

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Livonia, Michigan Chapter



May 2025
Volume 37, Number 5

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
231-585-7058
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:

May 1st -7:00 pm - Meeting

see this page and page 7

May 20th, 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

No Craft meeting until further notice.

*July 11 - 13: 48th National Confer-
ence of Compassionate Friends.*

Seattle, WA

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org>



At our meeting, we will have colored ribbons available on which you can write a message to your child, grandchild or sibling, and hang it on a wrought iron fence. These will stay up through May and June to celebrate Mother's Day, and Father's Day. This follows the tradition that the wind blows through the ribbons and carries our messages out into the universe. We will include a bagpiper and other music to keep this evening special.

Mom, You Just Can't See Me

Remembering is so painful. Even after eleven years, it is difficult to write about Connie's death. It still hurts to think of the last day of my life with her, to reconstruct events and decisions made so long ago, to retrace footsteps, to know I can never go back

and undo what happened. I can never again tell her the things I want her to know.

I will always miss my child. There is a vacant space in family gatherings, on holidays, birthdays, graduations, weddings and, especially, whenever photographs are taken. I wonder what her life would have been like had she lived, and I wonder how she would look now. Going through the grief and anguish of losing her was an unavoidable part of living, but I survived. Many times since, I have told myself, "If you can survive the loss of your child, you are strong enough to survive anything."

I thought I would shatter into a million pieces when she died, but that didn't happen, and losing her has made me more compassionate. Not only did I survive, but my bitter, angry memories have turned into soft, gentle longings. I see her now in the faces of her friends who experienced knowing her, and I see her in the eyes and smiles of children.

It is probably the fear of death that is so devastating for human beings. Her tragic death brought me face to face with the realization that, just as we are all born onto this earth, we all must die. Until she died, I had not internalized this, but because of her death, I've grown. I believe we are all knitted together in the great sweater called humanity, and the love and pain we endure are the stitches that bond us together.

(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 to members only.



Let Us Celebrate Their Births

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

A few years ago, I had a vivid dream about Connie. She was grown-up and beautiful. I ran to her and said, “Oh, Connie, how I have longed to see you. There are so many times I just yearn to see you.”

And she replied, “I’m with you all the time, Mom. You just can’t see me.”

Joanne R. Mott,

excerpted from Bereavement Magazine

Why You Didn’t Fail as a Mother

I have to tell you this. You didn’t fail. Not even a little. You are not a horrible mother. You didn’t choose this. You didn’t want this to happen. You didn’t do anything wrong. It just happened... To you. Despite your begging, pleading, praying, hoping against all hope that it would not. Even though everything within you was screaming, no no no no no no no no no no!!!!

God didn’t do this to you to punish you, smite you, or to “teach you a lesson”. That is not God’s way. You could not have prevented this if you: tried harder, prayed harder, or if you were a “better” person. Nor if you ate better, loved harder, yoga’d more, did x, y, z to the nth degree or any other way your mind tries to fill-in-the-blank. You could not have prevented this even if you could have predicted the future like no one can.

Even if you did nothing more, you are already the best mom there is because you would have done absolutely anything to keep your child alive. To breathe your last breath to save theirs. To choose the pain all over again just to spend one more minute with them. That, is the ultimate kind of love. You are the ultimate kind of mother. So wash your hands of any naysayers, betrayers, or anyone who sprinted in the other direction when you needed them the most. Wash your hands of the people who may have falsely judged you, ostracized you, or stigmatized you because of what happened to you. Wash your hands of anyone who has made you feel less than by questioning everything you did or didn’t do. Those whose words or looks have implied

that this was somehow your fault.

This was not your fault. This will never be your fault, no matter how many different ways someone tries to tell you it is. And especially if that someone happens to be you.

Sometimes it’s not what others are saying that keeps us shackled in shame. Sometimes we adopt others’ misguided opinions and assumptions about our situation as our own. Sometimes it’s our own inner voice that shoves us into the darkest corner of despair, like an abuser, telling us over and over and over again that we failed as mothers. That if only this and what if that, it would never have happened. That you woulda, shoulda done this or that so your child would not have died.

That is a lie of the sickest kind. Do not believe it, not even for a second. Do not let it sink into your bones. Do not let it smother that beautiful, beautiful light of yours.

Instead, breathe in this truth with every part of yourself: You are the best dam* mother in the entire world. The kind of mother who people write books about. The kind who inspires the world. No one else could do what you do. No one else could ever be your child’s mother as well as you can, as well as you are. No one else could let your child’s love and light shine through them the way you do. No one else could mother their dead child as well as you do. No one else could carry this unrelenting burden as courageously. It is the heaviest, most torturous burden there is.

