



# *The Compassionate Friends*

## *Lehigh Valley Chapter*

### **Supporting Family After a Child Dies**



Volume 39 Issue 2

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**February**

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is an international non-profit self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved families that have experienced the death of a child.

#### **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.

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**Our Chapter Meetings** are held at Bethany Wesleyan Church, Dining Room, Cherryville, PA, the second Monday of the month at 7pm

All bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings (over the age of 16) are welcome to attend. Participation in group sharing is confidential and voluntary. Our hope is that being among others who understand you may feel free to talk, cry and share, but it is okay to just come and listen too.

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

#### **Upcoming Meetings and Events**

- Monday February 10
- Monday March 10
- Monday April 14

#### *Meeting Cancelations*

*Those on the meeting text list will be notified via text. All others please call 484-891-0823*

#### **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 take your hand and walk beside you if you allow us to. We have no easy answers or quick fixes, but we care, share and understand. Although our members 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.

#### **To Our Seasoned Members**

Think back to your first meeting, You were hurt, confused and felt alone in your grief. Remember the comfort you felt when you found you weren't alone and that others that had been where you were and survived. Remember the love and support you felt as fellow members offered on your grief journey. Now you are stronger and may not feel the need to attend meetings for aid and comfort. We need you though. New members need you. They need your encouragement, support and wisdom. If you haven't attended a meeting in awhile please consider coming back to offer hope to those who now feel lost and see no hope.

## 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

All submissions must include the author's name and your contact information. Send to the newsletter editor

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

### Newsletter Editor Contact

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## Chapter Notes

### Dear Chapter Members

*It is with deep sorrow that I inform you of the passing of our long-time Chapter Leader, Gene Delong, on January 1st. Gene was a kind and compassionate friend to all he met. He was a dedicated chapter leader and we will miss his caring and positive nature. Although our hearts are heavy we take comfort in knowing that he has been reunited with his beloved wife, Dawn, and their son David. He leaves behind his daughter, Jamie, and our hearts go out to her during this difficult time.*

*Sincerely, Kathleen Collins*

## Going Crazy Syndrome

By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD from Grief Digest by The Centering Corporation

As C. S. Lewis noted, "Grief is like a long, winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape." As you explore the terrain of your unique grief journey, you may ask yourself, "Am I crazy?" A vital part of healing in grief is understanding the normalcy of your experience. Seemingly strange thoughts and feelings such as time distortion, obsessive review, search for meaning and others explored in this article are normal, and if you are experiencing them, that means they're necessary to your healing.

### Time Distortion

"I don't know what day it is, let alone what time it is!" This kind of comment is not unusual when you are mourning. Sometimes, time moves so quickly; at other times, it merely crawls. Your sense of past and future may also seem to be frozen in place. You may lose track of what day or even what month it is. This normal experience of time distortion often plays a part of the "going crazy" syndrome. No, you are not crazy, but if you don't know that time distortion is common in grief, you may think you are.

### Obsessive Review or Rumination

Obsessive review, or ruminating, are the psychological terms used for describing how you may constantly think about the circumstances of the death or stories about the person who has died. Its "telling your story" over and over again, either in your mind or out loud. This normal process helps bring your head and your heart together! Allow yourself to do this. Blocking it won't help you heal. Don't be angry with yourself if you can't seem to stop wanting to repeat your story. Review or rumination is a powerful and necessary part of the hard work of mourning. Yes, it hurts to constantly think and talk about the person you loved so much. But remember all grief wounds get worse before they get better. Be compassionate with yourself. Try to surround yourself with people who allow and encourage you to repeat whatever you need to tell again.

