



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

August 2009 Newsletter

Volume II; Issue 1

WNY Chapter #2303, Batavia, NY 14020

THE MISSION

The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

We are pleased, yet saddened, to have you join us at our meeting of The Compassionate Friends. We hope sharing your stories of the aspects of your journey through grief will enable you and your families to find a "new normal" in your life. We wish that you would eventually reach a state of peace where the wonderful memories you have of your children are more in the forefront of your heart and mind than the pain of your loss.

Upcoming Meetings

August 20, 2009

September 17, 2009

October 15, 2009

6:45 PM at Richmond Memorial Library
19 Ross Street, Batavia, NY 14020

National: The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

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www.compassionatefriends.org

The Compassionate Friends of WNY

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Visit our local web site: www.tcfofwny.org

The Compassionate Friends is about transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope. It takes people out of the isolation society imposes on the bereaved and lets them express their grief naturally. With the shedding of tears, healing comes. And the newly bereaved get to see people who have survived and are learning to live and love again."

—Simon Stephens, founder of The Compassionate Friends

To include your child or children on our web site, bring a photo along with a short story about them to a meeting. Pat will forward the information to our Webmaster.

Our Birthday Table ~ Parents/Grandparents: you may bring photos and other mementos to the meeting during your child's birthday month. You may also bring a birthday cake or your child's special treat to share with those attending.

32nd Annual TCF National Conference
Portland, Oregon
August 7 – 9, 2009

For more information about registration, check the National web site at
www.compassionatefriends.org.

From the Newsletter Editor: It's just one year ago that Pat and I did the paperwork to establish this Chapter of The Compassionate Friends of WNY. Though difficult for both of us at times, we are here for you who are travelling the path Pat and I have both taken.

This next year, we hope to reach out to many more parents and families who are struggling with the worst tragedy that can occur in their lives – the death of their precious children.

If you know of someone who has suffered this ultimate loss, please let us know. We will send them our newsletter and invite them to share their grief with us when they are ready. We all know the first meeting is the worst but we will encourage them to come again – when they can.

Pat and I both thank all of you who have joined us to help others, along with yourselves, through what seems to be an impossible journey. Margi.



May you find peace and comfort in your lives.

Our Children ~ Loved and Remembered

Let us remember our children
who have left us too soon.

August Birthdays

- ♥ Victoria (Tori), daughter of Eric & Laurie
Claus
August 8

August Remembrance Days

- ♥ Liza Espinosa, adult daughter of Marti Austin
August 22
- ♥ Rick, adult son of Delores Roblee
August 5
- ♥ Wyatt Zuber, young adult son of Pat Wheeler
August 29
- ♥ Wyatt Zuber, young adult grandson of Mae &
Larry Wheeler. August 29

Please contact Margi DuBois if any of your child(ren)'s information is incorrect or missing. Phone 343-2590, email her at margi_d@yahoo.com or mail her at 3233 Pratt Rd., #7312, Batavia, NY 14020

There are no dues or fees to belong to The Compassionate Friends. Your voluntary fax-deductible donation is our only source of funds and is used within our Community for outreach and support of bereaved families. All gifts are greatly appreciated. They may be given at the monthly meeting or mailed to Treasurer Margi DuBois, 3233 Pratt Rd., #7312, Batavia, NY 14020.

TCF "Online Support Community" Offers Opportunity for Grief Sharing

The Compassionate Friends national web site offers "virtual chapters" through an Online Support Community (live chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child. The rooms supply support, encouragement, and friendship. The friendly atmosphere encourages conversation

(continued next column)

among friends; friends who understand the emotions you're experiencing.

There are general bereavement sessions as well as more specific sessions. These include "Pregnancy and Infant Loss," "Bereaved 2 Years and Under," "Bereaved 2 Years and Over," "Men Only Sharing Session," "No Surviving Children," "Survivors of Suicide." There are also sessions for surviving siblings.

The sessions last an hour and have trained moderators present. For information, visit the national web site

www.compassionatefriends.org and click "Online Support" in the "Resources" column.

Reminder: July 31 is the deadline if you'd like to have another parent carry your child(ren)'s name during the Walk to Remember at the National Conference, August 9 in Portland, OR. Info was presented at the June meeting and was included in June's newsletter.

Questions: call Pat, 585-219-4720.

Once Again

I begin to love again, slowly,
almost against my wishes.

Yet, once again,

I struggle, then collapse.

Pain and sorrow
once again.

But this time

I don't struggle
as long.

The energy to live
returns sooner.

I struggle

to prepare

For both the calmness
and the sorrow
which are now
part of me.

-From The Anguish of Loss
By Julie Fritsch with Sherokee Ilse

Life Beliefs

...Grief is also the shattering of many conscious and unconscious beliefs about what our lives are supposed to look like.

Many of us share certain common beliefs: that after we're born, we'll have a good childhood – or if it's a challenging one, we'll make it through and grow stronger from it. Then we will meet our special someone, get married, and find a career. We understand that we may not get the greatest job in the world, and our marriage won't be perfect, but we will love our kids and for the most part, we expect to be satisfied. Finally, when we are old and gray, we will invite the family over to look at old photo albums, tell each one how much we love them, and then, that very night, die peacefully in our sleep.

