

WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE

For bereaved families and the people who care about them, following the death of a child.

Autumn | Winter 2017



***The
Compassionate
Friends***
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Birds sing after a storm;
why shouldn't people feel as free
to delight in whatever sunlight
remains to them?

~ Rose Kennedy



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Exit to Hope

On the road trip to The Compassionate Friends headquarters in Oak Brook, IL to become the Executive Director of The Compassionate Friends, I saw the interstate exit sign for the town of “Hope”. It was very fitting to see this symbolic sign on the way to serving in a new capacity. Thinking of the exit, I pondered how wonderful it would have been for someone to be standing beside the road pointing to the exact exit I needed to take to exit the agony of grief and enter into a world of hope.

Initially, there seemed to be a fog protecting us from the devastation of our son dying. But as weeks and months went by, I began to see more clearly and also felt the deep, deep pain more immensely. We all attempt to try to pull ourselves and our families back together. We start searching for what others refer to as a new normal. I tried a number of counselors, groups, books, and even a little “retail therapy”.

In my personal journey, initially I didn’t see anyone standing on the roadside to guide me to where I needed to go. The streets I traveled that were once familiar were suddenly unfamiliar. I did not know my way whether walking or driving. What was once comfortable and enjoyable for me brought fear and uncertainty. Friends and family saw the struggle was real. They did their best and tried to console with well-intentioned words that somehow offended me.

I am sure my journey is not unique. I am sure you have experienced the same things. As I have listened to others, it seems common to travel through grief first moving away from the fog and then into a world unknown. I do now believe that very clearly there are countless TCF volunteers standing and holding signs guiding families from the fog to hope.

It is a long journey and one that is not easy. I personally believe it is a lifelong journey. Not a life of despair but a life of learning to carry the burden of child loss, learning to find joy again, and learning to first remember that they lived rather than that they died. I know everyone can learn to live with this new normal. As we all know, there was no training for this. We did not even want to think about losing any of our children. It was unexpected even if their death was expected.

If you haven’t yet, trust in me that you can find hope again through grief work. I have hope again. It is a different hope than before but no less strong. I have hope that my son’s memory will not fade but will remain vivid through my talking about him and sharing him with anyone who will listen. I have hope that I can help others walk through grief. I have hope that The Compassionate Friends will be there for those that do not know yet that they need us.

Know that helping is healing. If you are far enough along in this journey, please help our others, just as others were there for you, by being a beacon along the road side to guide others emerging from the fog. When you go to a meeting or join online in a discussion, understand that those ten or twenty years away from when their child, grandchild, or sibling died are not there because they do not have hope, but are there to be a beacon for others.

Rose Kennedy watched four of her nine children die. One son died fighting in WWII, two sons were assassinated, and her daughter died in a plane crash. After all these loses, she stated, “Birds sing after a storm; why shouldn’t people feel as free to delight in whatever sunlight remains to them?” There is sunlight remaining. Look for the exits to hope though they may be hard to see at times. Find hope with The Compassionate Friends, knowing that you need not walk alone.

I look forward to continue holding a beacon for others. Please feel free to send me your ideas on how best to be beacons of hope at Debbie@compassionatefriends.org.



We Need Not Walk Alone

It is our mantra and what we live by. It is what has saved many of us, knowing someone has managed to survive the tragedy of a child dying at any age from any cause.

The Compassionate Friends is a great organization made up of great parents, grandparents, and siblings helping each other. Our lives are forever marked by before our loved one’s death and after our loved one’s death. Many devote time and energy to ensure TCF will be there forever and always. They pour their love for their family member mixed with their personal expertise into our organization to make it thrive. Often, they do this for years and years and years. You will see them at conferences, hear them on conference calls, and see their footprints on our policies, procedures, and guiding principles.

One individual that has done this is Phil Horsley. Phil’s only son, Scott 17, lost his life in an automobile accident. Phil later was invited to attend a TCF chapter meeting. When having lunch with Dave Pellegrin who was visiting the area, he learned a national conference would be held in Salt Lake City, UT. After going to the conference, he became a member of the TCF Foundation followed by leading the foundation’s board of trustees as president. He served on the Foundation for over 13 years, much of that time as president.

The TCF Foundation was created in 2000 to ensure TCF would always be available for families following the death of a child. Currently serving are Rick Yotti (President), Kitty Edler (Secretary), Mark Gedlinske (Treasurer), Karen Snapp, Steve Schmeisser, and Dale Dullabaun Sr. (just recently retired from the Foundation).

In Phil’s words, “It’s time for me to move aside and make room for others. It has been an honor serving on the Foundation for these many years. Thanks to TCF for the opportunity to serve.”

For more information on the Foundation, visit www.compassionatefriends.org/about/tcf-foundation/.





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The Gifts of Grief

by Donna Goodrich

First, let me make a statement: anything positive or any gift we may receive as a result of our child/children's death we would gladly give back, if only we could have them back with us again. Since that isn't possible, then why not accept and acknowledge the gifts or positives that we may receive as a result of their death? For a bereaved parent, this is very hard to do.

I know what most of you are thinking; "You are crazy! Nothing good can come from the death of my child!" I thought the same thing when I first started my grief journey. I continued this path of thinking until I attended a TCF National Conference and began rethinking how I was handling my grief. In my grief journey, I actually had begun to see positives in my life as a result of my children's deaths. But, like a lot of bereaved parents, I did not want to acknowledge that "gifts" or positives could come from my loss. The "gifts" were there just the same, so I began to acknowledge and use them in my "new normal" life - the one without my children. Here are examples of "gifts" you may have received as a result of your child's death.

Following the death of your child, do you remember that one special person who was there

for you? They didn't talk, they listened. They didn't give you advice or spout those awful clichés. They were just there, maybe doing a load of laundry or mowing your lawn. They never asked what they could do, they just showed up and did what was needed. They held us when we cried and let us talk about our precious child. This was possibly our first real gift of grief.

One of our next gifts is one we give ourselves—the gift of "courage"—to walk into that first TCF meeting, into a club that no one wants to belong. We didn't want to be in a room of bereaved parents, but our own gift of "courage" helped us to attend that first meeting.

In those first meetings we should have received our next gift—"hope". We saw parents who had been bereaved for many years. At first, we were concerned about seeing these parents there; will we "still" need to attend TCF meetings five or 10 years from now? Then we heard from these parents that they were there for us; they wanted us to know that they too were as broken as we are now when they first walked through that door. They told us how they managed those difficult days and nights when their child first died. They also showed us that they

had found joy in life again and gave us hope that we could too. Most importantly, they were there to walk this journey with us so we did not have to walk alone, and that is such an important gift. The Reverend Simon Stephens, founder of TCF, talked about the "Gift of Hope" when discussing TCF: *"It is the gift of HOPE which reigns supreme in the attributes of The Compassionate Friends. HOPE that life can still be worth living and meaningful. HOPE that the pain of loss will become less acute and, above all else, the HOPE that we do not walk alone, and that we are understood. The GIFT of HOPE is the greatest gift that we can give to those who mourn."*

Each of us has this choice to make at some point in our grief journey—to stay in the dark days of grief or to try to bring light to our journey and have the memory of our child be one of causing positive changes to ourselves and hopefully, to our world.

Our next gifts come at various times in our grief: new relationships in our life with those who understand our "new normal" because they too have lost a child, and pictures given to us of our children that we never knew existed. Someone asking us to talk about our child years after their death, when it has been so long since anyone, even family members, have mentioned their names to us is a precious gift as well.

Another gift that is so important to many of us is the gift of "signs" that our child is still nearby. These "signs" come in many different forms: pennies from heaven, dragonflies, butterflies, rainbows, hummingbirds, hawks, cardinals, feathers or deer—just to name a few—showing up at just the right time or at a time when it was totally unexpected. These are such small, insignificant (for some unbelievable) happenings to everyone else. But to a bereaved parent they are such special gifts, helping us through the darkest of days. Letting us know that our children are still with us—not as we want them to physically be, but they are still with us nonetheless.

