



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Published Bimonthly by The Topeka TCF Chapter

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www.compassionatefriends.org
Topeka TCF Chapter Website:
www.tcftopeka.org

September ~ October 2020
Editor: Susan Chan
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Topeka, KS 66614-3629

This newsletter is sponsored by:

*Duane & Mary Eberhardt in loving memory of their son Jerry
Eberhardt who was born on September 1st and died on October 25th*

*Joseph & Anne Steinbock in loving memory of their son
Jeff Steinbock who died on October 11th*

*Don & Julie Strathman in loving memory of their son
Keith Strathman who was born on September 10th*



Dear Compassionate Friends Family,

As I have been putting together this newsletter, I am once again reminded of how much we miss seeing everyone. How we miss having the opportunity to talk and share what has been happening on our grief journeys. How we miss the opportunity to be in a room with people who truly understand what we are feeling, worrying about and searching for. The connectedness we feel when we have the opportunity to be together cannot be duplicated through a newsletter, a website or even a phone call. And we miss the hugs of reassurance. But the reality of our situation right now is that we cannot gather for a support group meeting, nor a special memorial event like our Fall picnic. The pandemic continues to hold our country hostage in many ways.

We do hope this newsletter finds you and your family well and managing to successfully deal with the isolation, uncertainty and challenges in our Covid-19 world. Because our meeting place is still not allowing groups to meet, and the fact that it would be very difficult to maintain effective social distancing, we cannot say when we will be able to have an in-person meetings again. We certainly hope it will be soon. Please check our Chapter website (tcftopeka.org) in the menu bar under "Meetings" to see the current status of upcoming events/meetings.

We encourage you to seek resources through the national TCF website (www.compassionatefriends.org) where you can find Online Communities and Facebook groups you can join that will give you the opportunity to connect virtually with others who have experienced the death of a child, grandchild or sibling. There are also resources on our Topeka Chapter website at www.tcftopeka.org

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.

*~ 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:

♥ Duane & Mary Eberhardt in loving memory of their son Jerry Eberhardt ♥

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".

Grief lasts
LONGER THAN sympathy,



which is one of the
tragedies of the grieving.



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

~ Elizabeth McCracken

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

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

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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

Olivia Lynn Anderson, daughter of Suzannah Anderson; sister of Eli Anderson who was born on October 11th



Jordan Robert Barranco, son of Juan and Elizabeth Barranco, who was born on October 30th

Brian Lynn Blecha, son of Lynn and Alice Blecha, died October 15th

Derek G. Bodeman, son of Becky S. Bodeman, born on October 29th

Monty Brentlinger, son of Don and Carolyn Brentlinger, who died on October 21st

Skylar Callahan, son of Gena Callahan, brother of Branden, Alex, Chris and Jacob, who was born on November 4th and died on October 30th

Seth Austin Carney, son of Clay and Michelle Carney, died October 13th

Kale Cauthon, son of Denise Cauthon; brother of Josh and Cam, who died on October 15th

Kristi Diaz, daughter of Julie Diaz, born November 7th

Gerald (Jerry) Eberhardt, son of Duane and Mary Eberhardt, who died October 25th

Richard Brian Gilbert, son of Rick and Carla Gilbert, born October 20th

Justin Grabhorn, son of Philip and Barbara Grabhorn, who was born on October 10th



Tasman McKay Grout, daughter of Pam Grout, who was born on October 8th and died on October 15th

Mitchell Hermreck, son of Dennis and Ann Hermreck; brother of Shelby and Raegan, who was born on October 14th

Jeffrey Hoium, son of Mel and Helen Hoium, who died on November 12th

Abigail Hosie, daughter of Matt and Jennifer Hosie, who was born on October 30th

Steve Isley, son of Web and Jeanette Isley, who died November 6th

Vernon A. Jamison, Sr., son of Eugene A. and Mayverdis Jamison who died October 1st

Karen Kay Karnes, daughter of Wilson and Maxine Karnes, who died on November 19th

Gabriel Kidd, son of Julie Kidd, who died on October 1st

Morgan Kottman, daughter of Christine Kottman, who died on November 21st



Tabith Krystofosky, sister of Darrell "Bo" Cremer, Jr., who died on November 27th

Ben Lake, grandson of Patty Lake, who died on November 29th

Christen (Chris) Edward Locke, son of Alfonzo E. Locke Jr. and Sheila D. Locke, who was born on November 29th

Phylles McCarthy, daughter of Janet Hamilton, who was born in November.



