



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Brazoria County Texas Chapter

Nov/ Dec 2010

The Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved families that have experienced the death of a child.

Forever in Our Hearts
Our Children, Loved & Remembered

REMEMBRANCE DAYS

Personal information deleted for internet edition.

BIRTHDAYS

Personal information deleted for internet edition.



*God gave us memory that we might
have roses in December.*

- James M. Barrie

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Chapelwood United Methodist Church 300 Willow Drive, Lake Jackson

November 9 – Handling the Holidays
Sunday, December 12, 7:00 p.m. – Candle Lighting Service
(Candle Lighting will take the place of our regular monthly meeting.)

CHAPTER CONTACTS

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Tonight I Light This Candle

- Song by Alan Pederson

Tonight I hold this candle in memory of you
Hoping someday, somehow, my love will
shine through.
I close my eyes lost in the glow
There are so many things I want you to know.

This candle says I love you – This candle says
I miss you.
This candle is saying I remember you.
When I'm holding it toward heaven,
It feels like you are near.
If you're looking down tonight
And see this candle burning bright,
It says I'm wishing you were here.

In the glow of this candle I can almost see
your smile

And it carries me away for a little while
To another time, another place
When all it took to light up my world was
your beautiful face.

Someday, someday I'll see you again
I'll hold you in my heart until then.

This candle says I love you – This candle
says I miss you.
This candle is saying I remember you.
When I'm holding it toward heaven,
It feels like you are near.
If you're looking down tonight
And see this candle burning bright,
It says I'm wishing you were here.

Alan's CD is available on EverAshleymusic.com.

Love Gifts

We are grateful for the kindness of parents, grandparents, and friends who honor their children with love gifts to our chapter. These gifts are tax-deductible and enable our chapter to offer resources such as this newsletter, books, brochures, and special programs for bereaved families.

Memorial contributions may be made at any TCF meeting or sent to:

**TCF Brazoria County Chapter
c/o Connie Mosier
P.O. Box 1395
Brazoria, TX 77422**



Worldwide Candle Lighting

...that their light may always shine

Sunday, December 12, 7:00 p.m.
Chapelwood United Methodist Church – Sanctuary

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting is a special time during the holidays to remember all children who have gone too soon. Family members and friends are welcome to attend this beautiful service. Music will begin 15 minutes before the program for a time of quiet reflection. Refreshments will be served afterward in the fellowship area. You may bring a snack to share if you'd like. Even if you can't attend, you may wish join in remembrance by lighting a candle wherever you are.

Online **Remembrance Book** tributes may be made on December 12 at The Compassionate Friends national website, www.compassionatefriends.org.



Some people sweet, attractive,
strong and healthy happen to die
young. They are masters in disguise
teaching us about impermanence.

- Dalai Lama



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Christmas Past, Christmas Present

As the holidays approach, most bereaved parents feel anxiety, apprehension and some little bit of fear. The past is gone, along with our beautiful children. We live in the now, the new reality, of holidays without our children. This will be my fifth Christmas without my son, Todd. It will be my fourth Christmas without his children. And yet, I find that on some small level, I am looking forward to the holiday. I imagine the Christmases of the past when Todd was growing up and after he started his family.



I also imagine Christmases of the future where Todd's children share in the traditions that their Dad so dearly loved. But that won't happen. I have come to accept that wives and children go on with their lives. I have come to accept that my son's children will not be a part of their father's family, his heritage or his legacy. That is the reality.

But I have also found that wonderful people can help make the holiday special. I do very little at Christmas. Some shopping... most of it on the Internet, a little in local stores. I send cash to my son's children. I don't know who or what they are these days, but cash is far better than something that has no significance to them. I do get pleasure in a few things. I buy small toiletries for nursing home residents. I buy a gift for my dad's sister who is now 88. I buy for my mom's sister, my cousin, her husband and her daughter. I buy for my best friend. That's enough buying. My husband and I decide whether we want something special for the two of us and, if so, we buy it. Otherwise, we skip the gift giving. We won't be decorating this year, but we haven't decorated for five years.

