



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.

March-April 2016

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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:

March 15th April 19th

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:

March 29th April 26th

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. Robert King in loving memory of their daughter **Caren King Firth**.

Betty Myers in loving memory of her son **William Bruce-Tagoe**.

Dorothy Pisapia in loving memory of her son **Matthew Pisapia**.

Mr. & Mrs. William Bardol in loving memory of their son **William H. Bardol Jr.** on his birthday March 7th.

Mrs. Carmela Bergman in loving memory of her son **Dixon Bergman**. "Always missed, always loved."

Mr. & Mrs. Rick Dugan in loving memory of their son **Larry Dugan** on his birthday April 6th.

Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Jackman in loving memory of their daughter **Alicia D. Jackman** on her anniversary March 8th. "Miss and love you A.J. XOXO."

Mrs. Tracy Dullea-Juliano in loving memory of her son **Christopher Marc Dullea** on his birthday February 21st.

Mr. & Mrs. William Morgan in loving memory of their daughter **Kelly Anne Davis**. "Loved and never forgotten."

Mr. & Mrs. Henry Slopek in loving memory of their daughter **Laurie Slopek** on her birthday April 13th.

Mrs. Nancy Carpenter in loving memory of her son **James S. Carpenter VI**. "Always loved, always missed."

Mr. & Mrs. Steven Baisley in loving memory of their daughter **Stacey Ann Mahoney** on her anniversary March 21st. "Being our beautiful only child, years get harder for your not on vacation/business but "we'll see you again." Love Dad & Mom.





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, March and April. 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

March

WILLIAM C. LEWIS
NICHOLAS L. BOUDREAU
ALICIA D. JACKMAN
TIMOTHY JAMES THORSEN
PAULA BETH WATERS
COLLIN T. MURPHY
STACEY ANN MAHONEY
JOSHUA D. DEACON
KEVIN R. ELDREDGE
MICHAEL J. PAULHUS
TYLER PARMENTER

April

JOHN GARVEY
FRANK W. TOPHAM
MARC P. LEWIS
TIMOTHY JOHN O'NEIL
JUSTIN MAYER
GREGORY P. CALIMERIS

Birthdays

March

ALAN R. STUCHINS
IAN GREENBLATT
ETHAN PATRICK CONNOLLY
SHAYNE M. DESROCHES
WILLIAM H. BARDOL Jr
ROB McDONALD
PHILIP A. TASCIONE
WILLIAM NESBITT
IAN MACINNES HODGMAN
ELAINE HUDSON-McAULIFFE
LAURENCE PONTREMOLI
RYAN J. McCUSKER

April

JOSHUA D. DEACON
LARRY DUGAN
JAMES DAVID SIMONIS
SEAN PATRICK COTTER
LAURIE SLOPEK
STEPHEN NIKERD
MADELINE S. LAMSON
DANIEL J. SCOTT Jr.
PAULA BETH WATERS
CHRISTOPHER J. BROVELLI





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.

COURAGE

My brother died three years ago when he was seventeen years old. It was an accident when he fell while hiking in the mountains. I was fifteen and my brother was my hero. I would do anything to make him proud. When I lost him, I could have just given up. I have the courage to love people even though I know that I could lose them. I had many opportunities to just forget everyone else and lose myself. My brother was my best friend and when he died I could have, too.

I decided that he would not have wanted me to throw my life away. I try my hardest to work hard in school and live up to what his expectations would have been. I am not living just for him. I am living for myself. A lot of people like to escape their problems by drinking or doing drugs. Alcohol and drugs only make problems worse because escaping a problem is not solving the problem. Self-respect means knowing who you are and treating yourself with dignity. I want people to look at me and to respect me.

Staying in school and working to my potential is essential for respect. People cannot respect those who do not respect themselves. As Shakespeare said, "This above all else, to thine own self be true."

I do not make choices based on what the popular decision is. I base my thoughts and ideas on what I believe is right and important. I know that my brother would have been proud of me, because I made it through the most difficult time in my life, without him. I kept living when I lost the most important person in the world to me.

