



# The Compassionate Friends

## Eastern Jackson County Chapter

### Supporting Family After a Child Dies

March-April 2017

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### Dr. Seuss Poem

by Mark & Debbie Rambis

Grief of a child is a whoa,  
No one should ever have bestowed.  
It's no laughing matter  
As there is nothing sadder!

Your life's upside down.  
Seems you are crazy bound.  
You begin to have rushes,  
Oh those heart beat gushes!

You try but can't sleep  
Even counting those sheep.  
You toss and you turn  
Beginning to sleep yearn.

Or sleeping all the time?  
This does put you in a bind.  
You get dressed and are done.  
But you ask, "Who is this I've become!"

To the fridge you do run  
Always eating quite a sum  
You have eaten so well  
That you begin to "swell"!

Now the Doctor says, "Diet!  
And pretend to row a kayak!"  
And take these two pills,  
As they'll make you not ill.

You take this new script  
It makes you feel adrift.  
You walk with a hop,  
But this world must stop!

Your friends express glee!  
You flail, "It's not really me!"  
But they want the old you  
You put on "the mask" and play too.

But when the mask falls off in the end  
You'll find "The Compassionate Friends"  
Who show you they care  
For you without airs.

### When Does Grief End?

Grief hits us like a ton of bricks,  
flattens us like a steamroller,  
hurls us into the depths of despair.  
We know in a flash when grief hits,  
but when does it end?  
Like the month of March,  
grief rushes in like a lion  
and tiptoes out like a lamb.  
Sometimes we don't know when grief  
leaves,  
because we won't let go of the lion's tail.  
Why do we hold on so long?  
Grief offers us safety, protection from the  
world.

We don't want to let go because we  
secretly fear  
that we'll forget our loved ones,  
and we don't want to forget—ever.  
We don't want to let go  
because we fear the future  
and having to face life without our loved  
ones.

We don't want to let go  
because we make the mistake of  
measuring our grief with the depth of our  
love  
when neither has anything to do with the  
other.

How do we know when grief has run its  
course?

How do we know when we've grieved  
enough?  
Cried enough? "Died" enough?  
How do we know when it's time to let go  
of the tail?

We know when we feel joy again, in  
something  
or someone. Joy in living. Joy in life.  
We know when we wake up in the morning  
and our first thought is of something other  
than our loss.

We know when we look ahead with a smile  
and back with fond memories,  
and when we no longer dread the nights.  
We know when our life starts filling up  
with new interests and people  
and we start reaching for the stars.  
Grief ends when we let go of the tail.

--Margaret Brownley  
Bereavement Publishing, Inc.

### A Beginning

One day you wake up and realize  
that you must have survived it because  
you are still here, alive and breathing.  
But you don't remember the infinitely  
small steps and decisions you took to get  
there. Your only awareness is that you  
have shed miles of tears on what seems  
to be an endless road of sorrow.

One day—one glorious day—you  
wake up and feel your skin tingle again,  
and you forget just for an instant that  
your heart is broken...and it is a  
beginning.

--Susan Borrowman  
TCF, Kingston, Ontario

### I Am Spring

I am the beginning.  
I am budding promise.  
I spill cleansing tears of life from  
cloudy vessels  
creating muddy puddles  
where single cell creatures abide  
and splashing children play.  
I am new green growth.  
I softly flow from winter's barren  
hand.  
On gentle breeze I fly—embracing  
sorrow.  
With compassion, we feather nests  
where winged voices sing winter-  
spring duets.  
As frozen ice transforms to playful  
stream  
I whisper truth—life is change.  
I am spring.  
I bless long, dark wintry days.  
I crown mankind's pain  
with starry skies in deepest night,  
lighting solitary paths from sorrow to  
joy  
as the wheel of life turns round and  
round.

--by Carol Clum, in memory of her  
son Jason and her granddaughter  
Hannah

## Loss

I am here among friends,  
smiling at their humor  
and making plans for tomorrow.  
But there is another person,  
lying curled in the corner,  
crying out in unbelievable pain.  
This, too, is me.