Abigail Medley, daughter of Terry Medley and Jennifer Hoise, who was born on October 30th

Jessica Rae Meyer, daughter of James Robert Meyer and Jennifer Jean Meyer, and sister of Rebecca Meyer, born October 27th; died November 16th

Kyle Neighigh, son of Rosemary Robledo, who died on November 19th

Janet Pace, daughter of Barbara Hale, sister of Carla Gilbert and Sara Wallo, and mother of Shauna Andersen, born October 9th

Robin Lynn Paulson, daughter of Frank and Brenda Bissey and sister of Brad Bissey, born October 8th

Kiley Ramey, daughter of Gary and Linda Ramey, died November 24th

Adam J. Reams, son of Gene and Sandy Reams; brother of Nick Reams, born on November 24th

Sarah N. Rice, daughter of Gary and Peggy Rice, who died on October 6th

Brian Keith Robinson, son of Vernon and Pauline Robinson, who was born October 3rd; died October 13th

Luke Rojas, son of Wilma W. Rojas, born October 22nd; died October 29th



Abbey Rubottom, daughter of Darcey Evans, who was born on October 23rd

Patrick Sprowl, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sprowl, born October 18th

Jeffery Alan Steinbock, son of Joe and Anne Steinbock, who died on October 11th

Louis Walter and Teresa Caolina Stroble-Bernal, son and daughter of Raja Strobe and Beatriz Bernal, stillborn on November 1st

Caldyn David Wasinger, son of Austin and Krista Wasinger, who was born on October 28th

Jason R. VanDam, son of Will and Kay Hasty, died November 5th

Donald (Donnie) Warren, son of Nancy McCune, who was born on November 26th

Eric Edward Gordon Wiebler, son of David and Laura Wiebler, who was born November 15th

Richard Wilson, son of Kathrine Susan Whittington, who died on November 10th



(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 October & November)

Some Things You Need to Know

1. Grief Waits. If you put it away and try to ignore it, it will simply wait until you have no choice but to experience it.
2. We grieve as intensely as we love.
3. There is no “normal” in grieving.
4. You will never be the same person you were before your loss.
5. You must make a conscious decision to “heal”.
6. There is no set-in-concrete stages or timelines in grief.
7. It is typical to feel almost numb for the first few months. When that “fog” lifts, it can be very frightening. Think of it as a wave and ride it out.
8. Losing a child is “out of order. Talking to and being with othr bereaved parents can be extremely helpful.
9. Other people will not necessarily understand your grief unless you share it with them.
10. It is okay to talk about your child as long as you want.
11. It is okay to keep their belongings as long as you want.
12. It is okay to include them in celebrations and special occasions for as long as you want.
13. Finding “closure” is not a requirement for healing. For most parents, it is not even an option.
14. Even in death . . . love remains.

~ Sandy Goodman

Epilogue

*I want to leave you something.
Something much better than words or
sounds. Look for me in the people
I've known and loved or helped
in some special way.*

*Let me live in your heart as well as
your mind. You can love me most
by letting your love reach out to our
loved ones. By embracing them
and living in their love.*

*Love does not die, people do.
So, when all that's left of me is love,
give me away as best you can.*

~ Unknown



from:

<http://www.acor.org/ped-onc/timetogo/writings.html>

*Take for yourself the grace
of one quiet healing-step at a time.
Trying to rush the work of grief,
will slow down your renewal.*

*You only need to remember
that you will recover some day.
You only need to remember
that we all have our own pace,
and we all move in our own measure.
Healing takes time.*

~ Sascha Wagner, TCF Poet Emeritus



The Six Honorings

Guidelines for Going On After the Loss of a Loved One

By Dr. Ken Druck, Delmar, CA
May 10, 2020

The loss of our loved ones changes us forever. “You don’t think you’ll live past it,” is how author Barbara Kingsolver so eloquently explains it, adding, “and you don’t, really. The person you were is gone.”

So how do we go on after losing someone we love? How do we keep from letting our despair become the center of our lives? Combining everything I’ve learned from the loss of my daughter, Jenna, and from the families I’ve had the privilege of working with, I created *The Six Honorings*. Each of the honorings is a guidepost for surviving the death of a loved one, designed to help us honor them, heal our broken hearts, fight our way back into the stream of our own lives, and summon the strength to go on.