You have within you a sacred strength. You are the mother of all mothers. There is no one, no one, no one that could ever, ever replace you. No one. You were chosen to be their mother. Yes— chosen. And no one could parent them better in life or in death than you do. So breathe mama, keep breathing. Believe mama, keep believing. Fight mama, keep fighting, for this truth to uproot the lies in your heart— you didn’t fail. You are not a failure. Not even a little.

For whatever it’s worth, I see you. I hear your guttural sobs. I feel your

ache deep inside my bones. And it doesn’t make me uncomfortable to put my fingers as a makeshift band-aid over the gaping hole in your heart until the scabs come, when and if they do.

It takes invincible strength to mother a child you can no longer hold, see, touch or hear. You are a superhero mama. I see you fall down and get up, fall down and get up, over and over again. I notice the grit and guts it takes to pry yourself out of bed every single day and force your bloodied feet to stand up and keep walking. I see you walking this path of life you’ve been given where every breath and step apart from your child is a physical, emotional and spiritual battleground— a fight for your own survival— a fight to quiet the insidious lies.

But the truth is— you haven’t failed at all. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. You are the mother of all mothers. Truly the most inspiring, courageous, loving mother there is— a warrior mama through and through. For even in death you lovingly mother your precious child still.

excerpt from Still Standing Magazine

Before and After

There are moments which mark your life. Moments when you realize nothing will ever be the same and time is divided into two parts, before this, and after this. We all know this moment in our lives, that line that designates before and after. It seems like an eternity ago, it seems like a moment ago, one breath away. It is now the pivotal moment in my life, where I measure the then and now.

My grief has not been transformed into some meaningful nugget of wisdom, but I have learned much wisdom, as I have learned to integrate grief into my life. These bits of wisdom were passed from others who had walked with grief longer. Early on, I asked someone how I would get through the years ahead, acknowledging my son’s birthday, the holidays, the ordinary days. She said I would get through them by taking baby steps, focusing on the day, the moment, the breath

in front of me. I and my family have traveled these past seven years by taking baby steps.

Some say that time heals and that grief changes, but I have found that instead, it is my response to grief that has changed. My arms still ache to give him a hug, my heart yearns for his physical presence, and grief can still knock me to my knees, but now, I get up faster, as my grief carrying “muscles” are stronger. I am able to predict what moments are going to be challenging and find space and time to be with that grief filled moment. The days when I feel capable of accomplishing tasks while grieving, outnumber the days, when I just want to stay curled up on the couch. I can plant the tomatoes, weed the garden and can those tomatoes in the fall, while still grieving.

As I become more familiar with grief, I am also more aware of the resiliency that lies within me and from that resiliency, I feel strength to live with my life as it is. Perhaps the aspect of this that surprises me most is that I do feel joy. Joy is felt when I experience a beautiful sunset, a formation of spectacular clouds, time with my daughters, or when I discover a penny or other connection to my son. As time passes, and as I find balance in carrying my grief, I am also learning that joy and sorrow sit side by side and there is room in my heart for both. We grieve deeply, we love deeper still.

As you take your own baby steps, becoming familiar with grief in your life, you too will discover the resiliency that lies within. Someday, you will find room in your heart for both your sorrow and your joy. As Mitch states in his poem, “you will learn to weave together unraveled threads on the loom of a falling star.”

Kim Bodeau, TCF Chippewa Falls WI

Grief and Anger

At a recent chapter meeting, we discussed anger in our grief. Many experience anger after their child or loved one dies. A description of anger is “A feeling of rage, an emotional agitation to what is viewed as unfair,

unjust and sometimes even shameful.” When we are angry we need a target. Sometimes the target may be God. (He understands.) Some may even feel anger at their child or loved one, thinking, “How could he/she leave me like this? Why? Doesn’t he/she know I’m hurting and in pain?” Some people are angry at the doctors, some at the funeral directors, some even feel anger toward themselves, think they could have done something to prevent the death. We may even be angry at our spouse. He/she may not grieve the same way and we may misunderstand their feelings that are just as deep as our own. Maybe our clergyman is not as compassionate as we believe they should be, or maybe they were not available to us at all.

We are angry because we feel abandoned and that life is unfair. We also feel very alone and no longer in control of our emotions. We may also think nothing will ever be the same, and it won’t. But as time goes on, it does get somewhat easier as you work through your grief.

We all try at times to not let this anger show to others, but suppressing it can only lead to sickness and withdrawal. Masking anger will often hurt the ones around you and may even drive them away from you. You may even risk losing your closest support system. Dealing with your anger and admitting it and also seeking help from others who have experienced this feeling is always the healthy thing to do. Personally, talking has been the best help for me. Attending a Compassionate Friends meeting and talking to others who have “been there” has helped many.

