



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

ALBANY/HAROLD MITCHELL CHAPTER & SARATOGA SPRINGS CHAPTER

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

WWW.TCFALBANY.ORG
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JULY - AUGUST
2019

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

THE MIRACLE OF YOU

Who could have known the exquisite difference your brief life would make upon mine?

Who could have known a tiny baby would show me the beauty of a sunrise, or the wonder of a rainbow, or the pain of a tear?

Who would have known that an innocent little child would take away my fear of death, and point me in the direction of Heaven?

Who could have known that you would succeed where so many others have failed?

*Dana Gensler,
TCF, South Center, KY*

GRIEVING IN PAIRS

How many times have people said, "Well, thank God you have each other." How many times have you felt "each other" to be entirely inadequate at meeting your needs?

Alarming statistics are available telling us of the rocky road parents encounter in their marriage after the death of a child. We sometimes see in ourselves a touchiness or quickness to become irritated that wasn't there before. It always

seems that my "bad" day is my wife's "good" day, or the day she wakes up crying was the day I had planned on playing tennis.

Or sometimes, even more difficult, we both have a bad day and find no help from the other in pulling things back together. How can one person hold up another when he himself is face down in the mud?

Every person grieves differently. This is a rule that even applies within a family. And the needs of every individual are different. While you may need to talk and talk, your spouse may need some time alone to reflect inwardly.

You have both been through the worst experience of your life. And while at times you can face recovery as a team, sometimes you must develop the patience to be able to wait out certain needs alone or with someone else. Realize that no matter how it is shown, your partner hurts too.

*Gerry Hunt
TCF White River Junction, VT*



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.

When your beautiful heart stopped beating, my heart broke in two. Knowing that here on earth, there won't be another quite like you...

My beautiful child, one of a kind child, you're a part of me, today and always...

PLEASE CONSIDER GIVING A LOVE GIFT DONATION TO SUPPORT OUR NEWSLETTER & CHAPTER

WAITING FOR ANSWERS

Years ago I left my first meeting of The Compassionate Friends and drove home in tears. My son, Max, had died a few short weeks before and I had been anxiously awaiting this evening. These people must have some answers, I thought. With paper and pen in purse, I was ready to take notes and do as they prescribed. I would do anything to ease the ache in my soul.

But when I walked out into the spring air later that night, I felt betrayed. I hadn't heard any answers. Instead of learning how to leave my grief behind, it had been confirmed, made more real with expression. I knew I would miss Max forever. Now I wondered if I would grieve forever. Would it always be this way, a flash of pain aligned with every memory?

During the next months and years, I attended TCF meetings and conferences, read books, raged, kept busy, sometimes spent the day in bed.

I wrote, cried and talked about Max. Slowly, I discovered the answers I had long feared were true: yes, I will grieve forever, and yes, my memories will often provoke tears. But something had changed.

My grief was now more forgiving, my tears almost sweet with memory. Max's life took shape again as the anguish of his death began to recede. If I would always miss him, I would also always have him with me in so many ways. I wanted to carry his memory into the future: the joy, the lessons, and the inevitable pain. How could I do otherwise?

As I walked to my car after that first meeting, the TCF leader caught up with me. "How can I stop this pain?" I asked. She put her arm on my shoulder. "Just do what feels right to you," she said, "Listen to your heart. And we'll be here to listen, too."

Sometimes the best advice is none at all.

*Mary Clark
In memory of Max
TCF, Sugar Land-SW Houston
Chapter, TX*

And Life Goes On . . .

**A Flower bursts full of life
Flourishes, withers, then disappears
All within the blink of an eye
Yet life goes on . . . Always the same**

**All within the blink of an eye
Yet life goes on . . . Always the same**

**A child draws his first breath
Learns, grows, then passes away
All within the blink of an eye
And life goes on . . . But never the same.**

**A bird enters the world with a song
Sings for a few seasons, then vanishes**

By L. Dustin Twede

**LOVE GIFT DEADLINE FOR
THE NEXT NEWSLETTER:
August 20, 2019**

Summer Memories

Summertime is a happy time for most people in this country: vacations, holidays, family reunions, relaxed days at the pool, evenings in the backyard talking with family and friends, the smell of a fresh rain, the long days, the cooling nights, fresh mown grass and flowers that bloom profusely.

