



# The Compassionate Friends

## Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

May, June, July 2021 Volume 9, Issue 3

### Thoughts About Progress

One thing that is frequently discussed at our meetings is the despair of thinking you are on the road to “recovery,” when all of a sudden you seem to be back at square one. But are you really?

Let’s keep in mind most of us have had no previous experience “recovering” from the loss of a child. Therefore, we have no point of reference – it’s all new to us. Actually the “roller coaster” of emotions is perfectly normal. In the very beginning most of us seem to vacillate between dead numbness and excruciating pain. Constant crying, to not a tear left – just dried up and limp. We actually are living minute-to-minute.

After a couple of months we might actually have a few hours that we have not cried or felt that deep overwhelming despair. Then, WHAM – back to where we started. We tend to panic and think something is wrong with us. Let’s be realistic! There is something wrong – terribly wrong: we have each lost a child.

Let’s be fair to ourselves. We started to play a role to the outside world. Like the old song says, “laughing on the outside – crying on the inside.” We want to be acceptable to society. “You are doing so well,” we hear. If only they knew! We may feel we have to fool others, but let us really be honest about our feelings. To deny our feelings, particularly to ourselves, is to block the road to recovery. Remember that recovery in this case does not mean, “getting over it,” it means to gain control of our lives again.

So, let’s not worry about what other people think, say, or expect. Our friends (well meaning as they are), sometimes members of our family, even someone who has lost a child, should not sit in judgment. Each person grieves differently, due to a person’s general make-up and the relationship with the dead child. Unless someone has totally withdrawn from everything and everybody over a lengthy period of time, the chances are all is in the realm of normalcy. Only after we have walked down the long road of grief and can look back, remembering those early days and weeks, can we see we really are not on square one again. We have just slipped backwards for a time. That is all. Allow yourself that, and then strive forward again. It takes time, a lot of time! We tend to expect too much from others, others expect too much from us, and therefore, we tend to expect too much from ourselves.

Mary Ehmann  
TCF Valley Forge, PA

### Notice from the Editor

**I will be stepping away from the Newsletter Editor position at the end of 2021. I have been attending both the Wyandotte and Johnson County Chapters and therefore wrote one newsletter for both. If someone feels called to take over this position I would separate the two and have a newsletter editor for each chapter.**

**If you are interested, please contact your chapter leader.**

### WYANDOTTIE COUNTY

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](mailto:barbarastarr@live.com)

### National Office

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## **And Then There Was Hope**

Once, in what is now another life, I thought support groups were for someone else. I felt that with research, personal work, discussions with the elders in my family and wise friends, I would find all the answers I needed. This worked well until December of 2002. My son died. The death of my only child changed everything. My standard methods of "self help" were not going to get me through this. I needed more than even Solomon could give me. And I desperately needed hope.

My first meeting at Compassionate Friends was in March of 2003. My son had been gone almost three months; I was traumatized, I could not speak and I was doubtful that I would ever find even an obscure hint of peace in my life. April's meeting was somewhat better. I spoke a few words. In May I was rocked by the dual anticipation of Mother's Day and my son's birthday. In June I participated in the balloon liftoff; I sprained my ankle as we were walking back from the park. That night, as I set at home with ice on my ankle, I thought about the past five months. I realized that I was a different person than I had been earlier in the year. I was no longer the woman who walked into her first Compassionate Friends meeting because I was no longer walking alone. There were others at my side, in front of me, behind me, encouraging me, offering gentle suggestions, understanding and listening as I told my child's story over and over and over again.

I discovered that those who had walked this road before me were holding the lanterns of hope to cast light on my life path. It was these people and only these people who could reach me, who could teach me, whose voices could penetrate my fog, whose hearts could help me to begin the healing process.

By the time I marked the first anniversary of my son's death, I was beginning to discover that I had been transformed into a different person. Like my child whose body had died but whose spirit lived on symbolically in the butterfly, I had become a different person. I physically felt the pain of other parents. The first time I offered advice I sat in wonder at the realization that this very effort brought a little more light into my soul. Part of my healing process became the helping process.

Healing is what we seek, but we will never be "cured". As parents who have lost our children, we will never be the same people we were before our child died. I came to accept this fact. But I also found that we can live with this wound which, despite our initial certainty to the contrary, is not usually fatal. It is forever, it is painful, it is the worst wound a human can feel, but it is not fatal. Even when I was wracked with physical pain in my grief, the light of my Compassionate Friends gave me a new perspective, one of hope.

