

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Post Office Box 25573 Greenville, South Carolina 29616

(864) 288-9820 www.tcfogreenvillesc.org



January 8, 2008 Meeting

Always the second Thursday of the month

Topic:

Open Discussion

Facilitated by:

Julia Muirhead

Meeting Time & Location

7:30 P.M.

Pelham Rd. Baptist Church,

Family Life Center

1108 Pelham Rd., Greenville, SC

Compassionate Friends

A Safe Place to Talk

There is a need to talk, without trying to give reasons. No reason is going to be acceptable when you hurt so much. A hug, the touch of a hand, expressions of concern, a willing listener was and still is the things that helped the most. The people who were the greatest help were not judgmental. It's most helpful when people understand that what is needed is to talk about it and that this is part of the grief process.

TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Coming to the first meeting is the hardest, but you have nothing to lose and everything to gain! Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not The Compassionate Friends will work for you. At the next meeting you may find just the right person or just the right words said that will help you in your grief work.

TO OUR MEMBERS WHO ARE FURTHER DOWN THE "GRIEF ROAD"

We need your encouragement and your support. Each meeting we have new parents. **THINK BACK** – what would it have been like for you at your first meeting if there had not been any TCF "veterans" to welcome you, share your grief, encourage you and tell you, "your pain will not always be this bad, it really does get better!"

A PRAYER FOR THE NEW YEAR

Where there is pain,
let there be softening.
Where there is bitterness,
let there be acceptance...
Where there is silence,
let there be communication.
Where there is loneliness,
let there be friendships.
Where there is despair,
let there be hope.

*Ruth Eiseman,
TCF; Louisville, KY*

The New Year

Let this New Year gently lead you into a more peaceful time. May your grief stay within your heart for your loved one, but also guide you into new experiences that are still waiting for you. Let the memory of your loved one fill you with hope that this will be a better year, that the pain will subside and only the wonderful memories will remain. That the sting of tears will ease and you will find peace.

*By Karin Powell TCF
Volusia/Flagler Chapter
Ormond Beach, FL*

A NEW YEAR WISH

I wish you all a blessing
As the New Year approaches us all
May this year bring gentle memories
Of our child that God has called

I wish you all some sunshine
That clouds can cover on some
days I pray your hearts will mend
As mine has along the way

I thank God for our TCF "family"
and the Online Sharing each day
For so many are always there
To help so many find their way
I wish I could take each one of you
And show you what I've learned
As time has helped my own heart

Your feelings are my concern
The Holidays are the hardest
As you all very well know
Yet we can find healing
As the New Year unfold
May you all know I'm thinking
About each and every one of you
I give you all my blessing
And hope the New Year is gentle for
you.

*Sharon Bryant
TCF, Alabama*

New Year

The new year comes when all the
world is ready
for changes, resolutions - great
beginnings.

For us, to whom that stroke of
midnight means
a missing child remembered,
for us the new years comes
more like another darkness.

But let us not forget that this may be
the year
when love and hope and courage
find each other somewhere in the
darkness
to lift their voice and speak:
let there be light.

*"The Sorrow and the Light" by
Sascha*

The January 2009 Newsletter is lovingly dedicated to the memory of all our Children . . . gone too soon.

Our Children Remembered:
Loved, missed and forever in our minds and in our hearts, as we celebrate their life.

JANUARY SUNRISES

Brianna Lynn Barton
Charlie Bellinger
Erika Leeann Brock
Rivers Chandler
Trent Mauldin-Chapman
Jon Zachary Carpenter
Kim Gregory
Justin Hix
Jimmy Hayes
Jacob Alexander Nicholson
Michael Page
Rachael Marie Schmidt
Tracey Jean Whaley

JANUARY SUNSETS

Kimberly Grimsley Dacus
Jill Dunlap
Christopher (Chris) Ellison
Corey Alexander King
Jeremy McIntyre
Christopher McLaughlin
Michael Page
Christopher Lewis Parker
Kate Finnessy Proud
Matthew Robert Renner
Holly Stephens
Lucia White

A recent memo from our National Headquarters has urged the local TCF Chapters **NOT** to publish the birthdates of our children. This is because birthdates are often used to commit identity theft. TCF Greenville will comply with this recommendation as identity theft would lead to further grief for our bereaved families. We hope that all will understand this concern.

