

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Livonia, Michigan Chapter



April 2025
Volume 37, Number 4

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

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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:

April 3rd -7:00 pm - Meeting
see page 7

April 15th, 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 Gradinscak,
734-560-6883, you can text or call her.

Next meeting: May 1st: Annual
Ribbon Tying Meeting - more info
next month.

No Craft meeting until further notice.

Faded Memories

I remember the first time I realized that my sense of my son, Jeremy, was beginning to fade.

I was losing his smell, the exact color of his hair, the tone of his voice when he said, "Oh, Mom," the feel of his arms around me when I got a too-seldom sixteen year-old hug.

Until my son's death, it had never occurred to me that I knew him through all of my senses. I believe the profound sense of loss I've experienced results in part from this total cut-off from his being. It's not just that I can't physically see him, but the essence of who he was is gone.

Perhaps that explains why I would often go to his room when I wanted to recapture a connection with him. Some nights I would sleep in his bed. I would wear his tee shirts. I would make a cocoon of an afghan that wrapped around him many times. Somehow, I felt his energy about me. I smelled his smell.

At other times, I'd get out the Zip-lock bag; the one with snippets of his hair that was cut when they had to screw the "halo" in his head to secure his neck and severed spinal cord. I'd study the color of his hair, memorizing the shades of light brown.

And the sounds? Only one. I found a cassette tape that he had recorded himself accompanying a favorite band.

I listened to that for hours, eyes closed, trying to capture the vision of those moments.

Although my behaviors might seem odd to some, the fear of fading memories eased. Tom Robbins, in his book *Jitterbug Perfume*, says "Death is impatient and thoughtless. It barges into your room when you are right in the middle of something. It doesn't even bother to wipe its boots." True. I was in the middle of parenting my only child. Death not only left the dirty mess of grieving for me to clean-up, but I had no warning.

Had I had warning that a three-quarter ton pick-up truck was going to run head-on into my son's Toyota Celica, I would have long before bought a camcorder and taken hours of audio and video. Lights. Camera. Action. The opening scene is me yelling, "Can you quiet down a little? You're sounding great, but those drums are going to drive the neighbors crazy." No answer.

Next scene. In his room, head-set on, eyes closed, tongue showing, intensity high, drumsticks alive with action.

Next scene: At the soccer field. I'm feeling the pride of watching my half-back move the ball down the field, demonstrating his years of experience.

Next scene: Middle of the night. I wake up to go to the bathroom; pass by his room. I see the light from the computer screen. "Jeremy, you've got to

(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>
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Names Available to Members

Let Us Celebrate Their Births

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

go to school in the morning. Turn that thing off.” Fade out. Regrets. I didn’t have a camcorder.

Often, just when I’m struggling with trying to remember the details, the minute details, I’ll have one of those experiences.

It’s something that I’m hesitant to tell anyone about, partly because it feels so private and partly because I fear I won’t be understood.

I’ll be sleeping, and he’ll come to me. Instantaneously my senses take in his presence; all of who he is. I feel the weight of his body against me as we hug. I see his eyebrows that almost, but not quite, meet. I smell that smell that is his alone. I hear his voice, oh so familiar. I find myself surprised that he is so real.

I used to awaken disappointed that it was “only” a dream. Today, nine years after his death, I treasure these infrequent experiences. While I don’t understand it, and I have no explanations, each time it happens I believe I have spent a brief time in the presence of my son.

I thank God I don’t have to rely only on faded memories.

Judi Simmons Estes, Prairie Village, Kansas In Memory of my son Jeremy

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Please allow me to share some things that have helped me not only survive the last almost 10 years, but to thrive in a sense of the word. I think of them as my ongoing resolutions. Just “surviving” Scott’s death was NOT an option as I knew that Scott would not be happy with that. His philosophy was to enjoy life to the max! If all I could do was “survive” his death, I would NOT be showing appreciation for his life and the gifts that he gave me by honoring me with the almost 25 years we had together. So as difficult as it was, I began the journey to thrive by taking teeny, tiny baby steps. I’m pretty sure that at the beginning I didn’t even know that was what I was doing. However, within a short time it became my mantra.

Each morning I got up, took my shower, did something with my hair, and put on my waterproof mascara. Then it was a matter of putting one foot in front of the other to just keep moving forward. (I have to say that some days were backward movements, but that is to be expected. When I went backwards three steps, the next day I might go forward four steps.)