Courage is to keep fighting even though it looks like you are going to lose. When he died, I felt the world crash down on me.

Everything I ever hoped for just seemed empty. Even now sometimes it will just hit me that my brother is gone. I have to keep on living and facing the world because that is what life is all about. Sometimes things happen that seem impossible to face. If I do not face my problems, who will?

Life is not supposed to be easy but it is not devastating either. There are so many wonderful things that happen and I have to have the courage to realize it. Life is not just a long line of problems. It is also a long line of answers. I need courage and self-respect to find these answers. I have to trust myself and my future that everything will work out. It always does.

The answers to life's problems can only be found through hard work and belief in yourself. My belief in myself comes from a big brother who always had faith in me.

Patricia Kelley
TCF, Richmond, VA
In loving memory of my brother, Sean

Rest, my brother, you now have peace.
The wars within you all have ceased.
And with the rising sun each day, Upon the heaven you
will play.
Until that day we meet again, Know I love you, my
brother, my friend.

Sandra Evans
TCF, Kearsarge, NH



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Life's Tapestry

It's said a splendid tapestry depicts Life's "grand design." Immense in its complexity, the threads all intertwine...to form a pattern illustrating with explicit weave the reason why our children die, and why we're left to grieve.

I've heard it called the "Master Plan," and there are those who say each thread's the story of a life, from birth to dying day, no death occurs that is not planned; some greater purpose served.

And some draw comfort from belief that fate cannot be swerved. If destiny holds all the cards then nothing would be changed, we would not alter tragedy, for death was prearranged. I do not know if I believe that fate decreed the day my life lost its illusions, enchantment came to stay.

But I do know the path I'm on is one that's far less clear...I stumble through this dad mess praying light will reappear. Yet in my soul her light lives on; my love for her remains with innocence she healed my heart and broke thru life's chains.

My daughter showed me how to trust, her needs taught me to fight, she planted seeds of caring about others and their plight.

If the tapestry depicts the life of all who walk the earth. The master weaver added my child's thread, and knew her worth. Her life, her death, my agony, are pushing me to find the reason for her years with me, and why I'm left behind.

I understand my path will stay in darkness 'til I see the means by which I'll utilize the gifts she gave to me. If I can find a way to share the caring I now feel it will honor her dear memory, and help my heart to heal.

Salty Miglioccio TCF Babylon, MO

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 continuing 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)

Pictures of Our Children.....Memories of Another Time

Once, in another time, I took many pictures of my child. Documenting each stage of my child's life was a joy. The happiest of memories are in those pictures. Occasionally I will pull out pictures and remember that other time when I would urge him to look at the camera and smile or simply snap a candid, unrehearsed shot of a moment in his life.

The other day I was going through pictures and found one of Todd's birthday in 1999. On the T-Shirt was imprinted "Still Plays With Cars." In the picture Todd is holding the T-Shirt and smiling.

Todd loved cars from the time that he could hold the little matchbox cars in his hand, quietly making zoom, zoom noises. He grew up to be a GTO aficionado, buying first a 1967 GTO and later a 1965 GTO which he completely restored. He spent thousands of hours over a twelve year period restoring his 1965 GTO and won many well deserved trophies. So I felt it was appropriate, a year after the restoration was complete, to give him that special T-Shirt. He was very proud of it, and that made me happy.

Then I found a few other pictures and Todd was wearing his "Still Plays With Cars" T-Shirt in them. These are pictures that I cherish because Todd's avocation was his GTO, reading GTO magazines, surfing the web for GTO web sites and other muscle cars and talking with "car people". He judged many car shows and appreciated the loving work done by each owner. His GTO was second only to his children in importance in his life.

Today Todd's GTO sits in the garage of the home he built for his family in Austin.



I've been told that the younger children and their friends have been in the car and there's food and junk scattered in it. The car itself is dirty, the windows smeared. His widow was going to remove the tri-power from the engine as someone had told her this would make it easier to drive. Todd would not have liked that. The car hasn't been washed in a long time and the cover has been removed so that dust, dirt and the normal detritus of everyday life have had an effect on his GTO's beautiful teal blue body.

