



# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

A self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved families

## OCTOBER 2017

### Inside Valley Forge

Meetings are on the first Thursday of every month at 7:45PM (ending at 9:30PM). We meet at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Founders Hall, Valley Forge and Henderson RDs, King of Prussia, PA. For information please call Rhonda at 484-919-0820.

#### Meeting Schedule and other TCF Events of interest

Oct 5    General Sharing  
Nov 2    General Sharing

We encourage newsletter writings from our members. You may also submit articles written by others, please include the author of all articles submitted. **The cut-off date for newsletter entries is the 15th of the preceding month.**

**ARTICLES SHOULD BE SENT TO THE NEWSLETTER EDITORS.**

There are no dues or fees to belong to The Compassionate Friends, or to receive our newsletter. Your tax deductible donations (which we call love gifts) given in memory of your loved one enables us to defray the cost of chapter expenses, particularly the newsletter, meetings, and our outreach to the newly bereaved.

**Please include any special tribute you wish printed in the newsletter along with your gift.**

If you donate to **United Way** at your place of work, and wish your contribution to go to the Valley Forge Chapter of The Compassionate Friends, you may do so by entering: **The Compassionate Friends - Valley Forge Chapter United Way ID# 04-104.** on your pledge form.

**PLEASE MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO:  
TCF VALLEY FORGE CHAPTER  
SEND TO: CHAPTER LEADER  
RHONDA GOMEZ**

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#### TCF Mission Statement

When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

We welcome our newly bereaved friends, sorry for the cause that brings you. We have all been in the depths of despair, and offer unconditional love and understanding to all of you. It sometimes takes several meetings to feel the full benefit of group sharing.

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**REFRESHMENTS**

**Gwen Kearns** in loving memory of my son, **Denny**, and my husband, **Dennis**, on their birthdays & anniversaries.

**Barbara Cohen** in honor of my son, **Mark** on his birthday 9/18.

**Refreshments** may be donated in memory of loved ones, please call **Rhonda (484-919-0820)**, or you may sign the refreshment chart located on the refreshment table.

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**LOVE GIFTS**

**Omission from August newsletter**

**Mary Lou Harrison** in loving memory of my precious son, ♥ **Scott** ♥ **Harrison** on his birthday 8/4  
How I miss you and love you dear heart.

**Nina Bernstein** in loving memory of my son, **Andrew**, on his birthday 10/12.

**Catherine Dardozzi** in loving memory of my son, **James**, and my grandson **Evan**.

**Lilly & Herman Eason, Jr.** in honor of our son, **Peter Montijo**, on his anniversary 7/27.

**Rachel Himmelstein** in loving memory of my son, **Benjamin**, on his birthday 9/25.

**Shirley & Philip C. Kennedy, brother Sean & Family** in loving memory of our son/brother, **Philip V. Kennedy** on his 30th anniversary.

**Joanne & Thomas Lennen, Jr.** in loving memory of our son, **Scott Lennen**, on his 54th birthday.

Always in our thoughts, forever in our hearts. Miss & love you always. **Mom & Dad**.

**Joy Settles** in loving memory of my son, **R. Gary Korn**, on his birthday 10/5.

**Rose Yanni** in loving memory of my wonderful nephew, **David Yanni**, on his birthday 10/26.

David was a remarkable and caring young man.

**NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL**

**We are asking if possible , would you please receive your newsletter by email.**

We do not want to remove anyone from our newsletter mailing list who is benefiting from receiving it. We hope it is a help to you while going through your grief, giving you better understanding of your feelings, and letting you know **"We need not walk alone"**.

A newsletter helps to keep our TCF family informed of local and national events. We consider this an important function of our program.

