



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Published Quarterly by The Topeka TCF Chapter

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www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter Website:
www.tcftopeka.org

Jan ~ Feb ~ March ~ 2022
Editor: Susan Chan
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Topeka, KS 66614-3629

JANUARY MEETING

Monday, January 24, 2022
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS
7 - 8:30 p.m.

Preparing for and Handling Milestone Events - As bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings we know that there are many milestones we must face following the death of our child, grandchild, brother or sister. We all have to experience the “firsts” of the initial year of loss – first holiday, first birthday, first death anniversary date, etc. As time goes on, we must face graduations, weddings, baby showers and other events that will not include our loved one. Let’s talk about comforting and creative ways to prepare for and handle milestone events. Plan to share things that you have learned that have made these times easier for you, or at least tolerable. Whether we like it or not, these milestones will come, and preparing for them can be a gift we give ourselves.

FEBRUARY MEETING

Monday, February 28, 2022
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS
7 - 8:30 p.m.

Where Am I at on My Grief Journey?- The grief journey is a personal passage and may be different for different people. Your grief journey may be influenced by any previous experiences you have had dealing with loss. It may also be influenced by the relationship you had with the person who has died. The circumstances of the death can also influence the journey. There is no real set pattern for one’s grief journey although there are quite likely many emotions and reactions that many of us may share. Let’s talk about where we feel we are in our journey, what obstacles we feel we are facing in our quest for healing and strategies we might employ to ease our progress on the journey.

MARCH MEETING

Monday, March 28, 2022
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS
7 - 8:30 p.m.

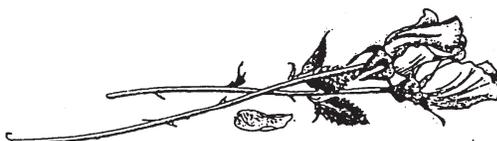
Forgiveness - Many bereaved people find that issues of forgiveness can play a big part in their healing process. Sometimes the inability to forgive can prove a stumbling block towards growth and healing on your grief journey. Let’s talk about the topic of forgiveness—do we feel the need to forgive ourselves for something we may have said or done while our child was still alive? Do we need to forgive those we may feel were in some way responsible for our child’s death? Do we need to forgive our child for actions they may have taken that resulted in their death? Forgiveness can be a complex topic and we will try and explore some of the reasons why forgiveness can be a healing element in our grief work.

Meetings are always held on the fourth Monday of each month unless otherwise noted. Listen to radio & TV for cancellations due to severe weather conditions. Always check the Topeka TCF Chapter website (www.tcftopeka.org) under “Meetings” for latest information.

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*

*Gary & Susan Chan in loving memory of their daughter
Rachael Reneé Chan who died on March 17th*

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

*Lori & Mark Neddermeyer in loving memory of
her daughter Madison "Maddie" Rae Naill who
died on March 19th*

Please Note:

If you wish to sponsor the next newsletter
(April ~ May ~ June 2022)
we must receive your information and \$30.00
check by March 1, 2022. Make checks payable to:
Topeka TCF Chapter



New Phone Contact #

**As of 1 January, 2022, the new
phone contact number for the
Topeka Chapter of
The Compassionate Friends is:**

1-785-817-1748

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>.

ATTENTION ATTENTION!!!

If you wish to continue to receive this newsletter, we **MUST** hear from you by February 1, 2022. Please return the yellow form that was in the Oct/Nov/Dec 2021 newsletter. If you don't have it anymore, you can download a PDF of the form from our website (www.tcftopeka.org) under "Newsletters". If your loss occurred in 2021, you will automatically be kept on the mailing list thru 2022. Otherwise, we need to hear from you or you will be dropped from the mailing list beginning with the April/May/June 2022 issue.

THANK YOU!

