



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies



August

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Our Mission: 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.

Meetings

Our chapter meets at Bethany Wesleyan Church in Cherryville, PA

To be notified of meetings call or text the newsletter editor at 484-891-0823. We will add you to the notification list and you will be notified of upcoming meetings

Meetings are open to bereaved parents, grandparents and mature siblings. Group participation is confidential and voluntary.

Note: In order to meet safely all attendees must agree to the following

- Face masks required for unvaccinated or partially vaccinated persons. Face masks are optional, but appreciated for those that are fully vaccinated and boosted.
- Do not attend if you are feeling ill, have been exposed to Covid or have tested positive in the last 14 days
- Chairs will be preset to maintain social distancing
- No food is allowed

To Our New Members

Making the decision to come to your first meeting can be difficult. It can also be difficult to return for a second or third meeting, but we ask that you attend three meetings before deciding whether or not TCF will work for you. We cannot walk your grief journey for you, but we can walk beside you if you allow us to. We have no easy answers or quick fixes, but we care, share and understand. Although our circumstances may be different, we have all “been there”...we are all grieving the loss of a child and therefore we can truly say we understand. You are not alone.

Telephone Friends

Sometimes you may need to talk to someone who cares and understands between meetings. To help we maintain a list of telephone friends. During these times the following members are available to listen, share and offer what support they can.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Infant Loss - Kim Szep - | 610-730-3111 |
| Only Child - Shelly Garst - | 484-241-5396 |
| Addiction - Nancy Howe - | 484-863-4324 |
| Homicide - Ginger Renner - | 610-967-5113 |



To volunteer as a telephone friend contact the newsletter editor

TCF National Support Resources

The TCF National website has over 35 private Facebook pages and a number of moderated chatrooms. To register for the FB pages or chat rooms go to www.compassionatefriends.org and click on the find support tab and then choose online communities.

Newsletter Notes

This Newsletter comes to you courtesy of The Compassionate Friends, Lehigh Valley Chapter. We hope that it will be of some comfort to you on your grief journey.

We welcome original stories and poetry from our members.

All submissions must include the author's name and your contact information. Send to the newsletter editor (address listed above)

If you move please contact the Newsletter Editor with your new address

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Inside this issue:

| | |
|---|---|
| Article - Nibbling At Life's Pleasures | 2 |
| Love Gifts & Our Children Remembered | 3 |
| Poem - Fireflies; A Grieving Parent Is | 4 |
| Poem - Flowing Tears | 5 |
| Article- The Roller Coaster | 6 |
| Article - Some Things You Need To Know | 6 |
| Sibling Page Article - Eternity Poem - MemoriesOf Your Face | 7 |
| Love Gift Form | 8 |

Nibbling At Life's Pleasures

By Patricia Butler Dyson, TCF Beaumont, TX

Most mothers I know are pretty selfless creatures. When there's not enough meat to go around, Mom takes a second helping of beans. There's probably nothing she'd rather do than iron Missy's cheerleader uniform at midnight. And why would she want a new Easter dress when the old polka dot polyester still fits? Altruism aside, every mom needs a smidgen of pleasure in her life to help maintain her sweet disposition.

To reward myself for being a hardworking wife and mother of three active boys, I allowed myself an occasional indulgence ... a long, hot bath in a tub filled to the brim, a good book (preferably one that would make me laugh), and my favorite guilty pleasure, a Skor bar. I liked to eat it a piece at a time, sucking off the chocolate before I crunched down on the tooth-jarring English toffee. If I managed to finish a Skor with fillings intact, it was a triumph. And if I could read a good book while soaking in a hot tub and munching on a Skor bar, well, life just didn't get any better.

Then one day I found out how life couldn't get any worse, when my 3 year old son, Blake, died suddenly from meningitis. Guilt and self-hatred overwhelmed me. What kind of mother wouldn't recognize how sick her child was and rush him to the hospital? How could I have been so blind, so stupid? As his mother, he trusted me to care for him, and I let him down.

