



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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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 required for unvaccinated or partially vaccinated persons. Face masks are optional, but appreciated for those that are fully vaccinated and boosted.
- Do not attend if you are feeling ill, have been exposed to Covid, tested positive in the last 14 days or have a new unexplained rash
- 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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A Grief Journey in Review

As I write this I am listening to Johnny Horton singing "Whispering Pines." This is a melancholy song, yet a sweet one. It reminded me of the day that my son died and the journey I have taken since then.

Todd was in a car accident in mid-December, almost on the winter solstice. He died on December 19. This is significant to me. I was raised in the cold, snowy part of the country. My son was returning from that area when the accident that took his life occurred. I remember recounting the events second by second when my son died. I remember how Todd disliked the shortened daylight of winter. How ironic that his death came on what was nearly the shortest day of the year.

We have just passed summer solstice. Todd has been gone for over 4^{1/2} years. I still miss him, and I think about him each day. I am a different person since my son died. My life has changed dramatically. The cast of characters in my life has changed somewhat. Solitude has become an important part of living for me. I no longer weep endlessly and fall asleep from exhaustion. I no longer walk the floor at night. The periods of manic rearranging of my house have slowed to something approaching normal for me.

Somewhere on this horrible journey of grief my subconscious mind accepted the fact that I will never see Todd again. I have accepted his death. I am rarely jolted by the sudden thought that Todd is not on this plane. My beautiful child, the baby who grew to be such a special man, is gone. This is part of who I am now. I now keep Todd in my heart. I talk about him with strangers as if he were still alive. With those who know me, I speak of the loss of my only child with quiet acceptance, and I share the many joys of my child's life.

Life has begun to improve. I am even thinking of a vacation next year. I am making more plans than I have in over four years. I have accepted what I cannot change. This is a milestone for me, because I have always been able to change the variables, to make things right, to bring back normalcy. But I won't be able to change the fact that my son has died.

Along the way I have had moments of epiphany....only brief ones, but epiphanies of various sorts. Most of the change has been gradual. Talking with other parents, reading, writing, listening to music, to radio programs, to speakers, going to seminars, watch-ing movies.. ..all of these efforts have helped me. But it was up to me to take those first steps. It was my choice to remove the crepe and add a colorful wreath to the front door. It was my choice to reach out for help and accept what those who shared my grief journey offered.

Much has changed in my life since that first year of grief. Much will change in the future. I have learned that change is the essence of life. I