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 and 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

Todd E. Huss, son of Betty Huss, who died on January 27th

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 ~

Erik Acheson, son of Gayle Graham, who was born on February 7th

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

Kristy Burton, daughter of Bonnie Bennett, who died on February 5th

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 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

Gylmn Guerry Lough, son of Billy D. and Inez G. Lough, who died on February 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 February 13th; and died on February 3rd

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

Kyle Horn, grandson of Julie Diaz, who died on March 26th

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

Todd E. Huss, son of Betty Huss, who was born on March 14th

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

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

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

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

MARCH ~

Vicki Rae (Luthye) Lee, daughter of Elma and the late Dale Luthye, who was born on March 2nd

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

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

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

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, died on March 19th

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

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

Haley Ayauna Mae Bowman, daughter of Chrissy and Eric Bowman; sister of Herschel, Hanna, Ryan and Lydia; mother of Eli, Everett and Ezekiel, who was born on March 20th and died on March 29th

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

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

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

Patrick Cummings, son of Carol Cummings, born March 30th

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christopher Wempe, son of Dan and JoAnn Wempe, born 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 Chan, 3448 S.W. Mission Avee., 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

New Year's Resolutions for Bereaved Parents

- That I will grieve as much and for as long as I feel like grieving, and that I will not let others put a time table on my grief.
- That I will grieve in whatever way I feel like grieving, and I will ignore those who try to tell me what I should or should not be feeling and how I should or should not be behaving.
- That I will cry whenever and wherever I feel like crying, and that I will not hold back my tears just because someone else feels I should be “brave” or “getting better” or “healing by now.”
- That I will talk about my child as often as I want to, and that I will not let others turn me off just because they can't deal with their own feelings.
- That I will not expect family and friends to know how I feel, understanding that one who has not lost a child cannot possibly know how I feel.
- That I will not blame myself for my child's death, and I will constantly remind myself that I did the best job of parenting I could possibly have done. But when feelings of guilt are overwhelming, I will remind myself that this is a normal part of the grief process and it will pass.
- That I will not be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help if I feel it is necessary.
- That I will commune with my child at least once a day in whatever way feels comfortable and natural to me, and that I won't feel compelled to explain this communion to others or to justify or even discuss it with them.
- I will keep the truth in my heart--the truth that my child is always with me in spirit.
- That I will try to eat, sleep, and exercise every day in order to give my body strength it will need to help me cope with my grief.
- To know that I am not losing my mind and I will remind myself that loss of memory, feelings of disorientation, lack of energy, and a sense of vulnerability are all a normal part of the grief process.
- To know that I will heal, even though it will take a long time.

- To let myself heal and not feel guilty about not feeling better sooner.
- To remind myself that the grief process is circuitous--that is, I will not make steady upward progress. And when I find myself slipping back into the old moods of despair and depression, I will tell myself that “slipping backward” is also a normal part of the mourning process, and that these moods, too, will pass.
- To try to be happy about something for some part of every day, knowing that at first, I may have to force myself to think cheerful thoughts so eventually they can become a habit.
- That I will reach out at times and try to help someone else, knowing that helping others will help me to get over my depression.
- That even though my child is dead, I will opt for life, knowing that is what my child would want me to do.

~ From the Brooksville/Spring Hill FL. TCF Newsletter

A New Year is For Hope

**It has been a different number,
Days have gone by.
We've accumulated more time
Between ourselves and our
child/sibling's death.
We may have rearranged our
Perspective -- have different
Ideas about what is most
Important and what hardly matters.
In this New Year, we know that
There will be ups and downs, some
Good moments and some bad moments.
And if we take just one moment,
Just one hour, just one step at a time**

--

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE IT.

Reflections on a New Year

We begin a new year, one that many of us enter with reluctance. After all, it means another year away from our child and another year to be lived without the physical presence of the one we have lost. Apprehensive about any new challenges that we may be called upon to face in our broken condition, we call out, “Wait, I’m not ready yet!”

The death of our child changed the course of our life; nothing will be the same again. But it also has shaped us into who we are today. And it will continue to do so as we learn to incorporate this loss into who we are to become.

Have you found that you have already begun to live differently? Compassion toward others is more profound. Trivial things are no longer important. Appreciation for life, and those in our lives, is paramount. We’re living the same life—differently.

Tragedies, disappointments, and heartaches combine with beauty, love, and joy to fashion our life. These are all a part of life, and our challenge is to incorporate them into our world. The difference that our child’s life has had upon the world continues through us.

