



The Compassionate Friends

Quad City Area Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

February 2022

Volume XXXV, Number 2

Dear Compassionate Friends,

I have been lacking in inspiration this month, so I went back into my archive to choose something to share with you from a previous newsletter. This one from February 2000 is particularly apt for me since my very closest friend (of over 50 years) is succumbing to stage 4 cancer, and so often I am at a loss of how I can best walk beside her in this journey.

“Lately we have received several phone calls from family members of recently bereaved parents seeking help for their loved ones and feeling helpless as they see them consumed with grief. I wish we could give them easy answers, magic formulas, or quick fixes, but there are none. Grief is individual; grief takes time; grief is tough, painful, overwhelming and seemingly endless. When someone we love hurts, we want to make it all better but, that is not possible. We encourage you to share this newsletter with the people who love you. Compassionate Friends has resources available to share with friends and family to give them ideas of what is or isn’t helpful and for them to understand in part the pain of your loss. When you are deeply grieving, it may be hard for you to accept the kind of help your friends or family have to offer. You probably don’t know what you need or what you need may change from moment to moment. You may feel angry or hurt in response to things people do or don’t do or say or don’t say. For the most part, your friends and family love you, are worried about you, and want to make it better, not realizing they cannot. Bereaved parents are also welcome to bring adult (or young adult) family members and friends to a Compassionate Friends meeting with them.”

Together we can grow as we grieve.

Sincerely,
Jerry and Carol Webb



Reflections

Why?

Why?

That's what we ask.

The truth is,
we may never be able
to know for sure why.
But we do know
that there is no single
"should have done" or
"could have done"
or "did" or "didn't do"
that would have changed that
why.
All that love could do was done.

Unknown

Say not in grief "He is no more,"
but live in thankfulness that he was.

Hebrew proverb

As you adjust to your life without the physical presence of your loved one who died, it's vital you get outside and move. Notice, I didn't say, "exercise," since for some people that may sound daunting. There is no need to make it a big undertaking. Pick short, achievable goals, like a short hike, a walk around the block, a bike ride to the park. Keep these jaunts short, as this will give you a sense of accomplishment, and you will derive the physical and psychological benefits of having enlisted your body in your ongoing encounter with grief.

Brad Stetson

I would tell anybody in grief to be kind and gentle to themselves and to NOT COMPARE their journey to the time and distance traveled by others grieving the same loss. There is hope, it may come as the slightest pin hole of light in the darkest of places, but hope is there and it will find you.

Kris Munsch, Blake's dad

B - Be kind to yourself.

R - Respect your body by not overindulging alcohol, drugs, and bad food; by getting enough sleep, and by moving around at least a little every day.

E - Engage with others in big and/or small ways. We're not asking you to bloom into a social butterfly or anything. Just try not to isolate. If you haven't been around other people in a while, go to the local coffee shop or go out for a walk and wave to your neighbors.

A - Allow your emotions to ebb and flow. Don't run from them. Expect that grief emotions will bubble up, their intensity will rise, and they will wash over you and recede.

T - Take life one minute, hour, and day at a time. The enormity of what it means to live life without your loved one is intimidating and overwhelming, but remember that coping with grief is something that happens bit-by-bit and day-by-day.

H - Allow yourself space and time to remember, honor, and to connect with your loved one's memory and their continued impact on the world.

E - Your critical voice has a lot of expectations about what grief should be like and how you should cope. Remember, there are very few "shoulds" when it comes to coping with grief. Everyone copes in their own way and at their own pace. So give yourself a break.

Newly Bereaved ...

Time will ease the hurt. The sadness of the present day is locked and set in time, and moving to the future is a slow and painful climb. But all the feelings that are now so vivid and so real can't hold their fresh intensity as time begins to heal. No wound so deep will ever go away, yet every hurt becomes a little less from day to day. Nothing can erase the painful imprints on your mind; but there are softer memories that time will let you find. Though your heart won't let the sadness simply slide away, the echoes will diminish even though the memories stay.

**Bruce Wilmer, TCF/NJ
Newsletter**

**Hope is being able to see
that there is light despite all
of the darkness.**

Desmond Tutu

Love Gifts

As parents and other family members find healing and hope within the group or from this newsletter, they often wish to make a **Love Gift** to help with the work of our chapter. This is a way to remember a beloved child and to help other parents who mourn the loss of their child.

Thanks to: Laurie and Bill Steinhauser, in memory of their daughter, Maggie, on her 17th anniversary.

