



THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS



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To those who are receiving our newsletter for the first time, we wish you were not eligible to belong to this group, but we want you to know that your family and you have many friends. We who have received love and compassion from others in our time of deep sorrow now wish to offer the same support and understanding to you. Please know we understand, we care, and we want to help.

You are not alone in your grief.

The Quad City Chapter



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FRIENDS

April 2010, Volume XXIII, Number 4

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Dear Compassionate Friends,

In this month's newsletter we have included an article that describes how the international organization, Compassionate Friends, began. Our local chapter began in a similar way with the assistance of a concerned pastor and a number of families in the upper Rock Island County area who had experienced the death of a child. Together at our monthly meetings we listened and encouraged and cried and shared what was helping us and what wasn't helping us.

Over 20 years later faithful volunteers gather each month to enable grieving families to have a safe place to share feelings and learn how others have survived their grief. Many who receive this newsletter have never attended a TCF meeting, and you are not expected to do so. However as you read the articles this month, you might think about if spending some time talking and listening to other bereaved parents – all at different stages in their grief – might help you make some significant progress in your own grief journey.

Over the next few months the chapter leaders will be sharing excerpts from a DVD that they believe contains some useful and encouraging information. And there is always time for sharing and listening and caring at a TCF meeting. If you have any questions or need directions, do not hesitate to call one of the chapter leaders listed in the newsletter. We do not walk alone. We are the Compassionate Friends.

Sincerely,
Jerry and Carol Webb

For Grandparents

One grandmother said she couldn't bear to visit her son's children after his death. She thereby robbed herself of his immortality, and her grandchildren felt a second loss and rejection. If a child dies leaving grandparents behind, our opportunities for turning grief into meaning and purpose are even greater. Who better than a parent to keep memory alive?

After much persuasion and the promise that her second son would go with her, this frightened grandmother went to visit her four grandchildren, who almost knocked her over with hugging and kissing. She later said, "They looked so much like David! Especially the two girls. And when they called me 'Grandma' and showed me how much they needed me to tell them about their father when he was a child, I wondered what I had been so afraid of."

When a child dies, it is natural to be afraid of any further pain. For a while we may just want to crawl into a hole and lick our wounds. But then we need to have the courage to say to ourselves, "I'm still here – I can fulfill some of the dreams and give the love my child would have given—I can make that life count." And in that sense of purpose and the good we do, we remain forever in touch with the child we thought we had lost.

**Excerpt from *After a Child Dies* –
Eda LeShan, Long Island, NY**

If you read or write an article or poem which might be helpful to other bereaved parents, please share them with us, Jerry and Carol Webb, Box 71, Cordova, Illinois 61242.

If you move and would like to continue receiving the newsletter, please send us your new address. Because we send the newsletter bulk rate, the post office will not forward it.

If you know someone you think would benefit from receiving the newsletter, we would be happy to add them to our mailing list.

If you prefer to no longer receive the newsletter, we would appreciate you letting us know. Thanks. Jerry and Carol Webb (Editors), Box 71, Cordova, Illinois 61242, (309)654-2727.

Carry On

We reach within and find resources to carry on when things are roughest. The most devastating of life's experiences often bring out our best qualities.

When things get better we look back and wonder how we ever did it. But we did, and it proves we have a great strength within us. Courage that has never been tested before surfaces and sustains us when it is really needed.

Let us be persistent and keep that courage and strength working now that we have discovered it.

Let its light shine so that others in their dark hours may see it and think, "If they can do it, I can too."

Shine your lights on the paths of your fellow sufferers. We have shared our suffering, now let us share our joys. Make your life, your struggles, count!

**Fay Harden
TCF/Tuscaloosa, AL**

A Meditation on Crying

Last June I earned a certificate of Crying. It was

given out after a workshop at the Compassionate Friends national conference and reads: "Chris Morrison has completed the graduate course in Advanced Crying and has earned the right to cry whenever necessary with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto." The certificate, a welcome light touch after a serious talk, gave us permission to do what we had already been doing for quite some time.

