



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

March-April 2024

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New Orleans, LA

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The Courage to Move On

The first time I picked up knitting needles was on a beautiful October morning in 2002, six months after my five-year-old daughter, Grace, died from a virulent form of strep. Learning to knit wasn't just a way to distract me during the long months of grieving. It also was an attempt to redefine myself. Once Grace was born, I became the mother of a little girl. That meant I combed her fine blond hair and taught her the ABCs; that we lay together on the sofa, singing along to her favorite movie, *Oliver!* I had a vision of a future in which Grace grew up and my role changed: I would shop with her for lipstick, teach her to ride waves in the ocean and share my favorite books with her. Once, when asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, Grace said: "I want to write books like my mommy, except I'll write mine in nail polish."

When your child dies, that imagined future dies too. Unable to grasp what had happened, I could no

longer make sense of words. I could not read. I couldn't write. I needed to find something new. Yes, for distraction, for meditation, but also to put me on a path that was not all wrapped up in who I had been. I needed something without Grace's fingerprints on it.

This is the part of grief that I did not yet know. Like most of us I knew the common things: how hard each birthday and anniversary would be; how my husband, Lorne, and I might not sleep or eat very much; how we should try to talk about our pain. Grief brings an emptiness with it, like someone punched a hole in you. My arms and my lap ached from the emptiness Grace had left behind.

After the death of someone we love, we are forced to figure out who we are now. It is difficult to reach the point where you realize that moving forward doesn't mean leaving behind the person you've lost. I remember how upset I became when we had to buy a new car shortly after Grace died. A part of me wanted to keep everything exactly as it had been. I even resisted painting the living room. Each small change seemed to make our daughter disappear a little more.

Then, that same October when I learned to knit, my husband began redoing the cracked asphalt sidewalk in front of our house. Every weekend, as the leaves changed from green to gold and then began to fall, he dug and measured and planned an intricate herringbone pattern. When the sidewalk was finished, he began work on the driveway, removing the sharp gravel and replacing it with cobblestones. By the following fall, Lorne had relined our small city yard with beach stones and circular patterns of cobblestone & brick. By the garden, he laid the stones in a heart shape for Grace.

This physical labor distracted

him. It helped the long weekends to pass, and he found a new passion. Our yard, our driveway, our front walk—all of it had changed. And it was beautiful. One warm spring evening, I looked around our exquisite yard. When we moved to this house, Grace had dubbed it "our happy house." That night I smiled—remembering and believing that, even with changes, it was indeed still our happy house.

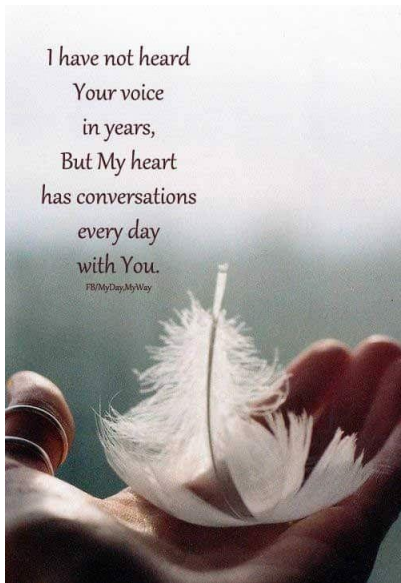
How to move on: Part of the work of grieving is to channel our emotions and energy into activities that help us redefine ourselves. Some people turn to creative pursuits. For me, it was knitting. The soft clicking of the needles helped me to relax. Some people reach out and help others by volunteering. And some, recognizing that life is precious and short, fulfill their dreams.

To help yourself heal, do what moves you. Or do what matter. Adopt a cat. Visit Spain. Ride a bike. Help the homeless. Be a mentor. And in each new activity, remember the loved one who brought you there. Then take those first tentative steps into the rest of your life.

--By Ann Hood

I
Hurt.