We acknowledge the following love gifts with sincere gratitude and deep appreciation in Loving Memory of:

Kelly Anne Bennett – by *Patricia and John Bennett*

Corrie Drayton Harley – by *Marie and Rod Harley*

Eric Gow – by *Janis and Tom Gow*

John R. Johnson II – by *Virginia Johnson*

Barbara Konduros – by *Helen and James Gaines*

Tim Malone – by *Jean and Frank Malone*

Quinn Hall – by *Shelvia and Tommie Nichols*

Rachel Marie Schmidt – by *Hilari, Paul, Sam, and Max Pugliese*

Jason Nicholas Smith – by *Janet Steketee*

Aubrey (Porter) Wallace – by *Phyllis and Pete Wallace*

Amy Wilkinson – by *Anne and Don Wilkinson*

Donny Wilkinson – by *Anne and Don Wilkinson*

Amanda Camile Williams – by *Julia Muirhead*

**** Love Gifts received after the 20th of the month, will be published in the following month's newsletter.**

It is the New Year

The holidays are behind us. We did with them what we could. Whether they were a time of sorrow, a time of joy, or a combination of both, they are now a part of our memories. In a strange way, as a memory in our hearts and in our minds, our child's place is there among all the other memories of the season. There is hurt along with the memory, but also thankfulness for the memory.

Now we look out on a winter landscape. The earth is cold, the land sharply defined. Yet underneath the hard crust, the energy and warmth of our earth is guarding and providing life to all that grows.

We may personally know the coldness and hardness of a grief so fresh that we feel numb—a grief so hurtful that our body feels physically hard, our throats tight from tears shed or unshed, our chests banded tightly by our mourning heart. If we are not now experiencing this, our memories recollect so easily those early days.

Yet as we live these days, like the earth from which we receive our sustenance, we too, in our searching, find places of warmth and change and love and growth deep within. Let our hearts and minds dwell in these places and be armed and renewed by them, and let us have the courage and love to share them with our loved ones, to talk about even that first dim shape of new hope or new acceptance, new understanding, or of new love.

These are our new roots, born of our love of our child that are forming and stirring within, gathering strength so that our lives, at the right time can blossom once again and be fruitful in a new and deep way.

*By Marie Andrews
South Maryland Chapter*

The Sharing Of Grief

I cannot carry this burden alone, the road is too steep and the pain too great. I shall only get to the top of the hill if I am able to lean on a firm shoulder whose strength lies in the reality of the feet which bear its weight. The sharing of grief is the only solution to the crisis that surrounds bereavement in our age. To share a person's sorrow is to accept their reality and to acknowledge the fact that none of us is immune from death.

*Reverend Simon Stevens.
Founder of The Compassionate Friends*

What Do I Do With My Child's Room?

I guess I put this off as long as I could. I am one of those bereaved parents who has never touched their child's room after they died. I have added things, but never subtracted. Basically, everything is in its place as she left it 6+ years ago. Everything that a normal 15-year-old would possess: posters and pictures of friends held to the wall by thumb tacks, playbills from the school musical she was in, dried corsages from school dances, stuffed animals won at the fair thrown haphazardly on her bed, teen magazines and CD's scattered here and there...my remaining links to the past, flashbacks before the loss of our innocence. One that really hurt was the note that she had left to herself that said, "Work at Perkins, May 14th from 7 - 3." Rather than my Nina excitedly, yet apprehensively going off to the second day of her first "real" job, my family and I were at the funeral home making the final arrangements for her funeral. Surreal and so sad...

I can remember the first year or two when I would peer into her room and look at all the glorious clutter of her active life. I swore I would never touch a thing, never throw anything out...it would be left intact forever. The times I did spend in her room were usually spent wrapped in her afghan on top of her bed, practically curled in the fetal position with a box of Kleenex, and sobbing my heart out "I will never change this room, never!" was my mindset back then.

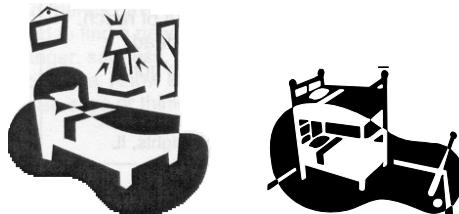
But things have changed. Due to some family issues, we have to make room for more people residing in our house. The time had come to face it...I had no choice. It is a long involved process. My sweet Nina was a pack rat, to say the least! She saved everything! I have sifted through page after page of her school work. I have squelched the urge to look through the shoebox that says on the outside, "Notes from Friends, 8th grade", instead choosing to not invade her privacy, even after death. I have gone through her closet, and studied her clothing, remembering what she looked like in each outfit. She was so tiny! Size 3-4 jeans and the teeniest little shirts you can ever imagine. It reminded me why we always said she was "Petite but powerful!"..though tiny she was a giant of a human being...loving, considerate, and so full of good ideas.