So, rather than being fearful of the challenges that lie ahead, perhaps a better question to consider at this time might be: What opportunities will present themselves in the coming year to honor this loss that is already a part of our life? Our child has become more integrally entwined into our being than ever before. We bring him or her to every situation that we encounter. How can we make that situation better because of this bond?

The start of a new calendar year is a good time to remember that we are in the midst of life. It is not perfect. Nor is it one that we might have chosen. But, our struggles do not put life “on hold.” Rather they are a part of life itself! Our life is ours to make the most of, with many gifts that we can share with others. There is no better time than the present to gather up the pieces and recognize the uniqueness that we each call “me”—a uniqueness made more wonderful because of our child’s presence in the life we choose to live.

~ Paula Stasiunas Schultz, Posted on January 5th 2021
In Memory of Melissa and Jeff



Valentine Faces of Grief



Though winter’s delicate, lacy snowflakes may remind us of the lace-trimmed hearts of February’s Valentines, the “mourning” heart seems frozen in time. The bitter winds of loneliness blow mournfully through our souls. Death has tapped us on the shoulder, introducing his brother, Grief, who has moved into our hearts to take up unwelcome residence. Wearing and exhausted by our pain, we have little energy to evict the intruder. It’s hard for us to remember that the sun still faithfully shines behind the clouds that have obscured our vision.

“Love” is apparently the thought for the season, and we are reminded of its tenderness at every turn. But a piece of the fiber of our lives has been torn away, and love seems a vague and unfulfilled promise that belongs only to others. Hearts and flowers, lace and love, romantic verse and melody seem to have abandoned us as we grope in the darkness of our beloved’s absence.

Will the pain every end? Will the hope of joy and renewal once again warm the frozen places in our hearts? Gradually, as the hurt begins to soften, and the thawing relief of healing slowly begins to melt the icy grip of our pain, hope does begin to “spring eternal.”

Roses, traditional in February’s favorite holiday, remind us that summer will return (even if it is not on the traditional calendar’s schedule!). It’s unlikely that we will ever again perceive the usual symbols of love in quite the same way as before, but in many ways our concepts of genuine love will be stronger, richer and less assailable. Frivolous and shallow affection are absent from our thoughts. Deeper commitments and more demonstrative attention have become our new marching orders.

In costly lessons, we’ve learned firsthand how fragile and fleeting life can be, and we are now resolute in our determination to announce to our remaining dear ones the importance of our bonds with them. We abandon the intimidation of “limits” such as the archaic notions that a “man” mustn’t cry or say, “I love you,” or that we’re too busy just now to pay better attention to someone’s needs.

As little by little our pain softens and recedes, and we learn that suffering is but for a season, we also learn that LOVE doesn’t die. In our emotional lives, Valentines can now take on a new significance as precious reminders of the love that still exists on both sides of life. Love lives within our hearts, and even Grief cannot steal it away. Love is our bridge over the rainbow.

~ Andrea Gambell, posted February 11, 2020, in memory
of her daughter Judy.

Grieving in the Second Year After a Loss

By Karyn Arnold September 14, 2016

There is a pretty well-accepted theory on grieving that the first year is the hardest. The loss is so new, the first months can be spent in a blur of shock and disbelief.

This can be especially true for a sudden loss, but can surprise people when they are in “shock” even after a loved one has died following a long and drawn out illness.

I’ve said it many times: nothing, and I mean NOTHING, can prepare us for the finality of death.

Navigating that first year, through anniversaries, birthdays and holidays can feel endless. But the assumption for most is that as long as they can get through that, it should be smoother sailing in the days ahead.

And then year 2 happens.

The second Mother’s Day without a mom. The second wedding anniversary without a spouse. A second Christmas without a child. And the griever may find themselves thinking, “this isn’t any easier”.

How To Access To Compassionate Friends On-Line Support Groups

To access the on-line support system go to compassionatefriends.org or use key word “Compassionate Friends”. Click on Find Support then click On-Line Communities then click on Get OnLine Support. You will need to register for the chat rooms.

How To Access To Compassionate Friends Facebook Groups

For the national TCF Facebook page go to Facebook and enter Compassionate Friends USA.

