THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST

N E W S L E T T E R

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 to help others be supportive.

January-February 2020

Vol. 25 Issue 1

YOU ARE INVITED

The Compassionate Friends - Metrowest Chapter meets twice a month. Evenings on the third Tuesday from 7:30 to 9:30 pm in the library of St. Mary's Parish Center, Route 16, Washington St., Holliston. The parish center is located between the church and the rectory. Our next two meetings will be on:

January 21 & February 18

The ***Tuesday*** afternoon meetings will be held on the last Tuesday of the month next to St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Milford at the parish center. ***Please call Ed or Joan Motuzas at (508) 473-4239 by the last Monday or earlier if you plan to attend.***

Directions....On Route 16, going north through downtown Milford (Main St.) at the Town Hall on the right take a left at the lights onto Winter St. The parish center is the last building before the church.

Going south on Route 16 (East Main St.) after Sacred Heart Church on the left, bear right on Main St., continue past Dunkin' Donuts on the right, proceed to the next set of lights and take a right onto Winter St. There is parking on both sides of the street. Look for Compassionate Friends signs to meeting room.

January 28 & February 25

WHO ARE WE?

The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, nonsectarian, mutual assistance, self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents and siblings.

Our primary purpose is to assist the bereaved in the positive resolution of the grief experienced upon the death of a child and to support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health.

The secondary purpose is to provide information and education about bereaved parents and siblings for those who wish to understand. Our objective is to help members of the community, including family, friends, employers, co-workers, and professionals to be supportive.

Meetings are open to all bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings. No dues or fees are required to belong to the Metrowest Chapter of The Compassionate Friends.

The Compassionate Friends Credo

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. ©2020

Weather Cancellation

In the event of inclement weather on meeting days or nights, if in doubt call: Ed or Joan Motuzas at (508) 473-4239

Chapter Information

Co-leaders

* Ed Motuzas	508/473-4239
* Joan Motuzas	508/473-4239

Secretary

* Joan Motuzas	508/473-4239

Treasurer

* Joseph Grillo	508/473-7913

Webmaster

*Al Kennedy	508/533/9299

Librarian

Ed Motuzas	508/473/4239

Newsletter

Ed Motuzas	508/473-4239

Senior Advisors

*Rick & Peg Dugan	508/877-1363

Steering Committee *

Judy Daubney	508/529-6942
Janice Parmenter	508/528-5715
Linda Teres	508/366-2085
Mitchell Greenblatt	508/653-0541
Wendy Bruno	508/429-7998
Carol Cotter	774/219-7774

The chapter address is:

The Compassionate Friends
Metrowest Chapter
26 Simmons Dr.
Milford, MA 01757-1265

Regional Coordinator
Dennis Gravelle
638 Pleasant St.
Leominster, MA 01453-6222
Phone (978) 537-2736
dgtcf@aol.com

The Compassionate Friends has a national office that supports and coordinates chapter activities. The national office can be reached as follows:

The Compassionate Friends
P.O. Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
Voice Toll Free (877) 969-0010
Fax (630) 990-0246
Web Page:
www.compassionatefriends.org

Chapter Web Page
www.tcfmetrowest.com

TRIBUTES, GIFTS AND DONATIONS

There are no dues or fees to belong to ***The Compassionate Friends.*** Just as our chapter is run entirely by volunteers, your voluntary, tax-deductible donations enable us to send information to newly bereaved parents, purchase pamphlets and books, contribute to the national chapter and meet other chapter expenses.

THANK YOU to the friends who help keep our chapter going with their contributions.

Mrs. Maria Peniche in loving memory of her son ***Manuel (Manny) Peniche*** on his birthday January 8th.
Mrs. Janice Tynan in loving memory of her son ***Michael Vincent Tynan*** on his anniversary. “Always loved, never forgotten.”
Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Scott Sr. in loving memory of their son ***Daniel J. Scott Jr.*** **“**Never to be forgotten and loved always.”
Mr. & Mrs. Earl Pearlman in loving memory of their son ***Marc R. Pearlman*** on his birthday December 14th.
Mrs. Susan Kane in loving memory of her daughter ***Lisa Soo Kane.*** “Always loved, never forgotten.”
Mr. & Mrs. Burton Stuchins & family in loving memory of their son and brother ***Alan R. Stuchins*** on his anniversary November 5th.
Mr. & Mrs Richard Contois in loving memory of their son ***Shawn P. Contois.*** “Every day brings us closer to you.” Love, Mom & Dad.
Mr. & Mrs. Steve Prouty in loving memory of their daughter ***Lillian “Lilly” Prouty*** on her anniversary January 10th. And her birthday January 13th.
Mrs. Joan Hennigan in loving memory of her son ***Dennis M. Hennigan***, on his anniversary November 23rd. “Always missed, forever loved in my heart.”
Ms. Regina Ferrera in loving memory of her son ***Charles J. Ferrera.*** “Every day brings me closer to you.”
Mr. Donald DiLorenzo in loving memory of his son ***Christopher D. DiLorenzo*** on his anniversary January 10th and his birthday February 23rd.
Ms. Carmela Bergman in loving memory of her son ***Dixon Bergman*** on his birthday November 6th.
Betty Myers in loving memory of her son who will never be forgotten and always loved ***William Bruce-Tagoe.***
Mr. & Mrs. David Burroughs in loving memory of their son ***Eric T. Burroughs.*** Never forgotten, always loved.

