



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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Chapter 1562

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Our 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.

Meetings

Our chapter meets at Bethany Wesleyan Church in Cherryville, PA

To be notified of meetings call or text the newsletter editor at 484-891-0823. We will add you to the notification list and you will be notified of upcoming meetings

Meetings are open to bereaved parents, grandparents and mature siblings. Group participation is confidential and voluntary.

Note: In order to meet safely all attendees must agree to the following

- Face masks shall be worn covering the nose and mouth at all times during meetings. Bandanas, Scarves etc are not acceptable
- Do not attend if you are feeling ill, have been exposed to Covid or have tested positive in the last 14 days
- Chairs will be preset to maintain social distancing
- No food is allowed

To Our New Members

Making the decision to come to your first meeting can be difficult. It can also be difficult to return for a second or third meeting, but we ask that you attend three meetings before deciding whether or not TCF will work for you. We cannot walk your grief journey for you, but we can walk beside you if you allow us to. We have no easy answers or quick fixes, but we care, share and understand. Although our circumstances may be different, we have all "been there"...we are all grieving the loss of a child and therefore we can truly say we understand. You are not alone.

Telephone Friends

Sometimes you may need to talk to someone who cares and understands between meetings. To help we maintain a list of telephone friends. During these times the following members are available to listen, share and offer what support they can.

Infant Loss - Kim Szep -	610-730-3111
Only Child - Shelly Garst -	484-241-5396
Addiction - Nancy Howe -	484-863-4324
Homicide - Ginger Renner -	610-967-5113

To volunteer as a telephone friend contact the newsletter editor



TCF National Support Resources

The TCF National website has over 35 private Facebook pages and a number of moderated chatrooms. To register for the FB pages or chat rooms go to www.compassionatefriends.org and click on the find support tab and then choose online communities.

Newsletter Notes

This Newsletter comes to you courtesy of The Compassionate Friends, Lehigh Valley Chapter. We hope that it will be of some comfort to you on your grief journey.

We welcome original stories and poetry from our members.

All submissions must include the author's name and your contact information. Send to the newsletter editor (address listed above)

If you move please contact the Newsletter Editor with your new address

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• by mail:

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The Robin's Song

By Genesse Bourdeau Gentry TCF,
San Francisco, CA



It's spring once again. Our part of the world is turning back towards the sun; trees are leafing out; wildflowers are blooming. Robins are again singing to one another.

And, I believe, also singing to those who are grieving.

Before my daughter Lori died in the summer of 1991, I was under the misperception that only the English robin had a glorious song. That smaller, red-breasted scalawag of a bird delights all who hear it, and I had felt that we in the United States had been short-changed when they'd misnamed its larger, boring, American cousin the same sweet name. All I'd ever heard our robins do was cheep!

Then one spring day in the year after Lori died, during one of the darkest times of my grief; my ears and heart flew open with surprise at a song I heard outside my window. I distinctly heard, in the midst of my pain, a bird singing loudly and clearly, "Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio! . . . Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio!" I went outside to see what marvelous bird might have been sent to sing to me. I could barely see the bird at the top of the neighbor's poplar tree, so, while hoping this exotic, magical bird wouldn't fly away while I was gone, I went to find our binoculars.

Rushing back, I could hear the bird from each room in the house. After adjusting the binoculars, I was truly amazed to see one of our "boring" American robins come clearly into view! As he continued singing clear as day, "Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio!" I marveled at this special message and wondered if my robin was the only one who sang these words. So I looked it up in my Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds and found that my robin was not an anomaly, but that robins are considered the true harbinger of spring, singing "Cheer-up, cheer-up, cheerily."

I stood there that day filled with wonder. I wasn't hearing things; there it was in the bird book: "Cheer-up, cheer-up, cheerily." I thought to myself, "Cheerily ... No, that isn't what I hear." We had lived in England for a year and our family, especially Lori, who loved to put on an English accent, often said "Cheerio!" to one another when we meant, "Goodbye" or "See you later!" There was no doubt in my mind as I stood there listening. It was cheerio. Lori could have found no more perfect way to try to cheer me up AND say "hello"!

Nine springs have passed since then, and although I will always deeply miss Lori's physical presence in my life, those darkest of times are thankfully now mostly in the past. It is spring once again and as I hear the robin singing so hopefully in the highest branches, it takes me back to that first spring song, and I smile, remembering. And I think of all those who are now in the darkest depths of their own grief and pray they too will hear this lovely song.