Since my daughter died in March of 2000, I have been thinking a lot about crying. Growing up, I did my fair share of it. I cried at Saturday afternoon movies when the heroine died, when I read sad books like *Anna Karenina*, when one of our 13 cats was run over by a car, when someone called me "four eyes," and when I saw others crying as my father did when Franklin Roosevelt died. On a scale of one to ten, I ranked about a seven on the weepy kid list. My father disapproved; he couldn't stand women who cried. Over the years my ample tears dwindled to a rivulet and for the past 25, I can barely recall crying at all. I had come to think of crying as a forgotten talent until we lost our oldest daughter. I discovered my supply hadn't dried up at all, but was simply in hiding, waiting for this event to break the dam.

In one sense, I feel fortunate to have recovered the ability to cry. It gives me another way to jettison, or at least lessen, feelings that cause me pain. Journal writing is also a good release, but it takes time, discipline, and concentration. Crying doesn't require any invitation or effort. It just arrives on the doorstep, walks right in, and makes itself at home.

My certificate tells me when I can cry, but it doesn't say where. Finding the right place and time to cry is important for me. I cry best when I'm alone, driving along the beltway,

reading poetry by Mary Oliver, or listening to Bruch and Barber violin concertos. I cry before I go to sleep and when I wake up in the middle of the night; I cry walking through sparse woods lit by filtered sun in early autumn. Everyone seems to have their own special place for crying. Some are able to cry freely in a group; others need solitude.

Crying has benefits, too. For one thing, it generates a product. As Dr. Bob Baugher, the psychologist leading the workshop said, "The lachrymal glands at the corner of the eye seep down into the nose, and you have to blow." I'm not too fond of that, but I do enjoy tasting the saline tears that trickle down to my mouth when I'm going strong. It brings relief, rather like the satisfaction of an animal licking its wounds to help it heal. Webster's dictionary says tears help to keep the eyes free of foreign particles, but forgets to mention they also help to cleanse the heart.

Dr. Baugher also suggested that we consider our tears a form of communication and assured us there is no such thing as crying too much. "Crying tells us to pay attention to the thousands of memories of the lost child stored in your brain," he explained. "Part of grief is reliving and re-experiencing those memories. That is the reason why it goes on forever. You feel better but you never get over it. You will always have brain cells that still hurt."

Now a year after the conference, my husband and I are planning a trip to Connecticut. There we will intern a portion of Christy's ashes in the family cemetery to rest beside her beloved grandparents. As I reflect on the internment ceremony and what I will say, I recall Shakespeare's lines from *Macbeth*, "Give sorrow words," and I weep. Yes, give sorrow words but also give it showers of tears with which to wash away the gravel newly lodged in the heart.

Chris Morrison

TCF/Arlington Chapter, Virginia

Some Mothers Don't Get a Perfect Ending — *Erma Bombeck*

If you're looking for an answer this Mother's Day on why God reclaimed your child, I don't know.

I only know that thousands of mothers out there today desperately need an answer as to why they were permitted to go through the elation of carrying a child and then lose it to miscarriage, accident, violence, disease or drugs.

Motherhood isn't just a series of contractions; it's a state of mind. From the moment we know life is inside us, we feel a responsibility to protect and defend that human being. It's a promise we can't keep.

We beat ourselves to death over that pledge. "If I hadn't worked through the eighth month." "If I had taken him to the doctor when he had a fever." "If I hadn't let him use the car that night." "If I hadn't been so naïve, I'd have noticed he was on drugs." The longer I live, the more convinced I am that surviving changes us. After the bitterness, anger, built and despair are tempered by time, we look at life differently.

While writing my book, *I Want to Grow Hair, I Want to Grow Up, I Want to Go to Boise*, I talked with mothers who had lost a child to cancer. Every single one said that death gave their lives new meaning and purpose. And whom do you think prepared them for the rough, lonely road they had to travel? Their dying child. They pointed their mothers toward the future and told them to keep going. The children

had already accepted what their mothers were fighting to reject.

The children in the bombed out nursery in Oklahoma City have touched more lives than they will ever know. Workers who had probably given their kids a mechanical pat on the head without thinking that morning were making calls home during the day to their children to say, "I love you."

