



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

ALBANY/HAROLD MITCHELL CHAPTER & SARATOGA SPRINGS CHAPTER

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

WWW.TCFALBANY.ORG

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2021

ALBANY/HAROLD MITCHELL CHAPTER

ZOOM MEETING

Please contact Kathleen Kelleher at Kathleen.Kelleher17@gmail.com or 518-439-1114 for instructions on how to join the Zoom meetings.

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.

SARATOGA SPRINGS CHAPTER

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GREENE COUNTY CHAPTER

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Albany Chapter Candlelight Service Tuesday, Dec. 21st 7:30 pm

The Albany Chapter of TCF will be hosting a virtual candle lighting ceremony during its regular Zoom meeting on Tuesday, December 21st at 7:30 pm. In order to join, you need a valid email address on file with the chapter co-leaders. You will be sent a Zoom link about a week before the event. You also need a candle (real or electric), and if you wish, a picture of your child. Our plan is to do the same readings and music we always have, and then go around to each participant who can say their child's name, hold up a picture and light their candle. If you are receiving the Albany Chapter Zoom links now, you are all set. If you are not, please provide your email by calling or emailing Kathleen at 518-439-1114 or Kathleen.Kelleher17@gmail.com. We hope to see you at the ceremony and feel free to invite others.

Some Suggestions For Thanksgiving

Through our lives, expectations of things to come are based upon past experience. If, in the past, you had set a glorious table and were the perfect host or hostess, it is very possible that friends and family will expect more of the same this year. They may not be aware that you are not looking towards the holidays with a "fun and games" attitude. They probably may not know that in anticipation of Thanksgiving, Christmas and Channukah, you may feel anxiety and fear. They are probably thinking that this year will be different and some sadness will accompany it, but I don't think they are aware of your anguish, especially if it has been "a while".

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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.

Call for Submissions

Anyone wishing to submit an original poem or story for publication in our newsletter can do so by sending the writing to Debbie Bouchey at alyssabob@yahoo.com

Please remember that editing may occur and not all submissions are guaranteed to be printed.



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.



The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting will be held on Sunday, December 12th 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.

Lights of Love

Can you see our candles
Burning in the night?
Lights of love we send you
Rays of purest white.
Children we remember
Though missing from our sight
In honor and remembrance
We light candles in the night.
All across the big blue marble
Spinning out in space
Can you see the candles burning
from this human place?
Oh, angels gone before us

Who taught us perfect love
This night the world lights candles
That you may see them from above
Tonight the globe is lit by love
Of those who know great sorrow,
But as we remember our yesterdays
Let's light one candle for tomorrow.
We will not forget, and
Every year in deep December
On Earth we will light candles
As...we remember

Jacqueline Brown
TCF Peace Valley, PA

**LOVE GIFT DEADLINE FOR
THE NEXT NEWSLETTER:
December 20, 2021**



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.

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

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Suggestions for the Thanksgiving

I would like to suggest to you that in fairness to yourself, you need to be honest about your feelings and just as important, you need to communicate these feelings to those around you. I really don't think that it is necessary for you to believe that because you set a tradition, and always made the turkey, fried the latkes and always had the family over, you need to feel obligated to do it again this year. Perhaps, you would like to tell everyone that:

- Someone else will have to make the dinner this year.
- You want to make dinner in your home, but you need lots of help because you don't have the energy to do it alone.
- You want to go to the parties, but you are afraid that you may break down and cry, and you want them to know in advance that this is really okay.
- It's okay to talk about your child. Not to, makes it very uncomfortable.

The list goes on, but the point is that to pretend everything is "just fine" is a lie, and that's not fair to you or to the people who love you.

*- Diane Zamkoff,
TCF, Simi Valley, CA*



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

WASHING THE FAMILY CAR

As the water began to bead across the hard black surface, my mind slipped into a memory. Back to a time when a smile could fix the pain and mortality was not questioned.

You and I played during the dreary task of washing the family car. Rinsing turned into a water fight. Soapy sponges became weapons and upside down buckets served as our fortress.

This dull chore became an adventure, a game shared only by you and I. Drenched, the giggles slowly

subsided and we turned to complete the more serious side of our labor.

We began to dry off the car. As the memory faded, so did my smile. With forlorn, my mind came back to the present.

I had my own serious task to complete. So I picked up the towel to dry off your headstone.

- Adele Rosales
TCF Ventura, CA
In Memory of my sister, Anita

AS THE HOLIDAYS APPROACH

When the holidays are fast approaching, we who are bereaved always have mixed emotions about having a nice holiday when our child or loved one is no longer with us. We wonder if we will ever be as happy and if we can ever again celebrate the holidays or any meaningful family occasion, especially the first birthday, first thanksgiving, or first Christmas since our loss. We try to look ahead to how we are going to feel when the time arrives, but it is usually not as hard as we had anticipated. Still, the occasion may not be as enjoyable as we'd like it to be or as we remember it from the past.

I would like to offer a few ideas for what we can do to make our holidays a little better. Consider buying gifts for less fortunate children, adopting a child/family at Christmas time, or inviting a lonely person to share your holiday meal. Make your child's favorite foods and discuss your loved one as you share the meal. Some people like to volunteer to serve holiday dinners for the homeless. Some bereaved parents want to visit familiar places their child loved to go, while others want to travel where their child had never been. Several of our Compassionate Friends members put a small Christmas tree at the cemetery and decorate the graves with Christmas flowers and/or a grave blanket. Making a grave blanket is very fulfilling; we did that for 10 years after our daughter Teresa died. Attending a Candlelight program is a wonderful way to honor your child or loved one.

These suggestions are things we feel we can still do for our child, but they are not reserved for bereaved parents only. All of them can be done for any member of a family or a friend who has died. After someone dies we must keep going and doing things that lift us up. We can't always try to please any people who feel we should act in a certain manner.

*Jackie Wesley TCF, East Central Indiana
and Miami-Whitewater Chapters*

“T’WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS” - FOR BEREAVED PARENTS -

‘Twas the Night before Christmas and I dreaded the days,
That I knew I was facing - the holiday craze.
The stores were all filled with holiday lights,
In hopes of drawing customers by day and by night.
As others were making their holiday plans,
My heart was breaking - I couldn't understand.
I had lost my dear child a few years before,
And I knew what my holiday had in store.
When out of nowhere, there arose such a sound,
I sprang to my feet and was looking around,
Away I went and flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The sight that I saw took my breath away,
And my tears turned to smiles in the light of the day.
When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a cluster of butterflies fluttering near,
With beauty and grace they performed a dance,
I knew in a moment this wasn't by chance,
The hope that they gave me was a sign from above.
That my child was still near me and that I was loved.
The message they brought was my holiday gift,
And I cried when I saw them in spite of myself.
As I knelt closer to get a better view,
One allowed me to pet it - as if it knew -
That I needed the touch of its fragile wings,
To help me get through the holiday scene.
In the days that followed I carried the thought,
That no matter what happens or what days lie ahead,
Our children are with us - they're not really dead.
Yes, the message of hope - a message so dear.

And I imagined they sang as
they flew out of sight,
“To all bereaved parents - We
love you tonight!”



*By Faye McCord
TCF, Jackson, MS*



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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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