



# *The Compassionate Friends*

**Eastern Jackson County Chapter  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies**

January-February 2025

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## **Faces of Grief**

Though winter's delicate, lacy snowflakes may remind us of the lace-trimmed hearts of February's Valentines, the "mourning" heart seems frozen in time. The bitter winds of loneliness blow mournfully through our souls. Death has tapped us on the shoulder, introducing his brother, Grief, who has moved into our hearts to take up unwelcome residence. Wearied and exhausted by our pain, we have little energy to evict the intruder. It's hard for us to remember that behind the clouds that have obscured our vision, the sun still faithfully shines.

"Love" is apparently the thought for the season, and we are reminded of its tenderness at every turn. But a piece of the fiber of our lives has been torn away, and love seems a vague and unfulfilled promise that belongs only to others. Hearts and flowers, lace and love, romantic verse and melody seem to have abandoned us as we grope in the darkness of our beloved's absence. Will the pain ever end? Will the hope of joy and renewal once again warm the frozen places in our hearts? Gradually, as the hurt begins to soften, and the thawing relief of healing slowly begins to melt the icy grip of our pain, hope does begin to "spring eternal."

Roses, traditional in February's favorite holiday, remind us that summer will return (even if it is not on the traditional calendar's schedule!). It's unlikely that we will ever again perceive the usual symbols of love in quite the same way as before, but in many ways our concepts of *genuine* love will be stronger, richer and less assailable. Frivolous and shallow affection are absent from our thoughts. Deeper commitments and more

demonstrative attention have become our new marching orders.

In costly lessons, we've learned first-hand how fragile and fleeting life can be, and we are now resolute in our determination to announce to our remaining dear ones the importance of our bonds with them. We abandon the intimidation of "limits" such as the archaic notions that "men" mustn't cry or say, "I love you," or that we're too busy just now to pay better attention to someone's needs.

As little by little our pain softens and recedes, and we learn that suffering is but for a season, we also learn that LOVE doesn't die.

In our emotional lives, Valentines can now take on a new significance as precious reminder of the love that still exists on *both* sides of life. Love lives within our hearts, and even Grief can't steal it away. Love is our bridge over the rainbow.

*--Andrea Gambill, Bereavement Magazine*



## **Valentine's Day**

The holidays are hard on all of us, but the letdown after seems to halt our grief work. As bad as the holidays are, they are filled with people and noise, some laughter and tears. In general, you have to roll with the activity of the larger family.

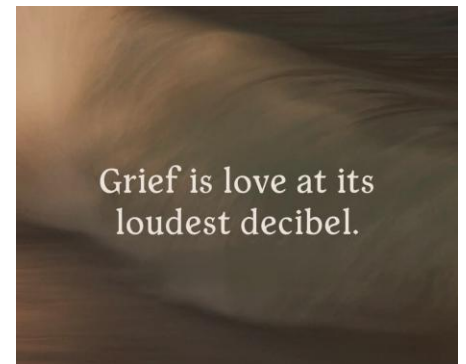
It's quiet now. It would be a good time to "reach out and touch someone." Touch someone maybe with a call or maybe with an old-fashioned handmade valentine. Think of the people around you who have helped you. It is easier to write and mail kind words than it is to say them face to face. If that just isn't your style, spend some time at the card shop; search out the sentiment that best reveals your inner feelings about your spouse, children, relatives or friends.

We spend so much time indoors these cold winter days it's easy to allow ourselves to crawl into an inner shell. Make an effort to come out of yourself.

Or try writing and decorating a card to your dead child. Perhaps you could use some of your time to find the lovely cards of past Valentine's Days from him/her. It may take courage to reread them, and it may bring tears to your eyes. But maybe it will bring a little joy to your soul to remember how innocently and sincerely they loved you.

Some of us have no card from our special children, but we know the special love from our "Angel Cupid's arrow." Our hearts have been pierced too. Use February 14<sup>th</sup> as a Grief Work Day!

