



# The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

May - June 2024

Chapter Leader: Theresa Phillips

24-Hour Help Line: (816)229-2640

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## Why You Didn't Fail As A Mother

by Angela Miller *Still Standing Magazine*

I have to tell you this. You didn't fail. Not even a little.

You are *not* a horrible mother.

You didn't *choose* this. You didn't *want* this to happen. You didn't do anything *wrong*. It just happened. *To you*. Despite your begging, pleading, praying, hoping against all hope that it would not. Even though everything within you was screaming, *no no no no no*.

God didn't do this to you to punish you, smite you, or to teach you a lesson. That is not God's way. You could not have prevented this if you tried harder, prayed harder, or if you were a "better" person. Nor if you ate better, loved harder, yoga more, did x, y, z to the nth degree— fill in the blank with any other lie your mind devises. You could not have prevented this even if you could have predicted the future like *no one can*.

No, there is nothing more you could have done. You did everything you possibly could have. And you are the best mother there is because you would have done absolutely anything to keep your child alive. To breathe your last breath instead. To choose the pain all over again just to spend one more minute together. That is the ultimate kind of love. You are the *ultimate* kind of mother.

So, wash your hands of any naysayers, betrayers, or those who sprinted in the other

direction when you needed them most. Wash your hands of the people who may have falsely judged you, ostracized you, or stigmatized you because of what happened to you. Wash your hands of anyone who has made you feel *less than* by questioning everything you did or didn't do. Anyone whose words or looks have implied this was somehow your fault.

This was *not* your fault. This will *never* be your fault, no matter how many different ways someone tries to tell you it was.

Especially if that *someone* happens to be you. Sometimes it's not what others are saying that keeps us shackled in shame. Sometimes you adopt others' misguided opinions and assumptions. Sometimes it's your own inner voice that shoves you into the darkest corner of despair, like an abuser, telling you over and over and over again you failed as a mother. Convincing you *if only* this and *what if* that, it would never have happened. Saying you coulda, shoulda done this or *that* so your child would not have died.

That is a lie of the sickest kind. Do not believe it, not even for a second. Do not let it sink into your bones. Do not let it smother that beautiful, beautiful light of yours.

Instead, breathe in this truth with every part of yourself: *You are the best damn mother in the entire world*.

No one else could do what you do. No one else could ever mother your child as well as you

can, as well as you *are*. No one else could let your child's love and light shine through the way you do. No one else could mother your dead child as well as bravely. No one else could carry this unrelenting burden as courageously. It is the heaviest, most torturous burden there is. There is no one, no one, *no one* who could ever, *ever* replace you. *No one*. You were *chosen* to be your child's mother. *Yes—chosen*. And no one could parent your child better in life or in death than you do. You have within you a sacred strength.

You are the mother of all mothers.

So, breathe mama, keep *breathing*. Believe mama, keep *believing*. Fight mama, keep *fighting*, for this truth to uproot the lies in your heart— *you didn't fail*. Not even a little.

For whatever it's worth, I see you. I hear your guttural sobs. I feel your ache deep inside my bones. And it doesn't make me uncomfortable to put my fingers as a makeshift Band Aid over the gaping hole in your heart until the scabs come, if and when they do.

It takes invincible strength to mother a child you can no longer *hold, see, touch or hear*. You are a superhero mama. I see you fall down and get up, fall down and get up, over and over again. I notice the grit and guts it takes to pry yourself out of bed every single day and force your bloodied feet to stand up and keep walking. I see you walking this path of life you've been given where every breath and step apart from your child is a

physical, emotional and spiritual battleground. A fight for your own survival. A fight to quiet the insidious lies.

But the truth is, you haven't failed at all. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

You are the mother  
of *all* mothers.

Truly the most *inspiring, courageous, loving* mother there is— a warrior mama through and through.  
For even in death, you lovingly mother your precious child still.

### **Mother's Day: A Father's View**

In our house as in other bereaved parents' households, Mother's Day comes with mixed emotions.

Setting aside a day to honor motherhood is only right; mothers do tend to be taken for granted. I remember the childhood joy of getting my mother a special gift, even if it was only a crayon drawing. As an adult, buying gifts for your mother & the mother of your children still brings back those happy childhood memories.

But this changed after Erin died. Looking through all the cards at the gift shop only reminds me of this irony. Cute, humorous, sweetly sentimental cards await the bereaved father shopping for his grieving wife. I can't find the card that will comfort my wife on this day.