Despite Houston's heat, summer has become a treasured time for me. My son was a child of summer. Born in May, he loved the summer sun on his face and the wind in his hair as he first rode a tricycle, then a bicycle, then drove a car. Those were wonderful times for him. The summer solstice on June 21 was a favorite day for us both. Since the summer solstice is the longest day of the year, Todd particularly loved to watch the sunrise and sunset. I found myself doing that again this year. As I looked at the sun directly overhead at noon (1:00 pm DST), I made the comment that this is the one perfectly balanced day of the year. Later as I watched a beautiful solstice sunset, I remarked to my husband about the light...the gorgeous light. I was seeing Todd in that light. He was laughing, chasing lightening bugs, running and spinning and turning, filled with the joy of summer. He was happy.

I listened to the neighbors' children playing, and I thought about all the wonderful summer days I had spent with my son. I am thankful that I had that time. I am thankful that my child was a son of summer. He found much joy in nature, in the outdoors, in activities that took him out of the ordinary and into the sublime.

That's how it is for bereaved parents. We eventually come to a place where we realize that our joyful memories have overtaken the pain of the loss of our child to death. We wouldn't trade the time we shared with our child for anything or any other experience. We have many relationships in our lives, but the unique nature of the parent-child relationship is so special, so deep, so life changing, that we endure and even embrace the pain because



we had, for that time in our lives, a relationship of pure love and pure joy with our child. There is no way to measure the depth, width or volume of a parent's love. It exceeds every other human relationship. Yes, we miss them terribly. We weep silently into our pillows at night. We light candles, take flowers to the cemetery, wear their favorite colors, treasure pictures of our children and keep them forever in our hearts. This is a big part of life for every bereaved parent.

Somehow, on the summer solstice, I felt my child's presence in the light of the day and the beautiful rose color of the solstice sunset. I could hear his voice, see his smile and feel his emotions. Peace slips into our hearts in extraordinary ways.

*Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX*

STANDING

People say
"Oh you are doing so well,
You are so strong,
You are an inspiration!"
We do not feel strong.
We feel shaken to the core,
Saddened beyond belief,
Pain beyond comprehension,
Forever changed.

What do they see that we cannot see?

That a horrible storm,
Unexpectedly ripped through

Our lives and we are

STILL STANDING

They are amazed

We are paralyzed

STILL STANDING

*Julie Short
TCF Southeastern Illinois
Chapter
In Memory of Kyra*

That First Summer Vacation

By: Diana Hammock, TCF/California, Central Coast

Summer time is here and with it you may be planning a vacation. If you have recently suffered the death of your child, that first vacation can be very difficult. I would like to share with you our experience the first time we took a vacation after our son, Paul, died. I have included some suggestions to help you through your first vacation and to help you plan around your grief.

Our son, Paul, died in November 1979 from leukemia. He had been ill for eight years. The last couple of years were very hard for us and we were not able to go on any vacations because of his illness. In August of 1980, we decided to go on a big trip to Hawaii like we had always wanted to do. We made our plans and we felt at the time that our grief was far enough along that we could enjoy ourselves. It was a very difficult vacation for our whole family. Each of us seemed unable to have a good time. We talked a lot about Paul. He was everywhere in our thoughts and minds. We all knew how much he would have loved the beauty of Hawaii, the ocean with all of its beautiful waves just right for surfing, and all of the sea life we saw when we went diving. It was very hard to have a good time and I soon realized we were all having problems coping with Paul's absence.

As I look back and remember our I know that even though we did not have a serve a purpose in our grief. We started during that vacation and I know now it

If any of you are planning a suggestions that may help.