Some gifts are actual changes to our own personality: Are you more compassionate than before; do you have a better sense of what matters most in life than you did before; and have your priorities or focus in life changed and now people or causes are more important to you than "things"? Have you ever stopped to think of all the wonderful scholarships, buildings, foundations, and, yes, even TCF, that came to be

as the result of a child's death? Yes, we would gladly give back all these gifts just to have our children back, but...

One of the last "Gifts of Grief" that I want to mention is the gift of "Memories of our Child". Many of us can remember what goes through our mind when our child first dies. That "tape" our mind replays every time we try to sleep or rest; the tape of the actual event, of the funeral, of how we heard they were dead or simply that our child is dead. At an early TCF Conference, I heard a very wise lady, Darcie Sims, talk about the fact that our memories

of our children change at some point in our grief. At first, when thinking about our children, all that comes to mind is that they died. But later on we will know we are moving forward in our grief journey when we think of our child and *"the first thing we think of is NOT that they died, but that they LIVED, and those memories bring a smile to our face, not tears."* I thought I would never get to that point in my grief, but I did and so can you. Death may have taken our children, but death can't take away our memories of them. Those wonderful, perfect, beautiful memories are ours to keep FOREVER.

Whether or not we recognize these gifts, accept and use them, these gifts and the death of our children have reshaped us all to our very core, from this point forward. As one of the Sandy Hook parents said *"You have a choice; let it destroy you or let it strengthen you."* Each of us has this choice to make at some point in our grief journey—to stay in the dark days of grief or to try to bring light to our journey and have the memory of our child be one of causing positive changes to ourselves and hopefully, to our world. I hope you can now begin to recognize all the "gifts" you have received.

Donna Goodrich has lost three children; a miscarriage; her son Garth, an identical twin, at birth; and her 17-year-old daughter Lauren in an auto accident. Donna has been involved with TCF for the past 17 years, including Chapter Leader, newsletter editor, 2010 TCF National Conference committee member, conducted nine Chapter Leadership Training Programs in North and South Carolina and Virginia, presented her workshop "Gifts of Grief" at the past four National Conferences, is currently co-Regional Coordinator for both North and South Carolina, Committee member for the 2018 TCF National Conference, and is a moderator for the TCF Closed page "Loss of a Child".

Sudden and Unexpected Loss: *It's Complicated*

by Judith Sullivan



On December 14, 2001 my 25-year-old daughter, Melissa, suffered a cardiac arrest followed by a coma. She died fourteen days later. Her doctors concluded that the ultimate cause of her death was due to complications of an undiagnosed eating disorder. Suddenly and unanticipatedly Melissa dropped out of our lives.

I immediately discovered a depth and breadth of searing emotional pain that left me flattened and disoriented. Sometimes, I found myself wanting to shake everyone in my world and scream, 'You can't believe what has just happened!' I felt like someone who thinks they have just seen a UFO and fears that no matter what they say no one will be able to understand. Early on, when my supporters turned to me with their eyes full of concern, they also wanted to know how to help. The question always went unanswered because I didn't have a clue.

As the days merged into weeks and then months, I learned much about the world of grief and began to discover some of the ways that bereaved parents survive and eventually thrive. I often found solace in the words of others. One

day I began reading a book that shone a light on an aspect of my grief process that, at the time, I didn't know I was confronting. Therese A. Rando, Ph.D., in *How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies*, writes about the distinction between an "anticipated death" and "sudden death." She states that if a child's death is sudden and not anticipated loved ones may have more difficulty coping.

Parents are shocked to their core when they get the news of their child's unanticipated and sudden death. They have been denied the buffer of time that could have helped them prepare. One minute their daily life is humming along the tracks of familiar routines, then out of nowhere one of the worst things that can happen to anyone strikes. The unexpected death of their child has no context; it doesn't fit into the life they had before the news. Stunned, they become temporarily frozen in time and deafened to all but the terror and panic that is beginning to consume them.

Clearly, a sudden and unexpected death itself creates tremendous emotional stress. But that's only the beginning as the pressure builds to meet the demands and

responsibilities of one's "previous" life. Perhaps one has other children to care for, a job pressing one to return, or bills on the table daring one to take a needed grief break. Other issues may haunt you as well. For example, it's not unusual for a bereaved parent to become obsessed with finding concrete answers to one question: How did this happen? It takes time and energy to try to gather information surrounding a child's death. It's also not unusual for parents to blame themselves. There seems to be a place inside most parents that always wants to protect their child, regardless of age, especially when their child has a problem or vulnerability. We may blame ourselves for not seeing the signs of impending doom and then conclude that our child's death could have been prevented—by us. This self-blame extends the grief process, intensifies it and may result in becoming immobilized and overwhelmed by guilt and shame.

Complicated grief can also result in an emotionally vulnerable and/or dangerous state of mind. Some parents may even become traumatized depending on the circumstances surrounding their child's death and their own life experiences. On the British website, www.suddendeath.org.uk, a list of common traumatic symptoms, as well as other related information, can be found. The symptoms include, among others, feelings of irritability, insomnia, nightmares, feelings of personal responsibility for the death, a belief that the world no longer makes sense, hopelessness regarding the future, isolation from others, and a decreased level of functioning in general. Whether or not the bereaved parent actually meets the criteria for a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnosis by a mental health professional, it is clear that any combination of those symptoms could easily interfere with one's ability to cope. Although some of these symptoms are experienced in most significant losses, when the symptoms are intense, last longer than what is typical, and interfere with daily functioning it is important for the bereaved to be assessed by a professional. If they are having persistent thoughts about not wanting to live, feeling hopeless about the future, and not seeking help on their own, it is very important that loving supporters respectfully encourage them to meet with a professional for at least an assessment.

It is crucial for the grieving parents and their supporters to know that professional help may be needed, is available, and can help in ways that other resources are unable to. My husband and I saw a psychologist for quite a long period of time. She helped guide us through the most difficult aspects of our grief process and it made all the difference.

In addition to the professional help that my husband and I received, we experienced invaluable support and comfort from several other sources. These included: 1) Active support from family and friends through consistent on-going contact. For example, at first we were invited to brief, simple activities such as going out for coffee or tea. Later invitations to a concert or a regularly designated dinner date were offered. 2) Attending a series of grief groups. These groups provided a weekly structure that was very valuable during the first several months of grief. Interacting with other bereaved parents allowed us to take off our social masks for an hour and a half and be open about our misery with others who understood. 3) Engaging in activities that were distracting and preoccupying thus temporarily relieving stress. Early on I volunteered at The Nature Conservancy doing simple tasks for goals I believed in. Also, doing things like jigsaw puzzles, crossword puzzles, and Sudoku gave my emotional brain a much needed break. 4) Doing activities that helped to temporarily transcend (rise above) my loss. The source(s) of transcendence are unique to each person. I felt transcendence whenever I explored prairie lands with big blue skies, waving grasses and native wildflowers or while photographing almost anything that was part of the natural world. 5) Engaging in activities that began a process of transforming our past relationship with our daughter to a new one. As a family, we established a scholarship in our daughter's name and held fundraisers to support it. My husband, who loves tulips, expanded his tulip garden and transformed it into a memorial garden for Melissa. The possibilities for people to process their sorrow and honor their deceased loved one are endless.

The rich mixture of all these sources of support—from short simple conversations over coffee with a friend to sessions with our psychologist to whom we brought the most serious issues—helped us survive and eventually thrive again. Grief work is the most demanding work that I have ever done; and, as anyone knows who has loved a child and lost them forever, this work will go on as long as we live.

*Judith Sullivan, Retired LP, MA in Counseling Psychology. She lives in St. Paul, MN and is retired as a Group and Family Therapist in the Adult Partial Hospital Program at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In December of 2001, her 25-year-old daughter, Melissa, suffered a cardiac arrest and died 12 days later. As a result of the sudden and complicated nature of her death, Judith wrote extensively about the experience, her grief as it evolved over almost a decade, and specifically the invaluable support that her husband and she received from other people. The culmination of this endeavor resulted in a self-published book entitled, *The Terrifying Wind: Seeking Shelter Following the Death of a Child*, in January 2014.*

The late Darcie Sims wrote hundreds of articles over the years on grief and loss which have been extremely popular and shared in hundreds of TCF publications. We Need Not Walk Alone is proud to honor her by featuring selections of her work in a column titled “The Wisdom of Darcie Sims.”