Donations & Contributions

★ **Bethany Wesleyan Church, Cherryville, PA**
For our meeting space

★ **Giant Food Store Employees United Way Contributions**
In Memory of David Todd Smith

★ **Aetna Payroll Contributors**

★ **United Way Payroll Contributors**

★ **The Matt Kush Foundation**
In Memory of Matt Kush



Our Children Remembered



Please keep the parents, grandparents and siblings of the following children in your thoughts and hearts

Birthdays and Anniversaries

	Birth	Anniv.
Patricia Arey - Daughter of Elizabeth & the late William Arey; Sister of Elizabeth Ann, Barbara, Rose Marie & Elaine	Apr 18	May 8
Holly Cavanaugh - Daughter of Bill Cavanaugh; Sister of Bo Cavanaugh	Apr 27	Sep 25
Edward Gaydos, III - Son of Edward and Sally Gaydos; Brother of Blasia Gaydos	Apr 23	Apr 8
Elizabeth Gibson, MD - Daughter of Richard J. Brown & The Late Marilyn Brown; Sister of Margaret Nahrganl & Eric Brown	Jun 15	Apr 2
David Hoagland, Jr - Son of Gypsy Garrett	Sep 24	Apr 26
Richard "Rich" Hollabaugh - Son of Linda Hollabaugh & the late Wayne Hollabaugh	Dec 20	Apr 10
James "Jimmy" Hotz - Son of Elizabeth Hotz	Apr 24	Jul 4
Robert Rute - Son of Linda Cavanaugh	Jul 9	Apr 4
Nicholas Savacool - Son of Howard and Laura Savacool; Brother of Brandon, Candace & Lacie	Feb 27	Apr 1
Sean Virmalo - Son of Udo and Janet L. Virmalo; Brother of Eric, Brett & Katelyn Virmalo	Sep 13	Apr 28

I Never Thought

~ Author unknown

I never thought I could go on living when you died, but - I did.
I never thought I would survive after burying you, but - I did.
I never thought I'd get through those first days, weeks and months, but - I did.
I never thought I would be able to endure the first anniversary of your death, but - I did.

...

I never thought tomorrow would be different, but - it was.
I never thought I would stop crying for you, but - I have.
I never thought that I would ever sing again, but - I have.
I never thought the pain would "soften," but - it has.
I never thought I would care if the sun shone again, but - I do.
I never thought I would be able to entertain again, but - I have.
I never thought I would be able to control my grief, but - I can.

...

I never thought I'd smile again, but - I do.
I never thought I would laugh out loud again, but - I do.
I never thought I would look forward to tomorrow, but - I do.

...

I never thought I would be able to create that "new normal," but - I have.
I never thought I'd want to go on living after you died, but - I do.
**Always missing you, always loving you, and thinking of you daily,
with a smile on my face and tears in my heart.**

Dear Friends,

In previous years, as a single adult, I didn't care much for Easter or give it great attention. I regarded it as an overly solemn occasion, and one with less than ample compensation for the lengthy gloom (LENT) that preceded it.

When I became a parent, Easter took on a new meaning. Perhaps through the eyes of children, I began to glimpse the human side of this tradition, which now seems to me as much a celebration of Spring, as a Resurrection of the Spirit. Easter now means new clothes for the children, Easter eggs, spring flowers, family dinners, and an Affirmation of Life renewed, with whatever religious and or secular traditions you observe. It calls for us to step forward from the dark and gloom of winter, into the warm and sun-filled Spring. It calls for us to reflect on the beginning of life, to take renewed pride in our families, to join and to be surrounded by our friends and loved ones.

This, of course, is the idealized version of life. It is often not that simple for families who have illness, poverty, separation, or the death of a loved one to deal with.

This was the first year I visited the cemetery on Easter Sunday. I felt the need. As on previous occasions, I crouched and moved among the little grave stones, reading names in silence, feeling saddened by the tender years inscribed. I felt sorry for the little children buried there. I felt my tears mingle with those of the parents who had stood here before me, earlier in the day. My sympathy turned to those parents (and grandparents, to be sure).