We are asking if you have email, would you consider receiving your newsletter in email format. You will receive your copy earlier if you opt to receive it by email. If you chose to use the email method of receiving your newsletter, you will have the option to switch back to the old method. If you wish to receive the newsletter by email please contact: **Frank Gomez fgomez@hybridpoplars.com**

**OUR CHILDREN & SIBLINGS LOVED, SADLY MISSED AND REMEMBERED**

Each month some of us must face those special, but difficult days of birthdays and anniversaries. This month we ask your thoughts and prayers for the parents/siblings/relatives of the following:

**OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS**

Maryellen & Dick Abell, son *Brian Abell* 10/14  
Chip Arena, son *Nick* 10/10  
Carole Bailey, son *Matthew J. Bailey* 10/6  
Victoria Bayle, son *Bobby D. Bayle III* 10/5  
Nina Bernstein, son *Andrew Voluck* 10/12  
Jacqueline Bonney, daughter *Genevieve* 10/28  
Joe & Maryann Bucci, son *Dante* 10/7  
Martha & Albert Caesar, son *Daniel Mark Caesar* 10/18  
Diana Clark, grandson *Alexander* 10/16  
Theresa L Cole, son *Christopher Michel* 10/10  
Lauren Cole, brother *Chris* 10/10  
Carole and Kevin Creighton, son *Ryan Kent Creighton* 10/7  
Virginia Di Fronzo, daughter *Sis* 10/7  
Harold & Marcia Epstein, grandson *Andrew Voluck* 10/12  
Gwen & Walt Gearhart, grandson *Jamie Rogers* 10/29  
Daniel Gentry, daughter *Emily* 10/9  
Rita Gibbons, daughter *Patricia Gibbons* 10/26  
Virginia Hagen, son *Matthew D. Hagen* 10/20  
Joanne Haley, son *Douglas Haley* 10/4  
Carl & Catherine Helwig, son *Michael Helwig* 10/9  
Janet Higgins, son *Nicholas* 10/10  
Lori Joseph, son *Andy* 10/6  
Lynn Kivlen, son *Brien Kivlen* 10/12  
Barb & Larry Lauchle, son *Gray* 10/23  
Maryann Lockyer, son *Keith* 10/23  
Maureen Lok, daughter *Jessica* 10/24  
Jennifer & Michael Magee, sister *Jacqueline Ann Rogers* 10/3  
Dan Markle, brother *Matt Markle* 10/30  
James & Mary Beth Mattiford, son *Scott Mattiford* 10/15  
Mark & Kathryn McNally, daughter *Beth Ann McNally* 10/1  
Alexandra Milas, sister *Demitra Vallianos* 10/16  
Fred & Marilyn Mountjoy, daughter *Barilyn Mountjoy* 10/3  
daughter *Maralin Mountjoy* 10/3  
Kelly & Hank Murray, son *John Murray* 10/30  
Kathy Nicholson, son *Frank* 10/26  
Peggy O'Brien, son *Rick O'Brien* 10/4  
Deborah Osting, son *Christopher Daniel Osting* 10/24

**OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS continued**

Roy Redman, daughter *Linda Inez Redman* 10/22  
Thomas & Jeri "Bubbles" Reinert, son *Thomas Reinert, Jr.* 10/21  
Ginger & Merle Renner, daughter *Deanna Dawn Renner* 10/11  
Carol Robinson, son *Jim Kearney* 10/4  
Skipp & Kathy Robinson, daughter *Carrie Robinson* 10/28  
Mike & Diane Rogers, daughter *Jacqueline Ann Rogers* 10/3  
Donna Rogers, son *Jamie Rogers* 10/29  
JoAnne Sands, son *Tyler* 10/16  
Bill & Jen Padove Scales, son *Zachary* 10/22  
Joy Conard Settles, son *R. Gary Korn* 10/5  
Robert & Nell Shoemaker, daughter *Brynn Shoemaker* 10/5  
Janis Siravo, son *Christian* 10/7  
Betsy Townsend, daughter *Wendy Townsend Besche* 10/25  
Janice Vanderslice, son *Gregory Vanderslice* 10/4  
Lucia Watters, daughter *Luanne Zambino* 10/14  
Mimi & Tom Weber, son *Michael* 10/8  
Beth Williams, son *Joey Burks* 10/4  
Sandra & Harry Wolfheimer, daughter *Ann Marie Wofheimer* 10/10  
Frank Yanni, son *David Yanni* 10/26