Shortly before he died, Todd stopped quickly to avoid hitting a little deer, and a tool box on the passenger seat slid into the glove compartment. He was sick about it, but was going to fix it during the holiday season. It hasn't been repaired yet. The Gulf Coast GTO Club that he belonged to in Houston offered to drive over to Austin to fix the glove compartment and tune up the engine, wash and wax his GTO as well as take care of any minor problems.

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The widow never responded to their many offers to take care of Todd's most prized possession. So, day by day, the thousands of hours of work, a legacy and love of Todd's life, his beautiful GTO, slowly decays.

I am glad I have only memories of Todd's GTO as a twelve year work in progress and finally as his perfectly restored muscle car and beautifully preserved pride and joy. The pictures in my mind remain frozen in time: my son, wearing his "Still Plays With Cars" T-Shirt, standing beside his GTO. Pictures indeed trigger memories of moments in our children's life. It is important to us, as parents who have suffered the worst loss on the face of the earth, to look at those pictures, frame them, display them in our homes and offices and remember the good times.

Once in a while I go to the web and Google Todd's name. There I see the professional photographs of his GTO...photographs of which he was so proud. His GTO was featured on the cover of a national muscle car magazine. This is how I choose to remember Todd's lifelong dream of restoring and showing a beautiful GTO. The lack of respect shown by others does not tarnish Todd's efforts, it further diminishes the character of those who see this as normal and not a problem. But time moves on, and the many people in Todd's life have moved on as well. Children, friends, the widow, in-laws and outlaws are getting on with their lives with new and exciting things on the horizon. Todd is but a memory to them. Their future is still bright and shining with promise... Big plans are being made by all.

But as a mother who has lost her only child, I am frozen in time. I will always keep my son in my heart as the child and man who graced my life for 35 years. Mothers are different that way. Our children are with us forever as the most defining component of who we are. And that is as it should be.

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

IF THEY ONLY KNEW

If only they knew that when I speak of him, I am not being morbid. I am not denying his death. I am proclaiming his life. I am learning to live with his absence. For twenty-six years he was a part of my life, born, nurtured, molded and loved – this cannot be put aside to please those who are uncomfortable with my grief.

If only they knew that when I sit quietly, apparently content with my own company, I am not self indulgently unhappy, dwelling on things which cannot be changed; I am with him. I am seeing his face, hearing his voice, remembering his laughter, recalling his excitement and joy in life. Please allow me this time with him, as I do not begrudge you your time with your children.

If only they knew that when I sometimes weep quietly, I do not cry in self pity for what I have lost. I weep for what he has lost, for the life he loved, for the music which filled his very being, and for all he still longed to hear, for the poetry which moved him to tears, for the beauty about him that daily fed his soul, for the exhilaration and excitement of flying the skies, of searching for his God in the vast space of the universe. For all that he loved and lost, I cry.



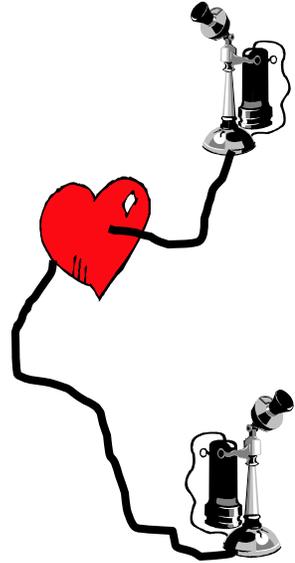
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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

- 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
- 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 - *for grandparents*
- alivealone.org
- aliveinmemory.org
- angelmoms.com
- babysteps.com
- bereavedparents.org
- beyondindigo.com
- childloss.com
- goodgriefresources.com
- parmenter.org - *children's bereavement*
- griefwatch.com
- GriefNet.org
- healingafterloss.org
- Jeff's Place-www.jeffsplacemetrowest.org.
- opentohope.com
- pomc.com - *families of murder victims*
- save.org
- survivorsofsuicide.com
- Taps.org - *military death*



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



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If only they knew the feeling of deep grief, the emptiness, the dull pain, the endlessness of death. If only they understood the insanity of the platitudes so freely spoken that “time heals,” that “you’ll get over it,” that “it was for the best,” that “God takes only the best,” and realize that these are more an insult than a comfort, that the warm and compassionate touch of another means so much more.

