



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

The mission of Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

SOUTHWEST DALLAS COUNTY CHAPTER

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Volume 8

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Issue 4



Dear Lesley,

In the nine years since you have been gone, I still find it hard to put into words the loss I feel. We miss you every day, every hour. Your smile and infectious laugh has been passed on to your daughter. By remembering you and speaking of you often, the gift you gave never fades. You will always be "Daddy's Little Girl"

Love Always,

Dad, JoJo and Kaylee



"If love could have saved you, you would have lived forever."

Spring is Coming

If you are newly bereaved and looking toward your "first" spring, you may be surprised by some of the feelings you may experience during the next few weeks. We hear so much about the beauty of spring – the new life and the feelings of renewal that are supposed to accompany this lovely time of year. During my "first" year, I expected that spring would cheer me up, and make me feel lots better. How surprised and frustrated I was when, on one of those truly magnificent spring days as life seems to burst forth everywhere, I was "in the pits." When a friend said to me, "Doesn't a day like this really lift your spirits and make you feel better?" I had to reply honestly that I was having a really bad day--that the sense of loss and emptiness was greatly intensified.

Gradually, I began to realize that my expectations for spring were unrealistically high. I had looked forward to spring with the wrong kind of hope. When we are newly bereaved, we are constantly looking for something to take away the pain and make our lives all right again. Unfortunately, there is no magical event or moment when this takes place. It does happen, but only with time and the grief work which we all must do before we can be healed.

The coming of spring cannot make everything okay again. What it can do, however, is remind us that regardless of what happens in our lives, nature's process will continue, and that can offer us hope.

I am looking forward to spring this year. I welcome the sun's warmth, the return of the birds from their winter in the south, and forsythia, the daffodils and the greening of the world. Know that someday you will once again welcome spring. Be gentle and patient with yourself and with nature. Don't expect too much. Be ready to let a little of the hope that spring can offer into your heart.

*-Evelyn Billings
TCF Springfield, MA*

OUR CHILDREN, SIBLINGS AND GRANDCHILDREN REMEMBERED

BIRTHDAYS



Lachandra Gentry daughter of James and Louise Folayan
Bradley Gilliland son of Rawley and Diane Gilliland
Joseph Neale son of John and Nancy Neale
Jacquilyn DuMond granddaughter of Heather DuMond
Hope Sandle daughter of Loretta Sandle
Valencia Hoy



ANNIVERSARIES



Brian Sloss son of Linda Sloss
Marcus Jones son of Yvonne Jones
Lesley Campbell daughter of Bill and Joan Campbell
Mike Walker son of Chris LeGrand
Brent Curtis son of Doug and Tricia Curtis
Christopher James son of Marie James
Matthew Blake son of Deannie Blake
Edward Jones III son of Edward and Pauletta Jones
Aaron Christian son of Mike and Kelly Christian,
Grandson of Christi Gibson



Save the Date!

TCF National Conference will be held July 2-4, 2010 Arlington, VA

"Reflections of Love,
Visions of Hope" is the
theme of The
Compassionate Friends
33rd National Conference
which will be held in



Arlington Virginia July 2-4, 2010. The event
will be held at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City
promising a beautiful venue for the 33rd

TCF National Conference. Independence Day
will not only feature our Walk to Remember,
but will include a world-class display of
fireworks over the National Mall, visible from
Arlington.

A national conference of The Compassionate
Friends is unlike any other conference you may
ever attend. It is a place where you can go and
know that you truly are not alone as you travel
your grief journey. Every person comes for the
same reason—a child has died. It is a place
where "friendship, understanding, and hope"
are more than just words.

This promises to be a conference you will not
want to miss as an anticipated 1500 TCFers
will come together for a weekend of caring,

sharing, and healing! There will be plenty to do
or you can simply relax with friends, old and
new, during the conference which features four
outstanding keynote speakers:

Gordon Smith, a two-term U.S. Senator and
now president and CEO of the National
Association of Broadcasters. He experienced
the death of his son Garrett to suicide while
Garrett was attending college. Gordon wrote
the book *Remembering Garrett*,

Maria Housden is author of *Hannah's Gift:
Lessons from a Life Fully Lived*, the best-seller
in which Maria shares the lessons in living she
received during the last year of her three-year-
old daughter's courageous, but losing,
struggle with cancer.

