



# The Compassionate Friends

## Topeka Chapter

### Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Published Bimonthly by The Topeka TCF Chapter

NEWSLETTER - Volume 3, Issue No. 6  
The Compassionate Friends, Inc.  
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National TCF Website:  
[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

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

November ~ December 2018  
Editor: Susan Chan  
3448 S.W. Mission Ave.  
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#### NOVEMBER MEETING

Monday, November 26, 2018  
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church  
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS  
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

**"I Am Thankful For..."** - Often times in the midst of the pain of our grief it is difficult to feel thankful for anything. But we need to step back a bit and focus on the things for which we can be thankful - the loving support of friends and family, the good health of our remaining family members, being part of a group that allows us to share our most deeply held inner thoughts about our child, grandchild or sibling to name a few. But perhaps one of the things we can be most thankful for is the fact that we had that child, grandchild or sibling in our lives; be thankful for the joy and memories they brought to us; thankful that we can move to a place where we remember not only that they died, but that THEY LIVED. Let's talk about "thankfulness" and how embracing it can impact our grief journey.

#### DECEMBER CANDLELIGHTING

Monday, December 10, 2018  
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church  
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS  
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Please Note DATE Change!!

**Holiday 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:**

Brad and Amy Almond in loving memory of their daughter, Carlie Almond who died on December 31<sup>st</sup>

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

Markand Debi Harvey in loving memory of their son Nathan Harvey who was born on December 9<sup>th</sup>

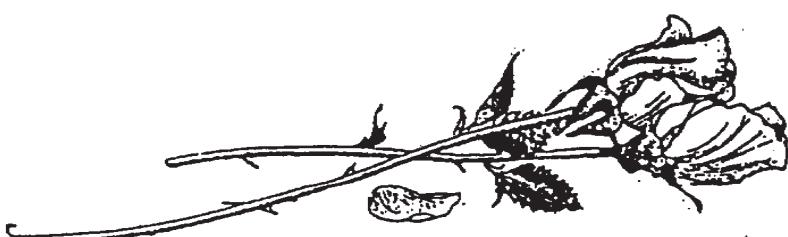


Duane and Mary Eberhardt in loving memory of their son Jerry Eberhardt who was born on September 1<sup>st</sup> and died on October 25<sup>th</sup>

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

*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,

**Thank Yous from the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Memorial Picnic and Dove Release** - We would like to thank all those who attended our special event on September 29th. We shared a wonderful community potluck meal, heard an inspirational program of music by special guest Alan Pedersen, and remembered our love for our children, grandchildren and siblings who have died as the beautiful flock of doves circled overhead following the release. We would like to thank all those who helped put together this event for the Chapter. Special thanks to Damon and Collene Tucker for sponsoring the shelter house in memory of their daughter Brittany; and Duane and Mary Eberhardt for providing the beautiful Dove Cake in memory of their son Gerry. We would also like to thank Dillions in Fairlawn Plaza for the donation of the delicious fried and baked chicken for our potluck, and Lindy Spring for their donation of ice. Special thanks to my husband Gary for his help and support not only for this event, but throughout the year with the TCF Chapter. Thanks also to Chris and Trista Phillipi, Jennifer Meyer and Debi Harvey for their help with this memorial event. Special thanks to the LOST Foundation for providing the broken heart pins and wildflower seed plantable hearts that were given as momentos of our 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Dove Release/Picnic.



Several TCF members took the opportunity to sponsor a butterfly bearing their child's name on Alan Pedersen's Angels Across the USA Tour van.



**A Reminder of the Topeka Chapter Memorial Candle Lighting in December** - We wanted to remind everyone that our local Topeka TCF Chapter Holiday Memorial Candle Lighting will take place on Monday, December 10<sup>th</sup> beginning promptly at 7 p.m. in the Formation Room at Most Pure Heart of Mary Church. Keep in mind that this is not our usual meeting date, but is earlier in December and that this event also *takes the place* of our regular December support group meeting. Plan to bring a desktop framed photo of your child for the Memory Table. Votive Candles will be provided. You are also encouraged to bring your child's favorite holiday treat to share with the group.

