



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

November-December 2023

Chapter Leader: Theresa Phillips

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

Private Facebook Page: Eastern Jackson County TCF

Website: www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org

TCF National Headquarters

48660 Pontiac Trail #930808 Wixom, MI 48393

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WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

December 10, 2023

Sponsored by:

The Eastern Jackson County (Independence) and South Kansas City Chapter of The Compassionate Friends

In memory of all children who have died, but will not be forgotten . . . *that their light may always shine*

In loving memory of all children who are no longer with us, The Compassionate Friends extends an invitation for you, your family, and friends to join us and other bereaved families around the globe for the 25th Annual Worldwide Candle Lighting.

Sunday December 10, 2023, at 7 pm
At Walnut Gardens Community of Christ
19201 RD Mize Rd
Independence, MO

What to bring:

1. If you would like a picture button, come at 6:30 pm. Bring a picture on plain paper 2 ¼ to 2 ½ inches or If you would like a button waiting when you arrive please send a photo to phillipsplace@aol.com on or before Saturday December 9.
2. Also bring a picture for the memory table
3. A snack to share after the program
4. If desired, bring a gift for a needy child in memory of your child
5. Plus we will be having a raffle.

As candles are lit at 7 p.m. local time, bereaved families gather to honor their loved ones in a way that transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious and political boundaries. Believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the ceremony creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. Wherever you are at that time, we hope you will join us in this loving remembrance. A memorial message board will be available that day at www.thecompassionatefriends.org. Please allow time for sign in and find a seat before 7pm.

How Can We Celebrate Thanksgiving?

One family, trying to avoid Thanksgiving, which was their deceased son's birthday as well, decided that family gatherings were no longer for them. They would travel or simply ignore the festivities. One day the mother came upon her ten-year-old daughter crying and asked what was wrong. She was sobbing, reported the mother, "All the children in school had told of their plans and made table decorations for the holiday, and Lynn felt completely removed from her classmates. She cried that she was not only deprived of her brother who had died, but she couldn't even have Thanksgiving dinner and a turkey!" The mother listened, held Lynn in her arms and cried.

That night the mother talked to her husband, and they decided that no matter how bleak and empty it would be, they would have a traditional Thanksgiving dinner. The family sat around the table, very quietly at first. The father said grace and thanked the Lord for a bountiful meal. When he was through, their ten-year-old said she had something to add. "I want to thank Mommy and Daddy for making this very special dinner for our family. And most of all I want to thank you, God." There wasn't a dry eye at the table for a few minutes.

But gradually, as the meal progressed, they made an effort to discuss why the holiday was celebrated. From there, the parents told of amusing

experiences at Thanksgiving dinners in their younger years. The mother said she planned to tell the stories to lighten the atmosphere just as carefully as she had planned the menu. By the time the meal was over, the parents discovered what had built up in their minds as unsurvivable had become just another turning point.

There will be many such turning points as you work your way forward. You have already survived what you were certain you could not live through—the death of your child. Turning points, plateaus, are merely steps in coping, and nothing more. As you go through each holiday, each season, each happy/sad occasion, you will gain strength from having passed beyond another painful event.

--Harriet Schiff, *The Bereaved Parent*

When Words Become Gifts

On Thanksgiving Day 1994, two of my three young adult sons, Erik and David, were killed in a freak car accident. Years after the accident, my husband and I were at David's college for a holiday event. I was in the dessert line when a woman came up to me and said, "I saw your name tag. Are you David Aasen's mom?" After doing a double-take (it had been some time since I had been asked what used to be a rather common question), I replied with much appreciation, "Yes, I am!"