We have changed our traditions... traditions that Todd loved so much. It is simply too painful to do this alone. We spend time with my family and a few friends. We marvel at the wonder that is Christmas for children. Christmas will never be what it once was, but I no longer dread the holidays as I once did. Some of my Compassionate Friends have returned to old traditions with their surviving children and maybe even grandchildren. Each of us learns to deal with Christmas in our own way. Each year I am a different person with a new perspective on the holidays. Next year I may decide to skip it all or immerse myself in the season. My truth is ever changing.

Find out what is right for you. Pressures from others mean nothing. You choose whether a celebration is in order. You choose how to celebrate. You choose the old traditions or you choose some new ones... maybe you choose nothing and decide to go with the flow of the moment. As bereaved parents, you will always remember your child at Christmas, but as the years add up and grief starts to release its grip on your soul, you may find that you can keep your child in your heart and have room for the spirit of Christmas as well.

The holidays do get better. Life does get better. The days will gradually become softer and sweeter. The nights will ease into gentleness. Friendships will again have luster, and relationships will become deeper and more meaningful. That is the future for each of us. The present is driven by where we are in our grief. So for this and every Christmas holiday season, be who you are and mark the day as you choose.

May we all have serenity throughout the holiday season and in the years ahead.

- Annette Mennen Baldwin, TCF Katy, TX
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
November 1, 2006

GIVING THANKS

- Sascha

I can not hold your hands today,
I can not see your smile.
I can not hear your voices now,
My children, who are gone.

But I recall your faces well,
The songs, the talks, the sighs,
And storytimes, and winterwalks,
And sharing secret things.

I know you helped my mind to live
Beyond your time with me.
You gave me clearer eyes to see -
You gave me finer ears to hear -
What living means, what dying means,
My children, who are gone.

So here it is Thanksgiving Day,
And you are not with me.
And while I weep a mother's tear,
I thank you for the gift you were,
And all the gifts you gave to me,
My children, who are gone.



*The best and most beautiful things
in the world cannot be seen or
even touched. They must be felt
with the heart.*

- Helen Keller

When everything is dark, when we are surrounded by despairing voices, when we do not see any exits, then we can find salvation in a remembered love, a love which is not simply a recollection of a bygone past but a living force which sustains us in the present. Through memory, love transcends the limits of time and offers hope at any moment of our lives.

- Henri Nouwen



MEDITATION

Time does restore to us our quiet joy in the spiritual presence of those we love, so that we learn to remember without pain, and to speak without choking up with tears. But all our lives will be subject to sudden small reminders which will bring all the old loss back overwhelmingly.

-ELIZABETH WATSON

Particularly at this time of year when families are celebrating the holidays, the “sudden small reminders” – and the large ones, too – come to plague us. We thought we were doing so well, and then there we are, crying as though our loss was yesterday.

We need to take heart. If our loss is recent, the sadness is understandably overwhelming. If it was a while ago and we thought we were over the worst, then perhaps this time it will not take so long for “the quiet joy” to reassert itself, the spiritual presence to return in its quiet and infinitely precious way.

Our life runs in seasons, as does our grief. Some seasons are long, some short. But if we are resolute in our efforts to be present to the moment, even as we know this moment will give way to another, we can be assured at these times of renewed pain that things will get better.

When I am feeling my most grief-stricken, may I hold in some place in my heart the promise that I will feel better.

- Martha Whitmore Hickman, from *Healing After Loss*



WHAT ADULT SIBLINGS MAY EXPECT

-- TCF brochure "Adults Grieving the Death of a Sibling"

