



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

ALBANY/HAROLD MITCHELL CHAPTER & SARATOGA SPRINGS CHAPTER

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

WWW.TCFALBANY.ORG

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2022

ALBANY/HAROLD MITCHELL CHAPTER

3rd Tuesday every month at 7:30 pm
Westminster Presbyterian Church
85 Chestnut St., Albany
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JanMessina@verizon.net
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OTHER LOCAL CHAPTERS

Due to the Coronavirus, many chapters have ceased in-person meetings, but may be holding virtual meetings. Please call your local chapter to inquire about meetings.

SCHENECTADY CHAPTER

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GREENE COUNTY CHAPTER

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UNFORTUNATELY THE SARATOGA
CHAPTER HAS CLOSED ITS DOORS

Candlelight Memorial Service

**Tuesday, December 20th
7:30 pm**

We are happy to announce that we will, once again, be having the Albany Chapter's annual Candlelight Remembrance Ceremony in person at the Westminster Presbyterian Church. Since the onset of COVID, we have been unable to meet in person. We will hear readings, listen to music and light candles in memory of our deceased children. We know that the holidays are difficult so this is a great time to be around others who share your sorrow and know how important it is to remember your child. Maybe you haven't said your child's name out loud for quite some time. This is a perfect opportunity to speak your child's name and light a candle for the beloved children who live forever in our hearts.

The ceremony will last about an hour, and we will meet in the Westminster Presbyterian Church, 85 Chestnut Street, Albany. Parking is available next door and all family and friends are welcome to attend. Light refreshments will be served.

Gifts of the New Year

Faith that in spite of the pain of today, I can and will learn to go on, one step at a time, one day at a time, learning to once again truly enjoy the little (and bigger) things that come my way.

Patience when I'm having a bad day, when I seem to take two steps backward and only one forward in learning to cope with the death of my child.

Laughter, which someone said is the best medicine. I believe laughter is a positive source of healing. When I feel good laughing at some silly little thing that comes along, I know another little part of me has healed.

Time, if nothing else, the New Year offers the gift of time — time to heal, to learn to cope, to put some wholeness back into lives that seem hopelessly broken.

Won't you join me in opening these gifts? You see, they aren't just mine to receive; they are gifts to be shared by all. You need only reach out and accept them. Each of these gifts can help us go on with our lives.

May the New Year bring you all of these gifts and many blessings, but most especially, may you receive the gift of peace.

Audry Cain

TAC, Western New York

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.

Newsletter Editor
Needed

I have been the editor of the Albany/Saratoga TCF Newsletter for the past 12 years. I am looking for someone who is willing to take over as editor of our newsletter. I have plenty of articles saved up over the years that can assist you in drafting the newsletter. There are also many sources online that you can get great ideas from. If you are interested, please contact me at DebbieBouchey24@outlook.com

**LOVE GIFT DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER:
January 1, 2023**



LOVE GIFT

Living on in our hearts.

Please consider sending a Love Gift to honor your child and to help support our chapter and newsletter.



26TH ANNUAL WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING

The Compassionate Friends' Worldwide Candle Lighting will be held on Sunday, December 11th from 7-8 pm, and unites families and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of people commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the annual Worldwide Candle Lighting (WCL), a gift to the bereavement community from The Compassionate Friends, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone.

I HAVE A PLACE IN HEAVEN

Please don't sing sad songs for me,
forget your grief and fears,
For I am in a perfect place,
away from pain and tears.

It's far away from hunger and
hurt and want and pride,
I have a place in Heaven
with the Master at my side.

My life on earth was very good,
as earthly lives can go,
but Paradise is so much more
Than anyone can know.

My heart is filled with happiness
and sweet rejoicing, too.
To walk with God is perfect peace,
A joy forever new.

Author Unknown

CANDLE IN THE NIGHT

A heart broken by the death of a child can never be healed. As parents we try every way that can be thought of to cope with the loss, but the void will always be there. At first that emptiness seems to take your breath away and most times we wish it would. This becomes different with the passage of time. It never goes away, but at some point we learn to live with it, and in fact this horrible feeling becomes a lifeline of sorts. One of our biggest fears is to forget our children. Forget how they looked or how their voices sounded. The smiles and tears that blur together to make a child. This emptiness in effect becomes a constant yearning to remember our children. Our hearts force us to find ways to fill that void to maintain our role as parents. Some are as simple as visiting the cemetery and some are as complex as changing our entire lives, dedicated to the memory of our child. In between are the many rituals we create or borrow from others to honor the memories and to keep our child's name alive. Lighting a candle and saying a child's name keeps their memory burning bright. It means we are struggling to cope with this unwanted role of bereaved parent in the only positive manner we can. We will most certainly shed tears every time and we will still miss our child, but we are doing something that allows the world to hear our child's name and for that one moment the candle means so much more than anyone else could ever understand. For a fleeting second that is our universe and every memory we have comes flooding back to us as we see the flame through tears, distorting it into something magical. It's the only gift we can give our children. This is as close as we can get to our child now. A tiny, flickering flame that can warm the heart and it's nice to think that perhaps they can see it also. It's a beacon, our light in the window, our shining star in the darkness. It's an opening of our hearts and a way to share our grief. We gather to honor the memories of our children and to share this bond of lighting a candle for the children all over the world. We miss them so much.

