

# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



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The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

*Welcome: The Nashville chapter meets at 3:00 P.M. on the second Sunday of each month in the HCA building on Park Plaza just north of Centennial Park off of 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue, North. Inside, you will see our sign and someone will greet you. We truly regret that we have no accommodations for young children, but teenagers and older siblings are welcome to attend.*

## July 8 meeting: Making the Pieces Fit

Grief is such a puzzle and it is difficult to find our way through the challenges it presents. Join us July 8 for our guest speaker, Bill McDonald, whose topic, “Making the Pieces Fit: Learning Your Way Through Loss” will help us navigate this difficult road.

Bill is a bereaved sibling, owner of funeral homes in three middle Tennessee towns, and is a licensed funeral director. He has conducted several grief support groups in neighboring towns for spouses, parents, and children; he has presented seminars in several states on *Making the Pieces Fit* and *Understanding Loss*. As a long-time friend of Nashville TCF, Bill has spoken to our chapter in the past and was a workshop presenter at the 1998 National Conference held here in Nashville. Join us as we learn from Bill and are encouraged by his words. Regular sharing groups will follow the speaker.



Attending your first TCF meeting can be difficult. Feelings can be overwhelming. We have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Please attend two or three meetings before deciding if TCF is right for you. There are no dues or fees. If you choose, you need not speak a word at a meeting. We are an international, non-denominational group, offering support and information to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents. We need not walk alone.

### Phone Friends

We have all experienced the pain of losing a child. We understand and would like to listen. If you can't reach one of us, feel free to call another person on this list.

- Accidental Death** .....Mike and Paula Childers  
646-1333
- AIDS**.....Joyce Soward  
754-5210
- Illness**.....David and Peggy Gibson  
356-1351
- Infant**.....Jayne Head  
264-8184
- SIDS**.....Kris Thompson  
931 486-9088
- Suicide**.....Ruth Edwards  
353-8547
- Small Child**.....Kenneth and Kathy Hensley  
237-9972
- Drug/Alcohol Overdose**.....Ed Pyle  
712-3245

## What is Left?

When a child dies, you ask, among other questions, what is left? A beautiful, sensitive intelligent son has chosen to end his life. What can be left after such a crushing blow? Others will point out that you have a spouse, other children or grandchildren, perhaps relatives and friends. They are all left. Perhaps you have a career that is left. And yet how meaningless all of those are to a bereaved parent, to one who is suffering the most devastating loss of all. So you continue to search for what it is that is left.

You read books on bereavement, scarcely remembering what you have read; you attend meetings, talk with others who have suffered a loss like yours. If you are fortunate, you have one or two good friends who, while they cannot fully understand, are there to love and listen. Perhaps there is a therapist who guides you in your search for an answer. But for a long while everything you read or hear has little meaning, and certainly cannot provide the answer to your question. Or can it? Does all that you have read and heard and experienced finally come together and answer the question of what is left?

For me it does. The answer was thirteen months in coming, but how clear it seems now. I am left. That's it! I am left and I have been left with the love of Scott. It is a new love, it is different, more intense, it is undemanding, it need not be reciprocated, there are no strings attached. I love this love of Scott's. It warms me and comforts me. It is a wonderful love, but I cannot keep it. It would be wrong to do so; this love is too precious to keep to myself.

I am left with love to spare and love to share. It will never run out. He will always be with me to replenish it. I have found my answer! I am left to share Scott's love with you.

Betty Stevens  
TCF, Baltimore, MD

## The Lasting Gift

*"Love on earth is limited and bound,  
Stayed by human flesh to the ground.*

*-but-*

*Love taken out of sight,  
Is love made free –  
Where wings take flight"*

Faye McCord  
TCF, Jackson, MS

The lasting gift that any loved one gives us  
is their presence in our hearts.

It is up to us to dedicate ourselves  
to integrating that loving spirit  
into our ongoing lives.

