

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Livonia, Michigan Chapter



January 2023
Volume 35, Number 1

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:

January 5th - Monthly Chapter
Meeting see page 7

**January 17th - 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.

January 28th - Craft Day
See page 8

What Happens After Christmas?

"I spent a lot of energy anticipating and dreading the holidays," Chris told me over the phone one evening last week. "I pushed myself to be with people, even though I didn't want to be. I even shopped for presents and decorated the house as I had always done before Jim died. I guess it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be— though I have to tell you it wasn't great. But now I'm wondering, what happens after Christmas? What happens to me now that there aren't a lot of people visiting me, there are fewer distractions and there is much less running around? What happens now that I've worn myself out physically and emotionally trying to cope with the pain of my first Christmas without Jim? How can I get through these next few months?"

Chris's questions are very familiar to those suffering from the death of a loved one. There are many like Chris who have kept themselves overly busy, running from store-to-store or house-to-house, stuffing down old memories, traditions and expectations. They find that once the holidays are over, they are tired, nervous, distraught and fearful of the long winter months ahead of them. We certainly can't change the nature of the winter that is upon us. No matter what we do, there will be days with fewer

hours of sunlight. It will be cold, and snow and ice may well keep us inside more than we would like. Though none of that can be changed, what we can have complete control over is "slowing down" in mind and in body and giving ourselves some time to heal from the pain of loss.

Winter is, in itself, a "slow" time. Life seems to come to a halt for awhile; trees are bare and new life is dormant under snow-covered earth. There is a quiet that hangs on the air. It can be in the quietness, in this slow-paced expectancy of a spring that will eventually come, that we can begin to open ourselves to the gentle prodding of beginning a new life. But in order to do that, we must indeed "slow down after Christmas. There can be quiet times in which we can work at our healing and growth. The healing will never be perfect, and there will always be scars, because love has the capacity to leave scars. But the scars can produce a growth beyond just survival. The growing may be difficult. Indeed, the grieving was and is. But as nature survives the winter and moves into the freshness of a new spring, we, too, can use this time before us to begin to nurture ourselves, listen to our inner yearnings, and realize that this time can be put to growth.

(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 only to members



Let Us Celebrate Their Births

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

What happens after Christmas? We take the time to pay attention to ourselves and to the possibility of using the cold and dreary months, as nature does, to begin to heal and grow. Spring always follows winter no matter how harsh that winter has been. So, too, can strength follow suffering, if we try to work through the suffering to new life.

*Maureen O'Brien,
Hamden, Connecticut*

Loneliness

Why are there times when a bereaved parent feels lonely, even though surrounded by loving people? Loneliness is the outgrowth of separation from one who has given meaning to life. Yes, other relationships offer meaning, but it is normal for the searing pain from the loss of one's child to supersede the pleasure from other experiences.

Part of yourself has been invested in another person. When that person has died, in a sense, you are lonely for a part of yourself that has been destroyed. At times you look around you and think that no one else is experiencing the pain you are feeling; that no one else's world has been shattered. The self-centeredness is a natural part of the grief process. Do not deny it, but do not hold on to it as a way of life.

Give yourself permission to accept help from others and then reach out and help others. Although your child is not here to give continuity to your life, by having lived and having given purpose to your life, your child can be the bridge of your continuity with life as a thinking, loving, and active person.

*Ruth Eiseman,
Louisville, KY TCF*

The Storm of Grief

I've often thought about how differently grief affects those left behind when someone has died. To me there are three groups of bereaved. There are those that lose someone they loved very much and are most affected. The middle group are those that cared

about the person and will miss them, but their death doesn't change their lives. The third group are sorry that the person has died, but are largely unaffected by their death.

Now envision those groups on a mountain. When my son died, I felt like I was on a mountaintop, alone with a storm raging around me. Thunder and lightning filled the sky, thick clouds enveloped me, and a cold hard rain fell upon me. Winds buffeted my body from every side. There was no shelter, no place to sit or lie down. Others who were suffering as much as I (my husband and daughters) were on their own mountaintop, and we could derive no comfort from each other. I stood there, sometimes railing against God, sometimes feeling as if my heart had been ripped out, sometimes just feeling an emptiness so deep, I feared I would drown in it.

Days, weeks, months passed. The middle group of people stood on the side of the mountain (close friends and relatives). They also were caught in the storm, but they had some shelter and each other. They wanted to comfort me but the path upward was winding and rocky and I could find no path down to them. The last group of people were at the bottom of the mountain in the valley. There, the sun was shining and the breeze was gentle. They could see the storm I was caught in, but could do nothing to help me. Sometimes the storm would subside, and I could see something besides dismal gray. I had respite from the wind and rain. But this would be followed by another raging storm. Eventually the sky would clear, and I was able to find a path to those that cared and could offer me hugs and a shoulder to cry on. The storm was still there, but there was also shelter and I wasn't alone.

