



The Compassionate Friends

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

February, March & April, 2020 Volume 8 Issue 2

Choosing Life

“It will never be the same. Never.” As a bereaved parent, you have often heard or said these words to express grief’s profound feelings of sorrow and disorientation. Your life has suddenly taken an unexpected course that appears both uncharted and endless. Bewildered, you vainly search for pathways back to your former life, until you confront the reality that there is no way back. Your child is dead forever. It is then that you may say, “...never the same.”

This is the aspect of grief that Simon Stephens calls “The Valley of the Shadow.” It is that very long time between the death of your child and your reinvestment in life. *Between*. It is not supposed to be a permanent resting place. Although some people do take up residence in the valley, it is a transition from the death of your child to life with renewed purpose.

The key to this transition is yourself. You must choose between life and the valley. You and only you can decide. And you must make that decision again and again, each day.

Giving in to the hopelessness of the valley is tempting. Choosing to move on toward life requires a great deal of work. You must struggle with the pain of grief in order to resolve it. It is a daily struggle full of tears, anger, guilt and self-doubt, but it is the only alternative to surrendering yourself to the valley.

Little by little you choose to move on. Little by little you progress toward the other side of the valley. It takes a very long time, far longer than your friends or relatives suspected. Far longer than you had believed – even prayed – that it would be. When one day you find yourself able to do more than choose merely to live but also how to live, you will know you are leaving the valley of the shadow. There will still be more work to do, more struggle and choosing. The valley, however, stretches behind rather than in front of you.

When you have resolved your grief by reinvesting in life, you will be able to realize that nothing is ever “the same.” Life is change. We would not have it be otherwise, for that is the valley of the shadow. Change has the promise of beginning and the excitement of discovery.

Life is never the same. Life is change. Choose life!

Marcia F. Alig
TCF, Mercer Area Chapter, New Jersey

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

Monthly Meetings

Johnson County

2/10, 3/9, 4/13

Wyandotte County

2/4, 3/3, 4/7

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

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BEREAVEMENT: AFFLICTION VS. ADDICTION

Since my son, Jonathan, was killed seven years ago, I've spent a great deal of time alone with my thoughts. Countless hours have been spent dissecting the various aspects and stages of grief. My diagnosis is a life of being a bereaved parent, and to my knowledge, there seems to be no cure. My prognosis, however, is self-determined.

Unlike alcohol addiction, there is no 12-step bereavement program in which to enroll. For some bereaved parents, only a few steps are needed to move forward. For others, the number of steps may seem insurmountable. Grief is such personal emotion that attempting to pinpoint time frames is impossible.

Although there are similarities, to my thinking, grief is an affliction rather than an addiction. However, just as the alcoholic is an alcoholic for the remainder of his life regardless of how long he has gone without drinking, so too for the bereaved parent. For as long as I live I will be a bereaved mother. The loss of my son will never be separated from me. The part of my heart that is tinged with sadness will always belong to Jonathan, no matter what twists and turns my life should take in years to come. What I must strive for in my quest as a bereaved parent is to enter and remain in the "recovery" stage, just like those individuals who suffer from alcoholism and drug addiction. To me, this bereavement recovery stage is a release from the overwhelming, all-consuming grief that initially occurs at the death of a beloved child. The ache of missing the child certainly remains but the intense physical distress abates. Coping skills improve and life begins to regain some sense of normalcy under totally abnormal circumstances.

Bereavement is an affliction that is thrust upon every parent who has lost a child. Unlike addiction, it does not happen slowly over a period of time. Because there is no cure, the healing will never be complete. The best that can be desired is that the recovery stage occurs and is maintained. As in addiction, bereaved parents must work hard to stay on this "recovery wagon" for the remainder of our lives.

Care must be given that parental grief does not grow into an addiction. In the beginning it is necessary to lean into the grief and let it run its natural course. However, severe grief can be insidious sometimes encompassing us to the point that it is difficult to function. At times it seems easier to allow ourselves to become somewhat drugged by its crutch-like façade than to face head-on the cause of our grief. We become enfolded, as we would in a soft, warm cape – wrapping our grief around us until such time that we feel it may be possible to slowly undo our tight grip. Allowing ourselves to lessen our grief grip in no way intimates that we no longer miss our children. This letting go of the intense grief does not happen quickly. Leaving any cocoon is never an easy task. There are always risks, whether real or imagined.