**OCTOBER ANNIVERSARIES**

Marilynn Anton, nephew *Steven Schneibolk* - 10/2  
Victoria Bayle, son *Bobby D. Bayle III* - 10/2  
Cindy Brickley, son *Timothy* - 10/20  
Sally Cahill, grandson *Tim* - 10/20  
Gina Cappelli, son *Dan Foley* - 10/9  
Barbara Cohen, son *Mark* - 10/26  
Tina & Mike Cusamano, daughter *Amanda Angelucci* - 10/1  
Tom & Marge Del Rosario, son *Dominic* - 10/17  
Virginia Di Fronzo, daughter *Sis* - 10/4/  
Joseph & Patsy Dooley, son *Peter J. Dooley* - 10/1  
Shirley & Herb Druker, daughter *Heidi* - 10/25  
Jim and Patty Duffy, son *Michael Duffy* - 10/28  
Bonnie Gardner, daughter *Michelle* - 10/19  
Thomas & Anne Glenn, daughter *Lauren Glenn* - 10/15  
Carol Graber, son *Bobby* - 10/28  
Herb & Karen Grant, son *Shaun* - 10/21  
Cathy Grosshanten, son *Gary* - 10/18  
Janet Higgins, son *Nicholas* 10/10  
Thomas & Virginia Hoesch, son *William E. "Buddy" Hoesch* - 10/7  
Marie & Ken Hofmockel, grandson *Steven Schneibolk* - 10/2

## OCTOBER ANNIVERSARIES CONTINUED

Joan Hornsby, daughter *Jackie* - 10/5  
 Jean Jones, grandson *Bobby* - 10/28  
 Margaret & Edward Kiefski, Sr., son *Edward Kiefski, Jr.* - 10/25  
 Maureen & Pat Mc Cormick, son *John Mc Cormick* - 10/4/2016  
 Fred & Marilyn Mountjoy, daughter *Maralin Mountjoy* - 10/3  
 John B. & Lillian Neff, son *Patrick Neff* - 10/17  
 Gary & Patricia Otto, son *Benjamin Otto* - 10/17  
 Joan Palumbo, son *Michael* - 10/13  
 Barbara Pearl, son *Jason Seth Pearl* - 10/16  
 Betty Jane Peters - Neilson, son *Martin A. Peters* - 10/22  
 Ruth Pluck, niece *Jackie* - 10/5  
 Robert & Barbara Pontician, son *Rob Pontician* - 10/28  
 Barbara Purtell-Frank, son *Michael John Keller Purtell* - 10/29  
 Marge Randolph, son *Doug Fixter* - 10/12  
 Ginger & Merle Renner, daughter *Deanna Dawn Renner* - 10/22  
 Robert & Nancy Ricciardi, daughter *Jessica Lee Ricciardi* - 10/7  
 Ilene & Sy Rockower, daughter *Amy Rockower* - 10/17  
 Thelma Rosen, brother *David Beeler* - 10/31  
 Barbara Rossman, daughter *Kickole Lyn* - 10/12  
 Ron & Sandy Ruth, son *Brian David Ruth* - 10/21  
 JoAnne Sands, son *Tyler* - 10/16  
 Carol Sannella, husband *Robert J. Sannella* - 10/21  
 Pamela Schneibolk, son *Steven* - 10/2  
 Susan Snyder, son *Brian* - 10/22  
 Ruth Thomas, son *David George Thomas* - 10/28  
 Barbara Torrens, brother *Robert Birmele* - 10/21/  
 Weldon & Marie Tyson, daughter *Lisa M. Tyson* - 10/26  
 Tina Ulshafer, son *Jimmy* - 10/30  
 Henry & Elizabeth Weaver, grandson *Donald Smith, Jr.* - 10/16  
 Jackie Wesley, daughter *Teresa Ellen Wesley Hough* - 10/2  
 Beth Williams, son *Joey Burke* - 10/4  
 Paul & Marcia Woodruff, son *Danny Woodruff* - 10/29

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Now that your life knows every darkness and sorrow,  
 Now that your time trembles with mourning and pain,  
 Now that your eyes see only empty horizons,  
 Now that your hand touches the center of grief. ---  
 Leave yourself open to comfort and caring,  
 Leave yourself open to softness and friendship.  
 Leave yourself open to kindness and blessing,  
 And try to listen for the still music of hope.

