



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.

November - December 2009

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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: **November 17th December 15th**

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:

November 24th December 29th

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. ©2009

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

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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

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. Pauline Slopek in loving memory of her cousin **Kathy A. Burns** on her anniversary September 11th, (WTC).
 Bethany W. Thomas in loving memory of her son **Thomas P. Lueders**.
 Mr. & Mrs. William T. Connors in loving memory of their son **Brian D. Connors**.
 Mr. & Mrs. John Cassidy in loving memory of their daughter **Jordana L. Cassidy**.
 Mrs. Dori Cabral in loving memory of her daughter **Cynthia E. Beatson**.
 Mr. & Mrs. Francis A. Bennett in loving memory of their son **Bruce F. Bennett**.
 Mrs. Betty Myers in loving memory of her son **William Bruce-Tagoe**.
 Lynn Waugh in loving memory of her daughter **Kelsey Mulkerrens**.
 Mr. & Mrs. Bruce Coughlin in loving memory of their son **Michael Coughlin**.
 Mrs. Beverly A. Marks in loving memory of her son **Shawn P. Marks**.
 Mrs. Alice E. Horigan in loving memory of her daughter **Donna M. McHugh** on her anniversary September 18th.
 Mrs. Joan Hennigan in loving memory of her beloved son **Dennis W. Hennigan** who is greatly missed and always loved.
 Mr. & Mrs. Robert Eldredge in loving memory of their son **Kevin R. Eldredge** on his birthday November 14th.
 Mr. & Mrs. Earl Pearlman in loving memory of their son **Marc R. Pearlman** on his anniversary October 30th. And his birthday December 14th.





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 November and December. 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

November

LISA MASTROMATTEO
JASON DANIEL HAWKINS
ALAN R. STUCHINS
ANDREW R. MILLINER
NATHANIEL WOODRUFF
CYNTHIA ZOTTOLI
ALLISON BETH MURPHY
DENNIS M. HENNIGAN
ANNA RAY RIVERA
ERIC M. PERKINS
MICHAEL COUGHLIN
DONNA ANN WOLFSON

December

CHRISTINA M. ROSSETTI
LARRY DUGAN
STEPHEN GRILLO
ARTHUR W. ROBINSON
DAVID C. LACY
MATTHEW S. BLAGDON
KEVIN HOLLAND
LAURIE J. LANDERS
THOMAS P. LUEDERS
ELIZABETH MARTIN

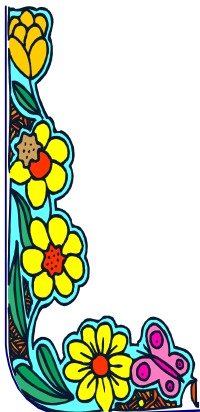
Birthdays

November

WILLIAM J. COSTIGAN
DIXON BERGMAN
JOHN M. COLLARI
MICHAEL COUGHLIN
JOHN RYAN PIKE
KEVIN R. ELDREDGE
ALICIA D. JACKMAN
JENNA L. PASQUINO
2ND LT. USMC IAN THOMAS McVEY
NICOLAUS BRAYTON

December

FRANK W. TOPHAM
MARC R. PEARLMAN
ERIC M. PERKINS
MATTHEW S. BLAGDON
AIDAN JOSHUA GARVEY



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 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.

I Am Your Sister and Always Will Be

"I am your sister and always will be." That's how Susie signed her cards to me. After a while, she shortened it to, "I am..." And of course I knew the rest of it. Susie was two and one-half years younger than I. She was alive one evening talking on the phone to Mom about the Oscars and to Dad about moving. The next day she was found. Whatever it was--it ended her life and changed mine forever.

There was a wonderful side of my sister that I didn't pay enough attention to. She was a kind and loving person, always ready to shelter lost animals and lost souls. When she was in a good mood, her smiles warmed my heart. Yet I spent most of my life wishing that things were different: wishing that she thought more of herself, wishing that she would take my advice, wishing that she were happier, wishing that we could accept each other.