Carol Staudacher,  
From *A time To Grieve*

## Mind Games

Mind Games—it can happen anywhere, anytime. Driving along the highway, I think: just suppose I turn my head quickly, will you suddenly be sitting next to me? Will you be humming along to a song that was a particular favorite of yours? I swear I can hear you. I want so much to hear you singing loudly and a bit offkey again.

Or perhaps I'm in the supermarket and I see someone with long, blond hair—is it you? My heart thumps. I want so badly for it to be you. People glance at me strangely and I realize I'm standing in the middle of the aisle weeping. Even the special foods you loved can reduce me to tears. I'm tempted to buy your favorites and prepare them for when you come home for supper.

At night when I climb into bed, I scrunch over toward the middle. This gives you room to sit next to me the way you would after coming home from a late date. My senses are alive with you. I can smell your special perfume and feel your long, slender fingers with the pearl ring Daddy gave you for graduation. I can hear your laughter. I will you to stay with me until I fall asleep.

Then there are the times when I consciously call out your name in the silence of the house. My mind knows there will be no response, but in my heart I hear you answer me and for that split moment you are there at the top of the stairs as surely as I am at the bottom. Barbara ... Barbara ... Barbara .... Your name is a litany.

I suppose that behavior could be considered quite strange. What does one make of it? Weeping in supermarkets, calling to one who is not there. Oh, but in that fraction of a second when one feels one's loved one close, that feeling, although bittersweet, soothes and comforts a splintered heart.

Mind games ... it can happen anywhere, anytime.

Bunny Placco  
TCF, Greater Providence Chapter, RI

## FOR SIBLINGS

### A Journey to the “New Normal”

May 31 marked seven years since my only sibling Dave died from cancer at age 32. This June 28 we would have been celebrating Dave’s 40th birthday with a big party, and I’d be kidding him about going bald, just like all the Snepp men before him. Instead, I’ll be getting ready for the TCF National Conference, at which I’ll share memories of his brilliance, great smile, and sense of humor with those who will never have the pleasure of meeting him in person.

At this point in my grief journey, most will be good memories of how Dave lived, rather than bad memories of how he died. I can’t recall the moment when that shift of perspective occurred, but I would like to share a few memories and milestones that have marked the way:

- Months after Dave died, I went to see the movie “Big”, starring Tom Hanks, and “lost it” when his mother stared out the window wondering if she’d ever see him again. I watched the movie again recently and didn’t lose it.
- It was three months before I felt up to sharing with anyone the details of the day my brother died at his home in Bellevue, Washington, in the company of Mom, Dad, and me. On the way home from that emotional conversation, I drove the wrong way down a one way street in downtown Chicago – it might be smart to have a friend drive you to your first few TCF meetings!
- I discovered that the grief path is not a straight line. A few good days can be followed by several bad ones. I’ve heard other TCF members call this their “roller coaster ride.”
- For a year, I couldn’t keep the radio on if “Wind Beneath My Wings” came on. For the next year, I kept it on but cried through it. Now, I can usually make it all the way through without any tears!
- With the help of TCF, I realized that despite friends expecting it to be possible, I’d never be “back to normal.” My focus instead shifted to finding my “new normal”. While I can’t point to a time when that happened (probably after the 1990 TCF Conference), THAT was a milestone.
- For three Christmases after Dave died, I didn’t put up a tree in my condo. For Christmas, 1991, as I was getting out ornaments for my first tree since his death, I came across a bunch of ornaments that he had had in his apartment. I came totally unglued then, but now I look forward to seeing those ornaments each Christmas.
- It was three years before I felt that I had enough emotional energy to pursue a relationship. Even now, I don’t have a lot of tolerance for guys I go out with that gripe about their brothers or sisters. My most vivid “landmark” to date along my grief journey came in February 1993. Following my Dad’s father’s death in December, 1992, we were in Atlanta cleaning out my grandfather’s apartment, and I came across a pile of post cards and letters that Dave had written to my grandparents through the years. Earlier in my journey, a “blind side” such as that would have sent me into a tailspin. In this case, though, my immediate reaction was one of happiness, for I had found a part of Dave that I didn’t know I still had! I saved a few of the post cards, sent a couple to my cousin who was referenced in some of the letters, and (amazingly) threw the rest away. It was fun to share the memories, but I didn’t feel the need to hang onto them. It was at that point, nearly five years after Dave’s death, that I truly felt as if I was closing in on that “new normal.”