Although I believe that time is perhaps the most important element in a bereaved parent's transition into the recovery stage, unlike many, I do not adhere to the adage that "time heals all wounds". The death of a child is a wound that will never heal and one from which we can never expect complete recovery. The passage of time simply allows us to move at our own pace from the intense, overwhelming mourning period into the recovery stage. Along with time, bereaved parents must learn to be both patient with and kind to themselves. Expecting too much from ourselves and those closest to us is a common pitfall. On many occasions we are truly our own worst enemies.

Looking to and learning from other bereaved parents, who are much farther along on grief's journey, can be a valuable experience. Many times these individuals have been down the paths we are traveling and are aware of the subtle obstacles that will impede our journey. Participating in groups such as The Compassionate Friends can be a source of support that is beyond measure. In many cases, the sharing of feelings and emotions enables us to hone our coping skills, which in turn, allows us to progress to or remain in the recovery stage.

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Since I am destined to be a bereaved parent for the rest of my life, it is my wish that my grief affliction will remain in recovery. I understand that there will always be "difficult Jonathan days" when I will need to pull the grief cape just a little tighter around myself for comfort, but hopefully as the years progress, these sad days will not be as frequent or last long as before. I will love and miss my sweet boy forever but I will strive to spend the remainder of my life in recovery by borrowing from Jonathan just a pinch of his zest for living!

Christine McGowan
TCF Abington, PA
In Memory of my son, Jonathan

Spirit Gifts

Grief is such an individual journey. We are cast on its path without our consent, enveloped by a depth of pain we never dreamed existed. We all have times when despair and loneliness threaten to engulf us.

But we do have one companion on this lonely, unsought road: our child who died. I think there is never a moment in the day when a part of me is not connected to Philip, to our years together—and to our present relationship. Our journey through grief is a good-bye to the physical presence of our children, but it is never good-bye to their spirits and to the essence of their beings. Philip lives inside me now, and the same gifts he gave me when he was physically alive are still available to me through his spirit. In some ways, those "spirit gifts" are stronger, because they are contained and undiluted within me.

When the days get unbearably hard, when I think of all this wonderful young man missed by not getting to live out his life, I try to remember to focus on the present Philip, the one inside me. I try to integrate his gifts into my life, sometimes seeing through his eyes, thinking from his heart and mind. Often when I walk in the hills, I'll hear his voice: "Pay attention, Mom." (He noticed the details in nature so much more than I.)

No matter how old your child who died, the essence of this unique being remains within you forever. It is through us and others who knew them that our children continue to live and affect our present world. Though not in the way we hoped and expected, our beloved children are still alive. ...May the spirit of the child who lives so deep within your heart help you through this month and through every moment of the re-establishing of your life.

Catharine (Kitty) Reeve
Newsletter Editor, TCF Marin and San Francisco Chapters, CA
Reprint permission granted by author to TCF
In Memory of my son, Philip

Breakfast With Dads

A breakfast for men has started 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

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**February**

- 7th *Breanna Fletcher, child of Amy & Billy Leiker*
 12th *Robert Leiker, child of Kim & Randy Leiker*
 13th *Craig Howlett, child of Davie & Elaine Howlett*
 20th *Amy Batson, child of Barbara & Don Batson*
 27th *Peter Daniel Downey, child of David & Christine Downey*

March

- 1st *Denny Apple, child of Dennis & Buelah Apple*
 9th *Jana Elizabeth Pinker, child of Bob & Rebecca Pinker*
 10th *Joel Streufert, child of Sherry Streufert*
 12th *Kevin Babson, child of Rick & Susan Babson*
 23th *Mikie Bowman, brother of Rick Bowman*
 25th *Israel Thomas Adams, child of Dan & Leann Adams*
 28th *Becca Menzel, child of David & Robin Menzel*