Continued on page 4

Our Children Remembered

August and September Birthdays and Anniversaries

	Birth	Anniv.
Holly Cavanaugh - Daughter of Bill Cavanaugh; Sister of Bo Cavanaugh	Apr 27	Sep 25
Carol Chanitz - Daughter of Jay & Ruth Chanitz	Aug 25	Aug 25
Joseph Chanitz - Son of Jay & Ruth Chanitz	Jul 16	Aug 28
Christopher Cole - Son of Donald Cole; Brother of Lauren Cole	Oct 10	Sep 10
Michael Conelias - Son of Trent & Joanne Conelias	Dec 10	Aug 1
John Counterman, III - Brother of Theresa Legarski	Sep 30	Nov 2
Christopher Daud - Son of Marie Daud	Nov 4	Sep 16
Hope Davidson - Daughter of Dean & Donna Davidson; Sister of Nicholas Davidson	Aug 8	Feb 8
Jillian Faustner - Daughter of Joan Cottone; Sister of Jennifer, Jessica & James	Aug 8	Feb 8
Brenda Fehr Hatrak - Daughter of David & Eileen Fehr, Sr.; Sister of Barbara R. Burgin & David A. Fehr, Jr.; Granddaughter of Elwood & Mary Mann; Granddaughter of Warren & Rose Fehr	Aug 7	Oct 21
Chelsie Graham - Daughter of Chris & Debbie Graham	Aug 31	Jan 8
Eric Graver - Son of Mary L Graver	Aug 31	Jan 8
Raquel Guerra - Daughter of Jeff & Kathi Kline	Sep 18	Nov 2
David Hoagland, Jr - Son of Gypsy Garrett	Aug 17	Jul 9
Matt Kush - Son of Rick & Ann Kush; Brother of Mike & Jenn	Sep 12	Sep 16
Joseph Lestishock - Son of Marjorie Lestishock	Aug 24	Feb 10
Anthony "Tony" Mariani, II - Son & Kathleen Collins & the late Anthony E. Mariani; Stepson of Brian Collins; Brother of Matthew Mariani; Grandson of William Pickett	Sep 13	Sep 6
Suzanne Miller - Daughter of Russell & Margaret Billig	Nov 28	Sep 28
Jim Minter - Brother of Jeanine Minter	Aug 30	Nov 5
PJ Pfenning - Son of Maureen Pfenning; Brother of Amanda Sciarillo & Lauren Pfenning	Jan 2	Aug 17
James Ralls - Son of Tina Ralls; Brother of Timothy & Geoffrey	Jan 2	Aug 17
Scott Rothrock - Son of Larry & Linda Rothrock	Oct 20	Sep 18
Jason Rute - Son of Linda Cavanaugh	Aug 25	Nov 13
Lauren Schneck - Daughter of James & Lisa Schneck	Nov 8	Aug 27
Anthony Sisonick - Son of Rella Sisonick Daniels; Brother of Nicholas Sisonick	May 22	Aug 3
Jonelle Sisonick - Daughter of Rella Sisonick Daniels; Sister of Nicholas Sisonick	May 22	Aug 3
Benjamin Steinert - Son of MaryAnne Steinert	Sep 23	Feb 1
Constance Stewart - Daughter of Joanne Stewart; Sister of The Late Kevin J. Stewart; Sister of Keith Stewart	Sep 23	Feb 1
Michael Szabo - Son of John & Maria Szabo, Jr	Aug 2	Oct 3
David Uecker - Son of Susan Uecker-Bittner & The Late Phillip C. Uecker; Brother of Amanda Uecker-Miernicki	Sep 13	Apr 28
Sean Virmalo - Son of Udo & Janet L. Virmalo; Brother of Eric, Brett & Katelyn Virmalo	Sep 22	Feb 12
Stephanie Volkert - Daughter of Joanne Fimiano; Sister of Zachary Volkert	Sep 22	Feb 12
Jonathan Weiss - Brother of Ginger Renner		Aug 6
Christina Williamson - Daughter of Chris & Kim Williamson; Sister of the late Christopher Jayden Williamson	Aug 1	Oct 22
Adam Wolk - Son of Michael & Sheila Wolk; Brother of Laura & Sarah Wolk	Aug 1	Oct 22
Hunter Yeagle - Son of Terree & Brett Oakwood	Aug 1	Sep 6
Craig Yurick - Son of Robert & Sharon Yurick; Brother of Todd Yurick	Aug 5	Jun 21

Continued from page 2

have learned from wonderful people; I have learned from negative people as well. Each person who transcends my life has taught me something about grief, about living, about moving forward into the light.

I don't know where I will be in five years or ten years. I dream about my son. We often have great conversations in those dreams. Sometimes he is a small child, sometimes a grown man. When I awaken I feel as close to Todd as I will be on this earthly plane.

Shortly after the summer solstice this year, a strange thing happened. My grandson and his girlfriend came home early which was odd because they planned to be out late. I was reading and listening to a news show. "Don't freak out, Nanny", my grandson said. "We were in an accident." I just looked at him.

Then I asked if he was hurt. "No, but the guy who was driving jumped out of the truck and ran away. He was doing 80 mph in the rain. He hit a curb, fishtailed, braked and spun around twice. Then the truck smashed into a utility pole. Annalee hit her head on the door panel. I bounced around in the back seat.. ..I didn't have a seat belt on." The EMTs had checked them out. I did the same. Then I sat down. I smiled at him. "What?" he said.

"What, what. What have you learned tonight?" I responded. "I'm never riding with him again.