My heart goes out to the 76,000 plus Americans who have died from COVID-19 in the past 60 days and their families, friends, neighbors, coworkers and communities. To them and all those who will join them in the hours, days, months and years to come, I dedicate this roadmap for healing.

The First Honoring: Your Survival

The first way in which we honor those we’ve lost is to survive their deaths. We do this by acknowledging that grieving is as natural and normal as bleeding when we’re cut, and giving ourselves permission to feel turned completely upside down and inside out. Allowing feelings like sorrow, fear, anger, and guilt to surface, rather than hiding, denying, or repressing them, allows us to begin addressing them in a constructive manner. And, it clears the air for beginning to move forward. Showing ourselves understanding, kindness, patience, forgiveness, and self-compassion, rather than criticism, judgment, and blame; surrounding ourselves with loving, supportive people; and keeping the individuals and situations that drain us at a distance, we slowly begin to summon the courage, clarity, strength, and faith to go on. One breath at a time, broken heart and all, we survive.

The Second Honoring: Do Something Good in Their Names

To honor your loved ones in this way, you may choose to do something as simple and elegant as lighting a candle or planting a tree, or as elaborate as championing a cause. Families who lose loved ones to alcoholism, addiction, depression, or cancer often speak out and do whatever they can to prevent other families from having to suffer these kinds of losses. Doing good in the name of the people you’ve lost and turning a tragedy into an opportunity to make the world a better, safer place, is a good and noble thing.

The Third Honoring: Cultivate a Spiritual Relationship with Your Loved Ones

As we struggle to come to terms with the fact that we aren’t going to see or hear our loved ones again — at least, not in the way we always did — what are we supposed to do? We can try to make ourselves stop loving them so we don’t have to feel the pain of missing them, or do the next best thing and find ways to express the love that never dies. Continuing to express our love for them — and feeling their love for us — without 100 percent certainty about the true nature of death is an act of faith.

In my own case, I’ve chosen to cultivate a spiritual relationship with my deceased daughter, Jenna, by continually telling her how much I love and miss her . . . and allowing myself to feel her love. Without 100 percent certainty that there is a spiritual realm in which this is possible, I bet my faith and do it anyway. I also do so with my mom, who passed several years ago. Randomly asking, “How’s my favorite mother today?” the way I used to do every

morning on the phone, is my way of telling my mom that I love and miss her. Love lives on as we learn to give and receive it in a spiritual way.

The Fourth Honoring: Embody an Element of Their Spirit

Whether it’s our loved ones’ love, kindness, sense of humor, enthusiasm, loyalty, or even irreverence, choose a beautiful, eternal aspect of their spirit and cultivate it in yourself. “I’m going to learn how to be a kinder person,” we may say to ourselves, remembering the light our loved one brought into people’s lives by being as kind as they were. We aspire to become the better version of ourselves by embodying that special quality.

The Fifth Honoring: Write New Chapters of Life

This honoring is perhaps the most challenging: to the best of our ability, we summon newfound strength and courage to go on with our lives, writing new chapters and making new memories. Determined to live out the rest of our lives as expressions of our love, rather than our despair, we resist entering the “Torture Chamber of Guilt,” where we obsess over what could have or should have been. Rather than beating ourselves up or blaming ourselves for what we did or did not do, we search for ways to make peace with what happened; celebrate the blessing of having had our loved ones in our lives; and acknowledge the ways in which we were good sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, or friends. We give ourselves the permission and encouragement to write new and wonderful chapters of life. By living out our own lives and making the most of each day (as they would have wished), we honor them.

The Sixth Honoring: Taking the High Road

Too many families are torn apart in the rawness of grief. Overcome with sorrow and broken-heartedness, we sometimes say and do things that hurt our other family members. When this began to happen after 9/11, I created a program called “Take the High Road.” Family members agreed to treat one another with patience, kindness, compassion, respect, humility, understanding and forgiveness as an expression of their love for those who’d died. Rather than allowing anger, despair, guilt, frustration, jealousy, blame, and helplessness to shatter and destroy their families, they took some deep breaths, stepped back, cooled down, restrained themselves and chose instead to take the high road.