Now, for two years, I've done nothing but wish she were here so we could have another chance to work at our relationship. Now, I wish that I had been able to give her my unconditional love & support. (She needed it and deserved it.) Now, I wish that I could have been with her that night so she would not have been alone. Now, I wish that I would have held her in my arms and told her how very much I loved her. Because, Susie, I am your sister and always will be.

*Michele Walters
TCF, Baltimore, MD*

Memories Of Your Face

I woke this morning
Finding everything in a haze
Wiping tears from my eyes
I saw your smiling face.

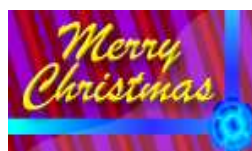
I reached out and touched you
Yet all I could feel was pain
You felt nothing
From your life within a frame.

I spoke, receiving no reply
I told you that I loved you
I asked you
Why?

I'll never have another
No one to take your place
All I have, little brother, are memories
And the picture of your face.



*Lisa Walmsey
TCF, Sarasota, FL*





The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



You in eternity, my son, and I in time

The “now” we knew was frozen
When you died in your sleep.

Add my 62 years to your 24
And we drew upon more than 86.

But now, blessed and beloved son,
you’ve left us so unexpectedly,
We’re in shock.

Your cat, Cola has lost weight in her grief.
How wrong was Death
to come as a thief in the dawn watch.

Oh, Andrew!
Beloved Andrew!

I remember your smile, your laugh,
And know this father’s pain will lessen,
But during how many years?

Goodbye.

Your own journey moved through some great pain.
You died peacefully at home.
Thanks for sharing life with us.

By Matthew J. Beach
TCF, Metrowest Chapter, Holliston, MA
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THE REASON FOR TCF MEETINGS

One could ask, “Why go and listen to the woes of other people when it is easier to get wrapped up in our own?” It is not to compare tragedies, nor assess the right or wrong means of grieving, nor to pressure or complicate or confuse a bereaved parent with timetables of grief. This is not the reasoning behind TCF meetings.

When a child of a family dies, the emotional pain can be intense. It is tempting at times to try to run either into solitude or avoidance. A balance is needed to survive and live more than a resigned existence. Finding a way isn’t easy when the “rest of the world” rushes by, taking little notice that our life has changed.

The monthly meetings of The Compassionate Friends is a special time we can set aside to gain and maintain our balance. We need a lot of encouragement to endure and experience our emotions and to express ourselves while grieving. Coming to a meeting can help alleviate the feeling of being alone in sorrow.

The environment of other bereaved parents offers a means of keeping in touch with reality, in which there can be a sharing and mutual understanding. There is sustained support knowing that others are willing to acknowledge that though a child’s song might be over, the melody of memories will remain woven throughout the remainder of our lives.

N. Hunt
TCF, Sioux Falls, SD

The Breakfast Cup

Yesterday we had breakfast, a small group of men whose common distinction was that we had each lost a child or young son or daughter to death. Talk ranged around the table, mixed with pride, love, regret, and questions: What now? How do we move forward in life a little less than we were? Why was I unable to protect my child? How can I honor his or her memory? How can I be a better man because of this precious gift given me?

The answers, if there were many, varied, and incomplete. As a result of these young lives we considered have come many acts of kindness and faith shared. Growing from their loss is a deepening sense of appreciation for our wives, and our children. There is also an unwanted, yet greater understanding of meaning of death. Who we are as husbands and fathers has changed, even though we can’t fully comprehend how these roles have been altered. Aaron, Mark, Mike, Wayne, and Jan...five guys sitting around a table sharing a meal, sipping coffee, and talking about our children, our hopes, our dreams, our disappointment, our loss, and our next steps.