Save a tree

To all that receive this newsletter via snail mail. If you would like to get your newsletter a week earlier thru e-mail please send your name and e-mail address to: ***headly @comcast.net.*** This would save a tree and reduce postal cost.

Our Children Remembered

As a regular feature, the newsletter acknowledges anniversaries of the deaths of our children/siblings and their birthdays. This issue covers the months, January and February. If information about your loved one is missing, incorrect or our chapter files are in error, please send the correct data, including your name, address, and telephone number, the name of your loved one and the birthday and date and cause of death to the newsletter editor, Ed Motuzas, 26 Simmons Dr., Milford, MA 01757-1265.

Anniversaries

January

ROY RANDALL
CHRISTOPHER D. DiLORENZO
LILLIAN "LILLY" M. PROUTY
EVAN M. RODRIGUES

February

DANIEL J. SCOTT Jr.
KAITLYN KENNEDY
KIMBERLEE KANE

Birthdays

January

KELSEY MULKERRINS
OLIVIA MARIE CATARINA
MANUEL (MANNY) PENICHE
LILLIAN "LILLY" M. PROUTY
NATALIA FELINA KI
ADAM MICHAEL BELYEA

February

LEA M. SIEBERT
MATTHEW DENICE
CYNTHIA ZOTTOLI
ETHAN WAYNE MILLER
SEAN M. THERRIEN
JULIE A. SLOCUM
STACEY ANN MAHONEY
CHRISTOPHER D. DiLORENZO
JOSHUA JOSEPH MARRONE
ANDREW DELPRETE

Softly...may peace replace heartache and cherished memories remain with you always on your child's birthday.

THE SIBLING CORNER

This page is dedicated to siblings together adjusting to grief thru encouragement & sharing

"Siblings Walking Together." We are the surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends. We are brought together by the deaths of our brothers and sisters. Open your hearts to us, but have patience with us. Sometimes we will need the support of our friends. At other times we need our families to be there. Sometimes we must walk alone, taking our memories with us, continuing to become the individuals we want to be. We cannot be our dead brother or sister; however, a special part of them lives on with us.

When our brothers and sisters died, our lives changed. We are living a life very different from what we envisioned, and we feel the responsibility to be strong even when we feel weak. Yet we can go on because we understand better than many others the value of family and the precious gift of life. Our goal is not to be the forgotten mourners that we sometimes are, but to walk together to face our tomorrows as surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends.

DEAR MOM & DAD – A NOTE FROM YOUR SURVIVING CHILD

Dear Mom & Dad,

There may be moments when you wonder about me. How I am doing since our precious family member was stolen from us. A few things I wish you would know:

- I am hurting so much, but afraid to share with you just how much, lest I add to the tremendous pain I see you are suffering
- I don't know what to say to you sometimes. I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing. I'm afraid of saying the right thing
- I know you knew my siblings from the day they were born, but I knew them my entire life. We were so close in years and they were older than me and so there is not a day of my life that they did not exist. You have years of memories before they were here. My life without them started the day they died
- I feel unloved sometimes as I watch you fuss over them instead of me who is still here. I understand why and don't begrudge you, but some days it stings
- I feel guilty for not protecting them and don't understand the lion that roars inside of me from all this hurt
- I've become fiercely protective of my other siblings and you. Don't mistake that façade of strength to mean I'm okay
- I don't understand this grief and that makes me question how I could possibly know how to help you and our family with their grief. But somehow feel responsible to do so
- I worry as I watch you fade and diminish from your grief
- I wish you could kiss this and make it all better, like you did when I was little and scraped myself. I know you can't but I still look up to you and the little child in me still wants it with all my heart.
- I don't blame you for their death
- I know I may be hard to handle: angry, sullen, distant. Please know that is just the hurt coming from my deep pain that I sometimes direct at you because I can't get to the one that is responsible
- Under all the ugliness, I still love you very much

JULIE BROWN

Julie Brown lost her sister Amy to homicide in 2016 and has spent the past years trying to care for her surviving son and her parents while navigating the stressful path of the justice system. She has learned from having a high profile case associated with the loss of her sister, that finding any small point of gratitude is a powerful way to survive and endure the complexity of grief that comes from sudden and violent loss. She and her husband Jeff reside in Pennsylvania where they are actively involved in their church and helping other families deal with loss to homicide.

