



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

ALBANY/HAROLD MITCHELL CHAPTER & SARATOGA SPRINGS CHAPTER

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

WWW.TCFALBANY.ORG
WWW.COMPASSIONATEFRIENDS.ORG

MARCH & APRIL 2017

TCF MONTHLY

MEETINGS

ALBANY

7:30 pm
3rd Tuesday every month
Westminster Presbyterian Church
85 Chestnut St., Albany
Jan Messina 439-0346
Kathleen Kelleher 439-1114

SARATOGA

1st Tuesday of every month- 7:30 pm
Wesley Health Center Care
Activities Room, Lawrence St.
Gabby Gravelle 596-4275

SCHENECTADY

1st Wednesday every month
St. Kateri Library, 1803 Union St.
John Powers 399-2492
JoAnn Bomeisl 372-8215

MID-HUDSON VALLEY

2nd Wednesday every month
Chris Yurchuk
845-691-2111

GREENE COUNTY

2nd Wednesday every month
United Methodist Church
Woodland Ave., Catskill
Judy 622-4023



TELEPHONE FRIENDS

Having a bad day? Need someone to talk to? Want information about the next meeting? Help is just a phone call away

**Jan Messina 439-0346
Gabby Gravelle 596-4275
Helen Connors 226-0557**

TCF...UNCONDITIONAL CARING

My son Philip died in August 1994, when he was 26 years-old. He died by suicide, influenced by a genetic illness, bipolar mood disorder (manic depression). I well remember how I flinched inwardly when people began referring to Philip's having "committed suicide." It seemed to diminish my wonderful son, to make him into what he never was: a kind of criminal. I wanted people to remember the beauty of this soul, yet what they focused on was the shocking way in which he died.

So it has been personally important to me to learn that TCF has made a change in the language it uses related to suicide. TCF now uses the terms "died of suicide" or "died by suicide" in all publications and presentations. The new, emotionally neutral language helps to lift the burden of stigma from all of us whose children or siblings died by suicide. It gives us strength and helps us heal.

If your child or sibling has died in one of society's less "acceptable" ways -- by suicide, murder, alcoholism, from a drug overdose, AIDS or sexually transmitted disease or in prison -- do know that TCF does not accept society's stigmas. There is no room for blame or condemnation when all our hearts are aching for the children we no longer have. We honor your child and your grief, no matter the cause of death.

Similarly, if you are a parent or sibling who may feel "other" in our oft-judgmental society, please know that you will not be "other" in TCF. We welcome you with understanding and compassion, whatever your age, your race, your ethnicity, whether you are rich or poor, married or single, gay or straight, whatever your religion or lack of religion. We welcome you.

And if you have endured the most terrible tragedy, if you have had more than one child or sibling die or have lost all your children or siblings, you are welcome. Many people are terrified that we are "contagious" because the worst nightmare has become a reality in our lives. They don't want to believe what we know: that neither we, nor they, can keep our children safe and alive. So they avoid us. And they especially may avoid you who have had more than one child or sibling or all your children die because the horror of what has happened in your lives terrifies them. We welcome you, and we honor your courage and want to be helpful to you in your healing. We offer our compassion and understanding to all parents and siblings and other family members who are on this very difficult journey into healing. May the unconditional acceptance one finds in TCF someday be mirrored in a wiser and more tolerant society.

Kitty Reeve

*In memory of my son, Philip
TCF Marin & San Francisco, CA Chapters*



LOVE GIFTS

Living on in our hearts.

This newsletter is made possible by donations through love gifts. Love gifts are a way that we can honor our children throughout the year, on their birthday, anniversary of their death or during the holidays. Please consider giving a love gift in memory of your children. Love gifts can be made in any dollar amount and mailed to Debbie Bouchey, 26 Berkshire Drive, East Greenbush, NY 12061.

