

# The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Livonia, Michigan Chapter



**December 2023**  
**Volume 35, 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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## 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 7- Monthly Chapter  
Meeting see page 7

**December 10- 7:00 pm : Annual  
Candle Lighting at Kellogg Park**

**December 19- 6:00 pm. TCF Dinner  
at: Grand Tavern 37714 Six mile Rd.  
Livonia. It is in the Laurel Park Mall.**

Contact Kathy Rambo (734-306-  
3930); you can text, call or e-mail her at  
Katjrambo@gmail.com.

*No Craft meeting this month*

**The Compassionate Friends**  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all  
children who have died

**Worldwide  
Candle  
Lighting®**

... that their light  
may always shine.

**Sunday, December 10, 2023  
7 PM Around the Globe**

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 10 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. Candles are provided.

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. Please do this by early November.

## The Fourth Christmas

As I walked into a large store last Saturday to pick up some gardening ornaments and pots, I was hit by the reality that this Christmas will be the fourth one without my child. Yes, it's late summer as I write this, but some retailers are already hyping the Christmas merchandise. A weakness swept over me; I didn't think I'd have to deal with Christmas so soon. But here it was..... color coordinated Christmas trees, thematic trees, wreaths, decorations, paper. I felt like screaming and shoving the shopping cart into a display.

I remember the first Christmas after my son died. He was killed in an accident six days before Christmas. The day after Todd was killed my cousin came to the house and asked what she could do. We had to shop for Todd's children; they couldn't quite decide what they wanted until a week before Christmas. So here we were, 5 days before Christmas, one day after my son died, shopping for my son's children. I don't remember what we purchased. I was still in shock as my cousin continued to push along. Never much of a shopper, I was totally lost on that day; I followed my cousin's green jacket around the stores. We got it done, and my cousin did all the wrapping while I sat and stared blankly at the activity.

(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 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*

This year will be the fourth Christmas without my child.....even though he's been gone for 2 years and 8 months, I dread facing another Christmas. His death anniversary is on the 19th of December.

Seeing this materialistic Christmas outrage in August set me back. My husband was with me; we bought what we needed and left. We went to the grocery store; when we came out, we found that I had left the keys in the car door. This was not a good sign.

"That's it", I told my husband. "What's it"?, he asked. "I'm not going into another store until January unless I have no choice." He reminded me that I didn't do much shopping anyway, so that shouldn't be too difficult. I laughed because he is right; I avoid retail stores and malls when I can.

In my rational mind I know that I overreacted to the Christmas display. In my emotional mind I know that this is my reality. Since my son's death I have avoided Christmas. I hang one wreath on the door. I started putting a candle in the window on the first anniversary of Todd's death, and I light it every night as it now remains in the window all year.

We each find our own methods of coping. We each re-experience the shock, horror and helplessness of our children's death with personal triggers-smells, sights, sounds, seasons. We must train our minds to expect the unexpected from ourselves. We must learn to accept our reactions. We must understand this is our normalcy.

If I stop reacting to certain events and dreading other events, if unexpected tears stop rolling down my cheeks, I might be considered normal by some. But, I know in my heart of hearts that these reactions will stop on the day that I die. The duration and frequency have been reduced. But, no, I'll not stop reacting. My mind tells me that to "get on" with it is to repress a big part of who I am: Todd's mom. My son lived, loved, laughed, cried, learned and taught. He was my singular pure joy. No, I won't erase him. I won't erase the memories because the

memories are as much a part of me as my heart.

*Annette Mennen Baldwin  
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen  
TCF, Katy, TX*

## Handling the Holidays

Christmas and Chanukah, two holidays rich in tradition and intimately connected with children, are often especially difficult for bereaved families. What you do, or don't do, may depend on whether or not you have young children or grandchildren who should not be deprived of the joy the holidays can bring.

Try to finish shopping well in advance so that you are not inundated by holiday displays and music which the stores seem to initiate earlier and earlier each year. You might want to shop by catalog or the internet. Take advantage of the people who said to let them know how they can help and ask them to shop or do holiday chores for you.

In consultation with your immediate family, decide which traditions you wish to keep and which you want to change. As you progress in your journey through grief, you may find that you are able to reinstate some traditions you could not handle in the beginning.