We have been handed a cup of grief which we cannot refuse. We each take it unwillingly, but take it we must. Its effect is catastrophic and causes us to weep with regret and guilt. The cup has stolen time and love. The cup has altered our course, our walk and in a bizarre way, the cup has led us to a path nearer to God. As men, we desire to fix and solve our family’s problems. We cannot overcome this cup. We can only hold out our trembling hands, raise the cup to our lips, and whisper a silent, aching prayer, “Lord, you will not take this sorrow from us, so help us to honor our children, Carl, Travis, Katie, Kate, and Brian. By Your will, with Your mercy and grace we drink. We share our children with the One who gives us hope and life. Hug them for us today, please. Amen”

Jan Owens
TCF, Visalia, CA



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Grief: A Lifelong Process

When my son was killed I was certain that I would die. My life went on autopilot, my heart was broken, my will to live was gone and I could see no meaning in the world.

Six months later I was still in a bad place. I could not vary from a routine, I became angry very easily, I rarely laughed and I didn't communicate with many people.

On the first anniversary of my son's death I was a zombie. I dreaded the day. I remembered the last conversation; I went over his death in my mind a thousand times. I started asking myself what if I had done this or that....would my child still be alive? I felt a misplaced guilt that was sadistically hammered home by the wrongful death lawsuit of my former daughter-in-law and her accompanying attitude that can only be described as purely malevolent. My husband, who was driving the vehicle when my son was killed, spent hours in self-recrimination, hours with attorneys doing depositions, hours quietly sobbing and my response was that we had to buck up. We had no choice. I hardened on the exterior, but inside I was broken into pieces.

I continued to go to Compassionate Friends meetings, became active in our chapter and read books on grief, death, dying and coping strategies. I leaned heavily on my Compassionate Friends as I endured the pain of losing my son and any possibility of a normal relationship with his children. I know the excruciating pain of intentional cruelty and the radiant warmth of compassion.

Eighteen months after my son was killed, I decided that I had to quantify my progress. I began to soften, to give positive reinforcement to those around me. I reached out to others. I stopped thinking of the negatives within myself and began searching for the positives. I began taking down my emotional wall and allowed some people inside.

It has been 3 years and 3 months since Todd was killed and, in hindsight, I can see the progress I have made. Initially each step was difficult. Now I move forward much like an amputee, progress is steady, but it is slow. I will never be the same again. A part of me has been confiscated by death. This is my reality.

I can laugh now, I can enjoy other people, I can see the beauty in each child I meet, each sunrise and each day. But I can also see and acknowledge the ugly side of this world. There is much cruelty in our world. There is much sadness. Some days I focus on the beauty and joy and some days I look at the cruelty and ugliness.

But the choice is mine to make. If I have a day that is good, it is because I have willed it to be so. If I have a bad day, I have also chosen this.

For I have discovered that grief is a lifelong journey. Our children are with us forever. I close my eyes and see my son. I dream of him at night; our conversations are very interesting, very reassuring. He is with me. And because I always told him that the world is what you make of it, then I must also tell myself the same thing. My world is what I make of it.

Yes, I still grieve. I still miss my child. To hear his voice would be a gift worth more than my life. But I have my memories....memories of raising a beautiful son who became an exceptional man. Our time together was the most meaningful experience of my life. I knew it then, I know it now. There is a void in my life that will never be filled.

My world was never perfect. It certainly will never be perfect. Each day I ask myself what kind of day I want this to be. Sometimes I want it to be a bad day. My sadness overwhelms me and I choose to exorcise it with a bad day. I have the right to have a bad day: my only child is dead. But these days I usually want it to be a good day.....the kind of day my son would have enjoyed.

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

CHRISTMAS IS ALMOST HERE

Hi All,

I promised I'd let you know how my day went at Children's Hospital today. I saw eyes that were weary, little ones hooked up to IVs, and teenagers without hair from the aftermath of chemo. This year they took me into the intensive care units. It was hard. Hard to see parents sitting next to their children, all so tiny, with tears rolling down their faces. While I was there, a four year old died. I had to get out of the area. I saw a set of older people come out, tears rolling down the elderly gentleman's eyes, and the woman, trying to control herself. We locked eyes for one moment, and I saw myself back 24 years ago as I was told, "He's gone."

