



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

FARGO/MOORHEAD AREA CHAPTER

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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The F-M Area Chapter of The Compassionate Friends meets the 2nd Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. at FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH
127 2ND AVE E
WEST FARGO, ND
Please enter on the West side. Our meeting is in the Fellowship Hall - lower level, west side.

Upcoming Meetings
February 9th
March 8th

Holiday Angel not included in previous newsletters
Bethany Ehlers - Marcus David Ehlers

Dates to Remember in 2012
July 20-22 in Costa Mesa, CA - 35th TCF/USA Natl Conference; 5th International Gathering
Regional Conferences
February 17-18 in Overland, KS
March 23-24 in Frankfort, KY
April 20-21 in Meadville, PA

If you have any pictures, stories, or poems of your child, grandchild or sibling that you would like to share on our website, please submit them to Sheryl Cvijanovich at SHERYLCV13@MSN.COM or mail them to the PO box listed on the back of the Newsletter. Anything sent to the PO Box will be scanned for the website and returned.

Help us save money and paper..... To receive the newsletters via email in a pdf format, please send an email to the newsletter editor, Nancy Teeuwen at FMTCFNWLTR@LIVE.COM. Please be sure to include your name in the email.

REMINDER - Our meetings now begin at 7 p.m.

LOVE GIFTS

Larry & Lois Gangnes in memory of their son, Brent M Gangnes
Laura Kuehl in memory of her children, Staff Sgt. David Kuehl & Wendy Kuehl
Ed & Elsie Foss in memory of their son, Brian Foss
Harriet Marquardt in memory of her daughter, Tammy Marquardt
John & Jill Gaffney in memory of their son, Matthew Gaffney
Rick Derheim in memory of his son, Keegan Derheim
Deb Wayman in memory of her daughter, Heather Wren
Jim & Suzie Hill in memory of their son, Jonathan Levi Poitra
John & Kylene Milligan in memory of their son, Matthew Milligan - Olson
We are deeply grateful for the LOVE GIFTS given this month.
Our chapter and all chapters, are financed solely through your Love Gifts.
Donations make this newsletter, postage, books, tapes, etc. possible.
Thank you for your tax deductible gifts

OUR CREDO

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. ©2007

"In grief, nothing 'stays put'. One keeps emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I'm on a spiral? But if a spiral, am I going up or down?"

~ C.S. Lewis: *A Grief Observed*

Our Valentine Cookies

The Valentine's Day Cookies
won't taste so good this year.

I stirred in the sugar, but you were not here.

Frosting – pink on the tip of your nose.

Days spun too swiftly – my biggest woe!

Did the time have to come so very soon
When you weren't here to lick the spoon?

My heart would dance and I would sing

To feel you tug at my apron strings.

But instead I'll toil with the rolling pin,

And rely on mind's eye for your silly grin.

When the heart shapes are baked, mine will still ache.

But I'll always love you, for goodness sake!

~ Kathy Slief, TCF/ Tulsa, OK

HAPPINESS IS . . .

Happiness is . . . “and I don't remember the rest of the commercial, nor what they're selling. Soda? Cigarettes? A car? Who knows? Does it matter?”

What is happiness? What do you mean be “happy?” Is it totally rollicky jollicky glee 100% of the time? Who do you know who has that? I imagine that the richest, the brightest, the prettiest, the most successful of people have issues they must face that trouble them, that render them less than “HAPPY.”

Is “happy” the absence of misery? Who do you know with no misery? Yet don't you know some happy people? Haven't you even heard laughter at a TCF meeting? Only “HAPPY” people laugh?

Maybe it's like a big, steep hill. Down at the bottom, in darkness, is abject misery and sorrow. Way way up at the top, beyond the rainbow, is that beaming gleaming unreal total 100% glee. And somewhere in between is where most of us are. During the first years after our child dies, we're down in the pits with the dark miseries. And we know we're the most unhappy of people.

But sometimes there's a glimpse, a memory of what's on the upper slope of that steep hill. Smiles, laughter, good days, pleasure. Happiness?