A very special thank you goes out to those people that facilitate our meetings every month. It is through their unselfishness in stepping up, that makes our chapter a safe place for the newly bereaved to get through the grieving process.

Thank you for your involvement and continued support.

Mitchell Greenblatt *(Ian's Dad)*
Linda Teres *(Russell's Mom)*
Janice Parmenter *(Tyler's Mom)*
Judy Daubney *(Clifford Crowe's Mom)*

Shifting our Thinking

Since our son, Tony, drowned in 2011, I have often wondered what does normal look and feel like after child loss. Sometimes nothing seems normal and sometimes things seem almost normal but not exactly. One term I often hear referred to is the "new normal."

Frankly, I liked my normal before Tony died. Due to that liking, the term "new normal" was not descriptive enough. For it to fit me, it needed to be "new but not quite normal" or "empty new normal" or even "unwanted new normal".

As I have traveled this journey of child loss for 8 years, I've had time to reflect. Like the picture, sometimes I think normal is this way and other times it is surely that other way. I know I cannot live in a constant state of flux, so have decided to try and shift my thinking instead of trying to define normal. After all, I am suspect that I and my family were really not exactly normal in the first place but a little quirky instead.

For months after my child's death, I wondered what people thought of me. Was I too sad, was I not sad enough, was I doing what I should, or was I doing what I shouldn't. I found to get answers I had to start to shift my thinking.

I could no longer allow those thoughts of should or shouldn't occupy my brain space. For one thing, my brain has surely shrunk since our loss. I can't remember things easily recalled before. I can't remember who you are and sometimes even wonder who I am!

I am shifting my thinking by first clearing my head. I evicted the family of should's and should have's. They were really troubling to me. The eviction notice took awhile to work out in my mind, but the should's, though sometimes visiting briefly, are pretty much gone from sight.

I then looked across the street and saw the family of expectations. Some of this family was closely related to me and others in the family were mere acquaintances. They seemed to have good intentions in steering me the right direction, but their right direction was not always my right direction. They too were kicked to the curb. My new mantra is "NO EXPECTATIONS" from them or from me. This has allowed disappointment to leave with them!

I also had some very strange next door neighbors. On one side was the timeline family and on the other side was the couch potatoes. They both had to go find a new neighbor other than me. The timelines were not only filled with expectations of theirs (not mine) but also seemed to almost have a stop watch to ensure my "healing" was moving swiftly along.

Those couch potatoes were just as bad. They could care less if I put one foot in front of the other. Sometimes, instead of helping me move forward they seemed to almost pull me back!

I am still very much working on shifting my thinking. Sometimes, I believe I have it figured out and then a life challenge comes along to shake my confidence.

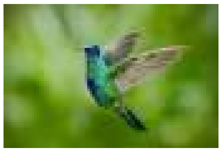
I am looking for some new neighbors. I am hoping you might be willing to join me on this journey and become one of my new neighbors accepting of a little quirky!

Forever Tony's Mom
Debbie Rambis

Reflections on Grief Ten Years Later

By Linda Campanella

It's shortly after sunrise and I am sitting on the deck of my cabin in the Berkshires waiting for a visit from my hummingbird. I yearn to hear the unmistakable vibration of her wings flapping as she hovers nearby.



Six months after becoming a motherless daughter in September 2009, I was alone in this same spot and, for the first time, allowing myself to indulge my immense, intense sadness. As I sat staring at the lake, alone with my grief in a location where I especially missed my mother Nan, suddenly a hummingbird flew in front of me and hovered no more than two feet away. I could have reached out and touched her.

(continued on page 6)

(continued from page5)

Over the years the hummingbird, and I'm sure it's the same one, has returned to visit me occasionally, and always at the very same spot. And in all these years I've never stopped trying to photograph her to provide family members proof of this miraculously wonderful visitor.

I have no doubt the hummingbird is my hummingbird. Nor have I any doubt she is a messenger dispatched on an important mission: to signal my mother wants me to know that she knows I'm thinking of her and wishing she were here.

Today I am actively wishing she were here, in the place she loved so much.

