The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Livonia, Michigan Chapter

December 2025
Volume 37, Number 12

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

Chapter Leader
Joyce Gradinscak
Mary Hartnett
(734-778-0800)

Newsletter Editor
Brenda Brummel
10531 Calumet Trail
Gaylord, MI 49735
810-623-1691
bbwriter59@aol.com

Treasurer
Mary Hartnett
5704 Drexel
Dearborn Heights, MI 48127

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:
December 4th -7:00 pm - Meeting: see page 7

December 16th, 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.

December 14th, Sunday, at 7:00 pm. Annual Candle Lighing in Plymouth at Kellogg Park. See article this page.

Annual Compassionate Friends Candle Lighting

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon.

The Livonia Chapter Candle Lighting will take place in Kellogg Park on December 14th at 7 pm. There will be music, readings and all the names of children that have been submitted will be read. Families and friends are welcome. The chapter will supply the candles. We are joining with tens of thousands of TCF members, relatives, and supporters around the world who will start lighting their candles in New Zealand at 7 p.m. their local time. By lighting our candles for this hour we are helping to create a wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone and encircles the globe for 24 hours. We do this in remembrance of all our children... that their light may always shine.

If your child(ren)'s name was on the list last year, it will be read this year. If you would like your child(ren)'s name added to the list to be read, call 734-778-0800.

The Holiday Balancing Act

The holiday with all of its traditions and special memories, also brings extra stress and pressure for families dealing with the death of a child. Instead of being a time of comfort, togetherness, and joy, the sights, sounds, smells and holiday gatherings can bring feelings of defeat, sadness, meaninglessness, and pain. Still for others, holiday traditions and rituals offer a way to remember their child and offers families a place to share stories and express their emotions.

Parents often have difficulty making decisions regarding the holidays. Everything from familiar traditions like holiday baking, decorating, gift exchanges, and family gatherings has changed. This can be frustrating and overwhelming but also rewarding and comforting. It all begins with a balancing act.

What I need, as a bereaved parent, what my immediate family needs, and which things can be adjusted to meet

(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

Child	***Parent, Grandparent, Sibling***	***Date***	***Age***

Names for Members only

December

Let Us Celebrate Their Births

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

(continued on Page 7)

those needs should be our priority. You and your family come first. What is the most comfortable for all of you is what should be done. Discuss with your kids how they feel and what they would like to do. Remember, this is a season of grief for them also. We need to balance the pain of our loss with the pain of their needs for the holiday. Be gentle with yourself, and allow yourself to do what feels right, even if others disapprove.

I recommend you start, create and maintain a new tradition each year for those first few holidays. It doesn't have to be something major. Simple things can make up a new traditions. Light a special candle, buy an angel stocking to hold and share thoughts about your child, find, print and share the recipe for a favorite holiday treat your child loved. (Baking Eric's favorite and giving haystacks to friends and family makes me feel he is a part of the celebration). Buying a special ornament each year in his/her memory and donating to TCF in your child's name are all easy but helpful gestures. New rituals that still include your child, helps to stabilize your emotions. Do what you feel you can handle and change old traditions into new ones to accommodate your changed family. If they work keep them, if they don't make things easier, discard them and try something new again next year... It's all a balancing act.

Communicating with friends and family is extremely important at this time of the year. Others are trying to make their plans and want to include us but don't know what to say. We need to talk about our mixed feelings and our grief and how overpowering our emotions are at times. Don't hide your feelings to make others feel comfortable. We need to share those feelings so others can help us and understand where we are coming from.

Accept the fact that nothing you can do is going to make things the way they used to be. While we may yearn for the past, we must face the fact that we have to live our "new normal." Part of that includes finding ways to incorporate our late child's memory into our remaining family's rituals. Decorate your child's grave or special area. Purchase or make a special ornament in their memory to add to the tree each year. Invite friends and family and attend a remembrance ceremony. Give someone who has helped you a gift or special card thanking them for their kindness. These can all help you feel better.

But most importantly, take care of yourself. Grief depletes energy, making simple tasks seem insurmountable. You may feel emotionally exhausted, stressed, and overwhelmed. Add to that the anticipation of the holidays and it all just seems too much to bear. `Respect what your body and mind are trying to tell you. Be patient with yourself. Do what you can for now and accept that it will just have to be good enough. Take a deep breath, remember your child's special smile and do something soothing for yourself... After all, it's just a balancing act.

Lynn Vines
TCF So. Bay/L.A., CA

Hung With Care

It has been a year since my 18-month old granddaughter, Katie, died of a birth defect, and I could still feel the grief.

"Maybe putting up Christmas decorations will make you feel better," my husband said, handling me the box of ornaments.

"Christmas won't be the same without Katie," I said. I opened the box. There on top of a pile of tinsel was Katie's stocking. I hadn't thought about what to do with it. I couldn't leave it off the mantle. It would be as if she's never been part of the family. But I couldn't leave it hanging empty either. What should I do?