This may seem like a strange Mother's Day column on a day when joy and life abound for the millions of mothers throughout the country. But it's also a day of appreciation and respect. I can think of no mothers who deserve it more than those who had to give a child back.

In the face of adversity, we are not permitted to ask, "Why me?" You can ask, but you won't get an answer. Maybe you are the instrument who is left behind to perpetuate the life that was lost and appreciate the time you had with it.

The late Gilda Radner summed it up pretty well: "I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned the hard way that some poems don't rhyme and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what is going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity."

Erma Bombeck was a bereaved parent who lost a child through miscarriage. This was her last Mother's Day column in 1996.

This I Can Share With You

Marilyn W. Heavlin

I have not experienced the death of my only child but some of us have.

I have not experienced a child dying by suicide, but some of us have.

I have not watched my child fight a terminal illness, but some of us have.

None of us would dare say, "I know just how you feel," even if our experiences are similar.

No two situations are exactly alike.

But I can say

I remember the pain when my child died.

I remember the feelings of insanity.

I remember the feelings of aloneness.

I remember wishing I could die.

I remember wanting to share something with my child, but he wasn't there.

So my friend, our experiences have parts in common
And parts that are different!

So, why should we listen to each other?

Do we have anything to share?

Do you know what heartbreak feels like?

All of us do.

Do you know the numbness of grief?

All of us do.

Do you know what it's like to have empty arms?

All of us do.

So let's learn what we can of our commonalities.

We loved a child, but our child left too soon.



This We Can Share with You

BP/USA Newsletter, Winter
2004 Grandparent's
Remembrance

We are the grieving grandparents, the shepherds of our children and grandchildren's lives. Our grief is two-fold and at times we feel powerless to help. We seek to comfort our children in the depths of their grief, and yet we need the time and space to face our own broken hearts. We have been robbed of the special tender touch a grandparent shares with a grandchild, and we have lost a symbol of our immortality. As we walk by our child's side, we both give and draw strength. We reach into their hearts to comfort them, and when they reach out to us in their distress, we begin the journey to heal together. We continue to be their guardians. We allow traditions to change to accommodate their loss. We support the new ones, which symbolize the small steps on their journey. It is in their healing that our hearts find comfort.

Susan Mackey,
TCF/Rutland, VT

TCF Bulletin Board

Contact
www.preciousparents.org
which publishes a
newsletter titled
HEARTLINE for parents
whose infants have died.

The next monthly meeting of the QC Chapter of The Compassionate Friends is on April 22th at 6:30 pm at the Bethel Assembly of God Church in Rock Island. The May meeting is on the 27nd.

GRIEF MATERIALS

Looking for a particular grief book? Look no further than the Centering Corporation, the official recommended grief resource center of The Compassionate Friends. With the largest selection of grief-related resources in the United States, Centering Corporation will probably have just about anything you're looking for – or they'll be able to tell you where to find it. Call Centering Corporation for a catalog at (402) 553-1200 or visit their Web site at www.centering.org. When ordering, be sure to mention you are with The Compassionate Friends and all shipping charges will be waived.

Our Newsletter
For parents who have experienced the death or deaths of multiple birth children during pregnancy, at birth, in infancy, or in childhood, contact Jean Kollantai at P.O. Box 91377, Anchorage, AK 99509.

Amazon. Com
When making a purchase from Amazon.com, enter through the link on the home page of The Compassionate Friends national Web site, and a portion of the purchase price will be donated to further the mission of TCF. This donation applies to all purchases, not just books, made from the Amazon.com site.

We Need Not Walk Alone

The Compassionate Friends National Newsletter
One complimentary copy is sent to bereaved families that contact the national office.

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.
P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
(877)969-0010

Email: nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Web site: www.compassionatefriends.org

Visit the **sibling resource** page at

www.compassionatefriends.org

Looking for more articles or previous copies of this newsletter? Go to www.Bethany-qc.org for copies of the last four years of The Quad City Chapter of The Compassionate Friends Newsletter. They are download-able in Adobe Acrobat format.