My once-carefree existence became a series of gray days followed by black, sleepless nights. I ate, but only to stay alive. I took short, cool showers, but only to get clean. I never picked up a book unless it dealt with grief. Driven by guilt, I convinced myself that I no longer deserved any of life's pleasures. Besides, how could I ever enjoy anything again with Blake gone?

One night, some months after Blake died, my husband, Jeff, left to take our boys to basketball practice. The dishes were done, the house was spotless, and the long, empty evening loomed ahead of me. I went into the bedroom, flopped on the bed and curled up with the cat. On the nightstand I spotted a book a friend had given me. "*Funny*," she had said. "*A great read.*" Well, it wasn't a grief book so I wasn't interested. Idly, I picked it up anyway and read the first page. Before I knew it, I was hooked. Suddenly, I heard a strange sound, somewhere between a hack and a hoot. The cat jumped and looked at me in alarm. I had laughed! It was a creepy, creaky laugh, rusty from months of disuse, but a laugh nonetheless. Did I just have fun? Yipes! I couldn't do that! I snapped the book shut and shoved it under the bed.

The next morning I took a shower as usual, only this time I lingered for three minutes instead of two and I turned the temperature up a notch so it was almost warm. I dressed and headed for the grocery store, where I careened down the aisles grabbing stuff from the shelves and trying not to look at the treats I used to buy for Blake. While reaching for a package of sugarless gum at the checkout, I caught sight of a display of Skor bars. I quickly looked away, but to my amazement, a Skor bar leaped onto the conveyor belt with my other groceries. Before I could put it back, the sacker had bagged it and it was mine.

I broke the speed limit getting home, dashed inside, and guiltily pitched the Skor bar on the highest shelf of the pantry. Later, when I opened the pantry to get a can of tuna for my lunch, a small voice from above called out, "Pat, oh Pat, I'm here. Come and get me." I slammed the door and started furiously chopping pickles for tuna salad. But the voice in the pantry

Continued on page 4

Donations & Contributions

- ★ *Bethany Wesleyan Church, Cherryville, PA*
For our meeting space
- ★ *Giant Food Store Employees United Way Contributions*
In Memory of David Todd Smith
- ★ *Aetna Payroll Contributors*
- ★ *United Way Payroll Contributors*
- ★ *The Matt Kush Foundation*
In Memory of Matt Kush



Love Gifts



Love Gifts enable us to reach out to newly bereaved and provide ongoing support to all members. They may be given in memory of a child or in memory or in honor of a friend or relative.

Please use form in this newsletter to donate. Gifts are tax deductible.

We thank the following this month for their generosity

Contributor

Loved One



Our Children Remembered

Birthdays and Anniversaries

| | Birth | Anniv. |
|--|--------|--------|
| Hunter Bremmer - Son of David Bremmer; Brother of Heather Bremmer | Dec 12 | Jul 27 |
| Joseph Chanitz - Son of Jay & Ruth Chanitz | Jul 16 | Aug 28 |
| Courtney Daud - Daughter of Marie Daud | Jul 15 | Jul 15 |
| Sarah Davidson - Daughter of Dean & Donna Davidson; Sister of Nicholas Davidson | Jul 10 | Jul 10 |
| Denise Deiter - Sister of Cheryl A. McCue & the late Cathy A. Mertz | Jul 3 | Jun 11 |
| Mark Dilts, Jr - Son of Mark & Joy Dilts; Brother of Beth Dilts | Jan 6 | Jul 8 |
| Sgt. Christopher Geiger - Son of George & Patricia Geiger; Brother of Roseanne Reenock, Michael, Terrance, David & Timothy Geiger | Mar 30 | Jul 9 |
| Eric Graver - Son of Mary L Graver | Aug 17 | Jul 9 |
| Chase Groeger - Son of Rich & Amy Herman; Brother of Daisha Hamilton | Nov 23 | Jul 16 |
| James "Jimmy" Hotz - Son of Elizabeth Hotz | Apr 24 | Jul 4 |
| Colleen Kilker - Daughter of Mark & Kathleen Kilker; Sister of Meghan, Bridget & Mark Kilker | May 6 | Jul 23 |
| David Kunsman - Son of Charles & Joan Kunsman | May 2 | Jul 15 |
| David Kunsman - Brother of Sherry Flanagan, Sandra Kunsman, the late Walter Alfonso & the late Charles Kunsman, Jr | May 2 | Jul 15 |
| John Leonard, Jr - Son of Jack & Jule Leonard; Brother of Karen | Jul 27 | Jan 6 |
| Ed McNally - Son of Don & Connie McNally; brother of Sean McNally | Jul 29 | Feb 11 |
| Peter Radocha - Son of Lucille Radocha; Brother of Gina Sacco & Frank Radocha, Jr | Jun 13 | Jul 1 |
| Robert Rute - Son of Linda Cavanaugh | Jul 9 | Apr 4 |
| Paul Woodling - Son of Gregg & Mary Ann Miller | Jul 21 | Nov 5 |

