



The Compassionate Friends

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

May, June, July 2020 Volume 8 Issue 3

Social Distancing

We have all learned this new catch phrase since the 2020 worldwide pandemic. But for bereaved parents, we have known about social distancing since we lost our child. We have all experienced the trip to the grocery store when someone you know chooses to go down a different aisle because they don't know what to say. Or the lack of invitations to social gatherings, especially if there will be children the same age as what your child would have been. We have all been warned that our "address book" would change after the initial mourning period.

On the other hand, I have also gone down a different aisle at the grocery store because at that particular time I was too vulnerable, and trying to speak with someone would only lead to tears. Or distancing myself from meeting someone new because the first thing most people ask is about your children. And then there is the person that just grabs on and starts crying for you and won't let go until you are also in tears.

I am going on 13 years since my son Keith died so for the most part have learned to handle my emotions. I have thought a lot about the mandatory social distancing. It would have been a great excuse to avoid seeing anyone. I already had no desire to get up and dressed each day. Or to get in the car and try to remember where I was supposed to be.

Then we have the masks. We all learned very quickly about wearing masks. We wore them to work, the grocery store, church, birthday parties, family gatherings, and in front of most of our friends. Many times our masks only came off at Compassionate Friends meetings and maybe at home. Our masks had to also cover the eyes because we all know how telling the eyes are during grief. Wearing that mask was exhausting.

But on the other hand, I wouldn't have had the other people around me that helped me get through each day. There would not have been anyone to take me to Compassionate Friends meetings. I would have missed so many warm hugs. There wouldn't have been the face to face meetings that I so desperately needed.

I do know how much those meetings helped me and I worry about the newly bereaved during this time in our lives. I am thankful now that we have the capability for face to face "Zoom" meetings as we go through this pandemic. But for the bereaved parent, this isn't new, it's just different.

—Debbie McFadden

TCF-Kansas

Before Donna's death, I found it hard to cry in front of others,
but now I see that I have to stand up and cry like a man.

—Paul Sillman, TCF, Madison, Wi

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**

**WYCO TCF— Please contact
your Chapter Leader if you
would like to set up online
meetings**

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

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Tears are Hot

I never really noticed how hot tears are as they roll down my face. Sure I have cried many times before you died; but you leaving made time stand still and life feel so surreal.

Shock, numbness, nausea, and pain so severe I was certain I would die. Can't they see it? Surely they can. No one acts as if they can see it. My heart hurts so badly, my soul aches; my breasts hurt yearning for my children, how can that be? Why can't they see it? Why can't they help?

Who am I now that my children have gone? Where am I now that your voices are nowhere to be heard? There are no phone calls with crisis to fix. No more reasons to give you money today. No problems that only Mom knows the answers to.

It's been a year now since you went home, and I find myself feeling so alone. Who will care for me when I am old? What of my future? Where have my dreams gone, your college graduations, your careers, your weddings, the holidays at your homes?

Since you left I struggle with so many questions. Am I still a Mom? I have no children now, so how could I possibly be a Mom? What if I had bought four new tires for the car instead of two? What if I had not given you gas money to take the trip?

I never noticed how hot tears are as they roll down my face. As I cry for missing you both as I often do, the tears fall in slow motion symbolic of how today it's still so unreal.

It seems like yesterday I received that dreaded call; I hate to have to tell you this, he said on the phone. At that moment I knew what I was about to hear would change my life forever. I knew what he was about to say I could not bear.

But for some reason I did not know you were dead; I thought mothers were to know those things, a feeling, a hunch. I had so much guilt that I didn't know my babies had died when I was in that meeting at 10:30 that day.

My first thought when I heard his voice was that you made him call because your daughter/niece "our baby girl" had died and you could not tell me yourself for your broken hearts and your personal shock. But then I heard those dreaded words that I will never forget the gist.

Amanda and Logan have been killed in an accident, or maybe he said, Amanda and Logan are dead, or possibly even, there has been an accident and Amanda and Logan didn't make it, I don't recall but the end result was all the same.

I never noticed how hot tears are as they roll down my face. As I cry today a year later, I cry more for me and our little girl not having you in our lives for I know you are home now and we will be together again one day.

I thank you for leaving your baby girl here with me; I thank God daily she was in the car behind you. We have each other and we will make it through and create a new life together as you meant us to.

Caring for her has helped me to heal that part of me that asked if I am still a Mom. My answer today is yes, I am a Mom of three, two of my children live in heaven and I have one precious little girl who lives here with me.

The year has gone so fast; I can't believe I write this now a year later and in some ways I feel no different. The pain is still immense; my heart still hurts, my soul still aches, the physical pain still remains.