The Wisdom of Darcie Sims

Handling the Holidays

The holidays are coming and I’m not ready. Everything seems to sparkle and there is always so much to do! It is a festive time, filled with joyous occasions and family gatherings. But when your family circle has been broken by death, holidays and special days may only serve to remind you of the empty space at the table, the hole in your heart.

I am not sure if I will ever again be ready. The world has simply gone mad and I, like you, have been caught in a horrible nightmare that seems as if it will never end. My own world twisted apart a long time ago, but you may be just starting on this path through the valley of despair. You may still be “frozen” in disbelief and even though days and weeks have passed, you may still be numb and in shock.

And even though your world may seem as though it has stopped, the calendar says it’s holiday time and you may be wondering what to do with the empty chair at the table and what is there to be thankful for this year. The holiday season is a time when the past and the present collide. We try to recapture what we once had or blot out bad memories. We try to ignore the empty chair.

As we set the dishes and count the silverware, we are acutely aware of the empty places at the family table. We try to find the holiday spirit, but when the family circle has been broken by death, the only things that sparkle this season, may be tears. We hold our breath and hope the holidays go quickly. We doubt we can endure too long. We sit in the dark, because we think we have lost the light.

Instead of bringing warmth, love, and excitement, the holiday season can be a painful reminder of the empty space at the table, of the terrible hole in the family fabric. But there are some things you can do to help ease the footprints that grief leaves on our soul. It is with a heavy heart and an outstretched helping hand that we offer these tips for

getting through the upcoming holidays.

Give yourself the gift of individuality this holiday season.

Claim your grief, become aware of it, acknowledge it, and create an action plan to cope with it. Be cautious in what you try, however. Some things will never work while others will only postpone or delay your grief.

Use your common sense. You did not lose that, although it may seem that way (at least to others!). You know what you need, so give yourself permission to grieve your way this holiday season. Do whatever works for you. Just be careful of drugs, alcohol and high places. None of those work effectively and can lead to additional problems that you don’t need right now (or ever!).

Be tired. Be hurt. Be grieving. Your tears are a symbol of the love you shared. Let them flow in whatever way you need as you find your way through the pain and into the light of memories and love. Grief is an individual journey. No one can walk it for us. Each footprint must be our own.

Be patient with yourself. Know that hardly anyone is as happy as you think they might be. We all have our hurts to bear. Do what you can this season and let it be enough.

Be realistic. It will hurt, but don’t try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Lay in a supply of tissues (a roll of toilet paper is even more efficient!). Let those hurting moments come, deal with them and let them go.

Be kind and gentle to yourself. Figure out what you should do, balance it with what you are capable of doing and then compromise. Forgive yourself for living.



Plan ahead. Grieving people often experience a lack of concentration. Make lists. Prioritize everything. Decide what is really important to you.

Listen to yourself. As you become aware of your needs, tell family members and friends.

Ask for help when you need it.

Take care of yourself physically. Eat right. Exercise (or at least watch someone else). Gift wrap some broccoli.

If nothing else, jog your memory!

Change something.

Everything has already changed; so don’t be afraid to change some traditions. But don’t toss out everything this year. Keep some traditions. You choose which ones.

Leave the word “ought” out of this holiday season.

Hold on to your wallet and charge cards. You can’t buy away grief, but you might be tempted to try.

Don’t deny yourself the gift of healing tears. Understand that heartaches will be unpacked as you sift through the decorations, but so, too, are the warm loving memories of each piece.

Share your holidays with someone, anyone! Ride the ferry, visit a soup kitchen or nursing home, spend an evening at the bus station. There are lots of lonely people who could use your love and caring.

Work at lifting depression. Take responsibility for yourself. We cannot wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it to us. We have to do that for ourselves. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat. (Cookies are often therapeutic!). Take a nap!

Hang the stockings, place a wreath on the grave. Do whatever feels right for you and your family.

Light a special candle. Not in memory of a death, but in celebration of a life and a loved shared.

Learn to look for joy in the moment. Get a pair of rose-

colored glasses and change the way you look at things. Joy happens when we look for it!

Buy a gift for yourself. Wrap it, but don’t hide it! Just when you think you are going “off the deep end”, open it up and enjoy.

While you are buying a gift for yourself, buy one for your loved one as well. Wrap it up and give it away to someone who might not otherwise have a gift. Pass on the love you shared together and it will never die.

Find the gifts of your loved one’s life. Think of all the “gifts” that your loved one gave to you.... joy, safety, laughter, companionship, compassion. List these “gifts” on strips of paper and keep them somewhere close to

you. Some may put them in a gift box while others may decide to place them in the stocking. Some may decorate the tree with them or simply keep them in a memory book or in a secret place. But, wherever you place them, know these small strips of paper hold treasures far beyond our capacity to understand. They hold tangible evidence that someone lived. It is a reminder that we did exchange gifts and that we still have those gifts, even if our loved one has died.

Live through the hurt so that joy can return to warm your heart!

Our loved ones have died. We did not lose them or the love we share. Practice thinking and then saying, “My loved one died,” not, “I lost my loved one.” Our loved ones are still and always will be a part of us. We cannot lose their love. Even though death comes, love never goes away.

May you find the gifts of joy and the memory of love given and received. These are the treasures of your life. May you rediscover them again and again. Whatever holidays these are for you, may they be manageable and may love be what you remember the most.



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The Unique Aspects of Sibling Grief

by Allie Sims Franklin, LICSW (Big A's sister)

From the shadows we come, the surviving siblings. We are all ages: younger, older, twins and subsequent children. We have our own story to tell, one that is often brushed aside in the concern for our parents, the spouse, and even the children of our sibling. We are grieving, experiencing the same intensity of pain, but not always acknowledged by others. When a child dies, a future is lost; when a parent dies, it is the past which is buried. The death of a sibling is the death of a friend, a rival, an antagonist, a confidant, and perhaps a co-conspirator. It is important to help give siblings a voice as we struggle in the shadows, searching to find light in the darkness.

My mother would tell you that when my brother, Big A died, *“the world went dark and silent. No longer did life seem worth living. The sun grew cold and the music died. There were no happy sounds in our house anymore and the sun cast only shadows of sadness.”* When Austin died, we all thought the sun had left forever. But much to our dismay, the sun kept coming up and we had to keep going, even though we

didn't always know where we were going! My mom used to tell people that the only reason she got up after my brother died was because I needed cereal. There is a little more to the story.

It is true, I was hungry. But what she didn't tell you is that at first, she moved the cereal down to a lower cabinet, to make it easier for me to reach. And then she put the milk in a smaller container so I didn't need help pouring it. Then the TV was moved to a shorter shelf so I could turn on my own cartoons. By now, all the possible accommodations had been made for me to be “self-sufficient,” -- mind you, I was 4. But every day I came back, needing something else. Finally, my mom, exhausted and looking to grieve in peace, asked me what more could I possibly need?

I told her that I needed my brother back. We cried together while she explained patiently to her 4-year-old daughter for the thousandth time that he could not come back. Then I asked her when our family would be fixed, “unbroken.” I

didn't have the words then that I do now, to say that I was hungry for more than cereal. I had lost my brother...and we were at risk of losing so much more...

It was then, in the early hours of a Saturday morning, that we came to realize that in our own unique struggles to find a way to breathe in those early days, we had lost each other. We didn't lose my brother, he died. But we were at risk of losing the support of our little family. This was the spark for us, the start of our commitment to find a way to reach through our differences in our losses to find some common ground.

Our story is not unique. One of the most difficult parts of being a bereaved sibling is the loss of the family we knew. Our parents are consumed by their own grief and while we certainly understand why, our experience is that none of our supports are the same. Siblings are the people who have known us and our family the longest. Our friends may not know how to help, and may shy away. Extended family is primarily concerned with our parents, and the family that we knew is shattered seemingly beyond repair.

