



The Compassionate Friends

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

November, December, 2020 January 2021 Volume 9, Issue 1

Holiday Healing

It's been almost two years now, another holiday season rolls around. The second Thanksgiving without you is this week. It's just a stupid day, a day where people eat Turkey and watch football why should I care?

There is no one to visit me this year; there is no one here who cares. The numbness is creeping in. The pain so deep, I can't breathe, I can't think, I can't stand it. All day long I think of you, but why? Why is today any different than any other day?

Is it holiday traditions lost? Is it knowing millions of parents everywhere will be with their children this week but I won't be with you? Is it remembering the closeness and laughter on this day throughout the years? Why do the tears fill my eyes and my heart hurt so?

Maybe somewhere deep down inside I am asking myself what am I thankful for and this question is so very hard since you are gone. When someone first told me to be thankful for the years I spent with you or to be thankful I had you in my life I wanted to punch them and scream leave me alone you don't understand!

But now I understand because I am eternally grateful for those years. Today almost two years since you left this place, my second Thanksgiving without you here I am thankful for all the love we shared. I am thankful for the gift of Motherhood you each gave me, the greatest gift of all.

On the good days now, which two years since you left this place there are more good days than not, but on the good days, I can't begin to count how many things I am thankful for. But if I had to pick just one thing on Thursday as I say my prayers, I would have to say I am most grateful for each day I spend with both of you tucked safely in my heart!

Deana L. Martin

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

*When I grieve, when I stand by others as they grieve,
even in the midst of seemingly unbearable sorrow, grief
becomes a way to honor life — a way to cling to every
fleeting, precious moment of joy.*

~ Cortney Davis, Nurse Practitioner

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.JDCDTCF.DRG

UPCOMING EVENTS

**JoCo will continue with
Zoom meetings.**

**WyCp has resumed their
regular meetings at the ad-
dress listed above.**

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

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and

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HOLIDAY HOPE

I have now survived over a decade of Thanksgivings and Christmases since my daughter Nina's death in 1995. It feels surreal that it has been that long since my dark-haired angel has not been present to share her infectious enthusiasm for the holidays. Admittedly, if not for my journaling, I have little recollection of the first two. Writing allows me to see how far I have come since the bleakness of my soul those first early holidays. In the midst of a "grief storm", when I feel that I have taken one step forward and two steps back, I only need to read what I have written to see that I have made much progress, something that in early grief I did not believe was possible. When in such a dark abyss, it is almost impossible to imagine that there is even a glimmer of hope and light.

The first Thanksgiving is a blur. Whether we went out for dinner or spent it with family or nuked a frozen dinner, I haven't a clue. As no one else seems to remember, I would surmise that it was the same for everyone else as well. The first Christmas without Nina was spent trying desperately to make sure that nothing was going to change. The trees would be decorated, cards would be sent, gifts bought—I believed that my daughter would not want us to be sad and that the holiday should and would play out as usual. It almost worked. But the effort of trying to achieve such an impossible task took its toll; coming home from my parents' home Christmas Day evening, the sight from the rearview mirror of the empty spot in the back seat next to my son where Nina should have been playfully sparring with her brother, was too much to bear. I spent weeks recovering from such an exhausting charade.

I learned a lesson that first Christmas because the second Christmas "after" I gave into the emptiness and pain that I felt. The artificial tree sat forlornly unadorned right where it was assembled in the middle of the living room; it seemed to symbolize the somber mood of that second holiday season. I vocalized to my family and friends that year about what I could and could not do, would and would not do, I used what I called the "five-minute rule", which meant however I felt five minutes before a holiday happening would be the deciding factor whether I attended or not. The respect for my feelings they showed me that year was the best gift they could ever have given me.

However, Christmas #3 seemed to mark a turning point. The visible evidence involved my Christmas Village. Though an inexpensive Department 59 wannabe, it was loved by my children, especially Nina. From the time she was very young, she imaginatively played with the ceramic people for hours at a time. Even as a teenager, she wanted to know when I would be putting up the Village, as it was her favorite part of our holiday décor.

The first two Christmases, I made a decision to never put up our Christmas Village again. The memory of Nina's interactions with the Village was too painful to comprehend. However, that third Christmas, as I was unpacking the few holiday items that I would display, I came upon the boxes holding the Village. I slowly opened the containers of precious memories and one by one removed and unwrapped each piece. Visions of Christmases past raced through my mind. This year, the images of Nina's wide-eyed childlike wonder and excitement each time the Village came out of its yearlong resting place brought a genuine smile to my face.