Given the fact that none of us — or our families — are perfect, and each of us grieves in our own way, there will always be the temptation to deal with our differences by taking the low road (i.e. impatience, resentment, criticism, condemnation and blame). Shows of respect, forgiveness, understanding, compassion, and humility in times of great sorrow are proof that taking the high road is always the smartest and best path forward. It’s also how our loved one would want each of us and the family to go on. Please feel free to add to this list of honorings as you discover other guideposts that promote love, healing, and integrity on your grief journey.

(About the author: Dr. Ken Druck has been a bestselling author, speaker, organizational coach/consultant and inspirational leader for the last thirty-five years. After the tragic death of his eldest daughter, Jenna, in 1996, Ken founded the Jenna Druck Center to honor her life and spirit. To date, the Center has directly helped more than 7,500 bereaved families through its Families Helping Families program and trained more than 15,000 young women through the Spirit of Leadership program. Ken has been called upon repeatedly to help families, communities and our nation after tragedies including 9/11, the shootings at Columbine High School, Hurricane Katrina, and the Space Shuttle Disaster. Over the years, he has appeared regularly as a guest on Anderson Cooper, Oprah and other popular talk shows. He is frequently featured in many of the nation’s leading newspapers.)

Ending It: Sometimes You Want To—But Don't

By Bob Baugher, Des Moines, WA

When it first happened, you didn't know how you would survive the moment. When, somehow, you got through that terrible day, you woke up the next day and found yourself still alive. Days went by, some of them in a blur. People moved around you, words came out of their mouths—most of their utterances lost to the moment. Gestures of comfort were offered in an attempt to ease your pain. Looks on faces exposed the truth that they, like you, felt helpless to really do or say anything that could change what had happened. Your brain, is in a whirl of confusion.

Then, it was a week. How could a week have gone by? One hundred sixty-eight hours without your loved one. How could you have lived those first seven days? But you did. As the days moved on, into weeks and months, you may have found yourself with thoughts that, at the time seemed to make sense in a world gone senseless. Your thoughts may have formed into a plan. A plan that seemed the only way to cope with the unremitting pain. A plan to end your life. It was your secret. No one knew. No one suspected. Is it your secret now? Why would you ever consider such a thing? One answer is that it was your mind's way of planning an escape from an inescapable prison of horror. With one act of life termination you could perhaps solve two problems: you could end the pain—and more importantly—you could be with your loved one. Perhaps as you read this, the plan is still there—sitting somewhere in your brain. You may have thought that this secret plan was so secret that no one would know—no one would suspect that you would ever consider taking your own life, especially after the devastation that the ending of one precious life has caused your family and friends.

Your plan may have been vague at first. For some people it may have gone like this: "I'm not going to do anything to actively end my life, but if I'm driving down the street and a semi-truck is heading towards me, I'm just going to let it happen." Or perhaps you've given up wearing your seatbelt, or you're taking more chances when driving, such as speeding or some other form of negligent driving. ("Go ahead, police officer, stop me and give me a tongue-lashing about how I shouldn't be driving like that. And, when you're done with your little speech, I will let you have it with explicit details of the way my loved one died. I can't wait to see the look on your face when I'm done.") Maybe your risk-taking involves alcohol or pill-taking, or both. Or there may be some other risks you are taking while convincing yourself with the thought, "If it's meant to be, so be it."

Perhaps you have considered a specific method that will end your life. You may have a gun or a rifle. Or pills or a rope, a knife, razor blades, or a hose for carbon monoxide. Or you may have considered jumping to end your life.

If any of this is true for you, I am going to say four vital things to you:

1. Millions upon millions of people in grief have had these exact thoughts. As you read these words, there are people out there right now who are considering ending their life because the death of their loved one has convinced them that their life is already over. If you put your life-ending thoughts in context with millions of other people, then such thoughts can only be considered somewhat normal. Normal? Yes. Our brain can come up with countless ideas, plans, feelings, and thoughts. However, as soon as these thoughts become behaviors that move into actions, then the line has been crossed. It's one thing to think it. It's quite another to behave it.

2. Think of all the pain you and your family and friends have been in since the day your loved one died. Then, think of the additional pain your death would cause for each person. I know, it doesn't seem fair to hold up this picture to you just at a time when you are in so much pain. But, I do it because it is absolutely true.

