



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

March-April 2016

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Love Never Goes Away

“Why does it hurt so much? Why is this grief so incapacitating? If only the hurt weren’t so crushing.” Sounds familiar? All of us have known hurts before, but none of our previous “ouches” can compare with the hurt we feel. Nothing can touch the pain of burying a child.

Yet most of us have discovered that the sun still comes up. We still have to function. We did not die when our child died, even though we wish we could have, so...we are stuck with this pain, this grief. What do we do with it? Surely we can’t live like THIS forever! There are no magic formulas for surviving grief. There are a few recognized patterns for grief, but even those are only guidelines. What we do know is that the emptiness will never go away. It will become tolerable and livable...some day.

TIME...the longest word in our grief. We used to measure TIME by the steps of our child ...the first word, first tooth, first date, first car...Now we don’t have that measure anymore. All we have is TIME, and it only seems to make the hurt worse. So what do we do? Give ourselves TIME...to hurt, to grieve, to cry. TIME to choke, to scream. TIME to be “crazy,” TIME to remember.

Be nice to yourself! Don’t measure your progress through grief against anyone else’s. Be your own timekeeper. Don’t push. Eventually, you will find the hours and days of grief have turned to

minutes and then moments...but don’t expect them to go away. You will always hurt. You don’t get over grief...it only becomes tolerable and livable.

Change your focus a bit. Instead of dwelling on how much you lost, try thinking of how much you had. Try letting good memories come over you as easily as the awful ones do. We didn’t lose our child...HE/SHE DIED. We don’t lose the love that flowed between us...it still flows, but differently now.

Does it help to know that if we didn’t love so very much, it would not hurt so badly? Grief is the price we pay for love. And as much as it hurts, I’m very glad I loved. Don’t let death cast ugly shadows, but rather warm memories of the loving times you shared. Even though death comes, LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY

--Darcie D. Sims

TIME does not touch the firmament of stars with a simplicity of days and nights and years. The rhythm of this smallness we call earth is only a whisper among galaxies? Beyond the measured years which rise and fall beyond the calendars of human time and place, the meaning of this smallness we call life will find us somewhere in eternity.

“For You from Sascha” by Sascha Wagner

Sorrow

It hurts deep down inside.

One feels diminished, less than we have been.

Empty, bereft – forlorn and incomplete. Sorrow is a painful word, but if someone is there to share the feeling, it becomes endurable and in the scheme of things a time of being that includes great emotion and thus a time of closeness, growing and becoming someone more than we have been before.

--Shirley Holzer Jeffrey, “Louie” chapter, in *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* by Elisabeth Kubler Ross

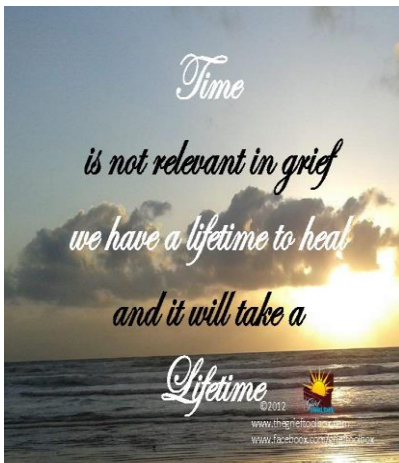
Spring is in the air and as a bereaved parent, sibling or grandparent, you may experience a “bitter-sweet” emotion. The changing of seasons after a child dies can bring with it hopes and dreams that are unfulfilled or memories of what was and should have been. Karen Cantrell, TCF Frankfort, KY



Healing...Unobserved

I used to wonder why I always felt like crying when leaving a support group. Then one night I left and it felt as though a great load had been lifted from my inner being. For the first time in several years my surroundings came alive. I observed the twinkling of stars and brightness of the moon. I heard the crunching of snow beneath my boots and paused to watch a rabbit darting to and fro in the twilight. Is this the beginning of healing or has it been there—slowly and desperately with great persistence—trying to emerge from beneath the greatest of sorrows and pain? Maybe tomorrow...I will make a snow angel!

--Nancy A Gleim, "From the Heart of Samantha"



Not An Easy Word

Hope is not an easy word for grievers—
but we, more than most others, need to understand what hope can mean for us.
Hope means finding the strength to live with grief.
Hope means nurturing with grace the joy of remembrance.
Hope means embracing with tenderness and pride our own life and the gifts left to us
by those we have lost.

--Sascha Wagner

The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.

--Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Waiting for Answer

Years ago, I left my first meeting of TCF and drove home in tears. My son Max had died a few short weeks before, and I had been anxious, awaiting this evening. These people must have some answers, I thought. With paper and pen in purse, I was ready to take notes and do as they prescribed. I would do any-thing to ease the ache in my soul. But when I walked out into the spring air later that night, I felt betrayed. I hadn't heard any answers. Instead of learning how to leave my grief behind, it had been confirmed, made more real with expression. I knew I would miss Max forever.