For individual groups within Facebook, please go to compassionatefriends.org or use key word “Compassionate Friends”. Click on Find Support then click On-Line Communities then click on View Groups or click on Resources then click on 24/7 Private Facebook Groups. The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private 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. Please click on the link next to the group you wish to join and answer the screening questions so we can confirm your request. If you are waiting approval, please message one of the administrators. Join requests to our Facebook groups must be requested personally, therefore when you wish to share the group with someone please pass along the link to the group.

Accessing Brochures/E-Newsletter

To access various brochures on dealing with various aspects of grief go to compassionatefriends.org or use key word “Compassionate Friends.” Click on Resources then click Brochures Available. You can also register for the national e-newsletter at this site.

Some people have told me that the second year was actually more of a challenge. Perhaps because of expectation – expecting to feel better and then feeling even more disappointed and sad when they didn’t. Or maybe it’s because the more time passes, the longer we’ve had to live without that person. The longer it’s been since we’ve seen them or heard their voice.

This is a terrifying thought for the newly bereaved, to think that it’s not going to be a steady climb upwards in grieving and healing, and I don’t share this to scare those who are in their very early days.

But expectations are a big part of our mindset, even when we’re not in the stages of grief. How much more do we enjoy the movie or party that we thought was going to be terrible? How disappointed are we when a long planned vacation-of-a-lifetime turns out to be not all what we would have hoped? If ever there was a time when we need to be setting realistic expectations for ourselves, then certainly our time of grieving is one of them.

Throw away the timeliness.

Don’t compare yourself with those whom you know have had a loss. The coworker who was back to work smiling only a few days after her Dad died? She was crying every day on the way to and from work. The family member who thinks that 18 months after your husband died you should be dating again? She has no idea what this loss feels like, what your love felt like, or what is right for you.

Be patient with yourself. Be patient with those who don’t understand. Don’t expect today to be hard and tomorrow to be easy. Honor wherever you are right in this moment and know that even if it feels uncomfortable, unsettling and uneasy, that it’s probably exactly where you need to be.

Stay open to the idea of hope and optimism – but don’t set a timeline for its arrival.

(About the Author: Karyn Arnold and is the founder of Grief in Common, www.griefincommon.com. Grief in Common is a website designed to connect and match those who are grieving based on background and similar experiences of loss, for online chats and opportunities to connect. She has been working in the field of grief and loss for over 15 years, facilitating bereavement groups, providing support one on one, and educating the community about the grief process.)



Awakenings . . .

"The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places." ~ Ernest Hemingway

For years I cursed spring . . .

During that time my heart woke to the bitterness of life. In the harsh frost of winter, my anguish and the season were one, a climate where I felt safe, cocooned in a blanket of grief, a camouflage that ensconced me from the world outside.

Like grief, winter brings the bitter cold to our life and those withered months drenched in sorrow tasted natural.

In the time I lingered frozen in my shroud of despair, spring had arrived, with feathered creatures whistling joyous songs while the leaves danced up our driveway. The warmth of the sun was a charlatan, exasperating my pain while seducing me like a stranger to a foreign place.

Welcoming the signs of spring felt like a betrayal of my grief, and for years I remained suspended, cursing the seasons as if they had something to do with my anguish.

Spring represented an unwanted gift and this rebirth offended me. How could life continue when I stood so raw?

Marooned in a well of grief, I felt alone in a world surrounded by people, a place where I was unable to articulate the wound that clutched at my soul.

My attention oscillated with an assault of questions, an endless loop of uncertainty that blemished my heart. Feeling guilty for being alive when he was gone, for waking each day, even the shame I felt running out of tears depleted me until nothing but darkness remained. Each day another upheaval when I woke peacefully until the ambiguity dissipated and exposed me to the pain again.

Meeting with other bereaved families and sharing our lives brought the courage I needed to begin functioning again. Slowly a thaw occurred and the bitter cold that once surrounded my heart began to warm.

The heartache that previously consumed me now unfolded into a treasure of memories and the gifts they bring with the passage of time. Gratitude can nourish us when our heart feels empty, though learning through loss is difficult, it remains powerful.