Christmas Day, I found the answer. "Katie was such a blessing in our lives," I announced. "I'd like to start a tradition in her memory." I passed around Katie's stocking which I'd filled with slips of paper, one for each member of the family. On each slip was an assignment to be completed in Katie's honor. Plant a tree, buy school supplies for an underprivileged kid, donate a book to the library.

Now every Christmas Katie's stocking turns out to be the best gift of all.

Sarah Gill,
Northcutt, Miami, TX

Believe?

As I steel myself for my third holiday season since losing my son, it occurs to me that one of the challenges – and there are many – is coping with a sense of being out of sync with the world and all the people in it.

The "season of good cheer" seems compulsory. Yet I can't bear to open the boxes of ornaments and decorations. I can't bear to put candles in the windows. I can't bear to use the Spode Christmas tree china. I can't play Christmas carols. I can't bake the date nut bars that he loved. I avoid shopping malls and keep the radio turned off. It is all I can do to order gifts for my daughter and wrap them.

This season also implores us to "Believe." Whether it's an appeal to believe in the birth of the Messiah, or to believe that a single day's supply of oil burned for eight days, or to believe that Santa will deliver presents by sled from the North Pole, the message is the same: believe. Yet, I have lost my son. I am consumed by a sense of disbelief. Of incredulity. How could this have happened? How could he be gone? How could this have happened to me? How could this possibly be my life?

In Joan Didion's new book Blue Nights about the death of her daughter at age 39, she writes, "This was never supposed to happen to her." Dennis Apple, a Nazarene minister and now author of Life After the Death of My Son, writes, upon discovering his son's lifeless body, "This isn't supposed to happen to me, God!" I assumed I had some sort of contract with the

Universe. I voted, I paid my taxes, I worked hard, I recycled, I volunteered. Our children were the cornerstone of our lives. We went to every single parent/teacher conference and never missed a Back to School night. The applications for summer camp were submitted on time. Every single school form was completed. We made sure they went to the beach, to Disney-world, and to ski slopes. We loved our children with devotion and we loved them unconditionally. We were vigilant in protecting them. We followed the rules. Do you hear me, Universe? I followed the rules.

Since I did, I thought that surely my children would be healthy and happy and safe. Surely they would forge their own identities and find their place in the world. There would be graduations, and jobs, and apartments, and weddings. We would be approached for loans for down payments on first homes. We would negotiate about who came home when for the holidays. I didn't really ask for a Pulitzer-prize-winning kind of outcome. I didn't need for my child to become President (of anything). But I certainly counted on a satisfactory outcome. An outcome I could live with. Never imagined an outcome I cannot agree to.

How does one continue to believe? I don't know yet. In the season of believing, here I am. Not believing. I'm out of sync.

Peggi Johnson,
Arlington, VA

Hanukkah Thoughts

At this season of lights,
We remember the light you brought into our lives:
The light of your laughter
The light of your wit and intelligence
The light of your love
May the time not be distant when the memory of these lights
Will illumine our hearts and minds
And eradicate the darkness therein. -
Stephanie Hesse,

The Paradigm Shift

Bereaved parents often recant with sorrow that the most calloused, harsh, and even cruel comments made to them regarding the loss of their child often comes from their nearest friends and family members. The reason for this is because these are the very people in our lives who have known us the longest and who think that they know us better than anyone. They have built a paradigm in their minds of who they think that we are based on our past relationship with them. We fit neatly into a box in their minds that tells them things like; "He has a great sense of humor," or "She loves to go the movies," etc. Based on our "history" with them, they have developed a long list of descriptive terms based on their memories about us that forms the framework of what they perceive us to be.

When our child dies, the components that served to build the models in the minds of those we love folds like a house of cards. Suddenly, and irrevocably we are changed forever. This makes those closest to us very uncomfortable. To them we may look and sound like we used to, but we behave very differently now. Their uneasiness with this dramatic change causes them to pressure us into changing back to the way that we used to be in order for us to continue to fit the mold that they have conceived in their minds of how we should be. They want us to "Hurry-up and change back ... now!"

Sadly, this is the reason why some families grow distant and many friendships end. However, this is also one of the reasons that it is so easy to open up and connect with others at a Compassionate Friends meeting. No one there has any preconceived expectations or ideas of how we should act or behave. We are embraced and accepted in our grief and brokenness just as we are. One thing that we can do is to reach out to our loved ones and let them know that although we may never again be the person that we use to be before our child died, if they will bear with us and not abandon us, with time and effort we may regain some of the traits and characteristics that we were most loved and remembered for.

