



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

January-February 2024

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Snowflakes

Have you ever stood outside, with your head tilted back and your mouth open wide, trying to catch a snowflake? Snowflakes fall everywhere, on your hair, your chin, your eyelashes, even your nose, and some even manage to land on the very tip of your tongue, only to finish before you can really get a taste.

Each snowflake is a completely different design and pattern. No two are ever created exactly the same. It is a mystery that continues to delight “snow catchers” everywhere. There are very few things that are so lovely, delicate, perfect, and different, yet disappear so quickly, never to be reproduced in exactly the same pattern again.

Sometimes it seems as though people are like that, too. Those we love are so lovely, so delicate, so perfect, so different—and they disappeared too quickly, too.

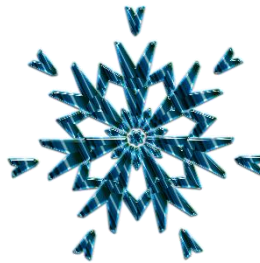
Each of us is as unique as those childhood snowflakes. We each have a unique look, sound, smell, touch. We are cut from unique patterns, assembled in an endless variety of shapes, styles, combinations. We look, sound, talk, think & act differently than anyone else. There are no identical matches just as there are no perfectly identical snowflakes.

We know this, but when it comes to grieving, we demand that everyone grieve the same way. Some of us will talk our way through the iciness of our grief while others prefer more solitude. Some want to read everything they can about grief while others wish to submerge themselves in work. Some cry endlessly while others never shed tears. We are as unique as snowflakes drifting from the sky.

There is no right or wrong way to

grieve, although there are some ways that are a bit less dramatic. Just as the snowflakes find their way to their destination, so too will each of us find our own way through grief. Frozen hearts and numb minds do, eventually, thaw. Icy memories that chill to the bone can grow warmer as we begin to move through our grief.

Whatever pain we are carrying begins to weave itself into our very being, and eventually it becomes a part of our history. We begin to become the sum total of our experiences, our unique patterns reflecting our unique journeys.



We carry souvenirs of our hurts, each stored away until time to add them to the next hurt, thus piling up one hurt after another, all to be carried forever in our being. These hurts leave scars, some big, some small, but all significant in their pain. Each scar must have a place in our being. We become a carefully organized mass of layers, as delicate and intricate and individual as a snowflake.

Sometimes, especially in the early months and even years of grief, all we can remember is the pain and horror of our loved one’s death. Pain overshadows everything. These shadows seem to make every day harder, and in winter, the shadows seem longer, deeper, darker. The snowflakes seem small, less beautiful.

The magic of winter’s decorations only leaves us cold and

barren. If we begin as frozen beings, the journey through grief becomes a process of thawing. And each of us will defrost in a pattern as unique and individual as the snowflakes that drift across the windowpane, leaving little icy streaks of memory on the heart.

So, be patient with yourself this winter season. Recognize your own unique emotions and hurts and learn to identify the tracings of your own snowflakes of grief. You will survive these winter days and this winter season. You will begin to defrost eventually, and it will be far less painful if you will begin to cherish your differences rather than use them as weapons and yardsticks of judgment.

Ways to Thaw, Survive and Find Hope

- Brush your teeth, every morning. No matter what else happens, do that and you are on your way. Just keeping a routine is a way to counteract the craziness. It is a “responsible, adult” thing to do and is a start. Just do it. Your dentist, mother and everyone you encounter will be glad you did.
- Take out the trash. Just get it out of the house. Someday you can try getting it out on the right day.
- Be realistic. It will hurt, but don’t try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Let those hurting moments come, deal with them and let them go.
- Take care of yourself physically. Eat right. Exercise (or at least watch someone else). If nothing else, jog your memory.
- Leave the word “ought” out of this holiday season. Work at lifting depression. Take responsibility for yourself. We cannot wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it to us. We have to do

that for ourselves. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat occasionally.