Karen Snepp  
Frisco, Texas

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### Tomorrow

*Tomorrow,  
I’ll try to understand her,  
Try to understand the excitement behind  
Those piercing black eyes.  
Try to understand her zeal for life,  
Tireless energy, and love for others.  
Tomorrow,  
I’ll sit down beside her and get to know  
This sister of mine.  
I’ll get to know the skinny little girl  
I grew up with and shared a bedroom with  
For all our teen years.  
Tomorrow,  
We’ll share secrets together  
We’ll go for long walks,  
We’ll just sit together for hours and laugh.  
Tomorrow,  
I’ll ask her about her boyfriends,  
I’ll ask her about her girlfriends,  
I’ll even ask what her favorite subject is in school.*

*Today?  
I’m too busy,  
I have too much to do,  
She’s getting on my nerves.  
Today,  
She’s borrowing my precious clothes, ruining them.  
Today,  
She’s using up all the gas in my car.  
Today,  
She’s asking stupid questions  
I just don’t feel like answering.  
Today,  
I’m too tired.  
But tomorrow,  
I’ll tell her how much I love her,  
I’ll hug her and tell her she’s pretty,  
I’ll tell her I’m glad I have a sister...tomorrow.  
Tomorrow  
Has finally come and she is gone.*

Kathi’s sister Cindy  
From “18, No time To Waste

***A note to the newly bereaved...  
(and a reminder to the rest of us)***

The first months and years after bereavement can be terrifying. It seems as if the pain stays at a monotonous peak; it seems as if one's mind will be lost at any moment. And although most of us "get better" after the first terror we usually do not realize that until we look back, years later.

When we think about it: This state of affairs is almost "reasonable." After such an overwhelmingly traumatic experience, we can fall – as it were – to the end of the world. Coming back from there is bound to be slow beyond our imagination and fraught with reversals. So far, no one has found a method to avoid this painful journey back. But perhaps it will help to know you have already begun to travel... You will find it is a long journey, and desperately hard -- and you may almost want to stay where you are. But you will realize later that the wind of tomorrow is already stretching your sails, and life awaits for you across the sea. If you only knew...

Sascha

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***Yellow Gold***

*The prettiest flowers I ever got  
Came not from a florist's bouquet,  
But from the hands of a little tot  
On a mild summer's day.  
They were only weeds from a pasture nearby,  
Held clutched in a tiny palm.  
Straggled and wilted and drooped they were  
From the long and weary trip home.  
But when I saw the shining face beaming up at me,  
So eager to please as he said, "Mommy, here!"  
They became more than weeds to me.  
The yellow petals seemed turned to gold  
As they glowed in the bright, shining sun.  
And of all the flowers I've gotten since then,  
I wouldn't trade a one for the beautiful weeds  
I received that day, picked by my baby for me.  
They're eternally wrapped and sealed with love,  
Preserved in my memory.*

Peggy Putnam  
TCF Hattiesburg, MS

***Mystery***

*I bought toys for my baby after she died  
And I opened the cedar chest and put them inside  
And nobody ever knew but me  
The meaning of the mystery  
Of brand new toys hidden here and there  
And not one baby anywhere.*

Andy Cipriano  
TCF Tallahassee, FL



**Heeding the Call of Life**

**T**here is tremendous wisdom that is accumulated in one's encounter with grief, and it needs to be shared. Healing takes place when we turn our pain into a positive experience and we realize that helping others is the key to helping ourselves. When that happens, our problems don't look so big. We expand on newfound strengths and we discover that as one door closed, many others have opened. The road to recovery from grief, therefore, is to take time to do things which will enable us to give new meaning to our lives.