I have had my moments of intense sadness, such as when I have come across her, "Book about Me" that she made in school, the part that asks who is the most important person in your life, to which she answers in her grade school handwriting, "My Mommy, of course." I cry for the loss of that love and our close relationship, even something that carried over into her teens, what are supposed to be the "rebellious years." Even in her confirmation book she wrote the same identical thing when asked who was the most important in her life. God, I miss her so.

What I have been pleasantly surprised about, though, is that maybe the fact that I waited so long has made this an easier (for lack of a better word...there is nothing "easy" about any of this!) task. Bittersweet, I guess would describe it. I have found myself laughing more at these pictures and reminders of the past, and crying less. And the most amazing thing has happened. The past three nights I have slept in her bed. I am the first one to have slept there since Nina died over six years ago. After I turn off the lights and crawl into her bed, the glow-in-the-dark stars that she put into perfectly placed constellations, gleam and twinkle...it is the only thing that you can see. I feel like I am lying in her bed, protectively wrapped in her arms, and seeing a piece of heaven just as she does now, and what she used to see from her bed when she was alive. The closeness I feel to her at that moment is indescribable! I haven't slept as peacefully since Nina died as I have these past three nights!

I wanted to share this with you in case there are others out there like me...who haven't taken on the task of clearing out their child's room and wondered if they ever would be able to. And, also for those who have heard the comments, "You haven't cleaned out her/his room YET!?!?!" I know it isn't the right choice for everyone; as we all know, the ways we handle our grief and our ways of dealing with our child's possessions are all different, just as they should be. But for those who have waited, I want to reassure you that it has turned out to be a much more positive experience than I imagined. All part of seeing that you really ARE making progress and finding a little hope along the way...that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Cathy Seehuetter,
Nina's mom forever
St. Paul, MN TCF



Shared Experience: A Two-fold Look at Grief

Question: What do I do with my child's room?

I think a child's room is something that has to be approached carefully with the thoughts and needs of other family members living in the house considered too. Diana and I couldn't deal with going through Rachel's things after she died. But Rachel shared a bedroom with her sister, Emily, so we had to consider Emily's feelings in regards to Rachel's room as well as our own need to have Rachel's things out where we could readily find them. Emily was 14 at the time and understandably wanted to have the room to herself. Our oldest daughter, Amanda, was 17 and wanted to have some of Rachel's things up in her room. So within weeks of Rachel's death we had her clothes, toys and other personal possessions in plastic tubs in the basement with some items in our bedroom and Amanda's bedroom.

About a month after Rachel's death we cleared off the top of the entertainment center in the living room and put important items on it that were Rachel's or represented her. We've continued doing this for seven years rotating the items on top of the entertainment center through the year. In a way this has become Rachel's "room" for us. It's also given us a real reason to go through the plastic tubs and determine what we want to keep. We gave away most all of Rachel's clothes within the first year. Papers, photos and artwork have slowly been put into scrap books and photo albums. But we did this at our own pace. Plastic tubs have been great in slowing down the feeling that we must move fast in making decisions on our children's things. Years later we now have Rachel's stuffed animals all up on platforms we built around the top of the walls in Amanda's old room out of the tubs and up where we can see them daily.

Cleaning out a room for us was a necessity but we were able to save the "room" by packing things up and thinking through the items that represented our daughter slowly. Take into account your feelings, the feelings of immediate family members living with you and the uses of temporary storage if you have to pack things up quickly.

Bill Sowers
TCF, Racine/Kenosha, WI

I am a control freak. I have no energy left to hide that fact anymore. I cleaned out Ross' stuff immediately because I thought it would give me some control over my emotions - and I think, to some degree, it did. That very first morning, before going to the funeral home, I opened my silverware drawer to get a spoon for tea. There, in neat rows, were all his favorite things - Power Ranger straws and Pooh Bear forks, lids to his Crayola cups. I slammed the drawer shut and made a plan. That afternoon, I called friends with pickup trucks and we started hauling out the possessions of his short lifetime. Things fell into place: our children's hospital gratefully took his beautiful toys and wrapped Christmas and birthday gifts. Our local women's shelter took his furniture and clothing. A friend of mine was involved in foster care at that time, and had a four year old boy - she took all the Tylenol, books, and gently used items. I told myself that this was the kind of boy I had - giving - and he was be very happy to see other children enjoying his things - it was Christmas, after all.

And then I had a flash of him, telling my father-in-law that he just didn't do that "sharing thing" very well. But he did.

It all went in those two days between his death and his funeral, leaving me with a house completely stripped of him. The precious things I did keep were packed carefully in Rubbermaid.