If only they knew that we will not find true peace and tranquility until we are prepared to try to stand in the shoes of others. We will not be understood until we learn to understand compassionately and we will not be heard until we learn to listen with hearts as well as minds.

*Jan McNess
TCF, Victoria, Australia*

Planning a Wedding for a Surviving Sibling

Of all of the events we look forward to enjoying with our children, I think weddings have always been pretty high on my list. So many images come to mind: colorful dresses on smiling bridesmaids; pretty bouquets of freshly scented flowers, a radiant bride walking arm in arm down the aisle with her proud dad; a nervous groom in awe of his beautiful bride. New beginnings; sacred moments to be cherished forever; friends and family gathered to witness and celebrate the union of two lives.

Four years ago we were preparing for the marriage of our younger daughter, Debbie. She was engaged in the fall and was planning for a wedding the following spring. A wedding to plan, so much to do, so much to look forward to, however, for our family this was the beginning of yet another bittersweet time. Debbie’s only sibling, Anna, had died suddenly from brain cancer six years previous.

Those were very traumatic, life-changing years for our family and close friends. Every area of our life was touched by the bitter pain that loss brings, as we slowly adjusted to the reality that Anna’s earthly presence was no longer with us. There were constant reminders that all the hopes and dreams we had for her had died, as well. Oh, how she loved weddings. She recorded every wedding ceremony broadcast on television. As parents, we grieved that fact that she would never marry. We would never share in the joy of planning and celebrating her wedding day.

In those early years of grief, I felt as if I would never find joy again. I certainly felt that I would never have the energy to help in planning a wedding for her younger sister. The thought of witnessing and celebrating Debbie’s marriage only brought pain and tears. My heavy heart was sorrowful and ached over the losses Anna’s death brought to her sister. Now the time had come. Debbie was engaged, and we had work to do!

Much to my surprise the next several weeks and months of planning were the most joyous times I had experienced since Anna’s death. As mom and daughter, Debbie and I made many memories together, and Anna was always with us. She was always part of the process. We would frequently find ourselves remarking, “If Anna were here she would take care of this,” or “Anna would not like wearing that dress.” It was as though she was guiding our every step.

Including the deceased child in the wedding can be a difficult topic. Most of the moms I have talked with regarding the marriage of a surviving child, express the need to somehow have the deceased sibling remembered in some way.

Sometimes the surviving child is afraid to discuss this with the parent, for fear of stirring up emotions. The bride or groom-to-be need not fear addressing the subject. Most parents have these thoughts right below the surface, and there usually is much relief when the issues are openly discussed. It could also be the other way around. The parent might be afraid to bring up the subject with the surviving child. Communication is important, so that everyone’s feelings can be expressed. Working through these feelings before the wedding will help the actual day to be more of a time of happiness and celebration, rather than sadness and pain.

As Anna’s mom, I was relieved, excited and grateful that Debbie wanted to remember her sister on this important day. I can honestly tell you that this did not detract in the least from the happiness and excitement of the wedding day. This was Debbie’s day, and my day to be “mother-of-the-bride.” There was sadness that Anna was not physically present, but she was there making sure that this was a day filled with joy, love and hope. It was so much fun from beginning to end.

If you are a bereaved parent with a surviving child who is planning a wedding and want to remember someone who has gone too soon, I would like to share some of the ideas that others have used to incorporate the memory of their loved one into the day.

When one of Anna’s college friends married, she had a floral arrangement around the unity candle that included things that reminded her of deceased loved ones. These persons were listed in the program. She had a purple crayon for Anna. (Anna taught preschool, purple was always a favorite!)

Another of Anna’s college friends had a votive holder with five candles that she and the groom lit in memory of loved ones, including Anna.

Anna’s college roommate had a single candle of remembrance for all her loved ones who had died, and released butterflies following the service.