Donations are used to provide postage for the newsletter and mailings to newly bereaved families. Some of the love gifts are used for materials to share with first time attendees at our meetings or to purchase books for our library. Our thanks to the many families who provide love gifts so that the work of reaching out to bereaved parents and families can continue. **If you would like to send a donation or love gift, please send it or to our Chapter Treasurer, Doug Scott, 6550 Madison Street, Davenport, Iowa 52806. Checks should be made out to *The Compassionate Friends*. Your gifts are tax deductible.**



Contact the Editors

If you read or write an article or poem which might be helpful to other bereaved parents and would like to share it...

If you move and would like to continue receiving the newsletter, please send us your new address. Because we send the newsletter bulk rate, the post office will not forward it...

If you know someone you think would benefit from receiving the newsletter, send his/her/their name and address.

If you prefer to no longer receive the newsletter or if you prefer to receive this newsletter via email...

**Please contact:
Jerry and Carol
Webb**

390 Arbor Ridge,
Benton Harbor, MI
49022 or email CarolynPWebb@gmail.com.



TCF's Facebook Page is a proven support area for bereaved family members to come and talk about their grief. Stop by and visit with some of our more than 120,000 Facebook members. **Please join our TCF/USA Facebook family.** Tell us about your child, sibling, grandchild, or other loved one and find support in the words and concern of others. **Check out the Discussion Boards!** Every day we also provide thought provoking questions, grief quotes, and links to grief stories, as well as TCF news such as updates on the National Conference, Worldwide Candle Lighting, and other TCF programs.

Closed Facebook Groups: The Compassionate Friends offers several closed Facebook groups to connect with other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. The groups supply support, encouragement, and friendship. Recently added groups include Men in Grief; Loss to Long Term Illness; Loss of a Step Child; Loss of a Child with Special Needs.

The Compassionate Friends National Newsletter

A complimentary issue of the National Newsletter is sent to bereaved families who contact the office at The Compassionate Friends, Inc., 48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808, Wixom, MI 48393, (877)969-0010.

email:

NationalOffice@compassionatefriends.org

Website: www.compassionatefriends.org

Visit the **sibling resource** page at www.compassionatefriends.org. It is also available to read online without charge.



e-Newsletter Now Available!

An e-Newsletter is now available from the National Office! The monthly e-Newsletter contains notes and happenings of interest to all TCFers. To subscribe to the e-Newsletter, visit the TCF National Website home page and click on the Register for TCF e-Newsletter Link. This newsletter is available to everyone.

About The Compassionate Friends

The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child. Founded in England in 1969, the first U.S. chapter was organized in 1972. Since then, 635 chapters have been established. The current Quad City Chapter was formed in 1987 (<http://www.quadcitytcf.org>).

TCF National Office

48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808

Wixom, MI 48393

Toll Free (877)969-0010

TCF National Web site:

www.compassionatefriends.org

Mission Statement

The mission of The Compassionate Friends Quad City Area Chapter is that 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.

Vision Statement

The vision statement of The Compassionate Friends is that everyone who needs us will find us, and everyone who finds us will be helped.

My First Five Years as an Only Child

I've been without my brother for five years. I guess the hard part is over now. Sometimes I think I've aged thirty years in the past five. In a strange way, these past five years have been the best and worst years of my life. I've accomplished the many things of a typical young adult—learning to drive, graduating from high school, going to college, and starting a career. Every one of my accomplishments has been clouded by the fact that my brother, George, is not here to share each milestone and is not achieving any more milestones for himself.

He was cheated of so many things. He will never graduate, get married, have children, or travel. He will never grow old, and I will never have a brother to grow old with. I'll never have nieces and nephews. The sibling relationship, usually the longest relationship of one's life, has been cut short for us. In these five years, although I've learned to accept that he's not coming back, the difficult part is dealing with it day by day. My relationship with George ended just when we started to become friends. The childish fights and other annoyances of having a big brother were changing to real conversations and to having an occasional ally.



I'm angry about all of the things that we've missed and all of the things that will never be, and I guess I always will be. Five years heals a lot of wounds, but the hurt will always be there, no matter how many years pass. In these past five years, I've been forced to grow up too fast. I've been forced into a new outlook on life. I've felt lonely and alone. I now realize that I will never be the same person as before. That person is locked away and is gone forever. Maybe I'm a better person now because of what I've been through. Five years ago I never thought I'd survive, but I'm still here dealing with it every day. I don't know what the next five years will bring, but at least I've made it this far.