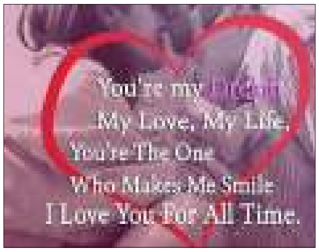
The ten-year anniversary of her death at age 74 from metastatic lung cancer is just days away. As I anticipate this milestone, sadness that had receded as my grief mellowed is surfacing again. It is an odd sensation, this anticipation of an anniversary reminding me viscerally of the wrenching anticipatory grief I experienced as Mom's terminal disease progressed and the disorienting grief that engulfed me after she finally succumbed.

When my grief was most acute, I obsessively surrounded myself with anything having to do with birds, as birds had played a poignant role in Mom's last months and days. I waited impatiently for a first dream in which my departed mother would return. I looked for her shape, or the letters of her name, in the clouds. I half-expected her to appear around a corner whenever I was out and about, so I was always on the lookout. Once, while driving on the Mass. Pike soon after her death, I spotted a Volkswagen Bug with license plate NAN driving ahead of me, so with my heart racing I raced up alongside the car to see if my mother was suddenly back from wherever she'd gone when she left us; the first car she ever owned was a VW Bug.

While still grieving intensely I immersed myself in poetry, which had been a great love of my mom's during her lifetime. I tried listening to the music of French chanteuse Edith Piaf, one of Mom's favorites, but it brought sobs, not solace. Less than two months after she died my overflowing grief found release on the pages of what became a memoir, written and edited in less than three months' time and published two years later. Initially I re-read parts of this story of our last year together almost daily to feel connected with Mom. Then weekly. Now not so much. Mercifully time has done much to tame the grief and mend a broken heart.

It was a very long time before my mother finally appeared in a dream. In ten years I've probably had only ten dreams of her, each of which I've forced myself to remember in the morning and record in writing for a file labeled "Dreams of Nan." Occasionally I've emailed my three siblings to share the dream with them.

I pulled out that file yesterday. On April 18, 2011, I wrote this to Eric, Paula and Claudia: *I had a vivid dream of Mom last night—really only my second since she died. The first was, as I think I excitedly told or wrote to you all, one in which she telephoned me from wherever she is, and it was clear she was calling me from "there." I asked her frantically if she had called Dad too, and she had. It was an awesome, if hard to explain, experience. Last night I dreamed we were together on the deck at the lake having conversation; there were many times in the dream when we were making intense eye contact during our chit chat, and several times when she gave me typical Nan looks (a smile, a smirk,…). I woke up soon after she and I made plans to go see the newly released "Jane Eyre" movie together. And then I couldn't go back to sleep.*



Ten years after losing her, what I wouldn't give to see her radiant smile or signature smirk again! And how wonderful it would be to make intense eye contact during chit chat here on the deck, or to see a movie together!

Never again, I know. It still hurts to acknowledge this.

Today I will settle for a visit from my hummingbird, and again I will try to capture her in a photograph. As I sit here, as I have on numerous other occasions poised to snap a photo, I am thinking, wishing, and even praying "Come back, come back!" Literally I am wishing the bird would return, but on a deeper level, my yearning may be a prayer that the woman this beautiful bird represents would herself come back. Come back to me, Mom. I still miss you terribly. Have coffee with me on the deck at Wildwood, the place you loved so much. Come back. Come back.

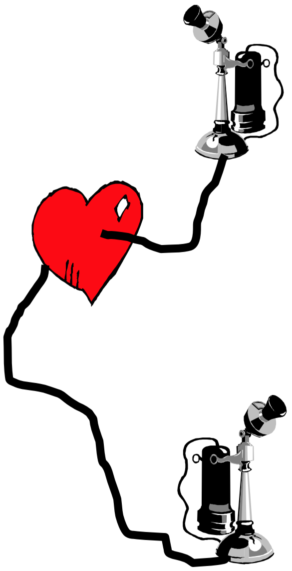
About the Author-----------

Linda Campanella of West Hartford is an advocate for compassionate end-of-life care and author of the award-winning memoir ***When All That's Left of Me Is Love: A Daughter's Story of Letting Go***.

Phone Friends

Sometimes it helps to just be able to talk to someone; maybe at a time when pain or stress seems too much to bear. We maintain a list of Telephone Friends; people who are willing to listen, to commiserate, to give whatever support they can. In a time of need, feel free to call one of our Telephone Friends.