 **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 9, 2018  
7 PM Around the Globe



Also, please be aware that The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting will take place on Sunday, December 9<sup>th</sup>. This event is the world's largest mass candle lighting, beginning at 7 p.m. in New Zealand. As the time becomes 7 p.m. in each time zones across the globe, candles are lit in memory of all those children gone too soon. It is a powerful experience to be a part of this event, and you are encouraged to light your candle in your home at 7:00 p.m. that night. You can also visit the Memorial Book on the National TCF website ([www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)) where you will see messages coming in from all over the world, and in many languages. There you will be offered the opportunity to write a message to or about your child.

Wishing you and your family peace for the upcoming holiday season. Until next time, be gentle with yourself and let the healing happen. Remember, You Need Not Walk Alone

~ Susan Chan, Rachael's Mom

# 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:

*Michael Morgenstern and Carla Elsea in loving memory of Riley James Morgenstern*

*Eric Nail in loving memory of his daughter Madison "Maddie" Rae Naill*

*The Potwin Presbyterian Church in support of the work of the Topeka TCF Chapter with bereaved families*

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".

**TCF National Office e-mail:**  
[nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org](mailto:nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org)

**Compassionate Friends web address:**  
[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

**Topeka TCF Chapter web and e-mail addresses:**  
[www.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.org)   [tcftopeka@gmail.com](mailto:tcftopeka@gmail.com)

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

## An Update on the Chapter Newsletter

As I mentioned in several newsletters, we have established an electronic list of those who prefer to receive the newsletter via e-mail. If you have not requested to be on the e-newsletter list, you will continue to be mailed a hard copy of the newsletter. Remember, you can also always access the current and past issues of our newsletter on our Chapter website at [www.tcftopeka.org](http://www.tcftopeka.org) under "Newsletters". Those families whose loved one died in 2018 are automatically kept on the mailing list for one full year unless they request in writing to have their name removed. You are all asked to send any address changes (hard copy or e-mail) to [tcftopeka@gmail.com](mailto:tcftopeka@gmail.com)<

### Upcoming Events/Dates to Remember

**Sunday, December 9, 2018** - The Compassionate Friends World Wide Candle Lighting begins at 7:00 p.m. in each time zone. Plan to sign in on the Memorial Page that night at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

**Monday, December 10, 2018** - Topeka TCF Chapter December Memorial Candle Lighting. 7 p.m. Most Pure Heart of Mary Church - Formation Room.

### Sites of Future National TCF Conferences:

2019 ~ Philadelphia, PA - July 19-21, 2019

2020 ~ Atlanta, GA                  2021 ~ Detroit, MI

2022 ~ Houston, TX

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**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.millions.com/community](http://www.millions.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.

**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.

**Pro = Print**  
DIGITAL PRINT AND COPY SERVICES

838 MASSACHUSETTS ST                  1033 SW GAGE BLVD, STE 200  
LAWRENCE, KS 66044                  TOPEKA, KS 66604  
785.842.3610                  785.272.0070

# 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 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>

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

Heidi Crarren, daughter of Julie Crarren, 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>

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

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

John Carl Harrington, son of Mary Harrington, 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, who was 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>

Abigail Hosie, daughter of Matt and Jennifer Hosie, who died 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, 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 23rd

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

Jamie Lynn Russell, daughter of John and Elaine Chandler, 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, who 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 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, who died on January 3<sup>rd</sup>

(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)

## THANKS

**Thanks to the friend** who “did” know the right words to say:  
“There is a group in town that might help you.”

**Thanks to the parent** who somehow found the courage to call that phone number and find out about “that group”.

**Thanks to the mother** who went to that first meeting knowing it would really hurt to talk --- and talked.

**Thanks to the dad** who said after the first meeting that he could never come back --- but did.

**Thanks to the parent** who, at the fifth meeting, put her arms around a “new one” and said: “They really can help.”

**Thanks to the mom** who, for the first time, was again able to bake cookies -- for her “Compassionate Friends.”

**Thanks to the homemaker** who could never talk in front of people -- who became a facilitator.

**Thanks to the six-foot father** who cried in front of other men -- and didn't say he was sorry.

Because of you, we will be able to help someone we don't even know -- next month.

~ John DeBoer, TCF  
Greater Omaha, NE

## Times of Remembrance

I have found in the years that have passed that I am most vulnerable at times of remembrance.

The word “anniversary” no longer holds a promise of celebration. Instead, holidays and birthdays, family gatherings and otherwise joyous occasions contain an undertow of sorrow.

If I get caught up in it, I quickly get pulled under and wind up gasping for breath. It is ironic that the presence of an absence can be so emotionally devastating.

