



# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

## ALBANY/HAROLD MITCHELL CHAPTER & SARATOGA SPRINGS CHAPTER

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

WWW.TCFALBANY.ORG  
WWW.COMPASSIONATEFRIENDS.ORG

MARCH-APRIL 2018

### 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 Compassionate Friends is for Sharing

Many people may think that meetings of The Compassionate Friends consist of bereaved people who sit and cry most of the evening, but that is certainly a misconception. It is normal to shed tears as we talk about our child's death, and we would expect a newly bereaved person to cry. We understand that completely. But we don't just sit and cry. Would you believe that most of the time we spend in our sharing group circle we may enjoy hearing others' stories about their children, or even sharing our own? Our meetings are usually about our memories, our questions and also telling what has helped us to cope with it all. We all have ideas that we share with others in the hope that

they may reach a point of "good memories" instead of bad memories of the child's death.

A support group should be very comforting and welcoming to those who attend and should always have non-judgmental members. We are less concerned at how the child died (even though we do care) and we are more concerned that we be there for the parents, siblings or grandparents who need us. They have a desire to talk and share about their loved one. We want to let them lean on us in their time of pain, just as we had others before us who let us lean on them. It does come full circle.

*By: Jackie Wesley  
TCF East Central Indiana and  
Miami-Whitewater Chapters.*

## A NAME FOR MY PAIN

I have given a name to my pain -

It's called "Longing."

I long for what was,  
and what might have been

I long for his touch and smell of sweat;

I long to hold him one more time.

I long to look on his beautiful face  
and impress it upon my memories and  
heart.

I long to return to the day before  
and protect him from his death.

I long to take his place,  
so he may live and have sons too.  
I long for time to pass much faster,  
so my longing and pain will lessen.

*By: Jane Williams-Muecke  
TCF Houston West, TX*



# 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.

*I could not find you  
where I thought you  
should be.  
But something told  
me you lived on  
inside of me.  
I finally looked where  
you were from the  
start.  
I found your soul  
deep inside my own  
heart.*

*Jacqueline Brown  
TCF Bucksmont, PA*

In loving memory of my daughter **KATHY**: Always remembered with great fondness. I count Kathy twice when I count my blessings. So very sad that she is no longer among us.

Love, Jim Tierney, Father

In loving memory of our daughter, **LISA GERHAN**, who died in March 1997 and was born in May 1971.

Love, Mom & Dad (David Gerhan & Anita Paul)



## LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY

“Why does it hurt so much? Why is this grief so incapacitating? If only the hurt weren’t so crushing.” Sounds familiar? All of us have known hurts before, but none of our previous “ouchies” can compare with the hurt we feel. Nothing can touch the pain of burying a child.

Yet most of us have discovered that the sun still comes up. We still have to function. We did not die when our child did, even though we wished we could have, so...we are stuck with this pain, this grief and what do we do with it? Surely we can’t live like THIS forever!

There are no magic formulas for surviving grief. There are a few recognized patterns for grief, but even those are only guidelines. What we do know is that the emptiness will never go away. It will become tolerable and livable...some day.

TIME...the longest word in our grief. We used to measure TIME by the steps of our child...the first word, first tooth, first date, first car...now we don’t have that measure any more. All we have is TIME, and it only seems to make the hurt worse.

So what do we do? Give ourselves TIME...to hurt, to grieve, to cry. TIME to choke, to scream. TIME to be crazy and TIME to remember. Be nice to yourself! Don’t measure your progress through grief against anyone else’s. Be your own time-keeper.

Don’t push. Eventually you will find the hours and days of grief have turned to minutes and then moments... but don’t expect them to go away. We will always hurt. You don’t get over grief...it only becomes tolerable and livable. Change your focus a bit. Instead of dwelling on how much you lost, try thinking of how much you had. Try letting good memories come over you easily as the awful ones do. We didn’t lose our child...HE or SHE DIED. We don’t lose the love that flowed between us...it still flows but differently now.

Does it help to know that if we didn’t love so very much, it would not hurt so badly? Grief is the price we pay for love. And as much as it hurts. I’m very glad I loved. Don’t let death cast ugly shadows, but rather warm memories of the loving time you shared. Even though death comes, LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY!

By: Darcie D. Sims

**LOVE GIFT DEADLINE FOR  
THE NEXT NEWSLETTER:  
April 20, 2018**

## A GATE TO TOMORROW

There is a gate that each of us has unknowingly passed through. This gate opens only one way...once we have passed through this gate we cannot return to the other side. Each of us stepped through the gate at a different time and in a different way. This gate opens to the world of parents whose children have died; it is their gate to every tomorrow.

There is no other place that compares with life in this world beyond the gate; there is no sorrow like the sorrow inside the gate. The numbing pain and perpetual agony we experience when first stepping through this gate are so overwhelming that we often don't immediately realize that there will be no return. But we will never return to life before the gate.

The new world inside the gate is populated with friends who are strangers and strangers who are friends.

