



# 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 2016**



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Vol. 21 Issue 4

### 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 19th      August 16th**

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 weekend 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 26th      August 30th**

### 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. ©2016**

### 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 508/366-2085  
 Mitchell Greenblatt 508/881-2111  
 Judith Cherrington 508/473-4087  
 Carol Cotter 774/219-7774

The chapter address is:

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

### Regional Coordinator

Tom Morse  
 66 Atwood Avenue  
 Middleboro, MA 02346  
 Phone (508) 572-3038  
 tjmorse521@gmail.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.

Mr. & Mrs. Harold Murphy in loving memory of their son **Michael Patrick Murphy** on his birthday May 17th and his anniversary May 31st.

Mrs. Janet Raneri in loving memory of her son **Major Robert Raneri** on his anniversary June 26th.

Mrs. Timothy Casey in loving memory of her son **James David Simonis**.

Ms. Carmela Bergman in loving memory of her son **Dixon Bergman** on his anniversary July 29th.

Mrs. Patricia Brovelli in loving memory of her son **Christopher Brovelli** on his anniversary July 18th.

Mrs. Virginia Lombard in loving memory of her son **Robert L. Lombard Jr.** on his anniversary June 27th.

Marta Ferreira in loving memory of her son **Jake Taylor Nawn**.

Mrs. Phyllis Curran in loving memory of her daughter **Monica Michelle Curran** on her birthday June 21st.



### Save a tree

To all members that receive this newsletter via snail mail. If you would like to get your newsletter a week earlier thru e-mail please send your 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, 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*

CHARLES J. GHERA III  
WILLIAM BRUCE-TAGOE  
KELLY ANNE DAVIS  
SCOTT F. MOTUZAS  
MOLLY ELIZABETH LACE ANDERSON  
CHAD M. G. DIGREGORIO  
THOMAS J. JOHNSON Jr.  
JEFFREY DAVID PARKHURST  
CHRISTOPHER J. BROVELLI  
ROB McDONALD  
RYAN J. McCUSKER  
DENNIS NIELD  
TARYN MARIE NORTON GAVELIS  
ANDREW T. LAUDER  
DIXON BERGMAN  
DANIEL BARRINGTON

### *August*

WILLIAM H. BARDOL Jr.  
STEVEN "CHRIS" MARSHALL  
ANTHONY V. BOTTCHE  
MATTHEW DENICE  
MICHAEL MINTO WALLACH  
SHANE L. MERRIFIELD  
JOSEPH MICHAEL McGRATH

## *Birthdays*

### *July*

ROY RANDALL  
SHAWN P. MARKS  
ROBERT NIELD  
JEFFREY DAVID PARKHURST  
ROBERT L. LOMBARD Jr.  
KAITLYN KENNEDY  
DEVIN J. EHRMANNTRAUT

### *August*

ERICA BLEAKNEY  
JASON MURRELL  
TIMOTHY JOHN O'NEIL  
CHARLES J. GHERA III  
JEFFREY CHERRINGTON  
DAVID A. SCHNEGG  
KEVIN HOLLAND  
CLIFFORD CROWE  
GREG BRUNO  
ADAM SCOTT COLE  
KELLY ANNE DAVIS





# 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.

## *When a Sibling Dies: The Loss of a Lifetime.*

I write a lot about my brother Will's death at 21. The day when the phone rang and I heard my mom say dark, foreign words like coroner, needle, heroin, autopsy, was the most impactful day of my life.

Putting my story out there means I sometimes get emails from readers who share that they have also lost a brother or sister. They talk about not knowing how to move on, the immensity of their grief, and the pain of watching their parents suffer. I instantly feel a connection with the person writing to me. It brings me back to the first months and years after my brother died, to the freshness of being without the person I was supposed to walk through a lifetime with.

"Be strong for your parents," said blurs of people at Will's memorial service. I nodded, but inside me, something twisted. I was 24, and in a daze as people streamed by, offering their awkward words and hugs. Be strong for your parents? I thought.

