



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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National TCF Website:
www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter Website:
www.tcftopeka.org

January ~ February ~ March 2021
Editor: Susan Chan
3448 S.W. Mission Ave.
Topeka, KS 66614-3629

Dear Compassionate Friends Family,

We are reaching out to each of you as we begin a new year that still embraces many uncertainties. We hope you have been able to find whatever peace and comfort you could in the recent holiday time. We know this can be a particularly difficult time for bereaved families, and it is our hope that 2021 will bring you more healing and comfort as you continue your grief journey.

We wanted to update you on the status of the Topeka TCF Chapter as we move forward in 2021:

1. We had hoped to be able to resume in person meetings beginning in January, but the group gathering regulations from the Shawnee County Health Dept. and from our meeting venue at Most Pure Heart of Mary Church are still limited to 10 individuals. Therefore, the Steering Committee has made the difficult decision to delay in person meetings until March 2021. We will provide updates of any changes to this on our website (www.tcftopeka.org) under "Meetings". We are hopeful by delaying resumption of meetings until March, we can better protect the health and safety of all our members.

2. We will be publishing our Chapter Newsletter quarterly during 2021. In the Nov/Dec 2020 issue there was a **yellow form** to fill out and send in if you wished to remain on the mailing list. *We have not heard from many of you.* We want everyone who wishes to receive this newsletter to do so, but we need to hear from you to let us know. There are two options to receive the newsletter - printed copy or via email. We will **be deleting** the names of all those who do not respond to us **by March 1, 2021** from our mailing list database. The **one exception** is those families who have lost a child in 2020 and the first part of 2021. We keep newly bereaved families on our mailing list for one full year before they are required to send in a renewal form. Please also do keep us updated on any address changes to avoid return fees from the Post Office.

3. We hope you will take advantage of the many wonderful grief resources online during this time we cannot be together. The National TCF website has many wonderful articles you can access at www.compassionatefriends.org. TCF also has closed Facebook groups dealing with specific types of loss that you can register to join. Other good resources are Centering Corporation (www.centering.org); What's My Grief (www.whatsyourgrief.com); The Grief Toolbox (www.thegrieftoolbox.com); and Open to Hope (www.opentohope.com). You can reach Topeka TCF through the "Contact" button at the bottom of our website pages (www.tcftopeka.org)

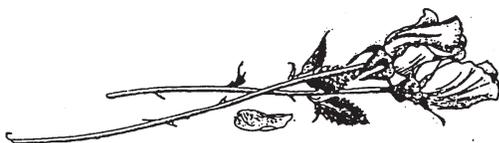
Take good care of yourselves. We hope you are all staying safe and are in good health. Please remember our motto:
"We Need Not Walk Alone"

The Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. The purposes are to promote and aid parents in the positive resolution of the grief experience following the death of a child of any age, from any cause; and to foster the physical and emotional health of all bereaved parents, grandparents and surviving siblings.

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TCF Mission Statement: *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.*

We Need Not Walk Alone



We Would Like to Thank the Following for Sponsoring this Edition of the Newsletter

Carolyn Brentlinger in loving memory of her son Monty Brentlinger who was born on February 6th

Philip & Barbara Grabhorn and Megan Granborn in loving memory of their son and brother Justin Grabhorn who died on January 27th

Margaret Kramar in loving memory of her son Spenser Thomas Good who was born on January 30th

Ralph & Judy Lundin in loving memory of their daughter Amy Lundin who was born on February 16th

Eric & Veronica Naill in loving memory of his daughter Madison Rae Naill who died on March 18th

Don & Julie Strathman in loving memory of their son Keith Strathman who died on January 8th

Damon & Collene Tucker in loving memory of their daughter Brittany Nicole Tucker who died on March 11th

Clayton Williams in loving memory of his wife Sharon who died on March 12th; and his sons Chad and Kenneth Williams

Todd & Kathleen Williams in loving memory of their son Baby Boy Williams born still on February 23rd



Are You Moving?

If you move, please let us know your new address so you can continue to receive this newsletter. It costs the Chapter 71 cents every time a newsletter is returned by the Post Office with an outdated address. Please send address changes to: Susan Chan, 3448 SW Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may email address changes to chanx2@cox.net. We appreciate your cooperation as this will save the Chapter money which can be better spent on bereavement outreach. If, for any reason, you wish to have your name removed from our mailing list, please drop me a note or email and I will take your name off the list. If you have chosen the e-newsletter option, please keep me aware of any email address changes.

A Special and Important Message to Our New Compassionate Friends

If you are newly bereaved and have recently attended your first Compassionate Friends meeting, you may have left the meeting feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared at meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return. We would like to let you know that these feelings are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least **three** tries before you decide whether or not the meetings are for you. You will find a network of caring and support which will help you as you travel your grief journey, and most assuredly, you will find hope along the way. We truly care about you and want to make certain that no bereaved parent ever needs to walk this path alone.