Kristina Steiner, TCF Staten Island, NY

Choose to Hear Love Instead

My friend had just had a miscarriage. She shared about it online, openly and bravely. She shared about her grief. She shared about her sorrow. She shared about the pain and how much she missed her baby.

Reading her words made my hands sweat. What was I supposed to say to her? The only suffering I had known was marital difficulties. No one close to me had ever died. I had a living, healthy child. Words seemed inadequate, and anything that came to mind I was too afraid to say. My tongue felt like a loose cannon, one wrong word, and it would all blow away. I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say a single thing.

...One year later, I stood in the receiving line at my own son's funeral. He was my second, and he had been sick. He died when he was six months and seventeen days old.

As people came and shook my hand, words flew through the air like daggers.

"At least he's not sick anymore."

"At least you tried to save him."

"At least you can get your life back now."

I wanted to scream. No "at least" would ease the pain. Nothing could. Nothing would. Every word hurt. Grief was thick, and my pain was so raw. Every comment felt like a

repeated insult to my deep, deep wound.

Next in line was my friend, that same sweet woman who I had no words for a year before. Now here she was, standing in front of me, unsure of the words to say, unsure of how to apologize for an unfathomable loss, unsure of what words to offer to soothe my bleeding heart.

I suddenly remembered what it was like to be in the other person's shoes. Fumbling, heart-broken with empathy and compassion, searching for anything possible, attempting with every ounce within me to love and understand. I saw my former self. And then I

began to see my former self in every single person.

Briefly, I had a moment of intense clarity. Every person that spoke to me was someone who was trying to speak from the love in their hearts. They just didn't know how.

... A few months later, I was reminded of this when I heard this advice: "Choose to hear love." When people open their mouths, and it doesn't sound like love coming out, choose to hear love instead.

People mean well. They want to love you. They want to understand,

continued next page



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and when they see your heart, broken and laid waste, sometimes all the wrong words come out – or sometimes, out of fear, they say nothing at all. They may say nothing you want them to say and everything you wish they wouldn't. Most people genuinely want to scoop you into their arms and take away any pain, *they just don't know how.*

So they stumble over words. They spit out platitudes, and then they walk away, either oblivious or kicking themselves in the face for struggling.

I was once there. I'm sure you may have been, too. There was a "before" to our suffering when we did not have the words to say.

And so. When it's possible, remember that when people open their mouths, and it doesn't feel like it's love coming out, choose to hear love instead. Choose to see a heart that wants to reach out, it just doesn't have the right words to say.

It's hard, and it may be a mantra I repeat to myself for the rest of my life, but that's okay. This will be it: choose to hear just love.

Lexi Behrndt



Let's Go Home

Let's go home – my eyes pleaded to my husband. We don't belong here. This is crazy – these people are still hurting. Two, five years later and they are still coming here. Let's go home. We don't belong here. We won't, we can't be like that. Perhaps – if I don't speak, If I don't tell them why we came – it won't be true. But wait... Why are they laughing? They all lost children, yet they are laughing at something somehow. And wait... Why am I nodding at what he's saying? Why do I feel I must say something to that couple who are in this nightmare even less time than we? They all seem to know what I'm feeling – without my even saying it – just not flinching at my tears. That steady, endless stream of tears that seems to never stop. Perhaps – one day I'll join their laughter – let's wait – perhaps we shouldn't leave just yet.

Sandy Fein, TCF Manhasset, NY

Getting on With Life - Making the decision to live again after a major loss is not easy. It requires putting your will power and thought power ahead of some very powerful emotions. You cannot wait until you feel better and then decide to live again. You must make the decision because you know it's right, and then wait for your feelings to catch up. They will.

Bob Deits, *From Life After Loss*

Support Groups for Grieving Parents & Siblings

The Compassionate Friends, Quad City Chapter Meeting

Upcoming meeting on

Thursday, February 24, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.

Our meeting is held in-person at 1830 6th Avenue, Moline, Illinois, on the second floor. Masks and social distancing are required.

The next meeting of the chapter is on March 24, 2022.