I am barely breathing. I am barely standing here. Strong is the last thing I feel.

In the early months after Will's death at 21, I existed in a heavy fog. Nothing was as I knew it. I'd abandoned the little life I'd started in Maine and landed back in Alaska where my parents were, where my brother and I had grown up. My friends were living their lives—going to college, working, falling in and out of love and lust. Meanwhile, my life had stopped.

My childhood home was filled with the cloying scent of flowers just starting to die. It struck me then how terrible it was that we send flowers to the grieving—here you go, another reminder that nothing is permanent, that everything lovely will be lost.

My brother's absence was heavy in the house. Though he had died in Seattle, his room was scattered with relics; the bed he had slept in for so many years, his big flannel shirts hanging like shadows in the closets, a handful of videos and books. Memories pinned to each corner. Having always taken comfort in words, I scoured the internet for a book for someone like me, an adult whose (barely) adult brother had died. What I found was unimpressive: there were more books on losing a pet than losing a brother or sister. A few books existed for surviving children after a death in the family, but they were for small children. One memoir documented a sister's grief following her brother's death, but it was out of print.

What did it mean that there were no handbooks for me? That people asked me to be strong in the face of the biggest loss I'd ever experienced or imagined? At times I felt like I didn't deserve to feel so shattered, especially in the shadow of my parents' immense grief.

A few months later, I started attending a local grief group. I sat in a circle with a few widows and widowers, a woman whose daughter had died, and a woman whose mother had died. I was younger than any of them by at least thirty years, but I could relate to their shares: "I feel like I'm going crazy." "I'm so damned angry right now." "I can't sleep at night."

Though the losses were different, the feelings were the same. So much was lost.

My parents, who would never be the same. Their pain was almost visible, as if a piece of their bodies had been cut out. I had lost myself, too, or at least the version of me that was unscathed by tragedy: an innocent version, who walked around in some parallel universe where her brother was still alive, ignorant to the incredible fortune of an intact family. My brother, my past. Will's big blue eyes. His loud laugh. He was the co-keeper of my childhood.



## ***THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST***



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The person who was supposed to walk with me longer than anyone else in this life. The only other person who knew what it was like to grow up with our particular parents, in our particular home.

The future. I cried for the nephews and nieces I would never have. I cried for my own faceless potential children who would never know my brother. How would I explain him? How would I ensure that his essence wasn't lost, that he wasn't just a figure in old photographs, a handful of stories? And I had to have children someday, right? I was the only person who could make my parents the grandparents they always assumed they'd be.

And all the hard times ahead when my brother wouldn't be by my side. When my parents began to age. When my grandparents died. There would be no one to share these dark milestones.

I felt like our family had been a four-legged table, and one leg had suddenly been torn off. The remaining three of us wobbled and teetered. We felt the missing leg like an amputee, each morning waking to the horrible fact that Will was gone.

I wrote letters to my brother in those early months and years. At first, memories blazed through my head and I used the letters to capture them before they flitted away, gone forever: my brother walking towards me when he visited me in Maine, the sun splattering his cheeks, turning him golden. The time I taught him to make snow angels in the front yard of our childhood home, our bulkily clad limbs sliding in synchronicity under icy stars. My tiny hand on my mom's belly, feeling my brother kick.

Later, I wrote the letters when I needed to cry, when the grief sat coiled and waiting in my chest, needing to be let out, released. I couldn't find the words of other bereaved sisters or brothers to bring me comfort, so I created my own.

One day, when I was lost in my sadness, my mom said, "You won't always feel like this. You'll have a family of your own. You'll move on." This seemed impossible in my 24-year-old skin. I couldn't imagine this potential future my mom spoke of, this invisible, imagined family.

But very, very slowly, I began putting my life back together. I finished college. I made the difficult decision to leave home again and move back to Maine. I met my husband and after several years, we had two children. Our son has my brother's big blue eyes and his love of music. Our daughter possesses the light-hearted spirit my brother had at the same age. The sibling love between them is palpable; they spat and giggle, they dance and huddle. I pray that they remain close as they grow, and that they get a lifetime together.