But the difference is today I have seen the other side; I have experienced joy where last year I knew I never would again, I have laughed and smiled and played as we used to do. I strive daily to go on in your memory, with your love as my inspiration as you would want me to.

Some days I even forget to notice the temperature of the tears as they fall down my face, for once more they are healing tears, tears of joy, tears of anger and tears of sadness, they are not only the tears of a Mothers broken heart.

—Deana L. Martin

In Memory of my children, Amanda Suzanne Mills and Logan Robert Mills

The Statement of One Bereaved Father

I did not choose to become bereaved. Painful as it is, I choose to allow grief to work progressively in me.

I grieve because I loved much: my child died, but my love didn't. Since I loved, and still love very much, I expect my grief to be severe.

I realize that each person grieves differently. I accept that my wife and children will grieve differently than I do.

Grief, while very real, is not rational. I accept in others what appears to me irrational.

Crying is a part of grief, it is not unmanly to cry. I must allow myself to cry, even openly.

I cannot forget the events surrounding the death of my child. I choose to recall the happy memories associated with my child.

If I allow it to, by my grieving, time will produce a healing. I realize that healing does not mean forgetting my child.

—Robert Gloor

A Word About Approval

A word about approval might be appropriate here. We are a society that lives by approval. Others must approve of our actions, or behavior and sometimes even our thoughts. If we don't meet the approval of society, we are cast out. Even we turn that lack of approval inside and say to ourselves: "If I don't conform, I must be different or wrong." If we are concerned with meeting another's approval, we surrender our individually—our real selves.

If we are to grow from the experience of losing our child, if we are to successfully resolve our grief, we must stop looking to others for approval of what we do. We must have personal confidence that how **we** handle our grief is good and right. Since **we** are working toward **our** recovery, we must do it **our** way. Just as no one can live our life, no one can live our grief, and no one can tell us how to grieve. See yourself as knowing what is best for you. Don't let others take that right from you by succumbing to their disapproval

—Margaret Gerner, TCF, St. Louis, MO.

A crowd of grieving caterpillars were carrying a dead cocoon to its final resting place. The poor caterpillars were weeping and broken hearted, but all the while the lovely butterfly fluttered happily over their heads.

Breakfast With Dads

The monthly meeting for Dad's has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Buddy & Chuck are discussing a way to have an outdoor meeting on the driveway or backyard. Everyone would bring their own snack, coffee, and lawn chair. We are not sharing food.

We will send out an email as soon as we have all the details worked out.

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, child of LeeAnn Daniel*
1st *Daniel Shore, child of Gisele Shore*
6th *James Brandt Heavilin, child of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
7th *John Reynolds, child of Glenda & Bob Holman*
10th *Joel Knopf, child of Mary Knopf*
13th *Matthew Thomas Billings, child of Jude Billings*
21st *Heather Katheryn Clark, child of Gloria Clark*
29th *James Ernest Watkins III, child of Arlene & Jim Watkins*

June

- 3rd** *Lori Mertensmeyer, child of Jerry Mertensmeyer*
14th *Lara Rogers, child of Tim & Janet Rogers*
19th *Tanner Lewis, child of Hayley Lewis*
20th *Christina Tsouflias, child of John & Stephanie Tsouflias*
24th *Dana Jeanne McCollam-Allison, child of Cathy Caplan*
26th *Erika Jaremko, child of Stephanie Post*

July

- 1st** *Vincent Boos, child of John & Rochelle Boos*
1st *Travis Findley, child of Chuck Findley*
23rd *Harrison Rupp, child of Seth Rupp*
27th *Austin Newell, child of Tracie Newell*

Deaths**May**

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

June

- 1st** *Christina Tsouflias, child of John & Stephanie Tsouflias*
12th *Lori Mertensmeyer, child of Jerry Mertensmeyer*
13th *Allison Michelle Fisher, child of Kelly & Kyle Fisher*
19th *John Reynolds, child of Glenda & Bob Holman*
19th *Keisha Clay, child of Carla & Frank Smocks*
20th *Augie Echeandia, child of Augie Echeandia*
22nd *Keith McFadden, child of Buddy & Debbie McFadden*
25th *James Brandt Heavilin, child of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
26th *Nick Viscek, child of Trish Viscek*
28th *Craig Howlett, child of David & Elaine Howlett*

July

- 6th** *Dana Jeanne McCollam-Allison, child of Cathy Caplan*
11th *Chris Thornton, child of Linda & Jerry Thornton*
19th *Landon Daniel, child of LeeAnn Daniel*
20th *Tori Jade Peavler, child of Susan & Tim Peavler*
27th *Patrick Spaulding, child of Yvonne & Scott Spaulding*

Mother's Day...Father's Day... Graduations...Proms...Vacations

Spring comes-and with it comes the uneasy awareness of difficult days ahead. For those who are still going through all the "FIRSTS" without your child, we share with you some special ways other parents have coped and managed. **Mother's Day—Father's Day—Graduations—Vacations:** These are special family times which often catch us unaware and bring unexpected tears and painful memories of young lives cut short. *It does get better!* And you can make these special days better with some planning and with encouragement from those who have already been there.

REMEMBER:

- Take one day at a time.
- Keep things simple by playing down the holidays and special days while they are so painful.
- Change your routine from past years.
- Make plans to be "busy" during at least part of the day (go out to lunch or a movie, or visit friends).
- Give your older children some "space"...they not only feel YOUR extreme sadness at these times, they also have their own feelings to deal with.

Whatever the "Special Day" that lies ahead for your family, try to focus on doing something meaningful and tangible to remember your child. As a family, share thoughts and suggestions about planting a tree or starting a rose garden, donating a book to the library or school, putting flowers on the altar or lighting a special candle, or taking that long-talked-of vacation. Tears and moments of sadness are okay, for they are expressions of love.

The anticipation is often worse than the day itself.

—Fox Valley Chapter TCF, Aurora, IL

One

It was only *1* second, *one* thought, *one* decision, *one* action in a lifetime of seconds, and thoughts, and decisions, and actions. It was so fast, so permanent, so irreversible, so hopeless. This moment, this thought, this decision, this action do not define him, do not honor him, do not immortalize him. It is the preceding 946,080,000 seconds, and thoughts, and decisions, and actions that define him, that honor him, that immortalize him.

I remember my brother in all of the other seconds, and thoughts, and decisions, and actions that preceded this *one*. I remember him coming home from the hospital, lip synching in the basement, falling out of the tree, biking across campus, coming home from school, from boot camp, from war... I remember him hiking, and skiing, and running, and laughing, and crying. I remember how safe I always felt when he was around. I knew he would take care, protect, defend.

I don't remember exactly when my brother became an amazing human being – I just looked at him one day and knew he was. I knew that nothing would make him change his mind about me. He was without judgment, without prejudice, without preconception. I knew my brother because we talked and he listened. I respected my brother most for his humanity – for being so sensitive, so vulnerable, so honest. I loved my brother for sharing the load when it was too hard for someone he loved to carry alone. I knew my brother because he left so much of him in me.

I trusted and respected my brother's decisions in the preceding 946,080,000 seconds, I have to trust and respect this *one* decision the same. I honor my brother by honoring myself. I do not dwell in that *one* moment, instead I celebrate and cherish all of the others. In that *1* second, *one* thought, *one* decision, *one* action, I found the strength he had given me and I will not let him down. I will not let that *one* moment be the only *one*.

Michele Mallory

There's No Law Against Grieving--Even for Men

Two years have now passed but I still remember that day like it was yesterday.

If you are reading this, then you have probably lived that day, too. It may have been slightly different—but still the same.

Even though there was a bunch of relatives and friends in the waiting room with me, it was like I was completely alone.

I had been called to the hospital less than an hour before. There had been a car accident. My wife was injured but not in danger. But no one would tell me anything about my 8 year-old Stephanie or 5 year-old Stephen who were riding in the car with her.

I had been led to a waiting room, hoping for word from the emergency room doctor. The minutes seemed like hours. Then the doctor came in. Stephanie was in critical condition and would be flown to Children's Hospital. But they were unable to revive my precious Stephen.

The words echoed over and over in my brain.

"Your son has died." The shock and the grief struck me at the same time. I had expected them to come in and tell me the kids were injured but would be just fine thanks to the excellent efforts of everyone involved. After all, that's the way it always happens on "Rescue 911."

But that wasn't the way it happened this time!

I only half remember being led back to my wife where I broke the news to her.

A moment later when I had been led into the corridor, someone asked me if I wanted to see my son. I don't even remember my response—just walking down the hallway, a nurse on each side holding my arms. All I could take were little half steps. My legs had no strength. Through the tears I could see all the nurses and hospital personnel stop everything they were doing and stare at us. Apparently they hadn't seen a grieving father before.

Finally we reached the emergency room at the end of what seemed like the longest corridor in the world. The door swung open and I spotted my son lying on a table at the far end of the room. I was helped to him and then left alone.

Waves of grief overcame me as I looked at Stephen's sweet face, laying there as if asleep. And the realization that I would never hear his laugh, I would never see him smile, I would never feel his kiss again.

After a few minutes a nurse came back and told me I would have to go because my daughter was being loaded into the helicopter and I should give her some words of encouragement, even though she might not be able to hear me.

I did that and I was driven to Children's Hospital where Stephanie died later that night.

