



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Published Bimonthly by The Topeka TCF Chapter

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www.tcftopeka.org

November ~ December 2019
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NOVEMBER MEETING

Monday, November 25, 2019
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Grief and Gratitude - During this month of Thanksgiving it may be difficult to conceive of feeling gratitude for anything when we are grieving the loss of a beloved child, grandchild or sibling. It would seem that we have lost so much. Can there be anything left for which to be thankful? It may be a good time to think about the "gifts" our deceased loved ones may have left us or to be grateful for those people who have supported us on our grief journey. Let's take some time to remember our loved ones but also to look for the small things that bless our lives on a daily basis.

DECEMBER CANDLE LIGHTING

Monday, December 9, 2019
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Please Note DATE Change!!

Memorial Candle Lighting - Please plan to join us for this special event to honor the lives of our children, grandchildren and siblings who "left too soon". You are asked to bring a framed desktop photo of your loved one (if you do not have photos, plan to bring something that represents them to you). During the Candle Lighting we will share special music, poetry and each person will have an opportunity to light a votive candle in memory of that special life and place that candle by their photo/memento. After the Candle Lighting we will have a time for fellowship and refreshments. You are encouraged to bring your or your child's favorite holiday treat to share with the group. Votive candles are provided. PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE: This event takes the place of our regular December support group meeting.

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.

This newsletter is sponsored by:

Gary and Susan Chan in loving memory of their daughter Rachael Reneé Chan who was born on December 28th

Mark and Debi Harvey in loving memory of their son Nathan Harvey who was born on December 9th

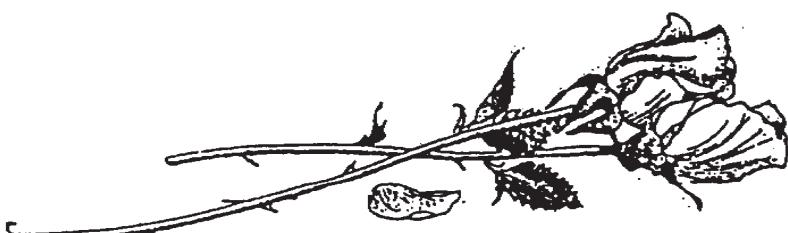


Tom and Mary Sue Kraft in loving memory of their son Tyler Thomas Kraft who died on December 9th.

Joe and Ann Steinbock in loving memory of their son Jeff Steinbock who was born on December 13th

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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We Need Not Walk Alone

From the Newsletter Editor

Dear Compassionate Friends Family,



It seems as though winter has wanted to make an early arrival in Kansas this year with our first snowfall just in time for Halloween. But hopefully we will have some moderate days yet before winter really tightens its grip. The changeover from Daylight Savings Time always seems to make for a true change in seasons with daylight disappearing before we have even had dinner. I am a solar person and usually do much better when I can have a good dose of sunlight to energize my activities.

This time of year, of course, we are being inundated by the Holiday Army which, despite our personal wishes, marches on relentlessly. It seems the school supplies were barely packed away before the Christmas ornaments were out on the store shelves. When we are grieving the death of a beloved child, grandchild or sibling this time of year can be particularly tough. Sometimes it is difficult, if not impossible, to get into any kind of "festive mood" let along handle all the attendant activities of the season like putting up a holiday tree, baking holiday cookies, and shopping for gifts. I guess the best advice I might be able to offer after nearly 28 years is to take good care of yourself, don't try to take on more than you are able to do, and plan your holiday season around what you feel is right for you and your family. Hopefully some of the articles in this newsletter may give you some ideas.

We hope many of you will be able to join us on Monday, December 8th, for our Topeka Chapter Memorial Candle Lighting program. We will begin promptly at 7:00pm in the Formation Room at Most Pure Heart of Mary Church (our regular meeting room). Our program will include music, poetry and the opportunity to light a votive candle in memory of your loved one. The Chapter will provide the votive candles, but you are asked to bring a framed, desktop photo of your loved one to place on the Memory Tables. We will also be having a slide show of photos of our children, grandchildren or siblings. If you have not previously submitted a photo to be included in the slide show, you can do so by sending a jpeg of the photo to dtucker35@cox.net<. Please include the child's name, birth/death dates and parent's name. We also encourage you to bring your child's favorite holiday treat to share with those attending following the program.