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My husband Greg, son Dan, daughter Nina, and I were enjoying a vacation in Florida, the first family vacation in nine years, when the unthinkable happened. After a day at Daytona Beach, we were driving to my celebratory birthday dinner, when an alcohol-impaired driver fell asleep at the wheel, crossed the median, and struck the side of the car where Nina was sitting. In an instant, my 15 ½-year-old daughter, with the flashing brown eyes, unforgettable smile, and a heart of gold, was gone. Forever after, the day of my birth would be the same day as my Nina’s heartbreaking death.

Now, not surprisingly, my friend calls me to tell me how much she misses her son, now away at college. When I gently remind her of what she had said before he went away, she replies through tears, “I know, but now I say ‘Be careful not to blink or it will all be gone.’ I miss him so much.” Unfortunately, we, as bereaved parents, know how true those words are. It is difficult sometimes to hold back the urge to lecture and scold the non-bereaved parents who make comments such as this. We want to remind them of our loss. We want to tell them that at least they can pick up the phone whenever they wish to hear their child’s voice, catch a plane and in a matter of hours visit with their child, or expect that when school ends and vacation rolls around, their child will be coming home. These are all things that many of us say we took for granted, that is, until our child died.



My Nina had probably the messiest, most cluttered bedroom that you could imagine. The untidiness of her room is legendary. I think the carpeting was dove gray, but you rarely saw it because of the mountains of clothes that she would try on and discard on the floor! A sock thrown here, a schoolbook thrown there...it drove me insane! She was so meticulous in the other areas of her life, I think her room was the sanctuary where she let her perfectionism go. I sometimes became relentless about *my* need for her to clean up her room. As I railed away about my disapproval of her surroundings, she always looked at me quizzically with a slight, almost indistinguishable shrug of her shoulders, a half smile, and said nothing. As a teenager, she had already figured out where her priorities should be. The first time I went into Nina’s disordered room after she died, I lay down on her bed among all that glorious clutter, her clothing still smelling of the sweet scent of her perfume, and wrapped myself in the afghan she had purchased for herself.



After weeping for a good long time, I realized what Nina meant by her non-response to my ranting and raving. She had learned at a much earlier age than I had that in the grand scheme of things, messy bedrooms do not really matter. She had already found out what it took my beloved daughter’s death for me to find out.

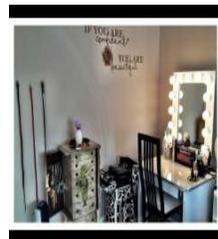
It was her work to be student council president, to put together blood drives and help with food banks, to teach religion classes to kindergartners (preferred spelling), to do peer-to-peer school counseling for classmates who were in a crisis, and to spend precious time with her family and friends.



Those things would mean something down the line; they were the things that mattered the most. Sometimes I wonder if she subconsciously knew that she didn’t have a lot of time to spread around all the love and good feelings that she had in her heart. She accomplished so much in her all-too-short life. I often wonder if somehow she knew that someday I would finally realize what was truly important in the short time we have on this earth.

Those of us who are members of The Compassionate Friends would give anything to bring our children back. We would let them know that now we understand that trivial things such as “messy bedrooms” do not matter. We would give anything to trip over those shoes carelessly flung in the entryway, pick up those empty soda cans tossed behind the bed, and gladly try to locate that missing sock that could be just about anywhere on the bedroom floor. We would give anything to have that so-called “frustration” all back again, just to be able to look at the face of our beloved child, see their magnificent smile, hold them tight, and know that they were here to stay.

Although our greatest wish can’t come true, there are many things that we can do to honor our children’s lives. We *can* still hold them close to our hearts. As the keepers of their memory, we *can* guarantee that, by sharing their lives with others, our children will never be forgotten. Moreover, we *can* begin living our own lives with more awareness, patience, and understanding of others, and more tolerance for “messy rooms.”



Cathy L. Seehuetter
TCF, St. Paul, MN
In Memory of my daughter, Nina



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF METROWEST



GRIEF WRITING

Some Ideas on Keeping a Journal

Writing is a simple, yet powerful way to begin working through your grief. You will find it helps to relieve some of the physical, emotional and spiritual pain that many grieving folks are experiencing.

