



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



NEWSLETTER

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.

July - August 2010

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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: **July 20th August 17th**

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 (Main St.) going north through downtown Milford (Main St.) at Tedeschi's Market on the left, 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. Our next two meetings will be on:

July 27th August 31st

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. ©2010

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**



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



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 | 508/620-0613 |
| Carmela Bergman | 508/359-8902 |
| Mitchell Greenblatt | 508/881-2111 |
| Judith Cherrington | 508/473-4087 |

The chapter address is:

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

Regional Coordinator

Rick Mirabile
11 Ridgewood Crossing
Hingham, MA 02043
Phone (781) 740-1135
Email: Rmirabile@comcast.net

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

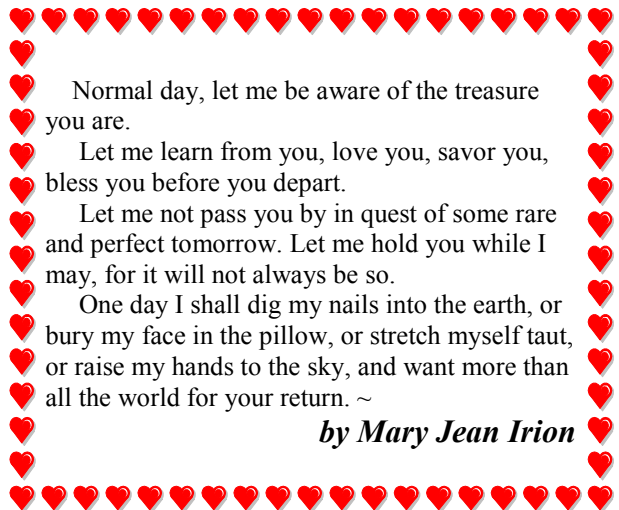
TRIBUTES, GIFTS AND DONATIONS

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.

Love Gifts

Mrs. Ruth Phillips in loving memory of her beloved son **Charles Phillips** on his birthday May 31st.
 Robert Hudson in loving memory of his sisters **Rita Hudson-Carney**, and **Beatrice Elizabeth Hudson**.
 Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Chinappi in loving memory of their son **Michael Chinappi** on his birthday April 25th.
 Mr. & Mrs. John Vautier in loving memory of their son **Corey S. Vautier** on his anniversary May 6th.
 Mrs. Janet R. Raneri in loving memory of her son **Major Robert M. Raneri** on his anniversary June 26th.
 Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Bergeron in loving memory of their daughter **Dolores Rose Bergeron** on her birthday May 15th and her anniversary May 28th.
 Mrs. Shirley A. Huntington in loving memory of her son **Russell D. Huntington**.
 Mr. Arthur W. Robinson III in loving memory of his son **Arthur William Robinson IV**.
 Mr. George J. Capadais in loving memory of his son **Robert G. Capadais** on his anniversary June 15th.
 Mr. & Mrs. George Reimann in loving memory of their daughter **Lisa Marie Simpson**.
 Mrs. Virginia A. Lombard in loving memory of her son **Robert L. Lombard Jr.** on his birthday July 22nd and his anniversary May 27th.
 Mrs. Dorothy A. Pisapia in loving memory of her son **Matthew Pisapia** on his anniversary June 10th.



 Normal day, let me be aware of the treasure
 you are.
 Let me learn from you, love you, savor you,
 bless you before you depart.
 Let me not pass you by in quest of some rare
 and perfect tomorrow. Let me hold you while I
 may, for it will not always be so.
 One day I shall dig my nails into the earth, or
 bury my face in the pillow, or stretch myself taut,
 or raise my hands to the sky, and want more than
 all the world for your return. ~
 by **Mary Jean Irion**



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 of July and August. 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 July

WILLIAM BRUCE-TAGOE
DANA NICOLE THERRIEN
JOSHUA WILLIAMS
SCOTT F. MOTUZAS
AIDAN JOSHUA GARVEY
NATHAN MILLER
ROBERT L. LOMBARD Jr.
2ND LT. USMC IAN THOMAS McVEY
JASELIS ALENA CAMACHO MONTALUO
DIXON BERGMAN