How can you help a bereaved sibling?

Acknowledge that Sibling loss is devastating – often sibs feel we are the “Forgotten Mourners.” We may be asked how their parents are handling the loss. Many times, we feel that our loss is not given as much weight by supportive others. Take the time to ask surviving siblings how we are doing.

Encourage us to seek and accept emotional support for ourselves – sometimes we feel driven to support our parents. Many siblings report putting their own grief on hold to care for parents or out of fear that their grieving will make things worse for their grieving parents who “have enough to deal with.” This can result in siblings feeling isolated

and alone within their own families. We may need reminders and permission to grieve and to accept our own support.

Allow us to grapple with our guilt – the truth is that all sibling relationships are not perfect and even great ones come with some not-so-hot moments of rivalry or ugly words. Grief has a unique quality of playing back newsreels of the worst moments between us and our siblings when we are feeling down. Remind us of memories where we were kind to our sibling. Help us put into perspective our normal sibling relationships. It would be weird if every moment we had with them was actually perfect. We may need you to help us to remember this.

We are surviving siblings. We face many challenges, sometimes alone. But with support and a lot of grief work, we can emerge from the shadows. We can claim our roles, and live the legacies we have chosen of our loved ones with pride (colored with sadness).

Am I Still a Sister? You bet I am! And just as my little family learned in the wee hours of a Saturday morning, crying over breakfast cereal, I hope our TCF family can find that we are all bereaved, we are all hurting, we are many things, BUT WE ARE NOT ALONE. Together we can become a family circle, broken by death, but mended by love.

Allie Sims Franklin, LICSW is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a grief management specialist, and the big sister of Austin Sims. She is the author of Am I Still A Sister? and a contributing author in Dear Parents and The Dying and Bereaved Teenager. She co-authored A Place For Me: A Healing Journey for Grieving Kids, Footsteps Through Grief, The Other Side of Grief and Finding Your Way Through Grief with her mother, Darcie D. Sims. Allie is currently serving as the President of the Board of Directors for TCF and is the Executive Director of the non-profit crisis lifeline, Crisis Clinic, in Seattle, WA.

How I Found Hope ...

TCF helped me find hope three years after my daughter died due to extreme prematurity (23 weeks). I thought I was going crazy that I had not “moved on/gotten over it” until my first chapter meeting. The Compassionate Friends helped me realize everything I was feeling was valid and I was not alone.

Julia West, ATC, BCTMB, St. Paul, MN Chapter

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Eleven Thanksgivings After

by Carol Thompson

The Monday before Thanksgiving my emotions pulled a surprise attack.

Cold sunny weather provided a Texas-perfect backdrop for Thanksgiving week, with Monday marking the first official day of preparation. Dinner would be at my sister-in-law and brother's this year. I was thankful for the contributing duties of mashed potatoes, fresh green beans and cranberry relish. Organization brings comfort; I was working on my week's list.

Then my heart wandered back to The Thanksgivings Before, anticipating events that had once shaped our family holiday, traditions that my mind logically knew could never be. It seemed as if I had to teach myself all over again. Sarah would not breeze in the door home from college on Wednesday night. We would not huddle up to watch Texas Tech football and the Dallas Cowboys or attend worship services. I would not make a big pot of potato soup for

her homecoming, hear the excited chatter of her arriving friends or go for Mexican food the Friday after.

Sarah would be almost 35 now but I could not move my years past her 24 years of life. She was now the way I had always thought of President Kennedy after 1963, frozen solidly in time. Forever Young.

I encouraged myself. I am working to move forward, reviving my interests, creating a "new life." I appreciate my loving friends and family and am grateful for the tremendous healing power of a struggling faith. Writing through the days helps me to focus. I have learned who to trust with my thoughts and when to lock up.

Thinking back before Sarah died, it is true that until I had experienced the loss of my own child, I was incapable of understanding the depths of such pain. I was sympathetic but not empathetic. This insight allows me to forego or lower my expectations

of other people and to better control hurt, anger and disappointment.

Most importantly, I have learned that rich healing takes place when hurting people extend themselves to others who struggle in grief. Listening, sharing with honesty, encouraging. These gifts of truth and service honor the memory of our precious children and continue their legacy.

But this Monday before Thanksgiving I'm crying. I miss my girl. It's hard to envision the years ahead having lost the most vital part of my life. I am not ashamed of my sorrow or my tears or worry that I'm not "making progress." What parent does not think on his or her son or daughter whether they are alive or have passed on? These thoughts cannot be shut off like a water faucet. I have given myself

the right to set the standards of my very personal grief, to measure my path using my own yardstick. I have mastered an essential lesson. "Do the next thing."

I recall the words of my friend, Pat, whose daughter Stephanie passed away years ago, when we were talking one day about our hopes for again experiencing life's purest joy. "I'll die happy with a broken heart."
This week there are beans to snap.

I have learned that rich healing takes place when hurting people extend themselves to others who struggle in grief.

Carol Thompson of Tyler, Texas is the mother of Sarah Kathryn Thompson who died in a 2005 pedestrian hit-and-run. Carol is a member of the local Compassionate Friends chapter which serves East Texans, and finds healing in writing about the everyday-life aspects of living with grief after the death of a beloved child.

How I Found Hope ...

As a bereaved grandparent, I found hope through love and faith. I will always miss my grandchild Angel Avery, but when my heart and soul is filled with hope, love and faith, the burden of grief no longer rules my life. For me, hope is being able to see there is light despite all of the darkness in grief, and I believe that my faith tells me that there is an afterlife and one day I shall be reunited with my loved ones in heaven. Because of this, my journey of grief became much lighter and brighter. As a grandparent, I cannot fix the loss of Angel Avery for my family, but I can share this belief of hope with them to lighten the burden of their grief journey.

Healing Hugs of Hope, Love and Faith to all from Angel Avery's Grandmother, Debbie Fluhr

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Minivan Moments

by Peggi Johnson

When my children were born, I was in my late 30s, climbing a corporate ladder, and driving the one car I ever cared about. I am not a “car person.” I usually don’t care much about what I’m driving as long as the engine starts. But that car? That car was a silver Saab 900S. What a car! I loved the way it handled, the way it looked, and the way it made me look. I was convinced that a certain cachet accompanied driving such a car.

I soon learned that a Saab 900S most decidedly did not work for two toddlers or preschoolers. By this time, I was a full time mom, having stepped off the corporate ladder. I needed a vehicle that could accommodate car seats, diaper bags, mini-coolers, and portable potties. I did not need a Saab; I needed a minivan. Reluctantly, I joined the army of minivan driving mothers.

I have no idea how many miles I put on the two or three minivans we owned over the years. I regularly took the children to visit my newly widowed mother, a three-hour drive away. I drove to pick them up at school, to take them to sports practice, to music lessons, to doctor’s appointments. I drove them to summer camp. We loaded up the minivan to head to the beach for a week.

In the minivan, I refereed sibling spats, handed snack bags to grumpy children, eavesdropped on their conversations with friends, and played books on tape (Little Lord Fauntleroy was a favorite.) I picked them up from sleepovers in those minivans.

I have no sense of direction and was lost far too often. When GPS first came out and was advertised on TV, the children instantly exclaimed, “MOM! THAT’S what you need!!”

When the middle school band director persuaded Jordan that he should play tuba, I had no idea I would become a “tuba mom.” But I did indeed become a “tuba mom,” transporting the instrument between home and school, creating an illusion that practicing had taken place. I transported it to competition sites and I delivered it to concert locations.

My minivans are gone. They are also gone for many of my friends who were raising their children at the same time I raised mine. Those friends have intact families. Their adult children may be geographically dispersed, but they are thriving and regularly the “whole” family is together. Often those families have expanded to include in-laws and grandchildren. Photos are posted on social media. I try not to be swallowed by envy when I see such photos.

I will never again have a new photo of my “whole” family, my “intact” family.