As a result of this desire to thrive, I would mention Scott’s name numerous times during the day as I spoke to friends, acquaintances and family. I must say they weren’t all extremely comfortable as I shared Scott with them, but as I listened to other people’s stories about their living children, it would remind me of Scott stories. If he had been alive, I would have joined in on the conversation mentioning some funny thing he had done, so I resolved to not hide my memories from myself or others. This became part of my healing process.

Of course there were the huge waves of grief that would knock me to my knees and challenge my path—they were part of the healing journey as well. I am extremely grateful to the handful of friends who would sit on the front porch with me and join in on the “Scott Stories!” Sometimes we would be sobbing and laughing at the same time.

In addition, journaling my thoughts and feelings in the form of letters to Scott has been a tremendous help. At first it was me ranting and raving about the injustice of having to live without him and then the tone of the letters softened into my memories of him and the lessons that I had learned from him.

Sascha Wagner stated it well in this quote: “The name of your child who has died is a magic word. Did you know? At any given moment— whether busy or still....STOP! And think or say that name. Something will happen and whatever that something is, let it happen...even if it be tears. The name of your child is a magic word... to heal your heart.”

As you begin this day, this week,

this year, I hope you will use the magic of your child’s name as well as the many beautiful memories that you have to bring Peace, Comfort and even an ever-increasing Joy on this journey to not only “survive”, but to “thrive!” *With Love, Respect, and in Compassionate Friendship, Suzanne Coleman (Scott’s Mom & Harry’s Sister), TCF Kitsap, WA*

A Grandmother’s Grief

My mother, diagnosed with lymphoma, died just before Mother’s Day in 2008. Only two months prior, she had been a high spirited fun-loving woman, the heart of our family who was looking forward to her 90th birthday celebration that fall. As I cared for my dear mother, knowing I would soon lose her, I reflected back on my daughter Kristen’s death at age seven and my mother’s concerns about me at that time.

I had been so consumed by my own grief then, and the grief of my young son, only nine when his sister died, that I was hardly aware of others’ grief. Not until a few years ago did my mother confide her pain of not only grieving for her precious granddaughter, but her daughter as well. Her fear was that the tragic and sudden loss of Kristen could also mean the loss of her daughter.

“Kristen drowned in the ocean,” she said, “but you were drowning in grief. I know you felt helpless to save her, but I felt the same about you. I had no idea how to rescue you.” Surprised to hear this, even though I had also feared losing my mind, I became aware for the first time of the unique role grandparents play when their grandchild dies.

I recently became a grandmother myself and have been overjoyed with this new role of welcoming Joseph into the world. My favorite picture is of my mother, shortly before she died, with a huge smile and outstretched arms reaching for baby Joseph when meeting him for the first time. While my mother’s death, unlike Kristen’s, is part of the natural cycle of life, I will miss her deeply. She taught me so much. I think of her often in my new role as a grandparent.

When Joseph was born, I had the luxury of spending the first several weeks with him, watching him change daily as his parents moved nervously into their new role. I loved being witness to the bond developing as they changed from being a couple to being a little family. My son, a resident in anesthesiology, studies nightly, often with Joseph nestled against his chest in a baby sling. He once shared how much he misses his baby while he spends long hours at the hospital. Watching the creation of this strong parental bond, I became aware of the unique dual bond of the grandparent. A bond that takes her heart to places she never thought possible...a bond that should never be broken. I now appreciate more than ever what my mother experienced.

Arleen Simmonds TCF/Kamloops, B.C

Evolution

Rich Edler once said, "The only good that can come from the death of your child is the person you will become." As bereaved parents we under go a metamorphosis. The person we were before our child's death is gone forever. We are evolving into somebody different. For most parents further along in their grief journey, they say that they have become better people as a result of their experience. Don't get me wrong, everyone of them also say that they would trade their "better" self for who they used to be if they could have their child back. However, the fact remains, we can't go back to who we were. The loss of a child is so traumatic and life altering that we can't help but to be changed by the experience. There are several ways in which we do change. Many bereaved parents have similar experiences. Some of them are:

*Our patience level is different – what used to seem like huge problems are now just petty annoyances. When somebody complains to me about how awful their day is going, I think, "If you only had a clue to what a real tragedy in life is – try walking in my shoes for a while!"

* We have a new appreciation of life – Unfortunately we have learned the hardest way possible just exactly how fragile life is. We no longer take those we love for granted.

* Other's expectations of us - people who knew us before our child's death often put our grieving on a time line. After a set amount of time (6 months to a few years depending on how compassionate the person), the "unbereaved" begin looking for the "old" you to emerge. They can be disappointed when you don't live up to their expectations. They don't understand that the person you used to be is gone forever.