Birthdays July

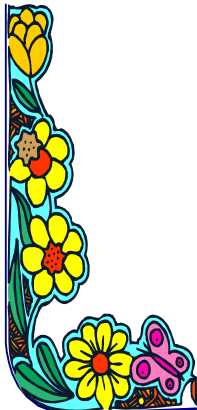
KAREN SWYMER-CLANCY
ROY RANDALL
DANA NICOLE THERRIEN
SHAWN P. MARKS
CHRISTOPHER SHEA
NATHAN MILLER
MICHAEL WEINSTOCK
KAITLYN KENNEDY
JASELIS ALENA CAMACHO MONTALUO
RICHARD G. CAPADAIS

August

NICOLAUS BRAYTON
DANIEL J. JOYCE
WILLIAM H. BARDOL JR.
RITA HUDSON-CARNEY
BRYAN SCOT LA VOIE
DAVID PELLETIER
ROBYN NELSON

August

CHRISTIAN ALBEE
ROBYN NELSON
JORDANA L. CASSIDY
MATHEAU VIRCA
JEFFREY CHERRINGTON
ANDREW P. BEACH
KEVIN HOLLAND
CLIFFORD CROWE
GREG BRUNO
DEBORAH NICHOLS-WEAVER
ELIZABETH CASEY



CHAPTER TID-BITS

Al Kennedy has graciously volunteered to make up picture buttons of our loved ones. The buttons are 2 1/4 inch diameter. If you have a photo of your child, you can e-mail it as an attachment to aksound@comcast.net or bring it to the next meeting. Al has a tool that will cut out the 2 1/4 inch diameter picture to fit it in the button. The circle is an approx. diameter of the button. A special thanks to *Al Kennedy*.





The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



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.

FOREVER ON MY MIND

When I attended my first meeting of the Bergen-Passaic Compassionate Friends, it was the day after my fifth birthday without my twin brother Alan. Up to then I was working nights and unable to attend meetings. Nine months later, May 1998 at a chapter meeting someone in the circle spoke of the tenth anniversary of his or her child's death. They said they no longer think of their child every day and it didn't bother them. This was shocking to me, not to mention upsetting. I could not imagine living a day without thoughts of him, both happy and sad. I went home very upset.

Even after five years I always thought of him each and every day. To this day I will lick the bowl of frosting and think of the times we fought over the bowl. After a snowstorm I write his initials in the snow. When I hear something funny I think of him. But I also think of all that he has missed. He would have gotten to know his six, soon to be seven nieces and nephews. We would have been able to enjoy many vacations together.

This June will be the ninth anniversary of his death. With the passing of time I have adjusted to not talking to him every day (we both had 800#'s at work). I do think of what he would say when I have a problem to work out. I think the part of the old me is returning. I have started to exercise again. This is something I used to love to do before Alan got sick. I have taken steps to advance my career, something I was planning at the time of his death. I also think I took on some of his traits like becoming a better writer and not emptying the laundry basket after each wash.

There are now many more good days than bad. But almost nine years after Alan's death, I am probably the only adult male to cry at a children's movie. In "Rug Rats in Paris" Chucky's father remarries sometime after his mother's death. Tommy is thrilled that he will have two mommies, one on earth and one in heaven. I am forced to remember that I can't have another Alan.

I have given myself a job that I love: The job of keeping Alan's memory alive. I do this by putting this newsletter together, collecting license plates, with his name, for each new state that I visit, donating to his scholarship fund and in many other ways.

When "Phantom of the Opera" opened on Broadway I had no desire to see it. That was until it opened in Philadelphia, after Alan's death. Alan was a publicist in Philly and the show was playing at the only theatre where I had not seen something Alan had publicized. One of the songs has a line "There will never be a day in which I won't think of you." I think this will be true for a long time to come.



Daniel Yoffee
Reprinted by permission of author



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



TCF...Unconditional Caring

My Son Philip died in August 1994, when he was 26 years old. He died by suicide, influenced by a genetic illness, bipolar mood disorder (manic depression). I well remember how I flinched inwardly when people began referring to Philip's having "committed suicide." It seemed to diminish my wonderful son, to make him into what he never was: a kind of criminal. I wanted people to remember the beauty of his soul, yet what they focused on was the shocking way in which he died.

So it has been personally important to me to learn that TCF has made a change in the language it uses related to suicide. TCF now uses the terms "died of suicide" or "died by suicide" in all publications and presentations. The new, emotionally neutral language helps to lift the burden of stigma from all of us whose children or siblings died by suicide. It gives us strength and helps us heal.



If your child or sibling has died in one of society's less "acceptable" ways by suicide, murder, alcoholism, from a drug overdose, AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases or in prison, do know that TCF does not accept society's stigmas. There is no room for blame or condemnation when all our hearts are aching for the children we no longer have. We honor your child and your grief, no matter the cause of death.

