



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

Brazoria County Texas Chapter

Sept/ Oct 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.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Second Tuesday of each month, 7-8:30 p.m.

Chapelwood United Methodist Church
300 Willow Drive, Lake Jackson

September 14 – Preparing for Seasonal Changes

October 12 – The Masks We Wear

To Our Newer Members: We do not always stay on the topic as planned.
We are here to discuss whatever you need to help you with your grief.

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Lifted by Love . . .

Balloons with butterfly notes were once again lovingly released to the heavens in our annual gathering of family and friends. Like the many vibrant colors represented by the balloons, our children were of different ages, different interests, and made their transition of various causes; but all were filled with the same breath-life that continues in a new place, a place that may be beyond our sight, but is as real as the sky is blue.

Just as we held the balloons until release, we held our children for too brief a time before their journey took a new direction, and we stood gazing after them in heartrending disbelief, anguish, guilt, and anger – and perhaps an occasional moment of wonder: What is it like where they are now? Do they think of us as we think of them? It's in the timeless space of wonder that love feels like love again rather than heavy, unrelenting sorrow. "All goes onward and outward," said Walt Whitman, "And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier."

When we consider the view from above the clouds, we can't help but feel a sense of wonder and truly *know* in the deepest place of the soul that somehow we are still connected to our children in a mysterious, but certain, way. Of course, the sorrow is always there, side by side with the love and wonder; grief is complicated like that. But just as a few of our balloons chose to linger behind in a tree, maybe at times our children are also near, telling us something of their side, holding out their hands in compassionate release so that we, too, can be lifted by love.

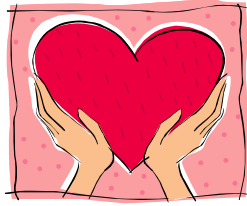
- R. Goddard



BALLOON RELEASE 2010

"Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy."

Isaiah 60:4-5



Love Gifts

IN HONOR OF

Connie Mosier and Rosalind Woods, with appreciation for organizing the Balloon Release and for all that you do for this chapter

GIVEN BY

Betsy Carpenter



Trick or Treat

*The night is dim
And the pumpkins grin
At children on the porch*

*The doorbell rings
"Trick or treat" they sing.
My heart burns like a torch.*

*The Dracula's face
And a princess in lace
Are peering in at me.*

*How I'd love to ask
"May I lift your mask?"
And hiding, there you'd be!*

*You'd get such a kick
From that silly trick.
But disguised you must stay.*

*In the wind that blows
My heart still knows
You're playing October charades.*

Kathi Slief – TCF, Tulsa, OK



Give sorrow words; the grief that
does not speak
Whispers the oe'r fraught heart
and bids it break.

- William Shakespeare

(Shakespeare was a bereaved parent whose son Hamnet passed away at the age of eleven.)

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Meditation

Nothing can fill the gap when we are away from those we love, and it would be wrong to try and find anything. We must simply hold out and win through. That sounds hard at first, but at the same time it is a great consolation, since leaving the gap unfilled preserves the bond between us. It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap; he does not fill it, but keeps it empty so that our communion with another may be kept alive, even at the cost of pain.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

It is strangely reassuring—this suggestion that the pain of that empty space will always be with us. Because while we do want to feel better, we do not want, ever, to forget.

We will, of course, find new places to put the affection and love and time that we used to pour out to the one we lost. Not to do that would be to turn inward, refuse to be vulnerable—a poor memorial, a poor stewardship of the life left to us.

But our ability to love and care is not limited to some finite number, so that taking on a new love means replacing an old one. Time does not expand, but love does—as with a parent who has three children, and then has another.

What was once loved and cherished is not replaceable.

Dear _____, There is a space in my heart that is always yours.

- Martha Whitmore Hickman from *Healing After Loss*

The Cord

We are connected, my child and I, by an invisible cord not seen by the eye. It's not like the cord that connected us at birth. This cord can't be seen by anyone on earth. This cord does its work right from the start. It bonds us together, attached at the heart. I know that it's there though no one can see, the invisible cord, from my child to me. The strength of this cord is hard to describe. It can't be destroyed, it can't be denied. It's stronger than any cord man could create. It withstands the tests, can hold any weight. And though you are gone, not here with me, the cord is still there, but no one can see. It pulls at my heart, I am bruised, I am sore. But this cord is my lifeline as never before. I am thankful that God connects us this way, a parent and a child, death can't take it away!

- Author Unknown

*Those who advise
dancing in the rain
haven't lived through
a hurricane.*



- R. Goddard



*Psyche, the Greek word for soul,
also means butterfly.*

SEPTEMBER: MONARCHS

Time between summer and winter.
Time under changing skies -
muted and heavy with foresight,
or endless blue, smiling at butterflies.