I imagine that some of them feel sad and wistful about those halcyon days gone by. I do, too. But in addition to the sadness and wistfulness, I feel something else: recalling those minivan moments utterly breaks my heart. I try to carry gratitude with that pain. I am grateful for memories of minivan moments and I am very, very, very glad I surrendered the Saab.

*I try to carry gratitude
with that pain.*

After adopting two children, Peggi resigned from her corporate career in telecommunications and devoted herself to full time motherhood. When her son, Jordan, died by suicide at the age of 19, Peggi, her husband Jeff, and her daughter Claire were devastated and dumbfounded. They joined the Arlington, VA Chapter of TCF and Peggi edited the newsletter for six chapters in the Washington, DC area for two years. After her husband’s retirement, they relocated to Charlottesville, VA where they joined the Piedmont, VA TCF Chapter. Peggi serves as chapter co-leader and edits the chapter newsletter. She is also a volunteer for hospice and writes articles for TCF.

How I Found Hope ...

Laughter was a big part of my life prior to May of 1995. However, I was taken aback when I attended my first TCF meeting (a month after Nina’s death) to walk through the doors and hear the laughter of other bereaved parents; I thought surely I must be in the wrong room! I just knew I’d never laugh again; didn’t they love their children as much as I loved Nina? I almost left before the meeting started. But I gave it a chance and quickly came to learn that these same parents, through attending meetings and meeting new friends there, symbolized HOPE personified. I knew that if they were able to laugh again, so would I. And just knowing that grief and joy would eventually coexist was the ultimate of hope for me.

**Cathy Seehuetter, Nina’s mom & Chris’ bonus mom
TCF of St. Paul, MN Chapter**



Finding Grace in an Ocean of Sadness

by Tina Zarlenga



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“Find a place inside where there’s joy, and the joy will burn out the pain.” ~ Joseph Campbell

Never anticipating the catastrophe barreling towards us, I found myself powerless to the energy brought by grief. Time had jumbled the chapters of my life, as it ended a story that had just begun with lessons in unbearable loss and impractical forgiveness.

This loss clung to me like a winter cloak, heavy and cumbersome suppressing any salvation that once remained while dissecting my heart. My child has died, and I have been ushered into a dark room I dare not escape as the avalanche of sadness cradles me in this isolated space we call grief, barricading any light of the future, I gasp for air.

Grief poured in unannounced divorcing our former lives with death and destruction for us to untangle, leaving debris we will examine for years to come. Bitterness deepened the wound and this quest for blame distorted my view. Abandoning the life before me, with no thoughts of forgiveness in sight, this noxious sore eroding my soul.

Clutching the latch, my hands grope to release this ache, each slip intensifying the panic as I fumble to let go. “I must be drowning,” I pant, as the fog slips in and my thoughts spiral about, we are engulfed in the depths of sorrow; with nothing familiar in our path, our life capsizes as I surrender to this broken place thrashing out to sea.

Vulnerable to the waves of grief, we search for a beacon, a light to guide us back to shore. Images overpower my thoughts as I bail buckets of memories unraveling in my mind’s eye, the life we once knew spilling before me while no future can be seen. Wondering how to endure with the fog eclipsing my view as uncertainty jolts me present and I stumble forward.

The words spill out like honey from a jar, thick on my tongue, slowly drizzling a sticky mess into the room. “I need time to pass, this is too hard, and I need this pain to move quickly so I can reflect and comprehend what has happened to my life and why he is gone.”

But grace does not expand from approaching emotions; it swells within them, gradually arranging the tangled puzzle towards enlightenment while mending your heart at a stagnantly slow pace.

I had to begin with a fresh mental picture, refining my intentions through these somber stories where progress becomes a smile, not tethered to guilt, as the murkiness dissipates in the distance.

Tending to this ache produced an avalanche of thoughts, words poured out through a stampede of emotions frantically penned in journals as I softly began the healing process. Gently extracting the hurt with authenticity inspired a light of kindness within me, a balm that softened the jagged pieces in the place where giving back brings comfort.

Grief had forged the exploration of my truth by unpacking the useless baggage I had carried for far too long, creating the space to encourage joy where pain once resided. Sharing his kind heart became the inspiration I needed to allow the radiance back into my life, and with each offering my focus shifted towards the future allowing compassion to blossom within me.

Scattering kindness provided the compassion I was lacking, releasing the turmoil of acidity by sharing sprinklings of joy. By stepping outside my grief and pursuing joy, I was able to find forgiveness in all the calloused places of my heart while gratitude enabled my spirit to soar.

Falling from grace through grief and anguish allowed me to view life from a different angle, transforming my motivation for change, manifesting a new perspective as compassion grew stronger and positive influences generated this shift to joyfulness.

Celebrating his life instead of mourning his death provided the tipping point of true happiness. Stepping away from the ocean of grief that once branded my heart revealed the undiscovered life still awaiting me.

The sparrows sing their calling songs as I relax in a cozy Adirondack chair with my favorite blue mug of brew absorbing the soft sounds of nature in the quiet of the day while cultivating peace with this soothing meditation.

With the whisperings of the seasons end, I notice the squirrels as they urgently jump through the trees preparing

for the upcoming frost. Nature’s simplicity perfects the landscape in this scene of discord, as the pine needles lazily blanket the lush tufts of green. Summers end is imminent and I wrangle it as if to slow its pace by reminiscing the joys I want to savor.

Finding grace in a place of peace helped me realign my thoughts, even after tragic loss.

This gentle nudge to embrace the quiet and welcome the softness of dawn with abundant anticipation became my place for peace, the precipice for deserting negative stories

entangled with my spirit. Allowing myself this gentle start illuminates the blank canvas before me, bringing hope to the surface and meaning to the seasons ahead.

Discovering this place of peace reminds me to slow down, capture the details in everyday and appreciate those around me. Life is fleeting, seasons change, and I strive to not get lost in the mundane.

Finding grace in a place of peace helped me realign my thoughts, even after tragic loss. Over time, I began with small steps, doing the best I could and, eventually, my best inspired others who have traveled similar journeys.

Inspire one another with your choices; there are so many good ones to make.

*While searching for a reason to go on after losing their five-year old son Ryan, she discovered that giving back could actually save her. Tina Zarlenga is married with two children, sharing stories of inspiration and hope, as well as her journey through grief with emotional essays of life on her website *Unraveling My Heart the Write Way*.*

How I Found Hope ...

People are always asking me why are we still attending meetings, and my answer is always because it helps me survive. Recently I was asked why do you attend “those meeting” and my answer was because it keeps my boys alive....That’s what TCF does for me.

Jacque Edwards-Mitchell, Manhattan, NY Chapter



Stuck Places: Is Secondary Gain Snagging You?

by Barbara Allen

When asked what I do, I'm about to shock yet another person. My answer these days is, "I specialize in the world of death and drugs." After reviving the person who asked, I explain the losses that brought me to The Compassionate Friends. Quickly I add how finding TCF allowed me to evolve into advocacy to educate and save the lives of others dealing with the disease of addiction. Should I change my response? Not going to happen – I've become an advocate for bereavement and substance use disorder issues. A bit of gentle shock opens doors slammed shut by mindlessness.

Recently I was asked two very different questions which got me thinking about the topic of secondary gain. I first learned about this concept when I was suffering from a collapsed immune system. My friend, Bruce and I were part of a support group. We kept looking for healing options. Others, instead, were adding to the list of their diagnoses. Bruce was formerly a successful banker now struggling to pay his mortgage. I had my own financial issues fighting insurance denials. After some time, each of us found

different modalities that were providing us hope. We were then tossed from the group as our health improved.

Another friend, Tim, introduced me to the concept of secondary gain. He suffers a degenerative disorder and is my hero for all things related to disability. When first experiencing onset of symptoms, Tim went to a martial arts studio asking to be taught how to fall. When he became scooter bound, he got a local engineering class to modify his lawn mower so he could take care of the grass. This meant he could also walk his huge dog. Always looking for ways to cope, Tim often had wisdom to offer. His sister, with the same disease and much younger, chose to collapse into the disease.