Similarly, if you are a parent or sibling who may feel "other" in our oft-judgmental society, please know that you will not be "other" in TCF. We welcome you with understanding and compassion, whatever your age, your race, your ethnicity, whether you are rich or poor, married or single, gay or straight, whatever your religion or lack of religion. We welcome you.

And if you have endured the most terrible tragedy, if you have had more than one child or sibling die or have lost all your children or siblings, you are welcome. Many people are terrified that we are "contagious" because the worst nightmare has become a reality in our lives. They don't want to believe what we know: that neither we, nor they, can keep our children safe and alive. So they avoid us. And they especially may avoid you who have had more than one child or sibling or all your children die, because the horror of what has happened in your lives terrifies them. We welcome you, and we honor your courage and want to be helpful to you in your healing. We offer our compassion and understanding to all parents and siblings and other family members who are on this very difficult journey into healing.

May the unconditional acceptance one finds in TCF someday be mirrored in a wiser and more tolerant society.

*By Kitty Reeve
TCF, Marin & San Francisco, CA*

The Myth of Managing Grief

Not long ago, a friend in New York said that she often feels cut off from the rest of the country because Sept. 11 is still so much with most New Yorkers. "We've all gotten on with our lives, and if you don't go down to the (World Trade Center) site, there are no visible traces," she said. "But there's still so much grief and sadness hanging in the air."

People outside of New York can't really understand, said my friend. "You talk with them and, if you didn't lose someone directly in the twin towers, it's like their tone says, 'Hey, shouldn't you be moving on?' They don't get that there's a collective grief. I actually prefer it when people don't even ask how it's going. It's easier." Our American culture boasts many virtues and several strong suits, but grieving - collectively or individually, isn't one of them.

Unlike older societies, we have few formal grieving rituals in place to guide us. So, we try to tackle grief in our typical American way - as if it's a problem to be solved, an illness to be cured, an unnatural, machine-gumming breakdown that needs to be fixed, ASAP. Perhaps more phobic about suffering than any society in history, Americans tend to start the clock ticking early in "managing grief." While solicitous and caring of the newly bereaved, we encourage heartbroken mates and parents to medicate themselves so they can "keep it together" through the funeral. This ignores the fact that wailing and keening and "losing it" are a pretty accurate rendering of what humans inside feel like when someone we love dies or leaves us. But, in our culture, public wailing and keening are considered bad forms; they are seen as unwelcome reminders of pathology among "healthy" people.

Even the most devastating loss - that of a child by a parent - seems to carry an unwritten statute of limitations on grief, something I learned several years ago when I reported on an international organization called Compassionate Friends. Founded in England in the late 1960s, the massive support network's chapters provide something that bereaved parents and siblings can't get from the rest of the world: "unconditional love and understanding" (as its informal credo states) with no expiration date.

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The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



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A GRIEF SHARED

As one member told me, she knew that a Compassionate Friends meeting was the one place she could go and never hear the unintentionally accusing question, "How many years ago did you say your child died?" Grief is not like an illness, to be fought and cured with medicine or chemotherapy and radiation.

Generalizations can be made about human behavioral tendencies, and time lines can be drawn for predicted "healing," but each person's grieving process is unique.

Some people never "get better." And nobody survives grief unchanged.

As Stephanie Ericsson wrote in "Companion Through the Darkness," grief is "a tidal wave that overtakes

you, smashes down upon you with unimaginable force, sweeps you up into its darkness, where you tumble and crash against unidentifiable surfaces only to be thrown out on an unknown beach, bruised, reshaped." Or, as a man who lost his 7-year-old son once confided, "I'd always thought of myself as a happy man, but that's gone now. We have moments of happiness, some of them long and filled with laughter, but the sense of what is lost is never far away."

In her book, Stephanie Ericsson also warned: "Grief makes what others think of you most. It shears away the masks of normal life and forces brutal honesty out of your mouth before propriety can stop you. It shoves away friends and scares away so-called friends and rewrites your address book for you."