If you are not able to attend, you might want to participate in The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting that takes place on Sunday, December 8th. During this global event bereaved families light candles at 7:00pm in each time zone literally creating 24-hours of light in memory of all those children, grandchildren and siblings who "left too soon".

We hope that your holiday season will be as peaceful as possible. That you will have times of special remembrance of that special life. Please remember, your Compassionate Friends family is here for you.

The image is a promotional graphic for the Worldwide Candle Lighting event. It features a circular logo with a stylized figure and hands. The text "The Compassionate Friends" is prominently displayed, with "Supporting Family After a Child Dies" underneath. Below the logo, the text "Light a candle for all children who have died" is written. To the right of the text is a large, glowing candle. The main title "Worldwide Candle Lighting®" is written in a large, blue, serif font. Below it, the text "... that their light may always shine." is written in a smaller, italicized font. At the bottom, the text "Second Sunday in December 7 PM Around the Globe" is displayed in a white, sans-serif font.

Until next time, be gentle with yourself and let the healing happen.
Remember, We Need Not Walk Alone.

~ Susan Chan, Rachael's Mom

Hung With Care



It has been a year since my 18-month-old granddaughter, Katie, died of a birth defect, and I could still feel the grief. "Maybe putting up Christmas decorations will make you feel better," my husband said, handing me a box of ornaments. "Christmas won't be the same without Katie," I said. I opened the box. There on top of a pile of tinsel was Katie's stocking. I hadn't thought about what to do with it. I couldn't leave it off the mantle. It would be as if she's never been a part of our family. But I couldn't leave it hanging empty either. What should I do?

Christmas Day, I found the answer. "Katie was such a blessing in our lives," I announced. "I'd like to start a tradition in her memory." I passed around Katie's stocking which I'd filled with slips of paper, one for each member of the family. On each slip was an assignment to be completed in Katie's honor. Plant a tree, buy school supplies for an underprivileged kid, donate a book to the library. Now every Christmas Katie's stocking turns out to be the best gift of all.

~ Sarah Gil, Miami, Texas

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:

- ♥ Tonya Allen in loving memory of her husband Charles David Allen and her son Charles Daniel Allen
- ♥ Ron & Janice Ash in loving memory of their daughter Wendy Jean Ash Long
- ♥ Mary Harrington in loving memory of her children: Juliet Faith, John Carl and Jaime M Harrington, Clara Harrington-Jones and her three miscarried babies.
- ♥ Mark & Lori Neddermeyer in loving memory of her daughter Madison Rae Naill, Joshua Ryan Spiegel, Cory Allan Neddermeyer and Jason Lee Price
- ♥ Penny Lumpkin in loving memory of her son William Henry "Hank" Lumpkin
- ♥ Greg & Marge Thompson in loving memory of their daughter Sharis A. Thompson-Meyer

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, or November/December). Makes checks payable to "TCF".

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

Kansas Regional Coordinator:
Marty & Renda Weaver - (785) 823-7191
mweaver@cox.net

Upcoming Events/Dates to Remember

Sunday, December 8, 2019 ~ The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting at 7:00p.m. in every time zone.
See more information at www.compassionatefriends.org/events

Monday, December 9, 2019 - Topeka TCF Chapter Memorial Candle Lighting at Most Pure Heart of Mary Church, Formation Room at 7:00 p.m.

TCF Regional Conference in Honolulu, HI - March 27-28 2020. "Hope, Healing and Aloha". For information go to www.compassionatefriends.org/events

43rd National TCF Conference in Atlanta, GA - July 24-26, 2020. Theme: "Sharing Sweet Memories of Love".