Tim was still working and having a full life. Darla sat isolated at home. Dependent on others for food and ultimately self-care, she chose the path of secondary gain. Always angry at being slighted by life, she demanded others care for her. She assumed support would come in financial

aid, prepared food and so forth. That didn't happen. While we suffer a real illness (including bereavement) along the path of the process, there can be traps, places where we get stuck.

Recently several colleagues asked me why some people seem very attached to their grief. Having been part of TCF for many years I resisted my initial urge to dismiss the question as ignorance. As I listened instead to their comments, I was reminded of the notion of "secondary gain":

"An indirect benefit, usually obtained through an illness or debility. Such gains may include monetary and disability benefits, personal attention, or escape from unpleasant situations and responsibilities". Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 9th edition. © 2009, Elsevier.

Then Maggie called upset that she was yet again struggling with her sense of guilt over the death of her son to overdose. *"Every morning I lay in bed for two hours obsessing what I could have done differently, better. I know better but I just can't stop."* We have had this conversation many times. Empathizing, listening and gently probing, I asked if this was a habit, a need, a process? What purpose was this obsessing serving for her?

Grief is a process and it takes the time it takes. How often do we find ourselves stuck and looking for a path forward? Is our pathfinding serving any healing progress or holding us captive to suffering? One aspect of secondary gain is that we can't see it. We are in it.

When I suggested Maggie change her morning routine for a few weeks, she agreed to give it a go. She's smart; she is aware. Maybe having someone see her in a different light can help her get unstuck. Together we'll learn how this change might serve her freeing up energy to do the things currently on hold.

When we lose our loved ones in any way the process is hard. Add a stigmatized loss and there are many other aspects to work through. With substance related causes – suicide, overdose, organ failure – we have the guilt of what may have occurred before death and then the eternal questions of "if only". We question everything and this layer of inner turmoil can lead to complications including secondary gain.

To my colleagues, I say, "Please start by learning about the grief we experience as parents, grandparents and/or siblings. Look at the many layers we deal with when stigma and ignorance surround the cause of death. Understand perhaps we are overdue for self-care, to matter, or to find a place for our unexpressed need to parent. These might be

seeds for the stuck places after a life-altering loss resulting in something like secondary gain.

For Maggie as well as myself, when stuck – seek input from someone you trust. I would never cut my own hair. Not being familiar with the back of my head, it would be a disaster. For me, I choose input from someone who won't sugarcoat feedback; someone who I know loves me as I am yet wants the best for my choices. Over time, I've cultivated a few special people who tell me what I need to hear, not what I want to hear. These friends allow me to feel safe in the world.

For me, it isn't a counselor, a lawyer or other professional. In the years of debilitating illness, I was forced to learn to ask for help. It was painful. I was the fixer; the go-to person. Then I became the needy person and I hated it. Being weak was not my thing. What I received was a blessing that keeps giving.

There is an irony to all the lessons of secondary gain for me. Professionally I was very successful, partly because I sought learning at every opportunity. I learned that typically many love to teach, to share information; those who protected or refused to share their knowledge had nothing I really needed. But I didn't trust letting anyone into my personal insecurities. Life in my childhood home was never safe; school and later the workplace was much safer. Debilitating illness forced me to let inner walls down.

When Jim died, I knew I couldn't do grief alone. Also, I would never allow anyone to put the cause of my son's death between the love and respect I have for him always and forever. Today my work in advocacy is amazing, built on compassion, respect and the wisdom shared by many. I continue to work through my own stuck places.

My work within TCF is another blessing as I continue to learn from everyone I meet in our chapters, on Facebook, at conferences or in line at the grocery store.

Life is complex; so is bereavement. Are you in a stuck place? You are not alone!

No Shame or Blame ~ Just Love*

Barbara's son, brother and niece died from substance related causes. She and husband, Tom, found TCF when her son, Jim, died in 2003. Finding hope from her grief within TCF, Barbara began researching the disease of addiction from new perspectives. Today she is an advocate for change at the state and national levels, collaborating with parents and agencies across the U.S. Barbara and Tom's non-profit, James' Place Inc. provides education, advocacy and scholarships for recovery services for those suffering this disease. A former regional coordinator and TCF Board of Director, she currently serves as a chapter leader. Barbara distributes the popular wristbands No Shame or Blame ~ Just Love.*



Does Grief Really Go Away?

by Bob Baugher, PhD

Of course you know the answer to the question in the title. In this article I want to review many of the ways that grief does not go away. When you approach people who've not experienced a significant death in their life, especially the death of a child, grandchild or sibling, and ask, "How can you tell if someone is in grief?" you often get answers such as, "They are crying, they look sad, they talk about their loved one, they aren't themselves, they seem out of it." OK, fair enough. But, what do these same people think when these symptoms are not visible? For many people, they breathe a sigh of relief that the bereaved person is "over" their grief or has "moved on" with their life. Several years ago I did an analysis of the media (radio, TV, newspapers) and found that journalists like to use terms like closure, healed, accept, or recover when talking about a person who has experienced a death. However, these are not terms that bereaved people typically use. The media use of these words only adds to the myth that we "get over" a death.

Because grief is such a complicated array of reactions, it would be amazing if any bereaved person someday totally "had closure, healed, accepted, and recovered." Several years ago, with input from bereaved people, I put together a beginning list of grief reactions by classifying them into five categories:

- Mind
- Heart
- Spiritual
- Other People
- Physical

In this article we will look at the Mind category and see how some of these grief reactions can last a lifetime. In future articles we'll examine the other four categories. See if you have found yourself experiencing any of the reactions listed below. If so, well, then—that's grief.

You may want to give this article to someone to help them further understand how you never will really be "over it."

Read the grief reactions below along with statements that people say and check the ones that still apply to you today:

Mind

Denial—"I still can't believe this happened." Or "I just can't believe that she (or he) is gone."

Unreality—"Sometimes this just feels so unreal."

Time Distortion—"At times it feels so long ago and yet other times it feels like yesterday."

Avoidance—"There are people, places or things that I still avoid since the death."

Searching—"I still find myself searching for this person."

Longing & Missing—"I still miss him (or her) being in my life."

Loss of Shared Communication—"I don't have the person who shared my ideas or little inside jokes with me."

Multiple Reminders—"Everywhere I look reminds me of my loss."

Concentration Problems—"I still have problems focusing on things."

Memory Problems—"Since the death my memory is still not what it used to be."

Obsessive Thoughts—"I keep having the same thoughts of my loved one over and over."

Rituals—"There are things I still feel I need to do in recognition of my loved one."

Confusion—"I'm still confused about many things related to the death."

Altered Sense of the Future—"I don't look forward to the future anymore."

Desire to Obtain More Information—"There is still a lot about the death I want to know."

Disruption of Social Clock—"It is wrong that my child (or grandchild) died before me."

Dreams and Nightmares—"I still dream about her (or him)."

Loss of Role—"Since the death I wonder who I am anymore."

These are just some of the Mind reactions that people can have for a lifetime. How many did you check? Don't worry if you checked many or a few. There is not a "score" to add up. The death of your child, grandchild, or brother or sister is something that has forever changed your life. Therefore, while the pain lessens, coping with the many aspects of grief is a lifelong process.

Yola, one of the original Seattle TCF moms put is so well when she talked about the grief of her son after 20 years. She said, "You know, Dr. Bob, grief is unfinished love." Yes, Yola, you are so right.

Love,
Dr. Bob

Dr. Bob Baugher is a Psychology Instructor at Highline College in Des Moines, Washington where he teaches courses in Psychology and Death Education. As a trainer for LivingWorks he has trained more than 1,000 people in suicide intervention. Dr. Baugher has written several books and articles on grief and loss. He has been invited to give workshops at TCF National Conferences for the past 20 years and has been the professional adviser to parents and siblings of the South King County (Seattle) Chapter of The Compassionate Friends for 30 years.

How I Found Hope ...

