

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



P. O. Box 50833 • Nashville, TN 37205 • (615) 356-4TCF(4823) • Nashville Website: www.tcfnashville.org

Chapter Leaders: Lamar and Joy Bradley, (615) 889-1387; email: lbradley1@mindspring.com

Newsletter Editor: Melanie Ladd, (615) 513-5913; email: joandmel@comcast.net

Treasurer: Jayne Head, (615) 264-8184; email: alanandgraysonsmom@comcast.net

Regional Coordinator: Polly Moore; (931) 962-0458, email: lolly39@aol.com

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 25th 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.

Annual Balloon Release Set for June 10

The June meeting is a special one, for it marks the date of our annual balloon release in memory of our children. Families and friends of TCF are cordially invited to gather at our regular meeting place for this very special event.

Please plan to arrive early in order to have time to write a message to or about your child. (Paper, pens and biodegradable balloons will be provided.) The notes will be attached to the balloon's ribbon.

At 3:00 p.m. we will walk across the street to Centennial Park as a group for a brief ceremony. Following this, the balloons will be released and we will watch as they sail to the heavens until they are finally out of sight.

Immediately following the release, refreshments will be served. Any snack or treat that you can bring to share will be most appreciated. Don't miss this wonderful event!



Funding for National Conference July 20-22

One of the best experiences a bereaved parent can have is to attend a TCF national conference. This year the 35th National Conference/5th International Gathering will be held July 20-22 in beautiful Costa Mesa, California. Anyone associated with the Nashville Chapter, either bereaved parent, grandparent, or sibling, is eligible to receive a predetermined refund to help with part of their conference expenses. Please contact Lamar or Joy Bradley at (615) 889-1387, email: lbradley1@mindspring.com for further information.

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

A Father's Prayer

I am a man, God, and I have been taught that I should be strong and show no weakness. My wife needs me to be strong; I cannot and must not be weak and lean on her. It is only with you that I can be honest, Lord, and even with you I am ashamed to admit it, but I want to cry. I can feel the tears securely dammed up behind eyes that want to burst. There is a voice in me that shouts, **Be strong! Be a man! Show no weakness! Shed no tears!** But there is another voice inside that speaks softly and somehow I feel it is your voice, Father. Is it you who tells me that I am also a feeling human being who can cry if I need to? Is it your voice that tells me that maybe my wife needs the tenderness of my tears *more* than she needs the strength of my muscles?

You are right, Lord, as always. My wife needs to see my grief. She needs to feel the dampness of my tears and know the aching in my heart. Then, just as we became one to create life, we become one in our grief which mourns this death. I think I understand, Lord. It is in *sharing* the awful pain of my grief that I become an even stronger man. It is in sharing my tears that I share my true strength. Oh, God, help me to communicate my deepest and most sensitive feelings to my wife so we may become whole together.

Norman Hagley
TCF, Palestine, TX



Papa, Remember Yesterday?

*That's what he'd say to me
when a happy memory came to his mind.
Yesterday was anytime in the past...
A day, a week or a month behind.*

*It didn't matter to him; it was all yesterday.
Last night, last Easter, when Santa came.
A sweet rush of happy memories from better days.
For him they were all the same.*

*His concept of time was different than ours,
He wasn't here that long.
Just three years of changing seasons...
I know why his memories were strong.*

*Now it's my turn to remember the past,
To cherish the days gone by.
Like him—I will smile about yesterday.
For his sake and mine, I will try...
Papa, remember yesterday.*

Jim Beerman
TCF, Cincinnati, OH

Touch of Love

*I would straighten your tie,
smooth your collar,
pick a bit of lint from your sleeve
before you left for your day's affairs
and I turned my attention to mine...
Today I brushed off a leaf
that had fallen on your name.*

Doris Alsup
TCF, Burleson, TX

Healing Versus Recovery

I have heard the terms “healing” and “recovery” used interchangeably to refer to the goal of processing grief.

I would like to propose the idea that recovery carries with it the assumption of an injury or illness and that when the necessary repair has taken place, the person will return basically to the same person he or she was previous to the injury or illness.