Sites of Future National TCF Conferences:

2021 ~ Detroit, MI

2022 ~ Houston, TX

Millions Community Rewards Program Helps Fund Chapter Expenses - A REMINDER - Have you signed up for the Millions 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.dillons.com/community rewards and click on "Register" at the top of the page. When you enroll you will be asked to designate which charity you wish to support. **The Topeka Compassionate Friends Chapter NPO number is TC248.** Once you have done so and have a Dillons Shopper's Card, every time you make a purchase at Dillons 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.

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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 each event. This is a directive from the National TCF Office to protect all TCF members. Due to space constraints, only those families who remain current on our newsletter mailing list will be included in the We Remember section

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



Carlie Almond, daughter of Brad and Amy Almond, who died on December 3rd

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

Lori Ann Becerra, daughter of Mike and Ginny Becerra, was born on December 15th and died on December 15th

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

Ryan Broxterman, son of Kevin and Susan Broxterman, who died on December 6th

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

Rachael Reneé Chan, daughter of Gary and Susan Chan, who was born on December 28th

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

Kevin Lee Cronister, son of Richard and Judy Cronister, who died on December 10th

Angel Winter Dawn Dickinson, daughter of Curtis and Debbi Dickinson, stillborn on December 25th

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

Ryan Flanagan, son of Dennis Flanagan, who died on December 3rd

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

Tyler Thomas Craft, son of Tom and Mary Sue Craft, who died on December 9th

Phylles McCarthy, daughter of Janet Hamilton who died in December.



John Carl Harrington, son of Mary Harrington, who was born on December 15th

Nathan Harvey, son of Mark and Debi Harvey; brother of Rachel, Amanda and Caleb Harvey; grandson of Velata Tibbs, born on December 9th

Shawn Michael Hatfield, son of Hank and Cathy Harman, who was born on January 11th; died on December 5th

Abigail Hosie, daughter of Matt and Jennifer Hosie, who died on January 27th



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

Abigail Medley, daughter of Terry Medley and Jennifer Hoise, who was born on January 27th

Austin Tyler Miller, grandson of Earl and Linda Frey, stillborn on December 3rd

David D. Morris, son of Merwin (Bud) and Velma C. Morris, who was born on December 18th

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, born on January 24th

Krystil M. Pearson, daughter of Patti Cox and sister of Kendall Pressler, who was born on December 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, born on January 7th; died on December 29th

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

Gregg W. Scott, son of Garry and Jo Scott, died on December 8th

Patrick Sprowl, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sprowl, who died on December 10th

Jeffery Alan Steinbock, son of Joe and Anne Steinbock, who was born on December 13th

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



Caldyn David Wasinger, son of Austin and Krista Wasinger, who died on December 1st

(Use the form on opposite page 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. (This month's listing includes birth and death anniversary dates for December and January)

Memory

There is a place called memory
where we sometimes like to roam
Through hills of love and laughter
a place we know as home.

A place that's free from all this pain
where our hearts are light once more

A place that lives forever
where life is as it was before.

Our children live in memory
they laugh and dance and sing
Their lives are filled with magic
that only heaven can bring.
They feel no hurt or anger
their spirits are free as air

And God's love will always protect them
in times when we aren't there.

Cherish this place called memory
feel the love that lives there
Remember the joys, the warmth of the sun,
and the bond you will always share.
Smile at happy moments,
laugh at times gone by.
Let the tears you cry be happy ones,
know love will never die.

Have no fear of visiting
the joy will outweigh the pain,
Learn to treasure memory
for there is much that you will gain.
And though life is not, as it was before,
and never will be again,
Our memories are much richer
than if love had never been.

~ Victoria Tushingham, Teaneck, NJ in memory
of her son Alex Boyle (Alive Alone 1995)

Memory can tell us only what we were,
in company of those we loved;
it cannot help us find what each of us must now become.
Yet no person is really alone;
those who live no more echo still
within our thoughts and words,
and what they did has become woven into what we are.



~ Book of Jewish Prayer

(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.)