Jackie Wesley, TCF, East Central Indiana

May Memories

Something about the month of May always catches me off guard. The weather seems to think it is August one day and then January the next. The Jacaranda trees with their beautiful purple blooms are proof that summer is almost here. The flowers that are evident in people’s yards remind me of the time spent together

getting our own garden and yard in shape. The many moans and groans as the entire family devoted a day to pulling weeds, trimming trees and planting vegetables and flowers now brings a smile to my face. At my son’s funeral, I was so overcome by the scent of the many different flowers that I did not think I would ever enjoy flowers again. The following May, the idea of cleaning the yards or planting anything left me cold. Who cared what the yard looked like. What difference did it make. Mow the grass... that was good enough.

For Mother’s Day, my surviving son’s and their dad came home from the nursery with five huge rosebushes. They had each picked their own favorite, and a massive rosebush covered with bright orange roses (Eric’s favorite) and an unusual light purple one (my favorite color). There they sat. What’s a mom to do? We all donned gloves and tools and went to work planting. The satisfaction in a clean yard, beautiful flowers and the peace that came from digging in the earth did much to renew my spirits.

I guess the point I am trying to make is at some time after wallowing in your grief, you may need a gentle push to start enjoying the small things in life again. It is very easy to become so used to feeling empty inside that you start feeling like it is your “new normal”. Don’t get stuck there. The effort to plant those rose bushes made me realize I needed to enjoy the little things all around me. Flowers have become enjoyable again. Looking at the trees with their new green leaves can make you appreciate spring. The world can be forgiven for not having stopped the day your child died. We are still here and doing ok. One day at a time we have coped and gone on. Just as our children would have wanted.

Now the sight of butterflies flying over rose-bushes lifts my spirits. It’s like a gentle reminder from my departed son that there are reasons to smile again ... reminders to have faith ... reminders that life can hold as much joy as we allow it to.

SIBS

The Other "I Love You"

"Wow." That one word meant everything to me. There I was, the picture of nervousness in white. The ceremony was just a few minutes away, and there I sat in that room on the brink of one of the biggest days of my life. I looked up, and there you stood in the doorway, all 6'3" of "little" brother complete with tux. I braced myself for what would come next as I saw your face curl into the smile we had always shared.

"Don't touch my stuff." "Cow." "Stay out of my room." This was the extent of our heart-to-hearts growing up. I'd go to my room for peace and quiet and seconds later, your music would be shaking the windows. You drank out of the milk carton, left the bathroom a mess of puddles, and

thought nothing was ever your fault. You could spoil even the best of my moods in five seconds flat and then breeze out of the room to finish your day. For years our contact was restricted to passing each other on our way to somewhere else - maybe a wave if we happened to pass on the road. By our late teens, we had grown into our own lives, and they had very little to do each other anymore.

I remember one day I'd noticed you'd started shaving. Another day I was shocked to finally see a hint of muscle on that beanpole frame. It wasn't until my wedding day, though, that I realized that you really, finally had grown up. And it isn't until now that I realize that in such a short time you taught me some really big lessons about life and love. It was impossible to think that in one moment you'd be gone. It was unimaginable to me that

the first funeral I'd ever go to was not for my 87-year-old grandmother, but for my 20-year-old brother. And it was crazy to think that this same bratty, brother would be the one to teach me how to live my life and even what it means to really love someone.

One Sunday morning, a phone call from my mom made the unthinkable a reality. Suddenly, those wishes I had always made out loud about being an only child began to echo in my head. I spent the first few nights just rocking and crying and repeating the same four words. "I love you, Mike." "I love you, Mike." Oh, why didn't I ever just tell you that? All that silence, all that yelling, all those opportunities I wasted in getting to know you were eating up my soul. This wasn't the plan. We were supposed to become friends again when we grew up. There was supposed to be so much time left. Time to start over and meet again as adults. How could we just leave things like this? How could we have been so cheated? I got my wedding pictures back right around the time that you died. When I saw them, I remembered that day and what you had said. It was not what I had expected, not "that dress makes you look fat" or "what happened to your hair?" but just one simple word: "Wow."

With some people in your life, the words "I love you" just comes in another form. The bond between siblings can be a quiet thing that even they don't always realize is there. We may have driven each other crazy all those years, but we couldn't have been so good at it if we hadn't known each other so well. I may not get any more days with you, but I got at least one that meant everything to me. I got one day when you weren't my bratty little brother and I wasn't the stuck-up older sister. I got at least one day when we were more than family; we were friends.