- Buy a gift. Buy a gift for yourself. Wrap it, but don't hide it! Just when you think you are going "off the deep end," open it up and enjoy. While you are buying a gift for yourself, buy one for your loved one as well. Wrap it up and give it away to someone who might not otherwise have a gift. Pass on the love you shared together, and it can never die.
- Breathe. In and out, in and out. It's that simple and that hard. Some days just breathing is all you can manage. Other days it's a bit easier, so relax and enjoy those moments when you can remember your loved one's life instead of focusing only on the death.
- Make a snow angel. Get outside. Catch snowflakes. Build a sandcastle. Take a memory walk.
- Put something that reminds you of your loved one in your pocket and every time you need a hug, just pat your pocket and recall the loving connection between you. I carry a rock with me always, to remind me of the steadiness, security and sturdiness of his love. I've carved the word HOPE on that rock so I won't forget what hope is all about. Hope isn't a place or a thing. Hope isn't the absence of pain, or sadness or sorrow. Hope is possibility. Hope is the memory of love given and received.

Surviving really isn't too hard. Living can be. No matter how crazy the world or out of "sync" you feel, don't lose the treasure of your loved one's presence in your life. You don't have to say goodbye. You don't stop loving someone just because he died.

Claim your grief and your unique way of surviving. Do whatever it takes to remember the life of your loved one, not just the death.

Each footprint is unique, each hurt is different, each snowflake the only one ever created. Your love is real, just as is your pain. But leave the regrets behind in the slush. Bring the joy of loving with you into this holiday season. Let its memory light your world. Our loved ones died, but we did not lose them.

Time and space become meaningless for us. The bonds between us are too strong to let death sever the ties. So light a candle and whisper a *thank you* for the moments you traveled together. Our arms may be empty, but the heart is full. And every time you see a snowflake or just image one, remember to cherish its unique design and pattern ...and to cherish your unique footprint through grief.

--By Darcie D. Sims

Snow

As we have been reminded with great emphasis of late, every snowflake that falls is unique and has its own individual design. There are beautiful patterns in each snowflake, and even the tiniest of flakes have their own markings. These patterns change again and again—even after the flake touches the ground. Each snowflake is a cause for wonder, one of a kind. No two are exactly alike.

Like the snowflake, our beautiful children were each unique and special. Some we only dreamed about, and some danced upon the earth. They filled our lives with wonder and transformed our world. We held them too briefly, but we will hold them in our hearts forever. We shall remember them always. At this time of remembering, it may help to reflect upon how our lives have been enriched by the love we have given to and received from our children. Unlike the snowflake, our children left treasures behind that can *never* be taken away.

--Denise Izon, TCF, Lake Area, MI



*Time slips by and life
goes on, but from my heart
you're never gone...
I think about you always,
I talk about you too,
I have so many memories,
but I wish I still had you!*

[facebook.com/MissingLovedOne](https://www.facebook.com/MissingLovedOne)

My Cocoon

I wrap myself in a cocoon of trivialities so, I don't think too much of you.

The hurting continues on and on. Move forward is what I hear. They don't understand there is no forward. The best I can manage is a circle. Every now and then the circle slows and the sun breaks through, and I can look at you with love and joy.

These are very good times. I enjoy these times so much.

As the circle moves, I look for ways to honor your life.

I want everyone to remember you and the wonderful ways you touched their lives--and still do.

I look forward to the time I can break out of my cocoon and become a butterfly like you.

Then we can spread our wings and fly together throughout eternity.

--Sylvia Heinze

The Change

My hair has become gray.

No artificial colors to brighten

Either my hair

Nor my endless, gray days.

My face has become plain.

Unadorned eyes or lips

Somber and dreary like

Each dark, aching night.

My energy has slipped away

Leaving a paralyzed, frozen shell.

Like a previously happy doll

Whose batteries have run dry.

My heart has two unhealed holes within.

Losing each precious daughter

Feels like shooting pain from a tazer to knock me to my knees.

But while God has closed

The door to my daughters' laughs and hugs

He has opened the window

To help me breathe.

The air is filled with longtime

friendships, loving family,

and compassionate friends

to help ease my loneliness

and share my grief journey.

Change has come in many ways,

But not to a mother's love.

-Barbara Batson



You know how some new parents look into the window at the maternity centre and share with other parents in excitement?

What if our angels are gathering around looking down at us, showing us off for being so strong and saying "my parent's awesome, which one's yours?"

"LITTLER DAYS" LIKE VALENTINE'S DAY

Those "bigger days" are tough, that's true.

Full of memories from the past and the reality of no more.

Although others may be able to understand that times like Christmas make us blue

They can't grasp how the littler days can cause our emotions to soar.