Time between summer and winter.
Time between laughter and tear -
harvest of beauty remembered
and voices (where are you?) to hear.

Time between summer and winter,
thoughtful and painful and wise -
muted and heavy with losing,
but smiling at butterflies.

- Sascha Wagner



*The water in a vessel is sparkling;
the water in the sea is dark.*

*The small truth has words that are clear;
the great truth has great silence.*

- Tagore, from *Stray Birds*



TO HONOR YOU

To honor you, I get up every day and take a breath
And start another day without you in it.

To honor you, I laugh and love with those who knew your smile
And the way your eyes twinkled with mischief and secret knowledge.

To honor you, I listen to music you would have liked,
And sing at the top of my lungs, with the windows rolled down.

To honor you, I take chances, say what I feel, hold nothing back,
Risk making a fool of myself, dance every dance.

You were my light, my heart, my gift of love from the very highest source.
So every day, I vow to make a difference, share a smile, live, laugh and love.

Now I live for us both, so all I do, I do to honor you.

- Connie F. Kiefer Byrd, TCF – Saint Paul, MN
In loving Memory of Jordan Alexander Kiefer

The Choice to Heal: The Five Insights

By Alvin C. Johnson, Jr.

Several years ago it became apparent to me that I was stuck in “recovering” from my son’s death. Nicholas contracted leukemia in 1986 and battled the disease for nearly three years before his death in 1989.

Seven years later, in 1996, it seemed there was no place for me to go with the continued feelings of grief—feelings which included sadness, frustration, and guilt. This was not my daily experience, but it came on periodically and occasionally crippled my ability to engage in life and work. While this was taking place I was also studying about family emotional systems process with Rabbi Ed Friedman and so I presented him with this problem. His immediate response was to suggest that I enter more deeply into my family, and somewhere in my family I would find the direction to move so I would no longer be stuck in my grief.

Armed with this conviction, my wife and I headed to Florida in March of 1996 for several days of golf and fun with my parents. In the seven years since Nicholas had died, no one in our circle of family and friends took his death as hard as my parents. They continuously called Zachary, our second son, “Nicholas” and struggled to move forward, themselves, with this tragic loss.

My decision was made; I’d talk to my Dad. So on the golf course one day, enjoying the beautiful sunshine and warm temperatures, I shared my struggle with him and asked how he dealt with Nick’s death. His answer surprised me, but also became the cornerstone on which I continue to deal with Nick’s death today. “Son,” he said, “I get up each morning, sit down at my desk, and open the drawer where I have a picture of Nick. I say, ‘you bugger.’ I think of how much I miss him, how grateful I am for him, and then I give him into God’s hands...every day.” His comment afforded me one of those moments in grief recovery where insight leads to deeper healing.

The first insight was this: I was stuck because I held to the belief that grieving has a finish line while we are alive. In reality, the only end to the pain we feel over the death of our children is our own death. The intensity subsides over time, as do other characteristics of grieving, but there is no day on which we can say we are done grieving the death of our children. While we hold to the joyful memories of our children who died, we also hold to the pain of the loss that comes from the fact that they died. Efforts to live outside that pain prove futile and frustrating. Even when you and I have worked our way through the pain to the “other side,” the path we traveled leaves a clear road mark and an indelible imprint on our psychological, intellectual, emotional and spiritual memory.

There is no going back—but there is no finish line either. The experience, with all its emotional components, remains with us all our lives. So, instead of looking for a finish line, I adopted my dad’s strategy and looked at recovery from Nick’s death as a 24-hour experience. There was no knowing what I’d be like three days, three months or three years from then. In fact, the future looked overwhelming. Instead, I started putting Nick in God’s keeping for another day—and only one day. As I gave Nick to God, so I gave my grief to God, thereby inviting healing. Whether God is or is not in the equation for you, the key for me was realizing recovery was a 24-hour experience and when broken into daily bites became manageable.

The second insight was this: I was stuck because of holding to the belief that acceptance meant that the experience of Nicholas would make rational sense. It didn’t then and it doesn’t now. Nearly 11 years later, the death of a child still does not make sense to me. But the reality of children dying isn’t for me to understand: it is for me to accept. Acceptance does not mean there is a rational explanation for why a child dies nor that I must like the reality. It simply means that the death of a child is a part of life and a part of my life. Acceptance means that the events of this fine boy’s life actually did take place and I was a participant and witness to them. Acceptance means that life has moved on and will continue to move on with or without me. Acceptance means that no, time does not stop when our world comes shattering down from the death of a child. O that it would, but it does not. Acceptance is looking back and embracing what happened in order to look forward and move on.