With those three almost magical words, this person gave me **five gifts**: Her first gift was **saying David's name**. Instead of just thinking to herself, "Hmmm, I bet that's David Aasen's mom, but I better not say anything," she said something. Her second gift was **sharing a story with me** about how her daughter, a classmate of David's, still treasures the friendship she and David shared. **Acknowledging that I'm still a mom** was her all-important third gift. While my sons' deaths have resulted in my becoming a bereaved mother, death cannot take away the fact that I am, and always will be, Erik and David's mom. The fourth gift was **permission to share a bit of my grief journey with her**. Since their deaths, I explained, there haven't been any truly easy, carefree, feeling-on-top-of-the-world days, but taking each day as it comes has been the

most “doable” way for me to go on. **Her questions and manner did not make me feel obligated to cover up my grief**, which was the fifth gift. I felt valued for my honesty, and my integrity remained intact.

The warmth of those five gifts has lingered on in my heart and has comforted me. As I reflect on the experience, I marvel at how a few simple words had such an impact. I have come to the conclusion that most bereaved parents want nothing more than the opportunity to talk comfortably with others about their children. Just being able to share stories about our sons and daughters in a safe place, along with the permission to mourn in our own way and for as long as we need to, even for a lifetime, is what matters most to us. The real treasure comes when others introduce our children’s names and stories into an everyday conversation. Knowing our sons and daughters are remembered and live on in the hearts and lives of others is a measure of the meaningful legacy that our sons and daughters have left to us and to the world.

—Nita Aasen, St. Peter, Minn.,
We Need Not Walk Alone

For That I’m Thankful

It doesn’t seem to get any better...but it doesn’t get any worse, either.
For that, I am thankful.
There are no more pictures to be taken...but there are memories to be cherished. For that, I am thankful.
There is a missing chair at the table... but the circle of family gathers close.
For that, I am thankful.
The turkey is smaller...but there is still stuffing. For that, I am thankful.
The days are shorter...but the nights are softer. For that, I am thankful.
The pain is still there...but it lasts only moments. For that, I am thankful.
The calendar still turns, the holidays still appear, and they still cost too much... but I’m still here.
For that, I am thankful.
The room is still empty, the soul still aches...but the heart remembers.
For that, I am thankful.
The guests still come, the dishes pile up... but the dishwasher works.
For that, I am thankful.
The name is still missing, the words still unspoken...but the silence is shared.
For that, I am thankful.
The snow still falls, the sled still waits, and the spirit still wants to...
For that, I am thankful.
The stillness remains...but the sadness is smaller. For that, I am thankful.
The moment is gone...but the love is forever. For that I am blessed. For that, I am grateful.
Love was once (and still is) a part of my being...For that, I am thankful.
I am LIVING...And for that, I am thankful.

Having loved and having been loved is perhaps the most wondrous reason of all.

For that, I am thankful.

—Darcie Sims

A Boy and His Tree

It was time. In an hour the November afternoon would be dark. With Baby Elizabeth in the stroller, we headed to our front lawn. Benjamin immediately began to run around, but my husband, David, seven-year-old Rachel and I stood beside the thin tree. Rachel held the order of ceremony that she had spent the afternoon writing. It was three pages of her own creation, the “service” for our family’s gathering that afternoon. Five members were visible to the human eye; the sixth member was held within our yearning hearts.

“We are very sad at this moment,” Rachel began to read from her printed page. “We think of the things we did together, and we think of the sad things that happened too, and it won’t be so hard. But we will still be a little sad in the heart.” Then she somberly passed the papers to my husband. She had written the next lines for him to read and they ended with, “It’s going to be hard to keep the tears away, but we will still dig up this tree, even if it hurts.”

And that was our reason for the ceremony. It was time to dig up the thin maple that died last fall and, like Daniel, did not bloom in the spring. It wasn’t just any old maple tree. The tree had so much significance, and that was why it had taken us all of spring and summer before we were ready to uproot it. Without leaves, it spent months in the front lawn. I was prepared to tell neighbors why we couldn’t dig it out of the ground, but no one asked why we kept a dead tree in our yard. Could they have known it was the very tree we planted three weeks after Daniel’s birth? Did they realize it died only a few months before our four-year-old son?