April

- 4th *Shane Day, child of Melody Gau*
 5th *Gus Girardi, child of Debbie Hestand*
 13th *Aaron Martin, child of Judy Martin*
 15th *David Edmonds, child of Christine Edmonds*
 17th *Elisabeth Legrande, child of Rick & Cheryl Shook*

Deaths**February**

- 1st *Tanner Lewis, child of Hayley Lewis*
 1st *Katie Reynolds, child of Mark & Liz Reynolds*
 3rd *Jake Findley, child of Chuck Findley*
 4th *Travis Findley, child of Chuck Findley*
 6th *Denny Apple, child of Dennis & Buelah Apple*
 7th *Deana Lori Kaitala, child of Rochelle Jones*
 10th *Nathan James Heavilin, child of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
 10th *Curtis M.G. Gilmore, child of Anita Gordon-Gilmore*
 12th *Erika Jaremko, child of Stephanie Post*
 12th *Johnathon Anders, child of Jim & Megan Anders*

March

- 4th *Peter Daniel Downey, child of David & Christine Downey*
 9th *Andrew Caraway, child of Shera Grimm*
 10th *Becca Menzel, child of David & Robin Menzel*
 11th *Gregory B. Dermer, child of Diane L. Dermer*
 12th *David Edmonds, child of Christine Edmonds*
 13th *Collin Scott, child of Mark & Cindy Scott*
 19th *Sarah Batson, child of Barbara & Don Batson*
 23rd *Mikie Bowman, brother of Rick Bowman*

April

- 1st *James Ernest Watkins III, child of Arlene & Jim Watkins*
 2nd *Jenny Anne Johnson, child of Susan & Jeff Johnson*
 3rd *Jason Holmes, child of Kathie & Mike Holmes*
 4th *Breanna Fletcher, child of Amy & Billy Fletcher*
 8th *Heather Katheryn Clark, child of Gloria Clark*
 9th *Aaron Martin, child of Judy Martin*
 9th *Adam Ward, child of Sharon Ward*
 10th *Harrison Rupp, child of Seth Rupp*
 13th *Angie Wieskamp, child of Dee Gavin*
 14th *Alexandra (Alex) Rumpel, child of Irina Galkina*
 15th *Brian Cupp, child of Kathy Grassy*
 16th *Ian Matches, child of Terri Matches*
 18th *Joel Knopf, child of Mary Knopf*
 22nd *Laura Michelle Travis, child of Gay Kahler & Brian Janes*
- 24th *Dalton Hawkins, child of Shawn & Rhonda Hawkins*
 25th *Bryan Bandera, child of Janet Bravo*
 28th *Sam Delay, child of Kathy Coggins*
 28th *Jace Boxberger, child of Tyler & Kelli Boxberger*
 29th *Ashley Holliday, child of Brad & Nancy Holliday*

Groundhog Day

According to folklore, every year on this day, a groundhog named Punxsutawney Phil, in a little town by the same name in Pennsylvania, wakes from his winter slumber, rises from his cozy little burrow and gazes about at his surroundings. Legend has it that if he doesn't see his shadow, he shakes himself off and ventures out to welcome an early spring. If he sees his shadow, he becomes frightened and quickly retreats down his hole to safety where he goes back to sleep and the winter weather continues. This year Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow, thus predicting another six more weeks of winter. When we lose a child, we seem to linger in a perpetual winter. For a very long time we see our world as a barren winter landscape. The warmth and love that our children brought to our hearts has been ripped away by their death and we're left with a cold aching void. We are a little like Punxsutawney Phil. We might be afraid to come to our first Compassionate Friends meeting. We may want to hide from the world and stay in our burrows. But if we are very brave and come to a meeting, we will meet others who have survived the long cold winter of their hearts. We gather to share our stories, support each other, love each other and very slowly we begin to and rejoin life as best we can. Remember, we need not walk alone.

Janet G. Reyes

The Pit of Grief

The day my child died, I fell into the pit of grief. My friends watched me struggle through daily life, waiting for the person I once was to arise from the pit, not realizing she is gone forever. The pit is full of darkness, heartache and despair; it paralyzes your thoughts, movements and ability to think. The pit leaves you forever changed, unable to surface the person you once were.