It will help you work through many of the issues which are difficult to communicate in other ways.

It is very personal and confidential, no one need share in your writings unless you specifically choose to permit it.

It is simple to do spontaneously.

It does not require making complicated plans; it can be accomplished at the moment your feelings and needs are strongest, even when you wake up at three in the morning.

Who are you writing for? Even though you intellectually know that it is for you and you alone, all your prior training has conditioned you differently. During school years we always wrote for others to see and usually judge, correct and grade. We have all written letters for others to read. Nearly all our prior writing has been to communicate with others.

JOURNAL WRITING IS DIFFERENT: IT IS ONLY FOR YOU TO READ!

While this sounds like such an obvious thought, you may be surprised at the difficulty in getting your inner self to grant you permission to write freely without ANY editorial judgment. As you progress in your writing, you will find that you are able to overcome the 'mind set' that you are writing for others, and you will concentrate on fully serving your needs for expression.

Since you are writing for yourself, you now have permission not to be a perfectionist. You can use an old wide lined school notebook or one of those expensive "designer journals," and you can give yourself permission to be as sloppy or as neat as you wish. Forget erasers, it's easier, quicker and more spontaneous to cross out words. Furthermore, there are no errors when writing for yourself, merely thoughts you wish to re-read and those you want to skip. Rather than erasing or tearing out pages in order to obliterate, try putting a big X through a page or crossing out a phrase. Pay attention to those thoughts you are inclined to obliterate, often they are rich sources of issues you need to work through in your grief work. For this reason, I always suggest a permanently bound notebook rather than a spiral bound or loose-leaf book.

As a new writer, I have certainly experienced a blank page staring me in the face, unable to think of anything to say. What a relief when I learned to write my "stream of consciousness". I set a time limit, for starts, perhaps 5 or 10 minutes, and then write everything which comes into my mind, no matter how unconnected, scattered or inane it may seem. Since I am not judging myself, and no one else will read it, it doesn't matter that it isn't a well composed sentence or paragraph. I capture whatever thought or image comes to mind. Since I am not trying to write a story, I merely begin to document my internal images and feelings, my internal dialogue.

Not having the pressure of composing something which makes sense, I just have to be able to write fast enough to keep up with my internal activity. If my thoughts lead me to a particular issue, I may begin to elaborate on it. When the allotted time has passed, I may choose to continue or will allow myself to stop for the day, and start again fresh the next day.

You will surprise yourself at how quickly you have developed a new tool for making progress with your grief work. With the mechanics of writing now a comfortable routine, you can become more focused. In grief work, we are frequently writing for one or more of the following reasons:

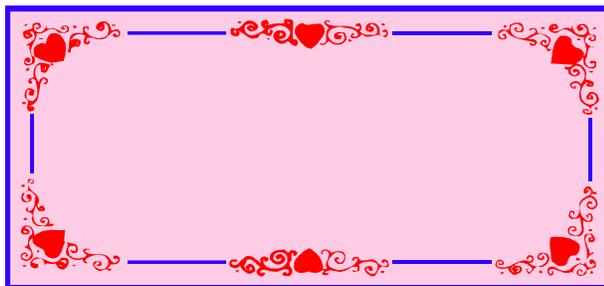
- To capture our experience or progress
- To confront an issue
- To vent, explore or express a feeling or emotion
- To connect
- To atone
- To preserve a thought
- To memorialize our loss

While few people feel they want to share everything they have written, there is frequently added value in sharing some of what we have written. Some, in their writings, have discovered parts of themselves which they felt they wanted to share. If you find this to be the case, the sharing circle at a meeting of The Compassionate Friends provides that opportunity.

If writing has always been easy and comfortable, please continue to do it. If this is all new to you, please be encouraged as you begin to use this new and useful tool which will serve you well, even beyond your grief work.

This article was adapted from a handout prepared by Alan B. Taplow, of Plainfield, New Jersey, for use with his Bereavement Support Group. He created it from material inspired by Carol Staudacher in her book, Men & Grief (New Harbinger Publ., 1991)

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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.”*