The grief that I felt was so intense. The shock was incredible. This couldn't be happening. Both of my children were dead.

I remember the newspaper reporter who showed up at my house the next day. I had gone home to get some clean clothes and take a shower. On my way into the house she approached me. We sat on the porch and both cried and grieved as I related to her the story of the wonderful life I had spent with my children. This reporter never once stared at me with that critical look that I have seen from others. If translated into words, it would be "Men don't cry."

So often men are not allowed by society to grieve. They have to be strong for their wife and their remaining family. How many bereaved mothers have told me that "He holds it all in. He never cries. He never talks about our dead child." They want me to meet their husband because maybe I can get him to understand it's okay to open up and feel grief.

I was fortunate that I grew up in a family where it was okay to let my feelings show. If I was beaten up by the school bully, my father and mother let me know it was okay to cry. When the first person I was really close to died, my grandmother, no one told me it wasn't alright to grieve.

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I was fortunate that I grew up in a family where it was okay to let my feelings show. If I was beaten up by the school bully, my father and mother let me know it was okay to cry. When the first person I was really close to died, my grandmother, no one told me it wasn't alright to grieve.

And this upbringing stuck with me. If I'm in a store and Bette Midler's song "God is Watching Us From a Distance" (Stephen's favorite tune to sing) comes on, I've given myself permission to cry, right then and there. If I read a poem that touches me, I've given myself permission to let it all out. And if I hear about the death of another child, I've given myself permission to feel my grief all over again.

The only thing bad about men grieving is that society looks down on us because we are not "strong." After losing both my children, I really don't care what society thinks. Only a small percent of them have had a child die, and they understand my feelings. The rest of them don't. And, God willing, they never will.

If you are a man and having a hard time allowing yourself to grieve, look at your inner being. Are you better because you haven't grieved? Or are you worse? Have your feelings of frustration from not grieving affected your relationship with your spouse or remaining children?

Our deceased children would, no doubt want us to accomplish something meaningful with our lives. They would want us to go on living.

Maybe it is time to grieve so that we can move forward with our lives.

Wayne Loder

TCF Lakes Area, MI

In Memory of my daughter and son, Stephanie and Stephen Loder

A Dog Named "HOPE"

On December 24, 1989 my daughter Jeanne Marie died suddenly at the age of 31 of an aneurysm. I had given her a yellow lab puppy for Christmas 1988. Jeanne was going through some very difficult times and I thought a dog of her own would help. After she named her puppy, I asked how she came to name her Hope. She replied, "Whenever I look at her I'll know there is always Hope for me." The two of them were in-separable. So much love between the two of them. Several weeks before Jeanne died, as she was playing with Hope, she looked up at me with her big brown eyes and said "Mom, if anything happens to me will you take care of Hope?" It was as if she knew. Now I have Hope who is always happy to see me when I arrive home. When I cry Hope gets very upset with me; barking, running around me, licking my tears away; until I get so mad at her and THEN I get control of myself and love her for loving me.

At Christmas time when Hope opens her gifts we sit around laughing at how excited she gets opening her presents. Ripping the paper off to get to another treat, etc. It brings back memories of how excited Jeanne would become as she opened her gifts - opening one after another with such joy and many OH's. It's such a warm/wonderful feeling to laugh at Hope and remembering the past Christmas'. Just picture adult's sitting around laughing at a dog opening her gifts, laughing so hard that we felt our sides would burst.

You see, Hope is an extension of Jeanne. She was her baby. Although I'm divorced, Jeanne's father and I are Grand-ma and Grandpa to Hope. When friends get talking about their grandchildren and showing pictures, I begin to tell them about my "Grand-Dog." If someone had told me years ago that someday I would love a dog as I do, I would have told them they were crazy. Now maybe I am! Without Hope I would not have been able to survive this terrible loss.

Since Jeanne's death the house isn't so quiet and lonely. I have someone who still needs me to care for them, to talk to, to play with, laugh at, and someone to love.

I now have "**HOPE**"!!!

Betty J. Lambert
TCF Dubuque Area Chapter, IA
Mother of Jeanne Marie



**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.

Tribute to Adam

Because of you,
We have started organizations.
We have reached out to others.
We have changed laws.
We have gotten involved.

Because of you,
We are not afraid.
We have gained compassion.
We have walked the valley of the shadow of death.
We have loved and we have cried.

Because of you,
We have gained strength and wisdom.
We have faith.
We have hope for a better world.
We have been blessed,
Because of you.

Keith and Wendy Downen
In Memory of our son, Adam Downen

Note: 18-year old Adam Downen was killed in Knoxville, Tennessee on May 21, 2000, the night after his high school graduation, after attending a keg party hosted by the parent's of a fellow graduate.

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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