---Topeka TCF Chapter Steering Committee

Additional Support Group Resources

HEALs - Healing after loss of suicide offers support to all survivors affected by the loss of a loved one to suicide. Meetings are at 6:30-8:00 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month. Pozez Center (north side of Stormont Vail). Contact Information: Sandy Reams 785-249-3792 or email TopekaHeals@gmail.com

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Group - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month from 6-8 p.m. at the Pozez Education Center. The group, which has regular meetings to share information and experiences, also has a blog for members that offers communication, resources and support. If you are interested in learning more about the blog, please email lrosen@stormontvail.org. For information call (785) 354-5225.

From Victims to Survivors - Support group for families who have had a loved one murdered. The group meets the fourth or last Wednesday of each month at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 4775 S.W. 21st. For more information, call Bill Lucero at 232-5958 or see <http://fromvictimstosurvivors.com>.

In grieving we face a sacred moment, one permeated with fear, overflowing with pain, steeped in difficulty.

Although we run from such an opportunity, its sacredness is in the sound of our returning footsteps.

~from Safe Passages by Molly Fumia



Love Gifts

**Your Love Gifts Help Spread
the Message of Hope & Healing ~ Won't You Help Today?**

What is a Love Gift? A Love Gift is a gift of money (or books, etc.) to The Compassionate Friends. It is usually in memory of a child, grandchild or sibling who has died, but it may be from individuals who wish to honor a relative or friend who has died, a gift of thanks that their children are alive, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help. The Compassionate Friends charges *no individual dues* or fees and depends on such Love Gifts to meet the Chapter's expenses, including the printing and mailing of this newsletter. **When you make a donation, make sure to check to see if your employer may have a "matching gifts" program** as this could double the amount of your donation. If you are not sure whether your company has such a program, check with your Personnel Department. This month we thank the following:

- ♥ *Tom & Barbara Conley in loving memory of their son Eric Joseph Conley*
- ♥ *Mary Harrington in loving memory of her daughter Jaime M. Harrington and her son John Carl Harrington*
- ♥ *Margaret Kramar in loving memory of her son Spenser Thomas Good*
- ♥ *Terry & Kathy Watson in loving memory of their son Taylor William Clay Watson*
- ♥ *Clayton Williams in loving memory of his sons Chad Williams and Kenneth Williams*
- ♥ *Todd & Kathleen Williams in loving memory of their Baby Boy Williams*

Your gifts enable us to print this newsletter and reach out to newly bereaved families. Donations are our only source of income and are **tax deductible**. If you would like to sponsor a newsletter, the cost is \$30.00. If we have more than one sponsor, we recognize all of them. If you wish to send a Love Gift, any amount is appreciated. It is whatever you feel you can give. Donations of books that you have found helpful to the Topeka Chapter Library are also greatly appreciated, and it is a nice way to remember your child or other loved one. If you would like to send a Love Gift or a Newsletter Sponsorship, you may do so by sending it to: The Compassionate Friends, c/o Susan Chan, 3448 SW Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. For Newsletter Sponsorships, please indicate which issue you wish to sponsor (Jan/Feb/March, April/May/June, July/August/September, October/November/December). Makes checks payable to "TCF".

Dillions Community Rewards Program Helps Fund Chapter Expenses - A REMINDER

- Have you signed up for the Dillions Community Rewards Program yet? If not, we encourage you to do so as it really helps to bring income into our Chapter to help meet expenses. The more participants we have, the more income we can generate. I encourage you to go to www.dillions.com/community-rewards and click on "Register" at the top of the page. When you enroll you will be asked to designate which charity your wish to support. **The Topeka Compassionate Friends Chapter NPO number is TC248.** Once you have done so and have a Dillions Shopper's Card, every time you make a purchase at Dillions a portion of your total will be donated to the Topeka TCF Chapter. Participating in this program **costs you nothing** and **does not affect your fuel points** for gasoline purchases. If you need assistance in setting up your account, call toll-free at 1-800-576-4377 and select Option 3.



Our Thanks to: Midland Care Connection for giving us a mailbox and Most Pure Heart of Mary Church for allowing us to meet at their facility. A special Thank You to ProPrint for helping to underwrite the printing cost of this newsletter.

TCF National Office e-mail:
nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Compassionate Friends web address:
www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter web and e-mail addresses:
www.tcftopeka.org tcftopeka@gmail.com

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And We Remember . . .

Because of the potential for the hurtful crime of identity theft, TCF Chapter Newsletters will now only publish the date of a child's birth or death without listing the year of the event. This is a directive from TCF National to protect all TCF members. Due to space constraints, only those families who remain current on our newsletter mailing database will be included in the We Remember section.

