



The Compassionate Friends

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

February, March, April 2021 Volume 9, Issue 2

Learning the Hard Way

My husband, David, and I used to attend his university's semi-annual alumni meetings. There was a couple who drove in for these meetings from a town an hour and a half away. Through the years, we developed a nice friendship, often going out to dinner together after the meetings. Then one day, we heard that Fred and Jean's eleven-year-old son, Russ, had been struck and killed by a car while he was riding his bike.

Although we were terribly saddened to hear about Russ, we just never got around to doing anything to express our sympathy. Jean and Fred didn't come to the alumni meetings for a couple of years, so we simply never saw them. Finally, they came to a special function. When I saw Jean, I asked her how she was getting along, and her reply was, "I didn't know if you had heard." Typically uncomfortable, I responded by saying something like, "Yes, I knew, but I just couldn't handle it. That's why you haven't heard from us." They quit attending the meetings, so that was the last time we saw them for ten years.

In the tenth year, our daughter, Paige, died following a six-month illness. We had been told from the beginning that her brain tumor was a bad one and that she would not survive. One of the things I had time to think about during the time was the awful way we had treated Fred and Jean;

Soon after Paige's death, I felt compelled to write them a long letter of apology, explaining that we now understood better what they had experienced, and that if they could "handle" the death of their child, surely we should have been able to.

Immediately upon receiving my letter, Fred called to say they were on their way to Nashville to take us to dinner. We had a wonderful reunion with lots of talking and some tears. Dave asked Fred if he ever thought about Russ. Smiling, he replied, "I think about him every day. Do you want to see his picture?" And he proceeded to pull from his billfold not only his son's photograph, but the obituary as well. This was one of our first lessons about grief: it's okay to remember our child.

Jean and Fred, these kind, forgiving people, helped us to realize that if sometimes folks don't respond exactly the way we'd like for them to, it isn't a lack of love for us or our child, but simply an example of human frailty. Because of their wonderful attitude we were able to be more understanding when we failed to hear from two families in distant cities who had been longtime friends. We also found ourselves more tolerant when inappropriate remarks were made to us. Any small effort should be appreciated – and is!

Peggy Gibson
TCF Nashville, TN

WYANDOTTTE CDUNTY

Eisenhower Community Center
2901 North 72nd St., KCKS
Richard Moore 913-238-1890
Marlene Moore 913-238-5348
1st Tuesday @ 7PM

JOHNSON COUNTY

Church of the Resurrection
13720 Roe Ave., Bldg B.
Leawood, Ks
Dennis Apple or
Arlene Watkins 913-712-4416

WWW.JDCDTCF.DRG

2nd Thursday @ 6:30 PM

UPCOMING EVENTS

JoCo will continue with
Zoom meetings.

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

REGIONAL COORDINATOR

Barbara Starr
816-229-2640
Email: barbarastarr@live.com

National Office

The Compassionate Friends
48660 Pontiac Trail
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compassionatefriends.org
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Days to Remember

Birthdays are days of life when we say happy words to each other.

Everyone sends cards and make phone calls to say Happy Day.

There are parties to bring everyone together to laugh and eat a wonderful, decorative cake.

The celebration has streamers that are hung from corner to corner above our heads.

Everyone that knows your child remembers all the funny stories they have shared.

Colorful invitations are sent prior to the celebration to give an address, date, and time.

Sometimes there are funny themes so that everyone knows how to dress.

Very beautiful wrap and ribbon allow the child to be surprised at what they may find.

People wear silly, pointed hats with glittering words and symbols to add even more fun.

Many times there is a slumber party where the child sleeps all night.

In general, it is a time when you take pride in the people that remember your child.

Then, when your child leaves you and their spirit moves on, most of the celebrations cease.

No slumber party, no decorative cake, so streamers, no funny stories.

There are no colorful invitations, no wrapped gifts or colorful ribbon.

No slumber parties, no funny party hats, and no more celebrations.

Maybe a new day should be created to bring many of these traditions back.

This new day could be called "passing day".

By creating this day of life, it might bring a celebration that today is lost.