Yes, a part of me died with my son, but the part that remains is constantly changing, continually evolving and always reaching for the light of hope. We each choose different ways to reach for hope, to live our lives as well as we possibly can without our precious children. But eventually we all awaken to hope.

My hope did not come as an epiphany out of the blue, but rather, it was more like a false dawn followed by true, muted rays of the morning sun. My hope was a process. I engaged the process by reaching out to others, listening, learning. I learned that the quick answer is rarely the right answer. I learned that silence often says more than words. I made peace with my pain, and I began to reach out to others with words of hope. For words were my gift to those who had given me so much.

At Compassionate Friends we see many new faces each year. Most parents continue their relationship with the group for at least a year, some for even two years. A few stay three years. The good news is that those who do not choose to come to meetings have chosen to go forward with their lives in a different way. Going forward with their lives is a very positive step and the goal of each bereaved parent. Not all of us stay; not all of us should stay. But for some of us, the hope continues to rekindle at each meeting. As we meet the newly bereaved and listen to their story, to their child's story, to the outpouring of pure agony and heartbreak, we hold the lantern. These parents will not know exactly what it is that we are doing as they are lost in the fog, as we all once were. Yet, we quietly hold the lantern, we keep the chapter moving forward, we meet parents and talk about their children, about our children, about grief, about life, about death, about pain and about hope. I have chosen to stay and hold the lantern for those who have followed me. For this gives me hope and peace and it keeps my child close to me in even the darkest of nights.

As grief is our companion, time moves forward; the pain becomes less searing, less encompassing. We learn to co-exist with our loss. We treasure our memories, we love our children and our hearts ache with our terrible loss. Yet, we have moved forward on the path. We are holding the lantern for others who find themselves on this path in life. We give this gift of hope with our presence which symbolizes the future of every newly bereaved parent. I remember my child as I walk this road with you.

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

## How Dad Copes

It will be four years on May 31 this year since our son Nicholas passed away. Wow. I never imagined in a million years this would happen to us. It is difficult to deal with the aching pain I still feel in my heart. Nicholas's friends are getting married and having children. Though we are happy for them, our sadness deepens with the thought of how different it could be if he were still here.

The anxiety that begins to build in the latter part of April in preparation for the anniversary of Nicholas's passing gets stronger and stronger as the day comes near.

Past years were shock years. I couldn't figure out how to deal with it all. I would listen to other parents that are further along in their grief for coping strategies, but it did not seem to help. How could anyone help me heal my heart after it was broken into a trillion pieces?

I have found that speaking about Nicholas to friends, family, and new acquaintances helps me tremendously. At first it was difficult to do because it does make some people uncomfortable. The more I do it, the easier it gets, and the better I feel. Talking about my son has been like a pressure relief valve for me.

I also make time to think about Nicholas and release my emotions. This time alone to reflect and weep brings overwhelming, though temporary, relief. Dads tend to hold back tears and feelings. We like to think we can maintain control. My advice is don't try. Instead, let your feelings go in private at a time and place of your choosing.

Thinking back to the beginning of this tragic event in our lives, I should have sought counseling from a grief therapist. My wife and I both should have done this. I truly believe this would have helped us develop better coping skills. At that time I didn't think private counseling would help. I was wrong.

Finally, The Compassionate Friends (TCF) volunteers are available to us all. TCF volunteers understand your loss and the dual problem of "maintaining control" for the sake of our family. Our chapter newsletter lists names and telephone numbers of other fathers and mothers ready and willing to assist us. I am one of the parents who volunteers to talk with grieving fathers. I have even become active in the administrative aspects of our chapter. Now, I tell parents, "we sincerely regret the circumstance that has brought you to this group." This is a club none of us dreamed we would ever join. I thank TCF for helping my family and me and for allowing me to help others.