It has been 12 years since Todd died, and I have been able to come completely down off that desolate mountaintop and live in the valley of sunshine. Sometimes I stay there quite a while. Sometimes I climb that mountain and experience that same

emptiness and sadness. We all know that this kind of storm may brew on those special days- birthdays, holidays, family events. We are also blind-sided by those times that just take our breath away ... being in a place they loved, hearing their music, smells, movies, ball games, or seeing their friends. We really have no control over these unexpected, sudden storms. I have learned to give into them and let the tears fall.

I can live with these storms and accept them as part of my life because my child lived and I loved him with all my heart. I cannot change the fact that my child has died, and I will not change my love.

*Barb Seth,
TCF Madison, WI*

Older Grief

Older grief is gentler

It's about sudden tears
swept in by a strand of music

It's about haunting echoes of first pain
at anniversaries.

It's about feeling his presence for an
instant one day while I'm dusting his
room.

It's about early pictures that invite me
to fold him in my arms again.

It's about memories blown in on wisps
of wood smoke and sea scents.

Older grief is about aching in gentler
ways, rarer longing, less engulfing
fire.

Older grief is about searing pain
wrought into tenderness.

*Linda Zalenka
TCF, Orange Park, Florida*

This Is My Path, Not a Path of Choice

This is my path. It was not a path
of my choice, but it is a path I must

walk mindfully with intention. It is a journey through grief that takes time. Every cell in my body aches and longs to be with my beloved child. I may be impatient, distracted, frustrated, and unfocused. I may get angry more easily, or I may seem hopeless. I will shed many, many, many tears. I won't smile as often as my old self. Smiling hurts now. Most everything hurts some days, even breathing. But please, just sit beside me. Say nothing. Do not offer a cure. Or a pill, or a word, or a potion. Witness my suffering and don't turn away from me.

Please be gentle with me. I will not ever "get over it" so please don't urge me down that path. Even if it seems like I am having a good day, maybe I am even able to smile for a moment, the pain is just beneath the surface of my skin. Some days, I feel paralyzed. My chest has a nearly constant sinking pain and sometimes I feel as if I will explode from the grief.

This is affecting me as a woman, a mother, a human being. It affects every aspect of me: spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. I barely recognize myself in the mirror anymore.

Remember that grief is as personal to each individual as a fingerprint. Don't tell me how I should or shouldn't be doing it or that I should or shouldn't "feel better by now." Don't tell me what's right or wrong. I'm doing it my way, in my time. If I am to survive and this, I must do what is best for me.

Surviving this means seeing life's meaning change and evolve. What I knew to be true or absolute or real or fair about the world has been challenged so I'm finding my way, moment-to-moment in this new place. Things that once seemed important to me are barely thoughts any longer. I notice life's suffering more - hungry children, the homeless and the destitute, a mother's harsh voice toward her young child or by an elderly person struggling with the door.

So many things I struggle to un-

derstand. Don't tell me that "God has a plan" for me. This, my friend, is between me and my God. Those platitudes seem far too easy to slip from the mouths of those who tuck their own child into a safe, warm bed at night. Can you begin to your own child, flesh of your flesh, lying lifeless in a casket, when "goodbye" means you'll never see them on this Earth again? Grieving mothers- and fathers- and grandparents- and siblings won't wake up one day with everything "okay" and life back to normal. I have a new normal now.

Oh, perhaps as time passes, I will discover new meanings and insights about what my child's death means to me. Perhaps, one day, when I am very, very old, I will say that time has truly helped to heal my broken heart. But always remember that not a second of any minute of any hour of any day passes when I am not aware of the presence of the absence, no matter how many years lurk over my shoulder. Love never dies.

Dr. Joanne Caciatore

Dear God, Please Let This Be...

... more than tearing a page from the calendar,
... a year of healing and health,
... a year to forgive past hurts, and to forgive myself for whatever I feel I did wrong,
... a year to figure out ways to resolve my anger so I can let go of it,
... a year to finally stop asking why and accept what is,
... a year to start taking better care of myself,
... a year to concentrate on and value what I have left as much as what I have lost,
... a year to risk reinvestment in life,
... a year to reach out to someone in my child's memory,
... a year to let those I value know how important they are to me,
... a year to thank You for all that You've given me, even the things that didn't seem like such a blessing at the time.
... a Constructive, if not "Happy" Year

Kathy McCormick and Mary Cleckley



Candle Lighting - 2022

SIBS

Celebrating Life is a Better Way to Cope with Death

Today marks a week since my youngest brother's birthday. However, instead of recalling memories of the family all here together eating cake and ice cream and celebrating the joyous occasion, my mind conjures up images that only seem to surface twice a year: on Jeffrey's birthday and on the anniversary of his death.