Love Gifts

There are no dues or fees to belong to TCF. As parents and other family members find healing and hope within the group or from the newsletter, they often wish to make a Love Gift to help with the work of our chapter. This is a meaningful way to remember a beloved child.

Love gifts are used to provide postage for the newsletter and mailings to newly bereaved families. Some of the love gifts are used for materials to share with first time attendees at our meetings or to purchase books for our library. Our thanks to the many families who provide love gifts so that the work of reaching out to bereaved parents and families can continue. If you would like to send a love gift, please send it to our treasurers, Larry and Joyce Molitor, P.O. Box 191, Cordova, Illinois 61242. Checks can be made out to *The Compassionate Friends*. Your gifts are tax deductible.

National Conference
Online registration is now available on the TCF Website for the 33rd Annual TCF National Conference - July 2-4, 2010 in Arlington, Virginia. A TCF National Conference is an event unlike any other where bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents are able to share with others walking the same grief journey. This is combined with well-known speakers, great entertainment, and more than 100 workshops covering most areas of grief after the death of a child.
www.compassionatefriends.org



What's it all about?

The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child. The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families in the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child and to provide information and education to help others be supportive.

Founded in England in 1969, the first U.S. chapter was organized in 1972. Since then, 635 chapters have been established. The current Quad City Chapter was formed in 1987.

TCF National Office

P.O. Box 3696
Oak Brook, Illinois 60522-3696
Toll Free (877)969-0010
TCF National Web site —
www.compassionatefriends.org

Mission Statement

The mission of the Compassionate Friends (TCF) is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child at any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

The Quad City Area Chapter of The Compassionate Friends meets on the fourth Thursday of the month in Rock Island, Illinois. See the newsletter for schedule.

Quad City Chapter Newsletter Editors

Jerry and Carol Webb
Box 71, Cordova, IL 61242

e-newsletter is now available from the National Office! The monthly e-newsletter will contain notes and happening of interest to all TCFers. To subscribe to the e-newsletter, visit the TCF National Web site home page and click on the Register for TCF e-Newsletter Link. This newsletter is available to everyone.

Resources for Grieving Parents & Siblings

The Compassionate Friends of the Quad Cities Monthly Meeting: April 22, 2010, at 6:30 pm

"Facets of Grief" - from the DVD *Space Between Breaths*

Bethel Assembly of God Church, 3535 38th Ave., Rock Island, Illinois

From John Deere Road, turn right at 38th St. (by Kmart) and go up the hill. Turn left on 38th Ave. The church will be on your right. We meet in the downstairs fellowship hall. (Or you can turn into the church driveway off of 38th St.; the church is on the west side of the road.) Alan and Rosemary Shoemaker — 309-441-5586, or Michelle Cauwels — 309-755-0783 for directions or information. Next month: May 27, 2010, at 6:30 pm.

The Compassionate Friends of Muscatine	Meets the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 at the George M. Wittich-Lewis Funeral Home, 2907 Mulberry, Muscatine, Iowa. Chapter Leaders are Linda and Bill McCracken. You can call them at (563)263-2737 for directions or information.
Helping Heavy Hearts — Grief Support Group	Meets the second Tuesday each month at 7:00 pm in the office of Family Resources located in Building 9 of the Annie Wittenmeyer Complex off Eastern Avenue in Davenport. For more information, contact Kirby White at (563)271-5908.
Mom's Group meets in Aledo	A group of moms who have had children die meet once a month in Aledo to support and encourage one another as they go through the grief process. You are invited to join them at 12:30 on the third Saturday of the month at the Happy Joe's in Aledo. For directions or more information, call Kay Forret at (309)582-7789.
Rick's House of Hope	Located at 4867 Forest Grove Drive in Bettendorf is a community resource is for children and adolescents dealing with grief. "Children and adolescents experiencing grief and trauma often need a safe place to express their feelings. They need companions for the journey of grief who are outside their family and not themselves grieving." The volunteer mentors at Rick's House of Hope provide this for young people and their families during painful and confusing times of grief. There is no fee for services. For more information, call 563 324-9580 or (563)421-7970. Find Rick's House of Hope on the web: www.genesishealth.com — keywords "children and grief."
Quad City SHARE	A support group for parents who have lost a child through miscarriage, still-birth, or early infant death. SHARE meets the third Thursday of each month at Grace Lutheran Church, 1140 East High Street, Davenport, Iowa. For more information, call Chalyn Fornero-Green at (309)496-2568.
Survivors of Suicide Support Group, Fulton	Location: Second Reformed Church, 703 14th Ave., Fulton, Illinois. This support group meets the second Monday of each month and is open to anyone who has lost a loved one through suicide. It's a safe place where survivors share their experiences and support each other. The group is completely free and light refreshments are served. For more information, call 589-3425.
Survivors of a Suicide Loss Support Group, Moline	For those who have lost someone to suicide, this group, facilitated by a peer survivor and a professional, meets the third Monday of the month in the Moline Library, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm. For details, contact Joel M. Moore (309)235-7174 or qcsos@yahoo.com