I had looked at that tree many times since Daniel left us, remembering how he played by it, rode his Cozy Coupe under it and ran around it. Just the other night when looking through the hundreds of pictures we have of him, I found one with him at age three in a hat and funny sunglasses, holding the tree. Never in our wildest dreams had we known both boy and tree would be gone in the same year. When the lines of the memories of Daniel had all been read, David dug up the dead tree. “Good-bye, Daniel,” I said within my heart. It was as though a part of Daniel was again being taken from me. It was the same feeling of “good-bye” as I had felt when the men from the

Vietnam Veterans had come to take the old, plaid sofa. Daniel had lived on that sofa during his last months. There he’d eaten cereal, watched videos, looked at books & thrown up. David cut a few branches from the tree, and Rachel announced we could make a cross out of them to place in the little memorial garden we have by the side of the house. Then, with David placing the maple over his shoulder, he and Rachel began to walk toward the nearby woods. Daniel had enjoyed the woods so much, and we knew it was a fitting place to carry his tree.

I was reminded of the time he and Rachel had ventured in there alone and were rescued by the brother of one of our neighbors. And there was the time Rachel, Daniel and I, along with one of Daniel’s friends, went for a walk in the woods and got lost. It was raining when we finally found our way out. We had no idea where we were, so we asked directions to get home. A kind, elderly man offered to drive us home. The kids had been excited about riding in his Oldsmobile, while I just felt foolish for getting lost.

When he returned from taking the tree to the woods, David placed a stake in the ground where the tree had been. This was to mark where we wanted the next tree to be planted. The local nursery was to come that week with a new tree, given to us by friends who wanted to do something in Daniel’s memory.

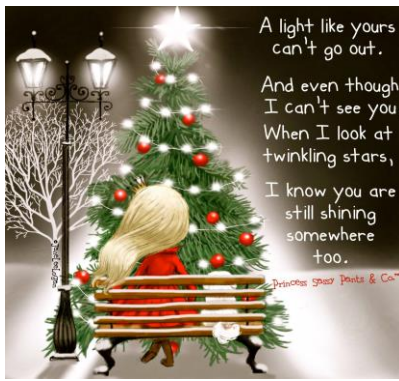
What a surge of joy I felt when I looked out the window the next day to see the newly planted tree! We had chosen a gentle and drooping weeping willow, because there was such significance in its very name and stature. It would be a reminder to others of our weeping spirits over the loss of our precious son, and to us, we would watch this tree grow and flourish, as our memories and love do for Daniel.

--By Alice J. Wisler. Reprinted from *Bereavement Magazine*



You know how some new parents look into the window at the maternity centre and share with other parents in excitement?

What if our angels are gathering around looking down at us, showing us off for being so strong and saying ‘my parent’s awesome, which one’s yours?’



But Norman Rockwell Never Painted Me

At this time of year, it always seems
That I see the families of others' dreams.

Everywhere I look, every ad I see
Shows the joyful reunions of family.
With the table laden, good times abound
While families reunited gather around.
But Rockwell never painted an empty
chair

And a family mourning the one who's
not there.

A season that once was celebrated
Now makes us feel more isolated.

I need TCF so that I can see

That there are others just like me
Whose feelings about holidays are
mixed, at best,

Whose strength of will is put to the test.
We're loving those whom we still hold
near,

But thoughts of one out of reach bring a
tear.

Even now, amidst the love and gladness,
This time of year brings a certain
sadness.

I no longer have the "average" family,
So that's why Rockwell never painted
me.

--Kathy Hahn, TCF Lower Bucks County, PA

Leaves are turning the shades of autumn,
Then falling, one by one, to the misted
ground below.

Summer flowers have faded and died.
The sun hides behind dark and dreary
clouds.

It is November again.

Was it so long ago that this month
brought warm?

Thoughts of Thanksgiving together,
The smell of wood burning, walks in the
nippy air.

This is the month you left us,
And all the warm glow of November
went with you.

All that remains are the chrysanthemums
Planted in a special memorial garden for
you,

Ready to burst into beautiful shades of
yellow and orange.

They symbolize one more year without
you,

But our LOVE has not diminished.

