



# *The Compassionate Friends*

## *Eastern Jackson County Chapter*

### **Supporting Family After a Child Dies**

May – June 2023

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## **Can We Skip This Day?**

### **Tips on Handling Mother's Day, Memorial Day and Father's Day**

Survival isn't instinctive anymore. Sometimes, after the death of our child, apathy takes over. Coupled with the celebration of motherhood or fatherhood in the absence of our child it can be a slap in the face. Here are some helpful ideas for parents enduring their first, or yet another Mother's Day and Father's Day.

#### **T.E.A.R.S.**

**T – Take care of yourself!** Go the extra mile to make yourself as happy as possible. ♥ Surround yourself with people who make you feel comfortable in your grief. ♥ Exercise is also a great outlet for grief. Sometimes, a hike alone or with your partner is a nice way to spend the day. ♥ Take a bubble bath with your favorite music playing in the background. ♥ If you have other children, dedicate half the day to a Mother's or Father's Day celebration with them and the other half alone or with your partner. ♥ Some parents will find a visit to the cemetery therapeutic. ♥ Cry, cry, cry —tears have a healing effect, and you have definitely earned these tears.

**E – Embrace the memories** [if you can] by looking at photographs, watching video tapes, sharing poetry or making a special cassette tape of songs which remind you of your child. At first it may seem overwhelming [if it's too much, keep it in mind for next year]; however, many couples say that those times of sharing bring healing to the family. It is a gentle reminder to the entire family that this child will always be your child.

**A – Acknowledge feelings of grief and doubt.** You may wonder if you

should “celebrate” without your child. It may seem pointless. Give yourself permission to have these feelings and accept them. Prepare for the likelihood that the “day” will be difficult; however, many parents say the days before the actual holiday are much worse than the day itself. If you do have feelings of joy, try not to feel guilty. The grieving process allows room to breathe in between the waves of grief.

**R – Routines can be changed!** If you typically spend Father's Day with a large family group, but this year it seems awkward or too painful without your child, excuse yourself from the routine and establish new traditions which are more accommodating to your grief. Sometimes, more intimate and personal gatherings make grieving parents feel more comfortable in sharing their honest feelings about the special event and the death of their child. Consider a gathering with other bereaved parents you may have met through a support group.

**S – Seek out ways to memorialize your child.** Some ideas: ♥ Light a candle at a specific time every year on this special day. ♥ Light luminaries in your yard. ♥ Create a collage or special album of photographs of your child. ♥ Plant a tree or flowers in your child's memory. ♥ Buy something that reminds you of your child. Having a specific theme is helpful, like angels, butterflies, Disney characters, or other themes. ♥ Reaching out to others honors the memory of your child on a special day [such as visiting shut-ins or a nursing home, donating time at an animal shelter, making a donation to TCF, a community pantry or a shelter for battered women and children].

Another suggestion for partners, family members and friends is to make a phone call, or send a note or

greeting card on the special day acknowledging the child. This is very important to parents, and it reassures them you have not forgotten—they certainly have not.

--By *Joanne Cacciatore, TCF, Phoenix, AZ, Director of AZ SIDS Alliance; © 1998.*

## **Adieu**

I imagined this spring year  
they graduated from college.  
You were all such good friends  
from early grammar school.  
I pictured there must have been  
wonderful parties with lots of potato  
salad,  
gowns to press and caps to block.  
I imagined their desire to get that  
“extra ticket” for grandma  
and one for a special friend.  
I visualized driving past their homes,  
hoping for a glimpse of  
movement  
behind their open windows.  
I tortured myself with guesstimates  
as  
to what degrees they received.  
I hoped that one would call and share  
with me their happiness and  
pride.  
I walked the narrow path today,  
sat on the cold marble bench  
near your grave and finally  
bid them all. . . Adieu.

--*Esther Rosensweig, TCF  
Manhasset Chapter, NY*

*Sometimes love is for a  
moment,  
Sometimes love is for a  
lifetime,  
Sometimes a moment is a  
lifetime.*

--*Pamela S. Adams, TCF, Winnipeg,  
Canada*



"Do not judge the bereaved mother.

She comes in many forms.

She is breathing, but she is dying.