### Search for Meaning

Naturally, you try to make sense of why someone you love has died. You find yourself asking questions like, "Why him or her?" "Why now?" "Why this way?" Of course you have questions. You are human and are simply trying to understand your experience. No, answers won't always be, and often aren't, specific to your question. Yet, you still need to give yourself permission to ask them. As you wrestle with "Why?" you may be outraged at your God or Higher Power. You may feel

*Continued on page 4*

## Our Children Remembered

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

### February Birthdays and Anniversaries

	Birth	Anniv.
<b>Tyler Balog</b> - Son of Jeff & Grace Balog; Brother of Troy Balog	Mar 4	Feb 6
<b>Gabriel Benner</b> - Son of Baily Benner	May 4	Feb 9
<b>Hope Davidson</b> - Daughter of Dean & Donna Davidson; Sister of Nicholas Davidson	Aug 8	Feb 8
<b>Eileen Collins Gant</b> - Sister of Brian Collins; John Collins, Steven Collins, Kathleen Collins & MaryAnn Watkins	Mar 25	Feb 14
<b>Brian Gum</b> - Son of Geary & Brenda Gum	Feb 21	Mar 5
<b>Heather Hawn</b> - Daughter of Mike & Cathi Tirrell; Sister of Holli & Chad	Feb 25	Dec 25
<b>David Heard</b> - Son of Susan Heard; Brother of Daisy Heard	May 20	Feb 10
<b>Matt Kush</b> - Son of Rick & Ann Kush; Brother of Mike and Jenn	Aug 24	Feb 10
<b>Ed McNally</b> - Son of Don & Connie McNally; Brother of Sean McNally	Jul 29	Feb 11
<b>Michael Milot</b> - Son of John & Patti Milot; Brother of Jill	Jun 30	Feb 2
<b>Amy Ortelli</b> - Daughter of Wayne & Rebecca Ortelli; Sister of Christian Ortelli & The Late Jennifer Ortelli -Bryant	Feb 10	Jul 5
<b>Mardelle Parenti-Blume</b> - Daughter of Brian & Nancy Kleckner	Feb 9	Mar 1
<b>Steven Poliquin</b> - Son of Chris and Eva Poliquin; Grandson of Louise Mazza	Oct 8	Feb 23
<b>Eric Rute</b> - Son of Linda Cavanaugh	Feb 15	May 20
<b>Nicholas Savacool</b> - Son of Howard and Laura Savacool; Brother of Brandon, Candace & Lacie	Feb 27	Apr 1
<b>Erik Swanson</b> - Son of Susan Swanson	Sep 14	Feb 10
<b>Stephanie Volkert</b> - Daughter of Joanne Fimiano; Sister of Zachary Volkert & the Late Victoria Volkert	Sep 22	Feb 12
<b>Victoria Volkert</b> - Daughter of Joanne Fimiano; Sister of Zacary Volkert & the Late Stephanie Volkert	Jan 14	Feb 16



## Love Gifts, Donations & Contributions



With no fees, our volunteer staffed chapter sustains its mission through the generosity of donations (Love Gifts). Each donation, of any size, allows us to maintain member support, publish our monthly newsletter, and manage chapter expenses. Donations may be given in memory of a child or in memory or in honor of a friend or relative. Gifts are tax deductible. The Love Gift Donation can be found on the last page of this newsletter.

Contributor	Loved One
♥ Rella Daniels	<b>Jonelle Sisonick &amp; Anthony Sisonick</b> <i>Love and miss you. Love, Mom</i>
♥ Rick & Ann Kush	<b>Matt Kush</b> <i>In Loving Memory</i>
♥ Jack & Jule Leonard	<b>John Leonard, Jr.</b> <i>In Loving Memory</i>

*Many thanks to the following for their ongoing contributions to the chapter*

**Bethany Wesleyan Church, Cherryville**  
*For our meeting space*

**The Matt Kush Foundation**  
*In Memory of Matt Kush*

**United Way**  
**Payroll Contributors**

*Continued from page 2*

a stagnation of disillusionment with your spiritual life as you embrace your pain. On the other hand, you may feel more in touch than ever before with your spirituality. Either way, you can only be where you are. You may be able to come up with dozens of reasons why this person should not have died under these circumstances at this time. Whatever the nature or number of your questions, asking them is a normal part of your grief journey.