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



I have not heard
Your voice
in years,
But My heart
has conversations
every day
with You.
FB/MyDay,MyWay

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.
--Carol Clum, TCF website

My Spring Bouquet

The rain poured so often,
the bulbs I planted bloomed in
profusion.
I cut them all to take to your grave,
leaving my yard as empty of blooms
as your death left our life and hearts.
It was a grand bouquet of flowers,
like our lives when you were here,
son.
From the bulbs new flowers will

bloom again.
I am sad, but also hopeful...
I know the harsh lessons of nature are
true. Like the flower, I will again
bloom, too.
--Marilyn Arvizo, TCF South
Bay/LA

Putting the Winter Behind Us

Underneath the hard crust, the
energy and warmth of our earth is
guarding and providing life to all that
grows. We may personally know the
coldness and hardness of a grief so
fresh that we feel numb—a grief so
hurtful that our body feels physically
hard, our throats tight from tears
shed or unshed, our chests banded
tightly by our mourning heart.

If we are not now experiencing
this, our memories recollect so easily
those early days. Yet as we live these
days, like the earth from which we
receive our sustenance, we too, in
our searching, find places of warmth
and change and love and growth
deep within. Let our hearts and
minds dwell in these places and be
armed and renewed by them and let
us have the courage and love to share
them with our loved ones, to talk
about even that first dim shape of
new hope or of new acceptance or of
new understanding or of new love.

These are the new roots, born of
our love for our child, that are
forming and stirring within,
gathering strength so that our lives,
at the right time, can blossom once
again and be fruitful in a new and
deep way.

--Marie Andres, TCF South Maryland

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 & decisions
you took to get there. You are only
aware 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

*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*

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

*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



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

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
parents' 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*

SPRING CLEANING

We used to live in a townhouse,
one of those inventions designed to
minimize housekeeping chores,

mortgage payments and a tendency to accumulate more things than one needs to cross the Sahara in summer. We moved there because I liked the idea of no yard work, and we would be unburdened by conversations of "It's-Saturday-so-mow-the-lawn." I hate housework (it hates me too!), and we wanted a less complex life.

Smaller places do have a certain appeal...especially during the "It's Spring and that means let's-get-organized-around-here-and-throw-out-all-YOUR-stuff" mood that tends to permeate the months of March and April.

When you only have one closet, cleaning it takes a minimum of time. Opening the door starts the process, and if you are clever, you will stand with an open trash bag as you pry open the door. Always do this at 2:00 a.m. when the other nearby occupants in your townhome are asleep, or during those few quiet moments of solitude you get after announcing that Dairy Queen is having a twenty-minute-only-special, and you have (thoughtfully) placed the keys in the car.

Designed by some psychologist in an effort to help patients rid their psyches of old memories, useless information and general "clutter," spring cleaning has become an American phrase most often associated with grief. It is a painful process, this sifting and sorting of all the things that tell us (and the rest of the world) who we are or were.

There are as many ways to spring clean as there are homes and hearts and minds and spirits that need "adjusting" (a real psychological term thrown in just to remind you that I am a professional too!)

How many times have you been told "It's time to move on," or, "It's time to get back to normal," or, "You mean you haven't gotten rid of that yet?" (That can refer to a multitude of things such as his favorite pipe, her bathrobe that the dog attacked during one his "spells," or an odd assortment of baseball cards, used gum wrappers and dirty socks that were secreted under the bed, left behind for you to find and cry over.

How come everybody else knows when it is time for me to spring clean! How come everybody else knows when it is time for me to open that closet and sort through all those memories, trying to decide which ones to keep and which ones to pass on to the Salvation Army? How come everybody else knows when it is time for me to get back to living?

I am spring cleaning. I am sifting through the "stuff" that made up my loved one's life and I am learning to let go of a few things...slowly.

