



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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March

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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.

You're Invited

The Lehigh Valley chapter meets at Bethany Wesleyan Church, Dining Room, Cherryville, PA, the second Monday of the month at 7pm

Our support group meetings are open to all bereaved parents, grandparents and mature siblings. Group participation is confidential and voluntary.

For information about meetings, directions to our meeting space or to be added to the meeting text reminder list call or text 484-891-0823

Note: For the safety of all attendees

- Please do not attend if you feel ill, were exposed to Covid, the Flu, or tested positive in the last 14 days

Next Meeting Monday, March 11

Note: If we need to cancel the meeting we will notify everyone on the text list and post the cancelation on our facebook page - facebook.com/TCFLehighValley

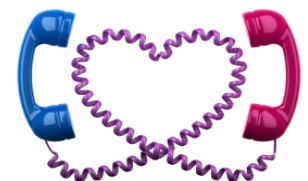
To Our New Members

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 below)

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

Newsletter Editor Contact

- by mail:
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How Are You?: A Silent Signpost for the Newly Bereaved

“How are you?” It is such a seemingly simple, benign question. Often, those who ask the question are not doing so out of real concern, but just as a polite, meaningless pleasantry. Just as often, those who answer the question would never think to respond with anything other than the implicitly expected “I’m fine” or “Good. How are you?” – even if everything wasn’t fine.

But what happens when the simple question of “How are you?” becomes a harsh reminder of the isolation felt by anyone struggling with overwhelming grief? What happens when it becomes the silent signpost marking the moment when the newly bereaved seemingly take two simultaneous paths: the one visible to the outside world where everything appears to be “OK”, and the invisible path they silently follow, because the ongoing pain associated with it isn’t usually welcomed by society. Recently, I spoke with a mother who had lost her son less than a month before. During our conversation, she mentioned several times that she was handling it well with the incredible support she received from her family, religion, and friends. But then she mentioned that recently, she could sense that when they asked her “How are you?” the tone was beginning to change. She said the question was beginning to be asked in a way that sounded as though they were tiring of her pain and were ready for her response to return to the standard, “I’m fine.”

It reminded me of my return to work a month after the death of my daughter. While some people welcome the return to work in an effort to distract themselves from the pain, I returned only because I needed the income. I recall the first day back, I made a bee line to my desk, desperately avoiding eye contact with everyone. I dreaded the inevitable question, “How are you?”. And yet, it came. While many people did their best to avoid me just as I avoided them, some did come to offer their condolences and sadly ask how I was. If I was being honest with them, my response may have sounded something like this:

How am I? I’m completely devastated. The skin around my eyes is raw and hurts from crying so much. Yes – even a month after her death... and there’s no sign of it stopping any time soon. I’m completely exhausted – physically and emotionally. It took all my energy to get out of bed this morning, much less get in the shower and then dressed and into the car to drive to work. On the drive it was hard to see through my tears. At some moments I felt like steering my car off the road and into a telephone pole, but thankfully I didn’t. In addition to a constant feeling of pain and nausea in my stomach, I’m angry when I look around and see that everything is “business as usual” around here and the world continues to march on without my daughter in it. The sound of laughter makes me want to scream. How could anyone be happy right now? I

Continued on page 4

Our Children Remembered

Please keep the parents, grandparents and siblings of the following children in your thoughts and hearts