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And We Remember - If you wish your child, grandchild or sibling included in the We Remember section of this newsletter, please fill out the form below and return to: Susan Chan, 3448 S.W. Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may also email the information to chanx2@cox.net< We do not automatically list your information just because you are receiving this newsletter. We only list information for those parents requesting it. If you have previously submitted your child's information and it has appeared in the newsletter during the past year, you **do not** need to resubmit it. If you have just begun receiving this newsletter, or have never submitted this information, you will need to do so in order for it to be included. **Please type or print clearly.**

Child's Name _____ Son _____ Daughter _____ Grandchild _____ Brother _____ Sister _____

Date of Birth _____ Date of Death _____

Father _____ Mother _____

Note: Please list your address and phone number. 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

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>.

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.

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.

TCF National Magazine

We Need Not Walk Alone Available Free Online

The Compassionate Friends national magazine, *We Need Not Walk Alone*®, is available for free online. The magazine remains available in print free with any patron donation or when ordered by paid subscription through TCF's online store.

We Need Not Walk Alone provides comfort and support to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents through stories, poems, advice columns, and much more. It has been referred to as "a support group in print" and is published three times a year.

Sign-up for a free online subscription through our website, compassionatefriends.org. It can be read online or downloaded to your computer for personal use.

Sign up for Compassionate Friends E-Newsletter

The Compassionate Friends National Office publishes a monthly e-newsletter designed to keep you up-to-date on what's going on with the organization and its chapters.

The e-newsletter includes information on such things as TCF National Conferences, the Walk to Remember, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, regional conferences, and other events of importance.

All you have to do to receive The Compassionate Friends e-newsletter is sign up for it online by visiting The Compassionate Friends national website at www.compassionatefriends.org and filling out the request to sign-up at the bottom of the page.



Find us on:
facebook.®

TCF National Page (open group)

<https://www.facebook.com/TCFUSA/>

Los Amigos Compasivos/USA

<https://www.facebook.com/LACUSA/>

TCF Private Facebook Groups

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/private-facebook-groups/>

Loss of a Child

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/407123299460580/>

Sounds of the Siblings (bereaved siblings only)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/21358475781/>

Loss of a Grandchild

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/421759177998317/>

Hints for Handling the Holidays

The holidays are among the most difficult times for bereaved families grieving the death of a child. Below are some helpful suggestions that may help getting through the holidays.



- Call a family meeting and discuss your plans for the holiday season, understanding that it would be unusual for you not to feel emotionally, physically, and psychologically drained. Don't set your expectations too high or you may find yourself disappointed and overwhelmed.
- Well intended friends and family might want to include you in their plans, believing it best for you to "get away" from grieving your loss. They do not understand that you cannot escape the grief that you feel. There is no obligation to say "yes". Only participate if you truly want to.
- Try to take care of your health. It's important that you eat and hydrate properly, exercise, and get plenty of rest.
- Take time to do the things you, as a person, want to do. You may want time alone to reflect or to write your thoughts.
- Consider eliminating such things as the festive decorations, cooking, and baking that you might normally have enjoyed. People will understand if you're not in a merry or joyous mood or simply don't have the energy. You may try placing an electric candle in your window in memory of your child. Don't feel obligated to send out holiday cards.
- If it is necessary for you to buy gifts, consider ordering them online or by phone. Most who are bereaved find it draining to go out and fight through crowded stores bustling with holiday cheer.
- Many families that are in mourning may use the money they would have spent on gifts for their child to buy gifts for a child who would not be able to celebrate the holidays otherwise.
- It is not unusual for you to want to include your child during the season. You may want to do something like: Ask friends and relatives who knew your child to send you a story about your child that you may not have known; Ask friends and relatives to create an ornament or remembrance of some type that reminds them of your child so that you can place it around the house or on a holiday tree. If it is your tradition, include placing a stocking with those of other children in your house, even if you do not fill it like the others—this is a symbolic gesture in memory of your child.
- If you have other children (especially young children) who normally celebrate holidays, you may consider continuing to do so to create some sense of normalcy in the house and so they will not feel forgotten.
- Consider attending a Compassionate Friends meeting or a memorial event such as The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting. Most families find some comfort in being with others who have experienced a similar loss.
- One way to include family and friends in remembering your child is to invite them (via email or other means) to participate in the Worldwide Candle Lighting by lighting a candle from 7-8 p.m. the second Sunday in December in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling. By doing so, they join the largest bereavement organization in the world in the world's largest mass candle lighting. It is quite a powerful experience. (This year it is December 8th)
- During the Worldwide Candle Lighting, one can go online at The Compassionate Friends website (www.compassionatefriends.org) and put an entry in the Memorial Book. Many individuals from across the globe will do so, leaving messages for or about their child. Reading the hundreds of messages left may be an emotional experience for some, but it also makes one realize that there are many others out there who do understand the depth of your loss.
- Remember that the anticipation of a holiday is often worse than the actual holiday itself.
- It is a good idea to have a plan as to what you may want to do on the holiday so that you have a roadmap to help you get through the day. But remember to be flexible and if your first plan isn't working out too well, switch to plan B.
- Be kind to yourself.
- It is okay to cry. We wouldn't hurt so much if we hadn't loved so much.

