



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies



February

Volume 40 Issue 2

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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.

TCF, Lehigh Valley
Chapter 1562

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

Our support group provides a confidential and welcoming space for bereaved parents, grandparents, and adult (16 yr +) siblings. We hope that by being among others who understand this profound pain, you will feel free to talk, cry, and share your experiences; it is also perfectly acceptable to simply come and listen.

To honor your loved one, we invite you to bring a picture of your child to display during the meeting on special days or at any time you wish. Refreshments brought in memory of your child are also warmly welcomed.

For additional information about meetings, directions to our meeting space or to be added to the meeting reminder text list call or text 835-201-4606

Upcoming Meetings and Events

- Monday February 9 - Topic: Memories of the Heart --- *more info on page 2*
- Monday March 9

Cancellations will be posted on the website & sent to meeting list members

To Our New Members

Coming to your first meeting can be an emotional experience, but please know that everyone present has experienced the profound loss of a child and shares a deep understanding of the pain you are enduring. We cannot walk your unique grief journey for you, but we can offer to take your hand and walk beside you if you allow us to. We have no easy answers or quick fixes; instead, we offer a safe space where we care, share, and understand.

Although each member's circumstances may differ, we have all "been there" and can genuinely say we understand. You are not alone.

To Our Seasoned Members

Think back to your very first meeting. You likely arrived feeling hurt, confused, and deeply alone in your grief. Do you remember the quiet relief of realizing you weren't alone? That others had walked this path and survived? That same love and support you received is now a gift you hold for others. While you have grown stronger and may no longer need the meetings for your own healing, our newest members need you. Please consider returning to share the hope that was once shared with you.

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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Chapter & Meeting News

Please Note: The chapter's primary phone number has changed.

Our new number is 835-201-4606

All other contact details such as email address and website remain the same.

Meetings

12 members attended the January meeting. Thank you to all who attended and a special thank you to Tom & Janice for providing the meeting snacks. We hope that everyone found some encouragement at the meeting.

February 9th meeting: Memories of the Heart

We all cherish special mementos that remind us of our beloved children, grandchildren, or siblings. At this month's meeting, we invite you to bring a meaningful item that can be briefly shared with the rest of the group. This could be something that was special to your child, a gift they gave you, or anything else that reminds you of the love you shared, even if their life was

Waiting for Answers

Years ago I left my first meeting of The Compassionate Friends and drove home in tears. My son, Max, had died a few short weeks before and I had been anxiously awaiting this evening. These people must have some answers, I thought. With paper and pen in purse, I was ready to take notes and do as they prescribed. I would do anything to ease the ache in my soul.

But when I walked out into the spring air later that night, I felt betrayed. I hadn't heard any answers. Instead of learning how to leave my grief behind, it had been confirmed, made more real with expression. I knew I would miss Max forever. Now I wondered if I would grieve forever. Would it always be this way, a flash of pain aligned with every memory?

During the next months and years, I attended TCF meetings and conferences, read books, raged, kept busy, sometimes spent the day in bed. I wrote, cried and talked about Max. Slowly, I discovered the answers I had long feared were true: yes, I will grieve forever, and yes, my memories will often provoke tears. But something had changed.

My grief was now more forgiving, my tears almost sweet with memory. Max's life took shape again as the anguish of his death began to recede. If I would always miss him, I would also always have him with me in so many ways. I wanted to carry his memory into the future: the joy, the lessons, and the inevitable pain. How could I do otherwise?

As I walked to my car after that first meeting, the TCF chapter leader caught up with me. "How can I stop this pain?" I asked. She put her arm on my shoulder. "Just do what feels right to you," she said, "Listen to your heart. And we'll be here to listen, too."

Sometimes the best advice is none at all.