*Seattle King County Chapter*

## THE BEREAVED MARRIAGE

Before the death of a child, in an intact marriage both contribute to a mutually satisfying relationship. The following are areas of sharing before the death and where lack of sharing occurs afterwards.

Before, in family activities, couples shared what happened during the day, etc. After the death, they may have an initial sharing regarding the funeral and everything relating to the child, but not to them as a couple. Emotional support was a balancing act before the death. Often there is no emotional support afterwards, because each is so wrapped up in individual grief. People in grief become introspective - a typical thought is how am I going to go on? Before the death there was mutual concern for each other's well-being; afterwards the concern is turned inward. While before the death there was interest in each other's work, hobbies, and activities, afterwards nothing has meaning.

Males deal with grief differently from females because they are expected to be strong emotionally, to not show emotion, to not cry after the funeral. Society does not allow males to show anger over the death. As providers, men go back to work soon after and are away from where the memories are. They do not have as much time to think about what happened. As protectors, they may be feeling guilt. "Have I failed to protect my child in some way?" Also, there may be a feeling of wanting to protect the spouse by not being too emotional, by being "strong."

Men are more self-sufficient, especially in the emotional area. Men are not likely to share very well; this hurts their ability to grieve. Men hurt as much as women do, but usually do not show it until something triggers it. A man may talk about many things like sports and politics, but rarely is there someone with whom he can share his feelings. Men escape to the job, to outside activities. It is hard to find someone with whom to share feelings. Men do not usually recognize that it is all right to feel depressed.

Society says it is all right for a woman to cry and to talk about the loss. Women usually have a network with other women, although some of those making up the network may drop the woman because of not being able to face what has happened. Women set the tone for the family. When in grief, her responses set the tone for the family atmosphere and can be devastating. Because women are the primary child-caring persons, the mother may be the one feeling guilty because she had responsibility for the child's everyday care. Women are given more prescriptions for tranquilizers than men because of doctors' attitudes.

How do couples reconcile these variables? What can they do to lessen the impact? Men should take it easy regarding outside activities. Emphasis should be placed on getting into the business of grieving, even isolating oneself at times to be able to grieve. Men should find someone with whom to talk, preferably another bereaved father. Don't choose a woman because a man is too vulnerable emotionally and an unhealthy situation could develop. Men are "shaky" on accepting a group experience. If anger is what a man feels, he should express it by channeling it into something physical - be angry at something, not at a person. Daily exercise that is appropriate for the individual is another way of channeling aggression. Men should make a concerted effort to learn how to cry. Crying is a natural response; tear ducts have a natural purpose. Find a catalyst - a photo of your child, an article of clothing - anything that will make you cry. No one else need know about the crying if you go into another room. Some men find it takes much time before they feel free to cry, but once they do, it is then easier to continue to cry in private.

The woman in the bereaved couple should remember that she needs friends, especially other bereaved mothers. She should schedule time away from her job if she is a working mother, if nothing more than a flexible coffee break schedule. Non-working mothers should use a baby sitter and plan time away from the usual environment. It is vital to nurture yourself. Physical exercise helps overcome depression and anger. Ask for help if you need it. If someone says, "What can I do?" give them something to do - shop, baby sit, clean house, write notes, something that will help you; it will also be good for the volunteer.

