



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Volume 40 Issue 8

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August

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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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 August 10 - Sharing
- Monday September 14 - Sharing

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 our July support group meeting. Thank you to all the members who came shared, listened and supported each other. We hope that everyone found some encouragement at the meeting.

Communicating with My Child

Eighteen months ago, I dedicated a bench to Philip. It's in a space Philip would like, out in the natural world, with abundant wildlife and wonderful views across hills and sea.

I go there often to spend time alone with my beloved son. I sit on the bench, look at the vistas, and remember our family as it used to be. I talk to Philip. I make him promises; I ask for his guidance. I muse on what his life would be like now. I tell him how deeply I love him, how missing him gets harder with each passing year. I tell him about his brothers, about his sister-in-law and his little nephew, both of whom he never met. I tell him how important he is to us. I tell him that we will never forget him, that though our lives are five years past his death, we still think of him all the time and want him with us. I tell him that I am having a terribly hard time accepting that he has died, and that I am doing the best I can.

I have no idea if I am communicating with a Philip who has survived death or with myself, who hopes he has. Some times I think I feel an impatient nudge, a sort of, "Get on with it, Mom, it's not what you think" message. Sometimes I feel his arms around me in compassionate understanding. Sometimes I don't feel any response at all.

I am grateful for these private times with my child. Whether he lives on in some other sphere and how I hope he does!- or whether he resides only in our deepest hearts, there is an honoring of him in these conversations, a recognition of his existence and its importance, that matters very much to me.

I believe that we all need to find our individual ways of keeping the channels to our children open. My conversations with Philip may seem odd to some people, but they are right for me. I encourage you to honor your own private ways of communicating with your beautiful child, whatever they are. If you are searching for the channel that will work for you, consider what some other bereaved parents have found helpful: poetry, painting, journal writing, hiking in the natural world, daydreaming, music, meditation, lighting candles, wearing a deceased child's clothing, sitting in his or her room, playing a sport she/he loved, among many, many others. May the time spent in private dialogue with your child bring you peace-filled moments, a renewed sense of connection, and strength to continue the difficult journey we are all on.

Kitty Reeve, TCF Marin County and San Francisco

Our Children Remembered August Birthdays and Anniversaries

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

	Birth	Anniv.
Christopher Crouthamel, Jr - Son of Carla Monteverde ; Brother of Leah, Stephen & Carli	Aug 10	Dec 28
Hope Davidson - Daughter of Dean and Donna Davidson; Sister of Nicholas Davidson	Aug 8	Feb 8
Edwin Frantz - Son of Pamela Green; Brother of Amy & The Late Troy T. Kidd, Jr	Aug 11	May 24
Eric Graver - Son of Mary L Graver	Aug 17	Jul 9
Matt Kush - Son of Rick and Ann Kush; Brother of Mike and Jenn	Aug 24	Feb 10
Michael Leh - Son of Jeneane Leh; Brother of Dayna & Samantha Leh	Nov 11	Aug 19
Joseph Lestishock - Son of Marjorie Lestishock	Aug 30	Nov 2
Carter Mayer - Son of Ashley Mowrey	Jul 13	Aug 20
Benjamin Miller - Son of Brian and Caitlin Miller	Aug 5	Jan 11
Jonathan Miller - Son of Stacy Miller	Aug 22	Nov 13
PJ Pfenning - Son of Maureen Pfenning	Aug 30	Nov 5
James Ralls - Son of Tina Ralls; Brother of Timothy & Geoffrey	Jan 2	Aug 17
Jason Rute - Son of Linda Cavanaugh	Aug 25	Nov 13
Heidi Schlenzig - Daughter of Tom and Janice Byrne	Nov 9	Aug 7
Lauren Schneck - Daughter of James and Lisa Schneck	Aug 10	Dec 2
Elliot Senseman - Son of Heather Lyons	Aug 17	Jul 27
Anthony Sisonick - Son of Rella Sisonick Daniels; Brother of Nicholas Sisonick & The Late Jonelle Sisonick	Nov 8	Aug 27
Jonelle Sisonick - Daughter of Rella Sisonick Daniels; Sister of Nicholas Sisonick & The Late Antony Sisonick	May 22	Aug 3
Zackary Stokes - Son of Pam and Duane Stokes	Aug 8	Jul 2
Michael Szabo - Son of John and Maria Szabo, Jr	Aug 2	Aug 17
David Uecker - Son of Susan Uecker-Bittner & The Late Phillip C. Uecker; Brother of Amanda Uecker-Miernicki	Aug 2	Oct 3
Jonathan Weiss - Brother of Ginger Renner	Aug 20	Jan 22
Christina Williamson - Daughter of Chris and Kim Williamson; Sister of the late Christopher Jayden Williamson		Aug 6
Adam Wolk - Son of Michael and Sheila Wolk; Brother of Laura & Sarah Wolk	Aug 1	Oct 22
Hunter Yeagle - Son of Terree and Brett Oakwood	Aug 1	Sep 6
Craig Yurick - Son of Sharon Yurick & The Late Robert Yurick; Brother of Todd Yurick	Aug 5	Jun 21



Thank You for your "Love Gifts"



From:

Loved One



No Love Gifts This Month

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

Where Are You?