I am doing my household chores,  
and routine is familiar and satisfying,  
a gesture toward a need for living.  
But there is another person,  
lying in bed,  
willing her mind a blank,  
not wanting to think or be.  
This, too, is me.

I look at a lovely spring day,  
a view of a world of growth and change,  
~~a world only God could make.~~

But that other person stares through  
tears  
with unseeing eyes,  
knowing there is no God.  
That, too, is me.

I am surrounded by my family,  
a gathering of love and joy  
and tenderness,  
of cherished moments and warm hugs.  
But another person is there,  
whose arms and heart ache  
for one she can never hold and comfort.  
That, too, is me.

Very slowly, I am learning  
there is room for joy and fun  
and cherished moments with friends.  
In this hurry up world,  
with no space or patience  
for grieving,  
there may always be two of me,  
and I'm doing the best I can for both.  
That, too, is me.

--Beth Lorber, Gassville, AR

## March of the Seasons

On March 20 winter is over and  
spring is here. Nature continues its never  
ending cycle: Death and Rebirth,  
Growth and Harvest. For many, there is  
reassurance in this never failing, familiar  
march of the seasons.

But we know, we especially know,  
that the cycle of the seasons will never  
be the same for some of us. In nature  
there is balance. The death and  
dormancy of winter are always replaced  
by the rebirth & awakening of spring.  
What is lost one year is replaced the  
next. What is harvested is replanted. But  
for some of us, what we have lost can

never be replaced. No gain can ever  
compensate us for the loss of a child.

I know, I know. Every other article,  
every other book, every other poem will  
cheerfully announce a new day, a visit  
from beyond, a rejoicing in heaven,  
"spiritual gifts," etc., etc. and so forth. I  
know of no "spiritual gift" worth my  
son's death.

When my son died, a friend, a very  
good and dear friend who had a tragedy  
of his own, said to me, "This will make  
you a more compassionate person."

"I would rather be the meanest man  
on Earth and have my son back," I  
snapped. But I was not given that  
choice.

When I was a small child, my  
parents would say to me, perhaps in  
order to profess their love and make me  
feel secure, "Steve, we would gladly  
give our lives for you." This did not  
make me happy. In fact, it made me feel  
extremely fearful, anxious and guilty. I  
could not say the same thing! What was  
wrong with me? What a selfish and bad  
little boy I must be! I could not, for the  
life of me, imagine myself dying for any  
reason, not even to save my parents'  
lives! I never breathed a word of this to  
anyone. It was my dirty little secret. I  
buried the thought deep, "I am an  
unworthy son."

My son was depressed before he  
committed suicide. What a stupid  
statement. He had to be depressed. He  
was tall, talented, handsome, & smart.  
He had everything to live for, but he  
must have thought otherwise. He must  
have thought we, his parents, would be  
better off without him. If he knew how  
much pain he has caused his parents and  
his sister, I know he would not have  
killed himself.

In the aftermath of David's death, I  
realized many things. I realized that  
without being fully aware, I was  
bargaining with God, "Take me. Take  
my life and restore David to life &  
health." I did not verbalize it, but I was  
contemplating my own death and  
actually felt I could make a "deal."

Then I had another realization. This  
was the other side of my parent's  
statement. I, the parent, was willing to  
die for my child. It is normal for a parent  
to feel this way about a child. It is not  
normal for a child to feel this way about  
his parents. A revelation that lets me off  
the hook. After fifty years, a "spiritual  
gift."

My daughter says she owes her  
(spiritual) life to her brother David. He  
taught her "life is precious." She  
propelled herself through school,  
overcoming great odds, "for him." More  
spiritual gifts.

I would like to say it was all worth it,  
but I can't. I have been in TCF for more  
than five years, and I have never met a  
parent who would not trade all of the  
"gifts" back for even one day of their  
child's life. I have not met anyone who  
would not trade his or her own life for  
the return of their child's life. Many of  
us have tried (consciously or  
unconsciously) that same bargain with  
God. But we don't have that choice. We  
can't make that bargain.