Catherine Read, a retired Navy officer is the
mother of six, including her 19-year-old
stepdaughter Mary, killed in French class
during the Virginia Tech shootings on April 16,
2007.

Helen Fitzgerald, a bereaved mom, is a
nationally known psychotherapist, certified
thanatologist, is author of *The Grieving Child*,
The Mourning Handbook, and *The Grieving
Teen*. She coordinated an extensive grief
program for mental health services in Virginia
for over 23 years.

See www.compassionatefriends.org for info.

To Our New Members

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But, you have nothing to lose and much to gain. Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. The second, third or fourth meeting might be the time you will find the right person - or just the right words spoken that will help you in your grief work. It is so much like work.

To Our Old Members

We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick. We have new parents at each meeting. Think back - what would it have been like for you if there had not been any "oldies" to welcome you, share your grief and encourage you? It was from them you heard, "Your pain will not always be this bad; it really does get softer."

Messenger of God

Oh, Little Butterfly,
Messenger of God,
When I see you in the sky
I cannot help but nod.
You bring me respite
From grief and despair
Every time I see you
Sailing through the air.
You renew my faith
In all God's wondrous plan,
And I know it's all in FAITH,
Not in what I understand.
Kathryn Poland (4-12-01)

Smile Because He Lived

You can shed tears that he is gone,
or you can smile because he lived,
You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back,
or you can open your eyes and see all that he has left.
Your heart can be empty because you can't see him,
or you can be full of the love that you shared,
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,
or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.
You can remember him and only that he is gone,
or you can cherish his memory and let it live on.
You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn back,
or you can do what he would want:
Smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

Unknown

The Legend of the Tear Jar

In the dry climate of ancient Greece, water was prized above all. Giving up water from one's own body, when crying tears for the dead, was considered a sacrifice. They caught their precious tears in tiny pitchers or "tear jars." The tears became holy water and could be used to sprinkle on doorways to keep out evil, or cool the brow of a sick child

The tear jars were kept unpainted until the owner had experienced the death of a parent, sibling, child or spouse. After that, the grieving person decorated the tear jar with intricate designs, and examples of these can still be seen throughout modern Greece.

Legends of tear bottles, or lachrymatories, also abound in stories of Egypt and middle eastern societies. In ancient Roman times, mourners filled small glass vials with tears and placed them in tombs as symbols of love & respect. In the Old Testament of the Bible, the notion of collecting tears in a bottle appears in Psalm 56:8.

In the Victorian era, a tear bottle was one of the greatest gifts you could give someone. It meant that you loved them, that you shared a grief which brought you together.

This ancient custom symbolizes the transformation that takes place in people who have grieved deeply. They are not threatened by the grief of people in pain. They have been in the depths of pain themselves, and returned. Like the tear jar, they can now be with others who grieve and catch their tears.

*--Linda May and Pleasant Gill White,
grief counselor and founder of the
Sibling Connection.*

~reprinted from MO-KAN Region TCF May 2003 Newsletter

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal;
Love leaves a memory no one can steal
Irish Tombstone

*Grieve not, nor speak of me with tears, but laugh
And talk of me as if I were beside you. I loved
You so—'twas heaven here with you.
Isla Paschal Richardson*

Letting Go of Guilt

By Clara Hinton

Quite often, the first feelings that overtake a mother or father following the death of a child are feelings of extreme guilt. Thoughts of if only seem to relentlessly keep returning. If only I had taken her to the doctor sooner. If only I had not given him the car keys when I knew the roads were icy. If only I had not turned my back to answer the phone. If only I had not left him playing alone in the bathtub. Guilt is such a heavy burden of grief to carry around!

How does a parent move beyond the guilt of losing a child? How can a parent shed the painful feelings of inadequacy? How does a parent ever find a way to let go of the guilt?

The most difficult step in releasing the tight clutch that guilt holds on a parents' heart is dealing with the reality of the loss. My child died are often the most difficult three words that will ever come from the mouth of a parent. Those words are hard words, yet they are words that are necessary to say and to understand before being able to rid oneself of guilt.

When we live in an if only emotional environment, we have not yet come to the full realization that child loss has actually occurred. We are still working through the mental if only reasoning which continues to wreak havoc on a parents heart. When a parent lives in an if only state, the reality of the child is death can never be completely accepted. As painful as it is, a parent must at some point make the hard choice to accept the reality that the child has died.