--Pat Dodge, in memory of her son Scott, TCF
Sacramento

My Heart Has Been Given Peace

As the holidays start closing in on us, I
am reminded of those special occasions
early in my grief journey after David
died. It was devastating to even think
about Thanksgiving, followed closely by
Christmas and a New Year. Being at the
shopping center and hearing all the music
and seeing the lights proclaiming "Joy",
when my heart was breaking, was almost
too hard to bear. My first Thanksgiving
meal consisted of one bite of food and
many tears. Christmas was heading my
way too rapidly, but for the sake of my
other three sons, I tried to do my best to
"stay strong" for them, with a small
generic Christmas tree, and cash as gifts.

Since that time over 20 years ago, my
heart has been given peace. That doesn't
mean that I don't think about David
every day, and miss and love him. It
simply means that he has moved to a new
place in my life.

I now enjoy the holidays, and actually
look forward to them.

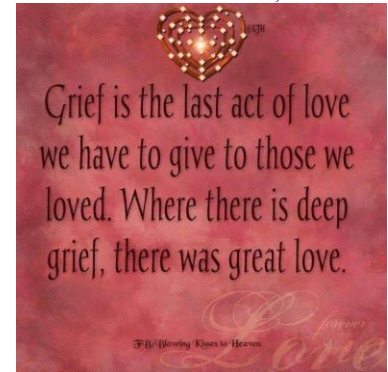
One of the things that allows me to do
that is thinking on the many things for
which I am thankful. Here is just a partial
list.

1. Even though my son's life was far
to brief, I am thankful for the time
which he enriched our family's
lives, and those of his friends.
2. The memories that he left with all of
us are priceless. He was very loving
and filled with so much fun and
laughter.
3. The gifts that David left behind:
 - a. A heightened compassion for
others whose children, siblings or
grandchildren have died.
 - b. A change in my priorities (Don't
sweat the small stuff)
 - c. The knowledge that love is
stronger than death and that my
love for him will continue forever.
 - d. The gift of courage, to face my
life, and to try to make my life a
tribute to my son. I have the faith
that we will meet again someday,
and I want him to be proud of
what I have made of my life.
4. I feel so fortunate to have three
surviving sons, and I realize that
this is a treasure that not all
bereaved parents have.
5. I am thankful for my "new" family,
my Compassionate Friends who
offered me a life line, and a role
model that showed me that my life
could continue and even be "good"
again. They gave me HOPE for the
future.
6. I am thankful that the excruciating
pain of new grief has mellowed into
a softer grief that allows me to have

a full life, good memories and
occasional sadness when 'grief
triggers' come to me.

As each of us faces a new tomorrow
without the dear children that we loved
so much, may we also be thankful for the
blessings that are ours because they
didn't just die, they LIVED.

--Barbara Starr, David's mom



"Merry" Christmas

I question if Christmas can ever be
"merry"
except to the heart of an innocent
child—

for when time has taught us the meaning
of sorrow
and sobered the spirits that once
were so wild,

when all the green graves that lie
scattered behind us
like milestones are marking the
length of the way,

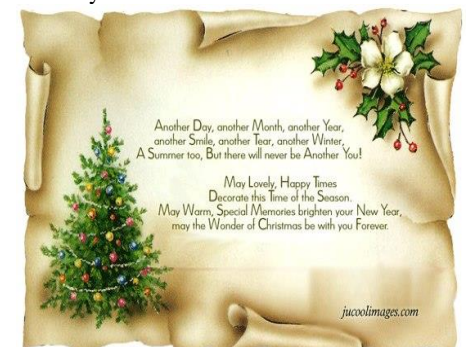
and echoes of voices that no more shall
greet us
have saddened the chimes of a
bright Christmas Day—

we may not be merry; the long years
forbid it—
the years that have brought us such
manifold smarts.

But we may be happy if only we carry
the spirit of Christmas deep down in
our hearts.