She may look young, but inside she has become ancient.

She smiles, but her heart sobs.

She walks, she talks, she cooks, she cleans, she works,  
she IS, but she is not, all at once.

She is here, but part of her is elsewhere for eternity."

- Author unknown

## The Significance of Mother's Day

I don't think I really appreciated the significance of Mother's Day until I myself became one. My life would never be the same and the death of my only child did not alter the fact that I am still a mother. I still have that intense feeling of love for my child, a love greater than any I had known before. So, on Mother's Day, a day on which we recognize the love and pride of motherhood—this year and every year--I, too, want to be remembered as a mother.

--Ginny Smith, TCF, Charlottesville, VA

## Mother's Day Sadness

We survived this Mother's Day  
continue moving on  
We miss the children that we lost  
don't always feel too strong  
But we would never trade them in for anything at all  
The love they brought to us, their lives

are joyful to recall  
So we keep moving through our tears  
our sadness and our grief  
And know that we again will be together, just believe!

-- Jenny Donaldson, Chad's mom  
South Kansas City TCF Chapter

## A Mother's Journey

My daughter has been dead for 43 months—part of a long and torturous journey for me. As soon as I could think rationally at all, I began devouring books and articles about grief. Some were good, some were terrible, but if it had to do with the loss of a child, I read it.

I scoured newspapers and the internet for support groups and participated in several. Some were good; others were a complete waste of time. Then one evening, my husband and I attended a Compassionate Friends meeting, and as someone in our group told me later, "I had found a place to be!" It was exactly what we had been searching for. There was an immediate bond as I met parents who suffered the same pain as I.

It does not matter how young or old a child is at the time of death. A child is the most precious treasure a person can be given in this life, and the death of any one of them is the most horrible tragedy that we will ever have to face.

People ask me if I have accepted Barbara's death; of course, I have, because there is no other choice. But I celebrate her life, and I think about her every day, regardless of what I am doing. I often reflect back to those dark, somber days when she was dying of cancer, and remember how courageous she was. Taking care of her in those final months was tedious, painful

work, but it was a privilege for which I will always be grateful.

Every event in our lives is punctuated now by her illness and death, having occurred before or after she was diagnosed, before or after she died, and so on.

My pain and grief are still acute and surprisingly close to the surface. I find myself weeping at some tiny reminder, but I have made progress over time. When I picture her sweet face, I see her as she looked, ravaged by cancer. Therapists tell me that someday that will change, and I will be able to see her as she once was—a vibrant, beautiful, healthy young woman. My journey goes on.

--Barbara Beall "in memory of my daughter, Barbara"

## Memorial Day

For each grave where a soldier lies at his rest  
For each prayer that is said today out of love  
For each sigh of remembering someone who died,  
Let us also give thought to the mothers and fathers  
the brothers and sisters  
the friends and the lovers  
whom death left behind  
--Sascha Wagner

## No Vacation

There is no vacation from your absence.

Every morning I awake  
I am a bereaved parent,

Every noon I feel the hole in my heart.

Every evening my arms are empty.  
My life is busy now, but not quite full.

My heart is mended, but not quite healed.

For the rest of my life every moment will be lived without you.

There is no vacation from your absence.

--Kathy Boyette  
TCF Mississippi Gulf Coast

## The Second Year

The Second Year, you know your heart is breaking into more pieces than you can count—again, and you are reminded that your life has been changed forever.

The Second Year, you wonder where the first year went. It passed so quickly—and yet time stood still. How did you get through another day—another morning—an hour—a minute?

The Second Year, you think you have begun to see things back in their “proper” place, only to find that nothing will ever return to the way it used to be.

Long before the “date” approaches, you begin to retreat, as if hiding might allow the painful memory to pass you by. And then you realize—the Second Year is worse than the first. The shock is gone. It’s real: no phone calls, no holiday celebrations, no birthdays, nothing—ever again. She’s gone forever.

My heart grieves—my eyes search the heavens—my soul seeks peace. I miss her...I miss her.

--Jo Ann Goldberg



### Thoughts on Mother’s Day (or Father’s Day, or Memorial Day)

I saw my friend standing, staring at a picture of my son and daughter, and I joined her. Instinctively we put our arms around each other as we stood there together.