Those we hold dear never truly leave us. They live on in the kindness they showed, and the love they brought into our lives.

Isabel Norton, Central Iowa Newsletter

became more insistent. "Pat, I'm here and I'm delectious!" A Skor-deprived woman can only stand so much. I flung open the pantry, stood on tiptoe, snatched the talking Skor bar, and ripped the wrapper open with my teeth. In a frenzy, I broke off a piece and popped it in my mouth. Hungrily, I sucked the chocolate off and crunched down on the rock-hard toffee. Lord, it was good! To my amazement, the heavens didn't open and swallow me.

Lightning didn't strike me dead. For the first time in months, I REALLY enjoyed myself I chucked the tuna back on the shelf and piece by piece, I relished the rest of the Skor bar. Then, with chocolaty fingers, I grabbed a handful of Cheetos and a couple of Oreos, and washed them down with a Yoohoo. It was the best lunch I'd had in months.

Later, as I was putting clean towels in the linen closet, I heard a familiar voice echoing from the bathtub, "Pat, I've missed you. Wouldn't a hot bath feel good? Why don't you fill me up?" Trying not to be alarmed that voices were orchestrating my behavior, I obediently ran hot water in the tub, but only half-full. I didn't want to go overboard. Peeling off my clothes, I hopped in. And as I sank into the heavenly, steamy water, I closed my eyes and thought of Blake. He knew how to live! He packed more living into three years than some people do into thirty. He ran faster, climbed higher, laughed louder than any little kid I ever knew. He savored life, every aspect of it. No nibbling at life for him! He broke it off in chunks and devoured it.

Right now, because of my grief, I could only nibble at life's pleasures. But I knew Blake wouldn't want me to live a guilt-ridden, joyless life. He would want

me to buy a SIX-PACK of Skor bars, fill the tub to the brim with the hottest water, grab a good book, and soak and eat and read until the water turned cool and I was all pruned.

And, by golly, some day I'd do just that.



As I spotted a firefly one night
Thoughts of my child seem to say,
My light still shines bright:
I'm not that far away.

You see me here, you see me there
It must be hard to comprehend.
Don't ever think my light's gone out,
I'm always here, my love I send.

During waking hours, stay busy.
Keep your light burning bright
for others to see.
Strengthen and encourage one another
As you always did for me.

When your nights seem the longest
Don't give up, just take a rest.
And remember it's the darkest hours
When fireflies shine the best!

A GRIEVING PARENT IS...

- ~A grieving parent is someone who will never forget their child no matter how painful the memories are.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who yearns to be with their dead child but cannot conceive leaving their living ones.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who has only part of a heart as the rest of it is buried with their child.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who begs for relief from the memories which plague them and then feels guilty when they get it.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who pretends to be happy and enjoying life when they really are dying inside.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who holds the lives of their remaining children as the most precious gift they have.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who can cry or laugh at the drop of a hat whenever they remember their beloved child.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who feels as if they just lost their child yesterday no matter how much time has passed.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who fears for their remaining family because they cannot bear to have any more loss.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who sits by their child's gravestone and feels a knife stabbing their heart.
- ~A grieving parent is someone who wants to help others who have lost loved ones because somehow their loss is theirs all over again.