When a child dies, there is, indeed, an injury of massive proportions. All systems—physical, mental, and spiritual—are affected. There is physical pain, emotional retching, spiritual upheaval, and struggling. All this may be occurring simultaneously. Though there may not be bleeding in the physical sense, there is emotional hemorrhaging. The body and psyche are in crisis. Bereaved parents are often unable to eat; they may experience sleep disturbances and disorientation. Believe it or not, all these reactions are normal. Grief is a normal part of life. This is not a mental illness or some chemical imbalance of the brain. What is not normal is to experience the death of a child.

The major difference between recovery and healing is that the goal is not to return to who we were before our child died. That goal is impossible to achieve. To continue to try to achieve a goal of recovery is to assume that life will be basically the same, with a few minor adjustments. We'll set one less place at the table, buy less food, feel sad on holidays, crying a bit more. Our lives have been permanently and irrevocably changed. Part of the healing process is accepting that not only has our life changed, but that we are, in fact, becoming different people. The becoming is the healing.

During this process, we examine every facet of our lives and our belief systems. This is a journey, not a “repair.” By living through this journey, we become different people. True, we may basically look the same, but we are not the same as before our child died. We look at life in a new way. Our interests change and our priorities change. We will never look at a child the same way again. We have a new and deeper level of understanding and compassion for those experiencing pain—all kinds of pain. We have a different understanding of spirituality. We ourselves feel new and different. We carry some of the old person with us through the healing process, but we emerge different.

We are healing, not recovering.

Birdie Tracy
TCF, Shoreline, CT

Death During or Following Conflict

A little-discussed problem for many bereaved parents is the state of their relationship with their child in the days or hours preceding the child's death. This problem is not unique to those of us who have had either our only child or all our children die.

Most frequently, the issue revolves around argument, anger, or harsh words between parent and children as the last contact before death.

It is small wonder that this should weigh heavily. None of us would willingly choose such an unpleasant, permanent parting. Yet, it is not entirely uncommon, as my own situation illustrates.

Olin, our seventeen-year-old son and only child, was working in the dining room and kitchen of a summer camp a few miles down the road from home. On the day of his death, July 6, 1982, I suddenly realized it was 8:00 a.m. and rushed to his room to get him up. Unfortunately, he had been out somewhat late the night before and had assured me that this would be no problem for working the next day. Thus, I yelled at him to get up, only to be assured by him that he had time. That seemed farfetched and I was verbally forceful in requiring him to get up and leave for work. Our dialogue was heated and senseless, my own option being a good example of a parent's unreasonable demand (so I discovered later from Olin's employer.)

I was troubled throughout the morning and resolved to apologize that evening and straighten out the needless tension of the morning. But such was not to be, for at noon he was dead, and never again would we meet in life.

It took months of soul searching, with much time spent in the abyss of depression and despair, before I could come to terms with the conflict that seemed to cloud the loving nature of our relationship.

I finally came to understand that the years of our contact as father and son, the genuine love we shared, was the true measure of our care and concern for one another. It was not the first time one of us had been unreasonable or argued. Had he lived, we likely would have had other, similar struggles, for such is normally a part of human association. Indeed, it is only in loving that we dare the closeness that enables the intensity of parent-child disagreements. Olin was a teenage boy seeking a growing measure of independence, albeit with the security of a strong and loving home base. And I was a parent trying to learn how to let go and still keep him safe. Such is a usual time of passage between parents and kids. This is not to make light of such a time, for in the best of circumstances it is difficult to deal with in a constructive manner. When children die in the midst of turmoil like this, it is only reasonable to expect a deepening of torment and guilt. For all of us, it is wise to accept that the love between parent and child, before, during and after the teenage years, keeps both vulnerable to disagreement or conflict.

I finally came to understand that had the situation been reversed, and I had died, Olin would feel a greater intensity of that same type of remorse and guilt. Like me, Olin would finally be forced to examine our years together, to remember other conflicts, and recall the consistency of the love and care with which all were ultimately resolved.

