

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Livonia, Michigan Chapter



January 2024
Volume 36, 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 4 - Monthly Chapter
Meeting see page 7

**January 16 at 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

**March 23 - 1:00 pm Annual Bowling
Fundraiser - see page 7**

Chapter website: www.tcflivonia.org

Reflections on a New Year

We begin a new year, one that many of us enter with reluctance. After all, it means another year away from our child and another year to be lived without the physical presence of the one we have lost. Apprehensive about any new challenges that we may be called upon to face in our broken condition, we call out, "Wait, I'm not ready yet!"

The death of our child changed the course of our life; nothing will be the same again. But it also has shaped us into who we are today. And it will continue to do so as we learn to incorporate this loss into who we are to become.

Have you found that you have already begun to live differently? Compassion toward others is more profound. Trivial things are no longer important. Appreciation for life, and those in our lives, is paramount. We're living the same life—differently.

Tragedies, disappointments, and heartaches combine with beauty, love, and joy to fashion our life. These are all a part of life, and our challenge is to incorporate them into our world. The difference that our child's life has had upon the world continues through us.

So, rather than being fearful of the challenges that lie ahead, perhaps a better question to consider at this time might be: What opportunities will pres-

ent themselves in the coming year to honor this loss that is already a part of our life? Our child has become more integrally entwined into our being than ever before. We bring him or her to every situation that we encounter. How can we make that situation better because of this bond?

The start of a new calendar year is a good time to remember that we are in the midst of life. It is not perfect. Nor is it one that we might have chosen. But, our struggles do not put life "on hold." Rather they are a part of life itself! Our life is ours to make the most of, with many gifts that we can share with others. There is no better time than the present to gather up the pieces and recognize the uniqueness that we each call "me"—a uniqueness made more wonderful because of our child's presence in the life we choose to live.

Paula Staisiunas Schultz

In Memory of Melissa and Jeff

Author biography, 2002: Paula and her husband Bob live in Chicago, Illinois., where Paula serves as co-editor of the South Suburban Chapter newsletter. Their son, Jeff Schultz, is currently a student at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. Their daughter, Melissa Schultz Cleaves, and her husband, Jeff Cleaves, had been married seven weeks when they died in a car accident on Thanksgiving weekend, 1999.

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 to members



Let Us Celebrate Their Births

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

The Paths to Peace

As bereaved parents, we look to others for answers about our grief journey. For eight years I have listened as so many parents spoke about the combination of factors which brought peace to their hearts and allowed them to move forward into a different, less painful, life. I have read books, watched movies, attended seminars and retreats. I have gone to 93 Compassionate Friends meetings. And I have discovered one key factor in finding peace and resolution on this terrible grief journey: there is no single element or singular combination of elements that answers the needs of more than one parent. Each parent must patiently seek those elements that will enhance the individual and a unique personal journey: there is no magic map to finding the path to peace.

There is one common denominator in this quest for the peace on our long journey, and that is patience. Patience with ourselves is mandatory, because the grief journey after the death of our precious child is so horrible, so painful, and so isolating that our psyches and our bodies take so very much time to begin the healing process. There are setbacks. There is progress. Each of these comes in spurts. Each is partially reversed and the process begins anew.

Friends and family do not thoroughly understand our perspective on our unique journey. We must make allowances for them. But we must ask that allowances be made for us. For we are finding ourselves while on a path that we did not choose. We are lost. We are weakened. We are heartbroken. Each of us in our own way is seeking the formula that is uniquely our own.

Some parents find a kind of peace in their religion. Some parents are angry with their God. Many parents seek private counseling. Other parents read prolifically about the grief journey, seeking some element which resonates with them. Many parents come to Compassionate Friends meetings and actively participate. Others attend meetings and say little. Some parents

slip into denial and proceed on the old path of their lives. We each make choices. We are different people with different experiences, backgrounds, cultures, genetic hard wiring, education and combination of abilities. The path to peace is found by searching, by reaching out to every resource available. We will reject much of what we find; but if we search, we will find what we need.

For many of us, finding other bereaved parents presents an opportunity to listen to the stories of their child and their journey and, within those stories, we find many threads that fit our unique journey.

