



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

July-August 2016

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Summer Time, Vacation Time, Family Time

I'll bet you never dreamed that there would ever be a time in your life when you would not welcome vacation from work...and the day-to-day hassles of routine living. It's probably a shocker to you that the slow pace of summer, cookouts, softball games, etc., are now a nightmare. Everywhere we go, there are kids out of school enjoying their leisure time, and our bodies jolt as we search for our own absent child who enjoyed this time of the year with a passion!

Surrounded by summer fun, a bereaved parent needs only look around and there are painful memories at every corner. When we are faced with all the living, loving, happy families with their children, the anger boils within and we feel very cheated. And this year we are afraid to go back to the beach cottage we've visited every year, or to the favorite mountain retreat where we laid around for a week and relaxed, or the amusement park where the kids had to ride every ride and see every attraction, no matter what the temperature was. Yes, fear of our memories, fear of too much time to think, fear of too many kids, fear of bursting inside from our pain...all of these feelings are part of the first few years of summer vacations for bereaved parents.

It's been nine years now for me, and I need to tell you that it will get easier, but I found that for the first few years I needed to consciously change some of my routines in order to deal with my fears. I could not visit the same places we had visited when Todd was with us. We tried new experiences in new places with

new people. That isn't to say there weren't some downtimes; however, the faster paced vacations worked better for us. I could not allow myself too much time to think. I enjoy those weekends away now, but for the first few summers I had to dig in the yard, repaint lawn furniture, rearrange the garage, and the multitude of busy projects we'd been putting off for the lack of time. That was a better vacation for me than forcing myself to go somewhere and feel miserable.

You've read it a hundred different times, you have to find your own way and your own peace—leave yourself room to escape if it becomes necessary. If you can find any enjoyment and relaxation, relish it...you deserve it, and it does not mean you don't care. It simply means you are healing. Now I walk down the beach and enjoy the solitude, or laugh when I see a toddler, or listen to the joy of kids laughing, and it warms my heart. Yes, I miss him, but I know he enjoyed every minute of this season, and I know that's what he'd want for me... and thank God, I can do it once more!

--Brenda Holand, TCF, Concord, NC

Summer Delight

Where is the child that skipped through
the sprays of summer rain
and laughed his way into my heart...
Where is the boy who climbed my trees
and spied on me, scaring me half to
death from behind the leaves...
Where is the child with sun tanned legs
who ran Fourth of July races
in green, green parks...
Where is the sleepy child who wrapped
his arms around my neck and said,
"When I grow up, I'm gonna marry
you, Mom."
He's here –
He twines our past around my future,
and takes me back home

and makes me young again
as sure as summer comes...
A sun-tanned spirit with an impish grin
still whispers in my ear that stars are not
stars at all but lightning bugs
he's captured in a jar...
In his eternal youth
he is my summer's glow,
the sunshine in my garden,
my comfort on long hot summer
nights of remembering.
Where is the child that once played
among my summer flowers?
He darts and runs away as I idly dream of
yesterday,
At once elusive, yet so near...Oh, I'm sure
he's here
I'm sure I saw him just a minute ago
Or was it just a touch of summer
madness that made me think
I'd greeted him...
Oh! Where is that child of summer
gladness?
His laughter slides down
summer rainbows and captures me with
unbound glee...
His summer brownness runs barefoot
on my heart...
With sun bleached hair he smiles at me
from photos from summers past,
And I remember love...
--Fay Harden, Heartlines, July 1986

Take all
the time you need
to heal emotionally.
Moving on doesn't take a day.

It takes
a lot of little steps
to be able to break
free of your broken self.



Reflections in Sand and Time

I looked across the lake, then
onto the sand,
Wishing I was still standing there
Holding your small hand.
Sand castles, buckets and
shovels
Flashed into my mind,
As I remembered all those
precious memories you left
behind.
Tiny footprints took me many,
many years back in time,
But of those I looked at—
yours I couldn't find.
But as I stood there
going so far back in the sand,
I almost could feel you holding
my hand.