Ed & Joan Motuzas, ...**Scott**, age 31, Kidney and Liver Failure, ..…..(508)473-4239
Janice Parmenter, …...**Tyler**, age 29, Chronic Addiction, ………..….(508)528-5715
Judy Daubney, ……...**Clifford**, age 27, Suicide, …………………....(508)529-6942
Linda Teres,………....**Russell**, age 19, Automobile Accident, ……....(508)366-2085
Mitchell Greenblatt,…**Ian**, age 18, Automobile Accident,……….... (508)881-2111
Sandra Richiazzi…...**Bryan,** age 17**,** Automobile Accident,………..(508)877-8106
Sarah Commerford….**Timothy,** age 21, Homicide…………………...(508)429-9230



It is always useful to have more Telephone Friends; individuals who are willing to provide support and comfort via the telephone. The chapter provides guidance for those who want to help. When you listen and talk to the bereaved, you make a difference. A longer list of Telephone Friends increases the likelihood that someone will be available when needed. Call Ed Motuzas at (508) 473-4239 if you would like to be a Telephone Friend.

PROTESTING "HOW ARE YOU?" GREETINGS

The person checking you out at the grocery store, the neighbors you barely know when they pass you on the street, the person handing out the bulletins when you enter church, all say casually, "How are you?" or "How are you doing?" as easily and frequently as they say hello. When and how did this become the new normal for greeting in our society? The problem for me and other grieving parents, siblings and grandparents is: How do you answer that question to someone who really doesn't want to know how you're doing? Also, you may not know them well enough to want to give them an honest answer or are not in a situation to give an honest response.

This simple question has raised an ongoing dilemma for me and for most of the bereaved people I have worked with over the last 35 years. In the groups I have facilitated, we have struggled with how to respond. Of course, there are the responses we would LIKE to give such as: "My son was killed in an accident last month. How do you think I'm doing?" "I'm doing terrible right now." "If you have a half hour to sit down with me and listen, I will give you an honest answer." "I don't think you want an honest answer to that question." Instead, we try to be more polite. A few of the parents have shared responses the groups liked and felt would be more acceptable such as: "I'm doing as good as can be expected." and "Not so good right now." or "Just doing the best I can." My way to protest this inane question is to simply not respond when I am having a hard day with my grief. I then change the topic.

We all hate being dishonest and saying, "fine" or "good" even though that is the easiest way out. I think we should start a petition to ban the misuse of this question as a greeting. We could probably get thousands of signatures. I need to admit though that even I have slipped at times and said, "How are you?" as part of a greeting. As soon as I say those words, I want to slap my mouth! Perhaps we should come up with big buttons to wear that say, "Please don't ask me how I am doing."

Of course, there are times when it is very appropriate to ask someone you know and care about how they are doing, but that is only when you are in a private setting and have the time to hear an honest answer. Even then, it is better to phrase it a little different. "How are you coping at this time?" or "I know this is a hard time for you, but I really do want to know how you are doing." or "On this roller coaster of grief, how is today treating you?"

The next important thing to remember is that when you get an answer, you should avoid trying to come up with something to make the person "feel better". There is nothing magical or profound to say to make everything okay for the grieving parent and you are more likely to say something that is at minimum, irritating, or worse, offensive.

Of course, with The Compassionate Friends audience, I am preaching to the choir, but you may want to share this with friends and relatives and raise awareness – or start the petition!

Janalee Tomaseski-Heinemann

A SPECIAL LOSS: LIVING WITH THE LOSS OF A SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD

I do not believe there is any experience in life as traumatic or life-altering as the loss of a child. The loss of a special needs child often brings a unique twist to this excruciating experience.

Those who have not been lucky enough (yes, I said lucky enough) to have a special needs child in their life may not understand the unique circumstances that are presented by such a situation. Most parents, despite themselves, when they learn they are to be parents start to dream about the life of their new offspring. Nobody envisions their baby as less than perfect, their child's life as less than blessed. When parents learn their child has developmental issues, disorders that will equate to "special needs" all its life, they are thrown into a state of grieving for both their child and themselves. This is true for every parent whenever they learn this news. It may be at birth or even in the womb, or later as development lags or an injury or disease creates damage to the brain or central nervous system. Most overcome this and begin to do the work needed to give their child the best life possible.

It is indeed hard work to care for a special needs child. It can consume every minute of every day and result in a life given only to the needs of that child. Every parent faced with this does what they can as they are capable physically and emotionally. That child and its care become your life, in many cases quite literally. But those parents are rewarded. It is incredible to see the world through the eyes of one of these children. My daughter was that child. Nobody or anything I have ever experienced in life taught me more than my daughter Erin did. No matter how hard my day was, coming home to Erin and her smile made everything right and the world brighter. I was able to marvel at small things that because of her I realized were major experiences and great achievements that few others even noticed. The world with Erin in it was brighter, happier, filled with hope and offered more opportunity than we probably deserved.

That is the beauty of a special needs child. Others may see them as needing and taking but those of us fortunate enough to live in their presence understand they are mostly giving. When these special people give they also give with all they have and give freely with no caveats or expectations. They are the personification of pure joy. When that life is taken from us it leaves a huge hole, a chasm of emptiness. It changes our lives as parents immediately and immeasurably.