Flowing Tears

by William A. Van Vactor,
TCF St Joseph, MO

The tears may come,
I know not when.
My face shows pain
And a puckered chin.

Large tears glisten,
Falling down my face;
On a large grey man
They seem out of place.

My thoughts may not be
Of the girl I knew.
Happiness, or sad tales,
Turn the mood blue.

My memories turn back
To my beautiful girl
Dimples on a pretty face
And a dainty curl.

Odd, but true,
A happy scene can make me cry.
Hold back the tears,
I don't even try.

At times I have tears
Expressing joy,
As a child might
With a repaired favorite toy.

My child left through
The portals of eternal life.
Now I grieve and feel wounded,
As with a knife.

The tears I feel
Make matters seem so clear;
Though I miss the one
I loved so dear.

The tears flow,
And the hurt will seem to heal;
Later I know
That life is not such a rotten deal.

The Lord above must have
Created all the tears,
So everyone
Could better handle their fears.

I know nothing can ever
Return my loving child,
Who had a lively step
And manner so mild.

Tears will not wash away
Reality this day,
But as long as I have them,
I have courage to stay.

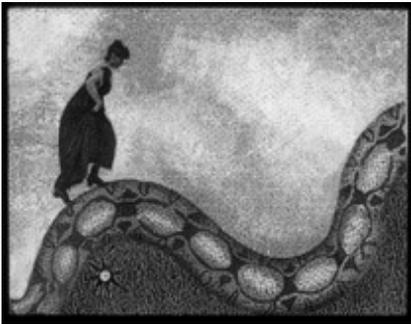
The tears will flow
And ease my grief;
That, I say,
"Is a great deal of relief."

So if you see me crying
And tears on my nose,
Leave the room quietly
And gently the door close.

For God gave me tears
So I might cope,
Whenever I seem
To have lost all hope.

We should never be ashamed of our tears, whether in private sorrow or public grieving. They alleviate our grief and encourage the healing of our wounds

TCF Norcogdoches, TX Newsletter



The Roller Coaster

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

As a child I enjoyed the thrill of the roller coaster: gliding up the giant track, reaching the top with a momentary anticipation and the thrill of the quick dropping roll to the bottom of the track. The deep turns, first to the right and then to the left were designed to heighten the anticipation of the next climb and drop. In my childhood mind, these curves, climbs and drops were an isolated experience, temporary and fun. The ride would end.

A few months after my son's death, I dreamed of the roller coaster. But this time it wasn't fun. It was a nightmare of fear, anxiety and pain; I was so paralyzed that I couldn't breathe. That dream was the simple symbolism of life since my son died.

Now I ride a different sort of roller coaster. The climb to the top is a slow, difficult rise to normalcy. The rapid descent to the bottom is yet another terrible setback. I hang onto the bar of sanity on the curves, first one way, then another. I really want to stop this ride, but it is for-ever. This ride won't end.

Today I recalled that roller coaster dream, in all its vivid detail, and I compare it to the roller coaster that is my life now. Are the highs lower and the lows higher? Are the curves softening? Yes, I believe they are. It's been two years and two months since Todd died. I still weep. Tiny tears still fall unexpectedly. I still have anxiety. I still feel as if the earth has dropped from under me. I still miss talking with my son. I miss seeing him. I ache for that special hug that only my child can give. Yes, I miss my only child very much. My heart has been shattered, my definition of myself has been altered and my loneliness is incomprehensible. But something has changed on the roller coaster of this life.

That something is, of course, me. I work through

my grief in many, many ways. I have consciously shifted the paradigms of my life. I have learned to evaluate people from a different perspective. I have become so sensitive to the pain of other parents that I feel it as if it were my own. I have stopped anticipating how I will handle stressful events, anniversaries, birthdays, holidays. I have learned to live without being a part of my grandchildren's lives. I have learned to keep negative energy and negative people at a far distance. I have learned that a routine provides necessary structure. I have learned to live in the moment, to take joy in simple things, to talk openly about my child's life and to acknowledge the things I cannot change.