“Loving him was worth the pain of losing him, wasn’t it?” she said. It wasn’t a question. It was a statement of fact, and we both knew the answer was “yes, yes, a thousand times yes.”

My friend is childless, but not by choice. I know how hard

Mother’s Day is for me, but I can only imagine how difficult and empty it must be for her.

For me there are memories of the months I nurtured that child beneath my heart. Will I ever forget the time he actually kicked a purse off that bump I called my lap? And the times he hiccupped? Even if he had died at birth, I would still have had those memories to treasure. Then there were those wonderful toddler days when he told the world all our family secrets and amused a whole airplane full of people when he said in his loudest three-year-old voice, “Tell the maid I want a cake!”

School brought a mixed bag of memories—some good, some bad, but all a part of growing up. How we loved him as a teenager. We lost him during those years, but sometimes I’ve consoled myself with the thought that 16 would be a magical age to be forever.

“Yes, dear friend, loving him was worth all the pain of losing him, and more. Much, much more.”

--Judy Osgood, TCF, Central Oregon

## The Broken Pieces

“If I am what I do, and I don’t, then I’m not.” These words have been spinning around in my head ever since I heard someone comment on how we tend to define ourselves by what we do rather than by who we are. I’ve thought about those words incessantly, almost to the point where they became nonsensical. But they aren’t.

Until the day of my son Bryan’s death, I’m afraid I was guilty of defining myself by my roles in life: Computer marketer, husband, father...and without really being aware of it, most often in that order. I was caught up with “bringing home the bacon,” “making a name for myself” and the tunnel vision that goes with all that. My sense of self-worth was wrapped up with these things. One of my colleagues called me “Rapid Robert” because of my pace in going places ...or was it a treadmill? I was a workaholic, and only too often by the time I’d gotten around to family matters, I’d run out of steam.

Then Bryan died. The superficiality of my life smashed headlong into a brick wall. For months I felt I was sitting in the middle of a field scattered with the pieces of my life: job pieces askew here, family relationships trailing off there, dreams piled akimbo here, hopes rent asunder over there.

As I listened to my son’s friends at the two remembrances for him, it dawned on me that at 19, a young man doesn’t have a long list of credits and accomplishments. Bryan hadn’t made a name for himself. Bryan was Bryan, no more, no less. His friends loved him for who he was, not what he was.

Strange the lessons  
fathers learn from sons  
to care  
to share  
to be there...

I wrote these words blinded by pain, and I could sense what it was that brought together people from all over in a common bond of shared grief—Brian cared about them. I wondered if I were to die suddenly, but after more than 50 years of life, how would I be eulogized? “A real professional, a true marketer, a dedicated employee...?” I’d settle for two words: “He cared.”

I’ve tried to put the pieces of my life back together again, but I’ve tried to be selective. I’ve left many pieces lying in that field because they don’t fit anymore. And I’ve fashioned new pieces—each in some way inspired by the lesson of Bryan’s life.

Hemingway wrote, “Sooner or later life breaks everyone, but afterwards some are stronger at the broken places.” I’ve tried to put the pieces of my life back together selectively. I’ve fashioned new pieces. Some pieces no longer fit. As bereaved parents, we have a choice: We can fixate on the death or we can affirm life. I know which my son would have wanted for me.

--Bob Rosenberger, TCF, Burke, VA

*It’s a myth that if you had a faith, you will be ok. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith. Grief is the price we paid for love.*

--Darcie Sims

### Now Let Us Look to Butterflies

Where are all the butterflies?  
Do they wing their way  
unaccompanied toward light?  
Do they rest sometimes  
in their silent flight?  
Are they ever frightened  
in the murky depths of night?  
Or do they sleep within our hearts?

If so, let us awaken them  
with gentle voice and touch.  
Let's bid them spread their wings  
to fly transformed with joy  
and such abandon that our pain, too,  
will yield within their tender clutch.