The third insight was this: the fact the picture was in a place that my dad visited every day inspired

me to keep pictures of Nicholas in a place where I would remember him every day...and enjoy remembering him. We can keep our departed children close through the wonder of photography and other items that remind us of them. My dad struck a unique balance between those who set aside large spaces for remembrance and those who set aside no space for remembrance at all. If needed, he knew where to go in his house to be close to Nick and, therefore, to a package of complete memories. Nick had and still has a place in his emotional and spiritual home. This is highlighted daily by being able to look at his picture. Not only does Nick have a physical space, but also a space in memory. We become unstuck when we structure the means to keep the memory of our departed children close. This varies from person to person, but keeping physical reminders nearby encourages us to keep emotional, spiritual, and mental image memories nearby and accessible as well.

The fourth insight was this: gratitude for the life of Nicholas helped muster movement against the forces of being stuck in grief. John Claypool tells a story in his book *Mending the Heart* about the time in his life six weeks after the death of his daughter from leukemia. He could not sleep, got up and went to read the story in Genesis 22 about Abraham and Isaac. As he read the commentary he was amazed to learn that this story of Abraham and Isaac was a story of God reminding Abraham of the gift he had received and from whom the gift came. Claypool says that from that night forward he came to see his daughter's life, though shorter than he wished, as a gift which he did not deserve and for which he desired to give gratitude. Gratitude is difficult in the midst of feeling cheated and deprived by death. However, gratitude overcomes tremendous pain and can move even the most stuck bereaved parent to new places of recovery and joy.

The final insight was this: healing and recovery call for us to make a decision, to answer the question, "Do I want to get better or not?" One can argue that grief recovery is more complicated than answering this question. But grief recovery concerns the direction we point ourselves day in and day out. If we wish to get better we need to encourage ourselves and point ourselves that way every day; we need to surround ourselves with bereaved parents who have healed and found meaning in life again; we need to realize that no one can point us towards the healing we desire except ourselves. Ironically, the times in our lives when we least feel like making decisions are the times when we need to make them: Seek healing? Stay stuck? Recover? Die ourselves? Sometimes it does come to such simple decisions as these.

When I studied churches that had experienced trauma, those that recovered had one principle characteristic in common: someone stood up and, from a position of leadership said, "We are going to heal and grow from this experience and embrace a new future." Most often the leader said this before knowing what direction recovery would go nor whom would help. They sought, as best they could, to point the ship in a direction that gave them the best chance of re-engaging life; choosing to get better.

Of all the insights given to me by my dad that day, this last one continues to be the most effective. Grief stays with us for a lifetime...as long as we have our minds we cannot escape from the experience of what took place. However, each day we can point ourselves towards the vision we hold of recovery and have the faith that one day we will get there.

Fr. Alvin Johnson, at the time he wrote this story, had served as an Episcopal Priest for over 20 years. In 1989 he and his wife Vickie became bereaved parents when their first child, Nicholas, died after a long battle with leukemia. Nicholas is survived by a sister Hannah and a brother Zachary. Fr. Johnson currently serves as Rector of St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Barrington, Illinois. He recently received his Doctor of Ministry degree in Congregational Studies focusing on the comparisons between how congregations and families recover from trauma. Fr. Johnson has spoken often at Compassionate Friends meetings and was a keynote speaker at the 23rd national TCF conference held in Chicago. He also served on TCF's National Board of Directors.

*From We Need Not Walk Alone, the national magazine of The Compassionate Friends.
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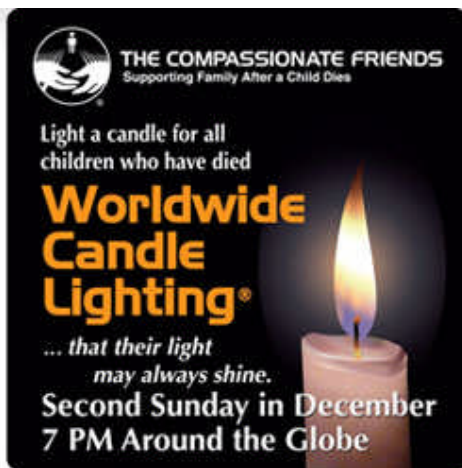


The Compassionate Friends
Brazoria County Texas Chapter
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Support & Friendship for Bereaved Families



Sept/Oct 2010



CANDLE LIGHTING SERVICE

Sunday, December 12

7:00 p.m.

Chapelwood United Methodist Church

If you would like to help with this year's Candle Lighting,
please come for dinner & a meeting:

Thursday, Sept. 30, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.
The Picket Fence, Lake Jackson

(Call Robin, 297-0544, so we can reserve a table for our group.)