--Linda Trimmer, TCF, York, PA

A Grief Analogy: The Whale

Recently a dear friend forwarded to me the following true story from the internet:

If you read the front-page story of the San Francisco Chronicle, you would have read about a female humpback whale who had become entangled in a spider web of crab traps and lines. She was weighted down by hundreds of pounds of traps that caused her to struggle to stay afloat. She also had hundreds of yards of line rope wrapped around her body, her tail, her torso, and a line tugging in her mouth.

A fisherman spotted her just east of the Farallon Islands (outside the Golden Gate) and radioed an environmental group for help. Within a few hours, the rescue team arrived and determined that she was so bad off, the only way to save her was to dive in and untangle her...a very dangerous pro-position. One slap of the tail could kill a rescuer.

They worked for hours with

curved knives and eventually freed her. When she was free, the divers say she swam in what seemed like joyous circles. She then came back to each diver, one at a time, and nudged them. Pushing them gently around, she thanked them. Some said it was the most incredibly beautiful experience of their lives. The guy who cut the rope out of her mouth said her eye was following him the whole time, and he will never be the same.

*May you, and all those you love,
be so blessed and fortunate...
to be surrounded by people
who will help you get untangled
from the things that are binding you.
And, may you always know the joy
of giving and receiving gratitude.*

As I wiped away my tears, I couldn't help but think about how when we are bereaved, we are tangled in webs and restraints similar to the whale's, that threaten our very existence. Every part of us is immobilized in pain, and we are held captive, incapable of freeing ourselves.

Often we feel as if we are swimming (and even drowning) in a foreign place where we don't recognize the surroundings, and we aren't sure whether we can trust those who may come and try to rescue us. We don't know how to free ourselves, and we find it difficult to believe that anyone else can free us either. We are sometimes so frenetic that "one slap of the tail" could "kill" our would-be rescuers! When we are lucky, along comes someone—like the fisherman in the story—who cares about us and views us with compassion, but who has no idea of how to help us. And that caring soul goes for aid from those who are experienced with our kind of pain and distress.

... Finally help arrives on the scene for us, but we are so entangled in our grief that even our mouths are impotent. We don't believe we can communicate with our caregivers, and even if we could, we have no idea what to tell them. We don't know what we want or need beyond our passionate desire to have our loved ones "back again."

Eventually, many who are captive finally give in to exhaustion and frustration and decide to relax a bit while cautiously "watching" to see what kind of help might be offered to them.

Caring and compassionate souls can then approach carefully and begin to cut away the things that are tangling our minds and souls. Gently, patiently and very carefully, they persistently work away at the life giving task. It often takes a long time, but if we don't fight their efforts, if we just cooperate by staying still and waiting for them to help us, we find that we can be free at last! It doesn't actually happen suddenly at all; it takes time and work and courage, but it is worth the wait and trusting.

When we are finally released, we must remember to not just swim away and forget our champions. Instead, like the grateful whale, we need to hang around for a while and gently nudge our heroes, offering our thanks and gratitude for their brave and unselfish work on our behalf.

There are lots of "heroes" like those who saved the whale: counselors, authors, speakers, funeral directors, friends, family members, co-workers, medical professionals, clergy, and even (sometimes especially) publications like *Grief Digest* magazine. With time, patience and trust, eventually we can swim free in the ocean of life and even give back some of the love and effort that was lavished on us.

--Andrea Gambill, Fishers, Indiana, Vol. 4, Issue 4 of *Grief Digest*.
andrea.gambill@insightbb.com

A person's most useful asset is
not the head full of knowledge,
but a heart full of love,
an ear ready to listen,
and a hand willing to help.