Cards, phone calls, party, and even gifts of remembrance would give this day meaning.

Today, the day when your child leaves us, is not remembered in celebration.

People do not know what to say in cards, say in person, or say over the phone.

Without a day to celebrate your wonderful child's life it's simply not remembered.

A day like this would once again celebrate the life that never dies in our hearts.

Maybe if a day like this was embraced, friends and family would once again remember.

Maybe this new, special day of life would create a change in our thinking.

At least it might. What do we have to loose?

Celebrate all the important days of life and the continued dates after death.

Don Batson, Father of Sara and Amy Batson

OTHER CHAPTERS IN OUR AREA

Eastern Jackson County (Independence, Mo) - 3rd Thursday 7:30 at Walnut Gardens Community of Christ, 19201 R.D. Mize Road, Independence, Contact Theresa Phillips 816-358-2969 phillipsplace@aol.com

North Metro Chapter (Liberty, Mo) - 2nd Thursday 7:00 at Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, 1900 N. 291 Hwy, Liberty, Contact Joe and Michelle Sanderson 816-769-6207 libertymotcf@yahoo.com

Kansas City Chapter (South Kansas City) - 4th Tuesday 7:30 at St. Joseph Medical Center, 1000 Carondelet, Community Education Center, Abell Lorenz Room, Contact Katie & Matt Knox 816-365-3999 katiejknox@gmail.com

Lawrence, Ks (Douglas County) - 2nd Monday 7:00 at 900 Madeline Lane, Lawrence, Ks, Contact Sarah 785-840-5349 dansrokelly@msn.com

Topeka, Ks 4th Monday 6:30 at Most Pure Heart of Mary Catholic Church, 3601 W. 17th St., Topeka, Contact Gary and Susan Chan. 785-272-4895

Contact leaders to verify how they are meeting at this time due to the pandemic.

WHAT I NEED

TIME ~ Time alone; and time with others whom I can trust and who will listen when I need to talk. Months and years of time to feel and understand the feelings which go along with loss.

REST ~ I may need extra amounts of things I needed before. Relaxation, exercise, nourishment, diversion, hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a cause to work for, to help others, any of these may give me a lift. Grief is an emotionally exhausting process. I need to replenish myself – to follow what feels healing and what connects me to the people and things I love.

SECURITY ~ I need to reduce, or find help for financial or other stresses in my life. I need to allow myself to be close to ones I can trust. It helps when I allow myself to get back into a routine, and to do things at my own pace.

HOPE ~ I find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing some things that helped them, and realizing that they have recovered and that time does help, gives me hope that sometime in the future my grief will be less raw and less painful.

CARING ~ I try to allow myself to accept the expressions of caring from others, even though they may be uneasy and awkward. Helping a friend or relative also suffering from the same loss often brings me a feeling of closeness with that person.

GOALS ~ It often feels that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, a trip next month, helps me get through the time in the immediate future. Living one day at a time is a good rule of thumb. At first, my enjoyment of these things just isn't the same. I know this is normal. As time passes, I will need to work on some longer range goals to give some structure and direction to my life. It is OK to get some guidance or counseling to help with this.

SMALL PLEASURES ~ I no longer underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food - all are small steps toward regaining my pleasure in life itself.

BACK-SLIDING ~ Sometimes after a period of feeling good, I find myself back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair or anger. Intellectually, I know this is often the nature of grief, up and down, and it may happen over and over for a time. I'm told, this is because as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death all at once. So, I give myself permission to let it in a little at a time.

DRUGS? ~ Drugs are not always helpful. Sometimes, even medication intended to help me get through periods of shock may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving. I cannot prevent or cure grief. The only way OUT is THROUGH.

Alan Taplow

Adapted by Alan Taplow from Judy Tatelbaum's book, The Courage to Grieve

Breakfast With Dad's (Weather Permitting)

The Saturday morning meetings for Dad's has resumed in the garage 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

February

- 7th *Breanna Fletcher, child of Amy & Billy Leiker*
 9th *Kyle Hughes, child of Irene Hughes*
 12th *Robert Leiker, child of Kim & Randy Leiker*
 13th *Craig Howlett, child of Davie & Elaine Howlett*
 20th *Amy Batson, child of Barbara & Don Batson*
 23rd *Bryce Moore, child of Paige Moore*
 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*
 15th *Ramsay Blake Taylor, child of Patricia Taylor*
 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*

Meeting Topics

February—Introducing Your Child
 Sharing your child with others
 through pictures, writings, etc.