*Jim Lowery
TCF, Sugar Land/SW
Houston Chapter*



THE STOCKING QUESTION

We struggled and debated about our Christmas traditions after Lindsay died...One question we particularly struggled with was the idea of hanging stockings.

In the beginning we didn't hang any. Our other children were too young to know anything of stockings and the treats and goodies they were supposed to hold, so it was easy to ignore the stocking question for a few years.

Everything changed when Melissa asked why her friends found stockings on Christmas morning, but she and Katie Rose did not. I bought a couple of kits, made them each one and hung them by the chimney. But on the days leading up to Christmas that year, it was more than I could manage to see two stockings, and none for Lindsay. So the Christmas of 1993, I made another personalized stocking...

On Christmas Eve, we hung the special ornaments we had collected for the kids, set the nativity up in its usual place of honor, and hung the three stockings across the mantle. The house was filled with smells of Christmas, lit only by candlelight and the twinkling lights of the Kentucky cedar. We stayed up late, frantically assembling the bicycles and doll houses, filling the stockings, wrapping the last minute gifts, and then fell into a deep slumber.

Next morning I was awakened by Melissa's urgent whisper. "Mom! Wake up! I have something to show you!" Assuming she was going to exclaim over the red bike in the living room, I woke Phil to join the celebration. But when we walked into the living room, my eyes were drawn immediately, not to the bike, but to the three stockings hanging on the mantle.

"Don't you see, Mom?" Melissa's voice was quivering "Santa forgot to put anything in Lindsay's stocking!" And sure enough — between the two stocking's bulging with prizes and treats, hung another one, forlorn and aching empty. I could hear its screaming accusations.

Do you think Santa sneaked in our rooms to see who lives here?" She asked. I was weeping now. The fact that Lindsay's stocking looked so starkly different from the others was MY fault, not Santa's. I was the one who bought the treats to fill them, but just didn't realize...I suppose I thought simply having it there was enough.

(continued on page 5)

GRIEF AND HOPE AT CHRISTMAS TIME

Once again, it's that time of year. Halloween is over, Thanksgiving is fast approaching, and Christmas is only a few steps behind. Will this year be different than the last seven? Will I find the magic again? Wait. Let me revise that question: Did I ever feel the magic?

As a bereaved parent, I have experienced only two holiday seasons. While I have physically lived through 49 holidays, emotionally there have been only two: the ones before and the ones after Jason's death. The two categories are distinctly different.

If memory serves me correctly, which God knows it doesn't always do, I spent the first 20 years focused on material issues. What would I get? What did I want? What would make me the happiest child in the whole world? As I grew older and had my own little family, I spent the next 22 years asking myself what I would get them. What did they want? What would make them love me more? How would I manage to pay for all of it? I always felt there was something missing...but didn't really have the time or interest to find that missing something. Besides, why borrow trouble? Each year, by the time I realized that something was missing, the decorations were packed in their boxes and the kids had gone back to school. I could always find the magic next year.

In 1996, Jason died. Suddenly, my life ended its forward march and everything I had ever regarded as important became nonsense. My heart was not simply broken -- it was ripped into shreds, emptied of what had fueled it over the span of my life. I had no hope of waiting for it to heal and had to face the reality that only a total reconstruction would suffice. I would have to create a new heart...from scratch.

That first fall was difficult. I was still numb, still cushioned from reality, but the pain of Jason's death was beginning to seep in. Then it was Halloween, and the horror of what had happened was upon me. Thanksgiving came with Christmas on its tail, bringing an empty chair, an unbroken wishbone, and silence where laughter had once prevailed.

I was sure it could not get any worse, but life always surprises us. The holidays of 1997 and 1998 were devastating. The numbness that had protected me that first season was gone. Reality had arrived, and I could not escape it. I would never again see Jason walk through our front door with that grin that always made me nervous, tracking snow across my "freshly waxed for the holidays" floor. I would never again buy two of everything for Jason and his twin brother. I would never again...enjoy the holidays... or life.