As time moves forward, I will continue to accept what is given and give what I can. I know the roller coaster will level out eventually. For as long as I live, I will keep my child with me, in my heart. That's all I can do as I ride this changing roller coaster that is now my life.

Some Things You Need To Know

- 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.
- We grieve as intensely as we love.
- There is no "normal" in grieving.
- You will never be the same person you were before your loss.
- You must make a conscious decision to "get better".
- There are no set-in-concrete stages or timelines in grief.
- Other people will not understand your grief unless you share it.
- It is okay to talk about your loved one as long as you want.
- It is okay to include them in celebrations and special occasions for as long as you want.
- "Finding closure" is not a requirement
- of healing. For many, it is not even
- an option.

Even in death ... love remains.

Sandy Goodman, www.loveneverdies.net

Sibling Page

Eternity

Traci Morlock
BPI USA, St. Louis, MO

Eternity. Seems like forever. Maybe it is forever. At least that's how long it seems since my brother, Sean, died. Eternity also has another meaning for me. Eternity is the cologne that Sean used to wear. Every time I even catch a scent of it I turned around looking for Sean. For the first two years after Sean died, every time I smelled Eternity I began to cry. Then I realized that, cologne smells differently on each person.

After those first two years, I would smell it and not recognize it. I would like the cologne that someone would have on and I would ask the what it was. For a while it seemed as though everyone I asked wore Eternity. After several times of asking and being upset by the answer, I just stopped asking. My husband and I have been married for 4 1/2 years and he is still not permitted to wear Eternity.

I was at work one day about a year ago and I smelled a delicious smell. I followed it all around the building. I never did find the source of the smell. I comforted myself by thinking that Sean was there telling me he was alright. I had been having a hard time and missing him terribly. About a week later, the smell returned and it was right outside my office door!! quickly turned the corner and there was a salesman that worked with me. I asked him the old question, "What cologne are you wearing?" His answer, "Eternity." The smell was identical to how it smelled on Sean.

I have never obsessed about something, but I guess I have about Sean's cologne. I began to think about how strange it was that someone who would

only live for nineteen years would wear cologne called "Eternity." Then I had a wonderful thought. What if by wearing Eternity, Sean was telling us that's how long he would love us and how long he would be with us? Maybe my husband will get a bottle of Eternity for Christmas this year.

Memories of Your Face

I woke this morning
Finding everything in a haze
Wiping tears from my eyes
I saw your smiling face.

I reached out and touched you
Yet all I could feel was pain
You felt nothing
From your life within a frame.

I spoke. Receiving no reply,
I told you that I loved you
I asked you why?
I'll never have another

No one to take your place
All I have, little brother, are memories
and the picture of your face.

"We have suffered,
But we have
survived;
We are hurting,
But we are enduring"

Ben Van Vechten

The Compassionate Friends Credo Copyright © 2007

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.

Other Local TCF Chapters & Support Groups

TCF Carbon County - 484-719-6753

TCF Easton - 610-515-3526

TCF Quakertown - 215-703-8431

GRASP (grief recovery after substance passing)

TCF Pocono - 570 - 350 - 6695

484-863-4324 or 610-442-8490

Love Gift Form

Your love gift will help defray the cost of chapter expenses such as the newsletter mailings, meetings and our outreach to the newly bereaved. The Compassionate Friends is a 501c(3) non-profit organization and your donations are fully tax deductible.

Deadlines are the 1st of the month previous to the month you wish publication in. Example the deadline for publication in January is December the 1st

Contributor Name *(this will be the name that appears in the newsletter)*

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Email Address

I would like to make a donation of _____ In Memory of In Honor of A Chapter Gift *(without memorial or honorarium)*

Name of person gift given for

Edition to be published in. *Deadlines listed above. Late submissions or those that do not indicate an edition will be published in the next edition.*

Special Text - Brief Messages Please. *Poems & story submissions are always welcome and should be sent directly to the Newsletter Editor for inclusion in the newsletter.*

Please designate which of the following your gift is for (you may circle more than one)

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Outreach Program

Special Events