~author unknown



Let warm memories

Be as close to you

As the warmth of summer

The child who owns this summer is
not here,
not here to know the wealthy summer
wind,
not here to share the glowing and the
song.
The child who owns this summer did
not live,
not live to touch the richness of this
day,
this day in summer, when you are
alone.
Cry to the summer wind
Cry, and behold the child
You remember.
--Sascha Wagner

In My Pocket

I have memories in my pocket.
They rattle just like change.
My memories of you are treasures
I carry wherever I go.
They are stored in bits and pieces,
parts of a beautiful whole.
They give me comfort
when I think I am alone.
Yes, I have memories in my pocket,
like so much other stuff I keep
there.
But of all the treasure I have,
it's the memories of you
that are the most precious.

--Martin Baer, TCF North Shore-Boston

Accept me as I am
grieving, pained.
empty, lonely

Just love me
and allow me to feel
what I must feel.

One day I will begin to heal--
I know not when.
Don't be afraid of me—
It is still me.

Struggling to find
myself—outside
of this pain. Please
just be my friend.

--Marilyn Henderson,
TCF Pacific Northwest

The Promise

Your birth brought me starshine,
the moon and the sun;
my wishes, dreams gathered
'round my little one.

My life became sacred,
full of promise and light,
all wrapped in the girl child
bringing love at first sight.

The years of your living,
filled with laughter and tears
excitement, adventure,
some boredom, some fears,

but ended too quickly,
ahead of its time.
The loss so horrendous
such heartbreak was mine.

But from the beginning,
one thought rose so clear;
never would your death erase
the years you were here.

I would not be defeated
or diminished by your death;
I would hang on, learn to conquer,
if it took my every breath.

For if your death destroyed my life,
made both our lives a waste,
it would deny your life's meaning
and all the love you gave.

I vowed that years of sadness
would change, with work and grace,
to years of happiness, even joy,
in which you'd have a place.

Memories of you, like shining stars
in the patterns of my soul,
are beacons flashing light and love,
and with them I am whole.

In your honor, I live my life,
now living it for two.
Through all my life, you too will live,
You lived...you live...you do.

--Genesse Boudrea Gentry,
Stars in the Deepest Night: After the
Death of a Child

The Gift of Someone Who Listens

Those of us who have traveled a while
Along this path called grief
Need to stop and remember that mile—
The first mile of no relief.

It wasn't the person with answers
Who told us of ways to deal
It wasn't the one who talked and talked
That helped us start to heal.

Think of the friends who quietly sat
And held our hands in theirs.
The ones who let us talk and talk
And hugged away our tears.

We need to always remember
That more than the words we speak,
It's the gift of someone who listens
That most of us desperately seek.

--Nancy Myerholts,
Waterville/Toledo TCF

The Miracle of You

Who could have known the exquisite
difference
Your brief life would make upon mine?
Who could have known a tiny baby would
Show me the beauty of a sunrise,
Or the wonder of a rainbow,
or the pain of a tear?

Who would have known that an innocent
little child?
Would take away my fear of death
and point me in the direction of
Heaven?

Who could have known that you
would succeed where so many others
have failed?

--Dana Gensler, TCF, South Center KY

I Still Love

She brought me red roses tonight, the ones
she knew I loved. I thanked her silently and
watched as she sat against the nearest tree.
She looked past me up toward the twilight
sky. Her mouth was slightly smiling. Yet she
had tears in her eyes. Her one hand tucked
her auburn hair behind her ear and her other
hand was twirling the grass between her
fingers. She shivered a little and I wished I
had my jacket to give her, a hand to comfort
her. I wanted to tell her I loved her again,
but it was as futile as trying to make roses
grow in the dark. I wanted to kiss away the
tears that were now streaming down her
upturned face. I wanted things like before,
when the world could make her laugh. She
held one more rose, the most beautiful one,
the one that had bloomed in her hand. She
walked through the vacant space between
her and me. I smiled in wonder as she tried
to wipe away her tears. With a shaking hand
she let down the final rose upon my grave
and made her way toward the setting sun.
---Alysa Mayer in memory of Keith

August Days

By Lora Krum

The back to school shopping trips would have already happened. New clothes, new shoes, new gear to be ready for a new year of school. Discussion of "getting back on schedule" would have continued...although nobody would have really started going to bed any earlier, or waking any earlier the next morning. After all, these would be considered "the final days of summer," and must be embraced and cherished for all that they were worth.