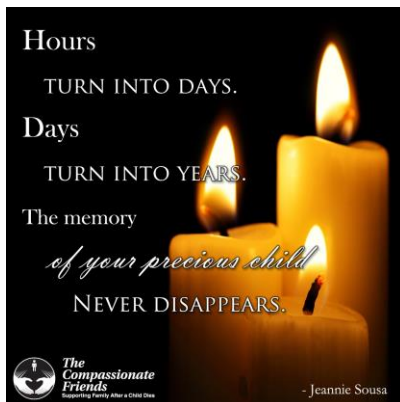
Hence, I shall not wish you the old
"Merry Christmas,"
since that is of shadowless
childhood a part,

but one that is holy and happy and
peaceful,
the Spirit of Christmas deep down
in your heart.



Special Handling Please

I was handed a package the other day.
It was wrapped securely to be mailed away.
Attached to the outside as plain as could be
was a simple note for all to see.
“Please rush through the holiday season;
too painful to open for any reason.
Contained within find one broken heart
fragile, broken, falling apart.”
Tried to go shopping the other day;
the hype of the season blew me away.
Sat down to write cards; that was insane.
Couldn’t find the list or think of my name.
People say, “Come over, be of good cheer.”
“Celebrate the holidays, prepare a New Year.”
But my grief overwhelms me like waves in the sea.
Can they cope with my crying, an unsettled me?
I don’t have any holiday cheer.
Decorations,
traditions, big family meal—I can’t do this year.
Do you know how I feel? Guilty and frustrated!
I’ve let everyone down!
Our holiday celebrations were the best in town.
So just ship me away, “address unknown.”
When my grief is better, I might fly home.
--Mary J. Pinkava, TCF Atlanta Online,
www.tcfatlanta.org



A New Year

As the year draws to its close, I pause...reflecting back over the long, empty months. My first full year without you—a milestone if only for the fact I survived at all, I suppose. Eighteen months ago we were together as we had always been... Your death precipitated my reluctant birth, a tormented entrance into existence as a bereaved parent... a Mommie with an empty home, empty

arms. No one left to mother.

I look back upon this year, January through December—winter, spring, summer, fall and finally winter again. The seasons have come and they have departed, just as they did when you were here to adore the warmth of the July sun and hate the cold of the bleak gray skies of January. The coldness of winter has lingered in my heart, my loneliness and grief holding it there. (I’ve heard that if I let go of the coldness, the sunshine of your smile will remain...but I’m afraid.) I’ve gone through all the pain of all the holidays, the exquisite occasion of your birth date, celebrated in sorrow without you...

One of my closest friendships gradually faded in this past year of mourning—someone who loved you who could not bear the pain of your departure. This has added to the crushing burden of losing you. I have met far too many others in the same position I am in, and I began laying the groundwork for new friendships from these meetings. I have wept more than I believed possible, and (with your support?) faced and conquered the bleakest of the black times encountered so far...

But there have also been occasions for laughter in these months; and I have come to acknowledge that life will go on, regardless of the direction of the path I choose in my efforts to learn to live in a world that no longer holds my beloved, cherished child. I have learned more of death than I ever wished to know and understand more of life and survival now as I struggle daily with my grief.

More and more I feel you trying to comfort me. I can sometimes feel your calm message...words you could have never spoken in life...surrounding me like the warmth of the love we shared for all of your life and most of mine: “*This is how it’s supposed to be, Mommie. I’m all right.*”

I love you, baby.

--Sally Migliaccio, TCF, Babylon, Syosset & Rockville Centre, NY

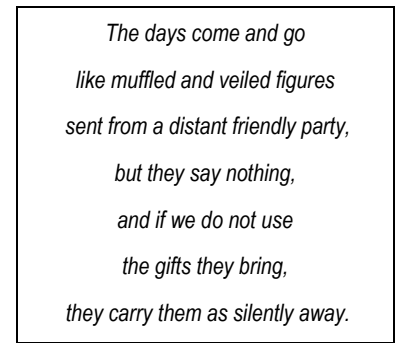
Walking in the Shadow of My Child

Wherever I go, I walk with his shadow on my being. I am clothed in a coloration not visible to the naked eye. It casts an unexpected influence on how I carry myself as I journey through life.