When we moved to a townhouse, we thought life wouldn't be so complicated. I wouldn't have to go out into the yard and remember how wonderful it was to enjoy the first spring flowers...with him. I don't want to cut the grass, because we loved playing in it, tickling our bare toes and laughing our way through spring into summer. We moved to a townhouse so we couldn't keep everything forever. It doesn't stay around anyway, so why have storage space? Why have cupboards that no longer need to hold cereal that turns the milk blue, or closets that no longer need to hold baseball shoes, bats and crumpled homework pages? Why have room for memories?

WHY? Because I can't live without them! Spring is a time for spring cleaning, for sifting and sorting and re-reading and remembering. Spring is a time for things to go and things to stay. We just have to decide which ones do what. Spring is a time for renewal, when the earth begins to defrost after a harsh and bitter winter. It doesn't matter when your loved one died; it does matter when you begin to let spring back into your life. It does matter when you open that closet and let the memories come out, along with the hurts and the hopes that you buried one day not so very long ago.

You never know what you are going to find when you start spring cleaning. You might discover treasures you had long forgotten, or the tax papers you needed, or the Easter egg no one found last year. You might find a few bits of joy lurking under the bed (we found dust

bunnies). What fun to remember how that stuff got there or who might have been hiding under the bed when you were looking for volunteers for trash patrol!

Spring cleaning is a tradition that follows the footprints across your freshly waxed floor. I wish there were still footprints to clean up, but since there aren't, I'll just have to spend a few extra moments with this box of treasures I found. No time like the present to inspect the "stuff" in search of few "bits of joy."

When we lived in a townhouse, we thought that maybe, in a few years, we could stretch out into something a bit larger (and have a maid, too!). Maybe we would just start a little patch of grass out front, plant a seed or two in a clay pot on the patio, and live with what we have. Eventually, my house got larger, and my heart has grown, too!

--Darcie D. Sims

WHEN I GO

When I go
don't learn to live without me
just learn to live with my love
in a different way.

And if you need to see me
close your eyes
or look in your shadow
when the sun shines

I'm there.

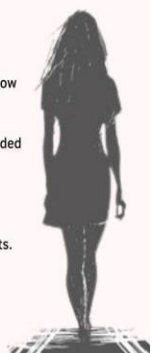
Sit with me in the quiet and you will know
that I did not leave.

There is no leaving when a soul is blended
with another.

When I go
don't learn to live without me
just learn to look for me in the moments.

I will be there.

Donna Ashworth, from 'LOSS'



A Gentle Reminder to Go on Living

Finally, I have a platform to complain, vent, accuse, and generally make my thoughts known on how wrong everything is. The only problem with that is that I find myself with little to complain about. I have a wonderful wife and two great kids. I get along with my parents and in-laws. I'm good at my job and like my neighbors....

Don't get me wrong. I could search for things to complain about. My dog won't obey me and has since trained my kids not to obey me. There is a petition circulating my neighborhood requesting that my truck be banned from the streets during daylight hours. Then, of course, there are the real things I could complain about: the war with Iraq, drought, forest fires, the economy, the presidential election campaign, and so on. *And last, but certainly not least, my infant son dying three months ago.*

To be honest, not much else has mattered since my son died. I miss him terribly, but I don't feel right complaining. I've always been told that life wasn't fair. Until my son's death, I hadn't experienced how unfair it could be. I have always been the happy-go-lucky, loud-talking, fun-loving, self-deprecating sharp wit (or is that half-wit?). I'm the jolly fat man who is quick with a joke and quicker with a beer. The happy Daddy, ready to wrestle, play trucks or Barbie. I'm a lot like Santa—only not as organized or as generous.

Or I should say, I was. What surprised me and helped my shattered heart was the generosity and compassion shown by almost everyone I knew. The support my wife and I received enabled us to hold our lives together for each other and for our other children. The kind word or open ear goes a long way when recovering from something like this. It's a long process, recovering from the death of anyone you love, but it is longer when it is a child. It's a journey that we are just beginning, and one that will never end. I know that it will get easier—because it can't get any harder.