It's been fifteen years now since Will died. The sharp shock and grief I felt in those early months and years are gone. It took years for the pain to fade, for the words "your brother is dead" to stop pounding in my head, but they did. Will's absence is mostly a dull hurt, the ghost of an old broken bone that aches when it rains. I feel it more on holidays and anniversaries, when someone close to me dies, or when I hear of a death similar to his.

I'll always wish he was still here. I'll always wonder what he would look like and what he'd be doing if he was still alive, at 36. At 50. At 75. I move on and through. Perhaps I am even strong, like those well-meaning mourners at my brother's memorial asked me to be. But my brother's loss will remain with me for my whole life, just like he was supposed to.

***Lynn Shattuck***

### ***Reality Changes***

Last night I met with a group of subdivision board members from another neighborhood to talk about the many problems we all face in keeping our communities strong. One of the board members had invited me after reading an article in the newspaper about efforts I was making in our neighborhood.

We had normal conversations, questions and answers, suggestions, brainstorming. No posturing, no politics, just sensible, kind people who sincerely care about their neighborhood.

Only one of the board members had met my son and knew him by name. In fact, he had only recently been told of Todd's death. As we were winding down, I told a story about an event that had occurred about three months after my son died. I was, of course, still in a state of shock at that time, and the event included the response of several friends who seriously (and rightfully) were concerned for my safety and were standing by my side immediately. I told this story to illustrate a point about the types of communities we all want.

The other people sat perfectly still and stared at me. Then, I realized that for the first time since before my son was killed, I had actually mentioned him as ancillary to the subject at hand. I hadn't cried, my voice hadn't quavered, I didn't hang my head, dab my eyes or develop instant anxiety.

One of the women finally collected herself and said she was so sorry. She remarked at how strong I was to continue on after the loss of my child. Strong? Me? No, I'm not strong. Today is just a better day than most. Thank you for your concern, but there really is nothing that anyone can say to make it better. Each day is what it is.

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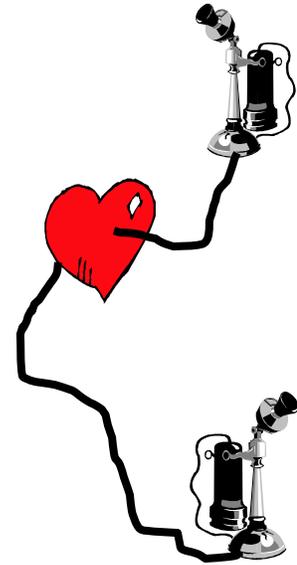
# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



## 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
- 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.

## Support Resources

### TCF Online Chat Groups:

[WWW.compassionatefriends.org/resources/online\\_Support.aspx](http://WWW.compassionatefriends.org/resources/online_Support.aspx)

- For questions, please contact Diana Jorden, 925-432-3854, who moderates the general grief and suicide loss rooms on Friday nights and Sunday. TCF online offers several specialized chat rooms, all moderated by moms who have been in chat for at least 2 years or more. We offer a sibling-only chat, loss under 1 year, loss over 2 years, loss of only child, suicide survivor, infant/ pregnancy loss, and every night (and Monday mornings) there is a general loss room open to parents, step and grand, and siblings.
- You can sign up for the online TCF National newsletter at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)
- You can reach our TCF National Facebook page through the link on the same home page of our national website. You will be asked to join Facebook if you are not already a member, and we hope you'll find our Facebook page as interesting as do the more than 11,000 fans who have already found us!