Babies so tiny, from 2 weeks old to 6 months old, fighting for their life. One dad and mom were sitting in their room where the dad was holding their 4 month old baby. She has a cancerous tumor. When the mother picked out the animal she wanted and turned the tag that read, In Memory Of, she looked up at me and with her eyes I saw the question. I didn't say anything, and then she said, "Did you?" I nodded my head yes. She whispered, "How old?" "Five" I stated. The dad started to cry, choking sobs coming from him, I went to him and hugged him and said, "It's ok, take care of this little girl God has given you," and he just kept crying and nodding his head yes.



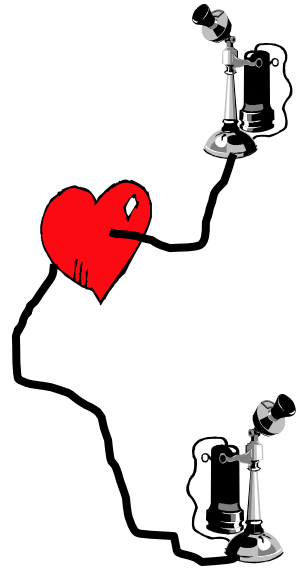
The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



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



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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The mom got up and gave me one of the tightest bear hugs I've ever received in my life.

Room after room, child after child I went on my rounds. And then we came to the room of a four year old little boy. He told his mom he wanted to be on TV. Two television stations were with me and we entered the room. I was carrying an armload of animals. He chose the cutest monkey. But when he saw the TV cameras, he went camera shy. His mom said, "He knows how to sing 'Jingle Bells'." I looked at his mom, the other mom with me, the two camera men, and the little guy, and I said, "Is that so?" He looked at me and I said, "Well, let's all sing Jingle Bells." I started off and everyone joined in. I saw his little lips start to sing for a second then he quit and just listened. I turned my head to see both cameramen with tears welled up in their eyes. Holding those cameras, focusing on that little guy, I've got two grown cameramen who are touched by what they saw. Isn't this what Christmas is all about?

The cameramen went to several rooms with me, then they had to get back to the studio to recap the filming and write the story for the news tonight. Now I can say I've been hugged by Fox stations and CBS!! The one man tried to say something to me and instead, he croaked out, "You are doing something here this world needs to know about." He said, with tears in his eyes, that his niece is ill with cancer and it's tearing the family apart. He said, "This is too close to home for me." But both stations are going to DCH Hospital in Tuscaloosa, Al with me Christmas Eve when I deliver there.

Not only were the kids glad to get a stuffed animal, but the parents knowing that all the animals came from bereaved parents, their lives were touched. One dad hugged me and said, "I pray to God I never have to walk in your shoes." I hugged him back and said I hope he never had to also.

It was a rewarding day. I know my son is looking down on this vast earth and is happy that I tried all I could do today to make children's and parents lives happier if only for a moment. I was very lucky. My son did not have an illness and have to be in a hospital. I don't know what that would feel like. But from the tears I saw today, the love I saw on parents faces, and the hugs that I received, I knew their hearts were broken.

One man was sitting in the hallway with two little girls about age 5 and 8. He thought I was selling stuffed animals and I told him no, we were giving away animals to all the sick kids. He was visiting his daughter's little friend. Amber was her name. I looked at Amber lying in the bed, golden blond hair flowing across the pillow, sedated heavily, she lay there asleep. The room was full of people. Some were crying. Some hugging each other. I knew Amber was in serious condition. I later found out Amber has cancer of the stomach. She's 4 years old. She was one of the most beautiful children I have ever laid eyes on. When I handed her mom the stuffed animal, I looked up to see her face and I saw the strain and weariness from watching her little girl. It broke my heart. I hugged her. And then everyone in the room hugged me.