Embracing this enlightenment and the growth it provided filled me with love and compassion. Through years of grief, love, and self-examination I began to find myself authentically whole again, and as the new buds of spring, my heart began to open.

Eventually, spring's return blossomed within me and I looked forward to the new beginnings it would bring, perhaps because of the cold, seemingly endless winter, or the accumulation of snow all around us?

But when I happened upon an old journal from twenty years ago, the place where all this grief began, the year our five-year-old son died, the fog began to lift.

Finding a quiet room I sat down and began slowly turning the pages, revisiting the season of loss I had endured. Tenderly I stroked the pages acknowledging that despairing period of my life. As I read, I recalled the brave woman I was, surviving the loss of my child, and I could not help but honor her and the battle she had forged to survive.

For days I continued reading the journal entries, discovering stories that swelled my heart and welled my eyes with tears. Yellowed pages filled with letters and poetry, notes and emotions bringing the words to life again, reminding me of how far I had come.

Entries I had written cursing the seasons stung at my vision, until suddenly aware of the anger I once held with spring. For it was not the season that hurt, the pain that gripped me was witnessing life moving on without me.

It took me years of unraveling to find myself again, and there are still days when I hear his sweet voice in the quiet of my day and know that he is still with me. Learning to step beyond the loss and share the love I had for my son in positive ways became one of my greatest blessings.

Gratefulness is plentiful when we look beyond ourselves and see the beauty that exists in life all around us. Ryan's story became a story of love, one of giving to others the way this small child gave to us. Caring for strangers with random acts of kindness began filling the emptiness that once consumed me.

The power connected to giving is immeasurable and that influence sustained me. Beginning with small acts that kept me anonymous was the tipping point I needed to shift directions.

Paying at a drive-through where I remained nameless energized me and instead of the melancholy I had previously felt, a new kind of optimism emerged.

Solace can be found in that quiet place of grace when you release a kind deed into the universe and let the laws of nature embrace it.

Over twenty years later, I was running a race on Ryan's birthday and aspired to do something special. Although I was unclear on how I would present it, I went prepared, picking up two \$10 gift cards from a local store. This time I needed to step out of my anonymous comfort zone and be present.

After asking permission, I handed the two gift cards to two young siblings there to run the race. The delight alone was a gratification to witness, but this act gave more.

After sharing Ryan's story, they all thanked me and I returned to my own daughter, both of us beaming. Within a few minutes, the children bashfully approached me, thanking me again and sharing how special they felt. Smiling, I looked up at their mom who stood watching with tears running down her face.

Allowing Ryan to live on in positive ways is a gift I have given away countless times without regret, connecting us with one another makes the world a more loving place.

Although we try and live with a strategy in mind, planning how many children we want or the house we need, within all of this, there is no immunity from loss. When we realize that material things are fleeting collections of wants and will not sustain us in tragedy, we begin to embrace the little moments of life.

Giving of ourselves is the most valuable offering we can present, shaping the world in a perfect light. A beautiful sunrise, a child's laughter, even the smile we bring the elderly neighbor when we stop to visit, will be the pause that will anchor us if our ship begins to sink.

(Tina Zarlenga, Posted on March 19th, 2020. Tina is a married, mom of 3 (one in heaven) as well as a writer of short stories with a passion for family, photography, scrapbooking and running.)

I Don't Know Who I Am Anymore: grief and loss of identity

By Litsa Williams, May 2017 www.whatsyourgrief.com

Identity is a funny thing. The way we think of ourselves, how we define ourselves, the story we tell ourselves about who we are, all of that comes together to create our identity. And yet we don't always have a conscious awareness of our identity or even a loss of identity. It often exists in the background, like the soundtrack of a film. We aren't consciously aware of it until something changes. Seriously, have you ever watched familiar movie clips without the soundtrack? It's weird.