I attended a fundraising function the other night at a hardware store brimming with decorations, doodads, kitchen gadgets. I mingled with the volunteers, stopped often to convey my appreciation for their efforts to raise funds to help children. One of the volunteers came to greet me, and she asked me that hard question, "How are you?" She asked it in a way that conveyed her genuine interest. She wanted to know how I am doing on my grief journey. Because of her leadership there's a scholarship in my son Matt's name; part of the proceeds from this Auxiliary's fundraising efforts generate the funds. This woman's brother died when he was a teenager. When Matt was killed, she reached out to me. It meant so much to me when she inspired the scholarship idea. It also helped that she was willing to tell me about her own loss.

I remember asking her how she managed to endure the loss as a teen. I felt so flattened by my mother's grief, I couldn't grasp what the experience would be for my surviving sons to lose their brother. I tried to imagine that experience, to lose a sibling in your youth, when you are still growing up, figuring out who you are, when you think you are invincible.

When she asked me "How are you?" with her dark brown eyes gazing directly into mine, I mustered a response. "I'm different," I replied. "'Better' is not the right word. I'm not in the same place I was four years ago after Matt's death." I struggled to find the words that would accurately express my feeling. After we talked for a while, I made up an excuse to dodge away. Then I hid in the aisles behind the pizza pans and mixing bowls wondering when I could slip out before I'd have to converse more, maybe have to contend with the dreaded question again.

As I drove away an image popped up in my mind's eye. It was the face of a man, a character from the X-files TV series our family watched regularly when the boys

were growing up. There was some alien creature that inhabited the bodies of a couple key characters. Once the alien was inside the person you'd glimpse a dark oily film that would wash over the bad guy's eyes; it would be a fleeting change, lingering just long enough to know that darkness flowed through the person.

I thought that's what this grief inside me is like. Most people don't know how it flows through me, always, a presence of its own, something that is me and not me. When a person who knows about my loss asks how I am doing, someone who knows I'm still learning how to live with my son's loss—a fleeting darkness flows across my eyes, a shadow on my heart.

I'm not as prone to breaking down into tears. That's not true, it happened just the other day, a person expressing their sympathies, at a moment I did not expect, from a person who I assumed did not know at all. The woman said she was sorry to learn that I'd lost my son. At that moment tears sprung to my eyes. I was working, we were talking about raising money for a children's center. We met in a small room with a couch, a couple of easy chairs. I'd noticed earlier as I waited for this person to arrive there was a drawing of a young man hung on the wall. It was a memorial, the man pictured in the frame looked to be in his twenties. I wondered what killed him and how his family was faring. I thought of Matt. I said to this caring person, this near stranger, "Thank you. I am so grateful to have the chance to talk about Matt."

She saw the tears in my eyes and felt she'd hurt me by summoning the grief that flows through my heart like an endless river, like a waterfall, the kind you come across on a hike in the woods with the water rushing over the stones, shushing by, and you wonder where could all that water be coming from on a sunny day.

How are you?