How do you get there? At some point it takes a conscious decision to survive, to smile, to rearrange, probably to compromise. Each of us has to make this decision for ourself. In a family people arrive at (and abandon for a bit) this decision at different times.

So—once you've decided to survive, what can make you “happy?” Different things for different people. You're still basically you. But look around, listen. Talk to other bereaved parents. Ask them.

For me, I decided to snatch at simple pleasures. Flowers that bloom in the cold—crocus, snowdrops—that's good. Birds are interesting to watch. Squirrels and chipmunks can be funny. A blue sky with puffy white clouds—that's beautiful.

A shining silvery airplane overhead—amazing! Snowflakes are a geometric wonder. Raindrops' collarbuttons plopping into a puddle are fun to watch. All around me there are small things to bring a small smile, to give me little pleasures.

But the world is not only for watching. There's doing, too. I've learned that an absorbing activity, something new to be mastered, something old to be perfected, an enjoyable project to be completed—these also bring pleasure (and are distractions). Painting can be engrossing for hours, as can quilting, knitting, working with wood, latch hooking, cross stitch, jigsaw puzzles. There are probably as many concentration activities as there are people. (Ask someone to teach you – or try a class).

Major muscle activities (exercise) are good for letting off excess energy, or steam. Walking, bike riding, swimming, or the really strenuous athletic kinds of games can divert the mind, be fun, and they're usually good for you, too.

It takes a conscious decision, some thought, some determination. I will survive. I will smile again. I will be “happy,” at least for part of each day. There will be bad minutes and sad hours; but I'll let the tears flow, and then try to find something good.

I need not walk alone. There are others to share and to care. When we listen or give an idea, talk or get an idea, we're helping each other. That's good, too. That's what TCF is all about.

Peace and Love! ~ Joan Schmidt, 2/28/85

“How Many Children Do You Have?”

Shortly after my son died, I realized that this question was going to be bothersome. Each time someone asked me about the number of children, I struggled with the answer. I soon decided I was not going to let this become a problem. I thought about how I felt about my choice of answers and chose the one that met my needs in the beginning. I had a surviving daughter, but I know for me to say “one” would seem a denial on my part that my son had lived, and that wasn't right for me.

In the beginning, when I still needed to tell people that my son had died, I would tell in detail about his accident when the question about how many children came my way. As the months passed and I had told the story enough times, I found that it wasn't necessary to go into detail any more. My needs had changed, and I rethought my answer.

Now, when I am asked how many children I have, I answer, “I had two children.” The criteria I used in determining if I go any further is whether the person asking is going to be a continuing part of my life. If so, they need to know about my son, and I tell them. Otherwise we will be constantly dancing around the fact. Better, I think, to have it out in the open.

If, on the other hand, the person asking is simply passing through my life, then I feel no need to go any further than “I had two children.” Seldom does anyone catch the “HAD” instead of “have,” and pursue it. If they do, or if they ask follow up questions about ages or professions, I tell them first that my 26 year old son was killed in an accident. Then I tell them about my daughter who is alive and doing well, this gives them a choice. They can either acknowledge my son's death and ask questions or they can ignore that and ask about my daughter. I am comfortable either way. If they are embarrassed, I see that as their problem. Just to show you how different we all are, however, my husband feels comfortable answering, “We have one child.” That is what is right for him and that is what he should say. You decide what is right for you – then Say it. That way you defuse that powerful question and it loses its ability to traumatize. Don't let it be a problem.