In between bigger days and ordinary days which are painful to get through.

Are those littler days so very special full of remembrances galore.

There's so much love wrapped up in what we tightly hold on to

What would any of us do to once again live with what we had before?

We have sat right by their side as they carefully signed their names

And addressed little envelopes with stickers of hearts and smiles

Remembering their laughs and excitement now bring sweet and bitter pain

Little hands full, they'd skip into school, it must have felt like a mile!

Maybe together we prepared special treats, sang silly songs and even played some games

How I long to go back to those moments and stay there for awhile.

Any parents can pine for times which have passed, but our hearts have much darker stains

For there will never be future times of anything special with our child.

Times like Valentine's Day may seem silly or small until memories flood our minds

There's so much that's been taken from us, that's our continued plight.

And in our emptiness, it is easy to feel isolated, ignored and left behind

When it seems like the world can be so indifferent, it cuts like a knife

Perhaps somehow, we can use the love of our children to make others a little less blind

Even if they cannot begin to know our strife

In our hopes to be treated with compassion and kindness, maybe we can somehow find

Ways to continue to be tolerant and kind, to help each other get through life.

-Lora Krum

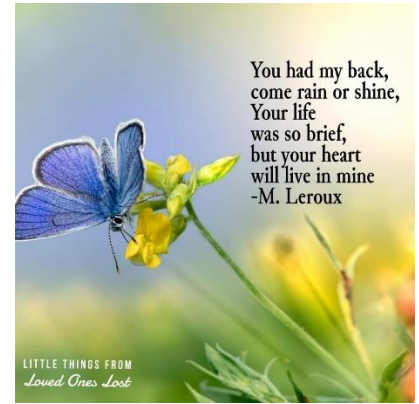
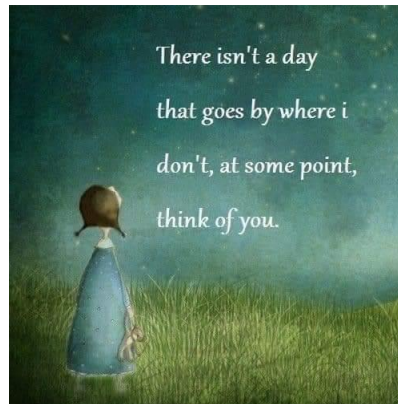
I Forgive

I've heard advice for the bereaved that forgiveness is an important part of "healing." I've worked hard at that elusive forgiveness and came to the realization today that I am actually able to forgive quite a lot.

- I forgive myself for not forgiving the people who caused my daughter's death. Some things are just not "forgivable," and she would understand.
- I forgive others for sharing their "miracles" with me, not understanding how cruelly this attacks my heart, as I wonder where my daughter's miracle was.
- I forgive others for not understanding me. I don't understand anything anymore, so I can't expect others to understand me either.
- I forgive myself for not being able to do all of the things I used to be able to do. I don't function as well as I used to, and that's okay.
- I forgive others for continuing to live in that other world where I once lived with my daughter. It's a good world, and I miss it a lot.
- I forgive myself for no longer fitting into that world and not always being able to fake it. I'm different now.
- I forgive others for avoiding me. They don't know what to say and, quite frankly, that leaves me with nothing to say to them either.
- I forgive my daughter for leaving me. She loved life, and she loved me. I believe she loves me still.

This is probably not what people mean when they say we need to "forgive," but it's the best I can do. It's enough that I can do anything at all, and maybe they'll forgive me as well.

--Written by Debbie Ortega



After A While

After a while you learn the subtle difference between holding a hand and chaining a soul, and you learn that love doesn't always mean leaning, and company doesn't mean security.

And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts and presents aren't promises, and you begin to accept your defeats with your head up & eyes ahead, with the grace of a woman, not the grief of a child.

And you learn to build all your roads on today because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans, and futures have a way of falling down in mid-flight.

After a while you learn that even sunshine burns if you get too much, so you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul, instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers.

And you learn that you really can endure, you really are strong, you really do have worth, and you learn ... and your learn ... with every goodbye, you learn....