There would still be late nights of swimming, pizza and ice cream on the patio, and carefree conversations full of laughter and love.

And then, that Sunday would come. That day right before the first day of school, when one young man would be packing up the car and heading back to a sophomore year of collegiate studies, while another would be putting drum sticks, lunch and a notebook in his backpack, and walking across the field into his junior year of high school.

As much as we all would have thought, talked about and prepared for that first day, we would have done all that we could to hold on to each moment of that 'last day of summer.' Most likely, it would have begun with all four of us heading to church, followed by one of our regular breakfast spots. There might have been a mix of excitement, melancholy, nervousness and of course loving thoughts, as we would discuss checklists and plans. The old "what are we gonna do today?" question might still come up, and just maybe both of these young men would still truly appreciate spending the day with their folks. There might have been a walk at the lake, some miniature golfing, and maybe a quick run in to the store to pick up any last minute items that they needed.

Then, the sun would begin to set, and the reality of summer time coming to an end would be forced upon us. I would watch my two young men gather their things and independently go about their rituals. I would probably stand back and think about the transitions through the years...from choosing their clothes, setting everything out, and getting

everything ready for those two energetic little boys...to the days when they "finally learned" how to do more for themselves. There would be a lump in my throat as I recalled my tears on their first days of kindergarten, and their first days of middle school. I'd have to hold back my tears as I would silently ask, "where have all of those special years gone?" and "oh, how I wish that we could hold on to this time forever..."

As they would have stalled, and gotten distracted in a few other things, they probably would have lingered downstairs for just a little longer than they should have, they might once again talk about the new year that was about to start. And then I would have smiled, and told them to get a good night's sleep. As they always had, I would imagine they would still both come over and give me a good night hug, and I would have wrapped my arms around the two boys and given them both a kiss on their cleanly shaven cheeks. Again, I'd think..."oh my, how much they've grown and changed over these fast years." I would tell them I love them, and remind them to pray, and watch them head up the stairs, as I would remember the days of sitting on their beds and saying prayers with them before turning off their lights and pulling the door halfway shut, so they could see the hallway light shining through.

All of those moments would have been special and emotional for any mom, as she learns to adjust to the changes throughout life and the changes she sees as her children grow up in front of her. The thought that these changes don't take place make this time of year even harder to get through. Instead of that special day full of "one last time" activities, and last minute efforts to make sure everything is ready for the new school year, we will walk aimlessly through the day, trying to be happy for all of the families who are cherishing their last hours of summer together. Instead of quickly baking a batch of brownies to be ready and on the kitchen table when they'd get home from their first day, the oven will remain cold and the counters are bare. No backpacks. No lunch bags. I will look at the kitchen table and my heart will ache, as I know that there's no breakfast that needs to be prepared in the morning...and there will be no need to remind everyone to watch

the clock, and be sure to be ready to leave on time.

I will hear others complaining of how tiring and frustrating all of these activities will be for them...and I will remember that I never thought of any of them as bothersome. How I never took any special moment that we all shared together for granted. How I would drop those two boys off at school and watch them walk in the doors of school. How I would drive away hoping they knew how much they meant to me...and how I couldn't wait to see them once the day was over. I will try to feel the gratitude for all of the special moments and years, fun and hard work, laughter and homework tears, that we shared together...and I will allow my tears to flow, as I whisper to my boys that I love them, and how I wish they were here.



Beach Havens

As the tide of grief goes down,
New beaches are revealed.
Their sand, it's true, is wet,
And barnacles protrude.
But wear your rubber shoes
(hot pink would be preferred).
Step dainty on the shore:
A storm thrown log will give you rest.
Now sit and sun yourself,
And dream of those you love.