~ Mary Cleckley, TCF/Atlanta, GA

Remember

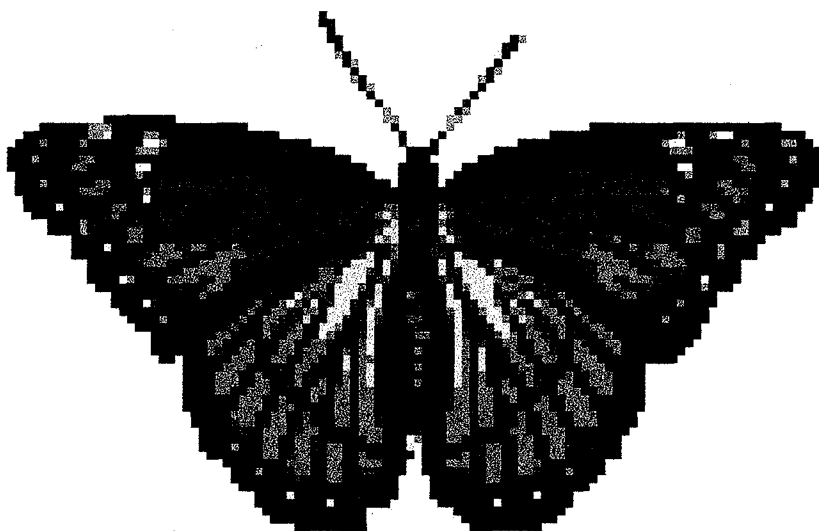
When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you, that I have left some mark of who I am on who you are. It means that you can summon me back to your mind even though countless years and miles may stand between us. It means that if we meet again, you will know me. It means that even after I die, you can still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart.

~ Frederick Buechner, “Whistling in the Dark”

OUR BELOVED CHILDREN REMEMBERED



Birthdays and Anniversaries have been removed from the Internet version of our newsletter for security purposes



SIBLING PAGE

From a Grieving Sibling

I am a surviving sibling. Fifteen months ago I was not even familiar with the term...now I am one! How am I doing? What are the guidelines to measure my progress? Why can't I remember when I was told of my brother's death...or the days following the accident for that matter? Did I go crazy? Was it yesterday, or was it over a year ago? Did I laugh just today when I never thought I would laugh again? What is this peaceful feeling that I feel from time to time? Is it healing?

Lee, 29, was my little brother. I remember trying to alternately protect or tease him, make him laugh or make him cry. He was like having a real live baby doll to play with since I was 10 years older than he. (Our Mother said he was the cleanest little boy in the neighborhood. I guess having 3 older sisters is the reason for that!!!)

How can I explain the pain I felt on learning of his accident. I wanted to go to him right away to see that he was OK, but our cousin, Judy, said that wasn't possible. I guess that was when I was told that he was dead...but I don't remember that. I only remember screaming.

When was it that I began to heal? Probably at the same time that I thought I was going totally, certifiably crazy! Then, someone told me about The Compassionate Friends and what they did. I wondered if they could help me but doubted that they could. After all, how could they understand how much I hurt at having lost my precious baby brother or how close we had always been and how he always helped me. Why should they even care about me? But, you know what...they did help. With the help and support of this group of wonderful caring people, I am alive today and working toward a fruitful life. I will never be the same as I was before June 18, 1992, but I truly believe I have become a better person.

While Lee's life taught me so much, his death taught me some invaluable lessons. I have learned to become more aware of life and my own mortality and am more attuned to other needs. I no longer take anything for granted. I miss him terribly but take solace in the belief that he is happy in his new world and that one day we will be reunited. Sibling grief takes a tremendous amount of time and work. Sometimes just thinking of my brother, looking at his picture, or hearing his favorite song, "God Bless America," reduces me to a teary mess. Sometimes these same things make me smile. But, I am surviving and have developed a new perspective on life. I am closer to and cherish my family more than ever and realize how very important they are. I am dedicated to helping other surviving siblings work through their grief. I pray daily for peace, not only for myself and my family, but for everyone making this journey through grief.

One thing that I have found to be most helpful during the past fifteen months of grief work has been to talk about and to be honest about my feelings. I encourage siblings (and parents) to try to hook up with a support group such as The Compassionate Friends to talk out your feelings and concerns. After all, we've already paid an extremely high price to join this group...the life of our loved one...so why not take You may even find yourself helping someone else (even though you might not believe that now.)

~ Sunday Lee Stanton. TCF/Wyoming Valley, PA

What Is A Brother?

Brothers can be older or younger,
even if they are your twin.

Older or younger, with a brother,
you never seem to win.

An older brother likes to pull rank,
and show you whose boss.

But in times of trouble,
He will defend his younger siblings,
no matter what the cost.