As you explore the meaning of this experience through your questions, be certain you don't commit "spiritual suicide." Do not prohibit yourself from asking questions you know are within you, even if the questions seem irreverent or doubting in your faith system. If you do suppress your normal and natural questions, you may shut down your capacity to give and receive love during this vulnerable period in your life.

Be aware that people may try to tell you not to ask questions, about your personal search for meaning. Or worse yet, watch out for people who try to provide easy answers to your difficult question. Most grieving people do not find comfort in pat responses; neither will you. The healing occurs in posing the questions in the first place, not just in finding answers.

Find a friend, group or counselor who will understand your need to search for meaning and be supportive without attempting to offer answers. Companionship and responsive listening can help you explore your religious and spiritual values, question your philosophy of life, and renew your resources for living!

### **Is This Death God's Will?**

Closely related to the search for meaning is the commonly asked question, "Is this death God's will?" If you have a perception of an all-powerful God of Higher Power, you probably find this question particularly difficult. Sometimes you may reason: "God loves me, so why take this most precious person from me?" Or you may have been told: "It's God's will and you should just accept it and go on." However, if you internalize this message, you may repress your grief and ignore your human need to mourn. Repressing your grief because you need to "just accept it and go on" can be self-destructive. If you don't ask questions and if you don't express feelings, you may ultimately drown in despair. If your soul does not ask, your body will probably protest. Repressing and denying heartfelt questions can, and often does, keep your wounds from healing. Listen to your questions!

### **Transitional Objects**

Transitional objects are belongings of the person who died. They often can give you comfort. Objects such as clothing, books or prized possessions can help you feel close to someone you miss so much. For example, when I was counseling a grieving woman,

she shared with me that she found it comforting to take one of her husband's favorite shirts to bed with her. She said, "As I clutched his shirt close to me, I didn't feel so alone. But as I worked with my grief, my need for the shirt dwindled over time."

Some people may try to distance you from belongings such as the shirt described above. This behavior fits with the tendency of our culture to move away from grief instead of toward it.

Remember embrace the comfort provided by familiar objects. To do away with them too soon takes away a sense of security that these belongings provide. Once you have moved toward reconciliation, you will probably be better to decide what to do with them. Some things, however, you may want to keep forever. That's all right, too. Simply giving away the belongings of the person who died does not equate with healing in your grief.

Nor does keeping some belongings mean that you have "created a shrine." This phrase is used when someone keeps everything just as it was after the death. Creating a shrine, however, only prevents acknowledging the painful new reality that someone you love has died. Understanding the difference between transitional objects and creating a shrine is important. The former helps to heal; the latter does not.

### **Anniversary and Holiday Grief Occasions**

Naturally, anniversary and holiday occasions can bring about "pangs" of grief. Birthdays, wedding dates, holidays and other special occasions create a heightened sense of loss. At these times, you may likely experience a grief attack or memory embrace. Your "pangs" of grief may also occur in response to circumstances that remind you of the painful absence of someone in your life. For many families, certain times have special meaning such as the beginning of spring, the first snowfall or an annual 4th of July party, and the person who died is more deeply missed at those times. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that these reactions are natural. Sometimes the anticipation of an anniversary or holiday actually turns out to be worse than the day itself.

Interestingly enough, sometimes your internal clock will alert you to an anniversary date you may have forgotten. If you notice you are feeling down or experiencing "pangs" of grief, you may be having an anniversary response. Keep in mind that this is normal.

The aspects of grief explored in this article are in no way an all-inclusive list of experiences, that might constitute the "going crazy" syndrome. However, my hope is that this information helps you better understand the normalcy of your unique journey into grief.



## The Valentines of Yesterday

By Anette Mennen Baldwin,  
TCF Katy, TX

In my lifetime I have received many valentines. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, school friends, good friends, boyfriends, acquaintances and my husband have showered me over the years with lovely valentines which have so appreciated. The tradition of declaring friendship and love on Valentine's Day is a very fond memory.

However, the sweetest valentines I have ever received are from my son. From the first days in nursery school when my son made a hand plaque and a drawing on construction paper to the final valentine in 2002, I cherished these gifts of love from my only child.