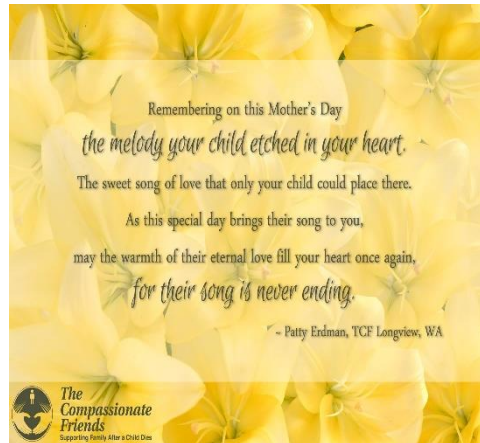
I realize this day, perhaps because it is so widely celebrated, even years later can take my wife back to grief that she thought she was "through with."

I can never do enough on Mother's Day; maybe I try to do too much. I know that all the cards, flowers, gifts and messy breakfasts in the world can't make up for the loss of our child. But I still do these things; she deserves them.

The unfairness of our daughter's death will always be there. I know I can't change that with a card. But I can remind her that she is a great mother, and most importantly, she is still the mother of our child.

This, then, is the wish I have for her and for all bereaved mothers on this day: Please be as proud as every other mother today; no one can dispute the fact that you brought your child into the world. Although s/he is no longer with you, the love you feel can never be taken away from you. If you are de-pressed, may your family and friends remind you of this and comfort you.

—Al Bots, TCF, Cleveland, OH



### **The Graduation Party**

You've been gone so long. I could not 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 would 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

### **The Class Ring**

Next to the door he paused to stand,  
as he removed the class ring from her hand.

Those who watched could not speak,  
as they saw the tears flow down his cheek.

They watched in awe and awkward fear,  
when he whispered "I love you" in her ear.

With the ring on his finger, he kissed her  
goodbye,

then turned away and began to cry.

The doorway swung open to let the wind blow,  
as they carried the casket into the snow.

—Bereaved Sibling, Author Unknown

### **Memorial Day**

My first Memorial Day after my son died in December was one I look back on with deep sadness but also with hope. Anticipating the arrival of Memorial Day nearly put me over the edge. The thought of decorating Shannon's grave was incomprehensible. For days I couldn't sleep, and I couldn't think of any ceremony that could help me get through this holiday.

I woke up very early on Memorial Day and decided I wanted some time alone at the cemetery before other family members arrived. As I pulled up beside Shannon's grave, I felt so empty & alone. I managed to get out of the car and walk over to his grave. I had not gotten a headstone yet; I couldn't bear the thought. It seemed so final, something I was unable to deal with at that time. Seeing the marker from the funeral home staring back at me brought the tears flowing. Reading those words, "Shannon Foster, 1972-1990," forced me to accept the reality—Shannon was gone. Never again would I hold him or see him.

My heart ached for all I would never know. I closed my eyes as I tried to find strength from within. Suddenly I felt a presence, someone's arms around me. A warmth came over me as I realized somehow Shannon was there. I kept my eyes closed as I talked aloud to the son I so desperately needed to see. I know Shannon could hear me and was helping me through this unbearable day. As I opened my eyes I felt his presence still beside me. As the sun came up that day I remained sitting by his grave, feeling once again close to my son.

--Judy Foster, TCF, Omaha, NE

## The Change

My hair has become gray.  
No artificial colors to brighten  
Either my hair  
Nor my endless, gray days.

My face has become plain.  
Unadorned eyes or lips  
Somber and dreary like  
Each dark, aching night.

My energy has slipped away  
Leaving a paralyzed, frozen shell.  
Like a previously happy doll  
Whose batteries have run dry.

My heart has two unhealed holes  
within.  
Losing each precious daughter  
Feels like shooting pain from a tazer  
to knock me to my knees.

But while God has closed  
The door to my daughters' laughs  
and hugs  
He has opened the window  
To help me breathe.

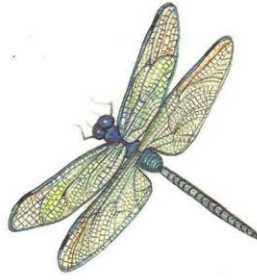
The air is filled with longtime  
friendships, loving family,  
and compassionate friends  
to help ease my loneliness  
and share my grief journey.