Now let us look to butterflies  
as symbols of our deepest love.  
Death, for all its boastful claims,  
has power only over mortal clay.  
Our children's souls unbound  
by earthly frames, now soar;  
and we, enriched by steadfast love,  
ignite new lives  
from their love's flames.  
--Shirley C. Ottman

### Missing and Valuing on Mother's Day... [Father's Day...Memorial Day]

Mother's Day is a special day,  
and special days are hard after the  
death of a child. For the first few  
years, it's a normal and natural thing  
for either parent to zero in on who is  
missing, rather than who is left...  
and I was no different.

Fortunately for me, not long  
after the Atlanta chapter formed, a  
local psychiatrist, Dr. Victor  
Gonzales, spoke one evening shortly  
before Mother's Day. He told of his  
parents' loss of their first two  
children. His story of how his life  
had been influenced and molded by  
his mother's reaction, touched me.  
He spoke of how he and his siblings  
who came later were forever denied  
his mother's happiness and joy. She  
was unable to value what she had left  
as much as what she had lost.

Dr. Gonzales said he spent a  
great deal of his childhood trying to  
make his mother happy, always  
failing and always feeling there must  
be something lacking in him that  
caused him to fail. The picture in my  
mind of him and his siblings always  
trying and always failing, through no  
fault of their own, made a great

impact on me. I determined from that  
day forward that my daughter would  
not have to lament later in life that  
she had been denied my happiness  
and joy because her brother had died.

On Mother's Day now, I make  
room for both missing and valuing,  
for they are not mutually exclusive.  
Now when I go to the cemetery with  
my rosebud on my day, my daughter  
has no part in my needs while I am  
there. When I come home, my son  
doesn't interfere with my acceptance  
and appreciation of my daughter's  
expression of love. She gives me a  
gift on my day, and I give her one in  
return. *It's probably the best gift I  
could possibly give her...my  
happiness and joy for life.* She is as  
important as what I have lost, and I  
know her worth.

If you are fortunate enough to  
have surviving children, I hope you  
too are able to value as well as to  
miss. There's room for both, you  
know.

--Mary Cleckley

### The Graduation Party

You've been gone so long, I  
couldn't feel the spirit of you over  
my sadness. My grief was taking me  
further away from you.

Then you came to me, just as I  
remembered you—laughing, shining  
eyes, moving so gracefully, so Alive.  
It made me happy just to look at you,  
for I hadn't seen you that clearly in  
years.

It would soon be your brother's  
graduation, and I wondered how I  
could get through it without crying  
for you. "YOU should be here....  
YOU should be part of this," I cried.

"HAVE A PARTY!" You  
bounced the words at me. "No," I  
said. "You were our party person."  
We could hardly have company over,  
especially without you egging us on.  
But as the days went by, those words  
continued to gnaw at me, or was it  
you?

Last night your brother  
graduated. We had a BIG party...lots  
of friends, lots of laughter, lots of  
memories and YOU. The banner,  
the balloons, all were touches from  
you. For a while you were back with  
us. It felt so good.

--Lynn Kulp, TCF, Sonoma County,  
CA

### Don't Die With Me

I watched you the other day as  
you sat by my grave, talking to this  
cold stone and laying down some  
flowers. You started to cry, and your  
lips trembled. You asked God, "Why  
not me instead of this beautiful  
child?"

I wish you knew how sad I felt  
to watch you break down. I need you  
to know this is not what I wanted.  
Please, please, "**Don't die with me.**"  
I know you can't feel my arms  
around you, but I'm always here, and  
I love you, too. I need you to keep  
me alive in your laughter and  
thoughts. And, by the way, "Thank  
you for the pretty flowers."

I sat in the chair right next to  
you today. You were looking at  
some really silly pictures, talking to  
each one with a smile, which I  
haven't seen in a while. You started  
to cry and your lips trembled. You  
asked God something new. "How is  
my beautiful child?" I wish you  
knew how happy I felt to watch you  
share your stories and pictures with  
everyone else.

This is what I wanted: "**You not  
to die with me.**" I know you can't  
feel my hands in yours. I needed you  
today and you came through. I want  
to say, "**Thank you for keeping me  
alive.**"

I was with you last night as you  
said your prayers. Your voice  
trembled a little and you tried not to  
cry. You said to God, "Please forgive  
me for almost losing faith in you. My  
heart was broken, and I was so lost.  
I'm much better now. Take care of  
my child; I know he is in good  
hands. Amen." I wish you knew how  
proud I felt as I watched you fall  
asleep. At last you have found some  
kind of peace. I know you can't feel  
my kiss on your head or hear me  
telling you good night. But I'm  
always right here, right here by your  
side.