I brought the Village upstairs and arranged it on the ledge of the bay window, where it always had been. I sat in the dark next to the lit village houses and watched the mechanical skaters on the make-believe pond twirl and glide on the mirrored "ice". Even through my tears, I felt the warm glow of beautiful one-of-a-kind memories resurface. I realized at that moment that a corner had been turned. Whereas the first two Christmases I was unable to setup the Christmas Village because of the memories, I was now setting it up for the same reason—the memories! But with a twist this year—what I had once perceived as a painful memory, with time had become a precious memory as I remembered the delight and joy the Village brought to Nina each Christmas of her life.

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Each holiday season following the third one has been gentler. We have gradually brought back some of our old traditions intermingled with the new. Though we are sadly aware that someone so loved is missing from our family gatherings, the beauty of the season can now overshadow some of the sorrow. We will never forget Nina and she will forever be included in our holiday celebrations. I put up a special little tree to exclusively hold the ornaments I bought each of the 15 years of her life; mixed in with the angel and butterfly ornaments I have since bought symbolizing her "eternal life". We light a candle and set her picture beside it, and we speak freely of our memories of her. The TCF Worldwide Candle Lighting program our chapter has each year is an especially important time for us to step away from the hubbub of the season, to reflect, remember, and bring Nina's spirit with us into the holidays.

Though the holidays can never be as they were, we who are further along in our grief journey can offer the gift of hope with the knowledge that with time, patience, support and compassionate friendship, you will find new ways (when you are ready) to bring a measure of joy and light back into the holiday season again. Wishing you peace, hope, solace and understanding...

With gentle thoughts,

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

First Christmas

It can't possibly be Christmas
without her being here.
Yet the world is singing round me,
joyful tidings and good cheer.

Though I try to put on armor
and brave the sights and sounds,
a few moments worth of shopping,
and the tears are spilling down.

I pray for strength to do it,
find a path through holidays,

look for shortcuts, good ideas,
some directions through the maze.

Then I find at last the answer:
I'll include her symbolically.
And the giving becomes perfect;
her love's flowing down, through me.

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry
from *Stars in the Deepest – After the
Death of a Child*

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 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

November

- 6th *Kyle Gabriel Eller, child of Jennifer & David Eller*
- 6th *Ariana Leigh Caraway, child of Shera McClelland*
- 11th *Gregory Bernard Dermer, child of Diane Dermer*
- 11th *Teddy Breidenthal, child of Joni & Ted Breidenthal*
- 18th *Nick Viscek, child of Trish Viscek*
- 20th *Colin Scott, child of Mark & Cindy Scott*
- 22nd *Alexandra (Alex) child of Irina Galkina*
- 24th *Jenny Anne Johnson, child of Susan & Jeff Johnson*
- 25th *Alex (Allie) Lahr, child of Amy & Bob Lahr*
- 27th *Andrew Caraway, child of Shera Grimm*
- 27th *Hunter McPhail, child of Ron & Ginger Adams*

December

- 10th *Jace Boxberger, child of Tyler & Kelli Boxberger*
- 11th *Tori Jade Peavler, child of Susan & Tim Peavler*
- 14th *Mark Skedel, child of Ralph & Laura Spillers*
- 16th *Austin Hawkey, child of Kim Bergeron*
- 19th *Keisha Clay, child of Carla & Frank Smocks*
- 23rd *Augie Echeandia, child of Augie Echeandia*
- 25th *Nathan James Heavilin, child of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
- 25th *Ethan Thomas Heavilin, child of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
- 30th *Laura Michelle Travis, child of Gay Kahler & Brian Janes*

January

- 2nd *Michael Silverio, child of Dana Bamberger*
- 7th *Deana Lori Kaitala, child of Rochelle Jones*
- 8th *Adam Ward, child of Sharon Ward*
- 9th *Patrick Spaulding, child of Yvonne & Scott Spaulding*
- 12th *Danny Poore, child of Deb & Darryl Poore*
- 16th *Thor Rodenbaugh, child of Chris & Ron Rodenbaugh*
- 15th *Jason Holmes, child of Kathie & Mike Holmes*
- 20th *Brian Cupp, child of Kathy Grassy*
- 23rd *Jeffrey Neil Crump, child of Paul & Ann Crump*

Deaths

November

- 5th *Kevin Babson, child of Rick & Sue Babson*
- 11th *Thor Rodenbaugh, child of Chris & Ron Rodenbaugh*
- 14th *Daniel Shore, child of Gisele Shore*
- 23rd *Jana Elizabeth Pinker, child of Bob & Rebecca Pinker*
- 27th *Robert Leiker, child of Kim & Randy Leiker*
- 29th *Kyle Gabriel Eller, child of Jennifer & David Eller*

December

- 7th *Mark Skedel, child of Ralph & Laura Spillers*
- 13th *Matthew Thomas Billings, child of Jude Billings*
- 16th *Sterling Franzwa, child of Fred & Sandy Franzwa*
- 26th *Austin Hawkey, child of Kim Bergeron*
- 31st *Joel Streufert, child of Sherry Streufert*