--Cathy Sosnowsky, TCF

North Shore, North Vancouver BC



I am a father who lost his only child to a drunk driver. Following are a few thoughts this Dad has for his beautiful son. I am sure that some of this makes sense to bereaved parents. I will continue to seek a meaning for all that has happened in my life. I really felt singled out, but I know that what happens to people just happens. We are not being punished for something we have done.

The Last Cry

When you were taken, it became so dark. I could not believe it happened to us. I loved watching you grow, and you never knew why I was watching you. It was a father's love. There is no force greater in my soul. I tried to protect you from harm as best I could, but I could not protect you from another. It was not in your hands or mine.

As I live each day, I can't understand how life could have allowed us to be separated. If there is a God in the air, I wish to breathe fully. I think about you often—not daily, but hourly, sometimes by minutes or seconds. Sometimes I cry, missing your presence. I love your wit, your smile, and most of all, being your Dad.

I told you so many times to be careful and you were. But on that November night your actions were directed by others, and the outcome has caused so much sadness and pain. I wish I could just change one second of your life, and that is all it would take to save this LAST CRY.

I am not saying as I write this letter and cry that this will be the last cry. When my time comes, you will have gotten the LAST CRY. I will always save it for you. Someone said that tears flush out the toxins and poisons from the body, so I should live a long time. Rest assured when the last hour comes, you will have THE LAST CRY.

I love you so much, Dad

--By Mark Warren Sr., in memory of his son, Mark Jr. (5/1/85-11/2/08).

When It Is Dark Enough, You Can See the Stars

Often it is easiest to see the stars in the long, cold nights of winter. People who have come through any kind of life-threatening event—a crash, a tornado, a severe illness, the loss of a loved one—speak of how it has changed their perspective, how it's easier to see what's important.

Several years after our daughter died, we experienced a burglary. All of our wedding silver was stolen, as well as antique pieces that had been handed down through many generations. Of course we were upset. But right away the words came to me: "It's only things." I have no way of knowing whether or not I'd have been this calm if the theft occurred before her death, but I suspect not.

The stars are not only clearer, but more beautiful. Ancient navigators found their way through the seas by looking at the stars. So maybe the experience of loss not only helps clarify what is important to us, but also helps us know where we are and the direction in which we want to go.

--Charles Beard

From Sascha Wagner:

Summer Soon...

Sunlight dancing on the branches
Of the birch tree at my door.
Meadow stretching smug and lazy,
Darker, greener than before.

Wind as warm as hugging children,
Clouds so round and very close--
And on one small grave their trembles
Lovingly an early rose.

Summer wind

*The one who owns this summer is not here,
not here to know the tender summer wind,
not here to share the glowing and the song.
The one who owns this summer did not live
to touch the richness of this day,
this day in summer when you are alone.*

*Weep to the summer wind,
weep and love again
the one you remember.*

August

This summer runs to harvest—Do you ask
How could a harvest be without my child?

Friend, someday soon
the harvest in your life
will bring you home and wealth,
from love remembered.



Dandelions and Grass

Dandelions and grass
Clasped in a chubby hand,
Starry eyed, so pleased with himself,
Never a bouquet so grand;
Slightly wilted, with drooping leaves,
Received as the rarest of blooms.
In my best vase on a cloth of lace
They proudly graced my rooms.

In the years to come, that same hand Wrote a lovely poem,
Built a model airplane
And played the saxophone,
But ever in this mother's heart
In all the years that passed,
The loveliest thing that David gave
Was dandelions and grass.