The Compassionate Friends of Muscatine	Meets the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 at the George M. Wittch-Lewis Funeral Home, 2907 Mulberry, Muscatine, Iowa. Chapter Leaders are Linda and Bill McCracken. You can call them at 563.260.3626 for directions or information, or contact them at linmac67@machlink.com .
Rick's House of Hope	Rick's House of Hope serves children, ages 3-18, and family members from the Quad Cities and nearby counties. We serve those with grief, loss, or trauma issues. Death of a loved one and divorce are common; however, any sort of traumatic event or family change would fit our criteria, such as: bullying, teen dating victimization/harassment, crime victims, and other needs. The continuous groups are Family Together for all members of the family on Wednesday nights 5:00-7:00 pm and a Teen Night on Thursdays 5:00-7:30 pm. All meetings are held at 5022 Northwest Boulevard, Davenport, Iowa 52806 and are free. Rick's House of Hope also does individual counseling/therapy. For more information, contact Lynne Miller, Program Manager, at millerl@verafrenchmhc.org or go to www.rhoh.org .
SHARE	A support group for parents who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death. SHARE meets the third Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. via ZOOM MEETING during the pandemic and in "normal time" in the Adler Room #1 in the lower level of Genesis Heart Institute, 1236 East Rusholme Street, Davenport, Iowa. Questions? Contact Chalyn Fornero-Green at 309.373.2568, or chalyn@shareqc.com or www.shareqc.com .
Phone Support	If you need someone who understands and will listen, feel free to call or email (if address is given): ♥ Doug Scott 563.370.1041, dns0826@gmail.com ♥ Kay Miller, 309.738.4915 ♥ Rosemary Shoemaker 309.945.6738, shoearthb4@gmail.com ♥ Judy Delvechio 563.349.8895, delvecchiojudy@hotmail.com Doug, Kay, Rosemary, and Judy are willing to take calls from bereaved parents, grandparents, or siblings who want to talk to someone who cares that they don't feel alone.

Printed Resources for Grieving Parents & Siblings

TCF Online Support Community	TCF's national website offers "virtual chapters" through an Online Support Community (live chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child. The sessions last an hour and have trained moderators present. For more information, visit www.compassionatefriends.org and click "Online Support" in the "Resources" column.
TCF's Grief Related Resources	There are resources on elements of grief with well-known experts in the field. To view the resources, go to https://www.opentohope.com/tv/ .
TCF National Magazine	<i>We Need Not Walk Alone</i> is available to read online without charge. Go to www.compassionatefriends.org and review the options at the top of the page. TCF e-Newsletter is also available from the National Office to subscribe to the e-Newsletter, visit the TCF National Website home page and click on the Register for TCF e-Newsletter link.
Grief Materials	Looking for a particular grief book? Look no further than the Centering Corporation, the official recommended grief resource center of The Compassionate Friends. With the largest selection of grief-related resources in the United States, Centering Corporation will probably have just about anything you're looking for — or they'll be able to tell you where to find it. Call Centering Corporation for a catalog at 402.553.1200 or visit their website at www.centering.org . When ordering, be sure to mention you are with The Compassionate Friends and all shipping charges will be waived.
Amazon.com	When making a purchase from Amazon.com, enter through the link on the home page of TCF national website and a portion of the purchase price is donated to further the mission of TCF. This donation applies to all purchases made at Amazon.com.
Previous Newsletter Editions	Looking for more articles or previous copies of this newsletter? Go to www.bethany-qc.org for copies of the last several years of the Quad City Chapter of TCF-QC Chapter Newsletter in Adobe Acrobat format.
Alive Alone	A newsletter for bereaved parents whose only or all children are deceased. A self-help network and publication to promote healing and communication can be reached at www.alivealone.org or alivealone@bright.net .
Bereaved Parents' Magazine	Online articles and poems. Reminder emails are sent notifying readers when new issues are available. https://bereavedparentsusa.org .
Our Newsletter	Published one to three times per year, when there is content to make a balanced issue. It usually contains 30 pages of personal stories and updates, poetry, subsequent birth announcements, and any new topical articles and information. Currently it is being distributed electronically (PDF), but a printout is available to anyone without email access. To request a sample copy, please email Jean Kollantai at climb@climb-support.org . Include your full name, your location, and your reason for interest.

A Valentine for Mom

As we grow older, we find that the simple reflections of our children are often the best memories we have. One such memory most mothers have is a valentine.....maybe many valentines. These special valentines were made by our children just for us. They were made when mom was the most important person in their world.

Some of us have kept each little memento of our child's years....from the first little hand plaque to the handmade gifts and cards to the special gifts that our children purchased with their own money. Each one is a part of our child, a part of us and a part of our shared history.

My first valentine from my child was a handmade red construction paper heart glued to heart shaped white lace paper... On it he had written "Happy Valentine's Day to my MOM. I love you. Todd." Shyly he asked if I liked it. I told him I loved it, and that his valentine was the most beautiful valentine a mother could receive. It is a treasure I have always kept. "I just wanted to be sure," he whispered.