So what do we do now? We don't  
throw away the gifts out of spite. I am  
thankful my daughter has found herself.  
I am thankful if I am able to help  
another person. Choosing to throw away  
the gifts will not bring our children  
back. Choosing to help others in David's  
name brings some dignity and meaning  
to his death. Throwing away the gifts  
would make his death meaningless. No  
parent wants his child to die in vain.  
Maybe I can give his death meaning,  
posthumously, by accepting the spiritual  
gifts.

--Steve Leibowitz, TCF  
of Northern Virginia

# I Hurt.

I don't even know where exactly I hurt—  
it's just a dull dry ache of the soul.

*If she had to leave  
I'm glad she left  
in Spring --  
When skies are warm  
Flowers bloom and  
Birds begin to sing  
Their sweet song heralding  
Beginnings.*

--Jeannine McKee

## Planting Hope

I knelt beside the Japanese maple and grasped a slender, brittle branch. It felt dry in my hand. I twisted it gently, and it snapped. I tested another, larger branch. It too broke off with a sharp crack. I hung my head. Only a few months old, and the tree was already dead. All around it plants were thriving. Delicate leaved azaleas. Hydrangeas with their mop like blooms. But the Japanese maple was supposed to be the centerpiece of this backyard garden. A memorial to my son Danny, who was killed a few months earlier in a robbery. I had nurtured the sapling so carefully. *Is this your last blow, God? I asked. Am I going to lose anything else? Are you even listening?*

I stood and surveyed the rest of the garden. I had planted it myself in the weeks after Danny's death. Literally carved it out of our back lawn. Most everything else had taken during the hot, humid Georgia summer. Everything but this maple, which sprouted from the soil just a few feet from a bench at the garden's heart. I had done all I could to keep it going. Watered it carefully. Added fertilizer. Put mulch around the base. Nothing worked. It's like Danny's life, I thought bitterly. Nothing we did worked there, either. Maybe I just need to accept that what's gone is gone—and that's it.

Danny had been a wonderful child—bright, good grades, well behaved. Then, in high school, he struggled to fit in—until he found the wrong crowd. He began hanging out with kids who did drugs. He tried marijuana, then moved on to LSD and, later, cocaine. Before we quite knew what had hit us, he was addicted.

We battled those drugs for eight long years, starting when Danny was just 15. We tried counselors, hospitals, tough love, kicking him out, moving him back in. And prayer. Lots of prayer. I prayed every day that Danny would find healing. That we all would. That somehow he, with our help, could kick this terrible addiction. But those prayers never seemed to get answered.

The day Danny was murdered, he was hanging out in a motel room. A few fellow drug users had come to the room to do some cocaine with him. Thinking that he had some money, they decided to hit him over the head and rob him. But they hit him too hard and he died. Police caught the killers a short time later.

The afternoon two plainclothes officers showed up at our door, I was sitting at my desk, getting started on our taxes. It was April, when the sun shines and the air is fresh in Atlanta. Just the day before, my wife, Sharon, and I had gone to a nursery to buy spring plants—including a 15-dollar Japanese maple sapling, all of 18 inches high. The officers walked into the living room, asked if Sharon could come downstairs and told us in matter-of-fact voices what had happened. Numb, I went to find our daughter, Laura, who was living at home then while attending Emory University. Then came the phone calls to our families.

The following weeks were chaotic with the funeral arrangements to be made, calls from the police about the murder case, friends and family visiting. Sharon and I were overwhelmed. Every task reminded me of the years of ache and helplessness. *God, I asked, is this how you answer prayer? Have I been praying into a void?*

One day I wandered out into the garage, where I had been putting all of the condolence gifts. There, scattered on the floor, was yet another chore: bunches of plants, sent with cards in pretty pots. They were thoughtful, but even contemplating disposing of them depressed me. I walked back inside to the family room, which looks onto our backyard. It was a clear day, and the lawn shone green in the sunshine. I stared at it for a while, until a thought began forming: *What if, instead of throwing those plants away, I put them in the ground?* I like gardening, and I could picture a neatly bordered oval alive with blooms and deep green leaves. Maybe a path and a bench. A memory garden. A place to remember. But also a place we might find peace. Peace we hadn't felt in eight long years.