Even though I went to my first TCF chapter meeting six days after Raymond died, it was the national conference 2 1/2 years later that gave me the most hope. Being around 1200 parents, siblings and grandparents that were also bereaved and sharing their stories made me feel that I was not alone. Probably the best part was all the other fathers that I was able to talk to; that there is a club for people like me that no one wants to belong to.

Ronnie Plotkin, Raymond's Dad



Heaven and Earth

by Christine Torricelli

If I could be at two places at once,
 I would be in heaven and down here on earth.
 This way I would be with all my children,
 Instead of walking the earth feeling such sadness.
 I would soar up to the skies,
 And hug my angel son and tell him how much I love him.
 I would float down to earth,
 To guide my earth babies and tell them how much they
 mean to me.
 Like a beautiful cloudless bird,
 I would spread my wings and glide between heaven and
 earth.
 Oh if only I could,
 I would be so happy, my heart would be so full.
 I wouldn't have to worry if my angel son needs me,
 Or wonder if his soul is at rest.
 I wouldn't have to doubt if he loves me and forgives me,
 For not being the mother he should have had.

I would try to make up for lost time,
 Have more patience and listen more, really listen.
 Two places at once is impossible,
 A fantasy that could only happen if I had gratifying dreams.
 Sorrowfully my dreams don't offer me contentment,
 They present only anger, fear and complete darkness.
 Funny how the endless moments of my days are filled with
 these emotions,
 Which follows me when I close my eyes, a complete circle
 with no break.
 Peace never seems to come to me,
 Only grief and guilt are at my side like faithful followers.

Christine belongs to the Wake County Chapter in North Carolina. Her son, Sean Patrick, died on January 12, 2016 at the young age of 17. Sean leaves behind two younger brothers who miss him every day, a step-father and a mother who no longer is afraid of dying and writes to keep her first born's memory alive. She writes to release all the pain and heartache that has no where to go but on paper. She feels that if her writing can help a grieving parent and let them know they are not alone, then she has a new purpose in life.

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Connect with Other Bereaved Parents, Grandparents, and Siblings Everyday on TCF's Online Support Community

The Compassionate Friends 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 rooms supply support, encouragement, and friendship. The friendly atmosphere encourages conversation among friends; friends who understand the emotions you're experiencing. There are general bereavement sessions as well as more specific sessions:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
9:00 - 10:00 AM EST <i>Parents/Grandparents/Siblings</i>	9:00 - 10:00 PM EST <i>Bereaved Less than Two Years</i>	9:00 - 10:00 PM EST <i>Parents/Grandparents/Siblings</i>	8:00 - 9:00 PM EST <i>No Surviving Children</i>
9:00 - 10:00 PM EST <i>Parents/Grandparents/Siblings</i>	9:00 - 10:00 PM EST <i>Bereaved More than Two Years</i>		9:00 - 10:00 PM EST <i>Parents/Grandparents/Siblings</i>
	10:00 - 11:00 PM EST <i>Bereaved Siblings</i>		
Friday	Saturday	Sunday	
10:00 - 11:00 AM EST <i>Parents/Grandparents/Siblings</i>	9:00 - 10:00 PM EST <i>Parents/Grandparents/Siblings</i>	8:00 - 9:00 PM EST <i>Suicide Loss</i>	
9:00 - 10:00 PM EST <i>Pregnancy/Infant Loss</i>	10:00 - 11:00 PM EST <i>Parents/Grandparents/Siblings</i>	9:00 - 10:00 PM EST <i>Parents/Grandparents/Siblings</i>	
9:00 - 10:30 PM EST <i>Parents/Grandparents/Siblings</i>			

Visit www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/online-support/ for more information and to register.

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How I Found Hope ...

The worst day of my life was August 5, 2005; I became a bereaved parent when my 11-year-old daughter and only child, Kelsey, was murdered by her mother while I was at work. My first TCF experience was the annual Worldwide Candle Lighting in 2005. I then began to attend monthly chapter meetings as well as annual conferences. Over the years, I have made many friends who are a part of this wonderful organization. I am saddened for the reason TCF exists; however, I am also extremely grateful for its existence. TCF has helped to keep my daughter's memory alive as well as her spirit.

Steve Roberts, Kelsey's Daddy, Ft. Worth, Texas TCF Chapter

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Now I Run Alone

by Jack Mackey

We didn't follow my plan.
 At first I heard
 the tap-patting of your sneakers next to mine
 I slowed us down
 teaching, holding
 We were supposed to stay together
 take it slow
 cross the finish line together.
 The mile clock blinked our lazy time as we swam
 through the dusky mist
 through wet evening soggy air
 and garden hose spray
 we sweat through our clothes
 down our tanned legs
 our breath heavy, strong, together
 not knowing
 we'd do this
 only one more time.
 Only tonight we darted
 through the dwindling numbers, up the lonely hill,
 gaining speed as our bodies
 settled into synchronous steps
 then surged.
 You stayed next to me,
 feet patting the pavement when you didn't speak
 turning suddenly,
 asking –
 Dad, can I go on ahead?
 I released my grip -
 Be careful!
 Watching your hair wave
 among
 the strewn and struggling masses
 turning a corner
 run on and
 finish ahead of me.

Jack Mackey is a retired management consultant. He lives in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware with his partner and their Cairn terrier. This poem was inspired by his son Kevin, who was a runner. Kevin was killed at age 14 by a drowsy driver.

The Compassionate Friends Closed Facebook Groups

The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of closed Facebook Groups. These pages are moderated by bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, and may not be accessed unless a request to join is approved by a moderator. These pages were established to encourage connection and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings grieving the death of a child, grandchild or sibling.

TCF – Loss of a Child

Moderators: Catherine Clayton Hyzy, Kelly Coccia-Stanczak, Jennifer Dixon, Janet Ferjo, Donna Goodrich, Eileen Nittler, Rebecca Perkins, and Goody Tendall
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/407123299460580/>

TCF – Loss of a Stepchild

Moderator: Babe Muro
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1615569958699734/>

TCF – Loss of a Grandchild

Moderators: Debbie Fluhr and Jennifer "Sue" Hale
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/421759177998317/>

The Compassionate Friends Sounds of the Siblings (for bereaved siblings)

Moderators: Tracy Milne Edgemon and Keith Singer
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/21358475781/>

TCF – Multiple Losses

Moderators: Karen McCormick and Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1349655251809164/>

TCF – Men in Grief

Moderators: Gary Odle and Mark Rambis
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1614661475452607/>

TCF – Grandparents Raising their Grandchildren

Moderator: Diana Marie
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1811379385769506/>

TCF – Bereaved Parents with Grandchild Visitation Issues

Moderator: Rita Studzinski
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1406047022842196/>

TCF – Sudden Death

Moderators: Carol Ladouceur, Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby, and Dana Young
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/103330700152910/>

TCF – Loss to Miscarriage or Stillbirth

Moderators: Libby Hall and Kelly Kittel
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1416535188654265/>

TCF - Infant and Toddler Loss

Moderators: Julia West and Deanna Wheeler
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1511758585777339/>

TCF - Loss of a Child 4 - 12 Years Old

Moderators: Heike and Brian Mayle
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/258423774673226/>

TCF - Loss to Substance Related Causes

Moderators: Barbara Allen, Karen Colangelo, Mary Lemley, Carol Wiles, and Karen Zaorski
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1515193738693712/>

TCF - Sibling Loss to Substance Related Causes

Moderators: Barbara Allen, Kristy Flower, and Andrea Keller
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1516508415263760/>

TCF - Loss to Suicide

Moderators: Donna Adams, Donna McGrew Anderson, Leanna Leyes, Barbara Reboratti, and Mary Ann Ward
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/100315106988458/>

TCF - Loss to Homicide

Moderators: Rebecca Perkins and Dawn Wassel
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TCF – Loss of a Child with Special Needs

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TCF – Loss to Long-term Illness

Moderator: Debbie Gossen
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/833665880062696/>

TCF – Loss to Mental Illness

Moderators: Sherry Cox and Annette Swestyn
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1481781792114726/>

TCF – Loss to a Drunk/Impaired Driver

Moderators: Michelle Arrowood and Robin Landry
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/858226880883307/>

TCF – Loss to Cancer

Moderator: Rita Studzinski
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/903539646362818/>

TCF – Loss of Your Only Child/All Your Children

Moderators: Becky Barch, Joannie Kemling and Tonja Knobel
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/976514755722145/>

TCF – Crafty Corner

Moderators: Gail Lafferty and Kathy Rambo
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/663193450477232/>

The Compassionate Friends Chapter Leadership (for anyone currently serving on a Chapter steering committee)

Moderator: Debbie Rambis
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1422251371371148/>

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TCF's 40th National Conference



TCF's 18th Annual Walk to Remember



An Update from the Director of Chapter Services

by Terry Novy

Diversity ~ What Does It Mean to You?