**By Stephanie Salter
San Francisco Chronicle
Sunday April 7, 2002
(Reprint permission to TCF,
with proper acknowledgment)**

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)**
- Rick Dugan (Larry's Dad)**
- Janice Parmenter (Tyler's Mom)**
- Judy Daubney (Clifford Crowe's Mom)**

This will not be the typical article you often see in a professional publication. There will be no references to scholarly works, no discussion of what has been gleaned from years of research, no statistics, no methodology. Rather, this will be a story from the heart, one that I hope may help psychologists first understand, and then do what they do best. I had the inspiration to write this article just a week or so before the tragedy in New York. In my frame of reference, following the horror at the World Trade Center and Pentagon and in Pennsylvania, perhaps this is divine inspiration – this is something I just have to do.

What is it like to live through such a profound grief, to have your whole life changed in an instant, to have much of your future taken away, and to find yourself in a world that you don't recognize? We have all had at least a taste of this, as Americans, our lives have been changed by these events. There is a loss of a sense of security and for what we thought our future would be. But what about those people who have sustained a more profound and excruciating loss – the loss of a loved one who was treasured and so much a part of the fabric of your very life. What is it like to have that person taken away so abruptly, to one minute have that loved one beside you as a part of your dream, and the next to have that love ripped away from you? What do psychologists and other helping professionals need to know in order to help those who have sustained such a loss?

This story is very personal for me and, therefore, somewhat difficult to tell. As many of you know, my daughter, Maria-Victoria, was killed in an automobile accident just three blocks from my home as her brother was driving her home from school. A speeding driver ran through a red light and smashed into their car killing Maria-Victoria instantly. She was 13 years old. It was a normal day, bright and sunny and my life was going along as normal. My daughter was a beautiful, intelligent and accomplished person known for her extraordinary kindness and compassion for others. She was innocence and pure love blossoming into a leader of others and she was building the confidence that could have taken her very, very far in this life. In one second she was here, in one second she was not. The fifth anniversary of her death was just two days after the New York tragedy. Within a few months of her passing, I joined a group called Compassionate Friends, which is a self-help group for parents who have lost a child. It was a very good move.

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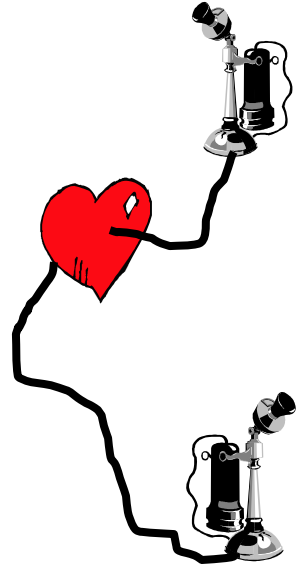
The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



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)620-0613
- Mitchell Greenblatt,...**Ian**, age 18, Automobile Accident,..... (508)881-2111
- Judith Cherrington,...**Jeffrey**, age 48, Cancer,(508)473-4087
- Gloria Rabinowitz.....**Gianna Rose Therese**, Still Born.....(774)287-6497
- Sandra Richiazzi.....**Bryan C. Plunkett**, Automobile Accident,.....(508)877-8106



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.

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It is said that the most profound loss a person can have is the loss of a child, I can tell you that this is the truth. However, for those who have not lost children, the most profound loss is the one they have experienced or are experiencing at the present time. Those of us in this group frequently lament about how ill-equipped others who have not experienced such pain and grief are in dealing with it. Ministers are often the focus of such discussions for example and we have often discussed how we can let others, especially professionals, know how it really is, what helps and sometimes, more importantly, what doesn't help. This is the purpose of this story, this Dialogue, to let my fellow psychologists know some things that in the future will help them be able to help. It is based on my own personal experiences as well as the numerous Compassionate Friends who have come into my life.

You have all heard or read about the stages of grief. The work that was done in this area by pioneers such as Elizabeth Kubler-Ross is very valuable in understanding the emotions of grief. Some professionals may feel that they can help people with grief because they have studied these stages and know the sequence by heart. Throw it all away. People who have sustained profound loss do not want to hear about the stages of grief – it's almost an insult. They do want to know that what they are feeling is normal, that they are not "crazy", that others have felt or done the same things.

There is no sequence of grief, it is a constant, evolving journey with many diversions into emotional peaks and valleys along the way. It is a journey and it is never over.