That evening, I discussed my gardening idea with Laura and Sharon. "That's a great idea, Dad," said Laura. "I think it will help you too." Sharon, who had grown withdrawn since Danny's death, said only, "I guess. But it seems like a lot of work. If it were up to me, I'd just throw them away."

But I needed that garden. The very next day I walked out to the backyard with a shovel and a 20-pound post hole digger. Over the next week—time off I had after the funeral—I dug up a 20-foot by 30-foot section of lawn, setting aside any rocks I found to use as a border.

Sweating in the warm sun, I chiseled the ground and prepared it for planting.

After agonizing over the right balance of sun and shade, I took the plants out of their pots, spread soil and fertilizer and began putting roots into the ground. Those first days hacking into Georgia's hard clay dirt, I found myself cursing and railing with nearly every swing of the shovel. I cursed the drugs, the murderers. And I called out to Danny and God. *Why? Pound. Why? Pound. Why?*

As the garden progressed, though, my anger started to subside. I went back to my job at work, and began doing most of the planting in the evenings. Working by twilight, I arranged azaleas into eye catching patterns of white, coral and red. I grouped the hydrangeas to set off the other plants. I bought a bench and situated it beneath a canopy of dogwood branches. The stones I had dug up earlier worked perfectly as a border, and I used others to make a path from an arched trellis to the bench. Sometimes, bent to the ground, my hands in the soil, I looked back and saw Sharon watching me from the kitchen window. *Maybe when I'm done we can sit on this bench together and enjoy these flowers, I thought.*

When the last azalea had been placed in the ground and the last stone laid, I stood back and examined my handiwork. It looked pretty good. But it still lacked one thing. A focal point. I looked around and then saw the Japanese maple sapling, still sitting in its pot. *Perfect!* I thought. I'll plant it next to the bench. We had bought the little tree the day before Danny died. It would be like a part of him were still alive, still with us.

Now, five months later, holding the maple's dead branches in my hand, that earlier glimmer of hope seemed mocking. Yes, just like Danny. Another hope shattered, I thought. Twisting the branches in my fingers... I knew what I should do with the tree. Dig it up and throw it away. After all, hadn't counselors sometimes advised us to give up on Danny? Kick him out and dust off our hands? We hadn't—and what had our persistence accomplished?

Still, looking at that small maple, I thought about everything that it signified, and felt something stir inside me—

(*Planting Hope, cont.*) a flicker of determination, a tiny spark of hope. I wouldn't quit—not yet.

I'll give it one last chance, I decided. So I dug the maple out of its spot by the bench and dragged it to a walled ledge that got morning sunlight. I scooped out a new hole, put the tree in, shoveled dirt on top, and went inside the house.

The following spring the azaleas bloomed again. Sharon, who had begun taking walks in the garden, occasionally hurried into the house to tell me about the appearance of a new, particularly beautiful flower. And in those moments I could see her beginning to heal.

One day I was standing in the family room surveying the yard myself. Everything was bright with new spring growth. I glanced toward the maple, about 50 feet away, and saw a patch of red in it. *Is there a cardinal in that tree?* I wondered. I grabbed a pair of binoculars and looked. The red patch wasn't moving. What on earth could it be? I set down the binoculars and went outside. I walked around the garden, past the trellis, which was laced with Carolina jasmine, and stood before the maple. A small batch of red leaves was growing from a branch. They shivered in the afternoon breeze. I reached out and touched one. It was soft and delicate. *Impossible*, I thought. *This tree was dead. But these leaves are alive.*

I stood, uncertain whether I should even tell Sharon. It didn't seem quite real—the maple, come back to life. And yet, looking around that vibrant, peaceful garden, I knew it was true. As true as an answer to prayer. I smiled. An image came to mind, an image of Danny, that filled me with peace and reassurance. I stood by the maple a moment longer. Then I went inside to tell Sharon.