Mary Clark, TCF Sugar Land, SW Houston Chapter, TX

Our Children Remembered

February Birthdays and Anniversaries

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

| | Birth | Anniv. |
|--|--------|--------|
| Tyler Balog - Son of Jeff and Grace Balog ; Brother of Troy Balog | Mar 4 | Feb 6 |
| Gabriel Benner - Son of Baily Benner | May 4 | Feb 9 |
| Hope Davidson - Daughter of Dean and Donna Davidson; Sister of Nicholas Davidson | Aug 8 | Feb 8 |
| Eileen Collins Gant - Daughter of The Late John & Dorothy Collins; Sister of John, Steven, Kathleen & Brian Collins & MaryAnn Watkins | Mar 25 | Feb 14 |
| Brandon Gehris - Son of Ryan and Tanya Nissen | Feb 2 | Sep 3 |
| Brian Gum - Son of Geary and Brenda Gum | Feb 21 | Mar 5 |
| Heather Hawn - Daughter of Mike and Cathi Tirrell; Sister of Holli & Chad | Feb 25 | Dec 25 |
| David Heard - Son of Susan Heard; Brother of Daisy Heard | May 20 | Feb 10 |
| Matt Kush - Son of Rick and Ann Kush; Brother of Mike and Jenn | Aug 24 | Feb 10 |
| Ed McNally - Son of Don and Connie McNally; Brother of Sean McNally | Jul 29 | Feb 11 |
| Michael Milot - Son of John and Patti Milot; Brother of Jill | Jun 30 | Feb 2 |
| Amy Ortelli - Daughter of Wayne & Rebecca Ortelli; Sister of Christian Ortelli & The Late Jennifer Ortelli - Bryant | Feb 10 | Jul 5 |
| Mardelle Parenti-Blume - Daughter of Brian and Nancy Kleckner | Feb 9 | Mar 1 |
| Steven Poliquin - Son of Chris Poliquin & The Late Eva Poliquin; Grandson of Louise Mazza | Oct 8 | Feb 23 |
| Eric Rute - Son of Linda Cavanaugh | Feb 15 | May 20 |
| Nicholas Savacool - Son of Howard and Laura Savacool; Brother of Brandon, Candace & Lacie | Feb 27 | Apr 1 |
| Erik Swanson – Son of Susan Swanson | Sep 14 | Feb 10 |
| Stephanie Volkert - Daughter of Joanne Fimiano; Sister of Zachary Volkert & The Late Victoria Volkert | Sep 22 | Feb 12 |
| Victoria Volkert - Daughter of Joanne Fimiano; Sister of Zacary Volkert & The Late Stephanie Volkert | Jan 14 | Feb 16 |



Thank you for your "Love Gifts"



From:

Loved One

♥Mr & Mrs Brian Kleckner

Mardelle M Parenti

Happy Birthday Mardie! Love, Mom & Dad

♥Jack and Jule Leonard

John Leonard, Jr.

Loved and missed forever. Mom & Dad

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



Beating The Winter Blahs

DIAGNOSIS: Grieving parents' depression seems aggravated by the cold weather and snow.

PRESCRIPTION: Force yourself to follow one or more of the suggestions listed below when the blahs strike.

WARNING: Don't expect miracles but appreciate the little lift these things will give you.

- Start a summer project - something for your yard from the workshop, something to wear from your sewing machine, seedlings to transplant when the ground thaws - and challenge yourself to get it done in time to use it on the first warm day.
- Redecorate - anything.
- Make it seem like spring by treating yourself to fresh flowers. Buy a single carnation or mixed blooms.
- January and February are slow months for restaurants so they often run 2 for 1 dinner specials to increase their business. Watch the newspaper for those coupons and treat yourself to a night out as often as you can. And remember, you're worth it.
- Go to the matinee movie often. It's a good way to unwind for a couple of hours and both your mind and body will appreciate that brief relief from tension.
- Try to make the winter easier for the birds and squirrels in your yard and you'll feel better about yourself too. They need water that isn't frozen as well as food.
- If you've got one, light a fire in the fireplace, fix a warm drink of some kind, wrap yourself in a comforter and snuggle in with a good book. Something funny or totally absorbing that you can get lost in.
- Bake some bread. The smell will make you feel good even if it flops (and no bread is bad hot)
- Take a long hot bubble bath.
- Put on some upbeat, happy music. It'll get you moving whether you feel like it or not.
- Start a pillow fight.
- Brew a pot of smokey tea. The scent will remind you of the great outdoors in summer time.
- Close the blinds to hide the snow.

