



# The Compassionate Friends

**Topeka Chapter**  
**Supporting Family After a Child Dies**

*Published Bimonthly by The Topeka TCF Chapter*

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Topeka TCF Chapter Website:  
[www.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.org)

November ~ December 2020  
Editor: Susan Chan  
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Topeka, KS 66614-3629

This newsletter is sponsored by:

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

*Gary & Susan Chan in loving memory of their daughter  
Rachael René Chan who was born on December 28<sup>th</sup>*

*Joseph & Anne Steinbock in loving memory of their son  
Jeff Steinbock who was born on December 13<sup>th</sup>*

Dear Compassionate Friends Family: **PLEASE READ**

1. Because of the effects of the continuing pandemic, the Topeka TCF Chapter Steering Committee has decided not to try and hold in-person meetings until January 2021. This means our first in-person meeting is tentatively scheduled for Monday, January 25, 2021. Resuming in-person meetings will be dependent on Topeka/Shawnee County restrictions for group gatherings at that time. Please check the Topeka TCF Chapter website at [www.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.org) under "Meetings" in the menu bar for the most up-to-date info.

2. Because of the ban on large group gatherings, we will not be able to hold our annual December Candle Lighting Memorial Program which had been scheduled for Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>. We encourage all families to participate in The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting (WWCL) to be held at 7 p.m. on Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>. In its 23<sup>rd</sup> year, the WWCL is the largest mass candle lighting in the world with bereaved families across the globe each lighting their own candle at 7 p.m. in their own time zone. It is a powerful and meaningful experience to participate in this event, so we hope you will light your candle for one hour in loving memory of your child, grandchild or sibling. More info is available on the National TCF website ([www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org))

3. Because it is no longer financially feasible to publish a bimonthly Chapter newsletter, the Topeka Chapter will begin producing a quarterly newsletter in 2021. The four newsletters per year will continue to include the We Remember section, meeting announcements, as well as articles and poems on various grief-related topics.. Please remember that we charge no dues or fees to participate in the Chapter or receive this newsletter. You can help us be able to afford to send this newsletter and host our memorial events by sending in a Love Gift or Newsletter Sponsorship in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling.

4. Included with this newsletter is a Newsletter Renewal Form to let us know if you wish to continue to receive the newsletter. Please fill it out and send to me **By January 1, 2021**. If we do not hear from you by then, your name will be dropped from the mailing list database. We want everyone who wants the newsletter to continue to receive it, but we need you to return the form to let us know. The form also offers you the opportunity to have your loved one in the We Remember section, or sponsor a newsletter in their memory.

Please take good care of yourselves, stay safe, and know that while we cannot be physically together, we are together in spirit and in the unending love our children left for us. We wish each of you a peaceful holiday season.

*~ Susan Chan, Rachael's Mom  
Newsletter Editor*

*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**

# Love Gifts

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

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

♥ *Tom & Mary Sue Kraft in loving memory of their son Tyler who died on December 9<sup>th</sup>* ♥

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".



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

Light a candle for all  
children who have died

**Worldwide  
Candle  
Lighting®**

... that their light  
may always shine.

**Sunday, December 13, 2020  
7 PM Around the Globe**



.....  
**Dillions Community Rewards Program Helps Fund  
 Chapter Expenses - A REMINDER -** Have you signed  
 up for the Dillions Community Rewards Program yet? If  
 not, we encourage you to do so as it really helps to bring  
 income into our Chapter to help meet expenses. The more  
 participants we have, the more income we can generate.  
 I encourage you to go to [www.dillions.com/community](http://www.dillions.com/community)  
 rewards and click on "Register" at the top of the page. When  
 you enroll you will be asked to designate which charity your  
 wish to support. **The Topeka Compassionate Friends  
 Chapter NPO number is TC248.** Once you have done so  
 and have a 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.  
 .....

**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.

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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. Alcalá, daughter of Pricilla Alcalá, who was born on January 13<sup>th</sup> and died on January 14<sup>th</sup>

Carlie Almond, daughter of Brad and Amy Almond, who died on December 3<sup>rd</sup>



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

Lori Ann Becerra, daughter of Mike and Ginny Becerra, born on December 15<sup>th</sup> and died on December 15<sup>th</sup>

Jon Bieker, brother of Andrea Smith; son of Don and Sheryl Bieker who died on January 9<sup>th</sup>

Ryan Broxterman, son of Kevin and Susan Broxterman, who died on December 6<sup>th</sup>



Aaron M. Campbell, son of Marilyn Campbell, who died on January 29<sup>th</sup>

Rachael René Chan, daughter of Gary and Susan Chan, who was born on December 28<sup>th</sup>

