



The Compassionate Friends
Quad City Area Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

May 2024

Volume XXXVII, Number 5

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Six months after our daughter died, we lost our third child to miscarriage. Anguished, I cried out, “Why?” Why, after we had already lost so much, were we now facing another loss that felt devastating?

“Why me?” “Why us?” “Why my child?” is not so much a question as a cry of pain. When grieving parents ask this question, they are not seeking an answer (which well-meaning friends or counselors so often try to give), but rather some response to ease the pain. If a bereaved parent cries out with the question, “What did I do to deserve this?” there is no answer that will satisfy. We cry out these questions, not because there is an answer that is true or will make any sense; we cry out as a means to express our pain and a longing for those who surround us to enter into our pain with us.

As time goes on, we will hopefully discover “Why?” is the wrong question. “Why?” focuses on the past. We cannot change the past. “Why?” is terribly frustrating (there is no satisfactory answer). “Why?” often becomes a search for someone to blame. We all ask the question, “Why?” at some point and in some way, and for some length of time. We can’t help it. It is part of the process, but at some point, for healing to begin, we must then ask the question, “What do we do now?”



Sincerely,
Jerry and Carol Webb

Mothers hold their children's hands for a short while, but their hearts forever.
~Author Unknown



My grief is like the weather. Somedays it's calm, quiet, maybe even a little sunny. Other days it's a devastating storm that makes me feel angry, exhausted, raw, and empty. I wake up in the morning and wonder: "Am I even alive at all? And if so, how am I supposed to make it through this day?" This is why when you ask me how I feel about Mother's Day, all I can say is that it depends.

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For Mothers who have surviving children, there is this gem of a comment: "Don't forget, you're lucky to have other children." Please let me assure you, a mother does not forget any of her children. This mother loves each and every one of her unique and special children in unique and special ways, but one of her children has died and so her love for this child looks a little untraditional. Mothers do not have a finite amount of love to be shifted, divided, and spread around depending on the number of children they have on this earth. Be careful with your comments because it's difficult enough for grieving mothers who often feel torn between feeling joy and happiness for their living children and grief for the child who has died.

www.what'syourgrief.com

Whatever you do, believe you will make it through the day. With time, the grief storms will grow smaller and less frequent, and you will find a little more balance and room to breathe. Believe you will be okay and have hope that in the future you will find yourself in a place where you can grieve and celebrate mother's Day all at the same time.

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The Power of “And”

Five weeks after Dorothy died, my nephew was born. I remember going to our weekly therapy session and sharing this news with our therapist. Of course, she wanted to know how I was feeling about his arrival. I replied that I was so happy that he was safely here, but I was also happy that he lived across the country, so I didn't have to see him yet.

“And,” she replied. I looked at her puzzled.

She continued, “And. You are happy he is here, AND you are happy that you don't have to see him right now. Rachel, you *don't have to choose.*”

After we left our session that day, I couldn't stop thinking about that one little word. Ever since Dorothy's death, I had found myself trying to separate my reemerging feelings of happiness from the steady depression I was in.

Much like a child trying to keep their peas from touching their mashed potatoes, I wanted my feelings of devastation to be untouched by any glimmers of joy I might be feeling. I didn't think it was possible for them to co-exist.

Three simple letters changed that. I began testing out this powerful little word. Whenever I had felt differing emotions, I had used the word “but” to keep them distant.

What if I used “and” to bring them together?

It's a beautiful day outside, AND I just can't face the world today.

That new picture of my nephew is so adorable, AND it reminds me of how much I miss Dorothy.

I'm looking forward to seeing my

family, AND I'm anxious to be around them.

I want to talk about Dorothy, AND I'm nervous about what others will have to say about her.

And was slowly changing my world. That one word was giving me the freedom to experience the storm of emotions that had been quietly raging inside.

I didn't have to wait for each feeling to pass over me completely; I could start feeling them in connection. Before “and” there had been so much guilt about the happiness that was sneaking its way back into my life.

Now, I had permission to let happiness start to color the darkness of my grief.

Over the next weeks and months, I exercised the power of “and.” With the recent birth of my nephew, I found many opportunities to use my new magic word.

I'm so happy that my sister-in-law is a mother, AND I wish that were me. I want to send my nephew this cute new outfit, AND I wish I could be buying clothes for my child instead. I want to be included in my nephew's life, AND sometimes it's just too hard. I'm so excited to be an aunt, AND I'm so worried that Dorothy is going to be forgotten.