Wishing you peace and beautiful memories carried forever in your heart

What Do You Remember?

By Carol Thompson

Isn't it interesting how often we speak of our failing memories associated with deep grief, but at the same time have the sharpest recollection of certain moments woven in with the loss of our children? The remembrance of what was seen, heard or smelled at that particular time is etched in our minds with crystal clarity.

I have a very vivid memory of a cold Saturday morning in late fall of 2005 following the death of my daughter, Sarah, in early September of that year. I remember that everything in my home was silent and chilled even though bright sunlight beamed from the living room windows, hitting the wooden floor in sharp, precise angles. The sun was shining only in spite that morning as I could feel no warmth from the rays.

My brother Steve and his wife Cindy called my husband and me to say they were dropping by for a little visit that morning. I remember thinking, "why would they even want to come over here? This house is full of pain and sorrow. Wouldn't it be better for them if they did not have to see us and our once happy home in such misery?" We were far too exhausted and burdened with sadness to even pretend with fake smiles and conversation that morning. But Sarah was their precious niece and she had dearly loved her aunt and uncle. Steve and Cindy willingly shared with us in our pain.

I recall that they arrived at our door with a white bakery box filled with doughnuts and pigs-in-the-blanket and refreshing orange juice. They sat with us and we talked and talked, about what I have no recall. But I do remember feeling deeply grateful for their willingness to show up, bringing thoughtful comfort. They brought no platitudes, they did not tell us what to do or what was best or give any advice. They were simply a calming presence in those most desolate of hours.

What I learned that morning I have tried to carry forward. All that is required to bring comfort to heartbroken people is a willingness to walk into the midst of grief and be present with them. We are called upon to summon the personal courage inside of us for the good of others.

Pain may come when we take out a memory and examine it and once again experience the emotions associated with the memory. Maybe there is healing in looking back from a distance. What do you remember?

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

The thought of being thankful
fills my heart with dread.
They'll all be feigning gladness,
not a word about her said.
These heavy shrouds of blackness
enveloping my soul,
pervasive, throat-catching
writhe in me, and coil.
I must, I must acknowledge,
just express her name,
so all sitting at the table,
know I'm thankful that she came.
Though she's gone from us forever
and we mourn to see her face,
not one minute of her living,
would her death ever replace.
So I stop the cheerful gathering,
though my voice quivers, quakes,
make a toast to all her living.
That small tribute's all it takes.

~Genesse Gentry
from "Stars in the Deepest Night"



About Being Strong

*Many people are convinced
that being strong and brave
means trying to think
and talk about "something else."*

*But we know
that being strong and brave
means thinking and talking
about your dead love,
until your grief begins to be bearable.*

*That is strength.
That is courage.
"being strong and brave"
helps you to heal.*

~ Sacha Wagner

Tears, Talk, Time, and Tomorrow

I never thought I could go on living when you died, but...I did.

I never thought I would survive after burying you, but...I did.

I never thought I'd get through those first days, weeks, and months, but...I did.

I never thought I'd be able to endure the first anniversary of your death. but...I did.

I never thought I'd let myself love my new grandchild, but...I did.

I never thought tomorrow would be different, but...it was.