Albert Tapia  
TCF Katy Chapter,  
In Memory of my son, Nicholas Albert Tapia

### 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.**

**Johnson County Information.**  
**Our Children & Siblings; Loved & Remembered**

**Births****May**

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

**June**

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

**July**

- 1<sup>st</sup>** Vincent Boos, child of John & Rochelle Boos  
**1<sup>st</sup>** Travis Findley, child of Chuck Findley  
**12<sup>th</sup>** Morgan Green, child of Stephanie Findley  
**23<sup>rd</sup>** Harrison Rupp, child of Seth Rupp  
**27<sup>th</sup>** Austin Newell, child of Tracie Newell

**Deaths****May**

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

**June**

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

**July**

- 6<sup>th</sup>** Dana Jeanne McCollam-Allison, child of Cathy Caplan  
**11<sup>th</sup>** Chris Thornton, child of Linda & Jerry Thornton  
**19<sup>th</sup>** Landon Daniel, child of LeeAnn Daniel  
**20<sup>th</sup>** Tori Jade Peavler, child of Susan & Tim Peavler  
**22<sup>nd</sup>** Troy Oehlert, child of Marsha Oehlert  
**27<sup>th</sup>** Patrick Spaulding, child of Yvonne & Scott Spaulding

**Meeting Topics**

**May**—Secondary Losses, The death of a child has a ripple effect.

**June**—Grief Triggers  
Stories of being “ambushed”.

**July**—Dealing with “Grief Bullies”,  
Being aware of those who attempt to push us through our grief.

### **I'm Still Counting**

My son's favorite character on Sesame Street was 'The Count'. Todd would laugh and count and laugh some more whenever the count would appear on PBS. "Come on, Mom," he would say, "count with me." So, I would join him and we would count together.

When my child died, I started counting hours. One hour since he died, two hours, then 24 hours, 36 hours, 96 hours. I started counting weeks, then months and finally years. I was totally focused on the moment that my son left this earth.

Now I count the years and months, weeks and days. While this may not sound like progress, it truly is a step back into life. Three years, seven months, one week and one day. I stopped adding the hours. Moreover, when people ask me about it, I generally say about 3 1/2 years. I try to keep it simple for outsiders who can't begin to understand.

Every month I dread the 19th. Another month is added to the time between my son's last breath and now. It's almost as if time might separate us, erase him from the memory of those who knew and loved him.

Despite my obsession with counting, I am moving forward in many ways. I think of my child each day, I honor his life each day, and I feel a real apprehension about his daughters each day. Their lives are horribly different from what they might have been if Todd had lived. Their values will be so jaded compared with his values; their experiences of personal growth are miniscule compared to what Todd would have given them. I know I cannot change this. So along with this private obsession, there is a deep lingering sadness for my son's children and for opportunities lost.

In the meantime, I count years, months and days. I keep my unconditional love for my child in my heart and in my life. And I continue to reach out and become the person I am meant to be. And I'm still counting with Todd.

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

### **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 year.

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

### **Breakfast With Dad's**

The Saturday morning meetings for Dad's has resumed in the Farmhouse at Buddy McFadden's house. The meetings are the 1st Saturday of the Month. The time has been returned to 8:30-10:30. 8625 Baska Ct., Lenexa, Ks

**When everyone is comfortable, we will resume sign-ups for breakfast items.**

**Any questions please contact Buddy 913-481-9581 or Chuck 913-302-2954**

## On Cleaning Out His Stuff

It has been 18 years since my son Chris was killed in a car accident. I have been using his room as my computer room for the last six years but I have not cleaned out his drawers or closet-they were almost as he left them. After recognizing that I needed more space and the job finally "had" to be done, I decided to finally begin the process of throwing some of Chris' high school papers away. After all, it had been 18 years-surely I had progressed far enough along in my grief to finally begin to deal with "his stuff."

Surprisingly I found the task challenging and gut-wrenching. I still had a difficult time working my way through some of the items I found, as I poured over notebooks, papers and drawings. One of the papers was an evaluation from a career counselor. Just reading over her findings brought a wave of tears that was almost uncontrollable. She had captured our boy with accuracy and tenderness, sensing this was a young man of character and warmth. She talked about his smile when he acknowledged that he didn't like camping very much, so he could not see himself as a forest ranger. She saw a young man who had a quiet and gentle strength. With a lump in my throat, I shared it with my husband and both of us "choked up" with tears.