That's when our journey through grief becomes a journey of discovering ourselves, our potential, and our resources in the encounter with life. That's when we become BETTER people, rather than BITTER people. In grief, no one can take away our pain because no one can take away our love.

That call to life is to learn to love...again.

Father Arnaldo Pangrazzi  
TCF, Muskegon, MI

## **CHAPTER INFORMATION**

### **The Birthday Table**

In the month of your child's birthday, a table will be provided at our meeting where you can share photographs, mementos, your child's favorite snack or a birthday cake, a bouquet of flowers—anything you'd like to bring. We want to know your child better, so please take advantage of this opportunity to celebrate the wonderful day of your child's birth and for us to become better acquainted.

### **What is the Yellow Slip?**

Please return your yellow renewal slip. After a year on the newsletter mailing list, those names that were added in that month of a previous year, will receive a yellow half-sheet asking that their subscription be renewed. This is simply to keep our mailing list and the information in it current. If you do not send the yellow slip back, we must assume that you no longer want the newsletter. Although you are given an opportunity to make a voluntary donation, there is no cost involved in your subscription. The newsletter is our gift to you for as long as you wish to receive it. You may request that your name be returned to the active list at any time simply by calling 615-356-4TCF (4823).

### **Religion and TCF**

The Principles of The Compassionate Friends state that TCF reaches out to all bereaved parents across the artificial barriers of religion, race, economic class, or ethnic group. Further, TCF espouses no specific religious or philosophical ideology. Despite our nondenominational status, many writers indicate that they have found comfort in their faith, and some have shared their anger and loss of faith. The opinions and beliefs expressed in letters, articles and poetry are those of the contributors.

### **Newsletter Deadline**

In order to meet printing deadlines, all donations and original poems or articles must be received by the meeting day of the preceding month to be published in the next issue of the TCF Nashville newsletter. All donations and submissions are greatly appreciated.



## **BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES**

### **Survivors of Suicide**

There is a caring SOS group in Nashville. For information about meetings and receiving their helpful newsletter, you may call the Crisis Center at 615 244-7444.

### **Sharing**

SHARING is a community organization interested in helping parents who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a newborn infant. SHARING meets the second and fourth Thursday evenings of each month at 7 p.m. in the Administrative Board Room at The Women's Hospital at Centennial Medical Center located at 2221 Murphy Avenue (between 22nd and 23rd Ave). Call 615 342-8899 to confirm dates and times.

### **Alive Hospice Support Group for Bereaved Parents**

A support group for bereaved parents meets at Alive Hospice. For details, please call John Baker at 615 963-4674.

### **Other TCF Chapters**

There are several other chapters of The Compassionate Friends you might want to know about. Anytime you are in their vicinity or feel the need to talk with other bereaved parents, feel free to attend their meetings. Also, when you personally know a newly bereaved family in one of these towns, please call the chapter number and give them the information so they can make contact with the family. To locate a chapter, you may call the TCF National Office at 1-877 969-0010, or go to [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) and click on chapter locator.



## Please be Gentle

**P**lease be gentle with me for I am grieving. The sea I swim is a lonely one, and the shore seems miles away. Waves of despair numb my soul as I struggle through each day.

My heart is heavy with sorrow, I want to shout and scream and repeatedly ask, “Why?” At times, my grief overwhelms me, and I weep bitterly, so great is my loss.

Please don’t turn away or tell me to move on with my life. I must embrace my pain before I can begin to heal. Companion me through my tears and sit with me in loving silence. Honor where I am in my journey, not where you think I should be.

Listen patiently to my story. I may need to tell it over and over again. It’s how I begin to grasp the enormity of my loss. Nurture me through the weeks and months ahead. Forgive me when I seem distant and inconsolable. A small flame still burns within my heart, and shared memories may trigger both laughter and tears. I need your support and understanding. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. I must find my own path.

Please, will you walk beside me?

Jill Englar  
TCF, Westminster, MD