--Veronica A. Shoffstall

**Our children were—
still are—and always will be—
part of who we are and what we do
Today—Tomorrow—and Forever.**

--Ken Pinch, TCF, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Thought for the Day

It's not easy returning to the world of normalcy when your world is so upside down. It's not easy to stop being a parent to your child who has died. The thought for the day is a word—patience—patience with yourself who is suddenly, powerlessly thrown into this horrid nightmare; patience with your spouse, who always seems to be having an up day when you're having a down day; patience with relatives and friends who wish to help but seem to hurt with hollow advice and logical words; and patience with time, for it takes time to adjust, and time can move so slowly. PATIENCE.

--Rose Moen, TCF,
Carmel-Indianapolis IN

There Is No Goodbye

For Tracy, my special angel

I close my eyes and you're a newborn in my arms,
Already I was promising to keep you safe from harm.

I blink and you're a toddler taking your first step,
So proud of you I could have wept.

I look again and you're starting school,
Already learning how other hearts to rule.

Before I know it you're graduating high school,
So wise, so young, no one's fool.

Now you're ready to face the world,
Off to college no obstacle too big to hurdle.
No longer would you be mama's little girl,
In front of you lay the whole wide world.

Now I open my eyes and you're standing there,
Wind blowing through your hair.
I see that beautiful smile on your face,
That from my memory I could never erase.

In my mind I know for now our time is gone,
You will never see another dawn.
No, my darling girl, there is no goodbye,
For in my heart, you will never die.

--Tina Robertson, in *Labours of Love*,
Noble House, © 2005

I Grieve

By Rabbi Earl A. Grollman, DHL, DD

Often people will say to me, "Since you are a grief therapist, isn't it great that when there is a personal loss you are spared the lacerating pain that others may experience."

Let me tell you something,

....Intense feelings of loss are just as real for us as well. When someone we love has died, part of us, too, has been buried with our loved one. Pain and fear may wash over us in waves. As the great poet Heinrich Heine wrote, "Sorrow is like a toothache in our hearts."

For all of us, the only cure for grief is to grieve, for grief is the price we pay for love. We cry when we have to; we laugh when we can. Our minds, bodies and souls require time to heal. We need to share our inner selves with those who will accompany us on the piercing pilgrimage. All we can do is to resolve to survive each day (each minute) the best we are able.

But we must offer all our departed love ones more than testimonials of tears and monuments of grief. There is an inscription above the Sorbonne Medical School that reads, "Here is where death is made to serve the living." We can live for them and the ideals, principles and values they cherished most. We can make of their memories living beacons that show us the way to kindness and sensitivity to the hurt and needs of others. Yes, we miss our beloveds. We grieve for them and now we must find ways that will permit our sorrow and grief to serve the living.

Reflections

Melissa has been dead for as many years as she lived on this earth. Nineteen. Did I learn from her illness and death? Am I a better person now? I knew before that life is precious. That family is more important than things. That money can't buy happiness. That everything and everybody dies, and the ever popular "life goes on." What have I learned? That I can live with a hole in my heart. She is there always. When I meet a nineteen-year-old girl or a thirty-eight-year-old woman I see her—and she is always smiling at me. For a very long time I couldn't see her smiling—just sick and suffering. Miss her? Oh yes! At least once a day and at times so overpowering that I almost go to my knees. A better person? I wasn't a

bad person before. I know that I have come full circle in my faith—that the "why" no longer matters—that "don't sweat the small stuff" is a really big category! Missy's strength has become my strength and I never doubt the power of love. I guess I am a better person.

--Missy's mom, Alice Micke

Slow Dance

Have you ever watched kids
on a merry-go-round?

Or listened to the rain slapping on the ground?

Ever followed a butterfly's erratic flight?

Or gazed at the sun into the fading night?

You better slow down.

Don't dance so fast.

Time is short.

The music won't last.

Do you run through each day on the fly?

When you ask "How are you?" do you hear the reply?

When the day is done, do you lie in your bed

with the next hundred chores running through your head?

You'd better slow down.

Don't dance so fast.

Time is short.

The music won't last.

Ever told your child, we'll do it tomorrow,

and in your haste, not see his sorrow?

Ever lost touch, let a good friendship die

'cause you never had time to call and say "Hi"?

You'd better slow down.

Don't dance so fast.

Time is short.

The music won't last.

When you run so fast to get somewhere
you miss half the fun of getting there.