JANUARY ~

Josephine I. Alcalá, daughter of Pricilla Alcalá, who was born on January 13th and died on January 14th

Olivia Lynn Anderson, daughter of Suzannah Anderson; sister of Eli Anderson, who died on January 17th

Jon Bieker, brother of Andrea Smith; son of Don & Sheryl Bieker who died on January 9th

Aaron M. Campbell, son of Marilyn Campbell, who died on January 29th

Heidi Crarren, daughter of Julie Crarren, who was born on January 22nd

Rebecca Lynne Smith Crismas, daughter of BobbyJean Smith, who died on January 7th

Claire Elise Fisher, daughter of Debra Fisher, who died on January 2nd

Anthony James Forshee, son of Darren and Gloria Forshee, who was born on January 9th

Spenser Thomas Good, son of Margaret Kramar, who was born on January 30th

Justin Grabhorn, son of Philip and Barbara Grabhorn, who died on January 27th

Shawn Michael Hatfield, son of Hank and Cathy Harman, who was born on January 11th

Marshall Hille, son of Paula Ackerman, who was born on January 6th

Juan Adan Lucio, son of Dalia Sanchez and Roberto Lucio, who died on January 5th

Eric Alan Palmberg, son of Jim and Doris Palmberg, who died on January 1st

Greg Lee Paulson, son-in-law of Frank and Brenda Bissey and brother-in-law of Brad Bissey, who was born on January 24th

Adam James Reams, son of Gene and Sandy Reams, brother of Nick Reams, who died on January 23rd

Kathryn (Katie) Rush, daughter of Thomas and Barbara Rush, who died on January 24th

Jamie Lynn Russell, daughter of John and Elaine Chandler, who was born on January 7th

Evan Michael Schuetz, son of Tom and Debbie Schuetz, who was born on January 23rd

Keith Strathman, son of Don and Julie Strathman, brother of Becky Strathman, who died on January 8th

Brandon Toler, son of Marty Tyson, who died on January 18th

Mary Jane Varner, daughter of Will and Kay Hasty, who died on January 3rd

FEBRUARY ~

Charlie Allen, son of Tanya Allen, who was born on February 6th

Carlie Almond, daughter of Brad and Amy Almond, who was born on February 24th

Brian Lynn Blecha, son of Lynn and Alice Blecha, who was born on February 9th

Monty Brentlinger, son of Don and Carolyn Brentlinger, who was born on February 6th

Christian K. Charay, son of Alfred Charay and Laurie Charay who died on February 27th

Rex McCarthy, son of Janet Hamilton, who died in February

Jaime M. Harrington, daughter of Mary Harrington, who was born and died on February 3rd

Nason John Hobelman, son of Dee Hobelman, who was born on February 14th

Bradley "Brad" Hurla, son of Mike and Judy Hurla, who died on February 15th

Richard L. "Rick" Linder Jr., son of Richard and Patricia Linder, who died on February 15th

Gylnn Guerry Lough, son of Billy D. and Inez G. Lough, who died on Feb. 21st

Billy Lucas, son of Bernie and Jeanette Bialek, who died on February 18th

Juan Adan Lucio, son of Dalia Sanchez and Roberto Lucio, who was born on February 15th

William Henry "Hank" Lumpkin, son of Joe and Penny Lumpkin, who was born on February 1st

Amy Lundin, daughter of Ralph and Judy Lundin, who was born on February 16th

Cecil L. Miller, Jr., brother of Brenda Bissey, who died on February 4th

Jeremy Joseph Pechanee, son of Pamela Pechanee, who died on February 22nd

Kiley Ramey, daughter of Gary and Linda Ramey, who was born on February 28th

Otto G. Schnellbacher, son of Mary Therese Sanders, who died on February 20th

Carmen Cristina Urdaneta, daughter of Leonel and Judy Urdaneta, who was born on February 13th; and died on February 3rd

Mary Jane Varner, daughter of Will and Kay Hasty, who was born on February 8th

John Carl Harrington, son of Mary Harrington, who died on March 18th

Michael Scott Watson, son of Warren and Beth Watson, who died on February 23rd

Zachary James Hudec, son of Greg and Liz Hudec, who died on March 25th

Joseph White, son of Karen White, who was born on February 28th and died on February 7th

Karen Kay Karnes, daughter of Wilson and Maxine Karnes, who was born on March 2nd

Baby Boy Williams, son of Todd and Kathleen Williams, who was stillborn on February 23rd

Ben Lake, grandson of Patty Lake, who was born on March 21st

George Winter, son of Cindy Taylor and brother of Elizabeth and Jolene Winter, who died on February 15th

Belinda Meier, daughter of Maggie Walshire, who died on March 20th

MARCH ~

Tyler James Baker, son of Barbara Baker, who died on March 6th

Madison "Maddie" Rae Naill, daughter of Lori Neddermeyer and Eric Naill; step-daughter of Mark Neddermeyer; sister of Jesse and Allie Naill; step-sister of Cale and Braden Neddermeyer; and granddaughter of Bruce and Ginny Miller and Allan and Marge Neddermeyer, who died on March 19th

Rachael Reneé Chan, daughter of Gary and Susan Chan, who died on March 17th

Tracie Nelson, daughter of Shari Brandenburgh, who was born on March 18th

Cotton Christenson, son of Tracy Christenson, who was born on March 19th

Alisha Marie Quigley, daughter of Karen Leiker, who was born on March 1st and died on March 12th