March—”Helps & Hurts”
 Sharing what helped and what hurt

April—Anniversaries, Birthdays and
 other special days.
 Calendar dates that cause so much
 pain.

- 13th *Angie Wieskamp, child of Dee Gavin*
 13th *Morgan Green, child of Stephanie Findley*
 14th *Alexandra (Alex) Ruple, 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*
 19th *Christopher Carpenter, child of Kay Carpenter Oldham*
 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 (Alexa, sister)*
 28th *Sam Delay, child of Kathy Coggins*
 28th *Jace Boxberger, child of Tyler & Kelli Boxberger*
 29th *Ashley Holliday, child of Brad & Nancy Holiday*

The Compassionate Friends 2021 Changes

New Location, New Time & New Leadership for Johnson County, Kansas

We are announcing many new TCF chapter changes that will begin this month. If you want to learn more, skip down to the end of this article. However, before we move on, we need to stop, look back, and give thanks for the faithful leadership Gay Kahler and Brian Janes has given to our Jo. County TCF chapter across the last fifteen years.

If you do the math, you will quickly see that this bereaved couple (Having lost both child and grandchild) have given leadership to approximately 180 TCF monthly support group meetings. They were the ones who arrived early, put out the signs, laid out the books, refreshments, pamphlets and welcomed us to a safe place where we could speak our child's name and share our grief with others. Gay and Brian spent untold hours on the phone with us, answered our emails, cried with us, hugged, and gave us hope for the future. In addition to giving local leadership, Brian served on the National TCF board of directors for 6 years. There is not enough room here to mention all they gave to us. Even though they have resigned as leaders, they will still be coaching from the sidelines as we move ahead.

Going forward, Arlene Watkins (mother of James) and I (Denny's dad) will co-lead the Johnson County TCF chapter. We will share more about ourselves in the days ahead. For now, you should know that we both have lost sons, James on April 1, 2015 and Denny, Feb. 6, 1991. Finally, here are the changes you should know as we begin this year, 2021.

We will now meet on the second Thursday of each month at 6:30 pm.

During the pandemic, we will meet via Zoom.

When the decision is made to return to an "in person" location, we will meet at:

The Church of The Resurrection in Leawood, KS. 13720 Roe Ave. Bldg. B

New phone number to reach Dennis or Arlene 913-712-4416

DEATH OF A CHILD: WHAT'S IT LIKE AT 10 YEARS?

January 11, 2002 ... Ten years? Sometimes it seems like yesterday. Sometimes it seems like it never happened. Most of the time it is somewhere in between.

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: Rich Edler, 58, past president of TCF's national board, author of *Into the Valley and Out Again* and treasured friend to many in TCF's extended family, died suddenly and unexpectedly on February 16. He had completed this article for *We Need Not Walk Alone*, TCF's national magazine, just over a month earlier.]*

It has been 10 years today since Mark died.

When I wrote *Into the Valley and Out Again* I chronicled first one day, then one week, then the first month and year. Now it is 10. Here are my thoughts:

The hurt never goes away. We never forget. We never get over it. We don't want to. We hurt so much because we loved so much. But the focus on death and the event fades and the warmth of good memories replaces it. Oh, we can still go back there in an instant. Back to the call, the moment, the good-bye. Back to the night that will forever separate our life between "before" and "after." But we now go back less and less. Time helps a lot.

I have fewer friends. Better friends, mind you, but fewer. I am out of the circle now. My Rolodex is cold. My networking, which used to be razor sharp, has atrophied. My power lunches have become tuna fish sandwiches. But the amazing thing is how much I don't care. I miss some special people so I go out of my way to stay in touch. And that is enough.