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The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



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Word spread in the hospital as I made my rounds and parents were waiting on us to get to their room. They knew all these animals come in memory of angels. I couldn't count the hugs I got today. I couldn't count the tears I saw shed. I can't even explain what it feels like. But I know lives were touched today.

When it was all done, and I'd been there for over four hours, one nurse asked me what will be my most memorable memory today. I looked at her and said, "The parents whose child went to heaven." And then I smiled and said, "And singing 'Jingle Bells' with a little four year old."

Doctors came and shook my hand and told me over and over that what I was doing was one of the most wonderful things they've ever seen, to take my son's memory, and everyone's child who helped me make this day possible, and to reach out and give to someone else that needs an angel's touch. It was a warm feeling.

And then there was J.J. J.J. is 14 years old and he needs dialysis daily. He knows every kid in the hospital. He knows where every room is, he lives there practically. He helped me pull one of the wagons filled with animals. He's a boy I will never forget. We were making our rounds, we came to HIS room. I looked at him and said, "J.J., you better hop in that bed so I can get a photo of you." With his mask on and his thin little body, he hopped into his bed so we could film him receiving his animal. He crawled into bed, pulled the covers up so we couldn't see his clothes on.....and we took our pictures of him. He jumped out of that bed and I said, "Where are you going?" He said, "With you." I laughed and said "Well, you better put your animal in the bed and pull the covers up by his neck." He did, then said, "Won't the nurses be surprised when they find a teddy bear in bed instead of me!" And off we went to make more rounds. J.J. stayed with me until it was time for him to get his dialysis treatment. He came back a while later, in a wheelchair. J.J. got to me because I was told his parents don't come to see him. When I asked why, I was told, "They say they don't have time." Don't have time? Your child has to have daily treatment and you don't have time to be there. J.J. doesn't want to go "home" for Christmas. He's already asked a nurse if she'd take him home just for Christmas Day with her. I can't imagine this. But it happens.

Last night a little girl was dying needing a liver transplant. They told me the liver arrived in an ice cooler. It was rushed in through the doors and was in process of being carried to the operating room.....when her little body gave out. Those kind of stories are hard to swallow. My mind reeled back to another little child, who needed to LIVE, and was on his way to the hospital and.....didn't make it. I rode in the ambulance with him, my heart ripped from my body. Praying with all I had in me. I too, lost my child that night.

I will do this two more times Christmas Eve. I will walk the halls of two other hospital and try and bring a smile to a child's face or to give the parents a ray of hope. It is all I can offer. But it's Christmas. My remaining two children are grown. They know what I do. My son said to me last night, "Boy, Mom, you sure got a lot of stuffed animals in." I grinned and said, "Sure do, and I've got a lot of sick kids who will get them."

I had a rewarding day. A VERY rewarding day. Will I do it again? YOU BET! Next year I hope to see others do the same in your state. Believe me, you will never forget it. Our children's memories will live on forever and ever. God Bless, Sharon Bryant.

Andy Dunbar

January 22, 1972 - October 24, 1977

I'm his mom and he's my angel.....forever

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The Holidays Are Coming!

"The Holidays are coming! The Holidays are coming!" Most bereaved parents make that observation with the same sense of fear and dread that Chicken Little had when he announced, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" We view Christmas or Hanukkah differently than the rest of the world. In our minds they become great trials to be endured. In my opinion, this trial is tougher than birthdays or death anniversaries. This is the time when love abounds. The family (and extended family) all gather together, coming from near and far, to share in this love. The only trouble with this happy scene is that our child is missing. He or she has traveled too far from us to come for the holidays! We can't buy gifts for a photograph or hug and kiss a memory. The emptiness that this creates in us cannot be filled, no matter how many relatives gather by our hearth. To add to the pain, most well-meaning friends and relatives feel that the best way to handle the problem is to pretend that it doesn't exist. They never mention the one person that is on the minds and in the hearts of everyone. We found out early on that it is not possible to keep the "presence" of our child out of a family gathering. Trying to do so makes everyone uncomfortable and causes us as parents to feel disloyal.