Haley Cleveland, daughter of Chrissy Bowman, who was born on March 20th and died on March 29th

Pamela Jaye (Luthye) Rodriguez, daughter of the late Dale Luthye and Elma Luthye, who died on March 1st

Eric Joseph Conley, son of Tom and Barbara Conley, who died on March 23rd

Brittany Nicole Tucker, daughter of Damon and Collene Tucker, who died on March 11th

Patrick Cummings, son of Carol Cummings, who was born on March 30th

Jason R. VanDam, son of Will and Kay Hasty, who was born on March 25th

Wendi Sue Cushing, daughter of Scott and Denise Cushing; sister of Deana and Dylan Cushing, born on March 17th

Taylor William Clay Watson, son of Terry and Kathy Watson, who died on March 16th

Evan Douglas Epoch, son of Nancy S. Epoch, born March 10th

Christopher Wempe, son of Dan and JoAnn Wempe, who was born on March 9th

*(Use the form below to submit your listing if you have not already done so. Once you have submitted your listing, you **do not** have to do so every year as long as you remain active on our mailing list. Your child's name and dates will remain on the We Remember database unless you request their removal or choose to discontinue receiving this newsletter.)*

And We Remember - If you wish your child, grandchild or sibling included in this section, please fill out the form below and return to: Susan Chsn, 3448 S.W. Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may also email to chanx2@cox.net< We do not automatically list your information just because you are receiving this newsletter. We only list information for those requesting it. **Please type or print clearly.**

Child's Name _____

Son __ Daughter __ Grandson __ Granddaughter __ Brother __ Sister __

Date of Birth _____

Date of Death _____

Father _____

Mother _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Note: Please list address and phone #. You will only be contacted if there is a question about your listing.

Is this a change of address for you? (please circle) YES NO

When Fathers Weep at Graves

I see them weep
the fathers at the stones

taking off the brave armor
forced to wear in the work place

clearing away the debris
with gentle fingers

inhaling the sorrow
diminished by anguish

their hearts desiring
what they cannot have--

to walk hand in hand
with children no longer held--

to all the fathers who leave a part
of their hearts at the stones

may breezes underneath trees of time
ease their pain

as they receive healing tears
...the gift the children give.

~ Alice J. Wisler
For David, in memory of our son Daniel

*Grief is the darkness of a broken life.
Grief crushes like a deadly avalanche.
Grief is a story sea that throws the heart
into the depth of pain, the center of despair.*

*But we are given tender remedies:
Remembrance of a golden joy embraced,
Rich feeling left from moments in the sun.*

*If we but reach for these:
they wait beyond the dark to give us hope,
to let us live again, to let us celebrate
the children gone from earth, yet always here
eternal light of memory and love.*

~ Sascha Wagner



Georg Arthur Pfeuger

Remembrance

What do we do when we love someone
But they have gone away
When all our days of bright sunlight
Have turned to shades of gray?

What do we say when no comfort comes
From words of love and hope
When efforts made seem pointless
As we fight each day to cope?

How do we act when we hear their name
And we cannot help but cry
This isn't fair, they were barely here
It's not time to say goodbye!

We promise them that they have made
A place within our hearts
Where they will live forever
Though we are far apart

We call upon the memories
As time allowed and then
Tuck them safely in our minds
To visit now and again

We cherish them as best we can
Each smile, each word, each look
We write the story they want told
On the pages of life's book

For most important is the vow
We honor when they're gone
Of sharing all they've given us
From that moment on

~ Donna Gerrior, TCF Pasco County, FL
In Memory of Rob

*The season of grief is our shutting down time.
We prepare the cottage of our hearts for winter,
securing our windows to the world, stocking the
cupboards with what will sustain us during the
cold and dark. Carefully we rebuild our inner fire, and
huddle in its warmth while the storms of winter pass,
awaiting a spring that will come as surely as the
steady passage of days.*

~ from *Safe Passages*
by Molly Fumia



7 Grief Strategies For the New Year ----Or For Anytime

The old saying is true: "If there is an elephant in the room, introduce him." No good purpose is served by denial, yet we are very good at it. And when it comes to facing the pain of our grief with both eyes open, we often turn away instead. But when we have a psychological elephant in the room of our mind, we should acknowledge him, and plan a way to shrink him down to a manageable size then get him on his way. If we've had a loss recently, the new year provides a good opportunity for us to be honest about the pain of our grief, and resolve in the months to come to be proactive and do the necessary grief work to begin addressing the elephant in the room.

#1. Write yourself a comforting and encouraging letter.

Imagine you had a friend who you cared deeply for, and imagine that friend had just experienced the death of someone they love very much. You would want to help them, you'd want to comfort them and encourage them. Well, now substitute yourself for that friend. You are worthy of being comforted and encouraged too, so write yourself a letter saying to yourself the same sorts of things you would say to a good friend. Then, read the letter aloud to yourself once or twice, put it away for a few days or a week, then read it again. Do this for a few months, then write yourself a second letter, and so on. This is an act of self-compassion, treating yourself as gently as you would treat someone else. Avoid thinking that you are so 'strong' or 'solid' that you don't need help and tender compassion. That is a misunderstanding of strength and personal fortitude. Feeling intense sorrow and bereavement is not a sign of weakness, to the contrary, it is a sign of deep humanity and personal capacity to love.