It is true that at the time of the event you are in a state of shock and numbness. In my case after a telephone call, I made my way to the accident site. It was eerily quiet with cars backed up in four different directions at the intersection, so that I had to drive on the wrong side of the road to get there. When I got to the scene I was no longer within myself, I must have dissociated. I felt like I was observing everything as if I was in a movie. The people in all the cars were watching me. I imagined they were saying "that's the mother". I was aware that I was playing this "role". I imagine that many of the relatives looking for loved ones in New York must have felt this way too. At the hospital I was placed in a special room, meant to be a comfort but cut off from others. It did allow me to get out of the movie. What helped? Friends coming to be with me. You need to hold and touch people, you need them to hold you and just "be there" for you. What didn't help? Waiting 1 ½ hours to be told whether my children were alive or dead. I already knew in my heart and soul that Maria-Victoria was gone from this life but to have a doctor finally come in and say in a cool and dispassionate manner that "your daughter is deceased" made me angry. A simple "I'm so sorry", a touch on the hand and some semblance of compassion would have endeared this doctor to me for life. Why is that so hard to do?

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The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



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We are blessed with this state of shock that comes almost immediately after suffering a traumatic loss. It allows us to do the things we have to do. For many of us this is very, very important. I needed to make sure that Maria-Victoria had a wonderful, up-lifting funeral service that told the world about the wonderfulness of my little girl. I needed to write an obituary that would touch the hearts of Atlanta. I needed to comfort her teachers and students at her school, thereby comforting myself. I needed to be there for the hundreds of people who came to show they cared. Some people criticized the news coverage in New York of friends and relatives showing flyers of their missing loved ones saying it was exploitation. I spoke to them through my TV set saying – “you just don’t get it, they need to do this, they need to let others know about the one they love, they need to feel like they are doing something to take care of them.”

What helped me so much in the initial weeks after the accident were touches from the hearts of other people. I savored all the cards, the incredible amount of food from individuals and whole schools, letters and phone calls from people I had never met who were touched by my daughter’s story and the physical presence of people I was close to. Such heartfelt gestures give life when life has gone out of your existence.

There is a time when you have to go back to work and start to live this new life. I was fortunate to have such a wonderful, supportive staff that literally carried me through that first year. Others are not so fortunate. Some have to go back to work just days after the funeral and are expected to perform as if nothing has happened. When a traumatic loss has struck you, you are amazed and perhaps a little bit angry that the world has gone on. You say to yourself, “how can these normal things still go on, how can people laugh, don’t they know the world has ended?” You think to yourself that you will never laugh again, that you will never feel joy again, it’s incomprehensible to think that you could.

During that first year (time will vary among folks) you are literally “out of your mind”. Believe it or not, there is actually a “physical pain”, usually in your heart and chest area and all over your body at times, experienced by many that is excruciating and you think will never go away. Mine lasted about two months and then just floated away. It was a relief to say goodbye to that constant companion. You are “out of your mind” because you think about your loved one constantly, probably a million times a day it certainly seems. That doesn’t leave much room for concentration and memory. Those who have experienced such loss need to know that this is perfectly normal. It is perfectly normal to put the iron in the refrigerator. At work if you don’t have support, you will certainly not be able to function like you used to.

You may be able to do some things on “automatic pilot” but this is not the time to be making major decisions and you, and the business you work for – need to give you leeway for your memory lapses and perhaps loss of drive. Every day is a struggle just to get up and live. Every day you get up and live is an accomplishment. So be supportive and tolerant, make it a point to know about these cognitive disturbances, help the person you are helping to understand them. And, if you can, help their employers to know what to expect and how to give support.

There is no timetable for grief. It is highly offensive to the grief-stricken to hear things like, “you need to move on”, or to receive messages that you are expected to be back to normal and “over it” in a certain time frame. I once had a principal come up to me about three months after Maria-Victoria died and say, “Well, have you gotten over the death of your lovely daughter?” I swear this is true. My response was, rather curtly, “I will never get over it”. This kind-hearted man had no clue about how much that remark hurt. Let me tell you that you never get over it. You are a changed, different person from the one you were before the death of your loved one. We don’t want to get over it because that suggests that we can somehow let that love go. That brings me to the dreaded “C” word. A word hated by the bereaved and one especially pertinent to those people who have loved ones missing in New York. The dreaded C word “closure”. I hate that word. I am offended by that word. Most of the bereaved I know hate it too. There is no such thing as closure, you never get over it and quit expecting us to do it. People need to learn to say something else to describe people who need to have something happen before they can continue with their personal grief. Something like “relief from uncertainty” is more like it.