- Survivor guilt is normal. Siblings usually have a relationship where they seek to protect each other. Despite the physical distance that may separate them as adults, this need to have provided protection weighs heavily in the aftermath of the loss.
- Guilt about how the relationship was maintained is common. So often as adults, the sibling relationship has changed from younger years. Each travels a separate path, and sometimes communication is lacking and ambivalent feelings about maintaining the relationship surfaces. No matter how good a relationship may have been, the survivor often believes it should have been better, causing guilt.
- Anger over a new role within the family often occurs. A surviving sibling may now be the one expected to care for aging parents, and he or she may have to step into the role of guardian for nieces and nephews. Remaining family members may look to surviving siblings for guidance. All these situations are possible reasons to feel anger over a sibling's death.
- When a sibling dies, it is natural for the surviving sibling(s) to look at their own lives and question how many years they have left, and what their deaths would do to the family.
- Surviving siblings may find positive changes within their lives. These may include greater emotional strength, increased independence, and a soul-searching re-examination of religious beliefs. Some survivors feel the need to make a change in their life's work, such as becoming a therapist, or working to effect a change in the area that took the life of the sibling.
- Even when a sibling has died, a connection still remains. Surviving siblings think about them, talk about them, remember them at special times such as birthdays, holidays, and death dates, and may create a memorial of some type. This connection with the sibling who died does not have to be given up to move forward in life.



To All Siblings This Holiday Season...

Be guided by the reality that there is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holidays after your sibling has died. Do what you need to do to get yourself through the holidays. We grieve differently than our parents do. Yes, we need to respect their grief, but we need to remember ours. Our siblings would want us to laugh and sing the Christmas carols, but we just may not be ready yet.

Guilt? Oh, yes, we will feel that this holiday season. But we may also celebrate their lives in our own special way. Whatever you choose to do, do what's good for you. Everyone is at a different stage in their grief. The holidays make the reality of loss even harder. I hope this holiday season you can find peace and love in memories. Please know you are not alone.

- Vera, Sara's sister (Lovingly lifted from TCF, St. Paul, MN newsletter)



Surviving the Holidays

The holidays are among the most difficult times for bereaved families grieving the death of a child. Below are some helpful suggestions that may aid you in surviving the holidays:

1. Call a family meeting and discuss your plans for the holiday season, understanding that it would be unusual for you not to feel emotionally, physically and psychologically drained. Don't set your expectations too high or you may find yourself disappointed.
2. Well intending friends and family may want to include you in their plans, believing it is best for you to 'get away' from grieving your loss. They do not understand that you cannot escape the grief that you feel. There is no obligation to say 'yes'. Only participate if you truly want to.
3. Try to take care of your health. It's important that you eat and drink properly, exercise and get plenty of rest.
4. Take time to do the things you as a person want to do. You may want time alone to reflect or to write your thoughts.
5. Consider eliminating such things as the festive decorations, cooking and baking you may normally enjoy. People will understand if you're not in a merry or joyous mood or simply don't have the energy. You may try placing an electric candle in your window in memory of your child. Don't feel obligated to send out holiday cards.
6. If it is necessary for you to buy gifts, consider ordering them over the internet or by phone. Most who are bereaved find it draining to go out and fight through crowded stores bustling with holiday cheer.
7. Many families that are in mourning may use the money they would have spent on gifts for their child to buy gifts for a child who would not be able to celebrate the holidays otherwise.
8. It is not unusual for you to want to include your child during the season. You may want to do something like: Ask friends and relatives who knew your child to send you a story about your child that you may not have known; ask friends and relatives to create an ornament or remembrance of some type that reminds them of your child so that you can place it around the house or on a holiday tree. If it was your tradition, include placing a stocking with those of other children in your house, even if you do not fill it like the others—this is a symbolic gesture in memory of your child.
9. If you have other children who normally celebrate the holidays, you may consider continuing to do so to create some sense of normalcy in the house and so they will not feel forgotten.
10. Consider attending a Compassionate Friends meeting or a memorial event such as The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting. Most families find some comfort by being with others who have experienced a similar loss.
11. Remember that the anticipation of a holiday is often worse than the holiday itself.
12. Be kind to yourself, and remember it is okay to cry.



The Compassionate Friends
Brazoria County Texas Chapter
P.O. Box 1395 Brazoria, TX 77422

Support & Friendship for Bereaved Families



Nov/ Dec 2010



CANDLE LIGHTING SERVICE

Sunday, December 12

7:00 p.m.

Chapelwood United Methodist Church

“Never hesitate to hold out your hand;
never hesitate to accept the out-stretched hand of another.”

-Pope John XXII