Do things at different times or in different places if that works for your family. You may want to observe the holidays by yourselves, rather than take part in large gatherings. If you do take part in family or other gatherings, feel free to mention your child if you want to. If others are uncomfortable, it's their problem. Do not let them make you feel guilty for talking about your child or crying. You might want to explain in advance that this is a difficult time for you and that talking about your child and even shedding some tears are necessary for healing.

Memorialize your child in some way. Light special candles; have a special Chanukah menorah; fill his or her stocking with messages of love; have a special tree or decorate the tree with special ornaments; buy presents for a needy child of the same age;

make charitable donations; volunteer in a hospital or homeless shelter. Try attending a TCF or other memorial service. While difficult, this may allow you to express your feelings in a caring and comfortable atmosphere. Savor any moments of happiness as a special holiday gift. Your children would not want you to be miserable. Honor them by remembering them with love.

*Stephanie Hesse,  
TCF, Rockland County, NY and North  
Palm Beach County, FL*

## The Single Most Memorable Holiday I Ever Had

I am not writing here to sadden anyone, but as a tribute to LOVE, FAMILY, and FAITH. On Dec. 6th, 1985, my daughter was murdered. While gathering her things to bring home, we found Michelle had lovingly made Christmas gifts for everyone in the family. Family came from Florida, Canada, Arizona and here in Georgia and remained through the holidays.

Sometime before the incident, my daughter told me that she had a dream that the whole family was together at Christmas time and she was outside the window looking in. She said that in her dream she felt such a feeling of contentment at seeing us all together. It had been years since all the family had been together.

We decided to have Christmas as Michelle would have wanted it. My husband and I wrapped the gifts Michelle had made for those she loved. On Christmas morning, while we were opening the gifts, my husband told me to look out the window. There are two rocking chairs on the porch, and one was rocking back and forth. My husband reached over and held my hand, and it was at that moment I remembered what Michelle had told us about her dream, and I realized then that dream had become a reality. Michelle was still with all of us and was indeed content at watching the family she loved so much sharing the joy of Christmas together.

I also realized Michelle would always be watching me and that, though in one sense she had been taken from us, she would always be a part of all of us. The little gifts she made for everyone that Christmas would be treasured for many Christmases to come, but what would be treasured most was her LOVE OF FAMILY and the FAITH of knowing that one day we will be together again.

*Ann Marie Parman TCF, Augusta, GA*

## Mourning or Morning or Christmas Day?

The inevitable awakening lies ahead for each of us, that moment when we open our eyes and face the climax of weeks of colored lights, carols, frenzied shopping, social gatherings, accumulating gifts...even if we have not taken an active part in all of the preparations. Now the prelude is over and the day itself is upon us. However we have anticipated it, with apprehension or dread, with courage or resolve, this is the moment when we confront the ultimate reality of dealing with the holiday without our child.

Will it be morning or simply mourning? Whether this is our first Christmas since our child's death, or one of many, this is far more than a cute play on words. For the answer lies within each of us and not without. The quality of our Christmas is but another in that long series of countless decisions we each confront when our child dies.

The holiday is more than just another day, but like every other day it does afford moments of grief and occasions for joy. It is simply more intense, more culturally bound in rituals that establish significance for certain parts of our lives. Without a doubt, we will each remember our child's anticipation and excitement for holidays past, and we will hear the unnatural silence of absence above numerous other sounds. Allow yourself to cry and let the hurt course through you as you dress. It is your own grief...it belongs only to you...and it must not be denied. Wash, brush your teeth, feel the hollowness without being consumed by it, for

there are others in your life. Even if you are alone, you are an "other", a personality apart from your deceased child and a great deal more than a life summed up in a denial of living. Therefore, grant yourself moments to grieve, but leave room to sandwich instants of joy between.

A single smile, one quiet laugh, a gentle moment of fondness for the delight of another, even if only from memory...these are all it takes to turn mourning in morning. You cannot and should not smother or suppress grief, but you must also remain open to the light that still can enter your life.

In my own memories of my son at Christmas I will find both reasons to cry and irresistible urges to laugh. His life was sunshine in mine. In the holiday his memory should not become a shroud to hide away my love for him. On the 25th, as on every other day, I will remember him and long for him, knowing he has forever marked Christmas for me with his own happiness, and it is only his permanent physical withdrawal that chills these moments with a seemingly endless sorrow.