*--Mary Valazquez, Warrington, PA*



## Night Agonies

In the deepest part of the night, when I am alone with my blackest grief, I reach deep inside myself and measure the depth of love for my child.

I focus on these feelings, now made unequivocal by death, and realize that an emotion so strong, so pure, cannot be obliterated by the physical act of dying. My love lives on. This link to my child remains, unbroken, unaltered. This bond, the strongest two people can share, continues.

But how can it remain, if my child does not? A solid bridge must have a secure footing on either side. The strength of the love that flows to my child from the deepest part of my being remains as it was in her life. I must conclude it is still anchored in the very fiber of my child's soul—on the other side of death.

With the reawakened awareness of the connections of our love, I find proof of her continuance, a soothing reassurance that though she is no longer with me, she still IS.

--Sally Migliaccio, TCF, Palm Beach, FL



### ***You Don't Grieve Just Once***

*Grief isn't a single moment. It doesn't arrive, say its piece, and leave. Grief stays. It lingers in the quiet, waiting to remind you that love and loss are forever entwined.*

*You grieve not just once but every time you wake to another day without them. You feel it when a song plays, when a memory surfaces, when their favorite chair sits empty.*

*Grief doesn't always announce itself.*

*Sometimes it whispers softly, and other times, it crashes into you like a storm, taking your breath away. It's a tidal wave that pulls you under just as you think you've found your footing.*

*There's no "getting over" this kind of loss. There's no final goodbye to the ache it brings. Instead, you learn to carry it—to live alongside the pain and let it shape who you are.*

*Be kind to yourself, and to others who carry this invisible weight. Grief is a journey that reshapes your world daily. It's not about "moving on"; it's about moving forward with the love that still remains.*

*You don't grieve just once. You grieve every day, in moments big and small, for a lifetime.*

*Because love never dies—it simply takes on a different form.*

*For everyone navigating this storm:  
You are not alone.  
-Facebook-Grief Journey*

## What It Means To Lose A Child

Gary Sturgis

Surviving Grief



### ***What It Means To Lose A Child***

*When it comes to losing a child the general rules of grief don't always apply. The landscape of life is forever changed. What you once knew is unrecognizable.*

*There's no way at all to sugarcoat what it feels like when the world expands into a vast wasteland, and you don't know in which direction to go. It expands in every direction, and you feel like you're completely alone, even though there are still people around.*

*These people will say things like, "I can't imagine" and "I don't know how you can be so strong." These well-meaning platitudes can sometimes make you feel even more alone.*

*The rules have changed for you. This is what it means to lose a child, that your worst nightmare has come true.*

*What people may never understand is that parenthood is indelible. It's permanent. This is true when your children grow up, move away, start a family, and create their own life.*

*It's also true when your child dies.*

*Each year includes anticipating the path your child may have taken. It becomes a lifetime of wondering what might have been.*

*Here's the thing...memories are fragile. They linger, but they also fade.*

*Losing a child means death has claimed a future. It requires the ability to hold onto the memories even tighter for fear of having them slip away.*

*It's now up to you as a parent to keep these precious memories alive. It's about making a space for your child even though your child no longer takes up space.*

*That's what it means to lose a child. Learning to hold onto the bits of them that remain...even though you're dealing with the reality of living without them.*

*As time goes on you'll continue to navigate the darkest parts of this new landscape as you learn to recall your child with joy. It happens slowly. The light you seek is on the horizon but getting to it is like following a faint line of breadcrumbs on a barren trail.*

*It takes a long time to accept the contradiction that joy and sorrow are inextricably linked. That they're twisted together in a brand-new emotion that keeps your child alive and present in your heart.*

*And... you know there's no way to go back to the life you once knew, because only you understand what it means to lose a child.*

--Gary Sturgis - Surviving Grief

**When darkness seems overwhelming, light a candle in someone's life and see how it makes the darkness in your own and the other person's life flee.**

--Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

## A Dozen Roses

If I had a dozen roses, I know just  
what I'd do—  
I'd give each one a name that  
reminded me of you.  
The first rose I'd name sunshine,  
'cause you brighten every day.  
The second would be beauty,  
the kind that never goes away.  
The third one would be priceless,  
like those hugs you gave to me.  
I'd name the fourth rose silly—  
oh, how funny you could be.  
Rose five of course is patience,  
something you have helped me  
find.  
The sixth rose I'd call memories,  
precious gifts you left behind.  
The seventh and eighth roses  
would be faith and grace.  
Nine would be unique, because no  
one can take your place.  
The tenth rose, well that's easy,  
I'd simply name it love.  
Eleven I'd call angel; I know you  
watch from above.  
I'd think about the twelfth rose  
and really take my time—  
After all, these roses are for you,  
my Valentine.  
I'm sending them to heaven in  
every color that I know,  
So number twelve I'll name forever;  
that's how long I'll love you so.  
--Alan Pedersen,  
[www.everashleymusic.com](http://www.everashleymusic.com)

## I Know You

I know who you are...  
I see your face reflected in mine.  
Ravaged by tears,  
distorted by the pain of a lifetime  
You are a parent of a child  
who now lives on in your heart.  
Joined in spirit,  
though physically torn apart.  
To live between two worlds  
is now our task.  
To be recognized by others, we all  
have a mask.  
But in the abyss,  
in the darkness of the in-between  
we often fall to our knees,  
tearing away pretense and silently  
scream.  
I know who you are...  
Your voice sounds as familiar as  
mine.  
It calls out, vibrating throughout all  
of eternity,  
Searching. Trying to find.

"Where are you my child? I hear you  
in my mind,  
but I cannot find the way.  
Somehow, I have gotten lost.  
Where are all of my yesterdays?"  
In the void, a child's voice has fallen  
silent.  
Deafening silence, echoing cries...  
We are left to follow each other in  
the darkness,  
always asking Why?  
Into the unknown, we stumble along.  
The sun will rise and another day  
will begin.  
But the only light I can see is in  
the outstretched hand of a kindred  
soul, another grieving friend.  
I know who you are...  
Your heart is shattered,  
your soul is broken, just like mine...  
And though the pieces may fit back  
together,  
one tiny fragment at a time,  
we will never again be whole.  
For there is a gap in our lives where  
our child should be.  
The child that lives in our hearts  
dances deep in our souls,  
laughs in our memories.  
I know who you are...I can feel your  
pain  
We will never be the same.  
I cry the same tears. We have the  
same fears.  
Alone in a crowd, we both cried  
aloud  
as our dreams came to an end.  
I know you, my grieving friend.  
You are not alone.  
Look in the mirror and you will see  
standing next to you... a reflection of  
me.  
--Lisa Comstock, Florence, KY

## Turn Again to Life

If I should die and leave  
you here a while,  
Be not like others, sore  
undone, who keep  
Long vigil by the silent  
dust and weep.  
For my sake turn again to  
life and smile,  
Nerving your heart and  
trembling hand to do  
That which will comfort  
other souls than thine.  
Complete these dear  
unfinished tasks of mine,  
And I, perchance, may  
therein comfort you.  
--Mary Lee Hall

## Who Comes to TCF?

Do you ever wonder why  
anyone in their right mind would  
want to attend a meeting where "they  
talk only about dead children"?  
Sometimes I hear that comment.

Some people tell me they are  
doing pretty well until they read the  
newsletter and "it's just too sad."  
Some have said that they don't want  
to attend meetings where they may  
cry or simply be reminded of the  
enormous hole in their lives. Some  
find it unnerving when others seem  
to be in great pain, even years after  
the child's death. It is terrifying to  
think of anguish without healing,  
going on for so long.

I also hear how reading the  
newsletter, or being around others, is  
the greatest source of hope and help.

What is the difference between  
the people who take comfort and  
those who feel dragged down by  
TCF? My observation is that the  
difference is the **ability to mourn  
and move through grief.**

The healing comes only when  
enough "why's" have been asked,  
enough tears have been shed, the  
death has been reviewed and relived  
enough, enough hugs have been  
given and received, enough peace is  
restored, and enough energy returns  
to continue living.