~ Bill Jenkins

## 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, shrunk 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

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(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 \_\_\_\_\_

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**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 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto: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 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/>

### 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](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) and filling out the request to sign-up at the bottom of the page.

### 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](http://compassionatefriends.org). It can be read online or downloaded to your computer for personal use.

## *For That, I am Thankful....*

*By the late Darcie D. Sims  
A friend in grief and to The Compassionate Friends*

It doesn't seem to get any better, but it doesn't get any worse either.

For that, I am thankful.

There are no more pictures to be taken, but there are memories to be cherished.

For that, I am thankful.

There is a missing chair at the table, but the circle of family gathers close.

For that, I am thankful.

The turkey is smaller, but there is still stuffing.

For that, I am thankful.

The pain is still there, but lasts only moments.

For that, I am thankful.

The calendar still turns, the holidays still appear and they still cost too much.

And I am still here.

For that, I am thankful.

The room is still empty, the soul still aches, but the heart remembers.

For that, I am thankful.

The guests still come, the dishes pile up, but the dishwasher works.

For that, I am thankful.

The name is still missing, the words still unspoken, but the silence is shared.

For that, I am thankful.

The snow still falls, the sled still waits and the spirit still wants to.

For that, I am thankful.

The stillness remains, but the sadness is smaller.

For that, I am thankful.

The moment is gone, but the love is forever.

For that, I am blessed.

For that, I am grateful.

Love was once (and still is) a part of my being...

For that, I am living.

May your holidays be filled with reasons to be thankful.

Having loved and having been loved is perhaps the most wondrous reason of all.



# Thanks For The Offer, But I Don't Know What I Need!

By Eleanor Haley

We've all heard it before, from the well-meaning, tilted-head friends at the funeral and in the weeks to follow: "Let me know what you need." It is, of course, a kind and often well-intentioned offer, but there is one fatal flaw: it assumes you know what you need. To be fair, on the surface, this isn't an unreasonable expectation. If a person hasn't experienced the depths of grief or some other pit of despair, it can be hard to imagine that sometimes you are just so overwhelmed you can't figure out what you need.

The reality is, no one can meet the needs that may be most pressing in your mind or give you the things you want the most. This is why you may find yourself internally screaming the response, "Yes, I need you to bring my loved one back!" or "Yes, I need you to take away this pain!" every time someone asks you if there is anything you need or anything they can do. Thinking about any other needs can feel impossible and overwhelming. You may find that you feel like you're sinking, but it isn't clear what help would help you come back up for air.

We want to talk about this basic but complex challenge: how do you figure out what you need when you have no idea what you need?

First, remember your needs might not all look directly like grief needs. When you lose someone, your life is shattered. One person disappears and it can feel like everything else falls out of place. We call those other things "secondary losses". Getting support from others is not always about that primary loss, often it is finding support for one of those secondary losses. In some cases, it may be practical, logistical support you need.

When you're feeling completely overwhelmed, it can be helpful to consider that you have needs in all the different areas of loss you are going through. In others, it may be emotional support – someone to let you cry, remember and listen without judgment. Finally, it may be just support related to your general well-being — things and people who will help boost your mood and reconnect with yourself. As with many things in grief, it is helpful to take it step by step.

Each day we encourage you to increase your awareness around your greatest "pain points". These don't have to be grief specific. Anything in your life that is a stressor may be part of your grief or making it more difficult to cope with your grief, so it is important to consider any needs that can ease your overall suffering in a given day. To do this, you will need to become aware of the moments in your day that cause the most pain, bring up complex emotions, are the most physically taxing, the most mentally taxing, and create the most stress. Write them down during the day, either on your phone or on a sheet of paper. If it is helpful, you may want to look at your needs in three categories:

**Practical/logistical needs:** Whether it is childcare, grocery shopping, filing taxes, mowing the lawn, etc, there are often countless concrete needs we have. Knowing what these are can make it easier to ask people in your support system for the help or take them up an offer.

**Grief needs:** Though all needs may be connected to grief, some are certainly more explicitly so. You may realize your need is for people who you can share memories with, or someone to be comfortable with your tears. You may need someone who wants to help you memorialize your loved one or join you in advocacy work. Whatever the case, you may realize you are feeling very alone in honoring and remembering and it is time to reach out to others.