Our perspective on life has changed forever. Few of our friends from life before the gate will linger with us now; these people are now the strangers. Our pain is all encompassing; they have lives to live, things to do, plans to make, happiness to capture. We are no longer part of their picture. Rare is the friend who stands by us inside the gate...stands by us until one of us dies and leaves the world inside the gate.

The strangers who are now friends live inside the gate with us. Some have just come through the gate; others have been here a long, long time. But these strangers who are now friends share our experience; they understand our need to talk about our children, each life and each death. They applaud our tiny advances toward acceptance and serenity and peace. Although we can never go back to life before the gate, we now have our compassionate friends...once strangers but now kindred souls who share our lives and our world.

Life will not be the same again, yet life can be good again. Inside the gate we will each find ourselves with the help of our compassionate friends. They listen carefully to stories about our child. They know our child's name better than they know our name. And that's how we want it to be...remember our children. Remember with us.

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



## NATURE'S BEAUTY

The other day I overheard a co-worker talking about having lost a love one and wondering (as we all have countless times before), what happened to that person. Is he/she really totally gone from this life? I like to believe that our loved ones really aren't as far away as they seem at times. We search our hearts and minds for the truth, but this search many times leaves us with even more questions. Perhaps this is because we are looking for an answer that is right in front of us each day? Later that day I was pondering this question my co-worker had raised hours before, as I gazed out the window at some bushes in my backyard. I really wasn't fixing my gaze on the bushes; they just happened to be outside of the window. All of a sudden a brilliant cardinal flew into my view and came to rest among the bushes. I watched these beautiful creatures as they enjoyed the meal outside my window. As I watched them they seemed to provide an answer for me. It seemed to make sense and to be so obvious that I was surprised I had not understood it to be true before.

Several days later I went to do some banking at the drive-up window of the bank. Wouldn't you know, it would be another one of those snowy days and my foremost thought was getting my errands done and heading home while the roads were still good. I had rolled down the window of the car and was impatiently waiting for the bank teller when I looked at the inside of the car door and noticed the perfectly shaped snowflakes falling only inches from me. I can't remember the last time I really enjoyed the immense beauty of something as common as a snowflake. It sounds kind of silly, but I was filled with awe at the wonder of nature's beauty.

I know that as I spend a quiet moment observing those cardinals outside my window. I felt a strange sense of peace come over me. The same sensation was with me as I observed each perfectly shaped snowflake. Our children were all beautiful wonders to us. No longer are we able to hug them or talk to them as we once did, but I just do not believe that they are no longer near us in some way. Perhaps we can still share a part of them as we gaze among all the beauty and peace of nature. Perhaps they are somehow a part of the beauty that we often ignore as we pass through our busy days. I encourage you to take a few moments out of your busy schedule to look around you for the magnificence that nature provides to us all. Give yourself the gift of a few quiet moments to reflect upon the beauty. Maybe your child has been waiting for the chance to spend this quiet time with you.

*In memory of Melissa by Marcia Rourke  
Loving lifted from TCF Madison Chapter.*

## NAMES IN GRANITE...

Several years ago, on a visit to Washington, D.C., I visited the Vietnam War memorial. I knew a young man who died during the war and whose name appeared on the Memorial. I made a point of finding his name on the Wall; it was a moving experience for me. After I located his listing, I stood at the Memorial, reflecting on his life, his surviving child and his wife, and thought about what this Memorial must mean to them.

This is a Memorial that was born in controversy. One veteran called it, "the black gash of shame." Another veteran thought the Memorial did little to lift the spirits of men who fought in the Vietnam War. In fact, a second monument was built on the site to pacify those who expressed initial dissatisfaction. As years have passed, however, and millions have visited the memorial, it has come to be a place of healing and peace.

People may wonder about its success as a tribute to the men and women who fought and died in Vietnam. But I don't. As a TCF chapter leader and editor of our chapter newsletter, I have come to understand the meaning of the Vietnam Memorial and its message to all of us.

We have a column in our newsletter titled, "That Their Light May Always Shine...Our Children Loved and Remembered." This column lists the day a child died, his/her name, and the child's parents. We call these "remembrance dates" rather than anniversary dates, thereby avoiding a word that connotes celebration and jubilation.

Occasionally and accidentally, I have omitted a child's name. Invariably, when this happens, I receive a phone call from a very distraught parent who wants to know why their child's name did not appear in the newsletter.

In fact, recently, a mother called to inform me that I had omitted her son's name. This child died five years ago. I asked why this error caused so much pain. She said, "When his name appears in the newsletter each year, it is the only time I ever see it in print. It is a sign to me that he lived and to anyone else that reads the newsletter. Maybe everyone else has forgotten that he lived, but I remember and the newsletter reminds others. Then I know I am his mother."

I understood, as never before, the importance of the written word, or as in this case, the written name. Any person who questions the impact of a black granite wall listing 58,132 names has never experienced the death of a child.