It clouds my way of looking at things; forces perspectives which I didn’t know were a part of my psyche. The shade of grayness through which I now view things absorbs some of the radiances which I experience.

Yet my shadow comes not from the valley of death, but from my child being closer to the light.

--Ed Kuzela, TCF, Atlanta



Winter Promise

The day slowly dissolved into dusk,
Leaving behind the newness of the morning
And the miracle of your birth.
Though winter brief the time that was left us,
Your love will remain with me always.
I gently kissed you one last time
Before you went with the day
To become a memory for me to hold
When I can’t hold you any other way.

--Debbi Dickinson, TCF, Naperville, IL

Words Are But Dust

Words are but dust in the roaring wind
when they try to bring you relief,
And thoughts are but straws on the raging sea when they seek to soothe your grief.
But love is a light in the lonely night to give comfort and show you the way.
And faith is a rock on which hope is built that you’ll meet again someday.

--George D. Walley, NW Suburban, NY

And I will light a candle for you to shatter all the darkness and bless the times we knew.
Like a beacon in the night
The flame will burn bright and guide us on our way.
Oh today I light a candle for you.

--Paul Alexander



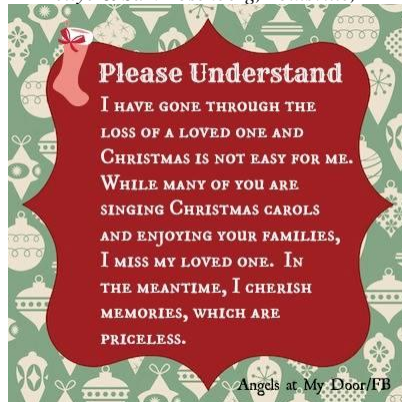
Today I Light a Candle for You

During the holiday season, both Jews and Christians light candles in celebration of their respective faiths, and as they do so, even the darkest rooms become more warm and bright from the glow of a candle. Then, we can ask ourselves, how powerful or sinister can the darkness be if it can be overcome by the light of one little candle?

There is then a message in this for all of us. When the darkness seems to overwhelm us—mental and spiritual darkness as well as the darkness of a winter night—we need to remember that darkness is powerless to withstand the smallest bit of illumination.

So as the world grows colder and darker during these winter months, we as bereaved parents must do what people of many faiths have been taught to do at this season. Light a candle in someone's life to help banish the darkness and fears. A little bit of light is all that most of us need, but, oh, we need that little bit so badly.

--Betty & Sam Rosenberg, Louisville, KY



Candle in the Night

I could not find her in the sky.
I did not see her 'neath the sun.
But when the shadows darken,
And the endless day is done,
Like a candle in the night
She gleams upon my sight,
And her whispered name
Warms me in the flame.
Vicki...in my prayer
Holds and loves me there.

--Earl Katz

Eternal Flame

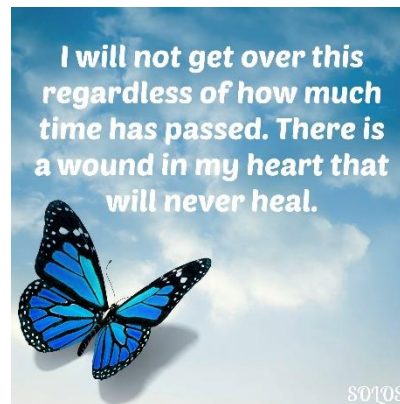
The time that we shared was so beautiful, it brightened my world like a candle in a dark room; it ended all too soon. That candle was torn out of my hands. The flame of your life was cruelly snuffed out, just as it burned the brightest.

Until my eyes adjusted to the dark, I was stunned, but then I realized I was alone in the darkness. I cried for the longest time. My heart was filled with

anger, loneliness, and fear. How could I find my way without your light to guide me?