Tyler Craft, son of Tom Craft, who died on December 9<sup>th</sup>

Heidi Carren, daughter of Julie Carren, who was born on January 22<sup>nd</sup>

Rebecca Lynne Smith Crismas, daughter of BobbyJean Smith, who died on January 7<sup>th</sup>

Kevin Lee Cronister, son of Richard and Judy Cronister, who died on December 10<sup>th</sup>

Angel Winter Dawn Dickinson, daughter of Curtis and Debbi Dickinson, stillborn on December 25<sup>th</sup>

Claire Elise Fisher, daughter of Debra Fisher, who died on January 2<sup>nd</sup>



Ryan Flanagan, son of Dennis Flanagan, who died on December 3<sup>rd</sup>

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

Spenser Thomas Good, son of Margaret Kramar, who was born on January 30<sup>th</sup>

Justin Grabhorn, son of Philip and Barbara Grabhorn, who died on January 27<sup>th</sup>

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

John Carl Harrington, son of Mary Harrington, who was born on December 15<sup>th</sup>



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

Shawn Michael Hatfield, son of Hank and Cathy Harman, born on January 11<sup>th</sup>; died on December 5<sup>th</sup>

Marshall Hille, son of Paula Ackerman, who was born on January 6<sup>th</sup>



Abigail Hosie, daughter of Matt and Jennifer Hosie, who died on January 27<sup>th</sup>

Nicholas Kuipers, son of Candi Kuipers; brother of Tayla and Jaythan, who died on December 23<sup>rd</sup>

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

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

Austin Tyler Miller, grandson of Earl and Linda Frey, stillborn on December 3<sup>rd</sup>

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



Eric Alan Palmberg, son of Jim and Doris Palmberg, who died on January 1<sup>st</sup>

Greg Lee Paulson, son-in-law of Frank and Brenda Bissey and brother-in-law of Brad Bissey, born on January 24<sup>th</sup>

Krystil M. Pearson, daughter of Patti Cox and sister of Kendall Pressler, who was born on December 24<sup>th</sup>

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

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

Jamie Lynn Russell, daughter of John and Elaine Chandler, who was born on January 7<sup>th</sup>; died on December 29<sup>th</sup>

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

Gregg W. Scott, son of Garry and Jo Scott, died on December 8<sup>th</sup>

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

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

Keith Strathman, son of Don and Julie Strathman, brother of Becky Strathman, died on January 8<sup>th</sup>



Brandon Toler, son of Marty Tyson, who died on January 18<sup>th</sup>

Mary Jane Varner, daughter of Will and Kay Hasty, died on January 3<sup>rd</sup>

Caldyn David Wasinger, son of Austin and Krista Wasinger, who died on December 1<sup>st</sup>

(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 & January)

## THANKSGIVING

November: Cool days, chilly nights, autumn leaves changing colors, football games, apple cider and pumpkin pie. Ah. November! . . . Is it November already? Oh, no! Make it go away! Just let me sleep; wake me up in January. November is here, the start of the holiday season.

This is the time of year most bereaved parents dread. This is the time of year when thoughts turn to spending time with family and friends and celebrating. Holiday decorations start popping up everywhere you turn and holiday music begins to play at the malls and on the radio. People are busy cleaning their home, and are all abuzz with getting ready for. . . Oh, no! Thanksgiving!

Everyone is asking what are you doing for Thanksgiving?" For the bereaved parent, especially the newly bereaved, this question can become daunting and almost horrifying. What am I doing for Thanksgiving?

Thanksgiving - giving thanks. But I don't feel very thankful.

How can I be thankful, when my child lives no more?  
How can I be thankful, when he/she will never again walk through my front door?

How can I be thankful, when my eyes are filled with tears?

How can I be thankful, when he/she won't be here throughout the years?

How can I be thankful, when my heart will never mend?

How can I be thankful, when I've lost my dearest friend?

How can I be thankful, when his/her hugs and kisses have now ceased?

How can I be thankful, and sit down to a feast?

How can I be thankful, when my heart is filled with sorrow?

How can I be thankful, when I can hardly make it to tomorrow?

What do you answer? What will you do this year? For some, the choice is to keep the same tradition they have in the past. Others choose to remain home and ignore the holiday completely.

There are parents who go on vacation or go out to Thanksgiving dinner at a restaurant. Newly bereaved parents may question "what am I supposed to do?" There is no standard right or wrong answer. Whatever feels the most comforting is the right answer for you. Family members or friends might disagree with your decision and say you are wrong. This often happens if you decide to break tradition, want to be alone, or decide not to celebrate at all. People can become very insistent, and tell you that Thanksgiving is about being with others. I have found that my choice has varied

over the years from choosing to be alone and not acknowledge the holiday at all; to going to friends' and family members' homes; to just having dinner at home and when asked, I say, "I know that you may not like my answer, but still. I need to do what is best for me."