January

- 5th *Ethan Thomas Heavilin, child of Marilyn and Glen Heavilin*
- 5th *Lara Rogers, child of Tim & Janet Rogers*
- 5th *Kyle Bunselmeyer, child of Suzette Bunselmeyer*
- 12th *Amy Batson, child of Barbara & Don Batson*
- 12th *Shane Day, child of Melody Gau*
- 21ST *Vincent Boos, child of John & Rochelle Boos*

Death Takes a Back Seat

There was a time, not so long ago, when the only focus I had was on the death of my child. The loss of his life and his absence from the physical plane swept over me like a tsunami. I lived his death every waking moment. The sorrow was devastating, and the waves of pain kept coming and coming, crashing over me, with no end in sight.

Each of us has experienced our grief in a unique way, and each of us has done what is necessary to cope. But at some point in my grief, I began perceiving my son's death as only one moment in his life. I believe that was when I began to find hope.

The shock had worn off; the tsunami of pain had subsided. I began remembering the events and everyday activities with joy instead of sorrow. I remembered his birth, his first steps, his first word, and his development as a toddler and then as a young child. I remembered his first day of school. I remembered the anxiety I felt as he blithely slipped out of the car and walked up that big sidewalk by himself for the first time. "I love you, Mom," he said as he grabbed his lunchbox, crayons and tablet. He looked so cute and confident that day. He knew he was going to learn to read.

I remembered his trips to the barber with my dad, the fun they had together, the first ride in Grandpa's new convertible, the obvious love they shared. I remembered the day my dad cried when Todd asked him, "Grandpa, have you ever loved someone so much that you just want to be a part of them? That's how much I love you." He was six years old, dad was the hardened WWII Marine, and dad's eyes filled with tears as the impact of this tremendous breakthrough my son had given him touched him. Dad was always a gentler, more open man after that innocent statement of emotion by his grandson.

I remembered the many Christmas celebrations, the anticipation that filled Todd's heart each year. The holidays were very special to him.

I remembered our move to Houston when Todd was just 12 years old; he got a paper route, a heavy duty Schwinn bike and he was earning money for his first car. Every Sunday I would drive him on his paper route at about 4:00 am because the papers were too heavy for the bike. Todd would make my coffee and wake me up, and off we would go. Those were special times when it was just Todd and I talking easily about his life, his dreams and the future. I thought about Todd's high school years, his graduation, the promise of the future and the tears in my dad's eyes as he watched the ceremony marking yet another milestone in his special

grandson's life. I remembered the birth of Todd's son, the nights we sat talking while he fed his baby, and the discussions about the best way to raise a child. I remember the day he married, the birth of each of his daughters, the deep love and devotion he had for them.

Then I recalled the day when Todd received his MBA from Texas A&M. My dad stood proudly in the aisle watching the ceremony and listening to the Aggie fight song, tears in his eyes as he looked at his grandson, grown-up and ready for life.

I remembered my son's first house-a fixer upper. My husband and I gave him money for the down payment and he put plenty of sweat equity into it. After his daughters were born, he chose to move to a larger home, selling his first home with no small amount of sadness. For this was where his adult life started. This home had marked his first real step in responsibility and the world of the adult.

All the good times come flooding back now, the memories as vivid as the moments were in time. Yes, there is still sadness, but my heart tells me that I must celebrate the 35 years Todd had on this earth. He lived a good life, laughed, loved and worked hard. He was a lot like his grandpa in that respect.

Now when I tell a story about Todd, there is a returning joy in my heart. And now, each day when I come home from work, I remember how good it was to see him after a stressful day and to reach out and hug my child.....whether he was 3 years old or 35 years old. We have a bond, a bond I have felt everyday since his birth. The bond between mother and child does not end at death.

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

Finding the Magic

Once again, it's that time of year. Will this year be different from the last seven? Will I find the magic again? Wait. Let me revise that question: Did I ever feel the magic?

As a bereaved parent, I have experienced only two holidays seasons. While I have physically lived through 49 hell-idays, emotionally, there have been only two types: the ones before and the ones after Jason's death. The two categories are distinctly different.

If memory serves me correctly, which it doesn't always do, I spent the first 42 years focused on material issues. First as a child...What would I get?...What did I want?...What would make me the happiest child in the whole wide world? As I grew older and had my own little family, I spent the next 22 years asking myself what I would get them. What did they want? What would make them love me more? How would I manage to pay for all of it? I always felt there was something missing...but I didn't really have the time or interest to find that missing something. Besides, why borrow trouble? Each year, by the time I realized that something was missing, the decorations were packed in their boxes and the kids had gone back to school. I could always find the magic next year.