Okay, back to identity. When we experience a loss we are often focused on the tangible "things" we lose – the person, the house, the job, the relationship, etc. That's, of course, a huge part of grief. But there is this other part of grief that we are often less aware of it. It is the secondary losses that happen like dominoes falling, creating far more to cope with than just the primary loss. We talk about these secondary losses a lot around here and often quickly list them off, throwing in "loss of identity" without saying much more. Today we are going to change that because there is a lot to say and to think about when it comes to loss of identity in grief. It shapes so much of how we exist in the world and research has shown that the lack of "self-clarity" that comes in grief as a result of loss of identity is correlated with higher rates of depression and post-traumatic stress. We're going to talk about different types of identity, how we can experience identity changes or losses, and what to do about it. Spoiler alert: there are no easy answers.

Relational Identity - This is one that quickly comes to mind in grief. It is the piece of my identity that is based on my relationship with another person. So, perhaps I am a sister, a daughter, a wife, a friend, a mother, and on and on. When we lose someone, we often feel we have lost this relational sense of self. We find ourselves asking questions like, who am I if not a parent?

Relational identities change, even with the same person. For instance, when someone becomes ill your role might shift from being a spouse or a child to a caregiver. There are still components of your original role, but you may find that shifting as you take on more and more responsibilities as a caregiver. When a person dies, caregivers often feel their sense of purpose is less clear. When your relational identity becomes so defined by caring for another person, when that person is gone it can be hard to regain a sense of self.

Additionally, grief can 're-write your address book'. Friends shift, a distance may arise between friends or family of the person who died. This can lead to another shift in relational identity, feeling a loss of community and connection to loved ones who are still living.

Professional identity - Phrases like "I am a teacher" or "I am a carpenter" or "I am a doctor" make clear that we often consider our profession as a huge part of who we are. We

have knowledge, skills, and expertise related to our jobs. Much of our time is defined by our jobs. We often have a community through our jobs. When we retire, lose or leave a job, even if it is by choice, there is often a loss of our professional identity that can have a profound impact on our sense of self. If I have been a teacher for 40 years, it is an adjustment to conceptualize who I am and what gives my days structure and purpose if I am no longer a teacher. Sometimes a job loss is the primary loss, but sometimes it is a result of needing to leave the workforce to care for a sick loved one or to relocate after a death. As you can imagine, this can result in multiple identity losses stacking up on one another.

Spiritual identity - Whether a Christian, a Muslim, an atheist, a Buddhist, or just someone who identifies as "spiritual" but not religious, we often have a spiritual identity that can grow, shift, shake, and disappear over a lifetime. This can be because of a death or just at different moments in life. After a loss we hear many people describe everything from a crisis of faith to an increased sense of spirituality. When it is the former, we often hear people describe a sense that they have lost something that felt fundamental to who they were and hence lost a bit of their footing. Also with the sense of self as a spiritual person, there is often a sense of community that comes with a religious community that may also be lost, leaving people feeling both the loss their spiritual identity and distanced or isolated from their spiritual community.

Financial Identity - Though we often don't think of finances as part of our identity, our ability to provide for ourselves and our family financially is often an important component of our sense of self. Whether it is a constant state of financial struggle or pride in strong financial independence, we often have an expectation about what our financial identity is and should be. Illnesses and deaths can have a deep impact on financial identity. From overwhelming healthcare costs to leaving a job to become a caregiver, to a dual income household becoming single income, death can rattle our sense of financial security and independence and create a financial loss of identity. On the other end of the spectrum, life insurance or inheritance after a death can improve financial security and, though this may sound like exclusively a good change to financial identity, for some people it leads to feelings of guilt after a death.

Physical Identity - Much like financial identity is often correlated with our ability to provide for ourselves and our families, physical identity often defines how we are capable of physically existing in the world. In basic ways, like having the luxury to work any type of job, play with children, go for a walk or to the gym, and move free from pain, our physical self is fundamental to much our daily life. For some, the physical is even more significant – people who identify as athletes or who use a lot of physical movement in their work are often even more deeply connected to their physical selves. An illness, injury, and even aging can take a serious toll on the physical self, leading people a physical loss of identity that can sometimes be accompanied by a loss of self-worth. This is something we may struggle with ourselves or watch a loved one struggle with as an illness progresses.