So, I sat alone for a while, overwhelmed by the darkness until I looked inside me. And there I saw your candle burning as brightly as ever. And from its flame, I lit a new candle and found my way out of the darkness. Now I know I will never be lost, for your light shines inside me forever. --Julie Jetta

Deep in winter, my friend,
When life is darkest
it is very important
to try thinking
one small sunshine-thought
every morning, early—
try your best.
--Sascha Wagner



All God's Children

Buying Christmas gifts isn't an unusual thing to do, but one year I couldn't stop. I walked into stores and compulsively threw toys into a basket. I bought hundreds of toys. "Somehow I have to do this," I told my husband. "It helps me." It helped me, but it didn't comfort me.

December, January & February were once our happiest months of the year—Christmas, New Year's and the birthdays of our three children. But on a snowy afternoon in January 1992, the world changed for us. Our children were killed in a car accident on the way home from school. Joshua, Kristen and Daniel were gone.... But the world went on, while John and I were stuck in time.

For months I didn't go into the kids' rooms. John continued showing up at his pool business. "Working, but not really working," he said. We often escaped to a friend's lakeside cabin. *Still waters to refresh our soul*, I told myself, but when the holidays rolled around, I couldn't be still. I had to do something. "I want to celebrate our children's lives," I said to John. "I can't lose my joy in giving for Christmas." That's when I started buying toys. Barbie dolls and teddy bears piled

up in the spare room. Finally, John said, "It's time to take them somewhere."

Okay, God, I thought, *guide us*. I spread out our map of the world. John traced his finger across it. He stopped on Grenada in the Caribbean. "My dad has a friend who was there in the eighties," John said. He gave me a questioning look. "How about Grenada?" "I shrugged. ... We called John's dad and talked to his friend. He told us about the Sapodilla Home for children. "That's it," I said. "We'll give our toys to those kids in Grenada" I pulled out colorful paper to wrap the gifts, but I started to cry. So instead we removed the packaging and stuffed the toys into duffel bags. An angel must have guided that decision too. Going through customs, every package would have required unwrapping. A couple of weeks before Christmas we checked into a hotel in Grenada. It was our son Josh's birthday. Once again, I couldn't stop crying. John and I sat by the pool, unable to hide our sadness. The housekeeper saw us. "Is there anything I can do?" she offered. I poured my heart out to her. The woman sat down beside us. "I too lost my child," she said. We talked for a long while. Could we have had a more perfect encounter?

Parents who have lost their children are among the saddest people in the world. But when John and I went to the Sapodilla Home we saw another kind of sadness—children who had lost their parents. We sang with them and gave them our gifts. It was good seeing John playing with kids again.

Upon our return home, time seemed to move forward for us once more. A vision for our future took shape. "We might be suffering now," John said, "but we can still have hope for tomorrow." Hope. I'd almost forgotten. It was the greatest gift we had been given—the hope that was born in Bethlehem on that very first Christmas. The reason for our celebrating and gift giving.

John and I next visited an orphanage in Ghana, again with bags of toys and clothes... Our experience in Ghana confirmed our mission. As parents without children, we would help children without parents. In 1994 we established Hearts of the Father Outreach. In 1999 we built the JoshKrisDan Home in Ghana, an orphanage named in memory of our children. We have since helped 50,000 orphans in seven developing countries, guided every step of the way.

The holidays will always be gift giving time for me. I'd once thought life had no purpose without our children. How could we have known how many children John and I would one day number as members of our family. A family of little angels on earth.

--By Elizabeth Moritz, Sheffield, Massachusetts, *Angels on Earth Magazine*

Handling The Holiday and Other Special Days

The following guidelines are shared in the hope that they will be helpful to you in planning for the holidays ahead and other special family times throughout the year.

Holidays, birthdays, and other special days are usually times for family gatherings and celebrations. When we come together for the first time after the death of our child, it can be really difficult. Our families try to protect us in the best way they can, but it will still hurt. How can we cope? How can we as grieving parents handle these times in a realistic and effective way?

First, acknowledge and accept your feelings. Tears, depression, and loneliness are all natural reactions to a loss—months, even years after the loss. At the same time, do not feel as though you are betraying your child if you are able to enjoy some of the festivities.