At our meetings we don't just sit  
around and mourn our children. We  
have speakers and programs aimed at  
giving us insights into our grief. Not  
everyone can apply concepts from all  
the meetings to their own personal  
grief; however, knowledge can breed  
understanding into another's grief.

It is also true that not everyone  
whose child died a number of years  
back is in pain. A few have not come  
to terms with their grief and are, for  
the first time perhaps, dealing with  
the pain buried long ago. Most with a  
significant time span are  
Compassionate Friends there only  
for you, the newly bereaved.

Who comes to TCF? We find  
those new and lost, barely  
functioning, and others who achieve  
a balance between the need to feel  
the pain and the need to be whole  
again, and those whose healing has  
allowed them to reach out in love to  
others. You are loved, dear ones.  
May knowing this help you to heal.

--Pat Ryan, TCF, Silverdale, WA





### Tracks in the Snow

It had been at least three days since the last snowfall, when I realized I had to head into town for groceries and out to the cemetery for one of my weekly visits. I cursed the snow often for covering up all the life I saw in the summer and spring. Everything was just a frozen blanket of white, a barren ice land, when the snow fell. The fact that my daughter, Kyla Louise, was buried underneath that thick coating of ice in the cemetery, made me dislike the snow even more.

So, on this day, I grumbled as I scraped my van windows in preparation for the long haul into town. My wheels crunched ice and slid as I pulled slowly out of the driveway. I let my mind wander into thoughts of a warm spring on the drive into town. I dreamed of flowers and birds, not frozen ponds and lifeless skies. I wondered if I would even be able to get into the cemetery to visit my darling's grave. Curse this snow!

After grocery shopping, I headed out to the cemetery feeling depressed and hopeless. Why had my daughter died at the tender age of four from a brain tumor? Why was I having to visit her grave covered in snow, and out of my warm arms? What was the point of it all? I shivered as I neared the cemetery. It looked like not many people had been out since the last snowfall because the ground was still a flat solid sheet of snow. Or was it?

As I let the van quietly creep into the cemetery, my eyes gazed at the snow, and a small laugh escaped my lips. Across the rows and rows of frozen graves were animal tracks showing every which way. Birds,

rabbits, deer and who knows what other types of creatures had found a quiet, safe place to play. The tracks told of deer leaping over headstones, romping in the snow. There were tracks of rabbits darting in and out of the bushes between the headstones. Bird tracks gently dotted the snow until they vanished where a winged one had taken flight.

I parked the van and stepped out into the glistening snow. As I walked towards my daughter's grave, I saw that a bird had visited her earlier, and that a rabbit had made a resting place under the bushes near her grave. A set of tracks even went back and forth between a pinwheel Kyla's grandma had left at the grave and a bush. What a wondrous sight!

My little angel even had visitors when I could not be there! As I stood quietly pondering this change in my point of view, something caught my eye a few rows up. I looked and there were two small deer running after each other. They stopped and looked at me, and I at them. Tears sprung to my eyes, and my heart soared. What majesty! They stood there still for a second, and then they bounded off and over the fence.

I pressed my hands into the snow on my sweet Kyla's grave, leaving my handprints. Then I drew a heart with my finger. As I walked away, I looked back and saw my own tracks, proof that I had been there, proof of my love. It was then that I realized what a gift the snow was. It had shown me how full of life the cemetery and the world really are, even though we think it is frozen and desolate.

On my drive back home, I looked around at the shimmering white land before me. I saw that the snow protected and preserved the land beneath it like a warm blanket, until the land could once again rise anew.

~Juliet Freitag

### It's So Cold

It's so cold.

I went to the cemetery today.  
50-below wind-chill.

After two and a half years  
I thought I was more used to this,  
But I wasn't as "healed" as I thought.  
Your little place in the cemetery  
So alone...So cold  
I wanted to stretch out on your grave,  
Cover you with my body,

Protect you from the cold.