Now I wondered if I would grieve forever. Would it always be this way—a flash of pain aligned with every memory? During the months and years that followed, I attended TCF meetings and conferences, read books, raged, kept busy, sometimes spent the day in bed. I wrote, talked about & cried about Max. Slowly, I discovered the answers I had long feared were true; yes, I will grieve forever. And yes, my memories will often provoke tears. But something had changed.

My grief was now more forgiving, my tears almost sweet with memory. Max's life took shape again as the anguish of his death began to recede. I would always

miss him. I would also always have him with me in so many ways. I wanted to carry his memory into the future: the joy, the lessons, and the inevitable pain. How could I do other-wise? As I walked to my car after that first meeting, the TCF leader caught up with me. "How can I stop this pain?" I asked. She put her arm on my shoulder. "Just do what feels right to you," she said. "Listen to your heart. And we'll be here to listen too." Sometimes the best advice is none at all.

--Mary Clark, TCF, Sugar Land-Southwest Houston

Forgive Until Forever

Grieving is a fierce and over-whelming expression of love thrust upon us by a deep and hurtful loss. Grieving is frequently such an entanglement of feelings that we often fail to recognize that ultimately, forgiveness must be an integral part of our grief and our healing. For what is love if forgiveness is silent within us?

We learn to forgive our children for dying, ourselves for not preventing it. We begin to forgive our God or the fate we see ruling our universe. We start to forgive relatives and friends for abandoning us in their own bewilderment over the onslaught of emotions they sense in our words and behavior.

I believe we must be open to the balm of forgiveness, through its expression in our lives. Whether through thought, word or deed, we find small ways to seek life once more. Deep within us, forgiveness is capable of treading the wasteland of our souls to help us feel again the love that has not died.

It is the beginning of release from the dominance of pain, not from the continual hurt of missing those we have lost, but from lacking the fullness of the love we shared with our child. That love lives with the strength inside ourselves, and yet our beings are so entrapped in a whirling vortex of anger, despair, frustration, abandonment and depression that we often feel it only lightly.

Let us all heed the quiet message heard so softly in the maelstrom of the spirit. Forgive, forgive and forgive until forever; let love enfold our anguish, helping us to grow and to give beyond this hour to a rich tomorrow.

--Don Hackett, TCF, Hingham, MA

Easter and Passover— 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 **he** was the one who gave me my first bed-ding plants for Mother's Day each year.

And now, the Lenten Season unfolds once more, and I'm aware of other bereaved parents who will withdraw to the privacy of their personal and painful world of memories with this new season for them. Ash Wednesday...Easter... Passover...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.

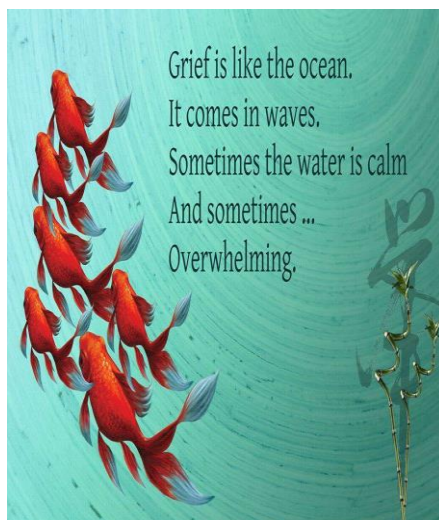
To walk through grief is not easy; when the shock and numbness have gone, we are left with reality, the reality that life includes pain and loss. Easter is a season of many feelings...a time of pain and loss. It is also a time of rebirth, and of real personal growth. So, also, are the Seasons of Grief.

Spring Holidays

Many special days soon are coming our way
Called Easter, Passover, Mother's and Father's Day
How do we react when non-bereaved people ask?
"How was your holiday?" as the weekend passed.
We nod, we smile, we say "Okay, just fine."
But you and I know it's just a good line.
No holidays are happy, for our sweet child has gone
Our family togetherness plan is

definitely all wrong.
So what do we do, how do we pay
Homage to those who celebrate that day
Our voices stay quiet, and our stories
are sad.
We just have to get through the days
that are bad.
Eventually we do come up with plans A
and B
Spending time with kind people who
really do see
We're desperately trying to give it our
best.
Our mourning style differs from all of
the rest.
As survivors we reinvent our careers
and our goals
Patching new ideas with our bodies and
souls.
We look for quiet places, safe harbor,
retreat
Sometimes we reach out, sometimes
take a back seat.
But somehow through it all Springtime
will renew
A strong sense of hope that we will get
through.
With the blooming of flowers, the
greening of trees
Our strength returns and the harsh pain
does ease.
Let out your feelings, continue to grieve
Soon you will see life's tapestry
reweave.