Until a death occurs, husband and wife behavior patterns within a family are predictable; afterwards, they are different. In the new husband-wife relationships don't try too much too fast. Drop expectations; be patient with each other. Respect how the other grieves and his timetable for doing it; no two people grieve exactly the same way or at the same pace.

If one spouse does not show grief, it does not mean memories are forgotten. Spend time together even if you have to schedule it. Each spouse is a reminder of the loss; for this reason they may even avoid each other. There may be feelings of guilt for allowing yourself to feel good when your child is dead. Therefore, resume slowly and with patience. It is important to be able to say, "I am angry about what happened to our child, but it does not mean I love you any less."

*Adapted from an article by  
Bill and Barbara Schatz - TCF, Bothell, WA*

**SHARED THOUGHTS ON SHOCK & DENIAL**

Shock is often our survival after the loss of a child or sibling. Our minds go into a state of numbness that insulates us from the pain of fully facing the death all at once. We have discussed anticipatory grief with long term illness, and most will say even though the physician predicts the loved one to be terminal, the mind will still hold back in accepting the fact that death is inevitable.

It is natural to deny anything that will bring such unbearable pain. We use this cushion to get us through that very early stage of our grief, whether it be sudden or long-term. Our brain tries to take one step at a time.

In retrospect, the numbness that shock brought, insulated and cushioned me enough to survive. The time we stay in shock varies greatly. It can be an aide in our grief, but we can not stay there forever.

We usually move into denial. I found myself stuck here for a while; I just didn't want to face the fact that future plans did not include Doug. I wasn't finished mothering him, and having many other children did not help in the beginning. I had a lot of unfinished love that belonged to Doug alone, and it could not be directed toward another child. I felt very guilty for being so all consumed with grief, and not being able to function for my surviving children.

We aren't ready to move on, so we frequently tell ourselves it is all a bad dream that will go away. We don't want to be a part of anything that says our child is dead. The pain is too great to admit our loss is permanent. We can never approve of the happening, but we eventually have to acknowledge the fact that it did happen, so that we can establish where we are. Once we totally acknowledge the death, we move on to other stages of grief.

No matter how well we have learned the grief stages, we can not rush through them to reach the other side. It is called grief work because of the effort and time it takes. We must lean into the pain. It is so gut-wrenching, and we have all had feelings that we just can't survive it. But it softens, we learn to live and love ourselves again. We regain our ability to feel, look for a tomorrow, and all those good memories that we worried about forgetting are still there. When the healing takes away the gut-wrenching pain, the memories can be pleasant. I wish you could be where I am, without going through where I have been. Peace is there for us, but never comes as soon as we would like it to. Be patient with yourself

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel* , TCF Valley Forge

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They are everywhere, people who are hurting so deeply...so desperately...so broken in spirit and soul that they feel almost certain they will never smile again. Hearts so tender and crushed, that pain is all consuming and it strips them of all hope that there could ever be a day they wouldn't hurt. If only they could see a day when their agony would end. But what can I do? All I can do is love them - so desperately that their pain is no longer theirs alone, but mine as well, and I bearing the same pain makes it more endurable. To this end I seek, and to this goal I commit my life. I can do something - I can love.