However you decide to spend this Thanksgiving, please remember that for however short or long your precious, awesome, amazing, wonderful child was with you here on earth, you are blessed to be their parent. You have been given a most spectacular gift—a one of a kind, unique, extraordinary child to carry in your heart, thoughts, and soul for all eternity. And this is a reason to be forever thankful.

From my home and heart to yours may you have a blessed Thanksgiving and may it be filled with peace.

~ Bev Rosen Katowitz  
TCF, Charlotte, NC

### Some Suggestions for Thanksgiving

Throughout our lives, expectations of things to come are based upon past experiences. If, in the past, you had set a glorious table and were the perfect host or hostess, it is very possible that friends and family will expect more of the same this year. They may not be aware that you are not looking toward the holidays with a fun and games attitude. They probably do not know that in anticipation of Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukkah, you may feel anxiety and fear. They are probably thinking this year will be different and some sadness will accompany it, but I don't think they are aware of your anguish, especially if it's been "awhile."



I would like to suggest to you that in fairness to yourself you need to be honest about your feelings and, just as important, you need to communicate these feelings to those around you. I really don't think it is necessary for you to believe that because you set a tradition and always made the turkey, fried the latkes, and always had the family over, you need to feel obligated to do it again this year. Perhaps you would like to tell everyone:

- \* Someone else will have to do dinner this year.
- \* You want to make dinner in your home, but you need lots of help because you don't have the energy to do it.
- \* You want to go to the parties, but you are afraid you may break down and cry and you want them to know in advance this is really okay.
- \* You want to tell them it's okay to talk about your child. Not to, makes it very uncomfortable.

The list goes on, but the point is that to pretend everything is "just fine" is a lie, and that's not fair to you or to the people who you love.

~ Diane Zarnkoff, TCF, Simi Valley, CA

# How Grief Changes Us Forever & For Now

By Karyn Arnold, *Grief in Common*  
[www.griefincommon.com](http://www.griefincommon.com)

Grief is change. It changes our life, our routine, our plan and right along with it, grief changes us. Change is hard under the best of circumstances (new job, a wedding, a baby), but the changes we don't ask for can be intolerable. Some of these changes will be forever and long lasting, but some will only be part of the acute and early stages of grieving (whatever that timeline looks like for you). And some of these changes aren't necessarily all bad.

Losing a loved one is just about the worst thing that can happen to any of us. But the feeling of losing ourselves can make a tough time even harder to cope. Because if we don't feel like ourselves, what strengths and skills can we possibly draw upon?

This subject has come up in our forums quite a bit lately. Following the griever's stories, as they talk about who they lost, when it happened, and how it happened, the same words punctuate each sad story... "I will never be the same again".

This is one of the terrible surprises in loss. The change, too much change, that's all happening at once. And complicating matters is the search, hope or expectation that things could ever be the same again.

While it's a totally natural and very understandable part of the process, it's also the most futile task of grieving: pining for things to go back to the way they were, or to expect ourselves to be the same person after we've lost someone we love.

A better approach may be to try and understand (and possibly even embrace at some point) all the ways grief changes us...for now and forever:

## HOW GRIEF CHANGES US FOR NOW:

- changes in sleep, eating, and overall energy
- personality changes like being more irritable, less patient, or no longer having the tolerance for other people's "small" problems
- forgetfulness, trouble concentrating and focusing
- becoming more isolated, either by choice or circumstances
- feeling like an outcast
- relationship changes with family and friends as they react to the "new" us
- feeling more anxious, afraid or fearful for the future as we wonder what's next or where we go from here, or waiting for the other shoe to drop

So if we say these changes are "for now", when exactly can a griever expect to change back? Here's where it gets tricky. As stated before, no one should expect to go back to who they were before their loved one died. These losses shape, change, and mold us like few other things in life can. But those fundamental parts of who we are, the focus we once had, the organization, the patience...those things tend to come back with patience, self-care, and time.

Those in the early stages of grief will find this hard to believe but I've seen it happen over and over and over. The veil that lifts, that one day where a griever wakes up and feels maybe just a little bit "better".

This isn't to say that they aren't still grieving. You can be crying every day and still be doing better, as strange as that may seem. The hope is to again see things like focus, and ability to remember birthdays, and where you parked the car, to return.