Because a parents primary role is to nurture and care for the child, a parent often has a feeling of deserving punishment when a child dies. That is simply another way of expressing the heaviness of guilt. A parent often wrestles with the thought that because my child died, I do not deserve to ever smile again. Guilt continues to prevent many parents from moving forward in this difficult journey we call grief.

It takes a lot of concentrated effort, hard work, and support from others to be able to forgive oneself and finally let go of the gnawing feeling of guilt following the death of a child. Until a parent makes the decision to leave the heavy weight of guilt behind, joy can never return to a heart that has been so deeply wounded by the loss of a child.

Letting go of guilt is a decision that must be made. There is no timetable for making that decision, and others cannot force that decision on any parent. Eventually, a parent will come to the realization that the child's death is real, and there is a hard choice to be made to continue to live in the guilt of the loss, or to let go of that heaviness of guilt and begin to experience a bit of peace and joy once again.

Letting go of guilt requires a real effort to put an end to the if only questions. Letting go of guilt means that a parent no longer blames himself for the death of the child. Letting go of guilt means forgiving oneself and accepting oneself. Letting go of guilt means being gentle with oneself and allowing time for healing to take place.

Letting go of guilt is one of the most difficult parts of grief work. It takes a lot of energy, understanding, and patience. But, when guilt is finally set free, a parents heart can begin to walk the journey of healing through child loss.

From www.silentgrief.com

Surviving the Death of a Child

Donna Lamb, LCSW

Senior Social Worker, *The Menninger Hope Adult Program*
(excerpt)

Especially problematic in parental grief is guilt, resulting from the parents' deep sense of responsibility for and helplessness after a child's death. Miles and Demi (1986) identify the following sources of parental guilt.

- **Death causation guilt:** resulting from parent's perceived contribution to or failure to protect the child from death
- **Illness-related guilt:** resulting from perceived deficiencies in the parental role during the child's illness or at the time of death
- **Parental role guilt:** the belief that the parent failed to live up to self- or societal expectations in the *overall* parental role
- **Moral guilt:** resulting from the belief that the child's death was punishment or retribution for something the parent did or failed to do
- **Survival guilt:** the belief that children should outlive their parents
- **Grief guilt:** resulting from the parent's behavioral or emotional reactions of grief at the time of or following the child's death

When Prayers Go Unanswered

By Mitch Carmody

As a beggar shares his bread with another beggar I share my heart on a difficult subject with the loss of a child; when there is no miracle.

No parent should have to go through the loss of their child; there is no greater pain on this Earth than to experience the death of your child, no grief harder to bear. There is no easy way out, no medication, placebo, no therapy, no shortcut or prayer that can take away the pain, it has to be experienced, you love hard you grieve hard. It is totally unfair and life does not seem worth living...but we need to live.

Some people blame God for taking away their child, some glorify God; that God picks his favorites to be with Him in Heaven and that they are in a better place, and that the good die young. Some people blame the devil for sending evil our way and that we were not faithful enough. Regardless of the cause of death; by disease, accident, suicide or murder, as parents we blame ourselves. We are the responsible parents who failed to protect our children from their death, no matter how you cut it, we blame ourselves. We are responsible for their welfare, and in some way we failed and our child died. No matter what facts can be brought before us that we did nothing wrong, we still rationalize our guilt. I believe for most of us we as parents are guilty of one thing: loving too much.

If you think back just a hundred years in this country or currently in many third world countries, life is much more egregious and harsh. Medical care may be many miles away by foot or nonexistent, no electricity, and no penicillin, not much in way of helping to save lives for the average person. Many people die and have died from lack of any medical care, most of them children, even our wars take our children year after year. This planet is cruel and harsh and although high in intelligence and many advances have been made, we as humans are very fragile and death is a continual oppressive enemy.

Six million Jews prayed to their God to release them from their captors and save their lives. Why no answer? Enemy Christian soldiers in many wars have found themselves both frightened and both praying to the same God that they won't get killed. The Muslim prays to Allah for protection in a country racked with war. Whose prayer gets answered? The families at home on 9/11 praying their loved ones survived the blast, the hundreds of individuals scared for their life running down fire escapes praying to get out. Why did some survive and not others? Pleas to God to find escape from earthquakes, fire and flood, again no answer, a prayer for a miracle for our child in the hospital, the child abducted or lost, simply our prayers for their protection at night. No answer, no miracle.