Everything, out of necessity, revolved around them. That hard work we came to almost cherish, the mindset of worry and care that was our constant companion are gone in an instant. Selfishly, I also immediately missed the brightening Erin brought my life. My ability to mirror her in smiling at life and appreciating even the smallest wonder was gone. It was at that moment that my wife and I realized how much we needed her. We were "special needs" parents. For 25 years we had lived each day with this as our blueprint for life. In the blink of an eye, it was gone with Erin.

Other people, meaning well, would tell us it was a blessing that we no longer had to deal with all that. They could not have been more wrong. It is eleven years since Erin's death and I still find myself seeking to find a new meaning, a defining vision to replace my life as Erin's parent and caregiver. There are other wonderful things in our lives but none rise to the level of our time with Erin and I now believe they never will.

Yet, thanks to her, I go on and see life for what it is. I remember how she marveled at small things that others might miss, I experience something that would have made her laugh and I laugh. I look into the eyes of other special needs people when I come upon them and in their eyes, I see her reflected back on me. I tell their parents they are lucky. Some understand and smile, others look puzzled until I explain how much I miss my special girl. They are lucky and I hope they cherish every minute of their time with that special child. I now look back and I cherish every memory of every minute of my time with Erin. I am so thankful today for that time. My loss is real and deep but I still count myself lucky to have been a "special" dad to a truly "special" girl.

DAVID HINES
TCF, ST. PAUL, MN

David Hines served as a police officer for 29 years in Minnesota, 23 years in investigations, 12 years as a coordinator for juvenile programs and a community restorative justice program. He also co-authored two curricula for training in restorative justice and written several articles on the same in various journals on criminal justice. He and his wife Colleen raised three daughters; Heather, Erin and Amy. Erin was a special needs child who died somewhat mysteriously at the age of 25 in April 2005. That event introduced David and Colleen to the St. Paul Chapter of TCF, an experience very much needed and appreciated. Today the Hines family lives in Lake Elmo, MN and has added three glorious grandchildren to the family.

Other Area TCF Chapters

MA/CT Border Towns Chapter (Dudley, Webster areas)
Chapter Leaders: Paul & Anne Mathieu
(508) 248-7144……..ampm1259@charter.net

South Shore Chapter (Hingham, Weymouth areas)
Chapter Leader: Mercedes Kearney
(781) 749-5625….mdkearney@comcast.net

Worcester Chapter
Chapter Co-Leaders: Lisa Holbrook
(774) 482-6066…..sixholes@charter.net
Mary Vautier….
(508) 393-7348….mjvautier@msn.com

Central Middlesex Chapter (Needham, Concord)
Chapter Leader: Carol Gray-Cole
(781) 444-1091……..cgc603@aol.com

Another Sweet Good-Bye

Some people stay in your mind, haunting you, lingering in your thoughts. I met such as a mother at a Compassionate Friends meeting some time back. She was fearful, frightened, heart-broken and very specific about her wishes. Her only child had died, and this was her first Compassionate Friends meeting.

She then faithfully attended meetings, listening to others and absorbing what was said and occasionally contributing. One evening she connected with the guilt that every parent feels when a child dies. It matters not that we couldn't control the circumstances. What matters is that our child has died. We feel guilt. We say "If only…." so many times that it is almost a mantra.

Her body language changed instantly. I noticed that her head was up, her shoulders were back. Her subconscious had acknowledged that her feelings were the same as every other mother's feelings. Imagined guilt can wear us down.

Three months later she called me. She wanted to inform me that she had identified the monster that had been eating at her for this long time. Her conscious mind had accepted what her subconscious mind had known.

While I will miss her sharp repartee and the smile that began gracing her face, I know that we have served our purpose. She has been freed from the demon of an irrational emotion. Now she keeps her child in her heart as she gently and graciously moves through this life.

The paradigm of Compassionate Friends is the opposite of the paradigm of life. We are sad to see you when you arrive. We are happy when you are ready to go. You have found your way; this makes the good-bye a sweet one.

Annette Mennen Baldwin
TCF, Katy, TX
In Memory of my son, Todd Mennen

June 14, 2007 – The First 8 Hours

June 14, 2007 was the day that my family and I tragically lost our beloved Macy and Loral in a train accident.

To wake up one morning before daylight to find two of our beautiful young Grandaughters, dead in a ditch just down the street from where we live, and to stand by as their lifeless bodies were extracted from a crushed car, and then lain out on the road and covered up with sheets, is an event that no amount of descriptive words can ever be written to fully communicate the intensity of the horror, terror, trauma, pain, sadness, weakness, grief, disbelief, sorrow, helplessness, despair, despondency, confusion, outrage, pity, numbness, dumbness, regrets, illness, and all other impacts that are so invasive and so brutally assaulting your life at that time.