Moments later, as I looked around this cemetery, in a larger view, a different view emerged. Amidst the bounty of flowers and palm, amidst the crosses and wreaths, amidst even little Easter baskets, I saw only tender love, dedication, and commitment to the memory of loved ones buried there. Such commitments can only

be carried out by parents who know it is important to survive.

These other parents, too, have lost children. Young children, teenage children, and adult children. That does not stop them from coming. That does not stop them from loving. That does not stop them from living. May the Hope of Spring, and the warmth of its sun, brighten your days.

Bob McCullough TCF Burlington County, NJ



My Spring Bouquet

By Marilyn Arvizo, TCF South Bay LA, CA

The rain poured so often,
the bulbs I planted bloomed in profusion.

I cut them all to take to your grave,
leaving my yard as empty of blooms
as your death left our life and hearts

It was a grand bouquet of flowers,
like our lives when you were here, son.

From the bulbs new flowers
will soon bloom again.

I am sad, but also hopeful...

I know the harsh lessons of nature are true.

Like the flower, I will again bloom, too.



Top 10 Things I have Learned about Grieving as a Couple:

Adapted from an article by Caroline, Mom to Jack Robinson ~Sharing,
Volume 15/ Mar-Apr 2006

1. Go to grief counseling as a couple if you can, it will help you understand and accept differences in grieving at a time when you both need each other so much.
2. Know that you each have strengths, weaknesses & limitations. Chances are these are different for each of you. It sounds obvious, but can be very hard to accept that both of you have suffered a great loss and one of you may not be able to give the other what you need in such a desperate time. Grief takes a lot of energy and you may not always have much to give during this time. Also, you each have different ways of coping and dealing with your grief, neither of you is wrong...allow the other space to do what they need to do.
3. It is normal to have disagreements over nothing that turn into big blow-out fights.
4. It is normal to get frustrated. Grief requires tremendous patience. Be as patient as you can with yourself and your partner.
5. It is normal to take things out on each other. Be aware of this and stop yourself as much as you can.
6. Know that no matter how good your relationship is, or how supportive your partner is, grief can make you miserable, cloud your judgment, and make you feel like you need a divorce.
7. It is not a good idea to make any big changes when you are grieving...this includes leaving your relationship.
8. No matter how alike you are, each of you will have different things that upset and bother you more than other things, and different stages and time frames for your grief. Do your best to understand that you do not have to agree or be feeling the same things at the same time to accept and support each other.
9. No matter how much you love each other, there will be times when you will feel completely alone while grieving the loss of your child. Grief is lonely.
10. Do your best to have a united front to family, friends and the rest of the world no matter if you agree or not. Other's judgments have a great potential during this time to pull you apart. You are much stronger as a pair than as separate individuals. There will be times when it feels like you have no one in the world to support, listen and stand up for you. Be there for each other as much as you can. NO-ONE else in the world loved your child more than each of you. Therefore, no-one else in the world shares this world of grief the same as the two of you

I Wonder (To My Spouse)



I wonder if you know...

Some mornings I still wake up and wonder if it was all a bad dream... and I know you must do the same.

I wonder if you know...

Each night before I go to sleep, I quietly whisper "I missed you again today" and say a prayer that he will hear it.

I wonder if you know...

That even though I stand strong and look okay on the outside, inside my pain is still very deep & very real! I know yours is too.

I wonder if you know...

That I heard "that song" again today, and in the privacy of my car. I cried for him! I know you still cry for him too.

I wonder if you know...

Sometimes I feel like I'm going crazy and spend hours wishing I could change things. We aren't crazy, are we?

I wonder if you know...

That I have tried so hard to be strong for you, and yet a part of me is also very weak and needs your strength.

But above all else. I wonder if you know...

You are my hero and I love you very much.

Stacie Gilliam TCF, Oklahoma, OK

The Strength of Butterflies

By Mary Sue Zercher—TCF Marietta, Georgia



They didn't want to change.
 Their lives were full.
 The caterpillars crawled happily through the green leaves,
 Played and rested in the sun, and ate their fill.

Yet, through the darkness and quiet mystery,
 they did change.
 Their luminous beauty now lights the skies,
 their colors are vibrant, their airy flight is delightful.

They didn't want to change.
 Their lives were full.
 They laughed and worked and sang and played;
 Our children loved their lives.