Why does the omnipotent force of all good not answer our gut wrenched beseechments in prayer? We are good

people, what did any one of us do wrong? We become very, very angry at God for taking our child. He did not answer our prayers, He gave us hope, only take it away, allowing us to love, only to give us this unending agony. What kind of a God would do this? How could He allow my child to die?

We even begin to question the very existence of God, but the paradox we find is if we do not believe in God, then who can we be angry at? We need to let out our anger in a healthy way, screaming at God is one way; He cannot be hurt and will not scream back.

I think we tend to make God out to be some powerful magician like the Wizard of Oz; that if the faithful bring their requests to Him in earnest, their prayer will be answered just as requested. I don't believe God throws lighting bolts and curve balls to hurt us or give us disease so that we can experience spiritual growth or fulfill some nebulous destiny. Conversely I don't believe He makes a choice of which soldier in the trench to save, or which child is cured of cancer. Prayers are answered through the hearts and hands of those all around us. If the right doctor is found, the right medicine is administered, the life guard is on duty, the scientist finds a cure, the soldier frees a captive, the fireman, the police officer, your neighbor, or the man on the street are all agents of God, whether they know it or not. Many times there is no miracle, there is no cure, there is no hero or savior and our loved one dies; our prayers seemingly ignored. We become very angry that we were lead to believe that our fervent prayers would be heard and yet they were left unanswered.

Sometimes there is no boat or helicopter available and our loved one dies despite our prayers. As much as we would like to believe that God can magically reach down his mighty hand and rescue us, we intellectually know that is not going to happen. God is not a physical entity; He is the combined love of this planet. Just as He used Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad and Moses to speak his words, he uses people to carry out the answer to prayer. If those boats and helicopters are simply not physically available at the time, or the right medication is not found we die, life is cruel, life is harsh.

My nine year old son Kelly died from a malignant brain tumor called Medullablastoma. We prayed and prayed that he would not die and that he could be cured. Though many medical breakthroughs in cancer have saved many lives most children with this diagnosis 20 years ago and today, die from this form of cancer. Kelly lived almost two years following his diagnosis. Did God answer our prayers? Yes, he did. Was Kelly cured? No, he was not. Was Kelly healed? Yes, he was, for when there is no miracle death is the ultimate healer.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

From previous page

A hundred years ago Kelly would not have even been diagnosed, he would have suffered more terribly and died much sooner. Our prayers were answered with what was available to us geographically, with an outstanding local children's hospital, wonderful doctors and nurses and excellent insurance that covered over a half a million dollar medical bill. Our prayers were answered when our town of Bayport raised money with a benefit for us and with Make-a-wish who sent us to Hawaii for two weeks. Our prayers were answered in Mexico where we traveled there to find a cure and Kelly's tumor disappeared. When the cancer came back out of control, my prayers were answered that God would take him from the pain. My prayers were answered when I asked Kelly for a sign that he survived death and that he could hear my lamentations. My prayers were answered that I could find some path out the valley of the shadow of death and embrace life again. Yes, God exists and answers prayers. My son has communicated to me after his death in a very real way; if Kelly survived death, than there is no doubt in my heart that God exists. By whatever name you call your personal omnipotent deity or how that universal force answers your prayers is as individual as a snowflake and different for everyone.

Your child dies at 3 months old from SIDS, killed with no warning at 18 by a drunk driver, or the onset of a sudden illness, what prayer can possibly change those horrific facts? There was no inkling of their fate or time to pray to prevent it; we are vulnerable to our physical limitations with every breath we take. Why did it happen? Like trying to comprehend that there is no end to the universe, there is no answer our intellect can understand. As long as this world turns our loved ones, including our children will die; we cannot escape it. When this happens we feel guilty for not preventing it somehow, and feel totally empty inside, feeling far away from the God who failed us and took our child.

Believing in God is a personal choice and whether or not you believe in God or not, death will claim lives and we shall all experience the pain of loss. I don't believe God takes our lives but I do believe He receives our spirit. God does not punish us, he picks us up when we fall and carries us when we cannot walk. Our destiny is a work in progress, just as melting snow from the mountain top finds the ocean, nourishes the landscape or forms a mountain lake, it will be what it will be and dependent on what it encounters on the journey. I don't blame God for my losses, I don't blame the devil, and I accept the fact that life is harsh and is terminal from our birth.