Outlook - Though this can be harder to label, our outlook or perspective on the world can be deeply connected to our identity and it can also be shaken by a trauma or loss. Whether it is the belief that the world is a fair and just place, a general optimistic perspective, being a 'happy person, or a feeling that the world is predictable or safe, our lens through which we see the world has a deep impact on our identity. A significant death or trauma can shake these assumptive beliefs about the world, leaving people sometimes feeling more negative, jaded, pessimistic, or unable to engage with other people or activities the way they used to. This can result in an identity change or loss that feels difficult to reconcile.

Uhhhhh, okay . . . so I have definitely experienced a loss of identity. Now what?

We've thrown a ton of information about grief and loss of identity your way. If you're thinking "yes, this is me!" you may also be thinking "what do I do about it??" There is no easy answer, but the first thing to keep in mind is your identity will never be what it was before the loss. Like so many things in grief, trying to go back to how things were before the loss just isn't possible. Part of regaining a sense of self after the loss is accepting that identity is going to be different than it was before.

From there it is important to remember that different doesn't mean bad. As human beings, we often don't like change. We have ideas about how life is supposed to look and who we are supposed to be. When life doesn't pan out that way, it can be easy to assume that no alternative will ever allow us to have a sense of well-being. Though there will always be a deep sense of grief around the people and things in life that we lose, this does not mean there will not be other things that bring a sense of purpose, joy, and contentment and that will slowly become part of your identity.

Remember, you can bring the past into the present. The person you lost, the person you were, those are all things that will still be a part of you as you go forward. The myth of "letting go" has left many griever's feeling like the healthy way to grieve is to shut the door to the past. As we have said time and time and time again, a continued connection to loved ones, as well as a continued connection to the person we used to be, can be a very healthy part of moving forward.

Finally, take some time to reflect on your identity. Whether it is talking with a friend, a counselor, writing, art, or some other form of expression, consider how your identity has shifted. Make an effort to focus not just on the losses, but also on gains. This may be the new relationships that have formed, positive changes in perspective, new skills or growth that have come from changes in professional or physical identity, etc. Though it is easy to focus on the loss of self, rebuilding self-identity can slowly come through an awareness of changes in the self. This means bringing pieces along, acknowledging pieces that will never be the same, and establishing new pieces of the self that are built on things that came before.

(Editor's Note: www.whatsyourgrief.com has lots of great articles on many aspects of loss and grief. Check it out.)

Newly Bereaved...Burden of Grief

As I struggle with words to find answers
Reading and writing my pain
The pages grow blurred before eyes that are tired
From this crushing emotional drain.
The relief that comes from the writing
Parallels what I feel when I read-
To open myself to the torture of loss
Seems to soothe this unbearable need.
There's no pleasure in life at this moment
It's an effort to get through the day
And I labor to stay above water...
But the shoreline is so far away.
So I pick up a pen or a book about grief
And it serves as a raft for a while.
And I hope, as my tears fall on pages of pain
That I'll learn once again how to smile.
As I swim toward the shore of acceptance
I pray for the peace of belief
That heaven's your home and you're waiting for me
Then I'll finally be free of this grief.

*~ Sally Migliaccio, TCF Babylon, NY
From Tracey. An extraordinary Child*



“DON'T STEAL MY GRIEF”

Don't try to make me feel better,
By quipping your cute jokes.
Don't try to rob me of my pain,
When I need it as my cloak.

I know you probably think,
You're doing me a favor,

But what you don't understand,
Is that my sadness is my savior.

Don't try to steal my right,
To express my grief in my own way.

You see, I lost my child,
And grief is the price that I must pay.

I need to feel the hurt and pain,
As it beats inside my chest.

Don't try to steal my grief,
When it's the only feeling I have left.

*~ Faye McCord, TCF Jackson, MS
In Memory of my son, Lane McCord*

Madison "Maddie" Rae Naill 1996-2012



9th Grade



Maddie,

We miss your smile, spunk, competitiveness, sense of humor & your laugh. We are grateful your friends still write to us, post on your memorial page, and take items to the cemetery. We are also grateful for family and friends of ours who always remember that awful day in March – nothing is the same without you here.

Love, Mom & Mark, Dad & Veronica, Allie, Cale, Kayson and all your family and friends.



10th Grade



Kindergarten



5th Grade

The Compassionate Friends

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

A self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings.

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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.