



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Volume 40 Issue 1

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January

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, 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.

We invite you to bring a picture of your child to display at the meeting for their birth or anniversary month or at any time. We also welcome refreshments brought in honor of your child.

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 January 12
- Monday February 9

Meeting Cancellations will be posted on the Webpage, Facebook page & texted to the meeting list members

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

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Inside this issue:

Article - The New Year	2-4
Our Children Remembered	3
Love Gifts	3
Poem - Borrowed Hope	4
Thoughts - New Year's Goals	
Articles - A time to Grieve, A Time To Heal; Pain	5
Article - Am I Making Progress	6
<u>Sibling Page</u>	7
Article - Ringing In The New Me	
Love Gift Form	8

Recent Events

TCF Lehigh Valley Candle Light Remembrance

On Monday, December 8th, we came together in fellowship to light a candle and place a special ornament on our remembrance tree in honor of the children who we deeply missed and will forever love. Our heartfelt thanks go out to Bethany Wesleyan Church for providing the space, and to all who participated.

TCF Worldwide Candle Lighting

On Sunday December 14th TCF National held its annual worldwide candle lighting. Hundreds of thousands of people participated at in person and in online to commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon. Candles were lit at 7pm in every time zone creating a 24 hour wave of light that stretched across the globe.



The New Year: A Time Of Hope

Another New Year has slipped into our lives, radically changing some things and leaving other things to evolve naturally. For bereaved parents a new year marks another year on the calendar without their precious children. It is a new year, but not much has changed since the old year. Why is that?

We act as the catalysts of change for ourselves. We choose to help ourselves; we choose to stay in a specific place in our grief. We choose to reach out for hope or we choose to withdraw into the familiar and postpone facing life and hope another day. There are no set rules or specific timetables in bereavement. We are each unique in our grief.

Eventually we all find hope. We find it in different ways and in different times. There will be no one moment of epiphany for bereaved parents. Instead, there are a series of minutes, hours, weeks, months and often years until we realize that we can truly say we feel the power of hope coming alive from deep within us. This moment will come for each of us. It will come in its own time and its own way.

Even those of us who have found hope and who shine its light on the paths of newly bereaved parents, still regress and withdraw into the dark

Continued on page 4

Our Children Remembered January Birthdays and Anniversaries

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

	Birth	Anniv.
Brian Burke - Son of Rich & Mary Burke; Brother of Melissa Burke ; Brother of Melissa Burke	Jan 3	Oct 9
Mark Dilts, Jr - Son of Mark & Joy Dilts; Brother of Beth Dilts	Jan 6	Jul 8
Marguerite "Maggie" Faber - Daughter of Carol Miller	Jan 17	Jan 17
Brenda Fehr Hatrak - Daughter of David & Eileen Fehr, Sr.; Sister of Barbara R. Burgin & David A. Fehr, Jr.; Granddaughter of Elwood & Mary Mann and Granddaughter of Warren & Rose Fehr	Aug 31	Jan 8
Jessica Finlayson - Daughter of Eric & Jean Dalstad; Sister of Rebecca Dalstad	Mar 19	Jan 22
Carly Grozier - Daughter of Cathie Given	Mar 4	Jan 17
Oliver Klitsch - Son of Shawn & Abigail Klitsch; Gr&son of Mark & Pam Klitsch	Jan 24	Oct 15
Morgan Knupp - Daughter of Ashlee Knupp	Jan 25	Jan 25
John Kopitskie - Son of Steve & Lisa Kopitskie; Brother of Leslie, Sarah & Matthew	Mar 4	Jan 25
John Leonard, Jr - Son of Jack & Jule Leonard; Brother of Karen	Jul 27	Jan 6
Andrea Luecke - Daughter of Louise Luecke; Sister of Jennae Luecke	Jan 30	Oct 23
Benjamin Miller - Son of Brian & Caitlin Miller	Aug 5	Jan 11
Marissa Monteverde - Daughter of Nadine Monteverde; Sister of Tanya & Jeremy	Jan 23	Nov 4
James Ralls - Son of Tina Ralls; Brother of Timothy & Geoffrey	Jan 2	Aug 17
Emmanuel Trotter - Son of Tonya Trotter	Jun 23	Jan 17
Shane Uttard - Son of Brenda Deubler	Jan 15	May 13
Victoria Volkert - Daughter of Joanne Fimiano; Sister of Zacary Volkert	Jan 14	Feb 16
Jonathan Weiss - Brother of Ginger Renner	Aug 20	Jan 22
Liam Whetstone - Son of Cody Whetstone & Linda Haller	Jan 19	Jan 19



Thank You for your "Love Gifts"



From:

Loved One

♥ Carol A. Miller

Maggie Jo Faber*Happy Birthday Maggie. Love, Mom*♥ The Matt Kush Foundation
Rick & Ann Kush**Matt Kush***In Loving Memory*

♥ Rella Daniels

Jonelle Sisonick and Anthony Sisonick*In loving memory of my daughter Jonelle and my son Anthony*

What are Love Gifts?