Because of my personal experience I choose to believe in God and thank Him/Her for every minute that I am given to experience life. Every moment is an opportunity to feel love by sharing hearts with one another. Even through all the pain of losing my son, my parents, two siblings, and two nephews I still feel His love through his children on this earth. That belief has sustained me in my deepest sorrow and the only thing that assuaged the pain. I believe there are Angels all around us, living and breathing as we do and although they cannot bring our child or loved one back they can help to heal the hurt. If you help to heal the hurt of others so shall your hurt be relieved. If you don't believe in God, believe in love, to me it's a matter of semantics.

Victor Frankle, author, doctor and survivor of a concentration camp said in his book "Mans' Search for Meaning": 'To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering.' We cannot change what has transpired, as we live we shall suffer. We cannot go back and change the past but we can change the future as we move from loss to legacy, substantiating our loved ones life by the way we live ours. We can honor their lives and allow them to live on through our actions. In our grief we are given the license to take emotional risks, and express the deep feelings in our heart. Other than the death of another child nothing can hurt us more than we have already been hurt.

I wanted to die when Kelly died, but I chose to live, who else would keep his memory alive? If we do not choose life, than ultimately two lives are wasted. Grieve hard, scream loud, feel every facet of your loss as long as you need to, grieve openly, express your lamentations and frustrations; you love hard, you grieve hard, it is supposed to hurt. Know that your grief will lesson as time moves on but you will always be a bereaved parent and like living with arthritis you will live with flare ups of pain the rest of your life.

God bless you on your long journey and continuing passage of pain, and know also that although our now children live in one sphere of existence and we in another, with faith, undying love and the desire, we can meet at the seam where our worlds connect, love never dies.

Love n light
Mitch

*Used with permission.
Visit Mitch Carmody at
www.heartlightstudios.com*



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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Compassionate Friends of Southwest Dallas County meets on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 PM in the parlor of the First United Methodist Church in Duncanville. The church address is 403 S. Main St. The parlor is located behind the church at 206 W. Daniel St. Child care is available by reservation. Call 972-298-6121.

NEW STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

We have several members who have agreed to fill vital rolls for the chapter.

Marshall Moran has accepted the position of treasurer.
Joyce Robinson has volunteered to be our new librarian.
Ross McBride has volunteered to be chapter secretary.

Thanks to Tim Patterson, Kathy Monk and Barbara Green for serving the chapter.

NEWSLETTER POLICY

Sponsoring a newsletter is a way to remember your child at any special time through the year. You may include a picture of your child (if emailed please use JPEG format) and a brief (100 words or less) comment about your child. To guard against identity theft, please do not include full birth or death dates. A donation of \$20.00 will help cover the cost of postage for the newsletter. Please make all submissions no later than the 20th of the month prior to which you wish them to appear. This is your newsletter. Please feel free to submit your own writings, book reviews, articles or poems you have found helpful. Be sure to include the author's name and source. Articles may have to be edited for space. Please email to: tcfswdallas@sbcglobal.net
Or mail to:
Bill Campbell
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CHAPTER STEERING COMMITTEE

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
Walk to Remember
Arlington, Virginia
July 4, 2010



THE TCF Southwest Dallas banner will be at the May and June

meetings. If you have not signed the banner in the past please make sure you do so at one of the next meetings. We will carry the banner at the annual Walk to Remember in Arlington, Va. on July 4th.

The Compassionate Friends Walk to Remember® is a highlight of every TCF National Conference. It was created as a symbolic way to show the love we carry for the children we mourn. Held at 8 a.m. Sunday on the final day of the national conference it starts at the host hotel of the conference.

Check the national website for details on how your child's name can be carried in the walk.

TCF Video: After a Child Dies

The Compassionate Friends has unveiled a web version of a new video After a Child Dies. We believe After a Child Dies will offer insight and understanding and hope to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents, and to those who care about them. After a Child Dies is now available to view online at www.compassionatefriends.org. **Our chapter also has a copy that may be checked out of our library.**

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NEWSLETTER
2010
APRIL

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Southwest Dallas County Chapter
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The Southwest Dallas County Chapter of The Compassionate Friends hopes that you have benefited from receiving this newsletter. Our purpose is to support and aid families in the positive resolution of their grief following the death of a child. If you no longer wish to continue receiving this newsletter please mail this page to the return address or email tcfswdallas@sbcglobal.net so your name can be removed from our list.