--Chuck West, Lilburn, Georgia,  
from *Guideposts on-line*.

*These days are the  
Winter of the soul*

*But Spring comes and brings  
new life and beauty,*

*Because of the growth ...  
of roots in the dark.*

--Iris Bolton, TCF Atlanta, GA

This is the spring  
I vowed to not own as mine;  
I'd keep a closed and winter door,  
Not let April's guile  
Encompass me in its  
Sentimental way,  
Not even when lilacs bloom  
And cast their scent upon  
A warming breeze.  
I vowed to stand in kitchen door,  
Jaded senses tuned to mundane things.  
I vowed ... I vowed ...  
But oh! The heart remembers  
A little boy with Buttercups  
Melting in his hand  
One love-filled spring.

--Dee McCollum, TCF, Atlanta, GA



### **It's Spring! The Butterflies Are Coming!**

Many of us at TCF hold the butterfly with utmost regard, for it is a symbol of our child's life after death. We think of our children being born into a free and more beautiful existence after the drudgery of a caterpillar's life here on earth.

But what about us? Does the butterfly hold an even deeper meaning for bereaved parents? It seems in fact we have died also. We are never the same after the death of our child. But can we be transformed into a beautiful creature, or are we doomed to be trapped in the web of a cocoon forever? I believe it is simply a matter of choice. We can stay in the silken threads which we have spun for ourselves. It's quite safe there. Perhaps if we isolate ourselves with a really tough cocoon, no one can ever reach in far enough to hurt us again.

But if we take a chance on emerging into a new person, the light of our children's love will have a chance to shine through our newly formed wings. It won't be easy. The grief cocoon holds anger, fear, guilt, and despair. But we can work through it. In fact, there's no going around it. All butterflies must work their way through an ugly cocoon. It's spring. The butterflies are coming. Won't you join them?

--Kathie Slief, Tulsa TCF

### **14 Months: The Second Spring**

Springtime: So poignant  
You were buried in the winter, and  
That is the way the world should stay;  
I'm angry at the landscape  
and its beauty.

Springtime: My anger ebbs  
and I enjoy  
The bird song, the balmy breeze  
and flight of ducks  
I eagerly watch the feeder  
and plan the garden  
Then throw away the catalog.

Springtime: I bring you fresh flowers  
and pretend you know.  
I tell you all the news and pray that you  
are peacefully asleep.  
Why did I bother you?  
I won't cut forsythia this year.

Springtime: I lovingly hold a child  
born the day you died.  
Then fight with my husband over  
nothing.

Who am I to deny the universal ebb  
and flow?

Why wasn't it me instead of you?

--Dorothy Abrams, Westport, CT

### **The Question**

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,  
beyond forgetting.

Now love does tell us why.

--Sascha Wagner

### **Spring, Soon**

Is this our season  
more than some other time of the year?

Is it?

With winter dancing out and in,  
freezing the melted snow one more time?  
Is this the season between death and life?

Is it?

With sorrow struggling in and out,  
finding the touch of hope one more time?

--Sascha Wagner

## May I Go?

May I go? May I go Now?

Do you think the time is right?

May I say goodbye to pain filled days & endless lonely nights?

I've lived my life and done my best, an example tried to be.

So can I take the step beyond and set my spirit free?

I didn't want to go at first. I fought with all my might.

But something seems to draw me now to a warm loving light.

I want to go, I really do. It's difficult to stay.

But I will try the best I can to live just one more day

to give you time to care for me and share your love and tears.

I know you're sad and afraid, because I see your tears.

I'll not be far, I promise, and hope you'll always know

that my spirit will be close to you, wherever you may go.

Thank you for loving me. You know I love you too.

That's why it's hard to say goodbye & end this life with you.

So hold me now, just one more time, and let me hear you say,

because you care so much for me, you'll let me go today.