#2. Buy a big calendar, and use it.

One of the main problems bereaved people face is the feeling that one day drags into the next, always the same. Grieving people also sometimes get pressured by other well-meaning people into doing activities they really don't want to do. An 'appointment calendar' can solve both of those problems. Large calendars, like a desk calendar, give you room to write. So as the new year begins, grab your pen, sit down with the calendar, and start filling your days with appointments. Appointments with whom? Well, most importantly, with yourself. Without isolating yourself or taking yourself out of social circulation, you can pen in some 'self-time' and thereby reserve a lot of valuable quiet time. Now this quiet time does not have to be momentous. Just by reserving time for yourself, you will give yourself time to breathe and reflect as the new year, with all of its demands and changes, unfolds. Appointments like "movie with me," or "reading

with me," "journaling with me" or "recreation with me" make it possible for you to always be able to tell others, when asked to go somewhere or do something, "Let me check my calendar, I may have an appointment." This way you can say "No" in a socially graceful way, and if you want to accept someone's invitation, you can always break an appointment with yourself, no one will be upset about that.

#3. Move your body, move your mind.

As you slowly adjust to your life without the physical presence of your loved one who died, it's vital you get outside and move your body. Notice, I didn't say "exercise," since for some people that may sound daunting (What do I wear? What gym do I join? What are the elements of my workout?). No need to make it a big undertaking, you're not training for the Olympics. So pick short, achieve-able goals, like a very short hike, a walk around the block, a bike ride to the park, etc. Keep these jaunts short, as this will give you a sense of accomplishment, and you will derive the physical and psychological benefits of having enlisted your body in your ongoing encounter with grief. This is a great habit to form in the new year.

#4. Realize that you do not need to "understand" your grief, or fit your loss into your religious or philosophical world-view right now.

When I coached Little League, I established the One Minute Rule. It was this: If I, or any player, gets hit by a batted or thrown baseball, whatever the person hit by the ball says for the first minute after being hit, is OK. Screaming and accusations were common after being hit by the baseball, but everyone knew that you got a free pass for a minute. And they knew that after a minute the hit person had to be ready to move on. Well, bereaved people get a lot longer than a minute, or a month, or a year, to integrate their experience into the rest of their outlook on life. So don't feel any anxiety about fully grasping what has happened to you. Time will help clear your mind, and you will eventually be able to cognitively address your loss, the pain it has brought you, and the changes in your life that have ensued.

#5. Decide that in the new year, you will, in some new way, begin to focus a bit more on others, as a part of your loved one's legacy.

This is a valuable change you can make in your life. We all need to get out of our skin for a while, we need to get out of ourselves and just focus on other people, and their problems. Sometimes this helps us gain a fresh perspective on our own life. So plan on doing that this new year, and as you do it, you will no doubt talk with new people, and when the opportunity presents itself tell them about your loved one who has died. You don't have to tell your loved one's life story or anything like that, just mention them in passing, or say

"My wife used to like to do this (activity)." You may feel a bit more comfortable talking about your loved one with people who didn't know him or her, and it is very valuable to begin to talk out loud—in the past tense—about your loved one. It may be shocking for you to hear yourself speak out loud in the past tense about someone so close to you, but it will help you integrate their death into your life. Where do you go to be around other people? Start with local civic groups, like the Boys and Girls Club, the Historical Society, the Kiwanis or Elks, the Library, Big Brothers and Sisters, a Habitat for Humanity project or a Rescue Mission.

#6. Listen to the Music.

A recent study I saw asserted that sad people who listen to their favorite music that matches their mood, report feeling better. Music is therapeutic and soothing. Throughout human religious and cultural history, music has been central to the expression of human values and sentiments. Sit down with a pen and paper, and make a short list of some songs of different types that you have always liked. Then go to youtube.com and search for them and listen to them, or go to the library and listen to them, or order them online (if you are not accustomed to doing that on a computer, ask a friend to do it for you). Just get the music playing so you can listen to it. And as you do, let your mind take you where it will—daydream—and after a while I'll bet you'll feel relaxed and even renewed.

When I was a teenager I spent four hours every Saturday morning, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., helping Mr. Leffingwell clean his expansive yard. There were what seemed like hundreds of plants and bushes, in addition to several lawns he wanted pristine. It was a big undertaking, as he was a very particular man. I remember that his wife died one year. He took one Saturday off from yard work, and he was right back at it the next week—and I was with him. The first Saturday back, he opened up the sliding door to his backyard where we were working, and he turned up his stereo. He was playing a record by John Denver, and on it was the tribute ballad Annie's Song. When that song came on, he stopped trimming bushes, and just stood there, looking at his pool, and staring around the green yard. As John Denver sang "You fill up my senses, like a night in the forest..." Mr. Leffingwell stood still. When the song was over, he went back to work, and I remember he worked hard, with vigor, until I left at 12:30 p. m. That soulful song seemed like a tonic to him, it seemed to soothe his aching heart. Find the songs that are meaningful to you, and let them speak to you.