Love Gifts are heartfelt expressions of love given in memory of our precious children, family members, and friends. With no dues or fees our chapter sustains its mission through the generosity of Love Gift donations. Gifts can be made in any amount and are tax deductible. Please use the form on the last page of this newsletter and mail or bring to the meeting.

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

sadness of our loss. And that is as it should be. For we have lost the most precious gift of our lives...our children's presence with us and their future in this life. Our children live in our hearts and our memories and our dreams. They do not share this plane with us. It is normal and it is good to think of our children often and to shed some tears for all that has been lost. These aren't setbacks as much as sweet memories that bring cathartic tears.

The element we find in these memories is a closeness to our child and our child's life. This, too, is healthy. An often-expressed fear is that our children will be forgotten. Worry not, gentle parent, your child will be remembered for all of your days and for many days thereafter. You will never forget your child. Others who knew your child will never forget. The proof of this is in our memories....sweet memories that take us back to another time when our child was with us.

So this New Year's, whether you are a few months, a few years or many years in your grief, think about hope. You have not forsaken your child when you reach for hope. Your hope brings your child back in a positive way that will warm your heart. Reach for that hope. As you move forward in your grief in the New Year, reach for hope. Your child will still be with you. And one day you will find that your child's presence is sweeter when hope is within you.

*Annette Mennen Baldwin;
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen*

Borrowed Hope

Lend me your hope for a while
I seem to have mislaid mine.
Loss and the hopeless feelings
accompany me daily.
Pain and confusion are my companions.
I know not where to turn.
Looking ahead to the future times
Does not bring forth images of renewed hope.
I see mirthless times,
pain filled days, and more tragedy.
Lend me your hope for a while.
I seem to have mislaid mine.
Hold my hand and hug me.
Listen to all my ramblings.
I need to unleash the pain and let it tumble out.
Recovery seems so far distant.
The road to healing, a long and lonely one.
Stand by me.
Offer me your presence.
Your ears and your love.
Acknowledge my pain,
it is so real and ever present.
I am overwhelmed
With sad and conflicting thoughts.
Lend me your hope for a while.
A time will come when I will heal.
And I will lend my renewed hope to others.

*Eloise Cole,
TCF Phoenix, AZ*

New Year Goals

The holidays are over and I bet you're glad about that. You did make it through, and by now maybe some of the stress of that powerful time has left you. Next year you will find you learned from this year, no matter how many years it has been, and I hope it will be easier for you, too, in the years ahead.

If you made New Year's resolutions, I hope they included:

- To try and take it one day at a time;
- To forgive yourself for whatever it is you feel you did wrong;
- To figure out ways to resolve your anger so you can let go of it;
- To concentrate on and value what you have left, as much as what you have lost;
- To risk reinvestment in life;
- To let those you value know how important they are to you.

These are important steps forward. Try to be good to yourself in the new year.

TCF Long Beach, CA '94 newsletter

A Time To Grieve, A Time To Heal

Have you ever noticed the many mixed-up emotions involved in grieving?

On the one hand, you feel restless.

On the other hand, you feel like you don't want to move at all.

You feel desperately alone, and yet you don't want anyone around.

You feel scatter-brained, forgetful, and yet frantically meticulous.

You feel like crying at nothing, and yet sometimes laughing at anything. (or do I have that backwards?)

Being in a crowd of people is fine as long as they don't talk to you.

And yet, if they don't talk to you, you feel as if nobody cares.

You want so desperately for someone to mention your child, to remember the life that once was.

And yet it can make you furious if ALL they want to talk about is the dead one,
and never even mention the living ones.

Grief settles over you like a hot blanket, you're as cold as winter snow.

Grief presses on you like a steam roller, you're floating in a bubble above yourself.

Grief boxes you in on four sides, and introduces you to a pain no one should have to know.

But then, once again, you begin to feel compassion.

You relate to other parents who have had an experience similar to your own.