*Debby Grogan*  
TCF - Atlanta, GA

### Some Common Thoughts Following the Death of Your Child

- It is not uncommon to feel bitterness or a sense of injustice when one loses a child. So if you find yourself thinking, Why me?, Why my child?, Why our family?, You're in good company.
- Some parents describe "an irrational sense of self-blame" following the death of a child. I never was able to figure out what a rational sense of self-blame might be. But I do know that many of us blame ourselves. We replay the what-ifs of our child's life and death a thousand times a day. Almost always self-blame is misplaced.
- Grief over the loss of a child lasts longer than any other kind. It heals more slowly and causes the most monumental disruption for those who survive. This is because a child is a part of what psychologists call our internal psychological structure - meaning that in a way, part of the parent dies too.
- Most experts believe that loss and helplessness are the greatest tests any human can face. A child's death is off the charts in both categories.
- You may be strong, smart, and highly resilient. But nothing can prepare you for the loss of a child.
- One reason the loss feels so enormous is that a child's death violates an implicit generational contract that our own children will survive us.
- A child's death also challenges the fundamental instinct of parents to protect their child. That is what we are supposed to do, isn't it? To make the world safe? The feeling that we have failed to do so can haunt us, compounding our sadness.
- In an era of medical miracles, we are less culturally conditioned to expect a child's death than in previous generations. On the contrary, the prevailing assumption is that science and technology can and will work wonders.
- Some experts estimate that in the face of a child's death two years is a reasonable grieving period. Others double that figure. The truth is, it takes as long as it takes - sometimes a whole lifetime. But if you are lucky, the grief will transmute. Even its physical properties will transform. Its weighty presence abates. The grief becomes gentler - less terrifying - and sometimes, paradoxically, rather sweet.

Taken from *After the Darkest Hour the Sun will Shine Again*  
By **Elizabeth Mehren**



**On Sibling Grief  
From a Grieving Sibling**

I am a surviving sibling. Fifteen months ago I was not even familiar with the term...now I am one! How am I doing? What are the guidelines to measure my progress? Why can't I remember when I was told of my brother's death...or the days following the accident for that matter? Did I go crazy? Was it yesterday, or was it over a year ago? Did I laugh just today when I never thought I would laugh again? What is this peaceful feeling that I feel from time to time? Is it healing?

Lee, 29, was my little brother. I remember trying to alternately protect or tease him, make him laugh or make him cry. He was like having a real live baby doll to play with since I was 10 years older than he. (Our Mother said he was the cleanest little boy in the neighborhood. I guess having 3 older sisters is the reason for that!!!)

How can I explain the pain I felt on learning of his accident. I wanted to go to him right away to see that he was OK, but our cousin, Judy, said that wasn't possible. I guess that was when I was told that he was dead...but I don't remember that. I only remember screaming.

When was it that I began to heal? Probably at the same time that I thought I was going totally, certifiably crazy! Then, someone told me about The Compassionate Friends and what they did. I wondered if they could help me but doubted that they could. After all, how could they understand how much I hurt at having lost my precious baby brother or how close we had always been and how he always helped me. Why should they even care about me? But, you know what...they did help. With the help and support of this group of wonderful caring people, I am alive today and working toward a fruitful life. I will never be the same as I was before June 18, 1992, but I truly believe I have become a better person.

While Lee's life taught me so much, his death taught me some invaluable lessons. I have learned to become more aware of life and my own mortality and am more attuned to other needs. I no longer take anything for granted. I miss him terribly but take solace in the belief that he is happy in his new world and that one day we will be reunited.

Sibling grief takes a tremendous amount of time and work. Sometimes just thinking of my brother, looking at his picture, or hearing his favorite song, "God Bless America," reduces me to a teary mess. Sometimes these same things make me smile. But, I am surviving and have developed a new perspective on life. I am closer to and cherish my family more than ever and realize how very important they are. I am dedicated to helping other surviving siblings work through their grief. I pray daily for peace, not only for myself and my family, but for everyone making this journey through grief. One thing that I have found to be most helpful during the past fifteen months of grief work has been to talk about and to be honest about my feelings. I encourage siblings (and parents) to try to hook up with a support group such as The Compassionate Friends to talk out your feelings and concerns. After all, we've already paid an extremely high price to join this group...the life of our loved one...so why not take advantage of what they have to offer.

You may even find yourself helping someone else (even though you might not believe that now.)

*Sunday Lee Stanton*  
Wyoming Valley, PA

**Random Reflections**

It's been a year now  
And the books say I should be  
Getting back to "normal."

But I still can't pass your picture  
On the bookcase without  
Touching your face.

I still wake up in the night  
Sometimes and can almost  
Hear your voice in the quiet.

I still run to the window when the  
Dogs bark at night with the hope  
In the back of my mind that somehow  
You've wandered into the yard.