“And” wasn't a solution or a remedy, but it was a tool.

The burden of Dorothy's death was a heavy one. I was struggling under the weight of the emotions I had tried to ignore, and I needed help.

My grief for Dorothy was never going away, but I needed something to help me carry the load throughout my life.

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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 Website:

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.

When Mother's Day Feels Empty

There are no words to completely describe what a mother feels when her child has died. She feels lost, abandoned, afraid, lonely, forgotten, and most of all, empty. The emptiness is like none other because it is an emptiness of the heart. When a child dies, part of a mother's heart also dies.

Mother's Day is a traditional holiday that has grown bigger and bigger throughout the years. We are bombarded with advertisements to take out mothers for a special dinner or buy Mother's Day flowers. For more than a month before Mother's Day, reminders are placed everywhere. It's impossible to pick up a newspaper, listen to the radio, or turn on the television without some kind of reminder of Mother's Day. There are Mother's Day banquets, Mother's Day baby dedications at church, and special family gatherings to honor mothers. All of this is wonderful except for the mother that is grieving the loss of her child.

For the grieving mother, every reminder of Mother's Day is like another wound to the heart. The hole in her heart caused by grief grows larger and larger with each reminder, and the emptiness feels darker and colder than she ever imagined possible. What is a grieving mother to do when there are so many reminders of the precious child she has lost? Mother's Day is the only holiday that specifically uses the word mother, so there is no real way of avoiding this day.

A grieving mother can, however, prepare for Mother's Day well in advance so that she knows how to avoid placing additional pain in her life.

Remember that Mother's Day is not a holiday that has to be celebrated. If a grieving mother does not want to

attend a banquet, or watch baby dedications at church, or see special family gatherings at restaurants, then she has the right to choose not to participate in these events without feeling guilty. Many mothers choose to stay home and do nothing special at all on Mother's Day, and that is fine. Grief follows no rules and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Explain to others that this day is painful. Giving yourself permission to grieve in your own way is very healing and helpful, especially during such a difficult day as Mother's Day.

Do what feels right for you. Maybe that means taking a mini trip away where nobody knows you. Maybe it is staying at home. Perhaps a walk in the woods or a walk along the sandy beach would help you during this empty time. Journal your thoughts. Release a balloon. Or, maybe you want to avoid Mother's Day altogether.

You know what feels best for your heart, and giving yourself permission to do what is right for you can be the most healing thing of all.

Lastly, remind yourself often that you will not always feel this empty.

With each passing day new hope will enter your empty heart until one day you will wake up to realize that the empty hole is beginning to fill with some joy. Mother's Day is only one day. With a little bit of preparation you can make it through, and you will have walked one more step in your journey of healing!



Clara Hinton
www.silentgrief.com

My husband Glen and I had

been married 24 years when our 17 year old son Nathan was killed by a drunk driver. Nathan was our third son to die. I was twenty-six and twenty-eight when Jimmy and Ethan died. I did not sense their deaths challenged our marriage quite as much as Nathan's death did. We had only been married six and eight years when the babies died. Perhaps because we were young or perhaps because we had two other small children, we were so preoccupied with our remaining responsibilities we didn't notice the attacks to our marriage that seemed so prevalent when Nathan died.



Somehow, we survived his death and our marriage survived as well. We have now been married 46 and a half years, and most importantly, we still like each other! How did we do it?

We were already aware of our differences in personality. Glen faced problems very methodically and logically. I faced problems like a bull in a china closet – head on, with very little logic. Glen faced Nathan's death in his typical methodical style. I now know he was devastated, but he didn't know how to show his sorrow. He went to work every day and appeared to be functioning normally.

I cried and howled. I felt so much rage that anyone who crossed me in any way was a potential victim. I could not think; I bucked my normal routine, and missed as many days of work as possible. My roller coaster emotions kept everyone at arms' length. I often locked myself in the bedroom and refused to talk with anyone. Glen very patiently slid notes under the bedroom door, assuring me of his love.

"You are the love of my life," he wrote and spoke those words to me until I would finally open the door and sob and sob as he held me.

At first, I viewed his quiet manner as weakness. I wanted him to confront the justice system and set everyone straight who questioned my style of grieving. His consistent behavior finally made sense to me. Logically, he felt certain the DA would not listen to him, and he knew others didn't understand our grief, so why exert the effort in trying to change them? I saw that his predictable behavior also meant he loved me before Nathan died and he wasn't about to change any time soon.