Some of my pre-grief friends gather around the top of the pit, waiting for the old me to appear before their eyes, not understanding what's taking me so long to emerge. After all...in their eyes, I've been in the pit for quite some time. Yet, in my eyes, it seems as if I fell in only yesterday.

Not all of my pre-grief friends gathered at the top of the pit. Some are helping me with the climb out of the darkness. They climb side by side with me from time to time, but mostly, they climb ahead of me, waiting patiently at each plateau. Even with these friends I sometimes wonder if they are also waiting for the pre-grief me to magically appear before their eyes. Then there are the casual acquaintances (or maybe even family members), you know, the ones who say, "Hi, how are you?" when they really don't care or really don't want to know. These people are the people who sighed in relief that it was my child who died and not theirs. You know, the "better you, not me" attitude.

My post-grief friends are the ones who climb with me, side by side, inch by inch, out of the pit of grief. They have no way of comparing the pit climber to the pre-grief person I once was. You see, they started at the bottom of the pit with me. They are able to reassure me when I need strength. They have no expectations, no memories, and no recollections of how I "should" be. They want me to heal, to smile more often and find joy in life. But they've also accepted the person I've become: the "Person" who is emerging from the pit.

Cindy Early, November 1999

From the "old" web page MISS (Mothers in Sympathy and Support)
Lovingly borrowed from the newsletter of The Compassionate Friends,
Seattle-King County, WA, July 2001

Writing the Heartache

The first year after the death of a child is like having the worst noise possible running through your head each day and night. There is no way to turn the horrendous sounds off because there is no off button.

Grammar didn't matter; penmanship went out the window. These aren't a concern when you are writing to survive.

I wrote through that noise. I wrote from the heavy bag of emotions bereaved parents and siblings must carry—anger, guilt, sorrow, and confusion, all the “what ifs” and “how comes” and “whys.”

I wrote of longing for a blond-haired boy with blue eyes whose laughter brightened hospital rooms. A quiet spot under weeping willows at a local park is where I carried my pen, journal, and pain. As I wrote over the course of many months, I was although I didn't realize it at the time, providing therapy for myself.

Some days when the weather did not permit a trip to the park and my body and mind harbored excruciating pain, I shut myself in a room, away from my other children and husband. I'd grab my journal and let the experiences of the day and my feelings freely emerge onto each white page. Grammar didn't matter; penmanship went out the window. These aren't a concern when you are writing to survive.

Writing the heartache, complete and honest, is a way of healing. Our cry is, “Help me with this pain!” We find ourselves lamenting as King David did in Psalm 13:2, “How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?” David wrote many of his psalms starting with anger and agony and, gradually, ending with hope.

Writing can do that for us. We enter into our devastation, get a good grip on what our struggles are, and something about seeing them on paper causes us to realize the pain is not only within us anymore. It is shared, even if only on a sheet of notebook paper. It is documented, and the more we write, the better we are able to understand and deal with our intense sorrow.

Some people think only the creative types write, when in reality, writing through the pain is available to anyone who has suffered the loss of someone close. “I don't have the time,” many say. “What will I write?” others wonder. The blank page scares some because they think they have to fill it with something profound.

But just writing a memory of your child or a few lines about how you felt after he died is a notable start. If we think of writing as a private endeavor and an effective tool, not a paper to be graded by a high school English teacher, we will conquer many of the doubts about our ability. In time, we will see that writing helps us become better in tune with our feelings and thoughts. It clarifies our lives and gives us understanding.

Other reasons to take the time to write are:

- To experience personal growth.
- To leave a legacy or a keepsake so that there will be recordings of what and who our child was.
- To demonstrate a way of cherishing our child.
- To feel a connection to our child as we remember the things we shared here on earth.

We also are honoring our grief, our pain, and what has happened to us. We are validating its existence. As studies have shown, writing is healthy for our minds and bodies.