In a state of unimaginable horror, to come on the scene, and to call the girls names, to scream the girls names, to cry out their names, and to beg for response from them to answer. To hear Elizabeth, Doug, and Darian in the same horrific agony of their similar futile requests, still rings in my ears. There were no answers! There as nothing! This is what is termed as "The parent's Worst Nightmare".

To stand in the street for six hours, while the Coroner is performing his morbid duties, the Sheriff performing investigations, and the TV News Reporters converging and speculating on every bit of information they could find. All of this is a massive blur, as though a bomb had exploded and left us in a permanently disoriented state after the impact.

In deep anguish I questioned, Why did this happen? How could this happen? Where are the girls? Why couldn't it have been me? How will my family survive without the girls? What do we do? How do we make arrangements? Can I be strong? Will anyone help us?

After six nightmarish hours on the scene, I walked home from the accident site which was only a quarter mile. I was lost in time, not knowing what lies ahead for us. I was totally engulfed in the horror of this day. How could our lives ever be the same? Why not me? Why not me? Why did it have to be my little girls?

(continued on page 10)

(continued from page 9)

When I arrived at my home, there must have been Sixty people there. I spoke to my wife, Elizabeth, to my son, Dawson, to my son, Doug, and to my daughter, Donna, and then I went into the house and talked to a few friends before I tried to lay down for some rest and to gain some perspective. Rest would not come and perspective no where near. The horror and trauma continued to engulf and decay all of my senses.

I was not alone in the alien form of emotions. My helplessness and sadness of having to see my Wife, My Sons, the Mothers, and the Siblings having to endure the same brutal assault of this day, is beyond any attempts to convey with words.

Losing young Children! There is nothing worse! It is just not fair!

A book could be written about the first Eight hours of feelings and thoughts of that most horrible morning of our lives.

But this is not the end of the story! This is not all of the pain! The real pain came later! And Continues! The “Parent’s Worst Nightmare” has not ended, lives have been shattered! What does the future have in store for us?

Every day, we wear a mask to cover the deep scars that only “People Like Us”, who have lost young children, can possibly wear.

The true impact of losing young children was truly impossible to understand before, “but now”, to all who have lost young children, I deeply, and unfortunately, understand what you have experienced.

I know we will get better in time, but will always carry this burden. The mask will always be there.

Paw Paw
Donald Moyers
TCF, Galveston County, TX
In Memory of Macy and Loral

Why I Attend TCF Meetings

After a busy day at work, when I’m rushing home to eat dinner, then hop back in the car again, going to a TCF meeting sometimes feels like just another thing added to an already busy day. Although there are days I hate my hectic lifestyle, that same hectic lifestyle is what disguises my pain. I think of my son every day, the moment I wake up, on the drive to and from work, and before my head hits the pillow every night. But the busyness is what keeps me from dwelling on a pain that is now all too familiar. Then I arrive. The same people, who were there for me at TCF from the beginning, almost five years ago, greet me. The faces that were once strangers, I now call friends.

The “How are you doing?” greeting is genuine; they really listen and care when I tell them that things aren’t that great. I can be honest and know that THEY GET IT. As we go around the room and share our stories, I find myself saying, “I do that too … I’ve thought about that too ... That’s something I’ve been struggling with too ...” When our meeting ends, on my drive home, I can’t believe I even hesitated on coming to the meeting tonight. I needed to be there. Although the pain of losing my son has subdued over time, it still remains. I’m thankful for TCF, a place I can go where everyone knows my name and my hurt. At TCF, I can share a "glimpse" of what really weighs on my heart, which is very often different than the mask on my face.

Jennie Ewert
TCF, Gladwin, MI
In Memory of my son Zach

Groundhog Day

According to folklore, every year on this day, a groundhog named Punxsutawney Phil, in a little town by the same name in Pennsylvania, wakes from his winter slumber, rises from his cozy little burrow and gazes about at his surroundings. Legend has it that if he doesn’t see his shadow, he shakes himself off and ventures out to welcome an early spring. If he sees his shadow, he becomes frightened and quickly retreats down his hole to safety where he goes back to sleep and the winter weather continues. This year Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow, thus predicting another six more weeks of winter. When we lose a child, we seem to linger in a perpetual winter. For a very long time we see our world as a barren winter landscape. The warmth and love that our children brought to our hearts has been ripped away by their death and we’re left with a cold aching void. We are a little like Punxsutawney Phil. We might be afraid to come to our first Compassionate Friends meeting. We may want to hide from the world and stay in our burrows. But if we are very brave and come to a meeting, we will meet others who have survived the long cold winter of their hearts. We gather to share our stories, support each other, love each other and very slowly we begin to and rejoin life as best we can. Remember, we need not walk alone.