One night he sat in front of me, got my attention, and said, "I don't care what you do; I'm not leaving!" And he meant it! If he wasn't going to leave, I decided I needed to learn to understand him.

As we talked, we began to realize the best thing we could do to honor Nathan's life was to learn to love each other even more deeply.

We now realize our differences are not weaknesses; they can be viewed as strengths. Thank goodness Glen is a peacemaker. If he weren't, I question anyone would still be speaking to us. Often I speak without my brain being in gear.

Glen has learned I have the ability to size up a situation quickly. I can make decisions fast. I may not always be right, but I'm fast. I have a sensitive side that probably causes my tears to flow often, but my sensitivity also helps me know when others are in need. Glen has learned to trust my sensitive intuition.

We have learned that "different" doesn't mean one of us is wrong. It just means we are different, and different is okay.

Marilyn Heavilin

The doctor I see every six months

or so for my rheumatoid arthritis always fusses at me. One of the routine questions is, "How's your pain level?" I usually say, "About a three." And then she looks at my hands and my feet at the swollen joints and twisted toes—and shakes her head. But here's the deal: sure they hurt, sure I can't do all the things I used to do, sure I have to do many things differently than I did them when my hands and feet were unaffected by this disease—but I'm STILL moving and doing what needs to be done. I don't really know how to do anything else.

And that's how it is with this grief I lug around—it's heavier some days than others, but I'm STILL moving and doing what needs to be done. This is not the life I thought I would be living, but it's the life I have. I make accommodations for my sorrow just like I make accommodations for my hurting hands and crooked toes.

- I try not to over-schedule my days. If I have an appointment, I mark it on the calendar and refuse to pile other commitments on top of it. That way if I'm wiped out I have some built in down time.
- I prioritize what needs to be done. Whether it is for a week or a day, I jot down a list (still using paper, but a phone would work) and then decide what are the two or three MOST important tasks that must be done in that time frame. If I find myself running behind because it's a hard grief day (or week), I can quickly make choices that ensure the needful things are done and the others laid aside for when I have more energy to do them. I'm less anxious about what I don't get finished because I know I did the most important things first.
- I build rest into my days. When I'm overtired, I'm more susceptible to

grief attacks. I pause every now and then to sit or take a quick walk outside or simply change my work from detail-oriented to broad strokes. I have more flexibility because I work at home, but even in an office it's possible. My husband walks every day on his lunch hour—sunshine and physical activity make his afternoons easier to bear.

- I ask for help. When I'm drowning in grief, I reach out for a lifeline. There's no shame in asking for help. I have a good friend that I can text or call anytime I need to and ask for prayer or a listening ear. I belong to a couple of online grief groups and they are full of people who understand my pain and will lift me up in prayer and encourage my heart when it feels especially broken.
- I accept my limitations. My toes don't allow me to wear beautiful shoes anymore so I've learned to wear what fits instead of what's in fashion. I am not the same person I was before I buried a child so I'm learning to live with the new me. I don't like crowds. I don't like unexpected change. I feel anxious in unfamiliar places and around strangers. I make choices that limit my exposure to those things when possible.
- I shake off the really awful day. I can't help that some days take a nosedive into terrible as soon as I leave the bed. I admit that grieving is hard, that it will continue to be hard. But I won't let my worst days be my only days. I am not in control of everything, but I can control some things. I would not have chosen this life for myself, but I can make choices that help make it bearable.

Melanie, from "The Life I Didn't Choose,"
TCF Queensland

Support Groups for Grieving Parents & Siblings

The Compassionate Friends, Quad City Chapter Meeting May 23, 2024, at 6:30 p.m.

Bethany for Children & Families

1701 River Drive, in Moline, Illinois (second floor)

The next chapter meeting is on June 27, 2024, at 6:30 p.m.