Birthdays and Anniversaries

	Birth	Anniv.
Scott Arcury - Son of Frank and Beth Arcury; Brother of Lauren Arcury	Mar 16	Jul 24
Tyler Balog - Son of Jeff and Grace Balog; Brother of Troy Balog	Mar 4	Feb 6
Christopher Brunner - Son of Cynthia Kern	Nov 29	Mar 20
Jessica Finlayson - Daughter of Eric and Jean Dalstad; Sister of Rebecca Dalstad	Mar 19	Jan 22
John Fry - Son of Cathy McDonald	Mar 19	Jun 14
Eileen Collins Gant - Sister of John, Steven, Kathleen & Brian Collins & MaryAnn Watkins	Mar 25	Feb 14
Sgt. Christopher Geiger - Son of George and Patricia Geiger; Brother of Roseanne Reenock, Michael, Terrance, David & Timothy Geiger	Mar 30	Jul 9
Carly Grozier - Daughter of Cathie Given	Mar 4	Jan 17
Brian Gum - Son of Geary and Brenda Gum	Feb 21	Mar 5
Emma McNulty - Daughter of Jessica and Susan Katzbeck	Nov 19	Mar 11
Jim Minter - Brother of Jeanine Minter	Aug 15	Mar 14
Mardelle Parenti-Blume - Daughter of Brian and Nancy Kleckner	Feb 9	Mar 1
Sheena Villa - Daughter of Bill Villa; Daughter of Barbara Maquera; Step Daughter of Angie Villa; Sister of Patrick Villa, Cruz Maquera & Gianni Villa	Mar 23	Mar 24



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. Gifts are tax deductible.

No Love Gifts this Month

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

MARCH -A Month of Transition

The first day of any new month seems reason enough to pause, perhaps, and reflect on the significance or meaning that each of us might associate with a new month. For me, March has always signified a time of transition, a slow but steady emergence from the dark depths of winter into the first, but sure, signs of Spring. Something like the "light at the end of the tunnel."

This Spring will have a different meaning for each of us. For some, especially the newly bereaved, there will be a reluctance to accept it - a feeling of longing for the child with whom we would have liked to share it. You may wish to ignore the signs of this year's Spring, but it will happen anyway - but you don't have to enjoy it. Your sorrow is too new to let you enjoy anything, we understand this feeling. It's part of the guilt that we feel for surviving the loss of a child. It just won't seem fair to you that the world goes on much the same as before.

Others of us, with the aid of time, sometimes much time, can face Spring with a little more resolve. The resolve to accept things the way they are. Somehow we learn to recog-nize our limitations, and we stop hurting ourselves with guilt or with the responsibility to change things. There is no way to change the fact that our children have died. The only thing we can change is ourselves. Those children will always be with us in our minds and our hearts. When we become secure in that belief, we will have changed. The changed person can accept life again and still be faithful to the memory of his child.

Bob McCollough, TCF, Burlington Chapter

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don't care at all about my job or what needs to be done, but seeing as how I need the money, I'm just going to put my head down and immerse myself in work. Hopefully it will mean that for a few hours today I'll be distracted from the overwhelming pain I feel. But every time someone comes up to ask me how I am, I'll be dragged back to into reality and the nightmare I find myself in. So, while I appreciate that you care, I'd rather you not ask. Maybe you could just tell me you're sorry, or even give me a silent hug... and then walk away. I simply don't have the energy right now to pretend that I'm "fine".

But, of course, I wasn't honest. My answer depended on how the question was worded. If they asked, "How are you?" I replied, "Fine". If they asked, "How are you doing?" I answered "I'm doing". Both were spoken in a flat tone of voice that implied I was not fine, and intended to discourage them from continuing the conversation. This may sound mean, but it took a lot of energy to keep myself from bursting into tears and telling them how I really was when they asked me that question. Because if I really was "fine", what would that say about how I felt about my

daughter? It made me feel guilty and angry at the same time.

Over time, answering that question got easier and felt less of a betrayal to my daughter. Eventually, I could answer "I'm fine" or even "I'm good" and truly mean it. But it took time and a lot of work. It took going to support groups where I could give an honest answer of how I was doing and no one would try to stop me. Everyone there would understand and encourage me to let it out.

In the last four years, I've learned how to acknowledge and express my grief when I need to, rather than keeping it inside where it simmers and grows. I've learned to accept that I have both good and bad days, and over time, the good began to outnumber the bad. I've learned to not let the guilt and pain associated with the bad days keep me from enjoying and appreciating my life.