Seven years ago Jeffrey died by suicide. Though I was only 14 at the time, and so many years have passed since his death, when his birthday rolls around each year, so does the pain. Today, however, is my last day for mourning. About 3 years ago, I

decided, instead of fighting back my emotions or feebly attempting to act as though everything is okay, on his birthday and on the anniversary of his death, I would allow myself a week to mourn and heal. I have even developed a ritual. On these occasions, I dress all in white, sit in a private place with the lights turned off, put on Bette Midler's "Wind Beneath My Wings" (the song she sang in the movie *Beaches* right after her best friend died), light a single white candle, and sort through old photographs of Jeffrey and the family. The color white has, for me, always represented light, rebirth, and newness. Thus, wearing all white is my way of saying, "Instead of mourning his death, I will celebrate his life." Lighting a single candle stems from our Catholic faith. It is a way of showing that the fire of

his spirit is still alive. With the heat of the candle I can feel the warmth of his presence. Listening to Midler's song helps me say all the things I didn't get a chance to say, especially when I carefully listen to the words and realize how much they apply to Jeffrey and me. The song seems to have been written for us.

When we were younger, I was the star of the family. The straight-A student who sang in the church choir and excelled in academic and athletic competitions. Jeffrey was the quiet one. He was reserved, an average student, and spent most of his time reading or practicing Ninjitsu. No one was surprised that I commanded most of the attention from my parents. This didn't seem to bother Jeffrey, however. He was easygoing, a good listener, and, best of all, he always supported me in everything I did. I thought he was the perfect brother. Losing him was extremely hard for me.

Everyone kept telling me to cry and let out the grief I was feeling. Someone even said that a year from now I wouldn't remember how painful this experience was. However, even now I remember how hard it was to return to school and my everyday life, and pretend everything was fine, acting as though I was dealing with his death and would be okay. I know people meant well by sharing their condolences and advising me on the best way to deal with my grief. In the end, I realized no one could truly understand what I was going through and their remedies for relief may have worked for them. However, I needed something more.

The first birthday after his death was especially hard, and I dealt with it in a very different way than I do now. I spent the entire month wearing black, closing myself off from everyone

(Continued on page 7)

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

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

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

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

TCF CHAT ROOM: www.compassionatefriends.org

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

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
Sibings 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, January 5th at 7:00 pm. First time tables; topic tables *“Have you thought about making any resolutions for the new year that deal with your grief?”*

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 Vitolins in memory of: Laura; “We miss you every day. Love, Dad, Mom and Karen”
 - ♥ Jim & Jan Anstett in memory of : Erika Kelly Anstett; “We love & miss you Kool Beans.”
 - ♥ Siobhan & Doug Sendelbach in memory of: Our son Richard;”Always in our hearts. Love, Mum & Dad”
 - ♥ Matt & Cindy Stevens in memory of : Justin; “Missing you ever so much Justin.”
 - ♥ Sharon & Dave Curson in memory of: David C.Jones III; “On the 25th Anniversary of your trip to Heaven, we love & miss you every day. Your Family”
-

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.

Arlene Cormer , whose beloved son, **Gabriel Cormer-Bridgeforth**, Born 2/15; Died10/12; 24 years

Let Us Celebrate Their Births

around me, and crying every time I had the inclination. I don't regret dealing with his death that way, but I do find solace knowing that seven years later, I can silently mourn without wearing black, without shutting myself off from the outside world, and without wearing a mask of happiness. I have healed at my own pace and in my own time.

I understand now that this is the only advice I could ever give someone experiencing a similar tragedy: make your time and deal with it in your own way. Only your way is the right way. Now I deal with Jeffrey's death the best way I know how - by celebrating his life. In that, I am at peace.

Karma Lowe

TCF of Los Angeles Newsletter



Candle Lighting at December Meeting

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

January 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



Our craft day will be on Saturday ,
January 28, 2023 from 10:00 am-1:00
pm at the Plymouth District Library.

We will be making photo charms.
Cost will be \$5.00 each with a limit
of 3 charms. There will be a sign up
sheet and examples at the the January
meeting. Please send your photo to
Gail Lafferty e-mail:

angel4gail2016@gmail.com.

Photo's need to be to Gail by
Monday January 23. If you have any
questions you can e-mail Gail or call
or text Kathy at: (734) 306-3930.