In 1996, Jason died. Suddenly, my life ended its forward march, and everything I had ever regarded as important became nonsense. My heart was not simply broken-it was ripped into shreds, emptied of what had fueled it over the span of my life. I had no hope of waiting for it to heal and had to face the reality that only a total reconstruction would suffice. I would have to create a new heart...from scratch.

The first fall was difficult. I was still numb, still cushioned from reality, but the pain of Jason's death was beginning to seep in. Then it was Halloween, and the horror of what had happened was upon me. Thanksgiving came with Christmas on its tail, bringing an empty chair, an unbroken wishbone, and silence where laughter had once prevailed.

I was sure it could not get any worse, but life always surprises us. The holidays of 1997 and 1998 were devastating. The numbness that had protected me that first season was gone. Reality had arrived, and I could not escape it. I would never again see Jason walk through our front door with that grin that always made me nervous, tracking snow across my "freshly waxed for the holidays" floor. I was sure I would never again buy two of everything for Jason and his twin brother. I would never again enjoy the holidays...or life.

Years four through seven, we bought gifts for needy families, hung Jason's stocking right beside the rest of ours, illuminated special candles to include him in our celebrations, and smiled cheerfully at everyone who offered us their joy-filled "Merry Christmas." And as I spread my Christmas cheer and goodwill toward men, I had only one thought in my mind. It became my mantra: *If I can just make it through December, I will be okay.* I was no longer focused on the material side of the season. I was no longer focused on the season at all. I wanted it over.

And now, here I am, at year eight. My eighth season of joy, my eighth year of decking the halls, my eighth year of Jason's physical absence. You probably think I am going to tell you that this year will be no different from the last seven. You might even anticipate that I am going to tell you that it never gets better, that there is on such thing as healing, and that grieving parents will always be bitter and angry, especially during the times when families everywhere celebrate the season of giving. Wrong. But don't feel bad; this revelation has totally shocked me also.

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A few days ago, I woke up and was amazed to see that it was snowing. Overnight, the world had gone from brown to pure glistening white. It was beautiful. Later that day, I heard someone in my home actually humming Christmas carols. How dare they! But...I was alone. It was me. That evening, I spent an hour printing up a beautiful green and red Christmas "wish list" with graphics! That was the straw that broke the camel's back. Suddenly, it hit me. And no matter how guilty I feel in acknowledging it, I have to tell you: I am looking forward to the holidays. How can this be? Why is this happening?

Well, after much pondering, I think I know why. I think I spent 42 holidays looking through a lens that focused only on black and white, on the physical, on that which can be seen and physically felt. The lavishly wrapped gifts, excessive food, amount of money spent, and glittering (sometimes gaudy) lights on the tree. The next seven were spent looking through a lens that was distorted and scarred by grief. I focused on what was missing rather than on what was still here. I think I wanted it that way.

But now, I feel I've learned how not only to endure—but to enjoy—a memory that can be defined only as bittersweet. I've come to appreciate that feeling emotional is really about feeling impassioned. And I think this year, as the songs start to play on the radio and the cards begin filling our mailbox, I will choose a different lens, a lens that captures what we cannot see or physically touch. A lens that goes beyond.

Not everything will change. I will still hang Jason's stocking beside ours, buy gifts for the needy, light candles in his memory, and all of the other things that have made the last seven years bearable. But this year, I hope to do these things with joy rather than with bitterness and sorrow. This year, I want to grasp the hand of a homeless mother, kiss the cheek of a newborn baby, and hold a sleeping kitten while it plays in its dreams. I want to watch Santa as he holds wiggly toddlers on his lap. I want to sing "Silent Night" on a snowy night in mid-December when it feels as if all the world is sleeping. I want to feel the Christmas that we cannot see.

This year, I want to remember who I really am. I want to enjoy the months ahead. Not because I need to or because someone says it's time to—but because—well, because I can. This year, I want to find the magic before it is time to put away the boxes. And I won't stop searching until I find it.

Merry Christmas to you and yours.

Believe in magic
And always...expect miracles.

Sandy Goodman
In Memory of Jason

Sandy Goodman is the author of Love Never Dies: A Mother's Journey from Loss to Love (Jodere, 2002). You can learn more about Sandy, her journey, and her book by visiting her Web site at <http://www.loveneverdies.net>.

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The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen, nor touched, but are felt in the heart.

~ Helen Keller



**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.

Hope

My heart has been broken.
My soul has been crushed.
My mind has gone to depths I never knew
existed.

Places where only God,
In His most infinite Love, could understand.
And even He could not console me at times.
But I am here on earth,
For whatever reason I still do not know:
And I have hope that, in time,
God will show me the way
And give rhyme to my reason.
So I wait in hope for a future
And a new beginning.

Kathleen Leeper
TCF Valley Forge, PA

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