**Well-being needs:** These needs fall somewhere outside of just the grief experience, and are things that simply help with our overall well-being. This can be anything from needing that push to get to the gym to needing someone to be social with (or at the very least, grab a coffee). It can be anything from painting to writing to photography that you know would boost your mood and well-being, but that you keep avoiding.

These are just a few small examples. We realize your needs may look very different. The important thing is to slowly begin increasing your daily self-awareness about what is difficult. At moments that you feel stressed or overwhelmed, make a note of what is creating that experience. At the end of a day, rather than just saying "this day is terrible," instead outline what has made it so challenging. As you do this over time, you may see trends emerging, areas big and small where some small help from others could make your days just a little bit earlier.

Others are unable to provide support if you can't tell them what you need, so just knowing your needs is the first step to receiving support.

Whether your support system can or will meet these needs is impossible to predict, but identifying the need and asking for help is the first step. If you're having difficulty navigating your support system, asking for help, feeling failed by your support system, or giving feedback, you can check out the recording of our webinar on Navigating Your Support System After a Loss. It is full of ideas for understanding how your support system can best help you meet your needs (once you know what they are, of course!), and how to handle it when they don't.

Source: <http://www.whatsyourgrief.com>

(Editor's Note: The What's Your Grief website has a wide array of articles on many aspects of grief so you might want to check it out to see if there might be something helpful for you there. Use the website address listed under Source above.)

# Another Christmas

By Margaret Kramar  
Topeka, KS TCF

On most ordinary days I can walk past the glass case in the entrance hall of Chippewa Elementary School containing Spenser's picture. He smiles from the golden frame, frozen at nine years old, watching everything that goes on in the school. But when I enter the gymnasium for the school Christmas assembly, I'm enveloped in Spenser's presence. The classes file onto the risers to sing Christmas carols, the teachers serenade the students, and Santa Claus arrives. He wouldn't miss it for the world.

In my son Lane's third grade classroom, the children's desks faced a table with wrapped toys and a Christmas tree. Chocolate chip cookies, cheeses, crackers and fruit punch were lined up on the window sill on either side of me.

Lane sat staring at me from his desk, his eyes fixed on me with serious concentration. I had no idea what he was looking at, or why his face bore such a stern expression. In the midst of a Christmas party, Lane would usually be running all over and putting his hands on other children. A girl unwrapped her gift, a toy with connecting magnetic rods. Those little rods would end up all over the floor, disconnected, scattered, lost.

I stopped in Tristan's room before the busses were called. We almost made it out the door before a set of grandparents stepped forward with a huge bag filled with individual treat bags. More candy, more wrappers, more little plastic Santa Claus heads that only make a sound ten times before they are broken.

Lane and Tristan ran around on the sidewalk before getting into the car, despite a chilly wind. Once in the car, they turned on the inside car lights, played with the locks, and would not get their seat belts on. More bags rustled, more candy came out. Wrappers would be on the floor mats, wedged into the seats, and stashed in little pieces in the side door compartments.

At home in the driveway, Tristan wouldn't go into the house because he was fixated on his pinewood derby kit. He broke the seal so the pieces would be scattered and lost, rendering the car worthless.

I screamed at him to get into the house. He fell on the car floor yelling, "I won't come into the house." I grabbed for an arm, but he was heavy, and laid out on the car floor. As I unlocked the front door I castigated myself for being a horrible mother, who should have taken the time to handle the scene differently.

The bright overhead dining room light revealed that the house was a mess. There were papers piled on the dining room table, and book bags flung on the couch, crammed with treat bags and little plastic toys that would all have to be sorted. I didn't have the energy to carry the laundry basket to the basement. I would have to clean up all the clutter before Christmas. I was so tired.

In their room, junk was all over the floor. Before I put them to bed, I made a half-hearted effort to sort through the debris, barely making a noticeable difference. Once in bed, illuminated by a soft night-light, Lane and Tristan were quiet, tucked under their quilts. I draped my arms over the guardrail of the bunk bed, and leaned my head against my arms.

"I'm sorry boys. I haven't been very patient today. I guess I'm sad about Spenser and it can get overwhelming."

Lane sprang up from his pillows, his head and shoulders outlined in profile against the dim night-light.

"But Spenser was beside you all day today," he said.

"What are you talking about?" I peered more deeply into the darkness, into his wide round eyes.

"In the room, today in the room. When I looked at you, he was right there next to you."