I heard you whisper before you  
fell asleep, "If you can hear me, dear  
child, I want to thank you for the  
short time we had together, and for  
the lifetime of memories you've  
given me. I love you now and  
forever." I heard you; thank you,  
Mama.

-- Marie Casperson

## A FATHER'S DAY POEM

Bittersweet is the word I would use  
Happy and sad both at once and confused  
That is the feeling I get every June  
On Father's Day and it's coming up soon  
I will do my best to partake in the fun  
Maybe barbeque and take in some sun  
But a part of me will be very sad  
Cause I won't hear you say  
Happy Father's Day dad!  
-Alan Pedersen, TCF/USA

## Our Stories Go On

When the story of our loved one's death is told, the story continues. Over the months and years that follow, we repeat our experiences to interested listeners. And the story never ends. Though our loved one's life is stopped in time, the stories are timeless.

People look for a cue from us that we have found closure. What truly is "closure"? Is it a time when we no longer grieve outwardly? Is it a time when we quit telling stories and speaking our loved one's name? Others may assume that we have "accepted," found peace and left this event behind us as we move forward in our lives.

The truth is we never leave grief behind. We will never forget. Our loved ones become a part of who we are today. And our stories are nestled in our hearts, safe and secure in the knowledge that life and love are eternal.

--Nan Zastrow

## Butterfly Soldier

A butterfly is a colorful, delicate creature. A soldier is one who works for a specified cause, a fighter. These two words would never be thought of together, but for me they happen to fit the way I now must live my life.

The butterfly's life is so brief, but the magnificence of this creature stays in my mind, and I long for its splendor when it is gone. The soldier is to be strong in or out of combat, courageous in the face of the enemy. There is no room for weakness (society does not allow it).

The butterfly stands for my daughter, whose life was so short,

but the impressions she made on everyone who knew her leave us with beautiful memories. The soldier stands for the daily struggle I have dealing with the tremendous grief I am left with due to her death.

My shield is a smile I must wear to protect others from the sight of grief. Yet in the center is the butterfly with its wings spread wide and all its colors as bright as the dreams left unfulfilled. Butterfly and Soldier... almost opposites that conflict with each other in a constant tug of war.

After the shock wears off, then "grief" becomes the war I must battle every day, without specific rules of assault defined. Tears can come as rapid as an automatic machine gun. The lacerations go so deep, but I can't find a medic for bandages or painkillers. The wounds seem to stay open and fester for such a long time. I feel alone on this huge battlefield, unable to hear anything but rifle shots or see anything but bombs lighting up a dark sky. No matter which way I turn, there is another minefield to cross that, with a sudden explosion, could take away my remaining body parts. I attempt to fight back, but it looks as if my position is forever taken over and I am in reverse, never moving forward.

Time seems to be my only ally, easing some of the pain and letting my mind use pleasant memories as healing agents for the open gashes. The Compassionate Friends (who use the butterfly symbol) is my lifeline to realizing that I will survive and learn to cope with the effects of "war." Now I am more like a soldier who has come back from a raging conflict and has to try and resume a "normal" life. But the "grief war" goes on, even though the scenery is different. I continue to suffer from all of its effects and battle scars.

A "survivor" is the way I see myself and others who fight in this "grief war," not knowing why we are still here or who we are any more. I will go on fighting and withstanding what life has to fire at me each day. My wounds are healing very slowly and forming scars that do not show on the outside, but always exist. Each day the emotions of "war" continue, but get less intense with

newfound friends, activities, and a loving family with whom to share the struggle.

I am a "butterfly soldier" holding on to the beauty of my memories and battling the pain of loss. I was lucky to have had a daughter for a few years that added so much to my life. It hurts so much that she is gone, and before all of her goals had been met. The "war" goes on with each passing day, and I take each "battle" as it comes. I still have a long way to go, and a lot of pain to deal with, but I will be okay. I am a survivor, not a war hero, just a survivor. I don't have any medals to prove any heroism or courage... I'm just a Butterfly Soldier."