A younger brother is noisy, pesky
and nonstop wants to play,

No matter what you do or where you go,
he is always in your way.

Who our brothers are, we don't have a choice,
So, we accept them with pride and just rejoice.

The role of a brother changes as he grows older,
His image of a sibling role model, becomes
more profound and bolder.

In a fatherless home, he would be
cool to have around,
role model image of a father,
through him could be found.

Your brother can be your confidant, young or old,
Many secrets, between siblings have unfolded.

When you are friendless and need a friend,
A brother is there to comfort and befriend you,
thru thick or thin.

A brother listens to your problems,
when he has the time and you feel the need,
Some good advice he can give--Yes indeed!

As a sister, don't have a problem with
a boyfriend, especially one he doesn't like,
His protective nature, will quickly tell that boyfriend to
"Go take a hike."

A brother can bring joy to a family,
good hugs, laughs and fun
I thank God that he gave me several
brothers and not just one.

Dorothy Martin © July 1998

MEMORIES

As I watched her leave

There is a place

That we call Memory.

A province by itself
which, though unseen,

is home and haven
to the heart.

and there,

in peace and beauty

waiting,

are those with whom

we shared our yesterdays.

-Nancy Cassel, TCF/Holmdel, NJ

Grief never ends, but it changes.

It's a passage, not a place to stay.

The sense of loss must give way if we're
to value the life that was lived

Let's Go Home

Let's go home –
My eyes pleaded to my husband.
We don't belong here.
This is crazy – these people are still hurting.
Two, five years later and they are still coming here.
Let's go home. We don't belong here.
We won't, we can't be like that. Perhaps –
If I don't speak,
If I don't tell them why we came –
It won't be true.
But wait... Why are they laughing?
They all lost children, yet they are laughing
at something somehow.
And wait... Why am I nodding at what he's saying?
Why do I feel I must say something to that couple
who are in this nightmare even less time than we?
They all seem to know what I'm feeling –
without my even saying it –
Just not flinching at my tears.
That steady, endless stream of tears that seems to never stop.
Perhaps – One day I'll join their laughter –
Let's wait – Perhaps we shouldn't leave just yet.

~ Sandy Fein, TCF/ Manhasset, NY

Just For Today

Just for today I will try to live through the next 24 hours and not expect to get over my child's death, but instead learn to live with it just one day at a time.

Just for today I will remember my child's life, not his death, and bask in the comfort of all those treasured days and moments we shared.

Just for today I will forgive all the family and friends who didn't help or comfort me the way I needed them to. They truly did not know how.

Just for today I will smile no matter how much I hurt on the inside, for maybe if I smile a little, my heart will soften and I will begin to heal.

Just for today I will reach out to comfort a relative or friend of my child, for they are hurting too, and perhaps we can comfort each other.

Just for today I will free myself from my self-inflicted burden of guilt, for deep in my heart I know if there was anything in this world I could have done to save my child from death, I would have done it.

Just for today I will honor my child's memory by doing something with another child because I know that would have made my own child proud.

Just for today I will offer my hand in friendship to another bereaved parent, for I do know how they feel.

Just for today when my heart feels like breaking, I will stop and remember that grief is the price we pay for loving and the only reason I hurt is because I had the privilege of loving so much.

Just for today I will not compare myself with others. I am fortunate to be who I am and to have had my child for as long as I did.

Just for today I will allow myself to be happy, for I know that I am not deserting him by living on.

Just for today I will accept that I did not die when my child did. My life did go on and I am the only one who can make that life worthwhile once more.

~ Vicki Tushingam, For Bereaved Parents

SHARED THOUGHTS ON REMEMBERING THE SAD AS WELL AS THE HAPPY TIMES

February is the month we express our love to those significant persons in our lives. For many bereaved parents and siblings, it can be a time of increased pain. We miss the exchange of love from the person who has died. Our Douglas died on February 7th. Valentine's day has always been a difficult time, because of being so close to his anniversary. Both holidays and anniversaries can renew our personal grief.