Many stories, many journeys, many new threads are shared in group discussion and in private discussions. We find “seasoned” grievers who provide perspective on our feelings, and listen to our story. We find newly bereaved parents who touch our hearts and remind us how we have built our path to peace brick by brick. Their pain brings reflection and new revelations about our own grief journey.

I found kindred souls at Compassionate Friends. These kindred souls have allowed me to explore the various aspects of my being and gradually create a path of peace for myself. But the journey does not suddenly end. We walk this path for the rest of our lives. And if we do the hard work and face our demons early on, we accept the unacceptable and face life on our own terms. And that is as it should be.

Grief never ends...but it changes. It's a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith...It is the price of Love.

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

How Are You?': A Silent Signpost for the Newly Bereaved

“How are you?” It is such a seemingly simple, benign question. Often, those who ask the question are not doing so out of real concern, but just as a polite, meaningless pleasantry.

Just as often, those who answer the question would never think to respond with anything other than the implicitly expected “I’m fine” or “Good. How are you?” – even if everything wasn’t fine.

But what happens when the simple question of “How are you?” becomes a harsh reminder of the isolation felt by anyone struggling with overwhelming grief? What happens when it becomes the silent signpost marking the moment when the newly bereaved seemingly take two simultaneous paths: the one visible to the outside world where everything appears to be “OK”, and the invisible path they silently follow, because the ongoing pain associated with it isn’t usually welcomed by society. Recently, I spoke with a mother who had lost her son less than a month before. During our conversation, she mentioned several times that she was handling it well with the incredible support she received from her family, religion, and friends. But then she mentioned that recently, she could sense that when they asked her “How are you?” the tone was beginning to change. She said the question was beginning to be asked in a way that sounded as though they were tiring of her pain and were ready for her response to return to the standard, “I’m fine.”

It reminded me of my return to work a month after the death of my daughter. While some people welcome the return to work in an effort to distract themselves from the pain, I returned only because I needed the income. I recall the first day back, I made a bee-line to my desk, desperately avoiding eye contact with everyone. I dreaded the inevitable question, “How are you?”. And yet, it came. While many people did their best to avoid me just as I avoided them, some did come to offer their condolences and sadly ask how I was. If I was being honest with them, my response may have sounded something like this:

How am I? I’m completely devastated. The skin around my eyes is raw and hurts from crying so much.

Yes – even a month after her death... and there's no sign of it stopping any time soon. I'm completely exhausted – physically and emotionally. It took all my energy to get out of bed this morning, much less get in the shower and then dressed and into the car to drive to work. On the drive it was hard to see through my tears. At some moments I felt like steering my car off the road and into a telephone pole, but thankfully I didn't. In addition to a constant feeling of pain and nausea in my stomach, I'm angry when I look around and see that everything is "business as usual" around here and the world continues to march on without my daughter in it. The sound of laughter makes me want to scream. How could anyone be happy right now? I don't care at all about my job or what needs to be done, but seeing as how I need the money, I'm just going to put my head down and immerse myself in work. Hopefully it will mean that for a few hours today I'll be distracted from the overwhelming pain I feel. But every time someone comes up to ask me how I am, I'll be dragged back to into reality and the nightmare I find myself in. So, while I appreciate that you care, I'd rather you not ask. Maybe you could just tell me you're sorry, or even give me a silent hug... and then walk away. I simply don't have the energy right now to pretend that I'm "fine".

But, of course, I wasn't honest. My answer depended on how the question was worded. If they asked, "How are you?" I replied, "Fine". If they asked, "How are you doing?" I answered "I'm doing". Both were spoken in a flat tone of voice that implied I was not fine, and intended to discourage them from continuing the conversation. This may sound mean, but it took a lot of energy to keep myself from bursting into tears and telling them how I really was when they asked me that question. Because if I really was "fine", what would that say about how I felt about my daughter? It made me feel guilty and angry at the same time.

Over time, answering that question

got easier and felt less of a betrayal to my daughter. Eventually, I could answer "I'm fine" or even "I'm good" and truly mean it. But it took time and a lot of work. It took going to support groups where I could give an honest answer of how I was doing and no one would try to stop me. Everyone there would understand and encourage me to let it out.