### Other Grief Support Websites

- [agast.org](http://agast.org) - for grandparents
- [alivealone.org](http://alivealone.org)
- [aliveinmemory.org](http://aliveinmemory.org)
- [angelmoms.com](http://angelmoms.com)
- [babysteps.com](http://babysteps.com)
- [bereavedparentsusa.org](http://bereavedparentsusa.org)
- [beyondindigo.com](http://beyondindigo.com)
- [childloss.com](http://childloss.com)
- [goodgriefresources.com](http://goodgriefresources.com)
- [parmenter.org](http://parmenter.org) - children's bereavement
- [griefhealingblog.com](http://griefhealingblog.com)
- [griefwatch.com](http://griefwatch.com)
- [GriefNet.org](http://GriefNet.org)
- [healingafterloss.org](http://healingafterloss.org)
- [Jeff's Place-www.jeffsplacemetrowest.org](http://Jeff's Place-www.jeffsplacemetrowest.org)
- [opentohope.com](http://opentohope.com)
- [pomc.com](http://pomc.com) - families of murder victims
- [save.org](http://save.org)
- [survivorsofsuicide.com](http://survivorsofsuicide.com)
- [Taps.org](http://Taps.org) - military death
- [webhealing.com](http://webhealing.com)



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I learned something last night. I learned that I have worked very hard at healing. I have focused on my pain and analyzed my loss every day for 3 years, 1 month and 1 week. I have considered my moods, my anxieties, my anger and my misery both privately and in the company of my compassionate friends. I have sought information that might better help me move forward so that one day I might have a life that is more evenly balanced. I have noted changes between last year and this year, last month and this month, yesterday and today. Some changes were positive, some changes were not good.

I also realized that without the guidance and help of The Compassionate Friends I would not be here today. I would be in another place mentally, I would be living in a self induced purgatory from which there would be no escape. With the encouragement of those who had walked this road longer than I and those who were just now beginning the journey, I kept moving forward. Because I demanded as much of myself as I expected of my child when I was raising him, I had become my own parent on this long, lonely road. Because I heeded the warnings of my compassionate friends and listened to their gentle suggestions, I had made it through the long days and nights without my child and kept my sanity.

I met the new me last night.....and it wasn't half-bad. I think I have found hope.

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



## Butterfly Wings, Bricks and Lead

When I saw her load of grief, it looked to me to be merely a light load of butterfly wings, as compared to my full load of heavy bricks. Then I saw another man, and he seemed to be carrying a small load of lead. But as I watched her step on the scales bearing her load of butterfly wings, the scales read "one ton." When he stepped on the scales with his load of lead, the scales also read "one ton." I knew my grief-load of bricks would weigh more, but those scales read for me, "one ton." Our loads of butterfly wings, lead and bricks weighed exactly the same to the one carrying that particular load of grief.



We bereaved parents often feel resentment when a non-bereaved person speaks about our child's death. HOW can THAT PERSON know or even dream of how I feel or what I am going through? These feelings may be justified. But when we begin to feel resentment toward another bereaved parent "That child's death was easy compared to my child's death," "I have suffered more than she/he ever did" we should remember that each of our grief-loads weighs two thousand pounds to the one under it. Compared to Rose Kennedy, who had one child in a mental institution, and lost one daughter and three sons in violent deaths, my grief-load begins to look as if it were made of gossamer soap bubbles, but when I again step on that scale, it still reads, "one ton."



Our grief-loads may appear to weigh less because we who are under them have grown stronger through time and grief process maturation. The load actually weighs no less; it is we who have grown stronger and can carry it more easily. Sometimes we can even completely ignore the weight that is still there. Always be careful in judging another's grief-load. Remember the lead, butterfly wings and those bricks, and how they all weigh the same to the one under that load of grief.

**Tom Crouthamel**  
**TCF, Sarasota, FL**

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)**

An important way to cope with grief is having an outlet, be it interpersonal, be it artistic, that will allow you to not have to contain your grief, but will give you an opportunity to express it, to externalize it to some degree.

**R. Benyamin Cirlin, Grief counselor**



## *THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST*



### *I noticed, My world had changed*

Prior to becoming a bereaved parent, I thought I had a glimpse of what parents whose children have died go through. I was an emergency room nurse. The sad part of my job was to inform parents that their child had died. After delivering this most devastating news, I would sit and cry with the parents. When I'd go home at night, I would think about the parents, pray for them and thank God my two little boys were safe and that my family was intact.