*You are near,
even if I don't
see you. You are
with me, even if
you are far
away. You are in
my heart, in my
thoughts, in my
life, always...*

LOVE GIFT DEADLINE FOR
THE NEXT NEWSLETTER:
APRIL 20, 2017

In loving memory of **DIANE EBERHARDT** on her death on August 31, 2002.
Love Mom, Mark & David (Sadie Eiser)

In loving memory of our daughter, **LISA GERHAN**, May 1971-March 1997.
(David Gerhan and Anita Paul)

In loving memory of my son, **TOM CHRISTOPHER**, died in March 1990 at
24 years old. Safely Home 27 years now. (Elaine Christopher)

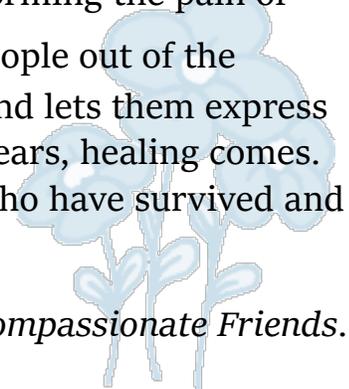
TINY FOOTPRINTS

Some children play with blocks and cars; but my toys are the moon and stars,
While kids on earth get hurt and cry, no tear has fallen from my eye.
For you, the tiger rips and tears; but I can play with beasts and bears.
When lion roars and shows his might, I ride his back in sheer delight.
You tread on dusty roads of old, while my feet skip down streets of gold.
But when my lovely day is through, I close my eyes and think of you.
I hear your voice so soft and mild, and know you sing to me, your child.
God sees your tears, and hears you sigh, but please, for me don't you cry.
In love we're never far apart, and I've left my footprints on your heart.

*In loving memory of Reagan Isaac Reavis
Born and died on January 29, 2007
By Jeannie Kelly, TCF Salem, OR*

The Compassionate Friends is about transforming the pain of grief into the *elixir of hope*. It takes people out of the isolation society imposes on the bereaved and lets them express their grief naturally. With the shedding of tears, healing comes. And the newly bereaved get to see people who have survived and are learning to *live and love again*.

-Simon Stephens, founder of The Compassionate Friends.



What A Son Will Tell His Mother About Grieving The Death Of His Sister

My son's only sibling, Maggie, his younger sister, my daughter, died almost four years ago, suddenly. She was twenty-two; he was twenty-seven. Perhaps because he is a man who does not easily talk about his feelings, we usually share our grief in oblique ways, but those moments are nonetheless intimate and meaningful.

However, this past summer, when I was visiting my son and his girlfriend, Jacqui, for a week, we had a chance to talk about his grieving more directly. He was relaxed on vacation from his teaching job, and we puttered around his new house, making a garden, and enjoying being together. We spoke often of Maggie and slowly, as we worked side by side, we made our way around to talk of how it is now, his grieving his sister. Here's what he told me:

"I've had a broad reach about all the things that were going to be affected by Maggie's death right from the beginning. I thought about the immediate losses and into the future; maybe that's just me and my personality, but I cast a wide net into the realm of all that Maggie's death was going to touch. And I knew it was never going to go away. I'm not sure that my grieving has really change a lot; once the initial shock wore off the depth of the grieving has been pretty constant, which has surprised me. The process of becoming an only child is a lot of things. Obviously, it's not always like that for everyone who loses a sibling, you might go from being four to being three, but for me I'm the only child now. I always consulted with Maggie about stuff, family stuff and life stuff, and I miss that. No one else knew me like she did. The other part is thinking about my parents getting older and being now the only potential caretaker and the prospect of doing that from a distance and alone is daunting. Having all the attention on me is weird and sometimes hard; it's not like everything got doubled when Maggie died, but just knowing that all family-

oriented business and conversations are falling just to me is sometimes a lot. There's no divide and conquer going on when it comes to the kids and Mom and Dad. Having someone who you were expecting to have through all the big life events not be there is really what gets me the most. Maggie won't get to come watch my soccer team play and she won't ever visit us here at the new house. She'll never know Jacqui. Jacqui is very receptive to Maggie still being a presence in our lives. It's really nice that she has dreams sometimes about Maggie and almost feels like she knows her. I do wish that they had known one another so that Maggie could be more of a person to Jacqui than just an idea. Obviously Mom and Dad have been important in helping with



processing the grieving, but a lot of my support has been in Mike, who has always been a surrogate brother but now he's really filling the role of the person who has known me the longest in a sibling kind of way. And I can really talk to him. I find I have very little patience for drama and fighting, especially among family members. I just think: Get over yourselves. Family has always been important to me but now those relationships are more important than ever and the little problems and differences are not worth getting worked up about. We just have to love each other."

It's hard living over five hundred miles from my son, but I make an effort to be with him often and for no specific reason other than that with this child, I can love him in person.