"I'm never riding with anyone who is drinking. I'm never riding with anyone who drives like a spaz or drinks," he said, summarizing the situation.

That was good. I smiled. Just shortly after summer solstice my grandson escaped death. The truck was a total loss. The driver was nowhere to be found. But Todd's son was alive, unhurt. His girlfriend was fine. I later confirmed with a deputy on the scene that it was a real miracle anyone walked away. Yet they did. They walked away from that mass of twisted steel and smashed plastic.

I like to think that my son is still on this earthly plane in some form. Watching.....watching over his children. That's what he did in life.

And so my journey continues. I no longer "freak out" about the unchangeable. My child would be glad to know this. "You're acting like Dad," my grandson said. "He was always cool."

"I guess I'm cool now. But there was a time..... I've changed. My perspective is the unique one of a mother who has lost her only child. And the journey continues until I, too, meet the angel of death.

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

Grief is Like A River

My grief is like a river,
I have to let it flow,
but I myself determine
just where the banks will go.
Some days the current takes me
in waves of guilt and pain,
but there are always quiet pools
where I can rest again.
I crash on rocks of anger;
my faith seems faint indeed,
but there are other swimmers
who know that what I need
Are loving hands to hold me
when the waters are too swift,
and someone kind to listen
when I just seem to drift.
Griefs river is a process
of relinquishing the past.
By swimming in hope's channels,
I'll reach the shore at last.

*Cynthia G. Kelley,
www.goodgriefresources.com*

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*

For Grandparents: Grandparent Grief

I am powerlessness. I am helplessness. I am frustration.
I sit with her and I cry with her.
She cries for her daughter and I cry for mine.
I can't help her.
I can't reach inside her and take her broken heart.
I must watch her suffer day after day.
I listen to her tell me over and over how she misses Emily, how she wants her back.
I can't bring Emily back for her.
I can't buy her an even better Emily than she had.
Like I could buy her an even better toy when she was a child.
I can't kiss the hurt and make it go away.
I can't even kiss a small part of it away.
There's no Band-Aid large enough to cover her bleeding heart.
There was a time I could listen to her talk about a fickle boyfriend
And tell her it would be okay, and know in my heart
That in two weeks she wouldn't even think of him.
Can I tell her it'll be okay in two years when I know it will be okay,
That she will carry this pain of "what might have been" In her deepest heart for the rest of her life?
I see this young woman, my child, who was once
carefree and fun loving and bubbling with life,
slumped in a chair with her eyes full of agony.
Where is my power now?
Where is my mother's bag of tricks that will make it all better?
Why can't I join her in the aloneness of her grief?
As tight as my arms wrap around her, I can't reach that aloneness.
What can I give her to make her better?
A cold, wet cloth will ease the swelling of her crying eyes, but it won't stop the reason for her tears.
What treat will bring joy back to her?
What prize will bring that happy child back?
Where are the magic words to give her comfort?
What chapter in Dr. Spock tells me how to do this?
He has told me everything else I've needed to know.
Where are the answers?
I should have them. I'm the mother.
I know that someday she'll find happiness again, that her life will have meaning again.
I can hold out hope for her someday, but what about now? This minute? This hour? This day?
I can give her my love and my prayers and my care and my concern.
I could give her my life. But even that won't help.

By Margaret H. Gerner, MSW An excerpt from "For Bereaved Grandparents"

Thoughts About Progress

One thing that is frequently discussed at our meetings is the despair of thinking you are on the road to "recovery," when all of a sudden you seem to be back at square one. But are you really? Let's keep in mind most of us have had no previous experience "recovering" from the loss of a child. Therefore, we have no point of reference. It's all new to us. Actually the "roller coaster" of emotions is perfectly normal. In the very beginning most of us seem to vacillate between dead numbness and excruciating pain. Constant crying, to not a tear left -just dried up and limp. We actually are living minute-to-minute. After a couple of months we might actually have a few hours that we have not cried or felt that deep overwhelming despair. Then, WHAM -back to where we started. We tend to panic and think something is wrong with us. Let's be realistic! There is something wrong - terribly wrong: we have each lost a child.