--Bonnie Harris-Tibbs,  
TCF Richmond, VA

## i carry your heart with me

I carry your heart with me  
(i carry it in my heart)  
i am never without it  
(anywhere i go you go, my dear;  
and whatever is done by only  
me  
is your doing, my darling)  
i fear no fate  
(for you are my fate, my sweet)  
i want no world (for beautiful  
you are my world, my true)  
and it's you are  
whatever a moon has always  
meant, and whatever a sun will  
always sing is you  
here is the deepest secret nobody  
knows  
(here is the root of the root and  
the bud of the bud and  
the sky of the sky of a tree called  
life;  
which grows higher than the  
soul  
can hope or mind can hide)  
and this is the wonder  
that's keeping the stars apart  
i carry your heart (i carry it in my  
heart)  
--ee cummings

*From where I stand I cannot see  
How far it is from you to me.  
At different times it seems to be  
a step or an infinity.*  
--Richard Dew, TCF Maryland

MAY: THE UNUSUALLY  
DIFFICULT MONTH

For the bereaved parent, May is frequently the cruelest month. The month of May offers the rest of the world a promise of another carefree summer, swimming, family vacations, relaxation, reading, cook-outs and picnics, trips to the lake and so much that is inherent in our culture. Yet May also brings memories of our children. The common denominator for mothers (and fathers) is Mother's Day. This tradition was wonderful when our children were alive; now the direct mail and newspaper advertising, sentimental television spots, in-store promotions, cards and letters and the countdown to the day itself are very cruel reminders of our lost children. Who will remember us on Mother's Day? This will be my fourth Mother's Day without my son. I miss him terribly all year long, but May and December are the worst months for me. First, we have Mother's Day, then my son's birthday and throughout the month I am bombarded with invitations for high school and college graduations...each one reminding me of what once was. My son finishing grade school, high school, college, graduate school. Each was accompanied by a ceremony. All the ceremonies rush into my mind as I realize how much of myself is my memories and those memories are very entwined with my son's life. A big part of me died with him that night in December. Three years ago, I was overwhelmed, sobbing, still occasionally in deep shock. My mind was mush, my heart was crushed and I did not have the will to do much more than quietly weep. It was my first Mother's Day without my son, the first birthday that he wasn't here, the first Memorial Day Weekend without him. I was paralyzed. May would never be joyful for me again. What to do what to do. I ask myself this question each April as

we begin the ramp up to the longest month. This year, I am counting out the last days of April and wondering how I will handle it. I am not worried about it; I am just wondering. I have gotten used to the transformation that has taken place in my mind, heart and soul. I experienced a slow spiritual awakening which accompanied a deep, deep sense of loss over which I have no control. I go with it. There are questions that we must ask ourselves. The answers are unique to us. Collectively we know this is a month to dread; individually we have our own memories and our own methods of coping. Collectively we lean on each other for hope, comfort and support. Individually, we each walk our own road depending on how many circumstances of life are in our month of May: Mother's Day, Memorial Day, birthdays, death anniversaries, graduations, weddings, baptisms, first communions, confirmations, how we handled the beginning of summer, the end of the school year.... all of these events can bombard us in May. The memories float into our minds like a mist that thickens into a heavy fog. We are enveloped in our fog of memories; the before death years come to us in a hodgepodge of the happiest times and clash with the reality of now. These are our memories, our children and ultimately our choices. And there seems to be little joy we can take from this month of memories. Once again, we make the decision. If we are not ready to acknowledge Mother's Day, we shouldn't do it. If we are facing other days in May that will tear at our hearts, we must plan for it. Some of us prefer to be alone and isolated. Others of us prefer to be with friends or family. Some of us go to the cemetery, others go to the park. Some read, watch movies, sit on the deck or simply rest. Others take a weekend trip which puts them into a different state of reality. There are as many choices as there are parents who have lost their children. Consider your

options. Be honest with yourself. Don't be pushed into anything. Take control. We each move forward toward hope at a different rate and in a different way. This is not about meeting the expectations of others; this is a personal journey toward peace and hope. It is your journey. I will always miss my son. I will always feel deep sorrow at his uncompleted life. But I know that he would want me to move forward, move back into the sunshine that is life on this earth. I'm working on it. Be patient with me. This is the most difficult road I have ever walked, but I am in motion, moving mostly forward and seeking something akin to peace, hope and tranquility. I will always be a work in progress.