Change has come in many ways,  
But not to a mother's love.  
-Barbara Batson, South Kansas City

## 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



### dragonfly

Having flown the earth  
for 300 million years,  
dragonflies symbolize our ability  
to overcome times of hardship.

They can remind us  
to take time to reconnect  
with our own strength,  
courage and  
happiness.

## 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"

## Gratitude...The Key to Happiness

I am convinced that the real key to happiness is gratitude.... I have thought a lot about this idea since my son, Mark, died five years ago. At first I was offended by people who smiled or even laughed during a TCF meeting. These were people who seemed to have some-how re-entered the land of the living. ...How dare they laugh? How dare they appear normal when their children have died? But over the last five years I have learned three valuable lessons:

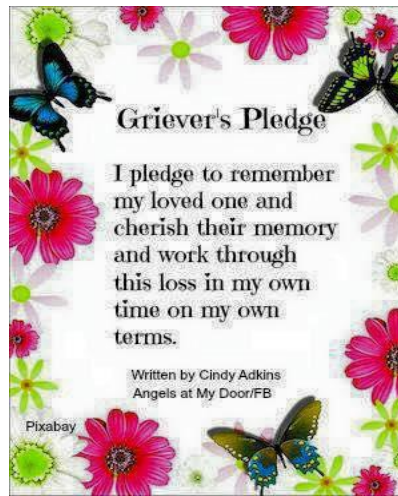
- *Life goes on and we must too.* Gradually the pain eases and the warm memories replace the sadness. Gradually we return to life. One day we find that it is 11:00 am and we have not thought about our child yet. At first, we feel guilt, but then we also realize we are going forward. We will never forget, but we decide that the loss of our child will not be the all-consuming factor in our life.... I am convinced that this is what our children would want for us.

- *We become grateful for what we have, not focused on what we have lost.* I see people in our chapter's meetings every month who have gone through "every parent's nightmare" and want no part of life again. But I ask that [they] also think about the ways they have been blessed, as well as hurt. In my experience, most people have more to be thankful for than they realize: health, other children, a loving family...life in a free country, faith that works for them, a true best friend, a spouse whom they love. Nobody has it all, but compared to most, ...we have a lot.

- *The life we now lead will be better than it would have been.* That does not make our child's death a good thing. It just means that our child's life mattered, and it has changed us forever. It means that in some small way the world will be better because our child lived, and we are the ones who can make it so. We have a new sense of priorities. We don't "sweat the small stuff." We know what matters because we know what is irreplaceable. And we know how deeply other people hurt, because we, too, have been there. We "know how they feel."

And when our life is different and better because our child lived, then that child is never forgotten. Each of us would do any-thing in the world to go back in time, but we can't. It is up to us now to go forward, and we can.

--Rich Edler, TCF, South Bay/LA, CA



## 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 new-found 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



### Monarchs in Butterflies of Migration

How much I wish that the monarchs - in their butterflies around us on their way to Mexico - were really Chris and not his representatives stopping briefly for a visit. Losing him and the opportunities to visit with him, talk with him in person, kiss him, share his intensity for life and living it so well, make us so lonely. Thank goodness for the butter flights!

--Bonnie May Malody

### 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

### 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)

--e.e cummings



### You Are Always with Me Even When We're Apart

Whenever we're apart  
and I am feeling all alone,  
I close my eyes and think  
of the happiness we've known.  
And somehow, I feel better then,  
because I clearly see,  
since I hold you close  
within my heart,  
you're always here with me.

--Written by Emily Matthews

### 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

### 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, “in memory of my daughter, Vicki Lewis, who entered her peaceful journey on Mother’s Day weekend 2006”

### 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

### 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

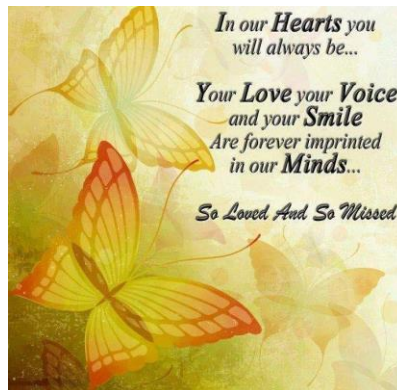
only imagine how difficult and empty it must be for her.

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



### Our Annual Walk to Remember

will be held September 21, 2024 At Waterfall Park (just behind Bass Pro) In Independence, MO Registration will begin at 8:30 am Walk will begin at 9 am Please watch for future emails and/or check the website [www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org](http://www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org) for preregistration and t-shirt order information.

**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.