*--Author Unknown. Submitted by  
Dianna Tull, Bereaved Parent,  
Springfield, IL, in loving memory of her  
son Robbie McIntyre.*

## One More Task

"What were you thinking of?" she asked. Never had this question been so bizarre as it was on this cold, gray, windy day. We were back at the funeral home where our son's funeral had been held, looking at headstones for his grave.

What was I thinking of? I was thinking that this should never be MY job. It should have been his daughter's or at least his wife's, but never mine. I am his mother. I saw him come into this world; I never should have been around when he left it. And yet, here we stand on this bleak day staring at blank headstones trying to decide on "what we want." I would rather scream, "This is not what I want. I want my son back. I want him back healthy, happy and alive, and I want it now. I'm tired of missing him, aching for him, grieving for him. I'm tired of all of our hearts breaking a little more each day. I want my son back

and I want my family's lives to be 'normal' again. I want things to be how they used to be. I want all of our lives back. That's what I want!" But instead we politely reply we have no idea what we are looking for.

The woman begins to explain about the cost difference in the various types of stone, something I had never thought of before. My mind wanders back to the day when we had to pick out his casket. My husband had said, "No matter what the cost, whichever one fits Jared's personality, that's the one we'll get." We walked into a room full of caskets and looked around. Nothing fit his personality. Jared was young, beautiful, and so full of life. These caskets were for elderly people who had led full lives and were now ready for a rest. We joked that since none of the caskets had flames painted down the sides or came in the color orange, his favorite color, we would have to go with something else. So we both chose the same one, a solid shiny, black one; it would match his much loved zoot suit that he would be buried in. Now here we are, again trying to pick out something else that seems impossible to match to our vibrant, daredevil son. Again, money is not a major factor, not because we are wealthy, but because this is the last thing we will buy for our son. Also, the bank I worked at had set up a memorial fund, and we decided since it wasn't enough for a scholarship, we would use it for this. We had planned to pay for college, but instead we were buying a headstone.

After looking around at the main examples, we finally try to decide on the stone that will mark our son's grave forever. My husband chooses an oval shape, because it is different, and Jared always had a distinct style of his own. He was never ordinary and neither should this marker be ordinary. We agree, it should be left rough around the edges, because at 19 Jared was still very much rough around the edges. Again, we go with black.

I was determined we would also need a memory bench. We are both dismayed when we are told the headstone is too wide for what the cemetery allows, and they have banned any new benches being placed in the cemetery. I cannot imagine why anyone would disallow memory benches; they are specifically made for this sole purpose. How could they underestimate the need of mourners to have a place to

sit and remember their loved ones?

The discussion continues. We can get the headstone. Since Jared is buried next to his paternal grandmother, and her headstone is the smallest size made, they will allow Jared's to be a little over the limit for a single headstone. No bench, but we do give them one of his fire department's patches to design a foot stone. Both the parents' and the siblings' names will be listed. His senior picture of him standing in front of the flag will be used. We select the single vase.

Although his life was brief, it's impossible to truly mark the memory of his existence with a single stone marker. So many things need to be said, so many pictures to show his beauty. Graves are where we go to remember their lives, not their deaths. A headstone is just so minimal. They rarely tell the story of someone's death, much less their life.

We have made the necessary decisions, paid the necessary funds, and now we will wait for it to be set. One more impossible task has been done. One more thing to remind us of the permanency of our loss. One more way to try to remember our son, who died on December 29, 2004, in the line of duty as a firefighter.

*Marlene Moore, Wyandotte County TCF*



*One more winter overcome,  
one more darkness  
turned too light and promise.  
Winter is the price for Spring.  
Struggle is the price for life.  
Even in sorrow, remember  
to prepare your heart  
for celebration—  
next spring perhaps,  
or the spring after that...*

*Sascha Wagner, Wintersun*

## The Seasons of Grief

The seasons take on new meanings when a child dies. The snow of winter melts into the first breath of spring. How well I remember the first spring of my grief. I looked forward eagerly to its coming.... Surely when the long dark days of winter are past, surely spring will be better.