How am I doing now? Even though I still miss my daughter terribly, I'm good.

Maria Kubitz

Lovingly lifted from the Livonia, MI Chapter Newsletter

MARCH WINDS

He raced against the wind as if his very life depended on it.
Eyes bright, cheeks glowing from the still almost chilly March wind,
Throwing me a smile now and then to make sure I was still watching..

I was, and when I caught a smile I applauded.
His efforts so great for one small boy.
I don't remember now if his kite ever flew, sometimes, in spite of heroic efforts they don't.
But I remember the day, the nip in the air, his cheeks glowing, his fresh clean smell
My afternoon of playing catch with his smiles...

I remember every year when March winds begin to blow.
Even if he had not died long after the age of flying kites, I would still remember.
Maybe if he were still here, teaching his own small boy the delicate art of flying kites
Catching his own smiles, it wouldn't hurt so when March winds begin to blow.



From "SONGS FROM THE EDGE"

By Faye Harden, TCF, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Not Guilt...-Regret

One of our basic responsibilities as parents is to keep our children from harm. So, when anything happens to them, we feel guilty whether we could realistically have done anything or not. When the ultimate tragedy occurs, we are devastated.

How could we let it happen?

Why didn't we stop it?

If we have compounded our guilt with any degree of human error of commission or omission, we are beyond devastation. Even words, either of anger or left unspoken, haunt us.

Guilt implies intent. If we intended to harm our child, we can feel guilty of that. If we never intended harm to ever, ever come to our child, the correct name for our emotion is regret.

The crushing pain is still there, but regret is softer, gentler, less judgmental, and easier to forgive and to heal. It is also more accurate. If that name doesn't feel strong enough for our feelings, it will in time. Let it float there and try it now and then. Not guilt - we feel regret.

*Kitty Sanders, Nashville, TN
Survivors of Suicide Group*

Time Will Ease the Hurt

The sadness of the present days
Is locked and set in time,
And moving to the future
Is a slow and painful climb.

But all the feelings that are now
So vivid and so real
Can't hold their fresh intensity
As time begins to heal.

No wound so deep will ever go
Entirely away,
Yet even hurt becomes
A little less from day to day.

Nothing can erase the painful
Imprints on your mind,
But there are softer memories
That time will let you find.

Though your heart won't let the
Sadness simply slide away.
The echoes will diminish
Even though the memories stay.

Bruce B. Wilmer

*Loving lifted from the TCF, South Bay L.A, CA
Chapter Newsletter*

Dreams

You were here the other night,
So alive and well, it seems.
But I awoke and then I knew
You were only in my dreams.

The tears then came so quickly,
For the time with you was brief,
You were alive and talking,
If only in my grief.

I heard your voice & touched you,
As if you were with me,
But I awoke and realized,
This was not reality.

So, I'll take my dreams when they come,
And keep them close to my heart.
Because in my dreams you're alive
And we are never really apart.

Joy Cumutt, Savannah, Georgia



Who Suffers More?

Suppose you had two jars from your supermarket that you wanted to re-use, but you need to remove their labels first. One of the jars has a pressure-sensitive label which peels right off without a trace of residue. The other one has a label that refuses to budge regardless of soaking, scraping or general pleading. The removal does not depend upon the qualities of the label or the jar. It is the kind of bonding that determines the kind of separation. Only the adhesive involved matters.

Neither the size of the label and jar, nor the length of time they have been joined together will determine how great a struggle there will be in separating the two from each other.

So it is with love and death. Therefore, let us always keep in mind as we experience our own separation pain that it is not relevant how old the child was who died -- we don't love our children more as they grow and develop. (Sometimes the more obscure label has the more tenacious bond!) The *only* measure of our grief is the intensity of our attachment.