<p>The Compassionate Friends of Muscatine</p>	<p>Meets the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 at the Snyder and Hallenbaugh Funeral Home, 2907 Mulberry, Muscatine, Iowa, Chapter. The contact person is Tom Summit, 563.506.0103.</p>
<p>Rick's House of Hope</p>	<p>Rick's House of Hope serves children, ages three to 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 p.m. and a Teen Night on Thursdays 5:00-7:30 p.m. All meetings are held at 852 Middle Road (Vera French), in Bettendorf, Iowa, 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.</p>
<p>SHARE</p>	<p>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. 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.</p>
<p>Phone Support</p>	<p>If you need someone who understands and will listen, feel free to call or email (if address is given):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Doug Scott, 563.370.1041, dns0826@gmail.com ♥ Rosemary Shoemaker, 309.945.6738, shoeartb4@gmail.com ♥ Judy Delvecchio, 563.349.8895, delvecchiojudy@hotmail.com <p>Doug, 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.</p>

Printed Resources for Grieving Parents & Siblings

TCF Online Support Community	<p>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.</p>
TCF's Grief Related Resources	<p>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/.</p>
TCF National Magazine	<p><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.</p>
Grief Materials	<p>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.</p>
Amazon.com	<p>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.</p>
Previous Newsletter Editions	<p>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.</p>
Alive Alone	<p>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.</p>
Bereaved Parents' Magazine	<p>Online articles and poems. Reminder emails are sent notifying readers when new issues are available. https://bereavedparentsusa.org.</p>
Our Newsletter	<p>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.</p>

14 years ago, my son was a vibrant, happy, carefree 14 year old.

Now 14 years later, he remains forever 14 years old; in our memories, in our mind's pictures, in the last photo, his school ID. Now Ben has been dead for the same length of time as he lived. **14 years.**

And us, how are we; how has the 14 years of missing, yearning, mourning, grieving shaped us? How are we different to what we could have been, had not Ben died? How has being a bereaved parent shaped who I have become?

I believe that apart from becoming a parent, becoming a bereaved parent is possibly the biggest life changing experience I have had. It has left me with a knowledge of pain, despair, and grief that can only come from an experience such as this. It has also left me with a deep fear that something will happen to my youngest son, actually not just something, but that he will die too. I am impatient with stupid people and mundane things and hate seeing and hearing stories of parental abuse and neglect. (Do they not know how lucky they are!!)

I am also more understanding, more compassionate, more aware of other's pain. I have a need and longing to live this life fully. I try to not put off today what is important; talking with family and friends, spending time with loved ones, and letting loved ones know they are loved. I have to make sure I become a better person in memory of Ben and I make the most of the gift of life which I still have and which was taken too soon from my son.

"Let us learn from the lips of death the lessons of life. Let us live truly while we live, live for what is true and good and lasting. And let the memory of our dead help us to do this. For they are not wholly separated from us, if we remain loyal to them. In spirit they are with us. And we may think of them as silent, invisible, but

real presences in our households." (Felix Adler, "Life and Destiny" (1913), Section 8: Suffering and Consolation.)

"If we kept in mind that we will soon inevitably die, our lives would be completely different. If a person knows that he will die in a half hour, he certainly will not bother doing trivial, stupid, or, especially, bad things during this half hour. Perhaps you have half a century before you die—what makes this any different from a half hour?" (Leo Tolstoy.)

As Mother's Day approaches and passes, I wish you all peace and love and hope that you too are able to travel the journey of grief and arrive at a point where you can live your life fully and share the love with others.

Lesley Henderson
In memory of Ben Henderson

Continued from page 3

Without a tool, I was going to be crushed. "And" helped alleviate some of the pressure. I felt like I could breathe again. I felt like I was remembering how to live AND love.

My husband and I recently "graduated" from therapy. (To be clear, I will probably go back to therapy many times in my life because it is extremely important for my family and our well-being.)

At our last session, my therapist asked us if we had any feedback for her. I thanked her for "and." She smiled and said that she was glad I found it helpful in my healing.

"I have found it helpful," I replied. "And I still have a lot of healing left to do."

-Rachel Whalen
Still Standing Magazine

Love Gifts

Dennis and Debra Ryan, in memory of
their daughter, Darcy Lee Ryan.

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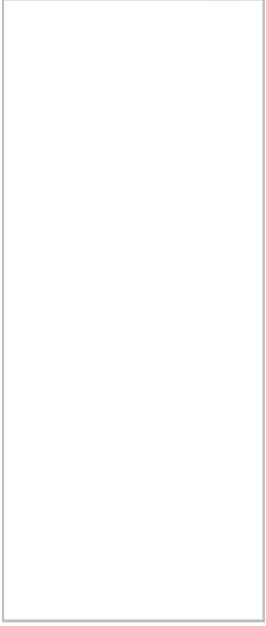
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Quad City Area Chapter
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To those who are receiving our newsletter for the first time, we wish you were not eligible to belong to this group, but we want you to know that your family and you have many 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.