How surprised I was at tears springing forth with the discovery of each new crocus and every bursting bud and spring flower. Yes, spring was beautiful, but oh, so sad, that first year without my son to share it. For suddenly I realized that it was he who gave me my first crocus, bulb and all, when he was five! And he who gave me my first bedding plants each year for Mother's Day.

The Lenten season has unfolded once more, and I'm aware of other bereaved parents who withdrew to the privacy of their personal and painful world of memories with this new season for them. Ash Wednesday... Easter... Passover for my Jewish friends... these are a totally new experience in the first years of grief. The liturgical words are a thousand years old; yet tears blur the painful newfound meaning.

Take time to grieve. Take time for the memories of other Easters. Take time to mourn what might have been. Indulge yourself in the beauty of an Easter Lily. Don't be afraid if at first there seems to be more pain than comfort in the age old words and the beautiful music of Easter. And never be ashamed of your tears. One day you, too, will say, "it is finished."

To walk through grief is not easy. When the shock and numbness have gone, we are left with reality, with the reality that life includes pain and loss. Easter is a season of many feelings... a time of pain and loss. It is also a time of rebirth, & of real personal growth. So also are the Seasons of Grief.

*—Shirley Melin, TCF, Aurora, IL*

## The Battle Within

The war we fight is as horrendous to us as any war ever fought anywhere, anytime. Many people around us, however, are unaware that we continue to fight this war. The best allies we have are those who are fighting the same war and understand our continuing struggle. The wounds we suffer, especially in our worst early battles, are very deep and slow to heal; indeed, the wounds never

completely heal. The pain initially is so bad that we sometimes are nearly ready to give up the fight, as our will is nearly exhausted. As days, weeks, months and years pass, we slowly win more major battles, but the small skirmishes still come, often unpredictably.

Just as our wounds never completely heal, the battles seem to never end. In time we come to understand that these battles will be part of our lives forever, although the frequency and intensity will gradually become less. We also find that our pain is lessened when we help those new combatants who are suddenly forced into this conflict. We hope that no one else is drawn into this war, but we know that inevitably, others will suddenly and unwillingly be forced into the battles. The war we fight is a silent war... within our own psyches. Such is the war of grief we fight as parents who have suffered the death of a child.

*Dave & Marsha Wildin,  
TCF, Algona, IA*

## Rituals for Grief at the Passover Seder

For Jewish people, the annual festival of Passover recounts the Biblical Exodus from Egyptian bondage to the freedom of the Promised Land. Historically it is the time of our collective liberation from being an enslaved people, "Once we were slaves, now we are free."

Seasonally, this Feast of Springtime usually occurs in mid-April when the blossoms of trees and flowers start to bud and soon are in full bloom.... Truly the holiday incorporates both themes of freedom and renewal as Jews retell the story each year among loving family and special friends seated around the dinner table, reading and singing in harmony and happiness.

How is it possible for bereaved parents, grandparents, siblings and other relatives to feel a part of these rituals in the shadow of a child's death? How can one be festive on this festival? How may one feel free when pained from such a devastating loss? How can one recover from past burdens and be renewed for the future?

Bereaved family members can try to identify with the positive and hopeful messages of Passover by investing new meaning into the Seder prayers, symbols and traditions....

Ask, "Why is this night different

from all other nights?" and know that it is different from all those times spent together with your loved one alive....

Instead of "Next year in Jerusalem," recite with all your strength "Next year in peace and wholeness." These variations may enable people whose spirits are at the lowest point during holidays, painfully reminded by the calendar, to find some solace in participating with other Jews throughout the world in this heritage and linking them with the fellowship of the Jewish people in common history and destiny.

These festival rituals may have the effect of sensitizing other persons to the private, agonizing ordeal of bereavement. Passover may become a public opportunity to express the loss of grieving parents, grandparents and siblings among family and friends, and for them to extend empathy and support.

What a beautiful way to work through the pain and mourning of a beloved child toward freedom and renewal

*--Rabbi Ronald Kaplan, pastoral counselor and chaplain at The Healing Center, Cherry Hill, New Jersey*

*For Remembrance dates please visit our website at*

[www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org](http://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](mailto: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**