#7. Wishing you well.

As the new year begins, write down what your loved one would want for you in the new year. Trouble imagining what that might be? It's probably the same as what you would wish for your loved one, had you

been the one that died. So sit down at the computer, or put pen to paper, and make a list of five or seven or ten states of mind or attitudes or commodities that your loved one would want for you to attain as you move forward without them physically with you. For example, my mother would want me to look toward the future, and not be paralyzed by mourning. Or, my father would want me to be optimistic about what will happen to me this year, or my sister would want me to buy those expensive boots we used to talk about. And then, armed with your list, choose one of those dispositions or possessions and pursue it. Look back at your list after a few months, and check off the outlook or object you now have. Deliberately choose to achieve something your loved one would want you to have in this new year. By doing so, you will honor their memory.

So often, we think of grief or bereavement as something that happens to us, instead of something we do. This is unfortunate, since passivity and inaction will not help us to engage the new reality of loss in our lives. This is not to say that grief is a "problem" we can solve, or a "condition" we can hurry up and make go away, but it is to say that we can be active participants and even helpful agents in our own emotional well-being. By deliberately and purposefully facing our sorrow, and calmly, carefully thinking about what we can do to help integrate our sorrow into our larger life, we can contribute to forging our new identity. And this is a powerful choice to make as a new year and our new lives dawn.

About the Author

Brad Stetson (Ph. D., University of Southern California) has published on a wide range of religious and social topics, including Tender Fingerprints: A True Story of Loss and Resolution (Zondervan, 1999, 2000) and Living Victims, Stolen Lives: Parents of Murdered Children Speak to America (Baywood, 2003). His books have been critically reviewed in academic and popular venues ranging from Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying, to the Journal of Church and State, First Things, National Review, Publishers Weekly and the Wall Street Journal. He has also written for various periodicals, including The Orange County Register, The Los Angeles Times, Grief Digest, and Christianity Today magazine. Mr. Stetson works frequently as a funeral chaplain and officiate, and has written and conducted nearly 1,500 memorial services.

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Editor's Note: Centering Corporation is a wonderful place for grief resources - books, gifts, momentos, etc. *Grief Digest* is a wonderful quarterly magazine and always has lots of great articles on the many aspects of grief and loss. Check it out at: www.centering.org

**Little by little, step by step, I learned that
I didn't need to hang on to the death
to remember the life.
What a joyous discovery!**

~ Kittie Brown McGowan, Montgomery, AL

A Valentine for Mom

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

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

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

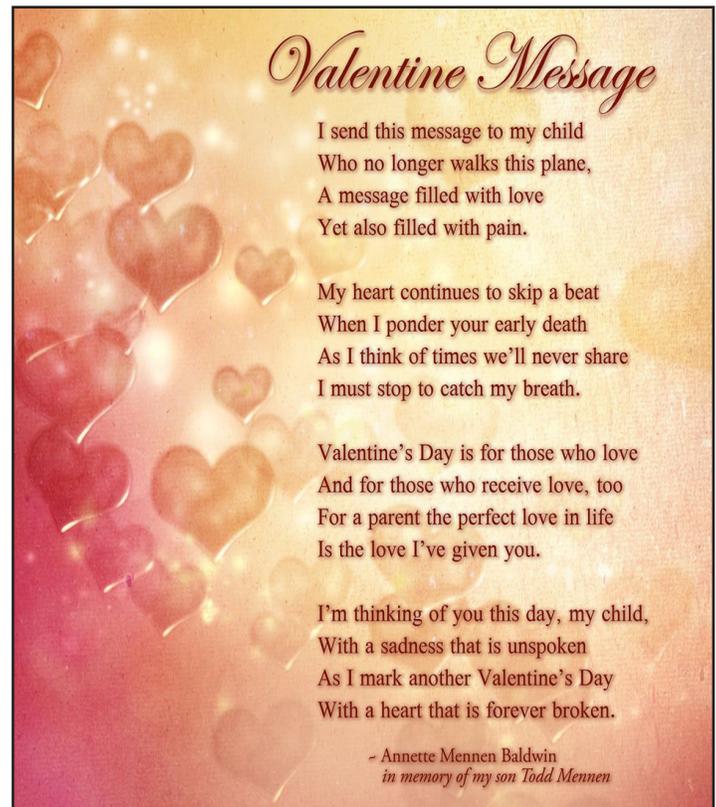
In my office I have a gift that Todd bought me five years ago. All grown up now with an MBA, bright future, important corporate job, family of four children, a beautiful new home, and major responsibilities, precious little time was available for finding the perfect gift for his mom. His life was busy; his free time was limited, but a something special caught his eye and he thought about me. He decided to buy it. A few weeks later, he gave me a brightly wrapped package containing a beautiful plate picturing a Sioux Indian princess. "She's beautiful, just beautiful", I told him. "Do you really like it?" he asked. The detail, the essence of her heritage and her outlook were captured perfectly. I told him, "I love it, Todd I'll keep her in the office so I can see her every day. I think she is beautiful." And she is in my office today, another treasure I will always keep. "I just wanted to be sure," he whispered.