There is usually a lot of support and attention paid to the bereaved at the time of the loss and for a short time afterward. But after a while that support fades and contacts drop off. Many, if not all, of my Compassionate Friends report that this is a time when you know who your real friends are. Sometimes people don’t know what to say and so avoid you. Especially in cases where children have died, people avoid you because they think it might be “contagious”. If this most horrendous of nightmares happens to you, it could happen to me. I don’t want to think about that so I’ll stay away from you. You may be shaking your head in disbelief, but it is true. Many find that family members are the least helpful. They do not want to bring it up because they think it will cause pain to you, but especially to them. If you remember one thing from this story, remember what is in this paragraph.

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The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



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The most precious words a person who has lost a loved one can hear are their loved one's name. Say it over and over again. It will not bring pain, it has great potential to bring joy and to heal. MARIA-VICTORIA, MARIA-VICTORIA, hearing her name always lightens my heart. In the beginning, people need to tell their story, over and over again. Your job is to listen, to give a hug or show that you feel for them. It was important for those missing loved ones in New York or for those who knew their loved one had died, to "tell their story". This is a part of the grief process, and a way to validate the strength of their continuing love for their loved one. It is a way to honor them and, most importantly, to assure that they will not be forgotten. That is the greatest fear of those of us who have lost our children (and probably for other bereaved persons as well). We do not want our loved ones to be forgotten. You are doing the bereaved a wonderful favor when you bring up their loved one's name and when you reminisce about something that they did or something special about them. It is a very, very special gift and so easy to give.

There can come a time when the bereaved person starts to refrain from bringing up their loved one's name or talking about them because they are afraid of making the other person uncomfortable. A lot of people don't know what to say and so they say nothing. You quickly learn who you can trust and who you can't to spill your heart to. People are afraid that what they might say will sound awkward or mistakenly think it will bring pain. This then can be misinterpreted by the bereaved person as a sign that you don't care. Never say "I know just how you feel" because you don't, you have no idea. Never say, "I don't know how you do it, if it was me I'd just die". My goodness, that implies that I must not have loved my child enough because I didn't die. What helps? A hug and saying "I think about you often", just a heartfelt hug, "I was thinking about Maria-Victoria today", "I know this is a hard time for you", "I am so sorry".

I went to see a therapist for about a year after Maria-Victoria died. What I liked about her the most was that she told me at the beginning that she knew very little about dealing with grief but felt that she was going to learn a lot by our time together. She did learn a lot and I got a chance to tell my story, to process how my life had changed and to run through ideas about how to redefine my life and redefine my relationship with my daughter. In essence, in the long term that is what we, as psychologists, need to do to help others. When you have experienced a traumatic loss you have to make a choice. You choose whether to retreat from life, to give up on life and what you held dear, or to grow from this horrendous experience.

Making this choice is not easy, but it is a choice. You also have to redefine your relationship with your loved one. You may not have a physical relationship anymore but you can choose to always have a strong and loving relationship. My feeling of connectedness with my daughter is very, very strong. She is very much a part of my life and will always be. I have redefined my relationship with her and do the things I want and need to do to keep our love and connection alive.

As you go on this grief journey, you do whatever feels right to do. There are no rules. In the beginning I would go to the cemetery and lay on a blanket and stroke the grass over her grave as if it was her hair. Imagine the sight of that to one that does not know. I still, after five years, have not washed the clothes from her clothes hamper (I probably never will). Before I moved, I would go into her bedroom at night, smell her sheets or sleep in her bed. I talk to her aloud every day. These are all perfectly normal things to do. As a psychologist, it is important to validate to the bereaved person that anything they want to do that brings them comfort is okay. We all have different ways of grieving and we all need to respect these different ways.

I am a very different person from the one I was before my daughter died. I think I'm a better person (a lot of my friends think so, too). What often comes out of tragedy is growth, often spiritual. I and everyone I know in Compassionate Friends no longer have any fear of death. Death is the door to where my daughter is. When fear is gone (the worst that could happen, has already happened), it is a very freeing experience. You are less afraid of change, you are less tolerant of arrogant, insensitive people or of doing things that don't have meaning for you anymore and you put your energy toward the things that are truly meaningful in this world. That doesn't mean you don't go through periods of sadness and despair and have to pull yourself up time and again – of course you do. You are not necessarily suffering from depression, but profound sadness and there is a difference. When you are depressed you don't want to do anything and you don't grow. When you are experiencing profound sadness, you still want to grow, to do things that will make a difference; you often feel compelled to do so.

As psychologists, and as friends or colleagues of those who have experienced a traumatic loss, we can help by supporting them on their own personal journeys, not by telling them where and when to go, but by being a friendly landmark along the way. We help by realizing there is no destination, not even an itinerary. At five years after my daughter's death, I probably think about my daughter about 500 times a day, rather than a million. Some would call that progress. I call it evolution.