And eventually, with a light as sharp as a sunburst,
you hear yourself saying your child's name with an unfamiliar smile on your face.
You remember some of the funny times, and feel laughter building in your throat.

One morning you notice that the sun is shining,
the flowers are bursting with the colors of Spring.

The seasons have passed unnoticed and somehow, you are still here.

Even though your child is still THERE.

You feel your heart swell with a love you never even knew could exist.

And you find a place in your life for something called (dare I say) Peace...?

And then, ever so gently, the memories enfold you in a warmth as soothing as a cool shower
on a hot summer day.

So you find you want to remember
and tender memories of LOVE lift you to unreachable heights.

To the brightest of stars,
to the loveliest touch of YOUR CHILD.

Dana Gensler, TCF South Central KY

Human pain does not let go of its grip at one point in time. Rather, it works its way out of our consciousness over time. There is a season of sadness, a season of anger, a season of tranquility, a season of hope. But seasons do not follow each other in a lockstep manner. At least not for those in crisis. The winters and springs of one's life are all jumbled together in a puzzling array. One day we feel as though the dark clouds have lifted, but the next day they have returned. One moment we can smile, but a few hours later the tears emerge... it is true that, as we take two steps forward in our journey, we may take one or more steps back. But when one affirms that the spring thaw will arrive, the winter winds seem to lose some of their punch.

Robert Veninga, from "A Gift of Hope: How we Survive Our Tragedies"

AM I MAKING PROGRESS?

January is a reflective month. Ice ponds reflect the leaden sky, and the heart reflects the emptiness of a frozen spirit. When will we begin to thaw? When will we feel like we're making some progress in this place of icicles and cold sheets, sunless days and long, empty nights? Will we ever be happy again? Will I ever be ME again?

January is also the month for making promises, commitments and resolutions (resolutions are FANCY promises). We begin our new year with high hopes, strong wills and long lists of things that will be different this year. To celebrate my commitment to a New Me, I bought a jogging suit, expensive shoes, and a digital watch, complete with timer, pulse meter and M & M dispenser. (You've got to have some motivation!) THIS YEAR WILL BE DIFFERENT.

We also spend some time looking back over the road we've traveled, and sometimes we wonder if we have made any progress at all. In the beginning, we misplaced car keys, checkbooks, toothbrushes, relatives and important stuff like the TV Guide. We had to begin making lists of everything. We simply couldn't remember anything. I couldn't remember my address, Social security number, zip code or my mother-in-law's birthday. (I never could remember that). I even started making lists of my lists! I knew I was going to be all right when I first discovered I could remember that I had made a list.

You know you're making progress when you can coordinate an entire outfit again. Shoes, belts, ties, purses, even sweaters and jackets often got left, simply because when we were hurting so terribly, we couldn't think about what to wear. Many of us didn't even know the panty hose were on backwards, or the tie was crooked. If you are wearing matched shoes right now, then you are making progress.

You're making progress when you no longer choke when you say your loved one's name. When you can walk down the cereal aisle in the supermarket and not dissolve into tears, progress is being made. When you can enjoy baking HIS favorite cookies or pie or cake again, you are on your way.

When the photographs come back out once more and you can wander through the scrapbooks again, letting the smiles peek through the tears, then hope is returning. When memories, for the most part bring comfort and warmth instead of emptiness and pain, January grows shorter. When you begin to understand that putting away

your loved one's things does NOT mean putting him out of your life, then your step becomes lighter.

Progress occurs when you completely understand that your loved one DIED, but the love you share between you can never be destroyed. Hope begins to return when you can hear laughter again and some of that laughter is your own.

Recovery is possible once unrealistic hopes for a lost future are given up, grieved for, and moved beyond. Perhaps it is not so much saying good-bye to our loved one as it is saying farewell to the old us and the life we shared. Making progress through grief doesn't mean that you no longer miss your loved one. He is a part of your life forever, but his role in your life changes. Our lifestyle and habits change to reflect a different family landscape.

Now, as you look back, it is amazing to see the life fabric no longer ripped apart with a gaping hole, but mended with tiny stitches, left perhaps a bit lumpy (like lots of us), but patched with time, effort and love. Old threads and new threads have blended together and have been rewoven into a pattern not quite the same as we had originally planned. It is a tapestry of love, given and received, remembered and shared.

Life can become good and whole and complete once again; not when we try to fill up the empty spaces left by loved ones no longer within hug's reach, but when we realize that love creates new spaces in the heart and expands the spirit and deepens the joy of simply being alive. The renewed energy and love we feel as winter turns into spring becomes the memorial to our loved one...not the grave markers we decorate, not the books we write, not the speeches we give, but the LOVE we share and pass on.