TCF Carmel, IN. Newsletter

Time does not really heal a broken heart...
It only teaches a person how to live with it.

Our Broken Hearts

By Jacquelyn M. Comeaux

In Loving Memory of My Angels...Michelle, Jerry & Danny,
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If someone fell and broke a leg, people would rush to their aid. They wouldn't stop to even think about it. Yet, when it's our hearts that are broken, few rush to our aid and even fewer understand. At first, we receive the cards and phone calls wishing us well and telling us "if there's anything I can do"...but they soon taper off to a trickle. Then we begin to hear that we must 'get on with our life,' 'we can't let it get us down,' and we're told just how soon we should be 'back to normal'... we're given a deadline of sorts. When we don't follow the acceptable standards for healing, we are thought to 'need help'...the professional kind... and we're told that we are 'in denial'. These same people, who seem to have all of the answers, not only have never experienced the loss of a child but also tend to not want to get too involved...too close to our pain. They would rather stand off to the side until we're back to our old selves...whatever that is!

They're uncomfortable when we speak of why our hearts are broken and they don't mention it for fear of reminding us of how our hearts broke in the first place... as if we could ever forget. When they ask us, "How are you"...it's more a greeting than a question. They don't want to hear how we ache inside, how lonely and empty we feel, how desolate we feel. Why...because they can't fix it. They can't make us whole again. And unlike a broken bone that's healed, we will never be as good as new. We will forever be missing a part of what made us the person that we once were.



Nancy Green, TCF, Livonia, MI

When our child died, so did a part of our heart and where that piece was, now there is nothing...only a gaping hole that nothing and no one can ever fill. Unlike a broken bone, we will not mend in a few weeks...in fact, we will never fully mend. We learn to live without that piece of our hearts...to live with our loss, to survive...one day at a time!

Thoughts on Valentines Day

"How sad this day must be for you."
I read it in their eyes.
As if there's no more love
between us anymore, you and I

How wrong they are
they do not understand
the bond between a parent and child

I do not have to see your face
to remember your sweet smile.
I do not have to hug you,
although If could, I would.
I do not have to hear your voice,
our love is understood

Everyday I think of you,
my thoughts are full of memories.
I realize that love does not end
with death's painful goodbye.
I await with hope until
we can say hello again,
you and I.



Karen Nelson ,TCF Elder Chapter Utah

Your Heart will mend, but it will....

*...be a different heart
...be wearing a deep and lasting scar
....be a more compassionate heart
...know life in a new and different way
and Understand the Eternity of Love*

Letting Go of the Pain

A few weeks or a few months after your child has died, you will probably find yourself in a situation where you find yourself laughing or having a good time - then you think to yourself "How can I dare laugh or have any fun now that my child has died and I hurt so bad?" We've all had this feeling in the early stages of our grief. I urge you newly bereaved, PLEASE do not feel guilty about enjoying the happiness that comes with life. When you find yourself laughing and enjoying something in life, it doesn't mean that you have forgotten your child it just means that you are "letting go" of some of the pain. In all of our lives there will be tears and in all of our lives there should be laughter.

When people used to say to me "You must put it behind you and let go of your child and start living again." I wondered what they meant by "it." I would get very angry. How dare those people think I could ever "let go" of my child, or even want to but after a while I realized that I don't have to "let go" of my child in order to live again. I just have to "let go" of the pain that his death caused. His life will always be a part of me and so will his death; I'll never forget him, but I don't have to keep the grief and pain with me always. So if you see me cry, I'm "letting go" of some pain. And when you see me laughing or having a good time, I'm living life again.