Yet, through the darkness and quiet mystery,
 they did change.
 Beyond their own imaginings they now live in indescribable harmony
 and perfect joy.
 Their new lives are a color invisible to us, but it is the color of eternity.

We didn't want to change.
 Our lives were full.
 We cared and nurtured and disciplined and laughed
 and mothered and fathered;
 we loved their lives and them.

Yet, through the darkness and quiet mystery,
 we have changed.
 Though fragile in our forever longing for them,
 we are gifted with a growing strength of spirit called HOPE.

We are a resilient and enduring new color as well,
 held close to our children by unbreakable threads of love
 that keep us tethered for a while yet,
 between earth and heaven.

*What the caterpillar calls the end of the world,
 the master calls a butterfly.*

Richard Bach

Sibling Page

An Unbreakable Bond

From the same roots
Nourished by the same soil
We grew, side by side.
One a little older, the older a little taller,
Such different blossoms,
Different, yet strangely the same.

We grew, our lives entwined,
Held together by shared experiences,
Common joys and sorrows,
Whispered secrets known to us alone.
Through that bond of love,
We shared strength.

We grew, our different paths parting us,
An ocean between.
Yet slender tendrils of love still reached
out one to another
They touched and they formed a bond once more,
An unbreakable bond like steel,
Through which strength and love flowed once more.

Then, too soon, the bond tightened,
As I was drawn to her side.
Entwined once more, I held her
And watched helplessly,
As she withered and died.
I am alone.
Yet that bond of love,
That bond between sisters Is eternal.
Even death cannot sever it,
Because my sister still lives
In heaven and in my heart.

Sharon Gray Written for her sister, Jenny
We Need Not Walk Alone, Summer 2007

An Open Letter to Our Siblings

Dear Sibling,

How can I possibly tell you how much I miss you?
But of course you probably know - since you knew
me better than anyone. No matter how much time
passes, I still wish you were here to share our lives
and the future I expected us to have together.

Even though we fought and at times neglected each
other, I just assumed that you would always be there.
That we'd grow old together and remember stories of
growing up and laugh at each other as we looked and
acted more like our parents. That we'd share our joys
and setbacks, and adore each other's children.

Your death has rocked me harder than I could
imagined I'd survive. Ultimately, there are no
answers to my questions. There is no replacing you
and there is no solace for my grief.

There is only the simple choice I make every day to
live on in the honor of your memory and the love we
shared. To strive to carry on the best of who you
were. To cherish the brief time we have with others.
To celebrate the opportunity to be alive. To have
compassion for the pain of others as well as my own.
To have the courage to love fully as I have loved you
and to remember that you would want me to go on
and find joy again.

You gave me so many gifts while you were alive and
I continue to discover the gifts in this loss. I am so
thankful you were born my sibling. I would not have
traded our time together for anything. You are
always with me because you are a part of me.

Mary Lamourex
TCF Marin County, CA

Sometimes, when I say 'I'm okay.' I want someone to look me
in the eyes, hug me tight and say, 'I know you're not'.

Author Unknown

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We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope. The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us. Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope. We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships. We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope. Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died. We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We Need Not Walk Alone. We Are The Compassionate Friends.

Other Local TCF Chapters & Support Groups

TCF Carbon County - 484-719-6753

TCF Easton - 610-515-3526

TCF Quakertown - 267-380-0130

GRASP (grief recovery after substance passing)

TCF Pocono - 570 - 350 - 6695

484-863-4324 or 610-442-8490

Love Gift Form

Your love gift will help defray the cost of chapter expenses such as the newsletter mailings, meetings and our outreach to the newly bereaved. The Compassionate Friends is a 501c(3) non-profit organization and your donations are fully tax deductible.

Deadlines are the 1st of the month previous to the month you wish publication in. Example the deadline for publication in January is December the 1st

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I would like to make a donation of _____ ☐ In Memory of ☐ In Honor of ☐ A Chapter Gift (without memorial or honorarium)

Name of person gift given for

Edition to be published in. Deadlines listed above. Late submissions or those that do not indicate an edition will be published in the next edition.

Special Text - Brief Messages Please. Poems & story submissions are always welcome and should be sent directly to the Newsletter Editor for inclusion in the newsletter.

Please designate which of the following your gift is for (you may circle more than one)

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Postage

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Outreach Program

Special Events