When you worry and hurry through your day,

it is like an unopened gift thrown away.

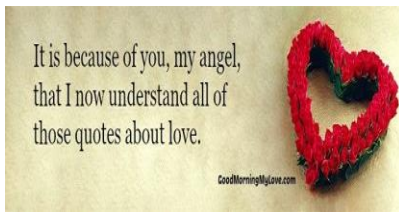
Life is not a race.

Do take it slower

Hear the music

Before the song is over.





For My Sweet Son

A few months' shy of 18 years I have lived without you. The number seems so long when it is measured in years. My heart does not understand what years mean. It only understands that I have lived a long time without hearing your voice, without hearing your laugh, without so many things that only a mother feels for her child. Somehow daily life has gone on. I question how could it, without you. The extreme raw pain has been exchanged for the knowledge that my life will be lived without you in it. My memories of you remain so strong that sometimes I feel that you are still here. Those memories are my solace from missing you. My heart will always feel the pain, but you will one day welcome me back with a big hug. Until we meet again, my son, Happy Birthday in Heaven. Know that you are in my heart every day, and in my soul forever.

--Karin Powell

Reflections on 20 Years

If anyone had told me twenty years ago that I would still feel so close to Laurie after two decades passed. I would never have believed them. But she is and always will be a part of me. It's been said that "the absence becomes a presence," and that's true.

My daughter who died is with me in different ways than my living children can be. She lives in my heart and I feel forever linked to her. Now, in the place of pain is a deep sense of missing, of longing. Yes, at times I am still blindsided by something unexpected—something as simple as a song, a previously unseen picture, spotting a young girl who looks just like her, even the sign on the store "Forever 21."

And the happiest events can be bittersweet—the marriages of Laurie's two siblings and the births of my four grandchildren. But the joys and the sadness are separate, even if I have to work on keeping them that way. *Grief is never a*

completed task. It is a lifetime assignment.

But when the sorrow softens, and when we learn with some certainty that the bad days are only temporary, when we've realized that we can keep our children alive in our hearts—

*then the sun can shine bright
and the world can become
an even more beautiful place.
And that is my hope for all of you
who are newer on this journey
than I.*

– Jan Gifford

Twenty Years

20 years...it has actually been 20 years. *I never thought in my darkest days and nights that I would ever survive 20 years without my brother.* Saying it out loud is almost impossible to believe—and hard to accept...My life has moved forward—I have survived—but I don't know if I've really been alive. I think I have.

There have been some beautiful moments that have brought some sense of joy to me, and some pieces of these last 20 years that I just can't remember. But ask me anything about my brother and THAT I can remember:

...the way he would smell after a bath
...the play-by-play recap he would give of the game he had just watched
...the temper tantrums he used to throw when he didn't get his way
...the way his skinny arms felt when they wrapped around my neck for a big hug.
But 20 years later, I can't remember
...the sound of his voice
...the last thing we fought about
...the last time he said he loved me
...and did I say it back?
They say that time heals all wounds. Does time really heal this one? Or does time take away your memories? I don't want to lose them.

But they definitely are not as strong as they once were. If I were to dig deep inside to search for these memories, I would have to process what really happened to him. I've been living with this scar for the last 20 years, and I think I've found a way to not feel it any more. I guess

grief really is something that evolves over the years, takes many shapes and forms. I believed that speech in the beginning, but I didn't understand that it would still affect me 20 years down the road. I tried really hard not to give grief that much power or control in my life, but maybe I failed.

As I sit here and type this, I can feel the tears welling up in my eyes, and my heart starting to hurt. I know there were days that I didn't cry, and days that I actually felt happy. And I know there were days full of happy thoughts of my brother. Wow...20 years! I didn't think I would make it one day without my brother, let alone 20 years.

So as this anniversary draws near, I have mixed emotions—disbelief that I actually survived this long without him and sadness for the same reason. I miss my bro more than words can express. I can't believe I miss you so much, Andrew Milne.

--Love, Your big sister Tracy

I never believed I would see another season change with gladness.
I never believed I would see the world again without the haze of tears.
I never expected to actually laugh again.
I never felt my smile would return and feel natural on my face.
I never hoped for another day when I would not want to die.
I never envisioned a world that could again be bright and full of promise.
I believed that all had passed from me the day he died and went away never to return.
But I was wrong, and I know that in the fullness of your grieving you too will come to understand that life goes on—that it can still have meaning—that even joy can touch your life once more.

