

# The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

## Livonia, Michigan Chapter



**December 2018**  
**Volume 30, Number 12**

**The Compassionate Friends is an international self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved parents and siblings.**

### **Chapter Leader**

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### **Treasurer**

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### **Meeting Information**

When: First Thursday of  
each month. 7-9 p.m.  
Where: St. Timothy's Church  
16700 Newburgh Road, Livonia,  
East side of Newburgh, 1/4 mile S. of  
Six Mile

### **Coming Events:**

**NEXT MEETING- December 6**  
**-- There will a candle lighting at our  
December meeting. People are asked  
to bring a small dish to pass. There will  
be shortened sharing sessions and then  
the candle lighting will be during the  
last hour of our meeting.**

### **No crafts for December**

**December 9 - Candle Lighting-**  
7:00 pm - Kellogg Park, Plymouth  
**December 18 - 6:30 pm** TCF Dinner-  
at Brann's Stea6khouse (39715 6  
Mile, Northville, MI) sign up at  
meeting or call Kathy 734-306-3930 or  
katjrambo@gmail.com



Livonia Chapter Annual  
Candle Lighting

Where - Kellogg Park  
Plymouth, Michigan

When - December 9 - 7 PM  
*Candles are provided*

### **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. 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

*(Continued on page 4)*

# **Our Children Loved and Remembered Always**

*This month, we remember the children who are so deeply and sadly missed. Please take a few moments to place them and their parents in your thoughts.*

## **Let Us Remember Them Always**

| <i>Child</i> | <i>Parent, Grandparent, Sibling</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Age</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|

*Names available only to members.*



## ***Let Us Celebrate Their Births***



### New Members

*We welcome new members. We are so sorry for the circumstance that has brought you here. Although we have no easy answers, we can offer you understanding through our common experiences. We also know how much courage it took for you to attend.*

Diane Bryanr whose beloved son; ***Seren*** Born 11/15; Died 8/23, 19 years

Linda Clappison whose beloved Goddaughter; ***Heather Marie Loeffler***, Born 3/7; Died 12/07, 18 years

Dan Kendra whose beloved son, ***Colin***, Born 5/25, Died 7/20, 21 years

Debbie Norton whose beloved son, ***Travis***, Born 11/5, Died 7/10, 25 years

Philip and Margaret Schreiber whose beloved son, ***Philip Jr***, Born 11/9, Died 7/28, 35 years

place it at his grave. We leave the tree there until spring so it can make 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 it is so and follow your lead.

*Marge Frankenberg*

*TCF Arlington Heights, IL*

*In loving memory of my son, Blake*

## Peace

Today is the one year anniversary of the day my son realized he could no longer live. I know this because he told us so in the writings he left behind. It is not the anniversary of his death.

What I remember of the day is that it was not unlike any other. There were no family fights or friend drama. There

were no failed tests or poor academic projects.

It was just a day like today.

That week was just like any other as well. Tom attended high school and college classes, and we worked, going through our days just as we always do. But Tom found a way to spend special time with each of us before he left. He and L.J. spent Monday night playing music together. I tried to record it, but it was not perfect, so I deleted the file that night. Tuesday night he and I made his favorite meal together, pasta with hot sausage red sauce. Then, we played a complicated Wii game which consisted of me pushing random buttons to fend off the bad guys while he worked his magic on the most powerful villains. We played for a few hours, until my hands hurt and I could not see straight from all of the blurred images on the television. He played the music he loved and told me which was his favorite song. I listened to it through his ears, but cannot remember the song name. That night, he peeked his head in our room, and played with the light switch, turning it on and closing the door behind him with a mischievous grin. He spent the next few days with his father, doing the things they loved to do together, including gaming with a great bunch of folks on Friday night. He spent Saturday and Sunday at our house, doing homework, playing on the computer, and listening to music.

That Sunday, as I cooked in the kitchen and talked casually with him, he wrote his final farewell to us.

We had no idea of his pain, his plan, or our future.

In his note, he told us that past week had been the happiest he could remember because he was able to live during that time without fear and anxiety of the future. So a part of me is at peace, if that's possible, because he was able to spend his final hours free from his demons. But how I wish, in that week, he had found the strength to fight through the darkness and tell us of his inner war. How I wish I had seen past his armored wall into his

soul, so I could pull him through to the light of our love. I wish we could have shown him how many people appreciated him and were impacted by him, and how many would have stood by his side as he fought his undiagnosed illness so he could win his battle with a full army. I wish...