You know you are making progress when all of this begins to make some sense (save this column to read later!). When the shoes match and the car keys are found and the list of lists grows shorter, then you are making progress. Then the laughter can return, and with the magical sound comes the healing of the hurt and the shedding of the band-aid, because the heart is learning to sing again.

January...the month to check on our progress, to make new commitments and to start jogging.

Hope springs eternal!

Darcie Sims, Ph.D., CGC, CHT - Grief Inc. - bereaved parent, grief management specialist, nationally certified grief counselor, a certified pastoral bereavement specialist, author and licensed psychotherapist and hypnotherapist.

Sibling Page

Ring In The New Me

This coming New Years Eve will be our 22nd without my dear brother Russell, who died in July 2002. It's a bittersweet holiday because it is also his birthday.

The holiday season can be a stressful time for everyone, but it can be especially hard for families whose lives have been shattered by loss. Celebrating the holidays suddenly felt like an empty ritual or a thing of the past. It was hard to embrace new traditions in order to find hope and joy again. It took time to give myself permission to do it the way that I do it.

I remember how hard the first few years were, how alone I felt in the world. I didn't know how to do the holidays without my brother. All I could do was go through the motions. Spending time with family was often when I felt the most alone. It was hard to see the rest of the family intact, acting as if everything was ok, and no one talked about Russell but me.

New Years Eve was especially tough, as there seemed no where to go and nothing to do where Russell wasn't not there. His absence was ever present for me. My grief followed me to every party, a cloud hung over me at every celebratory event. Alone in my thoughts, surrounded by strangers who didn't know or care what I was going through.

The repetition helped. My process of grief has been Trial and Error -MOSTLY Error! As hard as these events that come up every year can be, they are also opportunities to try something new. Every year I get to find ways for the holiday season to suck less.

Every year I get a little bit better at navigating the hard days. I have made it my job to bring up Russell at family events. It was a little awkward and weird those first few years; it was clear that it made some people in my family uncomfortable because it forced them to confront his death, but I am always going to make sure I remind everyone of his LIFE. It's up to me to keep talking about Russell, to remind people that he lived, to normalize the fact that we're

going to continue talking about him as a family. It's comforting to me to know that I get to keep working at it until I find what feels good.

About 5 years after Russell's death, my parents and I started hosting a party on New Years Eve that we always describe as a hybrid NYE/ Russell's birthday party. It's a mixture of my friends, my parents friends, and always a nice showing from our TCF family. Everyone there knows the deal, and I'm allowed to be emotional if I want, or jubilant, or whatever I need to be and no one will judge.

It's also just the perfect low-key way to ring in the new year, similar to a party my parents threw years ago that Russell and I basically crashed (along with a half dozen friends). We always have a huge spread of food and desserts (SO many desserts - Russell was a pastry chef after all). At midnight we sing happy birthday to Russell, and then we do a balloon launch, giving everyone there a chance to write messages to their lost loved ones and send them up. It's become a real source of healing and connection to be able to celebrate not just Russell, but all the people we still have in our lives. It truly feels like Russell is there with us every year. For many years, I was convinced that all my New Years would be ruined for the rest of my life, but the truth is, I would never be able to celebrate it with as many people as I do were his birthday any other day of the year. One year when Russell was very young, he was awakened by the fireworks at midnight, only to run out into the living room asking, "is it time for more presents?!"

I have tried to think of NYE the same way that Russell did - that the whole world was celebrating his birthday whether they knew it or not, and I allow myself to celebrate him every year, along with the rest of the world.

Jordon Ferber TCF Manhattan, NY

Note:

Siblings (age 16+) are welcome to attend our compassionate friends meetings.

Also The Compassionate Friends hosts a moderated chatroom and a facebook page just for bereaved siblings. To join go to www.compassionatefriends.org and click on the "Find Support" tab.



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.

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 find and then choose online communities.

Other Local TCF Chapters & Support Groups

TCF Quakertown - 267-379-0429

TCF Easton - 610-577-5193

TCF Pocono - 570-350-6695

GRASP - 484-788-9440

(grief recovery after substance passing)

Love Gift Form

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 1st

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

Address

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 are published in the next edition.*

Special Text - Brief message & signature (Examples Messages - Happy Birthday; Loved & missed forever, Always in my heart Signatures - Love Mom, Dad etc.)

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

☐ Newsletter

☐ Postage

☐ Office Expenses

☐ Special Events