I still whisper your name into the wind  
When I walk down our lane in the still  
Of evening and strain to hear an answer.

When I'm troubled and upset  
I still talk to you like  
I always did and  
Imagine the advice you'd give me.

I still stop on our dark country road  
Sometime and turn off the car engine  
And lights and wait and hope that  
I can see or hear you.

It's been a year now and the  
Memories are still so vivid  
That I can almost touch them.

It's been a year now and I know  
With all my heart that your  
Presence will never fade in my mind.

*Tammy Walmann* – Miami Co., KS

## THE CLUB THAT SHOULD NEVER BE

A few years ago, as I sat in my basement a couple days after I had lost my oldest son, an old acquaintance stopped by. As a lot of people had, he stopped to talk and grieve with me. But he said something that no one had said yet. He told me that I was now a part of the club. I indicated that I didn't understand. He explained that the club was comprised of fathers who had lost their children.

It was not a club that anyone sought affiliation with, but by reasons of fate found themselves to be lifelong members. It didn't exactly sink in at that time, but I came to understand what membership in the club meant.

I speak as a father because that is what I am, I know that mothers have their own club, but I am not a mother and therefore cannot speak as one. Fathers, as a rule, are not as emotional and outwardly caring as mothers. Even through a tragedy such as losing a child, we feel that we must remain totally in control and take care of the others hurting around us, even though deep down we want to tell the world how much it hurts. But we don't seem to have that ability. At least we do not have that ability with anyone outside the club.

As with any club, we members share a common bond. And as with any club, we come to rely on each other because eventually you must tell someone how much it hurts, or how mad you are or how that one grievous day has entirely turned your life upside down. And the only person you can bring yourself to tell is someone who has experienced it. They are the only ones who can understand how your heart has been so badly broken that at times it seems it may never mend.

They are the only people whom you feel even remotely comfortable talking with. Club members will never judge, they will never tell you to snap out of it, they will never tell you to straighten up and get back to normal because they know that nothing will ever be normal, as you knew it, again.

I am not talking group therapy here; I am talking about two men sharing with each other their deepest thoughts. This does not come easily. Each one of us has something that we must eventually say to someone. It might be how we reacted at the time of death, or how we feel about God now that He has taken a child away, or just a simple story that hasn't ever been told to anyone else. And once you have shared that story, you may not feel all that much better, but it was a story that had to be told. It was a burden that you had to relieve from yourself. And once finished, you are eternally grateful for that person being there and you know that sometime, somewhere, someone will find you for the same reason.

It was my turn the other day. In much the same way that my beloved cousin was there for me, I was there for my friend. As he started to recite his story, I looked at him. Sitting there was a soldier of 13 years, a Gulf War veteran.. a man whose features looked as though they were carved from a block of granite. But this was a man whose heart had been broken. This was a man who, if possible, would do anything to bring his dear daughter back to him. But knowing that would never be, he had to tell his story. It was difficult. He stumbled, paused, choked on each word, but he pressed on and when finished he wiped the tears away.

And I cried, too. I cried for him and I cried for me, because we had both been there and we would forever be there. We had experienced, as many fathers (and mothers) do, the absolute worst thing that could ever happen, something that should not be allowed to happen. We were members in a club that should never be.

-- *Brian Chambers*, Eddyville

**Bread Crumbs  
Finding Our Way Back**

Bread crumbs are all we have.

They are what is left behind after the death of our child. They are our memories and our mementos.

A bread crumb is the little answering machine cassette tape that says "*Hi, it's me. Leave a message at the beep.*" We may be the only people with a cassette tape in our safe deposit box. It's not much, a few quick words, but it's his voice - a small crumb from the original.

A bread crumb is his favorite shirt that I still can't part with, so I wear it for good luck on special days. A bread crumb is the last Father's Day card he wrote in his own hand before he went off to college.

*Thanks for everything Dad, especially the \$. My years at home were better than words can say and I never took anything for granted. I've had the best childhood anyone could have. Thank you for the ideas and opportunities I grew up with. I love you.*

*Mark*

I call these things crumbs because they are a disappointing piece of the real thing, but treasured because they are all we have.