The first Christmas after our son died, we did it "their" way. Never again! Now we make sure that he is very much a part of our holiday. For starters, we decided once again to hang all three stockings. We don't fill them, but just seeing them all hanging together is right for us. The tree was very important to Blake.



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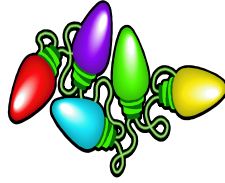


The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



(continued from last page)

Every year he took the responsibility of stringing the lights for us. Now it is important to us to see that Blake has a tree. We have a very special one, about 3 feet tall, that we weight heavily at the bottom. We decorate it with weather-proof ornaments and place it at his grave. We leave the tree there until spring so it can mark the gravesite when the snows are deep. We also have a lovely candle that we burn on special days. This is our way of including our missing son in the family circle. But most important, we talk about him. We don't do it obsessively, but we don't hesitate to recall memories of him as often as we recall those of other children in the family. Because we talk of him in an easy and natural manner, the rest of the family has taken our cue. They now bring up his name naturally. It is all so much more comfortable than the way we tried to handle it that first year.



Another couple in our chapter had a wonderful idea for the first holiday after their daughter died. Their greatest fear was that no one would mention her, so they compiled an album of her pictures and casually left it out on the coffee table. It wasn't long before people were looking through it, recalling favorite memories of her, and the ice was broken.



There must be so many other ways that you can make your child a part of your holiday, ways that seem right and comfortable for you. You may choose to keep your thoughts private rather than share them with others. But the most important thing to remember is that the choice is yours. Do what makes you comfortable, not what others think should make you comfortable. If you follow the dictates of your heart and that gives you comfort, those around you will see that and follow your lead.

Marge Frankenberg
TCF, Arlington Heights, IL



No Matter Where You Go...

I was watching a ridiculous but entertaining movie for my frame of mind at the time. There was a scene where the lead was playing a loud, rock song in a nightclub, when he suddenly stopped to say someone was crying. A surprised audience and band could not imagine how the lead could have heard the sobs. He called for a spotlight and began talking to a tearful girl who he found was on the run. Buccaroo Banzai said to her, "No matter where you go, there you are."

We, as bereaved parents, are sometimes just like that girl. We have found ourselves in a bad movie, trying desperately to run from the pain and suffering that is our grief. Some of us have tried to run away from our grief by changing jobs, moving or retreating into depression. It isn't surprising that we feel unable to do anything positive. No matter where you go, no matter what you do, there you are, no matter.

Grief is not something you can run away from. It isn't something you can shelve until a more appropriate time. It builds until it bursts out with tears, anger, guilt, blame, depression and loneliness. Let it go. Let it happen. We all deserve to grieve. We need to let grief express itself in every way to truly grieve well.

We as Compassionate Friends, above the roar of living around us, can hear your sobs, and we know your fears and pain. We can extend love and hope. In time, the tumult of feelings, the heartache and desperation will soften. Then, instead of finding grief wherever you go, you will find that you are there, now, and not having such a bad time.

Edie Kaplan
TCF, West Broward, FL

Tabloids

The line in the grocery store was long that day, leaving plenty of time to scan the magazines positioned near the checkout counter to catch the attention of restless, impatient customers. "Flatten Your Tummy," "Lose 40 Pounds in 30 Minutes with Our Amazing New Diet," "Eat Prune Pits for a healthy Sex Life," and on and on.



I thought about parents in grief. And I know the response most of us have in the early weeks, months and years of grief: What does it matter? Why should I be concerned about health? Life takes on a different meaning after a child dies. We feel like we will never again care if our tummies are flat and our muscles are strong.

If there had been an article on the rack that day about getting up when I'm not sure if I can walk, drinking water when I cannot even swallow, breathing in and out without sighing, waking up or going to sleep without flashbacks, staying silent when my heart wants to scream... I would have bought it.