On Sept. 11, 1997, I became a bereaved parent when the police informed me that my son, Andrew, had an auto accident and he was dead. My life stopped. I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to breathe again without my son, let alone survive his death. The days that followed, one thing was for sure, I didn't have a glimpse about what happens to a person when their child dies.

As I walk this journey of a bereaved parent... I noticed my whole world changed. My beliefs weren't the same. My priorities weren't the same and my future was changed forever. My whole life was shattered and I didn't know where to begin to pick up the pieces or if I had the will to pick up the pieces. Everyone around me, even though very attentive to me, continued functioning in their lives. I didn't know where I fit in any more. I was alone... trying to figure out, what happened, in that split second, when they told me Andrew was dead.

I noticed many things about my new world that I didn't like. I knew then, if I were to survive my son's death, then things must be changed and it was up to me to change them.

I noticed ... the silence of people not mentioning Andrew's name or his life was deafening to me. There were no stories about him anymore. It was like out of sight out of mind. I wondered what this world was doing to me. My son lived. He was a part of my life. I had dreams for him. He was my future. I was so frightened that everyone would forget him. I needed to hear other people say my Andrew's name. I needed to say his name and to tell stories about him. I could not stand the thought of going through the rest of my life not ever hearing or saying his name again. I knew then that part of my survival was going to involve keeping the memory of my son alive.

I noticed... people removed Andrew's picture and other remembrances of him from their homes, thinking it was going to upset me seeing them. I needed to know that he was important to other people. Just because he died, it didn't mean that memories of him couldn't still exist. As part of my healing I gave framed pictures of Andrew to family and friends to display in their home. This let them know I needed to have him around me.

I noticed.... people would shy away from me, run down the other aisle of the grocery store rather than chance running into me. I needed more than ever for people to come up to me and give me a big hug, rather than shy away. Depending on how I felt that day, I would hunt those people down that other aisle and show them that talking with me was not going to be a painful experience for them and that being a bereaved parent was not contagious.

I noticed... I struggled with something so simple as not being able to sign a birthday or anniversary card from our family because to do that, I would have to leave Andrew's name off the card. I had signed his name for 23 years and there was no way his name could be left off the card. I also knew I needed to continue to write his name or people would forget him. I now sign all cards "With Love and Memories of Andrew". It's funny, I rarely sent Christmas Cards before Andrew died. Now I make sure that I send everyone I know a Christmas card, so I can write his name and keep his memory alive. What's great is that people send cards back to me with the same message.

I noticed.... people were uncomfortable about what to say to me, so they would avoid mentioning Andrew's life or death for fear they would remind me of him. They would also feel bad if they thought they would make me cry and then "what would they do with me". It was easier for them not to say anything. What these people didn't know is that they don't remind me of Andrew... I think about Andrew every minute of every day. I will never forget his life or his death. Their mentioning Andrew's name only made me feel better. After experiencing a few of these encounters, I knew then, I had to make people feel that it was okay to talk about Andrew and that if there were tears, that was okay too. I always thanked people for bringing Andrew's name up and remembering him. If tears came first, I would explain that they did not make me cry and I really appreciate them talking to me about Andrew.

I noticed.... when I entered the room at my first bereaved parent meeting, I was surprised to find other parents in that room smiling, some laughing, and some making small talk. I thought...boy, I am really in the wrong place. It was inconceivable to me that I would ever smile or laugh again. I thought, they must not love their child as much as I did. Once the meeting began, I learned that these parents did love their child as much as I loved Andrew and that maybe I too, would someday smile and laugh again. Just maybe... there was a glimmer of hope that I might survive and they would lead the way.

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## ***THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST***



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I noticed...at my meeting, I learned a lot about my new world from parents who have walked the path before me. They brought to my attention the situations I may encounter and offered suggestions in how they dealt with the issues. They didn't theorize grief, they lived it everyday and shared their coping skills with the group. They gave me a strength and confidence and validated that I was on the right path in keeping the memory of Andrew alive. They were patient with me. I knew I was in a safe place where people understood me. They wanted to help me get better. They knew something I didn't know at the time.... that I was going to survive.