In my office I have a gift that Todd bought me five years ago. All grown up now with an MBA, bright future, important corporate job, family of four children, a beautiful new home, and major responsibilities, precious little time was available for finding the perfect gift for his mom. His life was busy; his free time was limited, but a something special caught his eye and he thought about me. He decided to buy it. A few weeks later, he gave me a brightly wrapped package containing a beautiful plate picturing a Sioux Indian princess.

"She's beautiful, just beautiful," I told him. "Do you really like it?" he asked. The detail, the essence of her heritage and her outlook were captured perfectly. I told him, "I love it, Todd. I'll keep her in the office so I can see her every day. I think she is beautiful." And she is in my office today, another treasure I will always keep. "I just wanted to be sure," he whispered.

Much has happened since my three-year-old son gave me that handmade valentine and my adult son gave me that special gift. The years have raced by; my son has been dead for over two years. And so this month I will open another special gift that my son bought me when he was still in college: my cedar chest. I'd always wanted a cedar chest for the special keepsakes marking our lives. That cedar chest contains pictures, cards, handmade gifts and other things that only a mother could hold in her hands while watching the movies play in her head. There are many movies in that cedar chest, but only I can see them. That is the beauty of memories.

Each of us has our memories of our child. Whether our child was five days old or 55 years old, we have special memories that are as much a part of us as our faces. Valentine's Day was always a special day for our family. We exchanged valentines and sometimes gave a special gift.

This Valentine's Day I will send my son a special handwritten valentine, carried on the wind to the cosmos. The message will be simple. "Happy Valentine's Day to my SON, Todd. I love you. Your Mom."

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

No Footprints in the Snow

As I look out the window to a sea of white, I see a tiny blue bird hopping across the snow covered ground. He barely even lands, never in one place for more than a second.

From a distance, the snow appears untouched, still perfectly in place. But as I look closer, I see a tiny imprint in the fresh powder. Tiny little bird-prints, perfectly impressed in the white ground.

And I can't stop myself from thinking that there are two little footprints that will never be in the snow. Footprints of a happy two-year-old, that will forever be absent. I allow myself to imagine a tiny boy with dark blond curls, and deep blue eyes, running carelessly through the back yard. He is chasing after our dog while my husband chases him. They fall to the ground in giggles and roll in the snow. I'm smiling relentlessly and taking a million photographs. And in that moment, all is right with the world. But then my breath fogs the bedroom window, and I snap back to reality. The snow in the back yard sits perfectly untouched. Forever undisturbed.

There are days, when those missing footprints overwhelm me. Days when the lost reality of those two little feet pattering around leave my heart throbbing in pain. Days when the silence of their absence is deafening. It hurts, and it will always hurt. But I know that just because I can't see those footprints now does not mean that they didn't exist. My son may not be here physically, but he did leave footprints in this world. He left an impression on me and on the hearts of many, an impression that will never fade away. No matter how much time passes or how much the world changes, he did exist. And he always will.

The snow begins to melt, and the tiny bird-prints slowly disappear, but that in no way negates their existence or the existence of the soul that left them.

Alex Hopper



The New Year

With the holidays past, we will be off on another 365. Some of you, I know, wonder if you can make it. That's such an enormous amount of time to contemplate all at once, isn't it? You may have some of your "firsts" coming in the months ahead, and the normal impulse seems to be to lump all those days together and start dreading them concurrently, like a prisoner serving several life sentences. It's possible to do it that way, but that's the hard way. Getting through this day may take all the energy you can muster. Why try to handle March or May or July or whenever your special days are now? You can't really, and by trying, you end up only defeating yourself in your effort to effectively survive this day. Whey this day is past, March or May or July will still be there, trying to defeat your tomorrow, but only if you let them! Get past this day, and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. By the time March, May or July gets here you will have improved your coping skills. You can better handle your special days with more practice. I encourage you to know you can and you will be better. Use this New Year constructively to facilitate that end, and use the help that is available to you through your Compassionate Friends.

Mary Cleckley ,TCF/Atlanta, GA



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Bethany
for Children & Families

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Moline, Illinois 61265

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TO those who are receiving our newsletter for the first time, we wish you were not eligible to belong to this group, but we want you to know that your family and you have many friends. We who have received love and compassion from others in our time of deep sorrow now wish to offer the same support and understanding to you. Please know we understand, we care, and we want to help.

You are not alone in your grief.