I don't regret, and I guess that's what is important. Is it right for everyone? Oh, absolutely not - but it was right for me. And I didn't know any different. So much of grief *is* just following your instincts, and mine told me to empty my house in order to control myself.

I think this was my first realization that there weren't any how-to manuals written to get me through this - I just had to learn to listen to myself and trust my own judgment, no matter how it looked to the outside world. That's how my son had always done it.

Peg Rousar-Thompson
TCF, Racine/Kenosha, WI

TCF National Office

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nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

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www.compassionatefriends.com

TCF National Memory Book

If you would like to have your child's name put in the TCF National Memory Book, please send the following information concerning your child to our National Office. **Child's Full Name, Date of Birth, Date of Death, Relationship to child, Your Name, Address, and Zip Code. Also include Your Phone Number and E-mail Address.**

Love Gifts – A Way to Remember

There are no dues to belong to Compassionate Friends, because we have already paid the ultimate price; the loss of our loved one(s). *A Love Gift is a gift of money given in honor of a child who has died from their family members or as a memorial from friends. Your gifts are **tax deductible** and are used to reach out to other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. Your gifts support this newsletter, our TCF Library, and other Chapter expenses.*



Birthday Table

Every month at our Chapter Meeting we provide a Birthday Table. In the month of your child's birthday, please bring pictures and small mementos of your child to place on the table. You may also bring a favorite cake, cookies, or other snack in memory of your child. We do this to celebrate and honor our children and to share their special day with others who understand.

Useful Web Sites

www.compassionatefriends.org - TCF National web site. Be sure to visit the **Other Grief Resources** section and the **Sibling Resources**, and the **Community Online Support** Section, as well as the chat room sections of the National web site.

www.tcfogreenvillesc.org - Greenville, SC Chapter web site.

www.SpiritLyric.com - great grief website with several links to many grief resources including other grief web sites, books, music, etc.

www.suicidreferencelibrary.com - contains very good grief information about suicide and general grief.

www.alivealone.org - Alive Alone for bereaved parents whose only child or all children have died.

www.bereavedparentsusa.org - information for bereaved families and newsletters.

www.agast.org – Alliance of Grandparents A Support in Tragedy

www.climb.org - Center for Loss in Multiple Birth

www.teengrief@newhope-grief.org - teenage grief web site

www.misschildren.org – mothers in sympathy and support. Provides support to parents enduring the tragedy of stillbirth, neonatal death and infant death from any cause.

www.pomc.com – a web site for parents of murdered children providing on-going emotional support and education, prevention advocacy, and awareness.



TCF Library

We invite you to check out books from our library. We are pleased that you might find a book that may help you or your family. If you have any books you would like to donate to our library that will be great. On the inside front cover of the book please put "Donated in Memory of (Your Child's Name)", and your child's birth and death dates. Also include your name and the date donated.

Newsletter Submissions

If you would like to submit an original poem or a poem of special meaning for you; you can send it to our editor, Dick Renner at the following address:

The Compassionate Friends
P.O. Box 25573
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We Need Not Walk Alone

January 2009

To those of you who are newly bereaved and receiving our newsletter for the first time, we warmly invite you to The Compassionate Friends. We are a self-help organization of parents, grandparents and adult siblings who have experienced the death of a loved one. We offer understanding and support through our monthly meetings, a lending library, and support materials.

Please do not be apprehensive about coming to a meeting. Every other person in the room has lost a child, grandchild or sibling. They come because they feel the need to be with someone else who understands. We know it takes courage to attend that first meeting, but those who do come find an atmosphere of understanding from others who have experienced the grief that you have now. Nothing is asked of you. There are no dues or fees and you do not have to speak. There is a special chemistry at meetings of The Compassionate Friends.

What is a Compassionate Friend? The dictionary definition is, "a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to help alleviate the suffering." Friend is defined as "a supporter or sympathizer." My "heart" definition of a compassionate friend is someone who "gets it" and never, ever forgets it. The power of a compassionate friend's empathy in the face of the tornado of agony that is the newly bereaved parent's life can be critical to their healing. If we, as healing bereaved parents, are willing to step in to the role of caregiver for the broken soul of another bereaved parent, it's important not to lose touch with our pain. Not to lose touch with that kick in the stomach we felt when we first learned of our own child's death. As our hearts heal, it can be easy to fall into the role of a teacher where we start to advise or pass judgment on how another bereaved parent grieves. If we want to help others heal, we must continue to relate to that instant that our child died. Love has undeniable power when given with a clear and pure heart, where nothing is expected in return and in a compassionate, caring way. **In** other words, like a compassionate friend.

Rob Anderson, Grief Digest, Vol. 2, Issue 3