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

Each of us has our memories of our child. Whether our child was 5 days old or 55 years old, we have special memories that are as much a part of us as our faces. Valentine's Day was always a special day for our family. We exchanged valentines and sometimes give a special gift.

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

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



Valentine Message

I send this message to my child
Who no longer walks this plane,
A message filled with love
Yet also filled with pain.

My heart continues to skip a beat
When I ponder your early death
As I think of times we'll never share
I must stop to catch my breath.

Valentine's Day is for those who love
And for those who receive love, too
For a parent the perfect love in life
Is the love I've given you.

I'm thinking of you this day, my child,
With a sadness that is unspoken
As I mark another Valentine's Day
With a heart that is forever broken.

- Annette Mennen Baldwin
in memory of my son Todd Mennen

Waiting for Answers

Years ago I left my first meeting of The Compassionate Friends and drove home in tears. My son, Max, had died a few short weeks before and I had been anxiously awaiting this evening. These people must have some answers, I thought. With paper and pen in purse, I was ready to take notes and do as they prescribed. I would do anything to ease the ache in my soul.

But when I walked out into the spring air later that night, I felt betrayed. I hadn't heard any answers. Instead of learning how to leave my grief behind, it had been confirmed, made more real with expression. I knew I would miss Max forever. Now I wondered if I would grieve forever. Would it always be this way, a flash of pain aligned with every memory?

During the next months and years, I attended TCF meetings and conferences, read books, raged, kept busy, sometimes spent the day in bed. I wrote, cried and talked about Max. Slowly, I discovered the answers I had long feared were true: yes, I will grieve forever, and yes, my memories will often provoke tears. But something had changed.

My grief was now more forgiving, my tears almost sweet with memory. Max's life took shape again as the anguish of his death began to recede. If I would always miss him, I would also always have him with me in so many ways. I wanted to carry his memory into the future: the joy, the lessons, and the inevitable pain. How could I do otherwise?

As I walked to my car after that first meeting, the TCF chapter leader caught up with me. "How can I stop this pain?" I asked. She put her arm on my shoulder. "Just do what feels right to you," she said, "Listen to your heart. And we'll be here to listen, too."

Sometimes the best advice is none at all.

~ Mary Clark, TCF, Sugar Land-SW Houston Chapter, TX
In memory of Max

Butterfly Wings, Bricks and Lead

When I saw her load of grief, it looked to me to be merely a light load of butterfly wings, as compared to my full load of heavy bricks. Then I saw another man, and he seemed to be carrying a small load of lead. But as I watched her step on the scales bearing her load of butterfly wings, the scales read “one ton.” When he stepped on the scales with his load of lead, the scales also read “one ton.” I knew my grief-load of bricks would weigh more, but those scales read for me, “one ton.” Our loads of butterfly wings, lead and bricks weighed exactly the same to the one carrying that particular load of grief.

We bereaved parents often feel resentment when a non-bereaved person speaks about our child’s death. HOW can THAT PERSON know or even dream of how I feel or what I am going through? These feelings may be justified. But when we begin to feel resentment toward another bereaved parent “That child’s death was easy compared to my child’s death,” “I have suffered more than she/he ever did” —we should remember that each of our grief-loads weights two thousand pounds to the one under it. Compared to Rose Kennedy, who had one child in a mental institution, and lost one daughter and three sons in violent deaths, my grief-load begins to look as if it were made of gossamer soap bubbles, but when I again step on that scale, it still reads, “one ton.”



Our grief-loads may appear to weigh less because we who are under them have grown stronger through time and grief process maturation. The load actually weighs no less; it is we who have grown stronger and can carry it more easily. Sometimes we can even completely ignore the weight that is still there. Always be careful in judging another’s grief-load. Remember

the lead, butterfly wings and those bricks, and how they all weigh the same to the one under that load of grief.

~ Tom Crouthamel, TCF, Sarasota, FL

Spirit Child

To my child who came into the world sleeping, ~ To my child whose little parts never fully grew, ~ To my child that I never felt move in my womb, ~ To my child that the world never knew ~ YOUR HEART WILL ALWAYS BEAT THROUGH ME.

I will think of you – ponder possibilities – miss creating memories, ~ BUT YOUR HEART WILL ALWAYS BEAT THROUGH ME.

To my child that I nourished, ~ To my child that fueled excitement, stretched my body, expanded my love space, made me glow, ~ To the child family would never know. ~ I WILL CHERISH YOUR CONCEPTION.