Our love does not end with the death. There still is a need to talk of our deceased, and how much they mean to us. Caring relatives and friends that will listen without judging, can be very helpful. We need to express our feelings, and feel understood, when we are both happy and sad. It is important to tell those trying to help us, that remembering that very special person who was such a significant part of our life is essential to our healing. They also need to know the importance of remembering the sad times for tears, as well as the happy times for laughter and smiles. Most non-bereaved feel only happy memories heal. Perhaps, this is because that is what feels most comfortable for them.

There is no way of knowing what another bereaved person is really experiencing. There are times we all hide our feelings. Often, we are concerned about family members close to us, and are afraid of adding to their suffering, so consequentially we avoid talking about the issue. We must remember they too may need to share their feelings, whether it be good or bad memories. We can offer comfort, understanding, and give them permission to express themselves.

Siblings tend to consider their parents the primary grievers, and often try to "be strong" for them. No one needs to be strong for another family member. The pretense of "holding it together" can be very damaging, and even deepen our depression. Depression can cause us to withdraw, so everyone needs to put effort into working very hard in keeping communications open.. Frequently, it is much more comfortable for siblings to share with peers, on any subject. When we sense we are pressuring them to talk, we must back off, and respect their wishes, or this can lead to their avoiding family gatherings. Sharing cannot be forced.

Many times our support has come from the people we would least expect. Everyone must choose those they feel most comfortable with when sharing their grief. Give our children the same privilege when sharing such a personal part of their life.

One of the ways we can help our family most, is to do our own grief work. This means saving time for ourselves to face our pain, and not run away from it. If we heal and gain some normality back into our lives, it will make it easier for the rest of our household.

~ Marie Hofmocker, TCF/Valley Forge

MAY I GRIEVE?

In the daytime, I walk and work, and all;
But at home, in the evening, I stumble and fall.
The office says, "Function, smile and get control."
But at home I can grieve to cleanse my soul.
Must I be two people for the rest of my life?
If I could be just one person for more than one day,
My freedom to grieve would help light the way.
But society tells me not to be sad,
They say, "She's at peace now
and you should be glad."
When grieving the loss of a child is perceived,
How much easier it is for we the bereaved.

~ Susanne Demars, TCF/Hingham, MA

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**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
FARGO/MOORHEAD AREA CHAPTER
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

MISSION STATEMENT: The mission of The 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.

A SINCERE WELCOME TO ALL COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS...We are a nonprofit self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child. We offer group support, understanding and friendship. Our purpose is to promote and aid parents and siblings in the positive resolution of the grief they are experiencing and to foster physical and emotional health. If you have questions or wish to talk directly to a member of the Fargo-Moorhead Compassionate Friends, please call any of the numbers listed.

FARGO-MOORHEAD COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS BOARD

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN THE BOARD AT ANY TIME!

Chapter Leader	John Milligan 701-282-4794	Secretary-Treasurer	Sheryl Cvijanovich 701-235-8158
Librarian		Initial Contact	Kylene Milligan..... 701-282-4794
Newsletter Editor	Nancy Teeuwen 701-730-0805	Newsletter Database	Mike Cvijanovich 701-235-8158
Newsletter Printing	Joyce at Olivet Lutheran Church	Mailing Committee	Contact Us to Join

LIBRARY INFORMATION: We have an extensive library available. Please feel free to check materials at our next meeting.

TELEPHONE FRIENDS

HAVING A BAD DAY OR NIGHT? Feel free to call and talk to any of the following:
John Milligan (son, 25 - car accident) 701-282-4794
Duane Skramstad (daughter, 20 - car accident; son, 2 - drowning)..... 701-437-2507
Cheri Eraker (son, 23 - accident)..... 701-451-0045
Carol Nelson (son , 13 - leukemia)..... 218-346-3854
Nancy Teeuwen (daughter, 15 hours - illness)..... 701-730-0805
Mark & Hella Helfter (miscarriage & son, 35 - accident)..... 701-235-9622

Love gifts must be received by the 15th to be included in the next month's newsletter. If you wish to give a love gift please complete:

Love gift given in Memory/Honor of _____
Name _____
Address _____
Relationship _____ Born _____ Died _____