*By Cissy Lowe Dickson  
TCF Houston Bay Area Chapter, TX*

## TO MY SISTER

You touched us all  
You loved us all  
Forever giving  
Forever caring  
Forever forgiving  
Never wanting in return  
Blessed are those who shared your life  
Rich are those who carry your memories  
Please rest now  
Your chores we will finish  
'Til we meet again.

*By Cindy Keltz  
TCF Arlington Heights, IL*

### I Still See Him

I still see him wherever I go.  
It's not really him, I know.  
The blond toddler held by his mother.  
The boy and his sibling  
as they play with each other.  
That little boy laughing playfully in the pool.  
The active boy running in the yard at school.  
The maturing young man  
with his hair cropped short.  
The high school boy enjoying his sport.  
The teenager hanging with his friends  
at the mall.  
These, though not my child,  
I cherish them all.  
For they bring to surface memories  
safely tucked away;  
So special, giving me a glimpse of him today.  
I don't see him in that young father  
who plays with his son.  
He's not in that proud grandfather,  
enjoying his life.  
Nor the retired man, dining out with his wife.  
He left too soon!

*By: Anne M. Dionne  
In memory of her son, Michael Steven Dionne  
Lovingly listed from We Need Not Walk Alone,  
National Magazine of the Compassionate Friends,  
Spring 2006*

# *What is Normal After Your Child Dies?*

## *In Loving Memory of Taylor Burgstahler*

*Lovingly lifted from Bereaved Parents of the USA, Winter 2010*

[www.bereavedparentsusa.org](http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org)

I wrote the following. I hope it explains how many of us parents feel since we have lost a child.

What is Normal after your child dies?

Normal is having tears waiting behind every smile when you realize someone important is missing from all the important events in your family's life.

Normal is trying to decide what to take to the cemetery for Birthdays, Christmas, Hanukkah, Thanksgiving, New Year, Valentine's Day, July 4th and Passover.

Normal is feeling like you can't sit another minute without getting up and screaming, because you just don't like to sit through anything anymore.

Normal is not sleeping very well because a thousand what-ifs and why-didn't-I's go through your head constantly.

Normal is reliving the accident continuously through your eyes and mind, holding your head to make it go away.

Normal is having the TV on the minute you walk into the house to have noise, because the silence is deafening.

Normal is staring at every boy who looks like he is Taylor's age. And then thinking of the age he would be now. Then wondering why it is even important to imagine it, because it will never happen.

Normal is every happy event in your life always being backed up with sadness lurking close behind, because of the hole in your heart.

Normal is telling the story of your child's death as if it were an everyday, commonplace activity, and then seeing the horror in someone's eyes at how awful it sounds. And yet realizing it has become a part of your "normal."

Normal is each year coming up with the difficult task of how to honor your child's memory and their birthdays and survive these days. And trying to find the balloon or flag that fits the occasion. Happy Birthday? Not really.

Normal is having some people afraid to mention my son, Taylor.

Normal is making sure that others remember him.

Normal is, after the funeral is over, everyone else goes on with their lives, but we continue to grieve our loss forever.

Normal is weeks, months, and years after the initial shock, the grieving gets worse, not better.

Normal is not listening to people compare anything in their

life to this loss, unless they too have lost a child. Nothing compares. NOTHING. Even if your child is in the remotest part of the earth away from you - it doesn't compare. Losing a parent is horrible, but having to bury your own child is unnatural.

Normal is taking pills, and trying not to cry all day, because you know your mental health depends on it.

Normal is realizing you do cry everyday.

Normal is being impatient with everything and everyone but someone stricken with grief over the loss of their child.

Normal is sitting at the computer crying, sharing how you feel with chat buddies who have also lost a child.

Normal is not listening to people make excuses for God. "God may have done this because..." I know Taylor is in "heaven," but hearing people trying to think up excuses as to why a fantastic young man was taken from this earth is not appreciated and makes absolutely no sense to this grieving mother.

Normal is being too tired to care if you paid the bills, cleaned the house, did the laundry, or if there is any food.

Normal is wondering this time whether you are going to say you have two children or one child, because you will never see this person again and it is not worth explaining that Taylor is dead. And yet when you say you have one child to avoid that problem, you feel horrible, as if you have betrayed the dead child.

Normal is asking God why he took your child's life instead of yours and asking if there even is a God.

Normal is knowing you will never get over this loss, not in a day nor a million years.

Normal is having therapists agree with you that you will never "really" get over the pain and that there is nothing they can do to help you because they know only bringing your child back from the dead could possibly make it "better".

Normal is learning to lie to everyone you meet and telling them you are fine. You lie because it makes others uncomfortable if you cry. You've learned it's easier to lie to them than to tell them the truth that you still feel empty and it's probably never going to get any better -- ever.

And last of all...

Normal is hiding all the things that have become "normal" for you to feel, so that everyone around you will think that you are "normal."



**Leadership**

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Albany Co-Leader: Kathleen Kelleher 439-1114

Saratoga Springs Leader: Gabby Gravelle 596-4275

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Regional Coordinator:



You need not walk alone

National Headquarters, P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522, 877-969-0100 (toll free)

[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://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  
c/o Debbie Bouchey  
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