To the child I never heard cry, and so often wonder why, ~ To the child that never opened their eyes to see the world into which they arrived – I may often question why. ~ To the child so light in weight – whose dreams never took shape – YOUR HEART BEATS THROUGH ME, CHERISHED YOU WILL ALWAYS BE.

To the child planted in my womb, ~ To the child that did not have time to bloom ~ YOU ARE THE FLOWER IN MY HEART GARDEN, YOUR SEED WILL ALWAYS & FOREVER BE. ~ My arms held you for a moment, for some moments never came, ~ BUT YOU ARE CRADDLED IN THE HEART – Remembered Always, Missed Often, LOVED FOREVER. YOUR SPIRIT LIVES!

To the miss-carried, stillborn, conceived in love, seed of my womb, ~ MY SPIRIT CHILD.

~ Pamela Hagens
TCF Nashville Chapter, TN

NOTHING DISAPPEARS

Science . . . tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace.

Nature does not know extinction.

And everything science has taught me . . .

Strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death.

Nothing disappears without a trace.

~ Werner von Braun, in THIS WEEK Magazine

FINDING SPRING AGAIN

It is the end of February, which means we are nearing the end of what has often been a brutal winter. While gazing at the mountains of snow piled high in my front yard and the foot-long icicles hanging from my roof, it is hard to imagine that spring will ever come. We have endured bitter cold winds that have chilled us to the bone and treacherous roads that we have cautiously traveled. The days have been long and dark and often free of sunlight. No matter how long you have been a native of the Upper Midwest, I know we all will be glad when it comes to an end.

However, as I described these thoughts about winter, I felt as if I was describing the days of my early grief. At that point, I did not believe that a day would ever come when I would thaw from the chill that had overtaken my body and mind. The bleakness of my existence during those early months after Nina died is almost frightening to remember; it is so difficult to even conceive of that much pain. I was anesthetized from some of its cruelty by the protective blanket of numbness that blessedly shielded me from the gale force of such overpowering sorrow. How could I ever feel spring in my heart again?

Spring had always been my favorite season. The air had a certain freshness to it that I would drink in. Simply put, it always made me feel happy and light of heart. Spring was our reward for surviving the freezing winter months that preceded it. It brought a smile to my face and a bounce to my step. However, it was the spring of the year where my heart was irretrievably broken. It was during this exquisite season of warm, lilac-scented breezes and sun-kissed mornings where my sweet daughter Nina's life would end.

I wondered if my thoughts about spring would never be the same. Rather than anticipate with gladness the coming of

I Am Spring

I am the beginning.
I am budding promise.
I spill cleansing tears of life
from cloudy vessels
creating muddy puddles
where single cell creatures abide
and splashing children play.

I am new green growth.
I softly flow from winter's barren hand.
On gentle breeze I fly – embracing sorrow.
With compassion, we feather nests
where winged voices sing winter-spring duets.
As frozen ice transforms to playful stream
I whisper truth – life is change.

spring, I dreaded it with the knowledge that it contained the anniversary of her death. The smell of the air and the look to the sky that I once found exhilarating now brought me back to my darkest day. I know that anyone, who has lost a loved one to death, no matter the season, understands.

Will spring come again to your life? In the almost six years since Nina died, has it come to mine? Looking back at my description of the winter of “my early grief”, I know that I have come a long way from that time of desolation. I have found, especially after the first two years, that with each subsequent spring, I have rediscovered some of the pleasure I used to feel. I have learned that just because I have found things to feel joyful about again; it doesn't mean I am dishonoring my daughter's memory. I now take her along with me in my mind and my heart. I try to retrieve memories of the dandelion bouquets she so carefully gathered and presented to me, the rides to the park in the Radio Flyer, our talks while sunning on the deck, and, of course, shopping for spring clothes! Her favorite pastime! I will always feel tenseness, apprehension and sadness as May 11th draws near, but I no longer hold it against spring.

It is a slow, difficult journey, this grief pathway we travel. It is as treacherous as the roads we maneuvered following the winter storms, never knowing when we will hit an icy patch on the road and be thrown into a tailspin. Yet, we must travel it if we are to find any measure of peace and healing.

Please be patient with yourself as you are working hard to survive this winter in your heart. Trust that spring, though a much different one than the one we knew before our beloved child died, will come again.

With gentle thoughts,

~ Cathy L. Seehuetter, TCF St. Paul, MN
In Memory of my daughter, Nina

I am Spring.
I bless long, dark wintry days.
I crown mankind's pain
with starry skies
in deepest night
lighting solitary paths from sorrow to joy
as the wheel of life turns 'round and 'round.

~ Carol Clum
(written after attending a workshop presented by John Fox, author of 'Finding What You Didn't Lose' and 'Poetic Medicine'.)



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter, c/o Midland Hospice Care, Inc.
200 S.W. Frazier Circle, Topeka, KS 66606-2800

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TCF Credo

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.
We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us.
Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances.
We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships.
We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief,
but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers.
Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace.
But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share,
just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together.
We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace,
share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.