3. If your life-ending thoughts have persisted to the point where you have taken steps or feel you will take steps toward ending your life, tell someone. Get the words out of your mouth. Who is the best person to tell at this point? It should be someone you trust. Someone who is going to take you seriously. Someone who will make sure you get help. It could be a friend, a relative, a counselor, a person on the crisis line, a religious leader, your doctor, or the Suicide Hotline at 1(800) 273-8255.

4. Finally, here is one of the most important facts on human emotion:

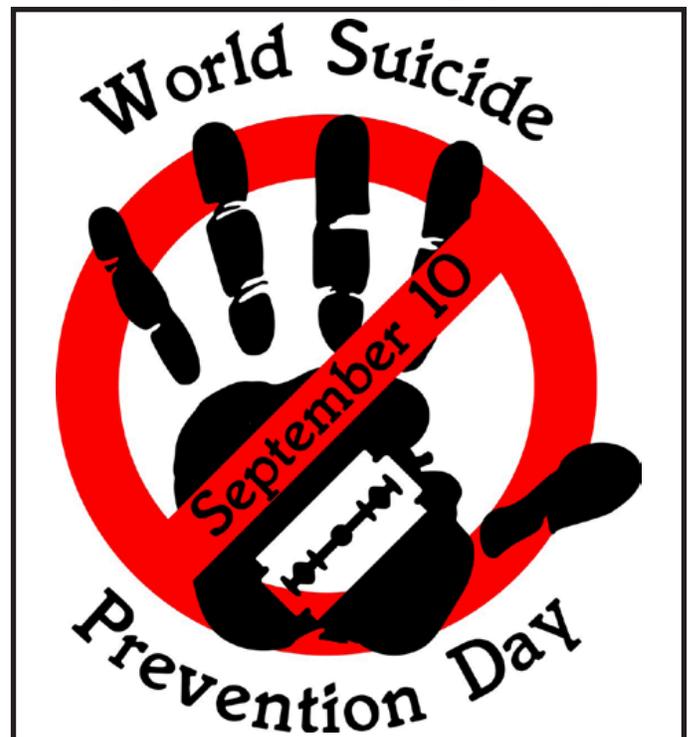
As terrible as you feel right now, you will not feel this way forever. You won't.

Don't believe this? Ask any parent who has experienced the death of a child. Ask any man or woman who is living each day without their beloved partner. Ask any child or adult whose brother or sister or parent has left this earth. They will likely say that, while they are never back to the way they felt prior to the death, they found that, with time, they began to feel better. And they want you to know that you will, too.

You will.

Now, put down this newsletter and do something that will save your life—even if you don't feel like it. It's what your loved one would want for you, isn't it?

(About the author: Dr. Bob Baugher is a psychologist and certified death educator who teaches at Highline Community College in Des Moines, Washington. He is a 24-year member of the advisory committee of the South King County Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. Bob has given more than 800 workshops, is a trainer for the Washington State Youth Suicide Prevention Program, and is co-author of several articles and books on grief and loss.)



The End of Summer, The Autumn of Our Healing, and The Harvest of The Heart

September summer has always been a time of nostalgia for me. The days are noticeably shorter with daytime temperatures beginning to cool down and the slightest chilliness of beautiful star-filled evenings requiring a sweatshirt or sweater. Early morning streets are filled with children going back to school. Most everyone is finally back to work, relaxed and sharing the adventures and experiences of summer vacations. And then one day, there is a wind from the west. And just by its feel you know these are the last days of summer and that fall will soon gently ease itself into our Rocky Mountains. Before we know it, the canyons are blazing with the fire of fall color working its way down into our valley.

It is a beautiful season and perhaps my favorite time of the year. We can sit for hours in Sugar House Park, watching the birds gather and head south for the winter and enjoy the trees now fully aflame with oranges, browns and reds so beautiful it can make our hearts sing with joy. And yet, with all the beauty that surrounds us, we as bereaved parents sometimes struggle to let it all in. For as summer wanes, and fall begins, our thoughts naturally turn to grammar school homework, high school parties and dances, college football games, shopping for new clothes, and the specter of holidays ahead without those of our children who have too soon been taken from us.