If we decide, if we are willing to work for it, we can mix remembrance with mourning and turn it into morning, thus enriching our lives by continuing to feel the laughter and joy our children gave to each of us. This is our lost child's Christmas gift to us this year and in all the years to come. Take it with the same grace and gratitude with which we accepted all the others from holidays past...from other Christmas mornings.

*TCF, Bridgeport, CT*

## Tradition, Tradition, Tradition

Even in normal times, tradition isn't what it is always cracked up to be, and sometimes "tradition" gets in the way of sanity. Often we cling to tradition because it's easier, we don't want to offend others, we don't want to be embarrassed, or we don't know what else to do. When you are a grieving parent, giving in to tradition can drive

you over the edge.

I found myself in the "tradition predicament" regarding putting up a tree the first Christmas holiday after my son, Chad died. I didn't want, need, or have the energy to put up a tree. Yet other family members wanted a tree and they wanted it as it always had been, big, bright, and decorated with ornaments they had purchased or made through the years. What eventually took place, with regard to a tree, changed our holiday forever and it has been a good thing for everyone involved.

I don't know the exact circumstances of how our "new tradition" came into being that first year. But I do remember frustration, tears, and upset people. I also remember my daughter saying to me it was her Christmas too and she needed a tree. It was her older brother, the one she remembered getting up with every Christmas morning when she was little that was dead, and she had to have something so she could deal with the emptiness. So she came up with a plan. She and her father would go find a tree and she would take care of the decorations all by herself.

That was ten Christmases ago and this year, once again, my husband and my daughter will leave early in the morning, a week before Christmas, and hunt for a tree, just the two of them. When they come home, I will prepare breakfast, while they get the tree in the holder, and move the furniture. We will sit down together and enjoy our meal and then my husband and I will leave for several hours. During that time we will do whatever we feel like doing. We have gone to the cemetery, gone for walks, gone to the bookstore, visited friends, etc. When we return, my daughter will have decorated our Christmas tree, and the whole house!

Every year the tree has been different, limited only to my daughter's imagination and the budget we keep her on. She didn't use our regular ornaments for a while and when she did, she told me ahead of time and

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# SIBS

## Forever on My Mind

When I attended my first meeting of the Bergen-Passaic Compassionate Friends, it was the day after my fifth birthday without my twin brother Alan. Up to then I was working nights and unable to attend meetings. Nine months later, May 1998 at a chapter meeting someone in the circle spoke of the tenth anniversary of his or her child's death. They said they no longer think of their child everyday and it didn't bother them. This was shocking to me, not to mention upsetting. I couldn't imagine living a day without thoughts of him – both happy and sad. I went home very upset.

Even after five years I always thought of him each and everyday. To

this day I will lick the bowl of frosting and think of the times we fought over the bowl. After a snowstorm I write his initials in the snow. When I hear something funny I think of him. But I also think of all that he has missed. He would have gotten to know his six, soon to be seven nieces and nephews. We would have been able to enjoy many vacations together.

This June will be the ninth anniversary of his death. With the passing of time I have adjusted to not talking to him everyday (we both had 800#'s at work). I do think of what he would say when I have a problem to work out. I think the part of the old me is returning. I have started to exercise again. This is something I used to love to do before Alan got sick. I have taken steps to advance my career, something

I was planning at the time of his death. I also think I took on some of his traits like becoming a better writer and not emptying the laundry basket after each wash.

There are now many more good days than bad. But almost nine years after Alan's death, I am probably the only adult male to cry at a children's movie. In "Rugrats in Paris" Chucky's father remarries sometime after his mother's death. Tommy is thrilled that he will have two mommies, one on earth and one in heaven. I am forced to remember that I can't have another Alan.

I have given myself a job that I love: The job of keeping Alan's memory alive. I do this by putting this newsletter together, collecting license plates, with his name, for each new state that I visit, donating to his scholarship fund and in many other ways.

When "Phantom of the Opera" opened on Broadway I had no desire to see it. That was until it opened in Philadelphia, after Alan's death. Alan was a publicist in Philly and the show was playing at the only theatre where I had not seen something Alan had publicized. One of the songs has a line "There will never be a day in which I won't think of you." I think this will be true for a long time to come.