* Priorities change – I used to define myself by what I did for a living. My work and my income no longer have the same meaning. Employers often have a difficult time understanding this. After the loss of my child, I no longer have the desire nor the drive to "climb the corporate ladder" that I once had.

* We are more compassionate – because we have felt the worst pain

possible, we are more caring towards others.

The road we travel as we survive after the death of our child teaches us many things about who we are and who we are becoming. As we help others, we also help ourselves. This new awareness of life and death does make us reevaluate who we once were.

Lorna & Matt Pierce -TCF, Longwood, FL

No Interruptions

I slept as late as I wanted today. I cleaned and ran my errands and rested when I wanted to. When I changed the bed sheets, there was no one to jump in the middle of the bed with a delighted giggle to feel the sheet float softly down on him, or to take toys out of their place as fast as I put them up. When I went to the grocery store, there was no one saying, "C'mon, Mom, let's get. . ." "Mom, can I have ... ?" When I got home I didn't have to plan to go to the park or to the toy store to buy just one more much-wanted toy. There was not one interruption. But, oh, what I wouldn't have given for just one interruption- from you.

Kathie

He has a hard time looking me in the eye
when I talk about her.
His eyes fill with tears. He fights them back.
"Don't cry, never cry", his ego tells him.
All the strength leaves his face
and he holds the weight of his head in his hands.
He can't say her name. He says "baby", "the baby".
When I say "Kathie" his insides are trembling.
But he battles for control; fights back for strength;
fights for energy; fights out of fear.
He lost his daughter, he can't lose himself.
Crying, I ask him if he holds the same memories,
the same feelings.
He says, "I think differently than you do"
with all the strength his voice can muster.
His face says he is lying. But I let him lie.
What purpose would it serve to force him to suffer more?
I have my answer. I am comforted.
We hold each other, protect each other,
and tuck her in safely,
lovingly in our hearts and minds.
Until another day...
Maybe then
he can love her without being afraid.

SIBS

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*

"One of the most difficult losses for grieving adult siblings can be the sense of loss of a shared history. Your brother or sister grew up in the same house with you, shared the same parents, attended the same school, climbed the same tree... Who else knew your childhood so well?" – Alan D. Wolfelt

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:

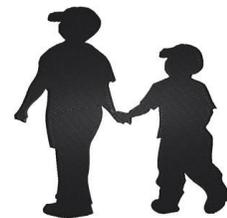
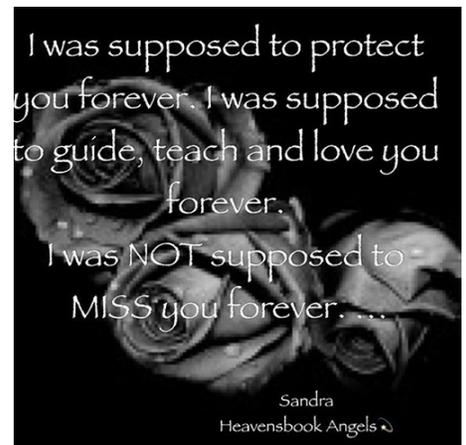
Ann Arbor: Mike Fedel: MikeFedela2@gmail.com; 734-998-0360 ; 3rd Sunday, 2:30 to 4:30 pm - First Presbyterian Church (Vance Room) 1432 Washtenaw, Ann Arbor

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 Thursday 7-9; 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



PLEASE REMEMBER

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

Livonia Chapter Page

Meeting is Thursday, April 3rd. Newcomers table and topic tables. Topic: Many of us wish we had taken more pictures, said more things like the mother in the Faded Memories article. What are some things you wish you would have “filmed” or recorded of your child(ren)?

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 is on back page.

♥ Brendolyn Jasper in memory of **Jeffrey Parker**: “Happy Heavenly Birthday Day. Love, Mom & Kym”

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.

Christine & James Dragston, whose beloved son, **Joshua James**, born 11/27; died 1/29; 21 years

Let Us Celebrate Their Births

Bowling Thank You

We would like to send our sincere thank you for everyone that showed up to support our chapter during our annual bowling event.. if you donated a basket, bowled, or just stopped by, we truly appreciate your support. Special thank you to our chapter leaders Mary Hartnett and Joyce Gradinscak for organizing this event and their husbands Mike & Rob for all they did to help out.”



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

April 2025

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: _____

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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

After the death of a child,
it becomes crystal clear.
We humans are capable of enduring
much more than we can ever imagine.
Knowing that doesn't make grief one
bit easier.
The painful truth is that we simply do
what we must do.
We do the unthinkable—
day after day.