I often go to my son's grave during my lunch hour from work. I

read him the sports page, stressing the current plight of the Avalanche, hoping for some divine intervention. During one of these sessions, I was sitting under the tree that shades his grave, complaining how unfair it was for a father and son to be separated by six feet of earth. I was most of the way through my diatribe when a bird pooped on my shoulder. I didn't look up because I wasn't sure if he was done yet, but I did scramble to my feet, cursing & threatening. As I stood there griping and wiping, I thought to myself that this was a sign. Not immediately, mind you. I mean, lightning bolts and thunderclaps are traditional signs from the afterlife. Bird poop generally doesn't have any existential significance.

However, the bird bombing was a message from my son. I can see you, rolling your eyes, but I believe. It was my son's way of telling me to get back to being myself. It's all right to mourn and grieve; in fact, it is a must. There is no timetable for grieving, but I need to wipe it off and get back to work.

I'm not so quick to complain about it anymore. Nothing can change the fact that he is gone. If I'm not going to complain about my son dying, I shouldn't be complaining about anything else. Because of my Irish blood and poet's heart, it won't surprise anyone when I raise a glass to toast my angel on occasion. But no longer will I complain about my loss—because I carry him in my heart and in my head. Besides, there are many large geese in the cemetery, and I don't need my son to send me a bigger message.

—Andrew Padden



Memories

Time can never erase
The memory of your face;
Nor the passage of the years
Stem the volume of my tears.

You are with me for always,
In my heart throughout all days;
Then in my dreams nightly
Your star shines ever so brightly.

I want your spirit to remain
Inside of me, despite the pain.
To forget you would be a curse,
because
No memories would be much worse.

You were born a part of me,
Now you live within the heart of me;
Forever precious, forever young,
My beautiful, darling little ones.

--Jacquelyn M. Comeaux, © 1999
*In loving memory of my angels,
Michelle, Jerry & Danny*

Box of Rocks

My youngest kept a box of rocks
She cherished like a treasure.
Occasionally, she'd get them out
To smile and hold with pleasure.

From the many states we lived in
And from each vacation place
She'd listen to what spoke to her
Then choose a stone to feel and trace.

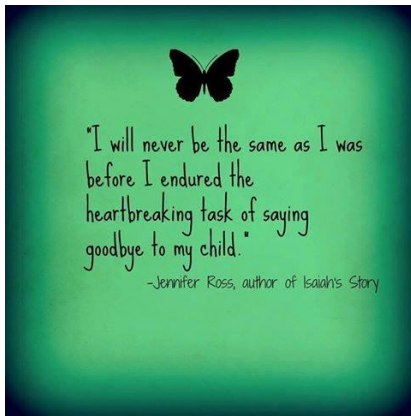
The round one is a wonder,
It's shape a perfect sphere,
One is formed just like a tooth
Whose large size has no natural peer.

Her sister gave a special one,
A fossil trapped within,
A gift she knew would please her sis,
True love expressed, soul twin.

My favorite one's made like a heart
Tan stone and white entwined.
I grasp it and remember her
Sweet smile and eyes etched in my mind.

So now I share her precious rocks
With dear ones that she loved
To remind them that she's never gone,
Just adoring from above.

By Barbara Batson
South Kansas City TCF Chapter



At first

my very name was grief.
My thoughts were grief
and everything I touched
was turned to grief.

But now

I own the light of memories.

My eyes can see you,
and my thoughts can know you
for what you really are:
more than a young life lost,
more than a radiance
gone into night.

Today you have become
a gift beyond my grief,
a treasure to my world
though you have left
my world and me behind.

--Sascha Wagner, *Wintersun*



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



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



Flowers, Trees, Plants & Things

Sheri, Sheri, how does your
garden grow?
Sunflowers, tulips and mums
Aren't we having fun?
Your garden grows full and
abundant,
The dogwood trees are in full
bloom,
The lilies are ready for Easter
to remind us of God's
resurrection.

*This world is a beautiful place,
but heaven is a much greater
place to be
With God, Sheri, angels, & a place
for me*

*Love to my daughter at Easter. --Brenda
Tomlin*

**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.*