Unbonding is not necessarily a visible or obvious process. Just as you cannot tell by looking at a jar whether its label is readily removable, you cannot tell just by looking at a parent how much suffering is caused by the unbonding process. For some parents the attachment is firm even before their children are born. For others it cements more totally with time.

None of us can judge for another. We can only extend to others the same comfort, support and understanding that we hope to receive for ourselves. Remember, we're all rowing in the same storm, and we all intend the same destination: the safe harbor of healing and peace.

*Andrea Gambill,
TCF Indianapolis, IN*

And the Oscar Goes To...

The Oscars...Oh, The Oscars... This award goes to the best actors and actresses of their time. These awards are broken down into different categories; such as drama, comedy, action, and so on. As these awards are given out, there are large screens, so everyone can watch the actors play their parts, to the best of their abilities. While these actors go to collect their lifetime achievement awards for their fame and success, they usually get a standing ovation in honor of their great acting. But I would like to take this one step further.



I know of a group of actors that would put the hall of famers back to square one, with lessons to learn. These people come in all kinds of races, sizes, and ages. They act with the best of the best; but not only when the cameras are rolling. They have learned to deliver award-winning acts in all categories, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, until the curtain falls. No matter what the role calls for, from drama to comedy, these bereaved parents are the tops. But there are no Oscars, no recognition, and they ask for none. They are the only ones who know how good they are, and for the most part keep it a secret.

Near the end of 1994 I became part of this group. They taught me, along with my family, how to act to the best of our abilities. We work on these roles, from the time we awake until we go to bed. Each day we learn a whole new different role. So, I tip my hat to these people who are silent, who taught me well and I hope to do the same for the newcomers. So, here's to you my fellow actors on this journey, may we be together until we meet our children again. "The world is a stage, and life goes on."

*Marlene Boylan,
"A Journey Together, magazine of BP/USA"*

*Grief is neither a sign of weakness nor lack of faith.
It's the price we pay for love.*

Darcie Sims

Sibling Page

"Could I Die Just Enough"

Could I die just enough,
To know you are okay,
To know where you are,
What you do night and day

Could I die just enough
To calm all our fears,
About life without you,
How we'll manage all those years

Could I die just enough,
Just put a toe over the line,
To peek into the world beyond,
And know that you're fine

Could I die just enough,
That I could quickly give you a hug,
And see you flash your smile,
While passing brief messages of love

Could I die just enough,
To hear one final story of yours,
About what it's been like, this journey
What happens after passing through life's door

Could I die just enough,
Not so much as to stay forever,
Just a tiny bit to give me a glimpse,
Of my missing link, my constant, my brother

Could I die just enough,
To tell you it's harder than I'd ever imagine, And
maybe you'd give me a reassuring word,
Or a one-liner that'd leave me laughing

Could I die just enough,
To let you know there's such a huge void,
Or can you see it all, and know it'll be fine,
And tell you all "worry no more"

Could I die just enough,
To let you know you're that important to me,
I'd dance around death, look it right in the eye, If
for one moment, you happy, I'd see... .

Kara Myers, TCF Rockland County, NY

Sibling Grief

When parents die,
you lose your past.

When your spouse dies,
you lose your present.

When your child dies,
you lose your future.

When your sibling dies,
you lose your past,
your present and
your future!

TCF Rich Township Chapter

Did you know that The
Compassionate Friends hosts a
chatroom and a facebook page
just for bereaved siblings?

To join go to
www.compassionatefriends.org
and click on the "Find
Support" menu. There you will
find options for moderated
chatrooms and private
facebook pages and
information on how to join.



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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.

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) 788-9440

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)*

Mail Love Gifts to:

Address

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, LEHIGH VALLEY
C/O BRENDA SOLDERITCH
415 S. HOKENDAUQUA DR
NORTHAMPTON, PA 18067

Phone

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)

Newsletter Expenses

Postage

Office Expenses

Outreach Program

Special Events