In the last four years, I've learned how to acknowledge and express my grief when I need to, rather than keeping it inside where it simmers and grows. I've learned to accept that I have both good and bad days, and over time, the good began to outnumber the bad. I've learned to not let the guilt and pain associated with the bad days keep me from enjoying and appreciating my life.

How am I doing now? Even though I still miss my daughter terribly, I'm good.

Maria Kubitz

The Shirt in the Clothes Hamper

The shirt was at the bottom of the dirty clothes hamper when he died. I found it there when I got around to doing a wash sometime after the funeral. Life must go on in spite of what happens to us, and the wash is part of ordinary day-to-day life.

It was natural for the shirt to be there; I'd done his wash since he was born twenty-one years before. I stood and looked at it and decided to leave it there.

Year after year, wash after wash, I left it there. This was a symbol of normal life. My life wasn't normal anymore, and I left it there to sort of hang on to the past, I guess. It gave me comfort to see such an ordinary, normal thing as one of his shirts in the dirty clothes when my life was so extraordinary now.

One by one such "hangings on" are done away with as we slowly re-enter life's mainstream again. We know the time is right for these habits to go, when we don't grieve for them when they happen. And they must happen, just as we must move on eventually.

One day in a fit of neatness my daughter did the wash, and she washed the shirt. It must have been five years after her brother died. I felt a tiny surprise when I saw the shirt hanging clean in the closet, but I didn't feel the sorrow or even disappointment. The time seemed to be right for the shirt to leave the dirty clothes hamper. A simple thing, but this was a symbol of progress of sorts.

I'm glad no one rushed me – I would have resented it. I was allowed this simple idiosyncrasy until it was natural to give it up. Left alone I probably never would have removed the shirt, just left it there, never really knowing why, but when this happened, I knew I was getting better. Finally, I was letting go, and that was ok.

Fay Harden

TCF, Tuscaloosa

Find a Road

"Mama, find a road we've never been on before." Her voice was excited and her young face happy in anticipation of the adventure in front of us. She knew that I would do it—because I had always done it before—and because I loved to do it myself—maybe as much as she did. It was a small request turned into a great episode of conspiratorial adventure and fun. It was something that the two of us did together that made it so precious; the memories continue to make it precious to this day. To remember it now makes my heart—and my stomach—rise and fall—because those days are gone. So I would find a new road and we would explore it together. If we happened to have helium balloons left from a birthday party, we would let them go out the car windows and giggle together, imagining scenes where people would come home from school and work and find a happy birthday balloon stuck in their tree. It was fun to make mischief together. So now, today, I say, "Sarah, I'm on a road that I've never been on before. I don't know this new journey, but I know I'll catch up with you one day."

Carol Thompson

SIBS

River Reflections

I just got back from a river rafting trip, where I found myself thinking about my brother a lot. He died 16 months ago of an overdose of morphine. I don't know why it happened; it happened. I didn't see the beginning of his life—he was three years older, but I saw the end. I can look at it now and see it in its entirety—his 33 years of living that I so much counted on and expected to last another 70 or 80 years. I thought I would always have him to talk to—about life, about family, and about ourselves.

The river was a meditative place for me. The rhythm of the oars, the gentle

motion of the raft, the shore gliding by, the gurgle of the water as it seeped into and back out of our raft—all of this provided just enough stimulation and was hypnotic enough that I didn't want to do anything but sit and think. For a few days on the river, I floated without any of my day-to-day concerns, without the usual level of tension standing behind me.

What rose to the surface, visible in the clear water of my mind after the silt of all my worries sank to the bottom, were thoughts of my brother. Nat would have liked this trip. The rough beauty of the terrain and the quiet power of the water would not have been lost on him. He would have noticed the beauty of the full moon and the light on the canyon walls as the sun rose and set.

I have felt a lot of anger at him for dying, for taking his own life, for engaging in an activity so dangerous, for playing Russian roulette, for committing suicide. He left no note, he didn't say good-bye; he left a wife and two sons whom he loved very much but who, like me, were not enough to keep him alive. It wasn't the anger, though, that I felt on the river. I just remembered him.