I missed you yesterday
and looked for you
among the artifacts of your life,
your room with pictures,
the clothes that still carried your scent,
your favorite tools and books,
the music you loved to hear.

The very walls echoed your vitality
and carried faint memories of riotous laughter.
And so I sat there, comforted for a while,
but forced at last to confess
that although beautiful memories lingered
you were not there,
not then and not ever again.

If I could not find you yesterday,
where, then, can I look today?
Who can I talk to, implore, beg
to show me the way?
Where are the hidden doorways
to the signs and wonders
others claim to see?

My musings bring no answers
so I take a walk to clear my mind.
Ahead, I see children playing,
and their laughter floating on the wind
reminds me of your own carefree approach to life.
Their running mirrors your own abandon
and the way you always found joy in simple
things.

Can this be the answer
to the riddle of finding you again?
Can it be that I will hear you
in every moment of laughter?
That I will see you
in the actions of a mischievous friend,
that I will feel you in every touch of compassion?

I've always heard
that if you seek, you will find.
Perhaps the corollary to that
is that you must seek in the right places.
I've been looking in the scrapbook
of all that used to be
and found only momentary solace.

So let me look for you anew
In all the wonders and blessings of life.
I believe you are reflected there
With Every expression of happiness and joy,
in every instance of fearless exploration and with
every act of unconditional love.

*By Harold Hopkins January, 2001
In loving memory of Lance Peter Hopkins 1975 -1999*

Are You a Grief Victim or Grief Survivor?

*Being a victim is a state of mind dictated by others. A
survivor dictates their own state of mind.*

A victim knows about feeling down and tries to stay up.
A survivor knows feeling down is okay.

A victim tries hard to hide the tears.
A survivor never leaves home without Kleenex.

A victim struggles to maintain a state of normalcy.
A survivor knows normal no longer exists.

A victim gets caught in isolation.
A survivor reaches out when they need to.

A victim is afraid they in time will forget.
A survivor knows they never will!

A victim sometimes feels guilty laughing.
A survivor laughs through their tears.

A victim tries at times to block out the memories.
A survivor embraces memories of all kinds.

A victim wants someone to cure their grief.
A survivor just wants someone to share their journey.

A victim struggles to get over their grief.
A survivor fights to get through it.

A victim tries to get on with their life.
A survivor lives their life knowing nothing will ever
be the same.

A victim says oh I'm okay...than secretly cries.
A survivor cries.., and says I'm okay.

Author Unknown



Driving

*You know how it is when you are driving:
suddenly you realize you've driven several miles
but you don't remember getting there,
With grief the miles are years.
Driving is habit.
The destination changes;
you are to turn left, but you still turn right.*

*When the child in the store calls, "Mom!"
I turn the way I always did.
We detour to avoid obstacles.
drive blocks out of my way to bypass his playground.
If you are old enough, you will see
a car like the one you owned when you were young,
and you will travel back through time.
Yesterday, I saw my child
in the passenger seat of a small car
approaching a red light.
I changed lanes to get a better look.
His head was the same, his blue eyes familiar.
He was close,
but his mother drove him away.
I should have driven forward, but I couldn't.
Wiping my eyes, I could see in my rearview mirror
the driver behind me honking his horn, screaming,
"What's the matter with you?"
The question I was asking myself.*

*From the Andrew Poems
by Shelly Wagner*

A GRIEVING PARENT IS...

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

Judy Skapik,, Sept. 2004 Tampa Bay Chapter of BP/USA Newsletter

*In this world there are many kinds of longing,
But no longing to match the longing for one's child*

Ki No Tourayuki

Gather Round Me Broken Things

After the death of a child all of us are faced with the decision of what to do with the possessions of our deceased child. What to keep, what to give away, and who should have those possessions.

Opinions vary on what is best, but the bottom line is that some decision has to be made within a period following the death. As with anything involving choice, there is potential for regret. It is my belief that one of the points which should be included in the decision process is an analysis of that potential. This primarily involves the possessions which are given to family and friends. One should ask themselves how they will feel if a favorite item of clothing of the deceased child is worn by someone who will be closely associated with them in the future. What effect will there be from that person's passing the article to someone else, perhaps to someone you do not feel close to? Can you live with

the possible misuse or destruction of a treasured possession?