I miss him every hour of every day. I miss his humor, his intelligence, his presence, his thoughtfulness and his soul. Someone recently responded on one of my posts that maybe Tom misses me, too. I hope he is beside me as I write, and can feel the outpouring of whatever is stronger than love, that I have for him. I pray that through his death, he found the peace he could not find in life.

*Kimberly Starr*

*TCF Facebook Loss to Suicide Group In Memory of my son Tom*

## 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 holi-

day 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 parent's 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*  
*In memory of my daughter, Nina*

## Some Holiday Thoughts

Let It S.N.O.W.

S: Share Memories

N: Nurture Relationships

O: Open and honest communications

W: Walk and talk with your child

### Make a Reflection Snowflake

**Purpose:** The child will make a snowflake to remind him or her of the person who died and the relationship they had together.

**Materials Needed:** Paper, cardboard or foam (you can buy these pre-cut; markers; scissors, glue, decorations including stickers and glitter; photo of the loved one.

**Directions:** Pre-cut or assist the child in cutting the snowflake. Assist the child or allow them to write and draw on the snowflake. Encourage them to use words and images to describe memories. Allow them to decorate the snowflake. Discuss the meaning of their decorations.

### Other Holiday Suggestions:

- Prepare a favorite dessert
- Watch a movie enjoyed by your loved one
- Volunteer or give a gift in the loved one's name
- Look through photo albums and share stories
- Light a candle
- Make a memory jar

### Our Holiday Wish for You

When you gather with family and friends,

...we wish you LOVE

When you gaze upon the lights of the season

...we wish you JOY

When you're pondering,

...we wish you PEACE

When time to remember rests upon you

...we wish you HOPE

*Contributed by Flora Cocora and Christine Hebert*

*In loving memory of*

*Blaise Hebert (son and grandson),*

*Nicholas Cocora, jr. (son and brother),*

*Geroge Subu (brother and uncle)*

The following are excerpts from an article on Sibling Grief:

## Feelings and Emotions

You may be experiencing grief over the death of your sibling if you feel any of the following –*shock, numbness, sadness, despair, loneliness, isolation, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, irritability, anger, increased or decreased appetite, fatigue or sleeplessness, guilt, regret, depression, anxiety, crying, headaches, weakness, aches, pains, yearning, worry, frustration, detachment, isolation, questioning faith* – to name a few.

Okay, so those things aren't specific

to sibling grief, however, the way they are experienced by someone grieving a brother or sister may be. For example:

### *You feel guilty because...*

- you are the sibling that survived.
- you knew your sibling inside and out and yet you didn't know about the struggles or hardships that led to their death.
- you weren't able to protect them.
- there are things you wish you had said, but didn't

### *You feel anxiety because...*

- you know how fragile life is.
- you're worried you may die in the same way as your sibling.

- you're worried others in your family may die.

### *You feel lonely because...*

- although you're surrounded by people, you miss the one person who you could truly be yourself with.

I could go on, but the important thing is to understand that your feelings are unique and important. Good, bad, or anywhere in-between, your relationship with your brother or sister was different than anyone else's and so you'll experience hurdles, triggers, and hardships that others may not.

Your parents, siblings, and other family members may grieve in many of the same ways that you do, but in many ways, their grief may differ. It's important to remember this because misunderstandings can arise amongst family members when people react differently in response to a death. It's also important for people supporting bereaved siblings to keep this in mind so they can help validate and support the griever's feelings and experiences.

## Overshadowed Grief

This is just a guess, but I suspect a lack of sibling grief resources exists because sibling grief is often overshadowed. People simply cannot fathom the out-of-order-ness of a parent having to bury a child, so when this is the case their thoughts and concerns often immediately go to the parent's grief. Parents themselves may not be able to effectively attend to their children's grief and outside family and friends may be hesitant to step in and offer support or suggestions. It might also be true that support and attention are first given to siblings who are younger or who are perceived to be more fragile. In a situation where any or all of these things are true, a grieving sibling may end up feeling as though other people's grief is more important than their own.

## ***Need to Talk to Someone Between Meetings?***

### **TELEPHONE FRIENDS:**

The people listed below have volunteered to take your calls:

Linda Houghtby - Long term illness - (734) 591-3062

Catherine Walker - Loss of Only Child - (248) 921-2938

Charli Johnston - Suicide - 734-812-2006

Joe Hofmann - Drug related death - 734-331-9919

Bob Vitolins - A father's grief - (313) 882-8632

Dana and Brandy Bumstead - Loss of an infant -(313) 447-8144

Kathy Rambo - Sudden Death - (734) 306-3930

***Remember that our chapter has a Facebook page. It is a closed page, so you just need to search for The Compassionate Friends of Livonia, Michigan and ask to join.***

### **TCF CHAT ROOM**

[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

The chat rooms are moderated and are open at different times. There is one open most evenings from 10-11 p.m. They are all moderated which means that all the chat rooms have a trained facilitator in them.

**National Mailing Address:** PO Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522; Phone: (630) 990-0010; Toll Free: (877)969-1101; Website: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

### **OTHER TCF CHAPTERS IN OUR AREA:**

**Ann Arbor:** Mike Fedel: MikeFedela2@gmail.com; 734-998-0360 ; 3rd Sunday, 2:30 to 4:30 pm - First Presbyterian Church (Vance Room) 1432 Washtenaw, Ann Arbor

**St. Clair Shores:** 2nd Wed. Kathy Joerin ; 586-293-6176, KJMac21@aol.com

**Detroit:** Kellie West Outer Drive Methodist Church, 12065 West Outer Drive, Detroit ; 2nd Wed., 6:30 - 8:30; 734-660-9557.

**Troy:** St. Paul's Methodist Church, 620 Romeo, Rochester, MI 3rd Thursday 7-9; Tina@586-634-0239

**Pinckney TCF Chapter:** The Christian House of Prayer, 9949 McGregor Road, Pinckney, MI; 2nd Monday of the month, 6 - 8 pm; Jimmy Batchelor - 734-277-9705

**Tecumseh TCF Chapter:** First Presbyterian Church, 211 W. Chicago, Tecumseh, 4th Sunday of the month, 2-4 pm, Rose Hatchett, 517-270-3308.



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This may be compounded by the fact that some people willingly allow their grief to go unnoticed by themselves or others. Raise your hand if you're the sibling who feels like it's your job to take care of and support the rest of the family. After a death, some siblings might quickly step in to take care of their younger children and/or their parents because they feel it's their role or duty. Sometimes this happens out of necessity, sometimes avoidance, sometimes expectation, and sometimes all of the above. It is important for all members of the family to recognize that no one's grief should take complete precedence. Although family members might take turns supporting one another, at one point or another everyone's grief deserves attention and needs to be attended to.

*I have been the editor of this newsletter for 15 years, and I try not to repeat articles, but the following is one of my favorites as it seems to capture the imagery of bereaved parents at Christmas. BB*

## Christmas Eve

*Silent night, holy night...*  
 "It's about time," he says quietly.  
 Deliberately, wordlessly,  
 They gather the materials  
 Carefully put away last year,  
 The matches, candle, candle jar  
 To fend off the harsh winter wind.  
 Tis the season to be jolly...  
 Slowly they drive toward the town's  
 edge,  
 Past homes with bright, blinking  
 bulbs.  
 Cars of faraway relatives  
 Fill their drives.

Happy, laughing  
 Families, children home from school,  
 Pass by on the way to midnight Mass.  
 It's the most wonderful time of the  
 year...  
 At last, town lights left far behind,  
 They sit mute, each wrapped in pri-  
 vate Cocoons of memories of Christ-  
 mas past, Excited whispers from their  
 room,  
 Silly giggles, fervent good-night  
 Kisses, anticipation of morning.

*On a cold winter's night that was so  
 deep...*  
 Through the gate, down the drive,  
 engine killed.  
 Frozen grass crunching underfoot  
 Hand-in- hand they walk up the hill  
 To the familiar moonlit stone.  
 With practiced hands they brush it  
 clean, Then prepare their votive Noel.

*The world in solemn stillness lay...*  
 Lump in throat, arm-in-arm,  
 Candle lit, they stand and weep,  
 But not so bitter as in years past.  
 The pain's as deep but not so long,  
 As once again they dream of things  
 That should have been but never were.

*The stars in the sky look down where  
 he lay...*  
 "Let's go," he says. She nods assent.  
 They leave, though turn back once to  
 see  
 The lonely flame of their lost child  
 Gleaming peacefully through the dark.  
 He whispers softly, his visit done,  
 "Merry Christmas and good-night, my  
 child."  
*Richard Dew. MD, from Rachel's Cry*

## First Christmas

It can't possibly be Christmas  
 without her being here.  
 Yet the world is singing round me,  
 joyful tidings and good cheer.

Though I try to put on armor  
 and brave the sights and sounds,  
 a few moments worth of shopping,  
 and the tears are spilling down.

I pray for strength to do it,  
 find a path through holidays,  
 look for shortcuts, good ideas,  
 some directions through the maze.

Then I find at last the answer:  
 I'll include her symbolically.  
 And the giving becomes perfect;  
 her love's flowing down, through me.

*Genesse Bourdeau Gentry  
 from Stars in the Deepest – After the  
 Death of a Child*

## Chapter News



### New Sharing Table

We are adding an Infant Loss Sharing Table to our meeting led by Michelle Ciemnicki. Please come and join if you would like to be a part of this sharing table.

### Save the Date

TCF Bowling Fundraiser, March 23,  
 2019 at 1:00 pm at Westland Bowl,  
 Westland, MI.

**A Love Gift** is a gift of money to Compassionate Friends. It is usually in honor of a child who has died, but may also be from individuals who want to honor a relative or friend who has died, simply a gift from someone who wants to make a donation to help in the work of the Livonia Compassionate Friends. Love Gift form on back page.

- ♥ Judy Cappelli "In memory of my precious son Christopher. Happy Heavenly Birthday, Christopher. I will never stop missing you. Forever 28! Love, Mom, Jimmy, Karra"
- ♥ Cindy Stevens "In memory of Justin. Missing you Justin ever so much. Love you always, Mom & Matt"
- ♥ JoAnne Tappan "In memory of Kevin Joseph Tappan. I miss you everyday!" Jeff & Blair"
- ♥ Flora Cocora & Christina Hebert "In memory of son/grandson "Blaise Christian Hebert", Son/brother Nicholas Eugene Cocora, JR", brother/uncle Attorney George Nickolas Subu; always in our hearts and prayers"
- ♥ Roger and Sally Cassidy "In memory of Danny. Always loved, missed forever 9 years!" Love, Mom, Dad, Justin & Brandon"

TCF Livonia Chapter  
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10531 Calumet Trail  
Gaylord, MI 49735

December 2018

If any of you would be willing to get the newsletter via the internet,  
*please email me. Thanks, Brenda Brummel*

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### LOVE GIFTS

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

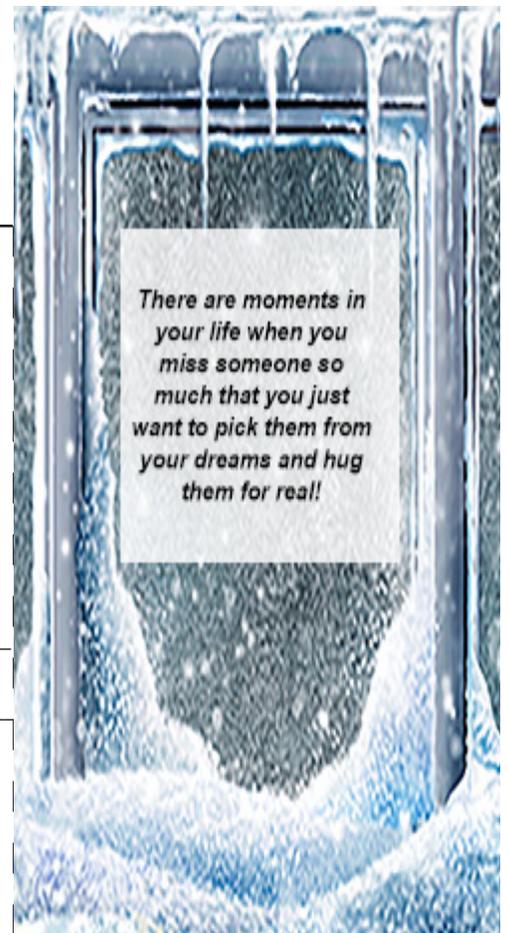
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Love Gift Donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ in Memory of \_\_\_\_\_

Message: \_\_\_\_\_

Direct my gift to: \_\_\_\_\_ Outreach (Printing, postage, phone , web  
\_\_\_\_\_ General Fund (90% local; 10% national)

Mail to: Rhonda Temple, 25164 Hanover St., Dearborn Heights, MI 48125



*There are moments in  
your life when you  
miss someone so  
much that you just  
want to pick them from  
your dreams and hug  
them for real!*