Grief is at its sharpest when, after a death, he all of a sudden flashes into focus so real and so present that I can hear his voice as if he has just spoken to me. I can imagine the scent of his hair, remember the texture of his face as I touch it, and I can see him walking and talking as if he were only there a moment ago. At these times, the grief flares up; the wound feels fresh and sharp with memories of the love, the charm, and the grace. I realize both with gratitude and with anguish for the wound this reality carries, that he is not someone I can let go. These memories will come to me for the rest of my life. He is truly a part of me. He is mixed up in my blood and my bones and the electrical impulses of my brain. And in whatever way all of these things go together to form a soul, he is a part of that too. There is no escaping him. This is the gift and the price of love—it doesn't end.

My brother was there in the river's sand and mud, in the full moon, the constantly flowing cold water, the clear dry air, the red canyon walls, and the blue sky. And he was there in me. And I was there, alive and more appreciative than I would have been before he died. I was more aware of my connection to my surroundings—that one day my body will be river mud, water, and bones like driftwood. What form my love will take then, I don't know. Maybe if there is a river and desert light offering delight to someone's senses, that will be enough. I don't know.

Emily Moore

TCF Los Angeles, CA

In Memory of my brother Nat

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

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

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



Livonia Chapter Page

Regular meeting: Thursday, January 4 at 7:00 pm. As usual, there will be a First Time Table and tables for “older” members. For the latter, the topic: Do you have anything like the shirt in the laundry basket that you have not been able to throw away - i.e. box of cereal, favorite food, etc.

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.

- ♥ Glenn & Carol Mead in memory of **Bobby Mead**; “In loving memory of our son Bobby. Happy 40th Birth day. You’re not here but still celebrating you. Miss you every day Bobby. Love, Glenn, Carol, Katie, DJ, Addison & Heidi
 - ♥ Jim & Gail Lafferty, in memory of our great nephew, **Camden Paul Edward Henline**; “You will be remembered & loved forever.”
 - ♥ Sharon Curson in memory of **David C Jones**:”We miss you , but know you are in Jesus’s Arms. Love Forever, Your Family”
 - ♥ Laura Myers in memory of **Paul Myers**;”Remembering you alway”
 - ♥ Susan Steinberg in memory of **Shannon**: “Happy Heavenly 55th Birthday Love you so, miss you always Mom, Dad, Todd, Chris & Ajax”
 - ♥ Matt & Cindy Stevens in memory of **Justin Bolin**; ”It has been 11 years on 1-5-2024. We really miss you so much.You will always be in our hearts! Love You, Mom & Matt”
 - ♥ Lisa Brown & Leslie Riley in memory of **Allie Halstead**; “Love and miss you everyday.”
-

Let Us Celebrate Their Births

Save the Date!

15th Annual Bowling Fundraiser
In loving memory of all the children who died too soon

Saturday, March 23rd, 2024 at 1:00 pm
(Registration will begin at 12:30 pm sharp)

Vision Lanes
38250 Ford Rd
Westland, MI 48185



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

January 2024

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: _____

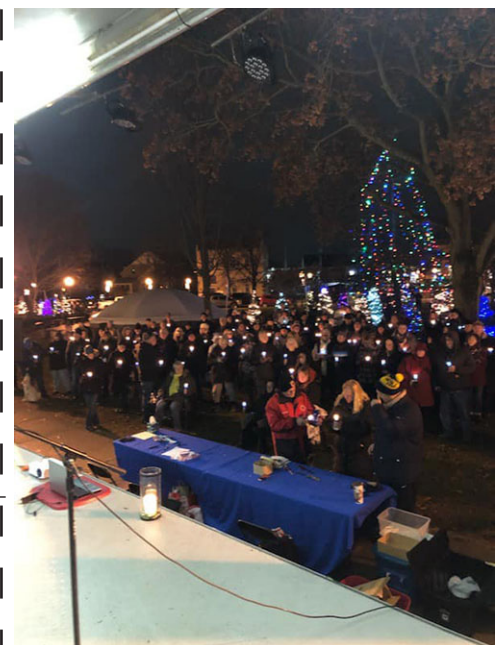
Email: _____

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



***Annual Candle Lighting
2023***