A parent must realize that other people, even those who are close, will not always feel the same about a possession that a bereaved parent feels. If you cannot or do not feel you can handle the possible mistreatment of those possessions, then it might be wise to store them away for awhile, or give them to a charitable organization. You will not witness their eventual destruction and they will be less likely to cause future grief. My own inclination is to keep some of those things which are broken or have missing parts but which have memories attached. I don't feel guilty that I am keeping items which could be put to good use by someone else, who may be in need. These broken things are just fine. The only broken thing I do not wish to keep is a broken heart. Perhaps someday it will leave.

Stan Denny, TCF, Austin, TX

The Butterfly in Our Lives

Most often we hear, in our Compassionate Friends circles, of the butterfly representing the lives of our children who have died. Their spirit lives on and our memories live on, often in fleeting moments.

But I really think the butterfly's life cycle - metamorphosis - could just as easily represent our own lives. We seem to fit the four stages of that cycle.

The Egg: *When we are small, we are protected, changing, and living in a somewhat small world - much like the butterfly egg attached to a leaf somewhere.*

The Caterpillar: *The caterpillar is much like our lives before the death of our child or children. We go through the day doing what we need to do. We grow a lot and we change somewhat slowly. We devour many things in daily life - work, church, Little League. And then the child is gone. We change!*

The Cocoon: *After the death of our child, we shut ourselves off from so much because of the grief. We often encase ourselves in the blanket of grief and depression because that is what protects us from horrible pain. We don't want to be a part of life because of all of its painful memories. There are reminders out there which cause pain.*

The Butterfly: *The pain lessens and we begin to heal as we work through the grief process, and we begin to see a ray of light - a little color. Some of the weight is removed. We break open our cocoon and begin to reach out ever so lightly and touch life again, just to see if it will hurt too much. As we discover the brighter days and brilliant colors of life, we become more like that butterfly. We are free to once again be a part of life and we can move about more easily and begin to take some of the nectar from life.*

Dale Tallant TCF Tulare, CA

Sibling Page

I'm Still Here

By Laura Wexler

At first "I'm still here" was the mantra I chanted inside my head, chiding myself for sadness, urging myself that, unlike Rachel, I was still living and must not be sad, must not miss a moment of time or anything else precious. Months later, unable to contain my grief, I said I'm still here as if I were the only one of my tribe to escape slaughter and wandering plains alone. I wanted to die. Not because I hate life, but because I wanted to see Rachel.

Many times my parents, washed in grief, looked at me through salt water, saying, "You're still here. You're all we have left" Those words weighed heavily upon me, made me feel too loved, too lucky. And they made Rachel feel too gone. But, just as many times I wanted to shake my parents out of depression and back into life before Rachel's death, saying, "I'm still here. Don't you leave me too."

For almost a year after Rachel died, I didn't say her name out loud. The sound of the R and the A and the ending L felt foreign on my tongue. Later, when I joined a support group, the facilitator noted that I never said Rachel's name. It just hurt too much. And if I'd had my choice, I would have asked my parents not to say Rachel's name either. Any instance we now used her name was unhappy.

Talking about family or home or anything in my past was terrifying for me. Sometimes, as I told a story or recounted a memory, I said "we" instead of "I." Pretty soon, though, I got the hang of checking over everything in my head before I opened my mouth. The thing is, though, if you tell a lie enough times, you start to forget the truth you're trying to cover up in the first place. I started to feel my memory blurring and that frightened me. Memory was my only link to Rachel.

I ask myself why I have such trouble talking about Rachel's death or even her life, and come up with a couple of things. I really believe no one understands my particular pain, the things

I've lost, tangible and intangible, since Rachel's death...

The only person that knows exactly how I feel is dead.

It's hard to worry about your own grief when your parents are not parental anymore. My mother, who probably told me when to take my first breath and how long it would last, abruptly withdrew from being an overbearing presence in my life. She never left me completely, but there were enough times when she'd look down at her feet and say quietly... "Laura, I just can't take this right now. I'm lucky if I can get up in the morning." Just as I wanted my old self, my old world back, I wanted a mother I could fight with.

My father sits as the head of the table, head bent to his chest, and pulls his glasses off to sob freely... This idea that you should be able to protect and comfort and be there for your parents even more than for yourself is particular to people on the brink of adulthood. Like me. In other words, if I were 12 or 13, few people would expect me to assume a parental role. But as I was 18, it was apparently okay for people to continually ask, "How are your parents doing? Are you helping them as much as you can?" I felt guilty enough about being alive. And then to have people insinuate that my main function in life thereafter was to be a comfort for my parents made me feel worse. Because I honestly didn't see that my parents were remarkably comforted by me. They were sad when I was there and when I wasn't. And I couldn't do a thing about it.

Laura Wexler, writer & assistant editor for "George" magazine, was 17 and leaving for college in a week when her sister Rachel, 18, was killed in a freak boating accident at a summer camp where they were counselors. Laura wrote "I'm still here" four

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 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