Years four through seven, we bought gifts for needy families, hung Jason's stocking right beside the rest of ours, illuminated special candles to include him in our celebrations, and smiled cheerfully at everyone who

offered us their joy-filled Merry Christmas. As I spread my Christmas cheer and goodwill toward men, I had only one thought in my mind. It became my mantra: "If I can make it through December, I will be okay." I was no longer focused on the material side of the season. I was no longer focused on the seasons at all. I wanted it over.

And now, here I am, at year eight, My eighth season of joy, my eighth year of decking the halls, my eighth year of Jason's physical absence. You probably think I am going to tell you that this year will be no different from the last seven. You might even anticipate that I am going to tell you that it never gets better, that there is no such thing as healing, and that grieving parents will always be bitter and angry, especially during the times when families everywhere celebrate the season of giving. Wrong. But don't feel bad; this revelation has totally shocked me also.

A few days ago, on a cold morning in October, I woke up and was amazed to see that it was snowing. Overnight, the world had gone from brown to pure glistening white. It was beautiful. Later that day, I heard someone in my home actually humming Christmas carols. How dare they! But...I was alone. It was me. That evening, I spent an hour printing up a beautiful green and red Christmas "wish list" with graphics! That was the straw that broke the camel's back. Suddenly, it hit me. And no matter how guilty I feel in acknowledging it, I have to tell you. I am looking forward to the holidays. Oh...my...GOD. How can this be? Why is this happening?

Well, after much pondering, I think I know why. I think I spent 42 holidays looking through a lens that only focused on black and white, on the physical, on that which can be seen and physically felt. The lavishly wrapped gifts, excessive food, amount of money spent, and glittering (sometimes gaudy) lights on the tree. The next seven were spent looking through a lens that was distorted and scarred by grief. I focused on what was missing rather than on what was still here. I think I wanted it that way.

But now, I feel I've learned how to not only endure -- but to enjoy -- a memory that can only be defined as bittersweet. I've come to appreciate that feeling emotional is really about feeling impassioned. And I think this year, as the songs start to play on the radio and the cards begin filling our mailbox, I will choose a different lens, a lens that captures that which we cannot see or physically touch. A lens that goes beyond.

(Continued on page 5)



STOCKING QUESTION (cont'd from page 3)

As I sat down, hugging the new Winnie-the-Pooh, Phil handed the stockings to the girls. I was lost in thought and grief, blaming myself for this incredible blunder, when Melissa very matter-of-factly dumped the contents of her stocking onto my lap and said, "Here Mom, Lindsay can have some of mine." And Katie Rose very quietly dropped an orange and two root beer barrels in the other stocking. "These are for you Lindsay." she said.

It just so happens sometimes that we think we are going to be okay with certain things, only to discover this is not so. And we eventually learn that it is okay to try new and different rituals every year until we know what feels right for us. We learn to live with our grief in different ways, and we learn what we need to do in order to find a little comfort and peace.

Dana Gensler, TCF Bowling Green, KY

GRIEF AND HOPE (cont'd from page 4)

Not everything will change. I will still hang Jason's stocking beside ours, buy gifts for the needy, light candles in his memory, and all of the other things that have made the last seven years bearable. But this year, I hope to do these things with joy rather than with bitterness and sorrow. This year, I want to grasp the hand of a homeless mother, kiss the cheek of a newborn baby, and hold a kitten while it plays in the place where kittens go to dream. I want to watch Santa as he holds wiggly toddlers on his lap. I want to sing "Silent Night" on a snowy night in mid-December when it feels as if all the world is sleeping. I want to feel the Christmas we cannot see.

This year, I want to remember who I really am. I want to enjoy the months ahead. Not because I need to or because someone says it's time to -- but because -- well, because I can. This year, I want to find the magic before it is time to put away the boxes. And I won't stop searching until I find it.

Merry Christmas to you and yours. Believe in magic...and always...expect miracles.

*Lovingly lifted from
Bereaved Parents of the USA, Western NY Chapter, Fall 2010*

EMPTY CHAIR

This year we will remember
Happier times in past months of December
This year we will certainly see
A massive void where you used to be
This year we will sit and stare
At that forlorn and empty chair
This year we will sit and reminisce
You are not here for us to hug and kiss
This year we will definitely see
No gift for you under the Christmas tree
This year we will shed a tear
For our children who are no longer here
This year we will raise a toast
To our children who we love the most
This year will be so difficult for us all.

MY OWN

We thought of you with love today,
But that is nothing new.
We thought about you yesterday,
And days before that too.

We think of you in silence,
We speak your name with pride,
And we relive our memories
of living side by side.

Your memory is our keepsake,
With which we'll never part.
God has you in his keeping,
and we have you in our heart.



Leadership

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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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