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A few days ago after putting five heart balloons and flowers on my daughter's grave, I found a card and letter put there by one of her friends. What a gift to me and my daughter. I close this story with her words so that we can all remember what really matters.

I thought I saw you dancing
but it was only the leaves in the wind
I thought I heard you laughing
but it was only the waves of the sea
I thought I felt you touch me
but it was only a moonlit dream...
but I know I felt you in my heart
because I miss you very much.
I love you

I met a girl about a year ago who when I first saw her I thought it was you. I had to take a double glance and every time since then, when I see her from a distance or run into her I always think I see you! She favors you so much in appearance but I'm sure she could never be as loving, good-hearted and caring as you were. The angel ornament reminds me of you, always caring and watching out for others! Miss you more and more each day!
Friends Forever. Love Always, Kristen

Lynda Boucugnani-Whitehead, Ph.D.
TCF, Jonesboro, GA

A MESSAGE FOR BEREAVED FAMILIES *By The Rev. Al Miles*

I was recently asked to give a brief meditation at a memorial service.

Attending this ceremony were more than one hundred individuals who had suffered the death of a loved one. Some of the attendees, I learned, had experienced the death of a daughter or son.

During my 10-minute talk, I encouraged those assembled to freely express their grief. I also advised the group to remember their deceased loved ones in ways which bring them comfort, joy, and peace. Grief is healthy and necessary I said, it is normal to experience various aspects of this natural process over the course of a lifetime.

"From the very day my son died and on numerous occasions since - I've been told by others that grieving is morbid and wrong," declared a man named Michael. Three years ago his 12-year-old son, Daniel, accidentally fell from a ladder while helping his father paint their home. The boy sustained massive head injuries and died a few hours later in a nearby hospital.

Already racked with guilt for not "saving" his son from this fatal tragedy (even though he was on the other side of the house at the time), Michael said the advice some people offered him made matters worse.

"My sister, Ellen, is a real sweetheart," Michael acknowledged sincerely. "She's 15 months older than I and we've always been very close. Danny just loved her, she was a wonderful auntie.

"Maybe that's why she said all the things she did in an attempt to ease my pain."

Michael said as soon as his sister arrived at the emergency department of the hospital where Danny would eventually die, she began to provide what he termed "empty rumbings."

"I was standing all alone in a distant corner of this busy trauma room," Michael recalled. "I watched all these strangers desperately trying to save my son's life. It was an awful nightmare like viewing in slow motion the most frightening horror movie one could ever imagine."

Ellen arrived at the hospital shortly thereafter. Initially, Michael said, her actions were very comforting. "My sister gave me her usual warm embrace, told me she would remain by my side, and said her prayers would be nonstop," Michael remembered. "Given the grave circumstances, these responses were especially helpful. But, as Ellen continued to speak, her words became more cold and hurtful."

According to Michael, his sister began suggesting that Danny's death was condoned by God. "Ellen advised me to immediately 'let go' of my son. 'Don't be selfish,' she instructed. 'Danny's death is God's will. It's simply his time to go.'"

Michael said Ellen also implied that God had "spared" him from witnessing his son's death. "My sister told me 'God won't give you any more than you can handle. God knew you wouldn't be able to bear watching Danny fall from that ladder, so God placed you on the other side of the house. Therefore, you need to praise God for sparing you this terrible sight'."

Even though he realizes the genuine effort Ellen put forth in her attempt to comfort him, Michael said his sister's words have added to the devastation he feels.

Michael said the responses he received from his spiritual leader following Danny's death were equally troubling. "Reverend Turner is a very kind and gentle soul," the grieving father admitted. "When I was a teenager, he helped to keep me on the right path. But, ever since my son died, the pastor's support has been lacking."

Three weeks after Danny's funeral, Michael said his pastor invited him out to breakfast. "I assumed Reverend Turner had suggested this meeting in order for him to see how I was coping, spiritually and emotionally, with my son's death," Michael said. "I really looked forward to being with my pastor. He had always been a very compassionate counselor. I felt depressed and grief stricken, and desperately needed the support of this fine man of God."

But, what Michael received instead of sensitive support was more "empty rumbings."

Reverend Turner said, "Some people are unable to even conceive children. Others have to live with a constant reminder that their daughters and sons are dying before their eyes from AIDS, cancer, poverty and other ills."