Those are our beliefs, our hopes, our fantasies, the way life should unfold. But what happens when someone gets cancer at forty? What happens when a loved one is killed in a car accident? *Or a child dies?* That is not the way things were supposed to happen. Life was never supposed to be perfect but was always supposed to be *long*.....When these things do happen, we not only must grieve the loss, we also must grieve the loss of the *belief* that it shouldn't have happened at all.

From "On Grief and Grieving"
Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler

The guardian angels of life sometimes fly so high as to be beyond our sight, but they are always looking down upon us.

Jean Paul Richter

ANDREW AND THOMAS

A simple question,
Never a problem before.
"Do you have any children?"
Really a simple question.
Easy. I say, "Yes," but
What do I say to "How many?"

"Two," my hard-headed
Heart always says.
One is dead.
Must I say only one?
Absolutely not – I have two
Sons.

From narrative in "K is for Killer"
By Sue Grafton

Grieving parents can well understand the answer given by Terry Anderson, chief Middle East AP correspondent kidnapped in Beirut in 1985 and held captive in Lebanon for almost seven years. After his release, colleagues asked him how he bore it...

"You just do what you have to do. You wake up every day, and you summon up the energy from somewhere, even when you think you haven't got it, and you get through the day. And you do it day after day after day."

Tissues, Tears & Treasures

A circle of chairs and boxes of tissues,
A roomful of tears and emotional issues.
Frightening at first, I did not want to enter
Into this strange group, and be in the center.

What I soon learned, as we sat side by side,
We were bound by the love of our children who
died.

Each shattered heart,
desperately seeking a moment of peace,
from the pain and weeping.

So many things different, and yet all the same,
Hearts lost in a fog of loss and pain.
Those who have journeyed, much further than
me,

Reached out in comfort, listened quietly.
Each shattered heart spoke, and the tissues
were passed,

We never avoid speaking of the past.

This circle of friends, have found a bond,
And here I'm still known
As "Tony's Mom."

Slowly, I've found
I can reach out to others
Who are newly bereaved, fathers and mothers.
Strength I have found in this

Circle of chairs,
To grieve and to heal
And to show that we care.

Diane Barta, TCF of Portland, OR



LOST POTENTIAL

Last year I attended a workshop presented by a specialist in grief named Dr. Cable. Dr. Cable said many important things about the grief process, but as a bereaved parent one thing stuck in my mind.

He said that if you ask a bereaved person to describe his deceased mother, he will say, "Oh, she was so sweet. She always wore flowered dresses and loved to bake cookies."

But, if you ask a bereaved parent to describe her deceased child, she will say, "Oh, he would be five this year and just starting kindergarten," or, "She would be twenty-two this year and graduating from college."

You see, we bereaved parents grieve the lost potential of our children. Our children don't stop growing in our minds. We grieve again and anew each year as our child would have been a different age.

*Chris Anderson
TCF, Walla Walla, Washington*

CHOOSING LIFE

"It will never be the same. Never." As a bereaved parent, you have often heard or said these words to express grief's profound feelings of sorrow and disorientation. Your life has suddenly taken an unexpected course that appears both uncharted and endless. Bewildered, you vainly search for pathways back to your former life, until you confront the reality that there is no way back. Your child is dead forever. It is then that you may say, "...never the same."

This is the aspect of grief that Simon Stephens calls "The Valley of the Shadow." It is that very long time between the death of your child and your reinvestment in life. *Between*. It is not supposed to be a permanent resting place. Although some people do take up residence in the valley, it is a transition from the death of your child to life with renewed purpose. The key to this transition is yourself. You must choose between life and the valley. You and only you can decide. And you must make that decision again and again, each day.

Giving in to the hopelessness of the valley is tempting. Choosing to move on toward life requires a great deal of work. You must struggle with the pain of grief in order to resolve it. It is a daily struggle full of tears, anger, guilt and self-doubt, but it is the only alternative to surrendering yourself to the valley. Little by little you choose to move on. Little by little you progress toward the other side of the valley. It takes a very long time, far longer than your friends or relatives suspected. Far longer than you had believed – even prayed – that it would be. When one day you find yourself able to do more than choose merely to live but also how to live, you will know you are leaving the valley of the shadow. There will still be more work to do, more struggle and choosing. The valley, however, stretches behind rather than in front of you.

When you have resolved your grief by reinvesting in life, you will be able to realize that nothing is ever "the same." Life is change. We would not have it be otherwise, for that is the valley of the shadow. Change has the promise of beginning and the excitement of discovery. Life is never the same. Life is change. Choose life!

*Marcia F. Alig
TCF, Mercer Area Chapter, New Jersey*

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CREDO

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.
We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.
The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes,
but our love for them unites us. Your pain becomes my pain,
just as your hope becomes my hope. We come together from all walks of life,
from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent
many races, creeds, and relationships. We are young, and we are old.
Some of us are far along in our grief but others still feel a grief so fresh and
so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope. Some of us have found
our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers.
Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others
radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering
of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share
with each other our love for the children who have died. We are all
seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed
to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain
as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith
as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone. We are the Compassionate Friends.