I never thought I'd stop crying for a day, but...I have.

I never thought I'd ever sing again, but...I have.

I never thought the pain would 'soften', but...it has.

I never thought I'd care if the sun shone again, but...I do.

I never thought I'd ever entertain again, but...I have.

I never thought I'd be able to control my grief, but...I can.

I never thought I could function without medication again, but...I can.

I never thought I'd smile again, but...I do.

I never thought I'd laugh out loud again, but...I do.

I never thought I'd look forward to tomorrow, but...I do.

I never thought I'd reconcile your death, but...I have.

I never thought I'd be able to create that 'new normal', but...I have.

I never thought I'd **want** to go on living after you died, but...I do.

~Debbie Landsman

Grief Comes in One Size

Grief comes in one size: Extra Large. If we tuck it away in the bottom drawer where it never sees the light of day, it remains exactly the same.

On the other hand, if we wear it, feel it, talk about it and share it with others, it is likely that it will become faded, shrunken and worn, or will simply no longer fit.

When grief has served its purpose, we are able to recognize the many gifts we have gained.

~Dianne Arcangel

Season of Grief

The season of grief is our shutting down time. We prepare the cottage of our hearts for the winter, securing our windows to the world, stocking the cupboards with what will sustain us during the dark and cold. 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 the days.

~ From Safe Passages by Molly Fumia

Tradition, Tradition, Tradition

Even in normal times, tradition isn't what it's always cracked up to be, and sometimes "tradition" gets in the way of sanity. Often we cling to tradition because it is easier, we don't want to offend others, we don't want to be embarrassed, or we don't know what else to do. When you are a grieving parent, leaning into tradition can drive you over the edge.

I found myself in the "tradition predicament" regarding putting up a tree the first Christmas holiday after my son Chad died. I didn't want, need, or have the energy to put up a tree. Yet other family members wanted a tree and they wanted it, as it always had been, big, bright, and decorated with ornaments they had purchased or made throughout the years.

What eventually took place, with regard to a tree, changed our holiday forever and it has been a good thing for everyone involved. I don't know the exact circumstances of how our "new tradition" came into being that first year. But I do remember frustration, tears and upset people. But I do remember my daughter saying to me it was her Christmas too, and she needed a tree. It was her older brother, the one she remembered getting up with every Christmas morning when she was little, that was dead and she had to have something so she could deal with the emptiness. So she came up with a plan. She and her father would go find a tree and she would take care of the decorations all by herself.

That was ten Christmases ago and this year, once again, my husband and daughter will leave early in the morning a week before Christmas and hunt for a tree, just the two of them. When they come home, I will prepare breakfast while they get the tree in the holder and move the furniture. We will sit down together and enjoy our meal ad then my husband and I will leave for several hours.

During that time we will do whatever we feel like doing. We have gone to the cemetery, gone for walks, gone to the bookstore, visited friends, etc. When we return my daughter will have decorated our Christmas tree and the whole house!

Every year the tree has been different limited only to my daughter's imagination and the budget we keep her on. She didn't use our regular ornaments for awhile and when she did, she told me ahead of time and said how meaningful it was for her to be the one who put Chad's ornaments back on the tree.

We have continued this "new tradition" to this day. Now, I find angel ornaments to put on the tree to honor our missing angel, and enjoy with my husband, sons, and family my daughter's traditional tribute to her brother.

This "changing tradition" has been so healing. Our family has had the brightness and beauty that a lighted tree can provide, and I have been able to save my energy for other things I wanted to do.

During the next few weeks, I hope you will make the activities of the season as stress-free as you can. I hope that you will feel free to experiment with new traditions, knowing there is no "right way" to go through this season only "your way." I hope that you will remember Christmas is only one day and that the time leading up to that "one day" will probably be more difficult than the actual day. And finally, I hope for peace in your hearts if not today than tomorrow or the tomorrow after, or the tomorrow after that. Take care.