## HOW GRIEF CHANGES US FOREVER:

- most griever's will forever feel that a part of them is missing – every day will have a void where they wish their loved one could be
- many griever's will carry at least some part of the trauma that surrounds even "expected" loss and feel a little broken or wounded in some way
- for some, a fundamental change in how they perceive the fairness of life

Yet most griever's I speak to wouldn't have it any other way. No one wants to experience loss, of course. Anyone who has lost a loved one would trade their new life for the old one- the life that had their loved one in it. But perhaps that's why some of the forever changes are the ones we hold on to. As a way to honor and remember the love and life we shared.

While it's hard to talk about any good that could come out of loss, and most griever's would never want any part of their loss to be presented with the old "silver lining" cliché, there are other changes a griever can experience.

And unlike those listed above, they aren't all bad:

- opportunity to feel closer to others, especially those friends or family who have provided especially good support
- new friendships that may develop because of loss – a coworker or neighbor who unexpectedly reached out, or connections made in a support group
- no longer sweating the small stuff, having a deeper understanding of what really matters
- becoming more compassionate and understanding to those around us
- the way loss can so totally break us so that we have no choice but to rebuild from the bottom up and "fix" some things along the way
- the loss of a loved one can show us a strength, resilience, and independence we may not have known we have. It can create opportunities for us to surprise ourselves with the things we can do, and the things we can endure

I've had many griever's talk about their life before loss. And many have shared similar stories about a friend who may have suffered a loss before them. They'll say now, "I had no idea what she was going through" and they'll talk about how badly they feel as they look back and see that they too had offered the well-intentioned but empty condolences. One thing they also always say is, "but that will never happen again". Because for better or worse, they will never again be someone who doesn't understand or doesn't know how to help.

While we'd never choose to be an ambassador to grief, we can choose (in time) to embrace the roles we've been given. So that for now, and forever, we can be someone who can help another walk this long and painful path. And perhaps we'll find the chance to grow and heal right along with them...

Whether talking about changes for now or forever, loss becomes a very important part of who we are. We just never want it to be the ONLY thing we are.

## *Enjoying the Holidays in a Different Way ... Without My Brother*

I was shocked and stunned when I received the news that my brother Scott had died in a car accident. I thought my brother was going to be in my life forever. We grew up together, experienced a shared history, and knew things about each other that no one else will ever know. I always assumed we'd raise kids together, grow old together, and share many more holidays together.

So how did I not only survive the holidays, but eventually learn how to enjoy them again without my brother? It was a rocky, painful journey, with pain that hit like waves, sometimes when I least expected it. The holidays brought back so many memories; every song, smell, and tradition was bittersweet.

Initially, joy made me feel guilty. I worried that if I let go of the pain, I would be letting go of my brother's memory. It felt disloyal to experience positive feelings when I missed my brother so much. Well-meaning friends told me that my brother would want me to have a happy holiday, and while I knew this on an intellectual level, my heart wasn't ready to accept it yet.

There were some relatives who tried to recreate a typical Christmas, with family traditions, as if my brother had never died. Not acknowledging my brother was the worst thing anyone could do. The pretense was that everything needed to return back to normal. However, things in my life were forever changed and I needed to figure out how to create a "new holiday normal." For me, this meant finding a way to honor the memory of my brother while at the same time reinvesting in my new life.

Here are some of the things that have helped me during the holidays. I hope they will help you as well. However, everybody who is grieving must decide what works best for them:

### ***Holiday Survival Tips:***

- Plan in advance how you are going to spend the holidays, and be able to say no if you need to.
- Take a break from holiday traditions that are too painful—create new traditions.
- Connect with others.
- Share stories of past holidays and spend time reflecting back. Keep your loved one's memory alive for those who were too young to remember the person.
- Include memories of your loved one in your celebration (e.g., light a candle, display pictures, make a toast in honor of the person).

My brother played many roles during the holidays. I can fill some of these roles but there are many more that will never be filled, and I fill those with all the memories that he left behind. Although we are poorer for having lost our loved ones, we are richer for having known them. I hope you will be able to celebrate the happiness, laughter, and memories that your brother brought into your life by enjoying this holiday in a new and different way!

~ Heidi Horsley  
www.opentohope.com

## **As the Holidays Approach**

When the holidays are fast approaching, we who are bereaved always have mixed emotions about having a nice holiday when our child or loved one is no longer with us. We wonder if we will ever be as happy and if we can ever again celebrate the holidays or any meaningful family occasion, especially the first birthday, first thanksgiving, or first Christmas since our loss. We try to look ahead to how we are going to feel when the time arrives, but it is usually not as hard as we had anticipated. Still, the occasion may not be as enjoyable as we'd like it to be or as we remember it from the past.