--Annette Mennen Baldwin, Houston TX



**When Fathers Weep at  
Graves**

I see them weep  
the fathers at the stones  
taking off the brave armor  
forced to wear in the work place  
clearing away the debris  
with gentle fingers  
inhaling the sorrow  
diminished by anguish  
their hearts desiring  
what they cannot have--  
to walk hand in hand  
with children no longer held--  
to all the fathers who leave a part  
of their hearts at the stones  
may breezes underneath trees of  
time  
ease their pain  
as they receive healing tears  
...the gift the children give.

--Alice J. Wisler  
For David, in memory of our son  
Daniel

## There Is No Goodbye

*For Tracy, my special angel*

I close my eyes and you're a  
newborn in my arms,  
Already I was promising to keep you  
safe from harm.  
I blink and you're a toddler taking  
your first step,  
So proud of you I could have wept.

I look again and you're starting  
school,  
Already learning how other hearts to  
rule.

Before I know it you're graduating  
high school,  
So wise, so young, no one's fool.  
Now you're ready to face the world,  
Off to college no obstacle too big to  
hurdle.

No longer would you be mama's  
little girl,  
In front of you lay the whole wide  
world.

Now I open my eyes and your  
standing there,  
Wind blowing through your hair.  
I see that beautiful smile on your  
face,  
That from my memory I could never  
erase.

In my mind I know for now our time  
is gone,  
You will never see another dawn.  
No, my darling girl, there is no  
goodbye,  
For in my heart you will never die.

--Tina Robertson, in *Labours of Love*,  
Noble House, © 2005

## The Father's Grief

--By David Pellegrin, Honolulu, HI

At my second meeting of The  
Compassionate Friends three years  
ago, one of the mothers said how  
nice it was to see a man attending,  
since "men grieve differently from  
women."

Her remark was no doubt meant  
to help put me at ease. I hadn't said a  
thing so far, and might have been  
intimidating in my silence, but it  
caught me off guard. What I was  
feeling after George's death, was so  
absolute, so awful, how could it  
possibly come with any  
"differences"? Would one grieve  
differently for an infant than for an  
adolescent? For a son than for a  
daughter? Surely grief was absolute  
for both mothers and fathers.

Over time I came to

acknowledge the differences the  
well-meaning mother had in mind:

- Neither I nor the other men who  
occasionally attended talked much;  
the women talked freely.
- I sensed I was better at  
compartmentalizing my grief than  
the mothers, better at keeping a lid  
on it socially and at work.
- My male friends seemed less  
comfortable than female friends in  
talking about George, bringing up his  
name, or even looking at his pictures.
- I came to see how intensely I  
felt that I had let my son down as his  
protector, the father's primary role.

Shortly after becoming editor of  
my chapter newsletter, I sent a copy  
to my friend Jack Knebel in  
California. Jack and his wife, Linda,  
had been involved with a TCF  
chapter after the death of their  
daughter, Hollis. He replied, "It's  
good to see that a man is taking an  
active role in the group." Then he  
went on to write movingly about  
those male-female grieving  
differences. The rest of his letter,  
which touched me deeply, follows:

"...Several years after Hollis  
died, Linda and I were being trained  
by TCF to be "buddies" for newly  
bereaved parents. One of the  
exercises was to list all the unhelpful  
things that others had said in trying  
to comfort us, so that we wouldn't  
make the same mistakes. The other  
trainees (who were all women) made  
long lists and did it with enthusiasm.  
When the lists were read aloud, they  
nodded knowingly at every entry and  
eventually hooted and howled with  
derision at the worst (some of which  
were pretty bad). When it came my  
turn, I held up an empty page and  
said,

"People may have said such  
things to me. I just don't recall. What  
I do remember is that people tried to  
tell me how sad they were for us,  
how much they loved Hollis and how  
much they cared about us. I  
remember one of my law partners  
hugging me in the halls of our very  
stiff and proper law firm. I remember  
men who had never told me anything  
more personal than their reactions to  
a Giants' loss crying at our loss and  
their fears.