Continued on pae 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

Gail Lafferty - Sudden Death - (734) 748-2514

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

TCF CHAT ROOM: www.compassionatefriends.org

The chat rooms are moderated and are open at different times. There is one open most evenings from 10-11 p.m. They are all moderated which means that all the chat rooms have a trained facilitator in them.

National Mailing Address: 48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808 Wixom, MI 48393

Phone: 877-969-0010; Website: www.compassionatefriends.org

OTHER TCF CHAPTERS IN OUR AREA:

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

St. Clair Shores: 2nd Wed. Kathy Joerin ; 586-293-6176, kjmac21@aol.com

Detroit: Kellie West Outer Drive Methodist Church, 12065 West Outer Drive, Detroit ; 2nd Wed., 6:30 - 8:30; 734-660-9557.

Troy: St. Paul's Methodist Church, 620 Romeo, Rochester, MI 3rd Thursday 7-9; Tina@586-634-0239

South Rockwood TCF Chapter: Southwood United Methodist Church, 6311 S. Huron River Drive. South Rockwood, MI 48179; 3rd Tues. of month meeting - 7 pm; Sheri Schooley, Leader; Contact Karen 734-672-7469



PLEASE REMEMBER

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

Livonia Chapter Page

Meeting is Thursday, May 1st. Ribbon Ceremony (see page 1) Newcomers table and topic tables. Topic: Has your grief included anger - to others, to your child, to yourself? How did you handle it? Do you still find it returning sometime?

**** If any of you who are having the newsletter mailed to you would be willing to receive it online, we would appreciate it. The cost of postage and printing has continued to go up. Just email Brenda at brendabrummel@me.com

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 and Mary Hartnett in memory of **Michael**: “Wishing you a happy heavenly birthday bud! Miss you so much! Love, Mom, Dad, Katelyn, Dakota & Brooklyn”
 - ♥ Tom & Connie McCann in memory of **our sons Ryan “Ryfro” Tom Jr., Bryan “Bryfro” Soupis considered a son by our family, Mark “Sparky” Abbott, Joe Coffey & Jim “Jimmy” Vick.** : “In memory of our son Ryan “Ryfro” on his 5/10 Angel Day; our son Bryan “Bryfro” Soupis on his birthday 5/15
 - ♥ Cindy & Matt Stevens in memory of **Justin**: “wishing you a heavenly birthday. Love you and miss you so much! Always in our hearts.”
 - ♥ Valerie Weatherly in memory of **Kelli**: “20 years of missing you. Seems just like yesterday...it still hurts but God wanted you with him. We love you more each day Kelli.”
-

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.

Clara Mirti , whose beloved daughter, **Kelly**, born 12/31; died 12/24; 63 years

Let Us Celebrate Their Births

It's been a year now, and I think of you every day. I think of you when I feel I'm doing more of what I think I have to do, than what I want to do. I remember our Mom ended up being so thankful that you decided to ditch work to go to the lake the day before you died. I think of you when I'm tempted to judge someone because they don't fit in my standards. I remember the friends of yours I had called “losers,” who showed up by the hundreds to say how much you meant to them and to be

there for your family at the toughest time of our lives. I think of you when I pick up the phone to talk to Mom and Dad every few days, just to keep close and let them know I love them. Because ultimately, the people you love in this life are really all that matter. You taught me that real love persists through anything: the longest silences, the harshest words, and even death. And that sometimes that can be the most painful thing in the world.

I try to remember two things on those

really bad days that still come around from time to time. One is that grief is an amazing testament to the person who has left. The more hurt I feel, the more I understand how much you really touched my heart. The second is that sometimes love just hides in strange places for a while, but sooner or later it always turns up, sometimes in the form of just one simple word and a smile. But in any form it takes, it's something to be treasured.

Kim Singletary, TCF Kamloops, B.C.

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

May 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

When Dandelions are
Roses

Just for you," he said as he gave me a handful of dandelions. I took them from his smudgy little hand, reached for my prettiest vase, and set them in a special place, where I could watch them wilt and fade.

Remembering that he had said, "I picked them just for you," the dandelions turned to roses. A beautiful, priceless bouquet he brought to me on my birthday - yellow roses, my favorite.

*Family and Friends of Murder Victims
West End Chapter, Alta Loma, CA*

Wounds don't heal the way you want them to; they heal the way they need to. It takes time for wounds to fade into scars. It takes time for the process of healing to take place. Give yourself that time.

Give yourself that grace. Be gentle with your wounds. Be gentle with your heart. You deserve to heal.

Dele Olanubi