--Don Hackett, TCF Massachusetts

"That was and still is the great disaster of my life – that lovely, lovely little boy. ...There's no tragedy in life like the death of a child. Things never get back to the way they were before."—Dwight D. Eisenhower



"The death of a child is so painful, both emotionally and spiritually, that I truly wondered if my own heart and spirit would ever heal. I soon learned that I could help myself best by helping others... It wasn't until Robin died that I truly threw myself into volunteer work. That precious little girl left our family a great legacy. I know George and I care more for every living person because of her. We learned firsthand the importance of reaching out to help because others had reached out to us during that crucial time. --Barbara Bush

A Name for My Pain

I have given a name to my pain—
It's called "Longing."
I long for what was,
and what might have been.
I long for his touch and smell of sweat;
I long to hold him one more time.
I long to look upon his beautiful face
and impress it upon my memory & heart.
I long to return to the day before
and protect him from his death.
I long to take his place,
so he may live and have sons too.
I long for time to pass much faster
so my longing and pain will less.
Will they?

*--June Williams-Muecke,
TCF, Houston West Chapter*



Answers

The memories are bright and far away
because in all those grieving years
The pain has calmed.
The mind has learned
that life and loss are brothers,
that death tells nothing
when we ask him "why?"

The memories are deep and long ago.
Here, after all those grieving years,
the songs we sang,
the thoughts we shared,
the morning kisses,
and the mystic evenings,
remain alive in us and unforgotten.

Now Love holds answers,
though we ask her nothing.
--Sascha Wagner

*Child Loss And
Grief Support*



*Time doesn't heal
your grief, it
teaches you how
to wear it.*

A Valentine's Day Wish

To all TCF Moms and Dads:
How I wish I could bring your child
back to you for Valentine's Day—24
hours you could spend telling your
child of your love. But alas, we are
doomed to spend another Valentine's
Day without our beloved children.

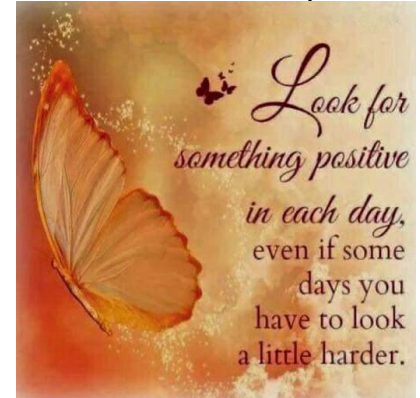
Others who have not lost a child
tend to take for granted these very
special days. A card that says, "I
love you, Mom and Dad" should be
carefully folded and saved in a
special place. All too many parents
consider these cards to be renewable
commodities. "There's no need to
save this one—we'll always get
another one next year."

For many of us next year came
and there was no card. Tears of
sadness replaced tears of joy on this
special day. But for many of us, the

memories remain of those earlier
Valentine's Days gone by. Because
our child's love remains with us, our
child will never truly be gone.

This year on Valentine's Day, let
us shed tears of joy that we had even
a short time with our child—for that,
no matter how short, can never be
taken from us.

--Wayne Loder



**Please help us help others. Make a
LOVE GIFT today. Tax deductible
Love Gifts may be sent to: TCF C/O
Theresa Phillips 6200 Kentucky Ave,
Raytown, MO 64133**

**Remember when you came to your
first meeting, and someone was
there who was a little farther down
the road and gave you a hug or
shared something that made you
feel like you are not crazy. Well, if
you are a little bit farther down the
road, please feel free to come back
to our meetings and help families
that are just starting their grief
journey.**

*Please visit our website at ,
www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org
Find us on Facebook at
[https://www.facebook.com/groups/
1582699755290182](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1582699755290182)*

*We have several volunteers who
write remembrance cards to families
on birthdays and death dates. Just a
reminder if you have an address
change, please email
phillipsplace@aol.com or mail a
note to TCF, C/O Theresa Phillips
6200 Kentucky Raytown, MO 64133
so the roster can be updated.
Please remember that you can give
to The Compassionate Friends
through your United Way pledge at
work or as a single gift, but you
MUST WRITE IT IN.*