"You women are used to talking  
about your emotions and about  
personal things. I wasn't, and my

friends weren't either. So, the fact  
that we could do so was a great gift,  
and it wasn't marred in the slightest  
by someone's choice of words.

"Now, the shell has been broken  
and I find it easier to talk about my  
emotions, my hopes and fears, about  
those things that really are important.  
And that for me was one of Hollis'  
greatest gifts.

"I know that even after George's  
death, he is a major part of your life.  
My guess is that you're becoming  
more open to the gifts that he and  
those who care about you are able to  
give. With compassion and  
friendship, Jack"

## Reflections

Melissa has been dead for as  
many years as she lived on this  
earth. Nineteen. Did I learn from  
her illness and death? Am I a better  
person now? I knew before that life  
is precious. That family is more  
important than things. That money  
can't buy happiness. That  
everything and everybody dies, and  
the ever popular "life goes  
on." What have I learned? That I  
can live with a hole in my heart. She  
is there always. When I meet a  
nineteen-year-old girl or a thirty-  
eight-year-old woman I see her—and  
she is always smiling at me. For a  
very long time I couldn't see her  
smiling—just sick and  
suffering. Miss her? Oh yes! At  
least once a day and at times so  
overpowering that I almost go to my  
knees. A better person? I wasn't a  
bad person before. I know that I  
have come full circle in my faith—  
that the "why" no longer matters—  
that "don't sweat the small stuff" is a  
really big category! Missy's strength  
has become my strength and I never  
doubt the power of love. I guess I  
am a better person.

--Missy's mom, Alice Micke

Those who have **SUFFERED**  
**UNDERSTAND SUFFERING**  
and therefore





So, what I really discovered is that maybe grief is more like an artichoke. Have you ever wondered when you walked through the woods for the first time and you snap a stick. An artichoke has layers; each one has layers and each have pickers on the top, more like life than a smooth onion. After you peel back each layer of the artichoke for all of your losses, what you have left is a heart. That is why we hurt  
*--Darcie Sims*

**A Father's Thoughts on Father's Day**

Am I still a daddy  
 after my daughter is gone?  
 I have no one now  
 to toss gently in the air and hug  
 upon returning to my arms.  
 I have no one now  
 to blow "xerbits" on her belly,  
 generating billows of laughter.  
 I have no hand to hold  
 while she tearfully gets a shot,  
 no foot to tickle, no hair to comb,  
 no tears to comfort and  
 no child to hold upon my lap.  
 My heart would ache much less  
 if I weren't a father.  
 So, I guess I'm still a daddy  
 even though this daddy's girl is  
 gone.  
*--Larry C. Brincefield*

**Graduation Day**

It's graduation time again. Your child would have been among those wearing the cap and gown, walking down the aisle to the ever stirring "Pomp and Circumstance." Now there will be a vacant spot in the line. Should you attend? Can you stand the pain? Will people think you're strange?  
 As always, you must follow your heart. So, go if you'd like to, and don't hide your tears. It's quite alright to miss your own child when celebrating the achievements of others.

Just remember that your own instincts are the most important ones, that no one else can make this decision for you; and it doesn't really matter what other people think of you. It was your child who died. This is your pain, and you have the right to feel it and deal with it in your own way—and may a bit more healing take place in the doing.

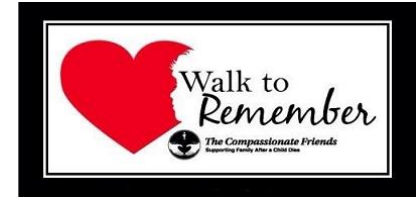
*--Peggy Gibson, TCF, Nashville, TN*

**Mark your calendar for these upcoming events:**



Registration is open for the 46th TCF National Conference July 7-9, 2023 in Denver!  
**REGISTER NOW:**  
<https://tinyurl.com/bdeamf3y>  
 Early bird Discount Registration is available until March 31, 2023.

**Walk to Remember**



September 23, 2023, at Waterfall Park, Independence, MO. More details to follow.

**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](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, 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.**