Let's be fair to ourselves. We started to play a role to the outside world. Like the old song says, "laughing on the outside — crying on the inside." We want to be acceptable to society. "You are doing so well," we hear. If only they knew! We may feel we have to fool others, but let us really be honest about our feelings. To deny our feelings, particularly to ourselves, is to block the road to recovery. Remember that recovery in this case does not mean, "getting over it," it means to gain control of our lives again.

So, let's not worry about what other people think, say, or expect. Our friends (well meaning as they are), sometimes members of our family, even someone who has lost a child, should not sit in judgment. Each person grieves differently, due to a person's general makeup and the relationship with the dead child. Unless someone has totally withdrawn from everything and everybody over a lengthy period of time, the chances are all is in the realm of normalcy.

Only after we have walked down the long road of grief and can look back, remembering those early days and weeks, can we see we really are not on square one again. We have just slipped

backwards for a time. That is all.

Allow yourself that, and then strive forward again. It takes time, a lot of time! We tend to expect too much from others, others expect too much from us, and therefore, we tend to expect too much from ourselves.

By Mary Ehmman, TCF Valley Forge, PA

A Tear Fell

I rode by your school by chance today
And I just happened to look that way.
The boys all had their ball caps on;
then I remembered my son was gone.

Just when I thought I was doing so well,
Before I knew it - a tear fell.
Then on Sunday as I sat in church
I looked around and missed you so much.

I saw other boys in their Sunday suits
And I remembered you were just as cute.
People all think I'm doing so well;
They don't know today - a tear fell.

When I'm reminded of what might have been
It gets too hard to hold it in.
When life will catch me off my guard,
That's when I seem to be hit so hard.

It seems all roads lead back to you
As I take each day and try to get through.
They say time makes it better, but I cannot tell.
I only know today - a tear fell.

By Carolyn Bryan, TCF Orange Park, FL

*Sometimes after a period of feeling good,
we find ourselves back in the old feelings
of extreme sadness, despair, or anger.
This is often the nature of grief, up and
down, and it may happen over and over
for a time. It happens because we are hu-
mans; we cannot take in all of the pain
and the meaning of death at once. So we
let it in a little at a time.*

By Peppers and Knapp from "How to go on Living"

Sibling Page

Ugly Club

I guess I am a member of the "ugly club" because something ugly happened to me... both of my sisters were taken from me in one year. My oldest sister was suffering with Alzheimer's, so I expected her to leave us soon. But it was cruel the way she died: not knowing anyone. I wish I could have been there because she was always there for me, since she was 19 years older than me. She was a second mother to me.

My other sister was 12 years older than me. Being the youngest in the family, it is hard to watch your siblings get sick and die. I lived with her for 10 years after we both lost our husbands. So we became very close. We were both so different but enjoyed living together. After she was diagnosed with cancer, she only lasted a year. I really thought she would beat it like I had done 3 years before her.

Losing a sister takes a part of you, but they leave so many memories behind to soothe one. Therefore we have to overcome the ugliness of unnatural death and go on with our lives.

I know they would have wanted me to live life in the fullest like they did.

Charlene Williams, Chapter Unknown

Reminiscing

I thought about you today,
As I bade farewell for school.

I thought about you today,
When I heard a certain song.

I thought about you today,
As the teacher passed the test.

I thought about you today,
When the kids jumped in the leaves.

I thought about you today,
as a stranger passed my way.

I thought about you today,
When I got drenched in the rain.

I thought about you today,
As I sat in church and prayed.

I thought about you today,
When I embraced an old friend.

I thought about you today,
As the day turned into night.

I will think of you again,
When I close my eyes and dream.

Lori Phillip, TCF , Scranton, PA

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 a towel to dry off your headstone.

By Adele Rosales, TCF Ventura, CA In memory of my sister, Anita

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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 - 215-703-8431

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

Contributor Name (this will be the name that appears in the newsletter)

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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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