Verne Smith, TCF, Fort Worth, TX

Sometimes you have to take it on blind faith that your heart is healing. It may not feel like the pain is going away. You might still cry just as hard as ever. But strength, confidence, and wisdom grow invisibly and you must trust that it is there.

*Stephanie St. Claire
TCF Valley of the Sun Chapter*

It's all right to...

Scream in the shower.
Yell in the car.
Cry anywhere you like.
Misplace your glasses, the car keys and the car.
Put milk in the cupboard, toilet paper in the refrigerator, and ice cream in the oven.
Beat up on the pillow, stomp on the ground, throw stones in the lake.
Change grocery stores if it hurts.
Wear one black shoe and one navy, have tear stains on your ties.
Eat french fries for breakfast, toast for lunch, and peanut butter for dinner (as long as you eat).
Write him a letter. Bake him a cake. Smell his clothes.
Celebrate his life on his birthday.
Talk to your pets, they understand.
Leave his room the way it is, for as long as you like.
Say his name just to hear the sound.
Talk about him to others.
Tell loved ones what you need.
Say no when you feel like it.
Cancel plans if you want.
Have a bad day.
It's all right to hurt.

And one day when you're ready: It's all right to...

Laugh again.
Dance and feel pretty. Have a good time.
Look forward to tomorrow. Sing in the shower.
Smile at a friend's new baby.
Wear make up once more.
Go for a day, a week & even a month without crying.
Celebrate the holidays.
Forgive those who failed you.
Learn something new.
Look at his picture and remember with happiness, not pain.
Go on with your life. Cherish the memories.

And one day when it's time - It's all right to...

Love again.

~Vicki Tushingham, TCF Bergen/Passaic, NJ

Sibling Page

My First Five Years as An Only Child

I've been without my brother for five years. I guess the hard part is over now. Sometimes I think I have aged thirty years in the past five. In a strange way, these past five years have been the best and worst years of my life. I have accomplished the many things of a typical young adult; learning to drive, graduating from high school, going to college, and starting a career.

In these five years, although I have learned to accept that he is not coming back, the difficult part is dealing with it day by day.

My relationship with George ended just when we started to become friends. The childish fights and other annoyances of having a big brother were changing to real conversations and to having an occasional ally. I am angry about all the things that we have missed and all the things that will never be, and I guess I always will be. Five years heals a lot of wounds, but the hurt will always be there, no matter how many years pass.

In these past five years have been forced to grow up too fast. I have been forced into a new outlook on life. I have felt lonely and alone. I now realize that I will never be the same person as before. Maybe I am a better person because of what I have been through

Five years ago I never thought I would survive, but I am still here dealing with it every day. I don't know what the next five years will bring, but at least I have made it this far.

Kristin Steiner,
TCF Staten Island, NY

It's Not Fair

It's not fair that my only sibling, my older brother, my best friend died.
But I have to survive this.

It's not fair that I won't have nieces or nephews, nor will my future children have Michael as the wonderful uncle that he would have been.
But I have to survive this.

It's not fair that he wasn't here to give me a hard time about turning 30.
But I have to survive this.

It's not fair to have to deal with such a heart wrenching blow.
But I have to survive this.

As all of us know at TCF, life sometimes isn't fair. We all have to survive the pain of losing a sibling or a child. It is not fair that we have to, but we do. It has been one year and three months since my brother died, and I have to survive this.

But you know what, every day that passes and every morning that I wake up, I realize that...
I Am Surviving This!

So Will You!

Renee Highsmith,
TCF Valley Forge Chapter
In memory of my brother, Michael Highsmith

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.



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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.

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 Pocono - 570-350-6695

TCF Easton - 610-577-5193

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



Mail this form to:

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C/O KATHLEEN COLLINS
2971 PHEASANT DR.
NORTHAMPTON, PA 18067

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