If the thought of preparing for these special days seems overwhelming, a first step may be to make a list of things to be done in planning for the holiday. *Have a family conference and decide together what is really important:* What traditions do you want to carry on? What would some members find meaningful? What things might be too painful? Are there any changes you want to make? Consider whether a task can be shared, if someone else can take it on, or whether it should be eliminated from this year's plans. Whatever decisions are reached, this sharing can demonstrate recognition and respect for each person's values.

In setting priorities, good guidelines to use are: Would the holiday or special days be okay without it? What gave meaning to your celebrations in the past? If you have family traditions, decide together whether you want to carry them on this year, or if this is a good time to begin new ones. Discuss ways of keeping traditions while trying to lessen the pain of loss. Remember that, although you may decide to do some things differently this year, you can return to earlier customs another year.

It is important to realize that while holidays and special days are traditionally a time of festivity, they can also be a time of frantic busyness and resultant fatigue. *Don't set unrealistic expectations for yourself.* As grieving persons we must recognize that we may simply be unable to function at our usual pace.

You may need to break things down into smaller, more manageable pieces, goals that might be easier to achieve. Fatigue can be deadly, and lead to feelings of depression under the best of circumstances. *Don't over-extend; don't over-commit.* Eliminate the unnecessary and reduce the pressure on yourself and others. By talking over what is really important with family members, priorities can be set, tasks shared, and plans

made to accomplish those things considered essential. Decide what you can handle comfortably, and let your needs be known to friends and relatives.

If your faith is an important part of your life, include time for its expression during these special days. But if your faith seems to have deserted you, as many bereaved parents find, you'll need plenty of time to sort out how your grief is affecting your beliefs. It may be helpful to talk with a minister who has personal experience with grief.

Our lives have changed. Our holidays will be different. It's not a choice of pain or no pain, but how we manage the pain we feel.

The important thing is to do what is comfortable for you and your family. It may help to know that those of us who have been through these holidays and special days before have found: Anticipation is frequently worse than the day itself.

Some Suggestions:

In addition to holidays observed by most folks, each family has its own times when they get together for fun and celebrations. Mark them on your calendar and begin early to plan your coping strategies.

Be intentional with your planning. Together as a family ask the following questions:

- Do we really enjoy doing this?
 - Is it done out of habit, free choice, or obligation?
 - Is this a task that can be shared?
 - Would the day be the same without it?
- Decide what you can handle comfortably.
- Are we open to talk about our child?
 - Do we feel able to send holiday cards this year?
 - Can we handle the responsibility of the family dinner, holiday parties, etc., or do we need to ask someone else to take over some of them this year?
 - Will we stay at home for the holidays, or choose a different environment? (Keep in mind that our grief will travel with us, no matter where we are.)

Shopping:

- Make out your shopping list as far ahead as you can. When one of the "good days" comes along, you can get your shopping done relatively quickly.
- Shopping by phone or from catalogs is the best way to avoid the crowds and the store decorations that go up earlier every year.

Don't be afraid to make changes.

- Let the children take over decorating the tree or invite friends in to help.
- Open presents on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas morning, or vice versa.
- Have dinner at a different time. Change the seating arrangement.
- Burn a special candle to quietly include your absent son or daughter.

Your greatest comfort may come in doing something for others:

- Give a gift in memory of your child to the charity of your choice.

- Adopt a needy family for the holidays.
- Invite a guest to share the festivities (exchange student, senior citizen, someone who would otherwise be alone).

Write or phone family and friends to let them know how you plan to approach the holiday, and how they can best help you.

Don't be afraid to have fun. Enjoyment, laughter, and pleasure don't mean you have forgotten your child. He/she would not want you to be forever sad. Give yourself and your family permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holiday when you are ready.

Make your plans flexible enough so you can change your mind at the last minute if necessary.

Make sure your plans don't isolate you from those who love and support you best. Take time to love and let yourself be loved, for this is the real gift of the holiday season.

--Prepared by Shirley Melin of TCF Fox Valley Chapter, Aurora, Illinois



Love Gifts:

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>

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.