Janet G. Reyes
TCF/AAC

Closure, Is It a Reality?

The use of the word "closure" is often heard in public circles or in the media especially after a tragedy and implies finality. The word comes with the sense that there will be a time, day or event like a funeral, that marks when a grieving person will be "healed" or "over it," as though it were a disease and you could magically take a pill to be cured. There is an expectation that when the eulogies are said and the casseroles gone, magically the grief somehow goes away. *The truth is that those of us who are in TCF realize that the death of a child or sibling changes our lives forever, and we will never really truly "be over it."* Yes, we will not have the intensity of the pain and sorrow we had at the beginning of our grief. We will go on with life and find a new normal for us, but life will never be as it was before the death, and we will not ever be fully "healed." Sometimes those around us have attempted to comfort us by pointing to deadlines, replacements or "at least's." We have heard it said, "at least you have other kids," or "you can have another baby," or "hasn't it been 6 months?" Many see "comfort giving" as a short term support effort, and soon we will be "over it" as we are kept busy returning to the tasks of daily living and focusing on our blessings. These comments hurt rather than provide the comfort meant to provide.

Grief follows no plan, no stages, timetable, formula, or schedule. There are no road maps; there are no absolutes. We learn in TCF that everyone grieves differently. Grief is like being lost. The familiar things we relied on to live each day are gone. We must find new anchors or stabilizers along the way and learn a new way of relating to the world and people around us. We are forced to learn to live without our child or sibling. The reality of our loss often far outweighs what we have remaining. Grief is all consuming, distorts reality, and we begin to mark time in "before or after our loved one died." No-one can hurry the process of grief; no one can do it for us. Not even our spouses, parents or other children can help us in those early days. The truth is that when our grief is new, we feel exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually. We barely have enough energy to breathe. We feel as though we have no control over our lives any more, nor do we care. We realize on some level we are helpless. We might even feel hopeless or purposeless. Some of us feel isolated, lonely and misunderstood. Some feel like everything is trivia compared to the loss we have experienced. Some feel like the world is spinning on around us, and nobody really cares that our child, sibling or grandchild died. All of these feelings are normal and part of the grieving process. *And yes, we also need to realize it is a process, a very long, gradual and difficult process.* Time does not heal all wounds, but time softens the intensity of the grief. What helps is finding those who will listen with their hearts and give us hope and understanding. Those who will spend hours, days and months with us as we retell our story over and over so we can somehow believe it ourselves. What helps is to surround ourselves with those patient people and meaningful activities that comfort and support.

Gradually the cold darkness of grief begins to give way to the warmth of the memories, acceptance, purpose, and reinvestment in life. We learn to speak of our loved one without crying and we begin to accept that whatever time we had with him or her, we would have taken even if just but a moment. We learn that grief is the price we pay for loving our child or sibling so much, and we wouldn't want it any other way. Our relationships with family, friends and yes, even God, can be strengthened or challenged as we look for new ways to connect with them. We may lose old friends who don't really understand. We learn that problems in life are not overwhelming. We are handling the worst thing that can happen to us; what else can happen? We learn to more deeply cherish those we love. We help others in grief without batting an eye. Sometimes we pick up "gifts" along the way by becoming more caring, compassionate toward others, and appreciative for what is important in life. New strengths can develop as we find our new selves along the way. Life will be different as we learn to cope, but still have meaning.

For those of you who are new in your loss, we hope that you will continue to share your sorrow with us and learn from those further ahead on the path of grief. Someday it won't hurt as much as it does, and you won't always feel "this elephant on your chest." We encourage you to ask the family and friends around you for what you need and tell them when their expectations for you are too high. We hope you will explain to them that your grief is not on a timetable and will probably not ever reach what society calls "closure." Explain to them that you will always miss your child or sibling but you will learn to live with a broken heart. We hope you will inform them that the mention of your child's name is music to your ears and it's OK to talk about him or her. Your TCF friends will be with you and hold your hand every step of the way.

Carole Dyck
TCF, Verdugo Hills, CA

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Address Correction Requested

TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. The second, third, or fourth meeting might be the time you will find the right person - or just the right words said that will help you in your grief work.

TO OUR OLD MEMBERS

We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick. Each meeting we have new parents. THINK BACK... what would it have been like for you if there had not been any "oldies" to welcome you, share your grief, and encourage you? It was from them you heard, "your pain will not always be this bad; it really does get softer."