I could almost imagine  
what your voice would sound like,  
"I'm so cold, mama."  
Nothing I can do to protect you.  
Helpless, hopeless, despair.  
Logically, I tell myself this is  
foolish,  
you feel no cold.  
Motherly, I ache to protect you.  
It's so cold today.

I'm sorry Catie, I'm sorry.

--Mary VanBockern, TCF, Sioux Falls



**Our loved ones leave behind a light  
That will never dim or fade  
It's kept bright by the love we feel  
And the memories we made  
It can warm us like a candle's glow  
And help bring comfort too  
And no matter where you go you'll  
find  
It's always close to you  
And in the darkest times remember  
In our hearts their light is strong  
So every time we think of them  
Their memory shines on.**

~ 'Their Light Shines On' by Andrea Jackson

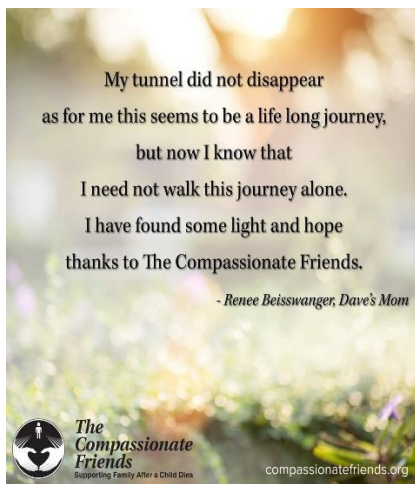
~ Art by Shawna Erback

*The New Year comes when  
all the world is ready for changes,  
resolutions—great beginnings.*

**For us to whom that  
stroke of midnight means  
a missing child remembered,  
for us the new year comes  
more like another darkness.**

**But let us not forget  
that this may be the year  
when love and hope and courage  
find each other somewhere  
in the darkness  
to lift their voices and speak:  
Let there be light.**

From "The Sorrow and the Light,"  
by Sascha



## Feel to heal.

It takes an enormous amount of energy to remain stuck in chronic grief...or sadness. Often, we try to resist these emotions by keeping a stiff upper lip or a cheerful demeanor when we're really seething inside. This is especially true during the times of the year when...difficult emotions [are most likely to] surface, such as the anniversary of a death or birthday.

What we resist persists. Instead of trying to talk yourself out of how you feel, harness the courage to acknowledge uncomfortable emotions. Accept your regrets, anger and sadness without remorse. Just let them be. Then [eventually, you will be able to] let it go. Not only will your energy resurface, but you also [may] find sensible solutions to many of the dilemmas in your life. Your discomfort [can] evaporate like mist in the sun

**Look for the positive.** Every thought in our heads is accompanied by a cascade of biochemicals called neurotransmitters. In general, thoughts that are optimistic, grateful and loving result in "feel good" neurotransmitters called endorphins. The same "feel good" chemicals are produced during exercise, love making and meditation. By contrast, thoughts that are fearful, angry or hopeless increase levels of stress hormones, which make us feel tired, anxious and irritable.

Learning to focus on the positive can-do wonders for energy levels as well as improve health and longevity. Research by Dr. Becca Levy of Yale University shows that positive thoughts energize the body to walk faster. Furthermore, Levy

found that an upbeat attitude toward aging extends life expectancy. It can provide the same kind of benefit as exercise, not smoking and having a healthy blood pressure, cholesterol and weight. Other research suggests that when people train themselves to feel love and gratitude regularly, their blood pressure normalizes, their heart function stabilizes, and they have more energy.

One way to practice a positive attitude is by keeping a "gratitude journal": Every day, write down three to five things for which you are grateful. Another strategy is simply to take notice when you fall into a "poor me" or martyred state of mind. Then do all you can to turn those thoughts around.

--Christiane Northrup, M.D.

## Little White Blanket

Little white blanket...first snow on the grave since you left. How can it be? Just yesterday you were here. You left in summer's humid heat. Cicadas sang your eulogy over fresh-turned soil. Now snow's first appearance covers your smooth, flawless sleeping ground.