*Meg Tipper, September 2012
Lovingly lifted from Upper & Lower Cape Cod
Chapter Newsletter Jan/Feb 2016*

THERE IS LOVE IN OUR PAIN,
MEMORIES IN OUR GRIEF,
AND HOPE IN OUR SHARING

Darcie Sims

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 choices of answers and chose the one that met my needs in the beginning. I had a surviving daughter, but I knew 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 to 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 that fact. Better, I think, to have it out in the open. It then loses its ability to interfere with the relationship.

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 is what he should say.

An Easter Remembrance

Easter signifies the Risen Christ, the most hopeful and positive symbol of Christendom, and the Jewish Passover celebrates escape from oppression and slavery into the promised land. These holidays have not become burdened with required gift giving, home decoration, and lavish partying. As winter ends, and the trees, shrubs, and flowers of our valley burst into bloom, many bereaved parents feel their spirits lift a bit, and the pall of gloom subsides for many. Some of our parents, in fact, leap into spring by planting a memorial garden for their child, which gives them something positive to do, and provides them with the pleasure of creating a little spot of beauty for them and their family and friends to enjoy. The exercise and getting out into these rare and beautiful spring days are an added bonus. And to have flowers from your child’s garden to bring inside to brighten your kitchen soon gives special joy. Whatever the approaching religious season holds for you, pitch in and welcome it. And please don’t forget the power of flowers — especially a spot of your own creation.

Jackie Rohr, Ventura, CA
Lovingly lifted from Beavereared Parents of the USA,
Western NY Chapter
Spring 2014 Newsletter

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, Bereaved Mother
Lawrenceville, GA*

BALCONY AND BASEMENT PEOPLE

Shortly after my daughter Malena died, I started a home based business to keep busy. During the course of this business venture, I was able to attend the company's annual convention. These conventions are geared toward encouraging and motivating the sales teams to sell, sell, and sell. There are workshops and motivational speakers all pushing you into "expanding your business." As I sat through many of these speakers, most of what they said I related to surviving the death of my precious daughter rather than expanding my business.

Three years later, one of the workshops I attended that weekend keeps popping into my head as my grief process extends past what the world finds "comfortable". The workshop was called "Balcony People and Basement People". I have spent days and weeks applying this to the people I have encountered during my bereavement. I continually seek Balcony people and I avoid those I consider Basement people.

Basement people are people who constantly pull you down or discourage you. Basement people in our grieving process can and do cause us much hurt and distraction. Basement people are the people who do not wish to hear about your child, they do not want to talk about your hurt or actively help you go through the grief process. Basement people are also people who say ugly or uneducated things about your loss such as "Aren't you over that by now?" Basement people criticize your bereavement or question every method you chose in dealing with your loss. Basement people make everything about them and their feelings; disregarding the fact that it

is your child who died. Basement people can cause a lot of hurt (often, unintended) to you during your bereavement process.

Balcony people are the people who pull you forward and along the road of grief. Balcony people come beside you and cry with you, spend time listening to you talk of your child and tell you stories they remember, too. Balcony people encourage you to seek ways to heal and process your loss. They understand that the way you chose to deal with the death of your beloved child may



not be their way but it is what is good for you. Balcony people understand when you do not want them around but stand by you in case you change your mind. Balcony people cook or clean for you because you just do not have the energy or they do not comment when the house is a little (or a lot) messier than it used to be. Balcony people understand that you will never be the "old" you and help you to find the "new" you who

will merge through the grief and loss you have sustained.

Take the time to identify the Balcony people and Basement people in your life. Spend most of your time with the Balcony people and try to limit the time with Basement people; if possible. Balcony people pull you up, cheer you on, encourage you and take care of you when you most need it. Basement people pull you down, criticize and find fault in what you do. Balcony people and Basement people; we all have them in our lives. It is our choice of who we allow to be part of our bereavement process and our lives. I choose my Balcony people.

*Tracey Cooley, Bereaved Mother
Tampa, Florida*

*Lovingly lifted from BPUSA website:
www.bereavedparentsusa.org/writings*

WHAT THE CATERPILLAR THINKS
IS THE END OF LIFE,
THE BUTTERFLY KNOWS IT'S THE BEGINNING.



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You need not walk alone

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www.compassionatefriends.org

TCF's 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.



TCF's VISION: That everyone who needs us will find us and everyone who finds us will be helped.

The Compassionate Friends
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East Greenbush, NY 12061

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