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According to Michael, his pastor suggested he did not have a good reason to grieve. "Since Danny didn't have AIDS, cancer, or some other terrible illness, I should be thankful," Michael said. "Reverend Turner told me, 'You should thank God daily for all the years of happiness and health God allowed you to have with Danny. And, be thankful also that when it was your son's time to die, God took him quickly.' Michael told me he felt "demeaned" by his pastor's advice.

Because of the conversation I recently had with Michael, and due to the number of stories other fathers and mothers have shared with me the past 20 years, I want to offer three recommendations to all parents who have experienced the death of a daughter or son.

Let no one tell you grief is morbid, selfish, wrong, or a sign of mental illness. Grief is a healthy and natural response to death and other losses. It is a necessary process. (If however, you yourself find that you're having a difficult time coping with day to day life resulting from any loss, seek the help of a counselor trained specifically to deal with grief issues.)

Let no one tell you it's wrong to feel angry at God. Anger is a normal feeling experienced by parents who suffer the death of a child. Although not all bereaved fathers and mothers feel anger toward God, many parents do, and these feelings need not be stifled. Remember, God can certainly handle the anger of humans!

Let no one put a time limit on your grief process. Following the death of a child, it is normal (and healthy) for parents to experience various aspects of grief for the rest of their lives. Therefore, remember your sons and daughters in all the ways that bring you comfort, joy, and peace!

The Rev. Al Miles coordinates the hospital ministry department at The Queen's Medical Center for Pacific Health Ministry.

Meeting Discussion: Feelings and Emotions

Therapists often encourage individuals to "deconstruct" and "reconstruct" themselves through a complex process that takes many, many years. In this evolution of the person, the psychological makeup, past and current environmental influences and many other factors play into the slow, yet simultaneous, deconstruction and reconstruction. Usually this is done without a great deal of emotional upset at any one time.

Unlike the patient who chooses to meet with a therapist, parents of children who have died have been suddenly and completely "deconstructed". They have been involuntarily thrust into the dark totality of personal deconstruction. The emotions and feelings that comprise this deconstruction are overwhelming. Parents who have lost a child to death will refer to their personal deconstruction as a total numbness followed by a deep pit, a dark hole, an abyss, a total loss of self, a purgatory of pure torture and a multiplicity of the deepest, saddest, most painful feelings and emotions known to the human race.

Reconstruction for parents is the most extremely difficult work one can choose to undertake. It is often much easier to bury emotions, hide in alcohol, denial, depression and other aberrant behaviors. Underlying psychiatric disorders can surface and take over lives and families after a parent has lost a child. Strange things happen to us.....we are more accident prone, we don't want to get up in the morning, word retrieval and names and places slip from our minds, we over-eat, we under-eat, we slide mentally from conversations in mid sentence. We avoid old friends who don't understand. We do not seek new relationships.

We lock ourselves in our homes or offices and shut the world out. The deconstruction is devastating.

How do we start reconstructing our feelings and emotions? That is the question we are posing at this month's meeting. All in attendance will be parents who have lost children. All will have a story to tell; many will have suggestions about coping skills and emotional recovery that cover a period of their grief. Some will come to listen, to absorb, and to reach for hope, to find an answer or two on this long emotional journey.

We encourage you to think back to the last normal day of your life and remember the first emotion you felt when your child died. Bring yourself forward in your grief; if you have the opportunity, write down some thoughts on your feelings and emotions as time progressed. This is painful work, but it is helpful when you are ready to open up and talk about the reconstruction of your emotions and feelings.

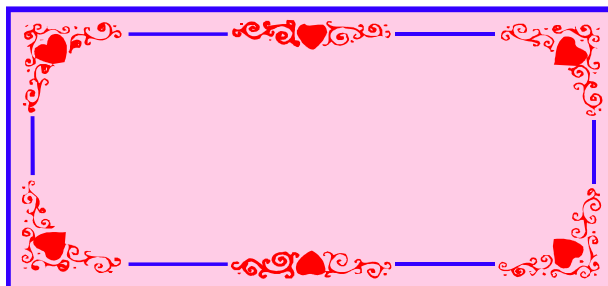
Think about where you are now in your grief and compare it with last week, last month, last year, two years ago and longer. Jot those thoughts down. Let's talk.....as only parents who have lost a child to death can talk to each other.

**Annette Mennen Baldwin
TCF, Katy, TX**

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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.”*