I believe he would come to realize that I did not doubt his love, that a petty argument had no power to devastate what love had built between us.

So at last did I still the guilt of our final parting, realizing that the bond of love was the bulwark of our relationship, thus rendering it impervious to smallness and pettiness.

We love our children and try to do what is right for them. But, we are human, without qualities of infinite foresight or insight. In spite of our intentions, we make mistakes. We feel the same emotions our children feel, and even though we strive to be more mature, we do not always succeed. In our loving, we make errors in parenting, just as our youngsters, in their loving, make errors too.

Olin knew I loved him. He knew before, during and beyond death. This I firmly believe, after walking the deep valleys of my guilt and anguish.

If you are one of those parents, who, like me, confronted the end of your child's life before conflict was resolved, I urge you to examine your relationship with your son or daughter in all its expressions during all the time you had together. I know you will feel again and see again the love. Know that your child saw and felt the love, too.

Remember, whatever your final words, you parted in love. In that same love you remain. And many of us firmly believe that it is in that love, ultimately, that you will meet again.

Don Hackett
TCF, Kingston, MA

I am battered and damaged,

Storm tossed and hurting on the deck of my ship of dreams.

If I choose, if I dare, I shall seize the rudder once again.

In the hours of my anguish I can still pilot and

Within myself determine the port to enter.

Through fog and darkness I may navigate or not.

The choice is mine and I am too injured to fear shoals

And too empty to crave home.

But there are shipmates aboard and I must call them up.

With their help I will unfurl the mainsail of hope

And set the course to an isle called Forgiveness.

It is a small island, but it governs the channel

To the harbor called Tomorrow

Don Hackett
TCF, Kingston, MA

LOVE IS IMMORTAL

Many of us will resent the lengthening of time between our child's life and our own present. Others may welcome the increasing distance in the hope that time itself will be a balm to pain. Yet, all of us perceive, beyond all the hype and expectations, that new years and seasons are merely calendar events.

Whatever problems we have had in the past will follow us into the present. There is no inner demarcation with hurting behind and joy ahead.

Each of us has the same opportunities now as we had before. We can permit time to simply pass, or we can work to mold its passage into constructive growth.

In the deaths of our children we have discovered with certainty that we lack the means to control the most cherished elements of our lives. But we also know that within each of us is the potential to rise above the debilitating anguish we have experienced.

Time continues to move forward and most of us have been too damaged to even play the games of resolutions and dance the rites of spring. We are beyond the futility of such exercises. But, let us each confront this moment and time with an inward commitment to recovery, to living the hours which comprise our existence with the fullness and love of which we are capable.

Hurting will ultimately lessen. Pain will slowly become more bearable. Fears and guilt will gradually pass away. But love, that inner dance of the heart which leaps to our child's name or the memory of an especially close experience that bears only the mantle of endless joy, will not pass away. All else, fame, fortune, distress and dismay, wealth and power, even ourselves, will at last be done.

But love...Love is immortal...May the immortality of love grow secure and healthy again within each of us.

Don Hackett,
TCF, Plymouth, MA
From *ALIVE ALONE*

Answers?

The memories are
bright and far away,
because
in all those grieving years
the pain has calmed.
The mind has learned
that life and loss are brothers,
that death tells nothing
when we ask him "why."

The memories are
deep and long ago.

Here,
after all those grieving years,
the songs we sang,
the thoughts we shared,
the morning kisses,
and the mystic evenings,
remain alive in us
and unforgotten.

Now Love holds answers,
though we ask her nothing.

Sascha

Loneliness and How to Overcome It

Why are there times when a bereaved parent feels lonely even though surrounded by loving people the bereaved parent loves? Loneliness is the outgrowth of separation from one who has given meaning to life. Yes, other relationships offer meaning, but it is normal for the searing pain from the loss of one's child to supersede the pleasure from other experiences. Part of yourself has been invested in another person. When that person has died, in a sense, you are lonely for a part of yourself that has been destroyed. At times you look around you and think that no one else is experiencing the pain you are feeling; no one else's world has been shattered. This self-centeredness is a natural part of the grief process. Do not deny it, but *do not hold on to it as a way of life*. Give yourself permission to accept help from others and then to reach out and help others. Although your child is not here to give continuity to your life, by having lived and having given purpose to your life, your child can be the bridge to your continuity with life as a thinking, loving and active person.