I noticed... Some people thought that because my son was 23 years old, somehow he wasn't a child anymore. Even though I was his parent, they assumed the grief would not be as intense as if he were a baby or young child. I'll never forget a 70-year-old man coming into the ER, dead on arrival, after a heart attack. I was told his mom was on her way to the ER. When his frail, 90 year old mom entered the room, she screamed out "my baby"- "my baby". She sobbed. She hugged him. She held and rocked him. She kissed him all the while saying, "my baby, my baby". I learned that night, it doesn't matter how old your child is because the parent child relationship is for life. That night her baby died. The night Andrew died was the night my baby died. Our children are our children forever.

I noticed... I didn't know what to say when people asked me "how many children do you have"? This caused me great anxiety when it came up in a conversation. I let them know, I had two boys. Most of the time, that was sufficient. If the conversation required more information, I told them that my oldest son, Andrew, died in an auto accident and he was a mechanical engineer. My younger son, Elliott, is alive and well and is a graphic designer. I told them about Andrew, not so they could feel sorry for me, but, because I will always be his mom, he will always be my child and I could not deny he had lived.

I noticed... that people compared my loss to their father dying, grandmother dying and yes, I had one person compare my loss to their dog dying. I knew these people didn't have any intention of hurting me. They were just trying to relate to probably the very worst experience they had ever had with death. I needed to let them know my father had died, my grandmother and grandfather, my friend, my aunts & uncles and even my dogs died. My Andrew dying was like no other experience I have had with death or hopefully will never encountered again. My life didn't stop with all the other deaths... like it did when Andrew died. Even though I grieved the other deaths, they didn't hit the core of my existence... like Andrew's death.

My heart didn't ache every minute of every day of every year, like it did when Andrew died. The difference.... I would have given my life to let Andrew live, but, I wasn't given the choice.

I noticed ...that the old family traditions at Christmas, Andrew's birthday and other holidays needed to be changed to include something that kept Andrew's memory alive. We started new traditions. At Christmas I give everyone an ornament that reminds me of Andrew and his life. Friends and family give me Christmas ornaments to hang on our new "Andrew tree" that reminds them of Andrew. We continue to gather on his birthday to "celebrate his life." It's not about the ornament, the tree, or his birthday. It's about family and friends taking the time to remember Andrew. To say his name. To let me hear his name. To tell me a funny story they remember. It means so much to me and has allowed me to continue to survive.

I noticed.... that even though it's been 9 years, Andrew continues to live in the lives of others. What I love most is when my nieces say "Aunt Sharon, I felt Andrew all around me today, or I heard his song and remember when....", or when my nephew, comes into the house with a new friend and asks, "where are the pictures of Andrew, I want to introduce him to my friend." When the little guys say, "I needed to get to first base last week and I asked Andrew to help me and I made it". Or when friends send me cards or mementos on his angel date or birthday. I will forever need to know that Andrew has not been forgotten. These little mentions of his name let me know, I will survive.

I noticed... after a year or two, people were expecting the "old Sharon back". They wanted me to move on, to go on with my life, to be happy and to try to forget my son's death. I guess they read one of those psychology or medical books that give bereaved parents one year to recover. I know now, that the writers of those books never consulted a bereaved parent. Society doesn't understand or seem to want to give us the time it takes to get better. I let people know that I was working very hard on my recovery. I didn't want pity. I wasn't attention seeking or a martyr when I cried. I wanted more than they did to feel like my old self again. I wanted the intense pain to stop. I hated where I was in my life and feeling this bad.

I let them know.... I had heard ....that as the years pass, the pain gets softer, the tears less, but I will never fully recover. I will always miss Andrew. I will always grieve his death. He will always be a part of my life and I will never forget him.

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## ***THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST***



(continued from last page)

I confess, with both sorrow and gladness, that I can no longer summon the full measure of those savage feelings and the unremitting pain that engulfed me in those early years. Working through them was the most demanding challenge of my life, enacting tolls in physical health perhaps even greater than the long term effects on mind and emotion.