I have kept every valentine my son ever made for me or bought for me. I have every valentine gift he ever gave me. These are the treasures that remind me how special my love for my son truly is.

There is no love to compare with the unconditional love we give our children. I think my son knew that nobody in the world would love him as much as his mother did. He also knew that he would love his children in just this same way. This unconditional love that we give our children is the most precious love in life. It is always our hope that they, too, will find the joy of this love with their children.

When our child dies, we cling to our unconditional love as we feel the anguish of a final separation on this earthly plane and a tsunami of betrayal as the devastation of this incomprehensible loss sweeps over us. The pain is real. It is physical, emotional, psychological, and forever embedded on our psyche. Yet without that unconditional love, there would be no pain. Who among us would trade the most infinitely rewarding love and the subsequent pain of loss for a life of lukewarm relationships?

And so, on Valentine's Day this year, looked back at this love, at the good times, the wonderful handmade childhood valentine cards and gifts, and the carefully selected cards of adulthood that my son gave to me. His words, his love, his appreciation for all that we

had shared as mother and child are reflected in these treasures.

There were tears, certainly, but they were tempered with the many wonderful sweet memories of my son and his life. It is these sweet memories which sustain me, give me hope and bring gratitude for all that was given to me.

My son is forever in my heart. He is with me every day and every night, and especially; he is with me on Valentine's Day.

## The Reunion Heart

Since Heaven has become your home  
I sometimes feel I'm so alone;  
and though we are far apart  
you hold a big piece of my heart.

I never knew how much I'd grieve  
when it was time for you to leave,  
or just how much my heart would ache  
from that one fragment you would take.

God lets this tender hole remain  
reminding me we'll meet again,  
and one day all the pain will cease  
when He restores this missing piece.

He'll turn to joy my every tear,  
With thoughts of you I hold so dear,  
And they'll become my special way  
To treasure our Reunion Day

*Author Unknown*





## My Thoughts on Mrs. Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln has always been my most admired and respected figure in the history of our country. After standing in front of his statue at the Lincoln Memorial, no one could ever forget the terrible marked sadness in his face, his forlorn and melancholy attitude. I have been picking up from other chapter newsletters the many pieces of prose and poetry attributed to Lincoln, which speak so poignantly of grief, and I have researched the Lincoln life.

It is for his wife, Mary, for whom I cringe now when I read how life dealt with her. Washington gossip circles referred to her “mental state”, that she was “deranged” and “eccentric”. The Lincoln’s lost their second son, Edward, almost 4, in February 1850. Their third son Willie was born in December of that year and died in February 1862 at the age of 11. And then, the tragedy of tragedies. In April, President Lincoln was assassinated in front of Mrs. Lincoln’s eyes ... her grief must have been worse than inconsolable.

How could life deal such a terrible fate to one woman? How could any one of us deal with such multiple tragedies? We know how easy it is to feel as if we are “going crazy” and how common that feeling is. To share that feeling in Compassionate Friends is more than wonderful ... to be assured that it is common, to learn and understand from other bereaved parents why we feel that way, and that it will pass helps immeasurably.

But tragedy stalked Mary Lincoln’s footsteps, for not quite six years later, her son Tad was killed at 18 in January 1871. History books do not say, but I pray that Mrs. Lincoln had ONE compassionate



friend who understood her grief over the death of her three sons and her husband. One friend wrote of her: “Poor Mrs. Lincoln. She has been a deranged person.” Yes, of that I am sure. And then I thank God for The Compassionate Friends.

*Mary LaTour, TCF/Dallas, TX*

## I'll Never Be The Same

Confusion reigns within my heart,  
Within my soul, because  
I know I cannot ever be  
The woman I once was.

How can I be complete and whole  
When part of me is gone...  
A special part... a precious part ...  
That part that was my son

One cannot lose a child to death  
And still remain the same  
Untouched by tears of emptiness  
Undaunted by the pain.

The cruelest nightmares come to pass  
Life's better pill to swallow  
In light of this, I can endure  
All else that's yet to follow.

