two of us. "Mom, when are we going to go look at leaves?" Todd would ask. That was my cue to load up some soft drinks and sandwiches and head out on the first sunny Saturday. We'd repeat this ritual until the leaves had all fallen and it was time to rake.

When we moved to the Houston area, Todd was 12, and we talked about the seasons. He told me about his great memories of leaves and drives and time together. He said he would miss autumn with me. That made me feel good. These were memories that we shared, of a time when it was just Todd and me for those special moments. Looking back, I am so glad that I spent the time to make memories. I thought I was making memories for my child, but in fact, I was making memories for us both. And now those memories are my memories.....good memories.....memories that I will cherish always.

Here it is autumn again. Soon Todd will be gone five years. The memories are flooding back: the first day of each school each year, the changes as he grew to become a man. High school, college, graduate school....all began in the autumn. Autumn marks the beginning of many good memories for me. I listen as the school bus stops in front of our house to pick up today's children. Once in a while I go to the door and watch them load up, chatting with each other as they take their seats. I think of my 12 year old son, getting on that bus in front of our home for the first time: the first day of school in Houston. And for a moment, just a fleeting moment, I think I can see him sitting at a window seat, waving at me. Waving goodbye.

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

*There are things that we don't want to happen but have to accept,
things we don't want to know but have to learn,
and people we can't live without but have to let go. ~ author unknown*

Dealing with COVID-19 this year has changed many things, but as bereaved parents we know it will still be with same when school resumes.

Reopening of School and No Child!

Summer ends, and across our nation, from the middle of August to the week after Labor Day, schools open for another year. For those parents surviving a child of school age, be that from nursery school to college or university, this can be as trying a time as the holidays.

School buses travel again the busy highways of our cities and the quiet lanes of our countryside. Anxious parents stand with children about to make the first ride to school. Gaggles of youngsters play at countless stops across our land. America's most precious and costly activity is renewed. The children are off to school.

I remember well the silences of the September mornings of those first years. The bus no longer stopped at our home. It simply drove casually by, the people within never realizing it once carried the focus of my love, the repository of my dreams. The drone of its wheels marked anew the mind-numbing dullness of my fragmented senses as it moved its way down the tree lined lane once alive with my son's comings and goings.

It was always possible to avoid "back to school" sales. Seeing young people and their weary parents gather school supplies and clothing was just too much in those earliest years. Somehow, the perfect notebook, the brilliant sweater, the odd-shaped erasers were simply unendurable. The stream of vehicles heading for Cape Cod for that final Labor Day weekend, the last family outing to end the summer, was another scene to avoid. It was a ritual from which we seemed excluded. Could we still be a family without him?

Those years are gone now. Having returned to education, I now have "back to school" buying to do myself. I see the buses arrive to unload their treasured passengers, no longer feeling the emptiness of a bus that drives on, barren of hopes and dreams. But I do and will forever remember the pain of those unhappy years and sometimes I reflect on the many parents who now feel as I did.

If you are such a parent, if you mourn a child who leaves a school desk somewhere unfilled, I promise that you are not alone in that pain. But even though you are not alone, you know that you are forever marked, that the death of your child or children has altered you in some basic manner.

Perhaps time and much grief work remain before your spirit can yield up the agony and permit a new self to emerge. That time and work was necessary for me, as it actually is for all of us. For me, grief resolution finally recalled me to my original work. I teach. I no longer administer or direct. The need for that fled before bereavement's assault.

I teach math, science, and social studies to sixth grade children, ages 11 to 12 over the course of a year. In wondrous ways they have restored love to my living. There is nothing of an intellectual character with enough value to equal that, so I have given them the love and caring that was mine, evoked by and for Olin. Thus do Olin's gifts live on, called forth and given new lift through the innocent and selfless love of schoolchildren.

All who walk this road realize this is not substitution. Such is not possible. But it does reflect qualities of successful reinvestment, something each of us sorely needs.

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Today as schools prepare for another year, I look forward to a new group of children. But cautions arise within as well, the legacy of that time over 12 years ago, when the world came to a sudden halt, when the laughter of lifetimes ceased, when dreams evaporated with a morning mist.

For those of us who dare live and love again, for those fortunate enough to have found a reinvestment encouraging the same, there is always risk. After all, tragedy can strike again. Our present or past pain grants no immunity. Students, the children within the school, invited me, albeit unknowingly, to take that risk again, although certainly not at the rich and deep level of father and son. Nevertheless, it feels right, and though I will never again know the depth of love which belonged to Olin and me, I welcome the chance to live once more on its margins.

So schools, which were once just another manifestation of hurt, have helped me to restore purpose and balance to daily living. There is surely such a reinvestment awaiting all of us, but we must seek the circumstances and create the opportunities for it to occur. I pray that all of us who have not yet had such good fortune may soon do so. All of our children would want this for us as well. With that thought in mind, it is indeed worth striving for that dimension in life once more.

Don Hackett
TCF Kingston, MA
In Memory of my son, Olin

Bent But Not Broken

The beautiful flowering tree planted in Nina's memory on Memorial Day a year short of a decade ago (by her favorite cousins) looked so regal and smelled so delicious yesterday. I like to think it flowers this time of year as a special birthday message from my "baby girl". However, with the vicious storm we had last evening I watched the soft white petals drift and swirl to the ground, as if a deluge of tears from a breaking heart. Today, it sits almost bare - a few petals still hanging on for dear life, unable to let go, desperate to regain its former beauty.

I can't help but see a symbolism in that tree that I can associate with. It is as if it stands as a monument to my grief, the ebb and flow of emotions that I have felt for the past nine years since Nina no longer walks this earth. When the tree is in full flower it seems much like family life "before". Of course there were short-term crises that now seem insignificant in comparison and life's speed bumps along the way, but all in all, pretty good. I mean, at least our family was intact. When the leaves were suddenly stripped of their branches and thrown to the ground in the furious hailstorm, it was like our lives after Nina's sudden death; thrown suddenly into a world of intense pain and sorrow, trying desperately to survive the unthinkable.

But, yet this morning, the tree stands, more barren and most definitely battered, but still hanging in there. Nine years later, those who love her, have weathered the tornado-like force of grief and loss. And nine years later, much like Nina's tree, though the storm has taken its toll, we will still manage to be upright; definitely bent, but still standing. And somehow, life roars on...

With gentle thoughts,

Cathy L. Seehuetter
TCF St. Paul, MN
In Memory of my daughter, Nina



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

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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.

Tabloids

The line in the grocery store was long that day, leaving plenty of time to scan the magazines positioned near the checkout counter to catch the attention of restless, impatient customers. "Flatten Your Tummy," "Lose 40 Pounds in 30 Minutes with Our Amazing New Diet," "Eat Prune Pits for a Healthy Sex Life," and on and on.

I thought about parents in grief. And I know the response most of us have in the early weeks, months and years of grief: What does it matter? Why should I be concerned about health? Life takes on a different meaning after a child dies. We feel like we will never again care if our tummies are flat and our muscles are strong.

If there had been an article on the rack that day about getting up when I'm not sure if I can walk, drinking water when I cannot even swallow, breathing in and out without sighing, waking up or going to sleep without flashbacks, staying silent when my heart wants to scream... I would have bought it.

Alice Monroe
TCF Colorado

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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