Little white blanket covers and cares for you when I no longer can. I care for you now with prayers and memories and by framing photographs of times gone by. Photos of you and me. When I look at us, I can still feel you sitting next to me, breathing, smiling, living your life with me.

Then I feel you gone from here, from me. I never knew before how to feel what's not there. Feeling the aching void where many times you sat. Feeling the not-me-ness of me, without you.

Little white blanket, tuck in my loved one. Cover her gently, make her comfortable, send her my love. When spring comes and the little white blanket disappears, let the crocuses I planted bloom their first blooms, counting every first since you left. First morning without you, first week alone, first month bereft, first Halloween and Thanksgiving and Christmas, first New Year...a strange year without you. With the passing of time, I fear I'll forget you, so I hold onto my grief, as I once held onto you.

Little white blanket, first snow on the grave, assure me she's cared for, that she won't forget me, that we are still us, that I am still me, that somewhere in spirit she is still here.

First snow, nature's wise surround for my departed. Little white blanket, teach me how to mend the hole ripped in the fabric of my life, christen the ground, baptize me in understanding the cycles of life...living, loving and letting go.

--Living with Loss Magazine,  
Bereavement Publications

## Shiny

The winter season brings its chill,  
The snow is falling, the night is still.

The tree is ready, the branches white  
To hold the icicles long and light.

Frosty clear and silver shines,  
Reflections sparkle, and crystals find

Shimmering facets shine and glow.  
A happy season we soon will know.

The balls of white, the feathered tree  
Will grace the loving family.

A silver star is up on high,  
The family soon to see and sigh.

The joy of love, a happy time,  
The shared tradition, the sweet and kind.

Memories of the ornaments  
With joyful love and sentiments.

Then suddenly, Amy's passed away  
We felt that pain, we hated that day.

This year the sadness to see the tree.  
The icicles balls cause misery.

The love we shared, traditions lost  
Have gone away at mournful cost.

Amy, Dad, the times we had,  
Now gone and empty, so very sad.

She loved the shiny, bright and true.  
I miss our times; I miss her too.

--Don Batson South KC TCF

They call a man a widower  
when he has lost his wife,  
The woman is a widow  
when her man does lose his life.  
And orphan is the word perhaps  
for the most of us one day,  
For it is normal losing Mom and Dad  
along the way.  
But you can look both high and low  
and then look far and wide  
And never find a word for one  
who's had a child who died.  
So, is it then so rare a find for  
lexicography?

Grief  
is all the  
I love yours  
we have  
left to say

My grief is like a river—  
I have to let it flow,  
But I myself determine  
Just where the banks will go.  
Some days the current take me  
In waves of guilt and pain,  
But there are always quiet pools  
Where I can rest again.  
I crash on rocks of anger—  
My faith seems faint indeed,  
But there are other swimmers  
Who know that what I need  
Are loving hands to hold me  
When the waters are too swift,  
And someone kind to listen  
When I just seem to drift.  
Grief's river is a process  
Of relinquishing the past.  
By swimming in hope's channels  
I'll reach the shore at last.

*The pain of today  
Shares space with the  
Memories of love  
Love does not change  
Love is not broken  
Love never dies  
Love is FOREVER*

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www.facebook.com/grieftoolbox

~Tanya Lord

The Grief Toolbox

Winter can be the cruellest season of the year, cold and dreary, depressing and long. This can also be true of your grief's winter: the air feels raw, days grow tedious, nights go on forever. The shock and numbness that first shielded you have worn away. Now you must face head-on what lies all around you: all that you miss and all that you fear, all your sorrow and all your dread. There can be a piercing loneliness to winter grief. Not only are you separated from the one who died, you can also feel isolated from those around you, perhaps even alienated from yourself. People who do not understand how plodding grief can be, may not be ready to bear all of your moods or all of your moans. And your world can appear so different, so silent, so stark, so empty. This is exactly the world you need.

*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.***