The Birth of the Compassionate Friends

By Joe Lawley, Nuneaton, England

There was nothing unusual in the death of a young person in our busy town-centre hospital. If not commonplace, it was certainly something that occurred with sad regularity.

On May 23rd, 1968, Kenneth, my eleven-year-old son, died. He had lingered at the hospital since the 21st after being knocked off his bicycle on his way to school. Our family stood around in stunned, agonizing disbelief. The nurses in the intensive care unit cried; they never quite got used to the death of the young.

Clergymen prayed, and one mentioned Bill, a boy even then in the final stage of terminal cancer. Sadly, within a few days Bill also died, and the nurses who had lovingly cared for him over the long irreversible course of his illness, also cried for him.

Not many doctors cry, it should be noted. "Professionalism – not becoming too involved," they say. Common compassion might just conclude that somewhere in their training someone should take them aside and say, "That's a child there. The parents' lives have just been shattered. Find something human to say to show you care." A bit hard on them you may think, and perhaps you're right. But the parents' pain is indescribable.

A visit to any Victorian cemetery will soon reveal that our predecessors lived in a time when the death of a child was a common event – but never painless.

The Second World War, portrayed endlessly by the visual media, confirms that children were not spared the horrors of the gas chambers, saturation bombing, the atomic bomb – they died by the millions.

The contemporary sight of our fellow adults and their swollen-bellied children dying from hunger, thirst and disease as the natural disasters of famine, earthquake and tempest strike, sadly deadens our reaction to the death of a child – until that child is our own.

On January 29, 1969, six people sat around a table in a small room in the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. Five shared a common bond. We were bereaved parents of children who had died by accident or illness. The sixth was a young clergyman, The Reverend Simon Stephen, who had said the prayers over Kenneth's and Bill's beds.

The clergyman recognized the inadequacy of the pious, though well-meant words that were taken from the little, black book the clergy always carry for just such occasions.

We were there because in Simon's quest for more effective and meaningful caring, he had noticed that between our two families, the Lawleys and the Hendersons, the coincidental deaths of our sons had caused something unusual to happen.

We had sent flowers to Bill's funeral, simply signing the card "from Kenneth's parents." Bill's parents, Joan and Bill, telephoned to thank us and invited us to come to their house. As we met one evening with tears, pain, comforting, touching, a friendship began that was destined to last forever.

The fifth member at the meeting, Betty Rattigan, had come because Simon had invited all of the families known to him who had lost a child during the previous year. Five of us had responded.

Continued next page

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Her son, Jimmy, had been killed doing a good turn – taking his mate home on his motorbike. In the curious way of fate, he was killed. His mate, thank God, survived.

The young clergyman posed two questions. First, would the befriending between bereaved parents, based on the common bond of losing a beloved child, work for others? Second, could we go out into the world to approach other bereaved parents simply because we could say, "I know how you feel, I also have lost a child?" Were we equipped to befriend them and to be available during their worst times, and would that be enough?

It was, and we did.

Oh, and there was one other question, "What shall we call ourselves?" The word *compassion* had been used many times during the meeting, and it somehow seemed to encompass all that we felt. Suddenly a name emerged: *The Society of the Compassionate Friends*. At the time, it seemed right; now, it seems almost inspirational.

You can find their telephone number almost anywhere in the English-speaking world and many other countries as well. Pray God, you never need to.

Bereavement Magazine
May/June 1994

Living Remembrances

At one time, men built palaces of stone, elaborate mausoleums, as their way of commemorating their dead.

There are other ways to perpetuate the memory of your loved one. Through your own life you can prolong the memory.

Death brings you a choice. It can lead you to the edge of the abyss. Or you can build a bridge that will span the chasm.

Your love is still part of your life.

Whatever it was that made your beloved dear to you, you can make real for others.

The memory of the dead can indeed outlast the monuments we erect for them.

Earl Grollman
Living When a Loved One Has Died

We quickly find there are no words to describe the experience of losing a child. For those who have not lost a child, no explanation will do. For those who have, no explanation is necessary.

Mary Lingle
Thursday, April 22