Today, however, I can reflect with gratitude upon a decade of mastery over the sadness. Control of my thoughts returned to me and I know freedom from the utter devastation of those early years.

Looking back reveals essential turning points on the road to healing. Some would seem to generalize easily for anyone. Others seem to respond to personal strengths and weaknesses more particular to an individual.

### **These points included:**

- Self forgiveness for the many deficiencies found within on the endless soul journey that is our lot in the wake of our child's death.
- Forgiveness of others, relatives, friends and associates, who are less affected than are we, who seem unable to help us in our time of deep trouble and need.
- The accepting, at last, the finality of our loss, and that we must gradually unleash ourselves from our former lives and structure anew.
- Learn to communicate value to spouses, friends, and surviving siblings, our love for whom seems shrouded behind the totality of our grief.
- Find ways to give expression to our need to somehow memorialize our child, be it through writing a book, planting trees, sustaining scholarships, or any number of ways. Our need to preserve and safeguard our child's memory is real and deserving of our attention.
- A time comes for many to find new homes, jobs, and purpose. These are often part and parcel of any significant change in our lives.
- Surrender to time, giving ourselves space within it to do our work. Use time to foster healing within, to enable us to grasp today and tomorrow with hope.

No recovery will return us to life as we knew it while our child lived. That life is forever gone and, to a certain extent, we may well have to accept that, as we perceive life today.

The finest days of our lives may well be a part of our past. Somehow, we must recognize that this is not unique to surviving our child's death, but is often a portion of the human condition.

Olin is dead. As much as I would wish it otherwise, it will never be. He is not forgotten. His voice, his laughter, his joy, and his shortcomings live on in me.

No day passes without thinking about him. I am grateful for his touch upon my life. Yet, joy is again mine. Pleasure is no longer a forbidden or guilt producing element in daily living. I live, gladly and with purpose, with Olin both behind me in time, but with me internally.

Is this not our goal, to heal, to find strength to love both yesterday and today? Our children have been the richest part of our lives and today should reflect the grace of that love in all that we are today.

***Don Hackett  
Kingston, MA  
In Memory of my son, Olin***

### ***Bittersweet Memories***

One of the most precious things to a parent who has lost a child is the memories. Without them, it would be as if their child never was. With them, it is so bittersweet that it can make a parent laugh and cry, rejoice and anguish, touch the sweetness to the lips and taste the salt from the tears.

Memories keep the heart from crushing under the weight of sorrow. They give a parent the chance to be with their child again. They can walk through their memories like they were a movie. When the memories are so vivid, you can almost feel them, touch them, hug them, and kiss them. It is so bittersweet when the reality comes and you realize it is just a memory, a thought and you are reminded of what you have lost.

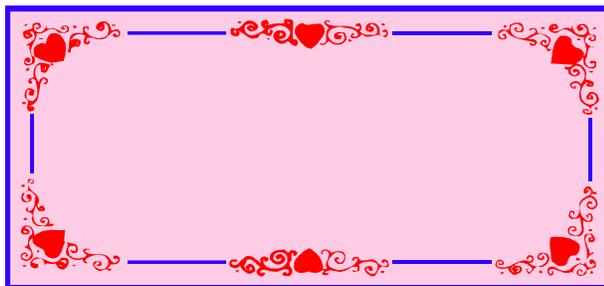
If you asked a parent if they would give up the memories so they did not have to feel the pain of knowing their child is gone, they would tell you no. As painful as it may be, not having the memories or feeling their presence, is just as unbearable as losing them.

There is no happy place to go to, but there is a place to be with your child. You know before you step into that realm that it will be painful, but you know that it will be joyful too.

So as we let the memories take us to a time that our child was safe with us, just rest a while until it is time to go and the next time try not to think of what is gone but what is still in your heart and will always be.

***Vickie Van Antwerp  
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*This newsletter is printed  
through the generosity of  
The Copy Stop  
Milford, MA*

### ***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.”*