--Lionel & Sandy Chaiken
Co-Leaders, Potomac TCF



Putting the Winter Behind Us

[By the time you read this, we may or may not still be looking at a winter land-scape, with the earth cold, the land sharply defined.] 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 easily recollect those early days. Yet as we live these days, like the earth from which we receive our sustenance, we too find places of warmth, change, love and growth deep within. Let our hearts & minds dwell in these places and be...renewed by them. Let us have the courage to share them with our loved ones, to talk about even that first dim shape of new hope, new acceptance, new understanding or 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 Rose

Sunlight dancing in the branches
of the birch tree at my door.
Meadow stretching smug and lazy,
darker, greener than before.
Wind as calm as hugging children,
clouds so round and very close,
And on one small grave their trembles
lovingly, an early rose.

--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

Daffodils

Daffodils are heartwarmingly beautiful, spring-like, colorful. Yet they must break through the dark, dry ground to blossom and share their beauty with us. Bereaved parents are much like these daffodils. This spring, you might not be in full glory, but we promise you a future spring, in full bloom once more!

--Betty Stiegelmeier, TCF Pike's Peak, CO

“In honor of Kelley Michelle Cavin, who died on St. Patrick’s Day 1990, Carol Cavin (Kelley’s mother and our former newsletter editor) suggested we reprint the letter she wrote to Kelley which appeared in our March 2010 newsletter.”

Dear Kelley,

In earth time, you will have been gone 20 years on St. Patrick’s Day. It is still painful to think about all the things you should have been here for all the things you didn’t get to do. I would love to know what all those events—our lives—look like from your perspective. Do you suppose we’ll ever get to have that conversation?

Did you know that your favorite horse laid down in his stall and died the week after you left us? I hope you were with him.

We dedicated a tree at church in your memory on Earth Day the month after you died. It’s a big beautiful flowering crabapple now, and (as Terry McConnell said) everyone knows “That’s Kelley’s tree!” Later Jennie and Jill’s mom made a beautiful stained glass picture of a butterfly which still hangs in the window of the foyer.

The whole family came to our house on your 15th birthday to have a picnic and dedicate your tree in the back yard. It was a wonderful day; you would have loved it. Each family took home a copy of your last school portrait, and the kids (some of the adults too) picked out one of your stuffed animals to take home.

We had a big dinner at the top of Crown Center for Chris’ 21st birthday—a wonderful celebration. Chad was really impressed when we paid off the balance on Chris’ motorcycle for his birthday present.

You would have loved Chris’ apartment in Rolla, and the party we helped him have after his graduation. Then a few weeks later, on your 21st birthday, Chris toasted you with a beer and a grilled steak. I was at David Ben Gurion’s grave in the Negev Desert, and Dad was back-packing in Colorado.

I missed you so much at Chris and Shannon’s wedding. Jill and Tracy came, and Chris found out that Jill is

married to one of his old biking buddies. Dad and Bobby took possession of their house the day of the wedding. Chris and Shannon soon found a cute little 1920’s bungalow in Englewood, & I moved into a condo. I still miss the home we all shared for 26 years.

I visited you at the cemetery on December 17, 2004—the day you had been gone from this earth as long as you were with us. Were you there?

I wish you could know your niece and nephew, Quinn and Maddie. I hope to tell them lots of stories about you when they’re old enough to remember their Aunt Kelley. I could barely stand being away from them the 17 months they were in England. Now we have celebrated all their birthdays since they returned, even Chris’ 40th!

Thank you for being with me for my breast cancer surgery last March. The Illinois license plate (with “Kelley” and a bright red cardinal) in the Cancer Center parking lot made my day—heck, it made my year!

I thought of you when Patrick Swayze died last year. You so loved him in “Dirty Dancing.” I thought my heart would break when Demi Moore felt him holding her in “Ghost,” and when he said, “It’s wonderful! You take the love with you!” Oh, how I long to feel your love and hold you in my arms one more time.

There is so much more to talk about, but it will have to wait until we are finally together again. All my love, Mom

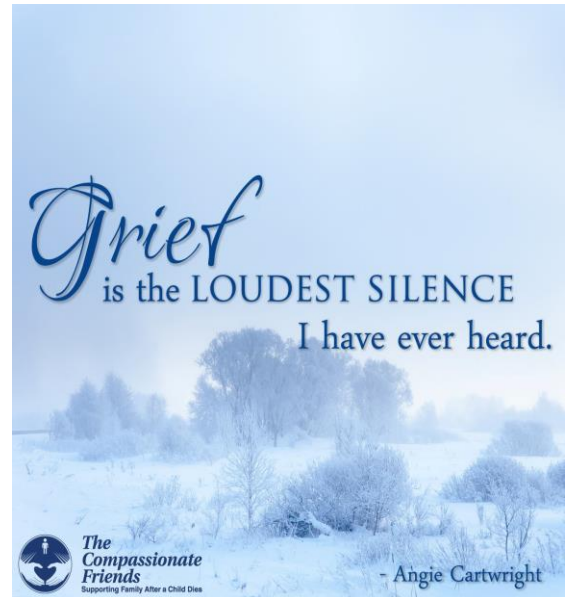
--Carol Cavin, Independence MO TCF

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



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.