Professor James Pennebaker claims that writing actually helps the physical body when the writer is able to open up, by sharing deep feelings on paper over a period of time. In his study, half of a group of students at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, wrote their heartfelt thoughts and feelings about a stressful event from their lives; the other half wrote about superficial topics. Each group wrote for 20 minutes a day, for four consecutive days. Before and immediately after writing, blood pressure and heart rates were tested and a galvanic skin response was done. Six weeks later, the students had their blood tested again.

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The group that had written about trivial topics showed no sign of changes. But the group that had poured their pain onto paper, claimed writing had actually calmed them. Their skin was drier after writing and both heart rate and blood pressure had decreased. Their blood work even showed an increase in lymphocytes, the white blood cells that work to keep the immune system healthy.

Writing through the heartache of losing a child is some of the best therapy I have found on this journey. I didn't know how helpful it was, I just knew I needed to organize my thoughts and get them on paper. Now, four years since my 4-year-old son Daniel's death, I see that when all the evidence is presented, there is no reason not to write. It causes dim skies to light up when not only the pain, but also the love and cherished memories, are recorded.

Alice J. Wisler
In Memory of my son, Daniel

Alice J. Wisler is a former newsletter editor for the Wake County, NC chapter of TCF. She lives in Durham, N.C., with her husband and three children. Their four-year-old son, Daniel, died in 1997 after eight months of treatments for a malignant tumor, neuroblastoma. She is the author of *Slices of Sunlight: A Cookbook Of Memories*, founder of Daniel's House Publications, and editor of *LARGO* and the new e-zine, *Tributes*.

This article was first printed in the *Durham (N.C.) Herald-Sun*, April 15, 2001.

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We Need Not Walk Alone, the national magazine of The Compassionate Friends.

A LOVE LETTER TO MY CHILDREN

You are great kids. You have always been great kids, although I haven't always been a great mom. After your brother died, I was hardly any kind of mom at all. I was so lost in my own grief, I wasn't there for you. You were bewildered, scared and hurt, but I couldn't seem to reach out to you beyond my own pain. I was like a day-old helium balloon drifting along, not sure whether my place was with you or with your brother.

I didn't drift for long. You grabbed my string and yanked me back! The yowls and shrieks still ring in my ears: "mom, all my underwear is dirty!" or "Mom, I'm starved!" or "Mom, he punched me!" Your brother was being cared for by his heavenly Father, but you needed your earthly mother. It was your need for me that saved my life.

I'm sorry that your brother's death robbed you of your childhood. While other kids fretted about what to wear or which movie to see, you wondered when the tears and sadness would ever end and if we would be a family again. If I could have shielded you from such great sorrow, I would have; but I couldn't.

Your lives were changed forever, and the future was uncertain, but you kept going. You supported and inspired me as we traveled that rocky road of grief together. You talked about your brother when no one else would say his name. You kept his picture in your rooms and proudly pointed out to friends, "This is my brother." You used his things, but gently. You reminded me of the cute, funny things he said and did. You included him in your bedtime prayers. You still do. Some day I believe you will tell your own children about your brother. Thank you for keeping his memory alive.

Because of the tragedy you experienced, you are more mature than other kids your age. You possess strength and courage beyond your years. You are resilient; little things don't get you down. Best of all, you are kind, sensitive, and compassionate to others. I adore you. You are my life.

Pat Dyson
TCF, Beaumont, TX



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

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JOHNSON COUNTY WEBSITE
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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.

A Love Song

The mention of my child's name may bring tears to my eyes. But it never fails to bring music to my ears.

If you are really my friend, Please, don't keep me from hearing the beautiful music of his name. It soothes my broken heart and fills my soul with love.

Nancy Williams

**IT WILL BE ANOTHER
BIRTHDAY WITHOUT YOU**

The sun will shine
roses bloom, geese fly
throughout the sky

servng angel food cupcakes
with rainbow icing
coated with tears

stocks will trade,
the weatherman predict
politicians debate

fluctuating between emotions:
the grief over death
the celebration over birth

it'll seem like another day
just a day, same 24 hours
not a special holiday

For this mother
it will be yet
another birthday without you.

But to this mother
who will stand at the grave
lifting balloons into the sky

In Memory of Daniel

Alice J. Wisler
TCF Wake County, NC

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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