- ◆ Be gentle with yourself. Don't expect vacation. Remember, as bereaved anything without our kids is tough movies, shopping or on a vacation.
- ◆ Plan to do some grief work because Give yourself time enough on the trip if you have a bad day so that you can just do what you feel like doing.
- ◆ Know that your child will be on your mind day and night just as he or she is at home. Our grief goes with us.
- ◆ Plan to do something your child would have loved to do, but did not get a chance to. Plan this in his or her memory.
- ◆ If you plan to visit relatives for the first time since your child's death, remember they mean well, even if they seem insensitive with their remarks. They have not lost a child and can't see through your eyes.
- ◆ If you have other children, remember them. They are also having a hard time coping on this vacation. Plan some activities that will be especially for them.
- ◆ Be especially careful to communicate with your spouse. Plan a vacation that is suitable for both of your needs. Remember you are both grieving for the same child, but we all grieve differently and in our own way.
- ◆ If you have been maintaining your child's grave site and feel guilty about leaving it unattended, let a family member or friend see to it while you are away. You need not feel guilty and it could fill a need for one of your family members or friends allowing them to help.

You will have a memorable vacation even though it will be difficult. You will look back on it as I have done and see it as another growing experience as you find your way through the grief work of a bereaved family. I hope all your vacations are nice this summer. Enjoy them for our kids.

vacation some six years later, great time, our vacation did working hard on our grief was a good vacation.

vacation, here are some

too much on your first parents, the first time we do whether it be going to the

you will, planned or not.

THE SIGN

*By Susan White-Bowden
Author of "From a Healing Heart"*

As a little boy, Jody loved to pick black-eyed Susans. He'd pick those wild flowers and bring them to me with such love and pride in presentation. The last bunch he picked for me was on my birthday before his death, August 4, 1976.

The black-eyed Susan is an independent wild flower that cannot be forced to grow out of season. The growing period for these wild flowers is the middle of June to the middle of August. But there, the first of September in the year of my son's death, in the center of Jody's grave, was a single perfectly formed black-eyed Susan. It stood with strength and reassurance. It was all alone in the still, unsettled dirt covering the grave. There was not even a blade of grass or a single weed around.

I wept with mixed emotions of intense loss and love, feeling both distance and closeness, sadness and sudden relief. I saw it as a sign from my darling Jody. It spoke to me words from my dead child. "Do not cry. Do not despair. I love you and never intended for you to suffer so much. Please forgive me, and please be happy with the rest of your life. Please believe that I'm okay and at peace."

Whether it was a sign from Jody or from God, perhaps a bird dropped a black-eyed Susan seed on the fresh grave, it brought me relief. I felt that my son wasn't so far away, and that his spirit would always be with me.

If nothing more, it helped me to begin to think of Jody there at the gravesite. He was dead, and I began to accept that. I started to realize that I would never again see his form as I had known it. But his spirit would be close and would guide me. I would not forget him and what we shared. He would always be special. What we gave to one another, what we had meant to each other, would not die or diminish with the passage of years, and it has not.

Each year since Jody's death, a single black-eyed Susan has grown on his grave. It is a comfort and a joy. It is a remarkable phenomenon that now makes me smile rather than cry. Jody was a kid who never forgot my birthday, and never outgrew giving his mom flowers. I choose to believe he still hasn't. There are many mysteries in life and death that cannot be explained, and I think shouldn't be, just accepted.

July's Child

Fireworks race toward heaven
brilliant colors in the sky.
their splendor ends in seconds
on this evening in July.

"Her birthday is this Saturday,"
I whisper with a sigh.
she was born this month,
she loved this month
and she chose this month to die.

Like the bright and beautiful fireworks
glowing briefly in the dark,
they are gone too soon, and so was she
having been, and left her mark.

A glorious incandescent life,
a catalyst, a spark...
her being gently lit my path
and softened all things stark.

The July birth, the July death
of my happy summer child
marked a life too brief that ended
without rancor, without guile.

Like the fireworks that leave images
on unprotected eyes...
her lustrous life engraved my heart...
with love that never dies.

*By Sally Migliaccio,
TCF Babylon, Long Island, NY*



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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.



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