Alice Monroe
TCF, CO



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



A Christmas Gift from Heaven

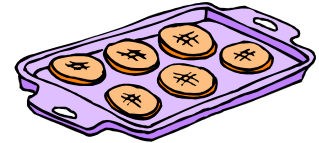
The first snow of the season is gently falling outside my office window. On the one hand, it is beautiful to look at; on the other hand, for me, as I know it is for those whose loved one's chair will sit empty at the holiday table this year, it signals the advent of the remaining three of the "Big Four" holidays. This time of year is perhaps one of the ultimate tests of endurance for the bereaved, and it is particularly difficult for those who will undergo Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's for the first time since their child, sibling or grandchild died.

It has been eight holiday seasons since my Nina died. Though I remember little to nothing about the first Thanksgiving, I still quite clearly remember that painful first Christmas. Even with the blessed numbness of early grief to anesthetize me from some of the sting, I still recall the emptiness. That only an 8 x 10 photo of her smiling face with a lit votive candle placed next to it marked Nina's presence that Christmas of 1995, along with the knowledge she would never physically be present at another holiday family celebration, was beyond comprehension. Although everyone tried desperately to bring some normalcy to an anything-but-normal holiday, by the end of the day we were exhausted from the effort. As we drove quietly from my parents house that evening, I will never forget the car ride home and watching my son in the rearview mirror. Where in other years past there would have been the back-seat horseplay of brother and sister after a fun holiday spent with extended family, instead he sat alone with tears streaming down his face with the conspicuously unoccupied seat next to him. The silence was deafening and spoke volumes of our intense sorrow.

I can truthfully say that each holiday since the first two have become a little more tolerable, I would never say "easier" because there is nothing "easy" about any of this. I think the word "gentler" fits better. Though obviously never the same as before, it has become bearable, even with moments of joy and laughter sprinkled in. The fact that it gets gentler with time may or may not help any of the newly bereaved reading right now because, honestly, that first and second year I couldn't imagine another holiday season, much less life, without Nina. Moreover, on my early grief voyage when someone who had been down the road before me gave the old "it will get better with time" routine, it fell on deaf ears. I could see no hope, no light at the end of the tunnel. My reality was that my daughter was dead and she was never coming back.

Whether it would get better down the road mattered little at that time; it just plain hurt. Though you may not wish to embrace stories of hope just yet, please let me share with you something that happened to me the week before that first Christmas. For 15+ years, a group of my friends get together right before Christmas. We only see each other once a year but always seem to be able to catch up right where we left off the year before. I decided to go to that gathering of friends that first Christmas after Nina's death. I felt she would want me to surround myself, if I felt able (an important point, please don't feel you have to do anything you don't feel up to, you are the best judge of what you can and cannot handle), with comforting and caring people and perhaps give me a small reprieve from some of the "awfulness" of the holidays.

When I got there one of my friends, Anne, walked over to me, gave me a hug and handed me a box. To the best of my recollection she said something like, "I know this is going to seem odd and I don't know what to make of it, but as I was baking these cookies, something told me to bring some to you. I have no idea why, but the feeling was very powerful to do this, so here they are." I opened the box and I couldn't believe what I saw: Spritz cookies, unbeknownst to Anne, Nina's very favorite Christmas cookie! I had bought a cookie press the previous year so that Nina and I could make them together and I very much regretted that we never had gotten a chance to do that. I agonized about that so often that first season after her death. Through my tears, I explained this to Anne.



I know, without a doubt, that those delicious little butter cookies were Nina's Christmas gift from heaven to me. It was her way to tell me to let go of the guilt of never making Spritz cookies together, and to let me know that even though she was gone from my sight, that she was still very much with me and holding me close during that excruciatingly difficult season. I share this hopeful message of love, which I believe is sent through Nina from **ALL** our children, siblings and grandchildren; that though we can't "see" them yet in the way that we wish, they do most definitely live on.