In my snapshot memory of Lane, I pictured that concentrated expression he drilled into me as I leaned up against the heat register.

"If you saw Spenser, why didn't you tell me this before?" He looked down and fidgeted with his bedclothes, turning the fabric softly in his hands. Lane was, after all, only about nine years old. "I was afraid you would say I was making it up."

"Okay, well then, as for Spenser, what did he look like?"

"Dull."

"Dull?" I watched him more closely, but he seemed to be telling the truth. "What are you calling dull? This was not a word he would ordinarily use."

"Like you could see through him. Like he was not really there. Like blurry, if you hold your finger up, and make your eyes go back and forth like this." Lane held his index finger straight up before his face, and made quick, darting motions with his eyes.

"Lane, are you lying to me about this? Are you making this all up?"

"No." He hesitated, as though I might punish him. Still he exhibited the rapt expression, the willingness to talk, even though I did not know where the dialogue was leading.

"What was Spenser saying? What was he doing?"

"He was whispering to you."

"What was he saying?"

"I couldn't hear him. His shoulders rose in an exasperated shrug.

Tristan was breathing slowly in the lower bunk. They both smelled sweet and clean after their baths.

"Then why weren't you afraid?" Wouldn't seeing Spenser have scared you?"

"It wasn't the first time I saw him."

When did you see him before?"

"He wanted to go out and play. To play games with us. It was November."

"Just this last November?" I asked. Through the hazy darkness, I saw Lane smile, the smile of a pleasant memory.

"So where was he?"

"Coming down the stairs to go outside. Then he vanished."

"Was he dull and blurry when you saw him that time?"

"Yeah."

"Lane, are you making all this up? Are you telling me this just because you think I want to hear it?"

"No."

I hugged him. It was late. His arms folded around my neck, and he gave me a wet kiss on my cheek. Of course he would say he was not making it up. As to whether he was, there was no earthly way of knowing. But was it Wordsworth, who besides talking about trailing clouds of glory, believed that young children were more in tune with the other world because they are so recently departed from it?

(Editor's Note: This is a chapter from Margaret's newly published book *Searching for Spenser*, a heartfelt and openly honest memoir of her son Spenser Thomas Good who died at age ten from T-cell lymphoblastic lymphoma. The book is published by Anam Cara Press, LLC of Lawrence, KS)

## 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 and music.
- 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.
- During the Worldwide Candle Lighting, one can go online at The Compassionate Friends website ([www.compassionatefriends.org](http://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 road map to help you 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.*



# The Broken-Hearted . . .

We are the broken-hearted parents,  
Who struggle every day,  
Weighted down with sorrow,  
For our children who have passed away.

Weary travelers joining many others,  
Who are also on this road,  
None of us ever imagined,  
We'd carry this heavy load.

The road is long and filled with anguish,  
Flowing with all of our tears,  
And the pieces of the dreams we'd envisioned,  
With our children through the years.

In a club no one wants to join,  
Screaming silently all the way,  
We can't believe how our lives have changed,  
And the price we have to pay.

Sometimes we wish we could cross over,  
That we too could die,  
The pain is almost unbearable,  
And all we do is cry.

We listen for our children's voices,  
And feel so terribly alone,  
It's unimaginable living without them,  
We just want our children home.

If only it were possible,  
There's nothing we wouldn't do,  
To be together once again,  
Would be a dream come true.

*The physical space that you used to occupy  
Remains empty and tangible  
At every holiday  
Vacation  
Special occasions  
Or quiet family time  
Your absence is felt  
Like a solid entity  
I will honor  
That space as  
A constant reminder  
Of the love that we  
Continue to share*

~ Tanya Lord, Grief Toolbox

By Claire Ann Stevenson in memory of her son Graham

We know they're happy in Heaven,  
Waiting for us to come,  
The only consolation,  
Until our time here is done.

We may not have the answers,  
Or understand the plan,  
But we are very thankful,  
To have held their precious hands.

We're separated physically,  
In that way we're apart,  
But in all other ways still connected,  
Forever within our hearts.

We cherish every moment,  
And are grateful through our tears,  
To have known the love of our children,  
And for the time that they were here.

To have been their parents is a blessing,  
And though our hearts are torn,  
We hope to celebrate their memory,  
And not forever mourn.

The love we had was priceless,  
In it we rejoice,  
And if we had the chance again,  
We would make no other choice.



# **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.