Letters from his girlfriend and his return letters back to her were comforting and lovely. His warmth, kindness and tenderness as a 17-year-old young man "in love" for the first time, came through as he wrote from his heart. Just seeing his handwriting again was such a cherished treasure. Lyrics from the many songs he wrote for "the band" were deep and inspiring. Some of his reports from school had encouraging comments from the teachers. I saved some of his childish drawings of Smurfs, "A Sweet Story" (a second-grade drawing of children running into the arms of Jesus) and his many stuffed animals-or "his kids" as he used to call them. He had named them, drew them all and then placed them in a scrapbook. What a precious gift to hold on to. I'll show it to my grandchildren some day.

Then I began the arduous task of organizing the cards, notes and words of comfort we received as the days, weeks and months after Chris' death passed by. Many shared how they remembered events he attended, and conversations they shared with our son, which we were not aware of. Some shared how they were praying for us. I saved rain and mud-soaked notes that were left on his grave-so many missed him in those early days of overwhelming grief, especially his classmates. What beautiful and wonderful human beings touched our lives so many years ago and gave us the strength in those early days of bereavement to go on. It continued to bring tears to my eyes and yet, the tears were those of gratitude for the many who had taken our grief and for a time, had cried with us and carried some of it for us. It warmed my heart to recall that so many cared and grieved with us. The prayers continued throughout the first year and beyond. We could not have made it without those human arms of love around us, listening ears, tear-soaked eyes and encouraging words.

Although I was drained after two days of tossing, remembering, crying and organizing, I was comforted for having done this job that I had dreaded for years. It brought me back in touch with my grief and I felt so much closer to Chris than I had felt in a long time. I felt as though I had had a visit with him. I was reminded of what a special young man he was and how I was privileged to have been his mom. One thing I know for sure, the love for Chris, the memories we shared with him and the compassion shown to our family will remain in our hearts far longer than "the stuff" and that is what is really important.

Carole Dyck

TCF Verdugo Hills, CA

In Memory of my son, Chris Dyck

## Marc's Birthday

To my brother Marc in heaven:

Today, December 14, 2012 would be your 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. It has been 5 years since you left this Earth, but it seems like yesterday. I feel your presence often, and know you are watching over me always, my dear guardian angel. You are of the timeless and formless now, finally and completely free, free of pain, attachments, worldly thoughts, and all forms of suffering. I pray your transition was one of peaceful passing, as you transcended your human experience. You embody the spirit eternal now.

Today, here on earth, a tragedy took place, as I'm sure you already are aware. I know you will watch over these children whose lives were abruptly cut short today and empower their spirit to ease the suffering of their grieving loved ones here on Earth.

I miss you and love you, my dear brother . . . please continue to guide me in the right direction, to give me the strength and confidence I need to face my fears and conquer my demons as I navigate the bumpy roads on this journey called Life. I used to envision us sharing and supporting one another through life's defining moments . . . I still interact with you nightly in my dreams, only to awake and accept the reality of your physical absence daily. May you R.I.P. Marc. May your spirit soar gloriously above the heavens, gracefully free like a butterfly chasing a rainbow.

Lisa Pearlman, 12/14/12  
TCF Metrowest Chapter, MA

## Companion Sojourners

The dictionary defines the word "sojourn" as temporary place where one may stop, rest, visit, dwell, abide and lodge. The Compassionate Friends is an organization of fellow sojourners. At our monthly meetings we stop for a while to find respite from a world that does not understand what it means to lose a child. We find a safe dwelling where there are others who are just like us. We don't need to have any special skills to be a sojourner. As bereaved parents we instinctively reach out to one another. Those of us who have been on our journey for a while are drawn to comfort the others who have more recently embarked on their path of grief. We don't need to say any special words. A discerning look, a listening ear, or a gentle touch can be balm the other person needs to give them a moment's solace. We are companion sojourners, wounded healers and compassionate friends.

Janet Reyes  
TCF Alamo Area Chapter, TX

## Thought for the Day

It is not easy returning to the world of normalcy when your world is so upside down. It is not easy to stop being a mother or father to your child that has died. The thought for the day is a word — **patience** — patience with yourself who suddenly and powerlessly has been thrown into this horrid nightmare; patience with your spouse who always seems to be having an up day when you are having a down day; patience with relatives and friends who wish to help but seem to hurt with hollow advice and logical words; and patience with time, for it takes time to adjust, and time can move so slowly. **PATIENCE!**

Rose Moen  
TCF Carmel-Indianapolis, IN



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

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

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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  
TCF New Jersey

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*When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.*

*~ from *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran*

## 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