It is difficult to write about this just today. I just went to a wedding of my closest friends' son, where Jacob's cousins, nieces and nephews, brothers and sisters and past friends all came together for three days of reunion and celebrations filled with stories of the past. On Sunday, over thirty people were at my place sharing enchiladas and childhood memories of those years we were all together. And of course, the occasional, "I wish Jake were here to see this." For me, not an hour went by that I did not think of him or see his face in his young nephew who bears his name. And yet ... and yet the season, the color, the beautiful days and evenings, the weddings, the parties and football games, and the eminent holidays now fill me with thanksgiving that Jake was part of my life for sixteen years. No small thing that. I consider myself lucky for that much time, for I know so many friends who had much less time with their beloved children. So this year, I choose to find the good and the beautiful of the season, and let the holidays come. For, it is in remembering his face and the goodness of his life and the beauty of the season, I find sweet healing for my grieving soul.

Very soon now, autumn and the harvest season will be upon us, and the bounty of summer's growth will begin to fill our barns and sheds. And this will be an opportunity for us, even though we grieve, to discover the rich harvest of memories with those of our lost children. In their season, they provided us with a bounty of their own. If we are able to accept it, this can be a fall season where we reflect on their abundance of smiles, laughter, humor, growth, learning, and sharing of love. God how we loved them, and how they loved us. Even through all the difficulties, the energetic exchanges of opinions and ideas, the heartaches, the tears, anxiety and disappointments, we cannot avoid the fact that we loved them with a measure beyond our comprehension. And in spite of the difficult times, their sweet and sometimes very short lives provided us with an abundant harvest of experiences that are able, if we let them, to bless us with healing memories to last for as long as we live.

So as we say goodbye to summer, as best we can, let us welcome the fall season and the coming holidays and all the beauty these seasons can and will bring to us. I fully realize that for those of us most recently bereaved, this will be difficult, and in our

sorrow and grief, seem perhaps almost impossible. Please let me reach out my hand and my heart to you in the quiet of your reading this right now.

If you can, imagine I am looking right into your eyes with all the compassion I can muster. And in that moment, I will share your tears, your agony of loss, and your grief, for I am truly one of you. I am after all, and have been a Compassionate Friend for over eleven years now. And as we share this moment, please hear the warmest feelings of my heart as I say to you this wretched agony of grief, this painful time of suffering, and this nightmare and horror you now feel will pass. At some point I promise you will begin to experience the light at the end of this painful tunnel of grief. I promise you will have summers and falls and holidays to come filled with healing memories of your children. I promise as Halloween comes, and you are finally able to turn your porch light on to welcome trick-or-treaters, you will see your own children in the bright and joyful faces at your front door, and smile and be glad they once blessed your life. I also promise the time will come when you will move past Halloween and look forward to Thanksgiving and the December holidays.

As I wrote earlier, I realize this may be too soon for some of you. All I ask is that you be willing to let these most difficult times pass -- as I have promised they will, and allow your hearts to soften and show you their rich places where you still love your children. For it is in those painful, tender places you will begin to find the abundance of love given to you by your children which will bring healing. And when that happens, you will look forward to Thanksgiving day with its abundantly filled table, and realize an equally abundant harvest of the heart.

Whenever we are able to accept it and embrace it, the grace of healing will come to all of us. Of course our lives will never be the same. We will always have the sadness of their absence in our lives and experience those frequent bittersweet times when we simply miss them. But the dark pain and suffering of their passing will itself pass - this I can promise you. For in these past eleven years I have looked into every dark and secret corner of grief, and have spent with you, all those endless weeks and months of intense pain and tears.

I have shared those endless days of self recrimination and regret and anger. And in all this I have finally found the autumn of my healing, and have feasted in the abundant harvest of love. Yes indeed, I promise you the light of joyful memory at the end of this dark tunnel.

So may you look forward to the fall and all its beauty and grace, and anticipate the holidays' peace and joy with a sure knowledge that this present darkness will pass, and that your life will once again be able to embrace the abundance of harvest enjoyed by the rest of your family and friends. And along with Rabbi Harold Kushner, who wrote the book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, be able to say as he did of his own son's life and death, "... I think of Aaron and all that his life taught me, and I realize how much I have lost and how much I have gained. Yesterday seems less painful, and I am not afraid of tomorrow."

~ Erin Silva, TCF, Salt Lake City, Utah

***The journey from grief to hope does not
happen swiftly. But it happens, if you let
your heart ride along.***

~ Sascha Wagner

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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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.