~ Sue Anderson, Emporia, KS

Christmas Eve



*Silent
Night, holy
Night ~~
"It's about time,"
he says quietly.
Deliberately, wordlessly,
they gather the materials
carefully put away last year,
the matches, candle, candle jar
to fend off the harsh winter wind.
Tis the season to be jolly ~~
Slowly they drive toward the town's edge,
past homes with bright, blinking bulbs.
Cars of faraway relatives fill the drives.
Happy, laughing families, children home from school
pass on the way to midnight Mass.*

*It's the most wonderful time of the year ~~
At last, town lights left far behind, they sit mute,
each wrapped in private cocoons of memories of
Christmas past, excited whispers from their room,
silly giggles, fervent good-night kisses, anticipation of morning.*

*On a cold winter's night that was so deep ~~
Through the gate, down the drive, engine killed,
frozen grass crunching underfoot, hand-in-hand
they walk up the hill to the familiar moonlit stone. With
practiced hands they brush it clean, then prepare their votive Noel.*

*The world in solemn stillness lay ~~
Lumps in throat, arm-in-arm, candles lit, they stand and weep,
But not so bitter as in years past. The pain's as deep but not so long,
as once again they dream of things that should have been but never were.
The stars in the sky look down where he lay ~~
"Let's go," he says. She nods assent. They leave, though turn back once to see
the lonely flame of their lost child gleaming peacefully through the dark.
He whispers softly, his visit done - "Merry Christmas and good-night, my child.
~~ Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace ~~*

By Richard A. Dew, MD, TCF Knoxville, TN

Snow



Every snowflake that falls is unique and has its own individual design. There are beautiful patterns in each snowflake and even the tiniest of flakes have their own markings. These patterns change again and again...even after the flake touches the ground. Each snowflake is a cause for wonder; each flake is one of a kind. No two are exactly alike. Like the snowflake, our beautiful children were unique and special; some we only dreamed about and some danced upon the earth. They filled our lives with wonder and transformed our world. We held them too briefly, but we will hold them in our hearts forever. We shall remember them always. At this time of remembering, it may help to reflect upon how our lives have been enriched by the love we have given and the love we have received from our children. Our children leave treasures behind that time can never take away.

~Denise Falzon, TCF/Lake Area, MI



Please Ask

Someone asked me about you today. It has been a so long since anyone has done that. It felt so good to talk about you, to share my memories of you, to simply say your name out loud.

She asked me if I minded talking about what happened to you - or would it be too painful to speak of it.

I told her I think of it every day and speaking about it helps me to release the tormenting thoughts whirling around in my head.

She said she never realized the pain would last this long. She apologized for not asking sooner.

I told her "Thanks for asking."

I didn't know if it was curiosity or concern that made her ask, but told her, "Please do it again sometime -- soon."

~Barbara Taylor Hudson

A FORGIVING THANKSGIVING

By Jim Hobbs, BP/USA of Northern Texas

Thanksgiving unlike Christmas, there was no pressure of giving that just right gift! Thanksgiving Day brought family gatherings and good food. Late on those afternoons, we would return home, full from over-eating, and satisfied that our family relationships were intact. It was also a day that reminded us of everything for which we are thankful.

We are supposed to be thankful, for our families, our comfortable life, etc. The death of a child changes our perceptions, however. When the family now gathers around the Thanksgiving table, I now see a missing plate that no one else sees. When our nieces and nephews are laughing or crying, I hear a voice that no one else hears. When a family member recounts a story about something his or her child did last week, I wish for a story to tell. (Of course, when I say no one else, I exclude my wife and daughter. I am sure that they see, hear and wish what I do, although probably at different times.)

We still have much to be thankful for, we bereaved parents, and we should remember that. But now Thanksgiving Day has an additional observance, doesn't it? It is a day for forgiveness also. We forgive others who cannot acknowledge the missing child, for whatever reason.

If family and friends cannot understand us, then let's exhibit tolerance, forgiveness and understanding. On a day which we offer thanks, we can climb another step on our ladder to healing.

I hope you have a forgiving Thanksgiving.



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter, c/o Midland Hospice Care., Inc.
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A self-help organization offering friendship and
understanding to bereaved parents and siblings.

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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.