I also think there is a second way of looking at this. Bread crumbs are a part of children's stories symbolizing signposts along the way to help lead us out of the forest - to find our way back to the land of the living, at least if the birds don't eat them.

I like to think that the return from grief is like finding our way out of the forest. The way is marked by great changes or signposts if we will only follow the bread crumbs. I think of them as gifts left behind by our children. They change us and they lead us out of the forest - but at a very different place than we first went in. Here are three I have found. maybe you will find others.

**Crumb One.**

We pick up a new sense of what is important and what is not. We suffer fools, superficial cocktail parties, and convenience friends poorly. We seem to develop an immediate impatience for the meaningless and the trivial. On the other hand, we pick up an incredible sensitivity to the world around us that we did not have before. We watch the news differently. We value people more than things. We live more in the moment and less in the future because we know that sometimes "tomorrow" doesn't come.

**Crumb Two**

We find our real self on the road back. After the loss of a child and a period of emptiness, we do eventually come back. But we come back differently - and I believe better - than the person that entered the awful forest. With our new understanding of priorities, we listen again to "that still small voice" that we silenced in the race to climb the career ladder or have the "perfect life" or do what our parents or teachers thought we "should" do. We find new courage to be the person we really are.

We begin living from the inside out instead of the other way around - from a sense of what is important, not what is expected. from a life of "what's in it for me?" to "how can I help you?" We discover new and compassionate friends, and sometimes drift away from old ones. We go from a thousand name Rolodex of contacts to a handful of people we love.

We often also find our spiritual center and an inner peace. We become unafraid to die, at the same time we are beginning to live again.

**Crumb Three**

We pick up one more gift that I have noticed. We seem to get anointed with an ability to help someone else. You know what I mean. We didn't want it. We didn't ask for it. But we got it, anyway. It's almost like a giant invisible radar screen gets mounted on our head and we now pick up vibrations from other people in need. And we find that we really can help. People seek us out. People who don't know what to say when a child dies call us and ask: "Could you please go over?" We know we can and will, if only to listen.

I am reminded of the story of a little boy who arrived home late from school. "Where have you been?" his mother asked. "I was helping Timmy who broke his bike," the child answered. "But Honey," the mother said, "You don't even know how to fix a bike." "I know Mom," came the reply, "But I was just helping him cry."

Sometimes we can just help someone else cry, and that is enough. Unlike most other people, we can walk directly up to a bereaved parent or sibling, look them in the eye, and say "I know how you feel." That is what TCF is all about. And in helping another person we help ourselves heal too.

So what do we do with these new gifts or bread crumbs left along the way for us? New priorities. A new sense of self. And the ability to help someone else.

These are definitely good things. They did not come *from* the death of our child. Nothing good comes from the death of a child. As Rabbi Harold Kushner said in Seattle: "there is no silver lining." but there is change. These changes come *after* the death, when we recognize that we can't change what happened, but we can change what we do about it.

One day our surviving son, Rick, put his arms around us in a family hug and said: "Okay Mom and Dad, now that we are a family of three instead of four, we each have to live our lives one-third better." That, more than any other moment in our grief, marked our turning point.

My wife has a reoccurring dream. She is in Heaven many years from now and she greets our son. "Okay, Mom," Mark says, "So tell me everything you did after I died?" On that day she will be proud to answer: "I lived the rest of my life one third better in your name."

I suspect most bereaved parents divide their lives into those two distinct stages of time: before and after the death. What we do in Stage Two we do in our child's name.

And because we do it, the world after our child died in some small way is changed forever. And when the world in some small way is changed forever, then our child's live continues to make a difference.

And when our child's life continues to make a difference, he or she is never entirely gone.

*Richard Edler, South Bay/LA Chapter*



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For parents, siblings & families  
We offer friendship, love and understanding  
We talk, we listen, we share, we care**

**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.

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