-Janet G. Reyes
TCF Alamo Area Chapter, TX

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 trail 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 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

(continued on Page 7)

SIBS

In Memory of James Franklin Fritz

The stockings are hung and the tree is trimmed bright,
With tinsel and ornaments and twinkling lights;
At four in the morning, I will wake with a start
And wonder why there is an ache in my heart.
At this time every Christmas, every year since I was eight;
You'd come to my bedroom and beg me to wake
To just come and see the job Santa had done;
And into the den, we'd head with a run!
Oh, thought of the magic of the early mornings,
By the light of the tree;
Send a shiver down my spine and a tear
down my cheek.
What happened to those moments?
Why must we grow old?
Why has this season left me feeling so cold?
I think it must be, my brother, my friend,
That our childhood has come to an aching end
And me at the tree without you does not
seem right
Us not together on a cold Christmas night...
It doesn't seem fair. It doesn't ring true.
All I want for Christmas is to be there with you.
Let Santa bring the toys that children will forget;
The only present I want; I haven't gotten yet.
I'm asking and begging for one gift this year:
To see a smile on your face and to whisper in your ear
How lucky I was to have a brother like you
How much I loved you and needed you too.
And how much I will miss you when Christmas morning arrives;
How I will miss the sparkle in your eyes.
I know heaven is nice, but please don't forget
The sister on earth who will always regret
Words left unspoken, things left unsaid
To a goofy little brother who wouldn't let her stay in bed!

I love you James
Amy
Written by my daughter, Amy on our first Christmas without her brother James.

Need to Talk to Someone Between Meetings
Telephone Friends

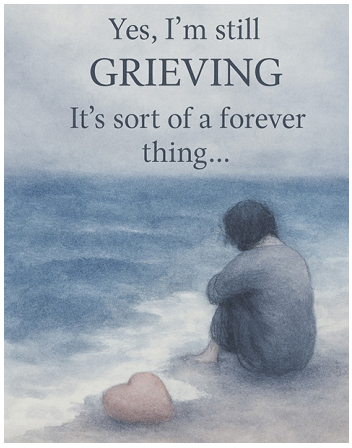
The people listed below have volunteered to take your calls:
Linda Houghtby - Long term illness - (734) 591-3062
Catherine Walker - Loss of Only Child - (248) 921-2938
Charli Johnston - Suicide - 734-812-2006
Marlene Hofmann - Drug related death - 734-331-9919
Bob Vitolins - A father's grief - (313) 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



PLEASE REMEMBER

Sibings 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, December 4th. There will be a candle lighting during the meeting. This is in addition to the candle lighting on the 14th. Snacks will be provided.

Memory Tree

There will be a TCF tree at Kellogg Park that will be decorated with ornaments with our children, siblings and grandchildren's names.
If you had your child, grandchild or sibling on the list last year to be read at the Candle Lighting, an ornament will be made and placed on the tree.
You can still contact the TCF at 734-778-0800 and give the names you want read and an ornament made for them.
Ornaments will be available at the meeting and there are blank ornaments at the tree in Kellogg Park.

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.

♥ Mike & Jan Wortmann in memory of ***Justin***; "20 years in Heaven. Love and miss you. Mom, Dad, Shannon, Josh and Julia"

♥ Mike & Mary Hartnett in memory of ***Michael***: "Merry Christmas, Michael. We miss you so much! Love You, Mom, Dad, Katelyn, Dakota & Brooklyn"

♥ Cindy & Matt Stevens in memory of ***Justin***; "Wishing you a Heavenly Merry Christmas, Justin."

♥ Laura Mikulan in memory of ***Zayne***; "In honor of Zayne."

♥ Jim & Gail Lafferty in memory of our ***Max***; "On your Angel Day & always, we miss & love you forever.♥ Mom & Dad, Tony, Andee, Greyson, Troy, Lizz, Andrew, Addison & Abigail"

♥ Judy Cappelli in memory of my son ***Christopher***; "I will never let your birthday be just another day. It will always be your Special Day. Happy 40th Birthday in Heaven. Forever and Always. Love, Mom"

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.

Roxanne Eaves, whose beloved son, ***Adam,*** born 7/8; died 1/4; 36 years
Laura Mikulan, whose beloved son, ***Zayne,*** born 4/6; died 6/1; 19 years
DeVoughn Owens, whose beloved daughter, ***Keauna Racheal Lenton,*** born 11/12; died 8/5; 26 years

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

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

December 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: _____

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

Before His Time

We see him on Fridays, at the football game
The players seem different, yet somehow the same.
Time stops for an instant and then marches on
He was there yesterday, now he is gone.
His friends, they are true, still stop by,
A smile on their face, a tear in their eye.
For he is the man-child who never grows old
Each with a memory, a story untold.
We remember them all, the way, they were then
And dream of the man, Max might have been.
Oh, that wonderful smile, cut down in his prime
Why oh why did he have to leave, before his time?
Larry Lafferty
In loving memory of his nephew, Max