

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Post Office Box 583 Taylors, South Carolina 29687

(864) 288-8342

www.tcfogreenvillesc.org

JULY 2003

This month's newsletter is lovingly dedicated by Gene & Bonnie Duncan in memory of their daughter, Alyson. Alyson's birthday was last month – June 18th.

What the TCF Veterans Know

Are you new to The Compassionate Friends? We want to welcome you, but somehow that word isn't right- this is not a group anyone wants to join. All of us wish no one ever had to walk through that door or receive this newsletter. So when we say welcome, perhaps what we really mean is we're so sorry-but we are glad you've found us and hope you will find support at TCF.

Many members of TCF were hesitant to attend that first meeting. We didn't know what to expect. Would we be forced to talk about our child? Did TCF members all share the same faith? Did we have to make a donation or commit to anything? The answer to all those questions is NO. We'll listen if you wish to talk; we are members of all faiths and none; there is not cost; and you may attend as often as you wish and stay for a long as you wish. Just come!

Our few rules are simple ones and designed to ensure that TCF is a safe and comfortable place for those grieving a child's death. We request that members maintain confidentiality within the group, and we ask you to respect everyone's right to their individual beliefs. We don't tell each other how to grieve; we just walk together along this most painful of journeys.

Having made the difficult decision to attend, some of us old timers remember being surprised or disappointed at what we found there. Perhaps we were hoping our grief would begin to ease but instead we woke the next morning feeling even worse. Already overwhelmed with our own pain, now the grief of others weighted on our mind. The parent who was sadly remembering their child's death 10 years ago frightened us: would we still feel so sad after all those years? And what about those folks laughing and drinking coffee? How can they seem so carefree? It was impossible to think I would ever hear the sound of my own laughter again.

Perhaps talking about the death of a child isn't such a good idea after all. But thousands of TCF members around the world would say it was a good idea, just not an easy one. Many forced themselves to attend at first, remembering the leader's recommendation that it takes three meetings before a new member should make a decision about TCF. Others wished there was a meeting every week. Everyone is different. Those of us who continue to participate, sometimes for a year, sometimes forever, slowly discover what makes TCF work for us. First it's good to know you're not losing your mind even though it may feel like it. It's strangely comforting to know that others understand your confusion and face similar difficulties. Sharing our own stories and listening to the stories of others eases the isolation that many bereaved families' experience.

One day we look at the parent who cries for the child who died 10 years ago with a new understanding. His everyday life is no longer eclipsed by pain; we visit with him regularly at the coffee table. But TCF is the place he can bring his memories and his grief and talk about the child he will always miss and love. The thought that we, too, may want to be involved with TCF for many years does not seem as frightening as it did those first months we hesitated before walking in the door.

It isn't easy getting here, of course. But we don't hesitate anymore. We unlock the door and stand there, hoping that the newly bereaved family arriving will know that they – and we – need not walk alone.

What is "Normal" after four years?
(other than the name of a city in Illinois)

Normal is every experience being "bittersweet". It is laughing through tears. It is having tears waiting behind every smile. Normal is trying to decide what to take to the cemetery for every special occasion and knowing that when I'm gone there will never be another flower or decoration on Amanda's grave. Normal is the new friends I've found since Amanda's death (the ones who don't shriek when I say her name). It is those special people, old and new, who are as comfortable with my tears as they are with my laughter. Normal is being more comfortable at a funeral home or cemetery than at a wedding or birthday celebration. Normal is feeling like I can't sit another minute without getting up and screaming when people talk about trivial matters or when I'm with people who just don't "get it".

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OUR CHILDREN REMEMBERED

Stacey Bannister – 7/5/67 – 2/15/03
Bryan Lee Denny – 7/23/55 – 3/28/98
Deborah Jolley – 2/27/61 - 7/24/99
Jeremy Knoke – 6/4/79 - 7/5/91
Tim McKelder – 1/18/76 - 7/18/98
Amanda Williams – 12/4/79 - 7/25/99

LOVE GIFTS

We acknowledge the following gifts with sincere gratitude and deep appreciation:

Mr. & Mrs. Wally Muirhead in memory of Amanda Williams.

Norman and Alice Raiford in memory of their granddaughter, Schuyler.

Mr. & Mrs. M.E. Linder in memory of their granddaughter, Hannah Marie.

MONTHLY MEETING

Thursday, July 10th at 7:30 pm at Pelham Road Baptist Church, 1108 Pelham Road.

In order for your child's name to appear in our newsletter column - "CHILDREN REMEMBERED", we must have a consent form on file. If you have not filled out one and would like to do so, please visit our website to obtain the consent form.

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Normal is wondering what Amanda would be doing now, how her hair would be cut, where she would be working, if she would have bought her first house by now. Normal is watching Amanda's friends go on with their lives (the ones that stay in touch, anyway). Normal is being so very thankful for those special friends who still call after four years and who "still remember Amanda". Normal is telling the story of Amanda's death as if it were an everyday, common place occurrence, and then seeing the horror in someone's eyes at how awful it sounds. Normal is wishing I still had remarkable stories to share with people about things she would be doing now "if" she were still here.

Normal is each year coming with the difficult, yet still special, task of honoring Amanda's memory. Normal is wanting to do everything in my power to ensure that she is NEVER forgotten. Normal is being scared to death that since she was an only child, there will be no one left to remember" when I'm gone. I am her legacy.

Normal is my heart warming and yet sinking at the sight of something Amanda loved or enjoyed doing, knowing that she's not here to enjoy it, and feeling guilty that I am here. Normal is trying to take care of myself, even when I don't want to, knowing that I want Amanda to be as proud of me in her death as she was of me in her life.

Normal is being impatient with everything and everyone except those who are as stricken with grief as myself. Normal is wondering how to answer the question, "How many children do you have?" and the chill that still goes through my spine each and every time it's asked. Normal is meeting this thing called grief head on and not running, as much as I wish I could. Normal is asking God "why?" knowing that the answer wouldn't change a thing. Normal is my heart racing at the thought of what has happened and the reality that "she's really not here anymore". Normal is hiding all the things that have become "normal" so that everyone around me will think that I am "normal".

By Julia Muirhead in loving memory of Amanda * 12/04/79 – 07/25/99 *



Visit Greenville's own website of The Compassionate Friends at:
www.tcfogreenvillesc.org

Remember

When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you, that I have left some mark of who I am on who you are. It means that you can summon me back to your mind even though countless years and miles may stand between us. It means that even after I die, you can still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart.