

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Livonia, Michigan Chapter



February 2026
Volume 38, Number 2

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

Chapter Leaders

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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:

February 5th-7:00 pm - Meeting:
see page 7

February 17th, Tuesday, at 6:00 pm. TCF Dinner at: Archie's Tavern 37714 Six mile Rd. Livonia. It is in the Laurel Park Mall.

Contact Joyce Gradišcak, 734-560-6883, you can text or call her

March 7th - 1:00 pm Annual Bowling Fundraiser
Vision Lanes - see page 1

No Craft meeting until further notice.



The Compassionate Friends

17th Annual Bowling Fundraiser

In loving memory of all the children who died too soon

Saturday, March 7th, 2026 at 1:00 pm
(Registration will begin at 12:30 pm sharp)

Vision Lanes
38250 Ford Rd
Westland, MI 48185
(On Ford Rd & Hix)

Please let us know if you will be joining us so we can reserve lanes
Joyce Gradišcak @ 734-560-6883
Or Mary Hartnett @ 313-550-5410

\$25 per person
(Includes: 2 games (9 pin no tap), shoes, 2 mystery game drawings, 2 slices of pizza & pop)
Additional Raffle Tickets will be sold for 50/50 Drawing and Prizes

Please make check payable to: The Compassionate Friends (Livonia)
Mail to: Mary Hartnett 5704 Drexel St, Dearborn Heights, MI 48127

OPEN TO PUBLIC

A Valentine's Day Wish

How I wish I could bring our children back to us for Valentine's Day—24 hours we could spend telling our children of our love.

But, alas, we are doomed to spend another Valentine's Day without our beloved children. Others who have not lost a child, tend to take for granted these special days. A card that says "I love

you, Mom and Dad" should be carefully folded and saved in a special place. All too many parents consider these cards to be renewable commodities. There's no need to save this one—"we'll always get another one next year."

For many of us, next year came and there was no card. Tears of sadness replaced tears of joy on this special day. But for many of us the memories remain of those Valentine's Days gone by. Because our child's love remains with us, our child will never truly be gone.

This year on Valentine's Day, let us shed tears of joy that we were given even a short time with our child—for this, no matter how short, can never be taken from us.

*Wayne Loder
TCF Lakes Area, MI*



We Can Never Return to Pleasantville

When I got home today, the movie, Pleasantville was on the TV. It's an

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>
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Names available for members only



Let Us Celebrate Their Births

*Softly ... may peace
replace heartache
and cherished memories
remain with you always on
your child's birthday*

interesting story of a young man who finds himself magically transported into a world much like a 1950s television show. Everything is . . . pleasant. The world is laid out in "Leave It To Beaver" perfection . . . and in black and white . . . literally. There are no colors, just shades of gray. Everyone is fitted into roles and follows them nicely. There are no problems because people live their lives "properly."

The movie's hero, who finds this world enjoyable at first, soon realizes that it is all wrong. People need to experience love, anger, sorrow, depression, joy. People need colors, not black and white, to make life real.

It occurred to me while I was watching the ending of this movie, that maybe the world has us bereaved parents all backward. We are seen by many as wrapped up in "black." They chide and deride us to return to what's "normal" . . . Come back to Pleasantville. But our eyes have been opened by our children, their struggles and their deaths. We now see a wide spectrum of colors many will never experience.

We shout the reds and oranges of anger.

We feel the soft blues and pinks . . . echoes of our children's voices in our minds.

We understand the greens of quiet reflection in a crazed world rushing off to the mall looking for that one perfect gift . . . our gift is in the time and love that we spent on our kids and continue to spend on others around us.

We shed sparkling crystalline tears reflecting a pain that springs from an ocean of courage that kept us going through days, months, and years of treatments, transplants, and tragedy.

Pride for our children, all of our children, glows deeply within us like the magenta colors of the sky in a setting sun.

And on some days we experience the warm golden glow of healing flowing gently through our bodies and souls.

We can never return to the world of

"Pleasantville" where hard things are hidden under a mask of unclear grays. Our eyes have been opened, not by death, but by the lives of our children.
Bill Sowers
TCF Topeka, KS
In Memory of my daughter, Rachel Sowers

The True Meaning of the Meeting

A misty, cloudy Thursday night in March found me, once again, driving to The Compassionate Friends meeting. Tonight a friend would meet me; she lost her 21 year old son seven years ago in an automobile accident. She has never sought counseling or attended a group meeting. She was always an introvert; the death of her son increased that tendency.

Together we walk to the meeting room. She's asking a few questions, but I'm doing much of the talking. A mom whose only child has been dead for 63 weeks is explaining to this woman who has endured so much for so long about coping with unimaginable loss. There's an irony here. There's also a reason.

Attending my first TCF meeting one year ago was not easy. The pain was brutally raw. The loss was unimaginable. I was reliving the death of my son in my mind, over and over and over and over. I wasn't angry. I was devastated. I wasn't blaming anyone but myself. Could I have done something differently and changed the course of events? This was my big question. My soul was an empty void, my heart broken, as another friend pushed me along into that first meeting. I'm glad she did. It made all the difference.

So tonight my friend signs in for the first time and makes a nametag. We look at the books and brochures. We talk. Melinda greets us: as always, welcoming the newcomer, extending her sincere, sweet and pure condolences to my friend. Other parents talk with us and soon the meeting begins.

Tonight's topic, ironically, is "letting go of the if only's." We all talk about our regrets, how we dwelled on

them. Some are still dwelling. Others are moving away from the darkness of regret into the light of affirmation: affirmation of our love for our child, affirmation of the decision to go on and make the best life possible, affirmation to remember the life of our child and honor our child's memory.

My friend joins in, hesitant at first, but soon contributing. Talking of death, of loss, of going forward, of focusing on the positive, of not dwelling on the horror, of eliminating the negative (including people) from her life. I begin to think about her losses (there are many) and her classically introverted personality. Yet here she is openly talking about private pain. And then it hits me. She is among kindred souls in this room tonight. Each of us has had losses of a magnitude that cannot ever be measured. She is comfortable with these gentle people who weep for their dead children, whose voices break in mid-sentence, whose silences often say more than any words could possibly convey.

The meeting goes by quickly. My friend has to leave to pick up a toddler grandchild. We say quick goodbyes to the others and walk quietly to the parking lot. I mention the Mothers' Retreat, but I know she has made commitments to care for grandchildren while her daughters work. Getting here tonight required a lot of juggling, but I am glad she did it. Her lonely, private struggle has come to an end. Now she knows she is not alone, there are others just like her: kindred souls who need her as much as she needs them. We go our separate ways in the parking lot and she shouts, "I love you." I love you, too, Sherri, my kindred soul.
Annette Mennen Baldwin
TCF Katy, TX

Spirit Gifts

Grief is such an individual journey. We are cast on its path without our consent, enveloped by a depth of pain we never dreamed existed. We all have times when despair and loneliness threaten to engulf us.

But we do have one companion on

this lonely, unsought road: our child who died. I think there is never a moment in the day when a part of me is not connected to Philip, to our years together—and to our present relationship. Our journey through grief is a good-bye to the physical presence of our children, but it is never good-bye to their spirits and to the essence of their beings. Philip lives inside me now, and the same gifts he gave me when he was physically alive are still available to me through his spirit. In some ways, those "spirit gifts" are stronger, because they are contained and undiluted within me.

When the days get unbearably hard, when I think of all this wonderful young man missed by not getting to live out his life, I try to remember to focus on the present Philip, the one inside me. I try to integrate his gifts into my life, sometimes seeing through his eyes, thinking from his heart and mind. Often when I walk in the hills, I'll hear his voice: "Pay attention, Mom." (He noticed the details in nature so much more than I.)

No matter how old your child who died, the essence of this unique being remains within you forever. It is through us and others who knew them that our children continue to live and affect our present world. Though not in the way we hoped and expected, our beloved children are still alive. ...May the spirit of the child who lives so deep within your heart help you through this month and through every moment of the re-establishing of your life.

*Catharine (Kitty) Reeve
Newsletter Editor, TCF Marin and San Francisco Chapters, CA*

Choosing Life

"It will never be the same. Never." As a bereaved parent, you have often heard or said these words to express grief's profound feelings of sorrow and disorientation. Your life has suddenly taken an unexpected course that appears both uncharted and endless. Bewildered, you vainly search for

pathways back to your former life, until you confront the reality that there is no way back. Your child is dead forever. It is then that you may say, "... never the same."

This is the aspect of grief that Simon Stephens calls "The Valley of the Shadow." It is that very long time between the death of your child and your reinvestment in life. Between. It is not supposed to be a permanent resting place. Although some people do take up residence in the valley, it is a transition from the death of your child to life with renewed purpose.

The key to this transition is yourself. You must choose between life and the valley. You and only you can decide. And you must make that decision again and again, each day.

Giving in to the hopelessness of the valley is tempting. Choosing to move on toward life requires a great deal of work. You must struggle with the pain of grief in order to resolve it. It is a daily struggle full of tears, anger, guilt and self-doubt, but it is the only alternative to surrendering yourself to the valley.

Little by little you choose to move on. Little by little you progress toward the other side of the valley. It takes a very long time, far longer than your friends or relatives suspected. Far longer than you had believed – even prayed – that it would be. When one day you find yourself able to do more than choose merely to live but also how to live, you will know you are leaving the valley of the shadow. There will still be more work to do, more struggle and choosing. The valley, however, stretches behind rather than in front of you.

When you have resolved your grief by reinvesting in life, you will be able to realize that nothing is ever "the same." Life is change. We would not have it be otherwise, for that is the valley of the shadow. Change has the promise of beginning and the excitement of discovery.

Life is never the same. Life is change. Choose life!

Marcia Alig

Being Public Takes Its Toll

When one is pretending, the entire body revolts. As we attempt to return to our jobs or our social life, or just to leave the house to do errands, we may feel that we must hold our heads up and keep acting brave. So we talk about things that don't interest us instead of talking about what plagues our heart and mind. We reluctantly agree to do things in which we do not have the slightest bit of interest.

All of this takes a tremendous amount of energy. But it does something else, too. Our bodies are under a great deal of stress as we work through our child's death. Trying to create and maintain an artificial front contributes to that stress. And stress, of course, manifests itself in many ways throughout the body - in headaches, rashes, insomnia, digestive disturbances, the inability to concentrate, and the impulse to fidget or be on the move. We may also have more colds and flues as well as unexplained pains in various parts of our bodies.

One of the kindest things we can do for ourselves is to behave, as much as is possible and reasonable, in accordance with our deepest needs and desires. We can greatly reduce the amount of time and effort we put into doing what only seems socially required.

I will not push myself into false situations or require myself to perform in a way that differs significantly from my truest self. I will take care of myself by not forcing certain actions or responses, regardless of the pressure put on me to do so. My self, my body comes first, and I need to remember that my body will revolt against pretending.

*Carol Staudacher
From A Time to Grieve*

Groundhog Day

According to folklore, every year on this day, a groundhog named Punxsutawney Phil, in a little town by the same name in Pennsylvania, wakes from his winter slumber, rises from his cozy little burrow and gazes about at his surroundings. Legend has it that if

Livonia Chapter Page

Meeting is Thursday, February 5th. Newcomers table and topic tables. Topic: One of the articles mentions how most bereaved parents, grandparents, and sibling ask themselves - If ONLY I had.... Did you ask yourself that questions after your child died and do you still ask it sometime?

A Love Gift -No dues or fees are required to belong to The Compassionate Friends. We have all paid the ultimate price, the loss of our loved ones. Parents and others may provide financial support for our chapter through Love Gifts. It is a beautiful loving way to remember our loved ones. Love Gift form is on back page.

- ♥ Thomas & Connie McCann in memory of : Sons Ryan "Ryfro", Tom Jr., Bryan "Bryfro" Soupis (considered a son to our family), Mark "Sparky" Abbott, Joe Coffey & Jim "Jimmy" Vick: " In memory of Tom Jr. "Happy Birthday on 2/16. We love you & miss you."
- ♥ Glenn & Carol Mead in memory of : **Bobby Mead**: "11 years of missing you. Keep your star shining above us and butterflies appearance on 2/18. Forever in our hearts. Love & soft hugs, Mom, Dad, Katie, DJ, Addison & Heidi"

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.

Tammy Swamba, whose beloved son, **Jack** born 4/25; died 10/11; 19 years

Let Us Celebrate Their Births

he sees his shadow, he becomes frightened and quickly retreats down his hole to safety where he goes back to sleep and the winter weather continues. This year Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow, thus predicting another six more weeks of winter. When we lose a child, we seem to linger in a perpetual winter. For a very long time we see our world as a barren winter landscape. The warmth and love that our children brought to our hearts has been ripped away by their death and we're left with a cold aching void. We are a little like Punxsutawney Phil. We might be afraid to come to our first Compassionate Friends meeting. We may want to hide from the world and stay in our burrows. But if we are very brave and come to a meeting, we will meet others who have survived the long cold winter of their hearts. We gather to share our stories, support each other, love each other and very slowly we begin to and rejoin life as best we can. Remember, we need not walk alone.

Janet G. Reyes



Thirty Years of Light

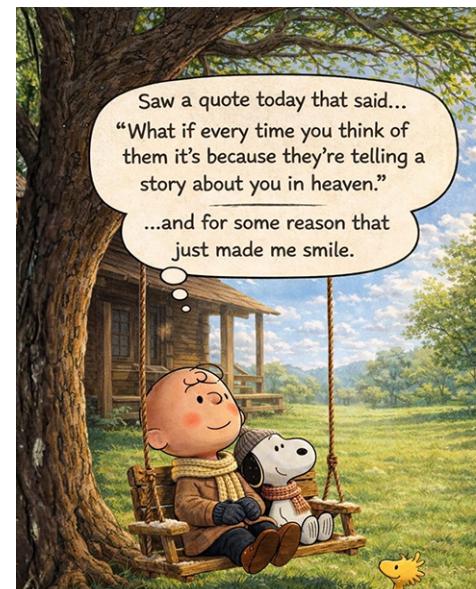
Thirty years have turned the world since you were called away,
A lifetime of tomorrows lost, a void that will not sway.

The calendar marks time's long march, the seasons come and go,
But in our hearts, the love you gave still sets a constant glow.
We see your smile in memories, your laughter in the air,
A spirit bright that time's long theft can never quite impair.
The pain has changed its sharpest sting to a quiet, steady ache,
A bond unbroken, though our hearts still beautifully break.
For thirty years, we've carried you in every step we've planned,
Guided by the love we shared, held fast within our hand.
You were a gift we cherished, a light

that shone so true,
And every single day that passes, we celebrate having loved you.
Until we meet where sorrow ends, and peace has found its name,
Your memory is our anchor, an everlasting flame.

Author Unknown

Received by Jim and Gail Lafferty on the 30th anniversary of Max's Angel Day.



My First Five Years as an Only Child

I've been without my brother for five years. I guess the hard part is over now. Sometimes I think I have aged 30 years in the past five. In a strange way, these past five years have been the best and worst years of my life. I have accomplished the many things of a typical young adult learning to drive, graduating from high school, going to college, and starting a career. Every one of my accomplishments has been clouded by the fact that my brother George is not here to share each milestone, and is not achieving any more milestones for himself. He was cheated of so many things. He will never graduate, get married, have children or travel. He will never grow

old, and I will never have a brother to grow old with. I'll never have nieces and nephews. The sibling relationship, usually the longest relationship of one's life, has been cut

short for us. In these five years, although I have learned to accept that he is not coming back, the difficult part is dealing with it day by day.

My relationship with George ended just when we started to become friends. The childish fights and other annoyances of having a big brother were changing to real conversations and to having an occasional ally. I am angry about all the things that we have missed and all the things that will never be, and I guess I always will be. Five years heals a lot of wounds, but the hurt will always be there, no matter how many years pass. In these past five years, I have been forced to grow up too fast. I have been forced into a

new outlook on life. I have felt lonely and alone. I now realize that I will never be the same person as before. Maybe I am a better person because of what I have been through. Five years ago I never thought I would survive, but I am still here dealing with it every day. I don't know what the next five years will bring, but at least I have made it this far.

Kristin Steiner

TCF Staten Island, NY

In Memory of my brother, George

Chocolate Angel

I attended my first TCF (Compassionate Friends) national conference in Philadelphia, Alan's second hometown, in 1995, shortly after the third anniversary of his death. The first workshop, for siblings, was called Dreams and Visions. Here I had hoped to learn how to live my future without Alan. There was a typo in the program; it should have been called Dreams and Visitations. I was about to walk out. I had dreamt for months after Alan's death that he was still alive but was not ready for the unknown.



A few years later, during tropical storm Floyd while walking to my car during heavy rain and winds, I suddenly got very worried, and upset thinking that the storm could damage Alan's stone at the cemetery. Then I stepped on a Hershey Bar wrapper and immediately stopped worrying. Alan

(Continued on page 8)



PLEASE REMEMBER

Siblings are welcome to attend the Livonia Compassionate Friend meetings. We ask that you be at least 16 years old.

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

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

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

Gail Lafferty - Sudden Death - (734) 748-2514

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

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: 48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808 Wixom, MI 48393
Phone: 877-969-0010; Website: 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 Thursday7-9; Tina@586-634-0239

South Rockwood TCF Chapter: Southwood United Methodist Church, 6311 S. Huron River Drive. South Rockwood, MI 48179; 3rd Tues. of month meeting - 7 pm; Sheri Schooley, Leader; Contact Karen 734-672-7469

TCF Livonia Chapter
Brenda Brummel
10531 Calumet Trail
Gaylord, MI 49735

January 2026

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

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: Mary Hartnett, 5704 Drexel, Dearborn Heights, MI 48127

and I had visited Hershey, PA very often, including a two-night stay, by ourselves, at age 14. I felt that this was his way of telling me not to worry.

Recently I was worried about another problem. I took my nephew to Burger King; where they advertised Hershey Park. The next day I saw a girl wearing a Hershey Chocolate t-shirt. The following day someone from Hershey checked into my hotel. I finally decided what to do about my problem; I like to think, with assistance from Alan.

I was once asked by a fellow TCF member to visit a medium. I am not sure if it's just by chance, but I like my way of hearing.