I hold each of you and your precious children close to my heart this holiday season. Please be gentle with yourself,

Cathy L. Seehuetter
TCF, St. Paul, MN



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



CANDLES IN THE NIGHT

A heart broken by the death of a child can never be healed. As parents we try every way that can be thought of to cope with the loss, but the void will always be there. At first that emptiness seems to take your breath away and most times we wish it would.

This becomes different with the passage of time. It never goes away, but at some point we learn to live with it, and in fact this horrible feeling becomes a lifeline of sorts. One of our biggest fears is to forget our children. Forget how they looked or how their voices sounded. The smiles and tears that blur together to make a child. This emptiness in effect becomes a constant yearning to remember our children.

Our hearts force us to find ways to fill that void to maintain our role as parents. Some are as simple as visiting the cemetery and some are as complex as changing our entire lives, dedicated to the memory of our child. In between are the many rituals we create or borrow from others to honor the memories and to keep our child's name alive.

Lighting a candle and saying a child's name keeps their memory burning bright. It means we are struggling to cope with this unwanted role of bereaved parent in the only positive manner we can. We will most certainly shed tears every time and we will still miss our child, but we are doing something that allows the world to hear our child's name and for that one moment the candle means so much more than anyone else could ever understand.

For a fleeting second that is our universe and every memory we have comes flooding back to us as we see the flame through tears, distorting it into something magical. It's the only gift we can give our children. This is as close as we can get to our child now. A tiny, flickering flame that can warm the heart and it's nice to think that perhaps they can see it also. It's a beacon, our light in the window, our shining star in the darkness. It's an opening of our hearts and a way to share our grief.

We gather to honor the memories of our children and to share this bond of lighting a candle for the children all over the world. We miss them so much.

*By Jim Lowery
TCF, Sugar Land/SW Houston, TX*



Uncharacteristic Behaviors

When Junior, the National Zoo's resident ape went on his escape travels a few months ago, the story was recorded in the local papers. This was probably because he came close to hopping over his barrier and into the laps of his human observers, many of them children. The press called this "uncharacteristic behavior" and, in a side note, added that his long time mate, Pency had recently died.

Now you and I would put all of this into proper perspective and agree, "Of course!" And then we would reflect upon our own "uncharacteristic behaviors" following the death of our beloved (grand) children.

Many times these behaviors confound and confuse those close to us. How far will we go beyond our barriers? And will we return and be "ourselves" again? I was amazed at emotions I had never felt so strongly before. I thought that anger would become a permanent part of my reactions and I welcomed any kind of release from it. Confronting it and dealing with it was difficult. Sadness settled upon me like a soggy fleece and I thought that I might never shrug it off! And the apathy with which I met each day was very concerning, indeed! Junior's escapade brought all of my own "uncharacteristic behaviors" up from the not so distant past. Amusing?...a little; but more than that I wanted to shout with the children who watched him that late summer day, and encourage him to run and run, shaking off the grief and sadness of losing his beloved Pency.

*by Lorie Hartsig
TCF, St. Mary's County, MD*

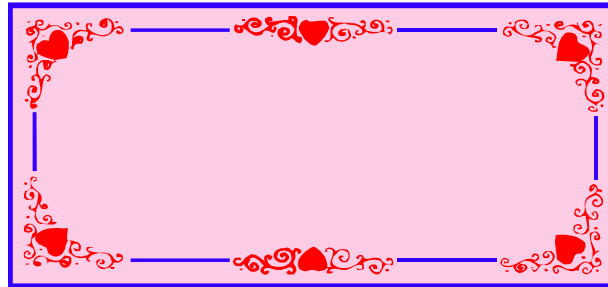
After October

And if there be a perfect month,
for me, it is October...
With days and nights like laughing fauns,
with mornings bright and sober.
When wind will dance in sudden glee
to do the autumn-sweeping
or cloud and fog and wistful rain
can move a heart to weeping.
And in October You were born,
four days before November...
And four years later you were gone,
my little son, my only son,
I love you.
And remember...

sascha



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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all
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Sunday, December 13, 2009
7 PM Around the Globe