I have new and different priorities. I move through life a little slower, a little more tuned to life around me, and to life gone too soon. I brake for sunsets. I hurt for the people who share this walk with me. Since Mark died, hundreds and then thousands of children have died. I feel for them and for their families in a way I could never have understood before. I value people more than things, moments more than milestones and I no longer equate what I do with who I am.

I am not having the life I expected to have. I recall an old saying, "Man plans ... God laughs." Dennis Prager, an author and Los Angeles radio talk-show host, said that unhappiness equals image minus reality. What he meant is that you are unhappy when your image of where you should be is dramatically different from where you really are.

When a child dies, the reality of the life we are going to have is altered forever. I am no longer going to be Mark's dad. I am no longer going to join him at UCLA football games. I am no longer going to be a grandfather to the children he will never have. If that gap between image and reality is a recipe for unhappiness, well, then the reverse is also true. If you "solve" the equation of happiness, happiness equals image matched closely with reality. So I have had to change my image to match the new reality.

I like my new life better. This makes me feel guilty because I would trade my life in an instant if I could have Mark back. But I really do like the person I have become since Mark died. I don't even know that person from 10 years ago. Back then my life purpose was to run a large advertising agency. Today, it is to give back in gratitude for the joy of the life I have been given. I want to make Mark proud. I want to be a blessing to others. And I want to enjoy the journey, too. I still have a grief that goes unspoken. Who will listen at 10 years? Yes, I still miss Mark. But I miss him quietly and silently. I grieve for his loss; for the loss of the person he would have become (he would be 28 now, but instead is forever 18); and also for the loss of the life I would be having if he were here.

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I have an overwhelming sense of gratitude. I have been blessed beyond measure. I have a surviving son who has given me more joy than I could imagine any parent having ... and now a beautiful daughter-in-law, and a granddaughter. Gratitude is one of the most helpful and healing things you can do on your grief journey. And with gratitude comes thanks. So in gratitude, Kitty and I made a list this week of the people who were there for us when we needed them most. These are the people who dropped everything in their lives on a moment's phone call and rushed to our side. These are the people with whom we are joined forever, and who, no matter how far they drift, or what unimportant spats we might have, will always have a special place in our heart. You make your own list. Then find those people wherever they are, and say thank you.

I choose joy over sadness. If there is one overriding thought in these years, including 10 TCF conferences in a row, it is simply this: Grief is inevitable; misery is optional. It does no good to sit in a hole. It does no good for the loss of one life to lead to the loss of two.

What *does* do good is doing good. To decide to lead the second part of your life *differently and better* than you would have before ... in your child's name. When we do that ... when we do one small act of kindness we never would have done before ... when we reach out to other bereaved parents because we can and because we have been there ... then the world is changed in some small way for the better, and then the actions we take become a living tribute to our child's life. And then that child is never entirely gone.

And that, my fellow compassionate friends, is how it looks at 10 years for me.

Rich Edler
TCF South Bay, CA
In Memory of my son Mark Edler
Spring 2002, We Need Not Walk Alone
Reprinted with permission

Any Child's Death Diminishes Me

What difference does it make whether a child is stillborn or dies after some years of life? She spoke of lack of memories because her child was stillborn. He commented on the deep pain brought by those very memories which remind him of what he lost. When it comes to a child's death, does the type of death matter? Is a murder worse than an accident? Suicide worse than chronic illness? Teenage worse than older adult? Stillborn worse than teenage? I've tried to be thankful that Jeanie wasn't murdered, that she and those dear boys did not linger comatose, or die from prolonged illness. I could not find thankfulness, though I have sought diligently for it within my deepest being. The death of each child, whatever the age or circumstances, brings its own guilt and anger, its own despair and questioning. Any child's death diminishes the parents who love that child, and for those bereaved parents, that death is surely the worst, their grief the most severe.

Robert F. Gloor
Tuscaloosa, AL
In Memory of Jeanie



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

The Compassionate Friends
Debbie McFadden, editor
8625 Baska Ct.
Lenexa, Ks 66219

If you wish to contribute an article
or poem, please contact me at the
above email address.

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.

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