I would like to offer a few ideas for what we can do to make our holidays a little better. Consider buying gifts for less fortunate children, adopting a child/family at Christmas time, or inviting a lonely person to share your holiday meal. Make your child's favorite foods and discuss your loved one as you share the meal. Some people like to volunteer to serve holiday dinners for the homeless. Some bereaved parents want to visit familiar places their child loved to go, while others want to travel where their child had never been.

Several of our Compassionate Friends members put a small Christmas tree at the cemetery and decorate the graves with Christmas flowers and/or a grave blanket. Making a grave blanket is very fulfilling; we did that for 10 years after our daughter Teresa died. Attending a candle light program is a wonderful way to honor your child or love one.

These suggestions are things we feel we can still do for our child, but they are not reserved for bereaved parents only. All of them can be done for any member of a family or a friend who has died. After someone dies we must keep going and doing things that lift us up. We can't always try to please any people who feel we should act in a certain manner.

~ Jackie Wesley  
TCF, East Central Indiana  
and Miami-Whitewater Chapters



## Christmas Past, Christmas Present

As the holidays approach, most bereaved parents feel anxiety, apprehension and some little bit of fear. The past is gone along with our beautiful children. We live in the now, the new reality, of holidays without our children.

This will be my fifth Christmas without my son, Todd. It will be my fourth Christmas without his children. And yet, I find that on some small level, I am looking forward to the holiday. I imagine the Christmases of the past when Todd was growing up and after he started his family. I also imagine Christmases of the future where Todd's children share in the traditions that their Dad so dearly loved. But that won't happen. I have come to accept that wives and children go on with their lives. I have come to accept that my son's children will not be a part of their father's family, his heritage or his legacy. That is the reality.

But I have also found that wonderful people can help make the holiday special. I do very little at Christmas. Some shopping....most of it on the Internet, a little in local stores. I send cash to my son's children. I don't know who or what they are these days, but cash is far better than something that has no significance to them. I do get pleasure in few things. I buy small toiletries for nursing home residents. I buy a gift for my dad's sister who is now 88. I buy for my mom's sister, my cousin, her husband and her daughter. I buy for my best friend. That's enough buying. My husband and I decide whether we want something special for the two of us and, if so, we buy it. Otherwise, we skip the gift giving. We won't be decorating this year, but we haven't decorated for five years.

We have changed our traditions....traditions that Todd loved so much. It is simply too painful to do this alone. We spend time with my family and a few friends. We marvel at the wonder that is Christmas for children. John and my aunt cook and my cousin, her daughter and I clean up in the big country kitchen of my cousin's home. Gifts are exchanged. There is no Christmas tree, but the three acres in front of the house are decorated with all kinds of lights and lighted figures. Santa and his reindeer are in the front garden, close to the road. Angels, reindeer and more gather in the west pasture and front yard. The house is framed in lights. It's quite lovely. For me that is enough.

Christmas will never be what it once was, but I no longer dread the holidays as I once did. Some of my Compassionate Friends have returned to old traditions with their surviving children and maybe even with grandchildren. Each of us learns to deal with Christmas in our own way. Each year I am a different person with a new perspective on the holidays. Next year I may decide to skip it all or immerse myself in the season. My truth is ever changing.

Find what is right for you. Pressures from others mean nothing. You choose whether a celebration is in order. You choose how to celebrate. You choose the old traditions or you choose some new ones.....maybe you choose nothing and decide to go with the flow of the moment. As bereaved

parents, you will always remember your child at Christmas, but as the years add up and grief starts to release its grip on your soul, you may find that you can keep your child in your heart and have room for the spirit of Christmas as well.

The holidays do get better. Life does get better. The days will gradually become softer and sweeter. The nights will ease into gentleness. Friendships will again have luster, and relationships will become deeper and more meaningful. That is the future for each of us. The present is driven by where we are in our grief. So for this and every Christmas Holiday season, be who you are and mark the day as you choose.

May we all have serenity throughout the Holiday season and in the years ahead.

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

### *Only December*

*Feelings heavy,  
tears and tears.  
Will the darkness last?  
Or is it - only December?  
Hadn't past months  
brought peace and hope?  
Where is the strength of October-  
and November?  
Lights, carols, ornaments on trees,  
cards from friends,  
happy times in seasons past.  
We remember.  
We remember.  
Will January bring light at last?  
Will we be stronger then,  
for making it through  
this December?  
When people ask  
how I'm doing,  
I say, "Well, you know,  
it's December..."*



*from Stars in the Deepest Night - after the death of a child  
By Genesee Bourdeau Gentry*

# **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 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.