*Daniel Yoffe,*

*Reprinted by permission of author In Memory of my brother, Alan*

## 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

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:** 48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808 Wixom, MI 48393

Phone: 877-969-0010; Website: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

### OTHER TCF CHAPTERS IN OUR AREA:

**Ann Arbor:** Mike Fedel: [MikeFedela2@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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

**Tecumseh TCF Chapter:** First Presbyterian Church, 211 W. Chicago, Tecumseh, 4th Sunday of the month, 2-4 pm, Marsha & Jeff DiCenzo 517-918-5608 & 517-358-1883



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

# Livonia Chapter Page

Regular meeting: Thursday, December 7 at 7:00 pm. As usual, there will be a First Time Table and tables for “older” members. For the latter, the topic: “Have you started any new Traditions for the holiday season?”

The meeting will include a candle lighting for all of those present. Candles will be provided. Please understand that there are two Candle Lightings - the one the night of the meeting and the one on Sunday, December 10th in Kellogg Park. See *Memory Tree* below.

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**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.

- ♥ Robert White in memory of **Jillian** “Happy Birthday in Heaven Jillbean. I love and miss you with all my heart. Dad”
- ♥ Mike Wortman in memory of **Justin**: “Forever in our hearts. Mom, Dad, Shannon, Josh and Julie”
- ♥ Robert and Mary Vitolins in memory of **Laura**; “We love and Miss you every day. Mom, Dad and Sister Karen”
- ♥ Jim and Gail Lafferty in memory of our son, **Max Christopher** on his Angel Day; “You are so missed and so loved forever.”
- ♥ Jim and Gail Lafferty in memory of our great nephew, **Camden Paul Edward Henline**; “You sweet baby

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## 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.*

John and Diane Guerin, whose beloved grandson, **Simon Mansons**, born 2/3; died 8/11; 21 years

Charler Lopez, whose beloved daughter, **Melissa**, born 3/14; died 3/25; 41 years

Carolyn Siewicki, whose beloved daughter, **Jennifer**, born 4/30; died 11/25; 38 years

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said how meaningful it was for her to be the one who put Chad’s ornaments back on the tree. We have continued this “new tradition” to this day. Now, I find angel ornaments to put on the tree to honor our missing angel, and enjoy with my husband, sons, and family, my daughter’s traditional tribute to her brother. This “changing tradition” has been so healing. Our family has had the brightness and beauty that a lighted tree can provide, and I have been able to save my energy for other things I wanted to do.

During the next few weeks, I hope you will make the activities of the season as stress free as you can. I hope that you will feel free to experiment with new traditions, knowing there is no “right way” to go through this season, only “your way.” I hope that you will remember Christmas is only one day and that the time leading up to that “one day” will probably be more difficult than the actual day. And finally, I hope for peace in your hearts, if not today then tomorrow, or the tomorrow after, or the tomorrow after that.

*Sue Anderson*

## Memory Tree



*If you had your child, grandchild or sibling on the list last year or already added this 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.*

*There is a box at the tree with plain ornaments which you can stop at the tree and make one for your loved one.*

*The Worldwide Candle Lighting sponsored by The Compassionate Friends will be held*

*In Kellogg Park on December 10, 2023 starting at 7 p.m. Please come early to get your program and see the Memory Tree before the program starts. Please dress warmly as it could be a cold night. Friends and family are invited.*

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## One Little Candle

I lit a candle tonight, in honor of you  
Remembering your life and all the  
times we’d been through.  
Such a small little light the candle  
made Until I realized how much in  
darkness it lit the way.

All the tears I’ve cried in all my grief  
and pain

What a garden they grew, watered in  
human rain.

I sometimes can’t see beyond the mo-  
ment, in hopeless despair  
But then your memory sustains me, in  
heartaches repair.

I can wait for the tomorrow, when my  
sorrows ease

Until then, I’ll light this candle, and let  
my memories run free.

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

**December 2023**

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

**Holidays**

The Holidays bring memories of  
past happiness, and the sorrow of the  
“never will be”

We hope you will find the time for  
yourself;  
The time to reflect on the past joys;  
The time to center yourself; Time to  
cry;  
The time to cry and clean your heart  
of the agony which builds;  
And the time to say, “Happy Holi-  
day” to your child.  
Somehow they will hear and will

know.  
*Ray & Lynn*