Ruth Eiseman
TCF, Louisville, KY

The “Children Remembered” Listings

If you are unable to attend TCF meetings and would like for your child to be listed on page 2 in The Children Remembered, please let us know, printing the exact way you’d like the child’s name to appear, the child’s birth and death dates, and the parents’ names as they should be listed. You may call the database manager at 615 356-1351, drop us a note at TCF, P.O. Box 50833, Nashville, TN 37205, or email us at davidg14@bellsouth.net. We’ll be glad to include them. You need to contact us only once, unless any of your information changes.

Picture Name Tags

If you will bring a clear picture of your child, wallet size or larger, to a TCF meeting, Lamar Bradley will make a beautiful permanent name tag with your child’s picture on it for you to use each month. You will also have an opportunity to select your own butterfly to accompany the photograph. The original photo will be completely safe with Lamar and will be returned to you at the following meeting. The best part of this is that there is no charge. A big thank you goes to Lamar for unselfishly giving his time and talent.

We Need Your Help

If you know a family outside the immediate Nashville area who has experienced the death of a child, regardless of age or cause of death, and you have access to the address (and phone number) of the parents, it would be most helpful if you would call us with that information. Our mission is to reach every bereaved family in Middle Tennessee, but we have to know about them in order to give them the support we ourselves have received. If you know the child’s name, birth date, date of death and cause of death, so much the better. Our outreach chairperson will send a warm letter of sympathy and information about TCF along with appropriate brochures and articles. There will be no demands made upon the parents, and the information you provide is strictly confidential.



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.

Alive Alone

Alive Alone is an organization to benefit parents whose only child or all children have died. Visit their website at www.alivealone.org.

TCF Web site —A Treasure for You

When you log onto the TCF Web site at www.compassionatefriends.org you will find a wealth of information about TCF and grief—poetry and articles, chat rooms, grief in the news, other chapter Web sites and numerous other resources. Check it out.

Men Do Cry

*I heard quite often "men don't cry"
Though no one ever told me why.
So when I fell and skinned a knee
No one came by to comfort me.*

*And when some bully boy at school
Would pull a prank so mean and cruel
I'd quickly learn to turn and quip
"It doesn't hurt" and bite my lip.*

*So as I grew to reasoned years
I learned to stifle any tears.
Though "Be a big boy" it began
Quite soon I learned to "Be a man."*

*And I could play that stoic role
While storm and tempest wracked my soul.
No pain nor setback could there be
Could wrest one single tear from me.*

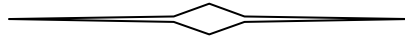
*Then one long night I stood nearby
And helplessly watched my son die.
And quickly found to my surprise
That all that tearless talk was lies.*

*And still I cry and have no shame
I cannot play that "big boy" game.
And openly without remorse
I let my sorrow take its course.*

*So those of you who can't abide
A man you've seen who's often cried
Reach out to him with all your heart
As one whose life's been torn apart.*

*For men do cry when they can see
Their loss of immortality.
And tears will come in endless streams
When mindless fate destroys their dreams.*

Ken Falk
TCF, Northwest, CT



Father's Day

As the day approaches, I wonder how I will react.

Am I still a father?

I will sit quietly, never allowing friends and family to see how I feel.

I miss my son, but I can't allow myself to "break."
I must remain strong and always be the "rock."

I wish I could just let someone know how much I miss my little angel.
How much I cry and how much I miss hearing, "Dad, I love you."



I am a father, but I wonder, "Will I just pretend, as usual,
that it doesn't bother me?"

Remember me, for I hurt, too, on this special day.

TCF, Tampa, FL