When I Googled the definition of Diversity I found many definitions; I like this explanation:

It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

What does Diversity mean to TCF?

The mission statement of The Compassionate Friends was designed to describe the very inclusive nature of a very exclusive organization. What does this mean? A child, sibling or grandchild must have died in order for family members to join, but there are no other special criteria that must be met in order to be a member and attend meetings.

Question: Is your Chapter being inclusive to all members or are you exclusive and offer support within your comfort zone? All TCF Chapters must be 100% supportive to all; remember Diversity starts at the Chapter level. The following list should be reviewed twice a year to assure your Chapter is inclusive toward all persons:

- Parents, siblings, grandparents
- Those who are newly bereaved, (1 day/week/years)
- Those who are grieving a miscarriage or stillbirth
- Those that are many years down the road, and have never grieved their loss
- Parents who are senior citizens when their child died
- Family members of various ethnicities, races, cultures and/or traditions
- Adoptive/foster parents and stepparents
- Those of various faiths or no religious faith
- Single and divorced
- Those grieving a child who died from stigmatized losses such as, but not limited to: AIDS, suicide, substance related, homicide or mental illness
- Those who others may feel contributed to their child's death
- Parents who have experienced multiple losses, have lost all their children, or their only child
- Men (in our society, men often struggle to express their emotions openly)

- Same sex parents, (LGBTQ) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer/Questioning, Transgender/ Transsexual community

When you review this list, think about whether all bereaved family members, no matter the situation, truly feel accepted when they attend your meetings. It is the Chapter leadership's responsibility to make everyone feel welcome.

- Work with the steering committee and discuss ways to ensure your chapter in improving in diversity.
- Have Greeters at meetings to welcome everyone; introduce new members and offer brochures that apply to their situation.
- Make sure that Grandparents and Siblings are made to feel welcome; their grief is different but equally important.
- Familiarize the leadership team about different losses so they can be a good support system. It is important to learn about causes of death such as homicide, suicide, substance related causes, etc. This increases sensitivity to the grievors and educate chapter members. It is imperative that all members are supported and not judged.
- Plan programs where the members break into smaller groups to discuss a variety of topics that don't apply to all. When the group unites share a small summary of your discussion to educate all members and help them understand the need for understanding and acceptance. For example: Tonight we shared about the importance of not being judged because our loss is substance related.
- Having a male member of leadership begin the sharing sessions is a great way of saying "Men are Welcome". Plan a "Men Only" sharing session or special get together; this will allow all to be comfortable with their sharing.
- Open a meeting with a ritual such as reading the credo, which is an effectively points out that TCF is inclusive. The group looks to the members of leadership to set the tone; remind the group that TCF supports parents, grandparents and siblings regardless of their age, cause of death, cultural or religious backgrounds.



- The Facilitator steps in when topics/comments begin to make members feel uncomfortable. Members can share their own beliefs, but the meeting is not a forum to persuade others.
- Comments such as "You need to trust in the Lord", must be met with "I'm glad your faith has been a comfort to you. It is important that everyone finds what will be most helpful to them in coping with their loss".
- Review your Chapter leadership customs and discontinue any that suggest that TCF has a religious affiliation. Examples of customs/practices that should NOT be included in any Chapter meetings, newsletters or special activities, etc.
 - Prayers
 - Faith-based music at meetings/ programs
 - Allowing Mediums to attend a meeting or in any way endorsing their use
 - Religious symbols
- Establish procedures for Chapter follow up with member; provide leadership with the resources to ensure that everyone feels comfortable.

- Review your Chapter newsletter which represents the Chapters' beliefs as well as TCF's as a whole.
- Ensure that all publicity welcomes bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings, rather than just bereaved parents. Meeting the needs of a diverse population starts with having a warm and inclusive environment for all who attend.

As an organization, officials of chapters, and representatives of the umbrella organization, we must walk a fine line to make sure ALL members feel the love and warmth of a caring environment no matter what their religious, racial or ethnic background, economic circumstances or beliefs might be. Maintaining this sensitivity is hard to do. It's easy to do what's comfortable and natural for the majority; but we must always think beyond the majority. The questions to ask ourselves are, "Will we offend anyone?" or "Will the newly bereaved person attending a meeting for the first time feel the comfort and compassion that we intend to offer and truly see what our organization is about?"

Welcome New TCF Chapters:

- #2501 TCF of Sweetwater County ~ Green River, WY
Chartered ~ July 17, 2017
- #2502 TCF of Shelbyville ~ Shelbyville, IN
Chartered ~ August 4, 2017
- #2503 TCF of the North GA Mountains ~ Cornelia, GA
Chartered ~ August 17, 2017
- #2504 TCF of Glen Head, NY ~ Glen Head, NY
Chartered ~ August 22, 2017
- #2505 TCF of South Central Indiana ~ Nashville, IN
Chartered ~ August 23, 2017

- #2506 TCF of Smith Point ~ Mastic Beach, NY
Chartered ~ September 20, 2017
- #2507 TCF of Southern Huntingdon County ~ Orbisonia, PA
Chartered ~ September 21, 2017
- #2508 TCF of Oro Valley ~ Oro Valley, AZ
Chartered ~ October 10, 2017
- #2509 TCF of Garrett County ~ Oakland, MD
Chartered ~ October 10, 2017
- #2510 TCF of The Roaring Fork Valley ~ Carbondale, CO
Chartered ~ October 25, 2017

Our thanks to the following Chapters for their generosity (Gifts received between May 1 - September 15, 2017)

- Circle of Love (\$2,500-\$5,000)**
Nashville Chapter
in memory of the children of the Nashville Chapter
- Circle of Hope (\$1,000-\$2,499)**
Manhattan Chapter
in memory of all their children, grandchildren and siblings gone too soon
- Circle of Caring (\$500-\$999)**
Abington Chapter
in memory of all our children and siblings
- Arlington Chapter
in memory of all their children, grandchildren and siblings
- TCF Twin Forks/Hampton Chapter
in memory of all their children gone too soon

- Circle of Support (\$200-\$499)**
Contra Costa County Chapter
in memory of their children, grandchildren and siblings gone too soon
- Livonia Chapter
in memory of all their children, grandchildren and siblings
- Circle of Friends (\$50 - \$199)**
Bridgeport Chapter
in memory of their Beloved Children
- Southwest Florida Chapter
in memory of their children, grandchildren and siblings gone too soon
- Staten Island Chapter
in memory of their children, grandchildren and siblings gone too soon

- TCF North Palm Beach County Chapter
in memory of their children, grandchildren and siblings gone too soon
- TCF of Roanoke Valley
in memory of their children, grandchildren and siblings gone too soon
- TCF of the Treasure Coast
in memory of their children, grandchildren and siblings gone too soon
- TCF Potomac Chapter
in memory of their children, grandchildren and siblings gone too soon
- The Compassionate Friends of Pasco County
in memory of their children, grandchildren and siblings gone too soon

With sincere gratitude and deep appreciation, we acknowledge the generosity of the following individuals and organizations for their gifts to The Compassionate Friends. Your commitment and support are essential to fulfilling our mission. The following patron donations were received between May 1 - September 15, 2017.



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How I Found Hope ...

*After my special needs son Sebastian died, I felt directionless and empty.
Connecting and helping other bereaved parents and organizations have given me
a purpose again.*

Brian Mayle, Sebastian's dad

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