There's nothing that can fill the empty  
Spaces that remain;  
I've tried and failed so many times,  
I cannot try again.

No trying to regain the past...  
That's all a bitter sham...  
It's time that I resigned myself  
To be being who I am.

To the woman I've become  
No acting out a part  
A mother with a shattered dream  
And a broken heart.

*Peggy Kociscin, Unknown Chapter*

# Sibling Page

## Everything is a First

Everything is a first. Many moments must be faced. There are the first holidays, the first anniversary, and the first birthday.

Thoughts about my brother Dave, will always be with us. It's never more than a sentence away from me ... NEVER.

The ordinary cannot be ordinary. A certain phrase, a look or an article of clothing can trigger thoughts and emotions. The joy of my senior year in college was interrupted by sad reality.

Forget? How is this possible? The days and months following my brother's death were filled with grief. Flowers and food were everywhere love and concern were translated into strength that kept me moving one step at a time. People don't know what to say-nothing is NORMAL.

Tragedy has brought a seriousness to my life. Thoughts about the meaning of life and the unimportance of a lot of things I have previously found important are circulating in my mind. I think about my own funeral now. When will it be: Tomorrow, next week, next year, before or after my parents? There are good days and bad days. I am learning to deal with all of this. People ask me, "How are you?" Here is my answer. "I am mad. Dave died at the age of 17. I'm angry that my parents have to go through this.

I'm confused about my role in the family. I am jealous of other families. I am sad. I'm fearful about the future. I am hopeful things will get better. I am courageous. I think about my brother every day. I will be STRONG."

*Lisa Ann Jones, TCF Avoca, PA*

**You'll never know how strong  
you are until being strong is  
the only choice you have**

*Bob Marley*

## Dear Sibling,

How can I possibly tell you how much I miss you? But of course you probably already know – since you know me better than anyone. No matter how much time passes, I still wish you were here to share our lives and the future I expected us to have together.

Even though we fought and at times neglected each other, I just assumed that you would always be there.

That we'd grow old together and remember stories of growing up and laugh at each other as we looked and acted more like our parents. Your death has rocked me harder than I could have imagined. And at times I didn't want a future that didn't include you. Ultimately, there are no answers to my questions:

There is no replacing you and there is no solace for my grief. There is only the simple choice I make every day. To live on in the honor of your memory and the love we shared. To strive to carry on the best of who you were. To cherish the brief time we have with others. To celebrate the opportunity to be alive. To have compassion for the pain of others as well as my own. To have the courage to love fully as I have loved you and to remember that you would want me to go on and find joy again. You gave me many gifts while you were alive and I continued to discover the gifts in this loss. I am so thankful you were born my sibling I could not have traded our time together for anything. You are always with me because you are a part of me.

*Melanie Lamourei TCF Marin County, CA*

### Note:

*Siblings are welcome to attend our compassionate friends meetings. We just ask that you are at least 16 years of age.*

*Also The Compassionate Friends hosts a moderated chatroom and a facebook page just for bereaved siblings. To join go to [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) and click on the "Find Support" tab.*



## The Compassionate Friends Credo Copyright © 2007

**W**e 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.*

### 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](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) and click on find and then choose online communities.

### Other Local TCF Chapters & Support Groups

**TCF Carbon County** - 484-719-6753

**TCF Easton** - 610-515-3526

**TCF Quakertown** - 267-379-0429

**GRASP** - 484-788-9440

**TCF Pocono** - 570-350-6695

(grief recovery after substance passing)

### Love Gift Form

*The Compassionate Friends is a 501(c)(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 1st

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

**Address**

**Phone**

Mail this form to:

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, LEHIGH VALLEY  
C/O KATHLEEN COLLINS  
2971 PHEASANT DR.  
NORTHAMPTON, PA 18067

**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 are 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.

I would like my love gift to go toward: (you may choose more than one)

☐ **Newsletter**

☐ **Postage**

☐ **Office Expenses**

☐ **Special Events**