--Joy C. Worland

Sometimes

Sometimes
Memories are like rain showers
Sparkling down upon you
Catching you unaware
And then they are gone
Leaving you warm and refreshed

Sometimes
Memories are like thunderstorms
Beating down upon you
Relentless in their downpour
Leaving you tired and bruised

Sometimes
Memories are like shadows
Sneaking up behind you
Following you around
Then they disappear
Leaving you sad and confused

Sometimes
Memories are like comforters
Surrounding you with warmth
Luxuriously abundant
And sometimes they stay
Wrapping you in contentment

-- Marcia Updyke

Another Death Anniversary

It has been three years since my son died. On the anniversary of his death, I went through the morning saying very little. In the afternoon I left work and went for a drive. I drove past the park we used to love for those special talks and special events. I drove past the high school he attended. I drove around the neighborhood thinking of him peddling his heavy duty bike as he delivered his papers seven days a week. I remembered the good times and some of the "teaching moments". I drove past the first house that he bought and remembered how proud he was of his purchase and all the work he did making that house a home for his child and wife.

As I drove, I felt the deep burning in my eyes of tears so long repressed. Has it really been three years since he left us? I remembered the day he died, the days that followed his death and months of withdrawal after his memorial service. I remembered all the firsts...the first Christmas, the first Easter, the first Mother's Day, the first birthday, the first Thanksgiving and the first anniversary of his death. I remembered the agony, the heartache,

the gut churning shock of losing my child to death. How did I survive this? I wondered why I am still here.

How can any mother whose only child has died begin to get a grip on sanity? Have I gotten a grip on sanity? How could I accept losing my son's daughters to the long-term, seething hatred of my husband and me by my former daughter-in-law? How did I endure the protracted pain of the wrongful death suit she filed against my husband and me in the accidental death of my child? What did I say in all those depositions? Who were those lawyers? Were they thinking of my child or just the money they would receive? How can I help my child's son as he moves forward into adulthood? How do I take the endless days of longing for my child's voice, his hug, his special "I love you, mom"? How can I stand hearing other parents talk about taking flowers to their children's grave or putting candles next to their child's urn, when I don't even know what my former daughter-in-law did with my son's cremated remains?

The answer is not simple, yet it is not complex, either. The answer is in honoring my child in a way that exemplifies his life – gently, persistently and without reservation. The twisting road to this discovery has been made much smoother with the help of my Compassionate Friends group. I listen. They talk. They listen. I talk. The dialogue has grown to be part of who I am now. The conversations help me to chart my way on this stormy sea that is now my life.

Without these gentle, understanding parents, I probably would have lost my mind. But they are there for me, month after month. They are there daily if I need them. They help me, and I help them. Each of us does our best in the hope of giving and gaining peace and solace.

I finished the anniversary day by purchasing a small wind chime. I took it to the little bench and marker that are surrounded by a small garden which our Compassionate Friends group maintains in memory of our beautiful children. When I hung it on the branch of a bush, I listened as the chimes sang their beautiful song.....a song for my child. Briefly I thought that someone might take it. But then I thought, I don't care. This is for today. This is my way of

reaching out to my son today.... on the third anniversary of his death. If it's gone next week, I will be sorry, but it won't matter. I have honored my son on this sad day. The gentle song of these chimes will float upwards and reach him today. That is what matters. It is in this little garden that I visit my son today. This is where a little bit of peace touches my soul. Once again, I thank my Compassionate Friends for providing an answer.

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

Beach Havens

As the tide of grief goes down,
New beaches are revealed.
Their sand, it's true, is wet,
And barnacles protrude.
But wear your rubber shoes
(hot pink would be preferred).
Step dainty on the shore:
A storm-thrown log will give you rest.
Now sit and sun yourself,
And dream of those you love.

--Cathy Sosnowsky, TCF
North Shore, North Vancouver BC

For Remembrance dates please visit our website at www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org
Find us on Facebook at <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, P.O. Box 2204, Independence, MO 64055 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**.

TCF asks for donations in memory of our children who have died. Our activities support the grief work of many families. We also work to educate members of our community about the grief process & how they can support bereaved parents.

Please help us help others. Make a LOVE GIFT today. Tax deductible Love Gifts may be sent to: TCF, P.O. Box 2204, Independence, MO 64055