



# The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

November-December 2022

Chapter Leader: Theresa Phillips  
24-Hour Help Line: (816)229-2640  
Private Facebook Page: Eastern Jackson County TCF  
Website: [www.easternjacksoncounty tcf.org](http://www.easternjacksoncounty tcf.org)

TCF National Headquarters  
48660 Pontiac Trail #930808 Wixom, MI 48393  
Website: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)  
(877)969-0010

Mark your calendar for this upcoming event:



The Eastern Jackson County (Independence) and South Kansas City Chapter of The Compassionate Friends will be participating in the Worldwide Candle Lighting at Walnut Gardens Community of Christ Church on December 11, 2022, at 7pm.

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 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Worldwide Candle Lighting.

The event will be held at  
Walnut Gardens Community of Christ Church  
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 email picture to

[phillipsplace@aol.com](mailto:phillipsplace@aol.com) prior to December 10 and buttons will be available when you arrive at the church.

2. Also bring a framed 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](http://www.thecompassionatefriends.org). Please allow time for sign in and find a seat before 7pm.

For more information, e-mail [phillipsplace@aol.com](mailto:phillipsplace@aol.com) or call 816-358-2969

In the event of inclement weather please watch your emails and the chapter website [www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org](http://www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org)

## 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

## 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.

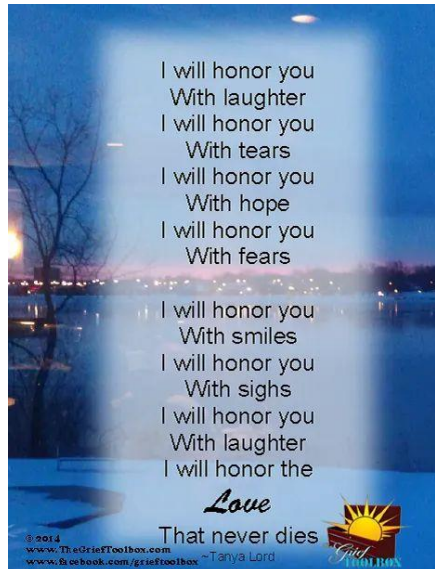
That night the mother talked to her husband, and they decided that no matter how bleak and empty it would be, they would have a traditional Thanksgiving dinner. The family sat around the table, very quietly at first. The father said grace and thanked the Lord for a bountiful meal. When he was through, 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 un-survivable 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, MN We Need Not Walk Alone*

## Grief

I had my own notion of grief.  
I thought it was a sad time  
That followed the death of  
someone you love.  
And you had to push though it  
To get to the other side.  
But I'm learning there is no  
other side.  
There is no pushing through.  
But rather,  
There is absorption.  
Adjustment.  
Acceptance.  
And grief is not something that  
you complete.  
But rather you endure.  
Grief is not a task to finish,  
And move on,  
But an element of yourself-  
An alteration of your being.  
A new way of seeing.  
A new definition of self.

## 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?

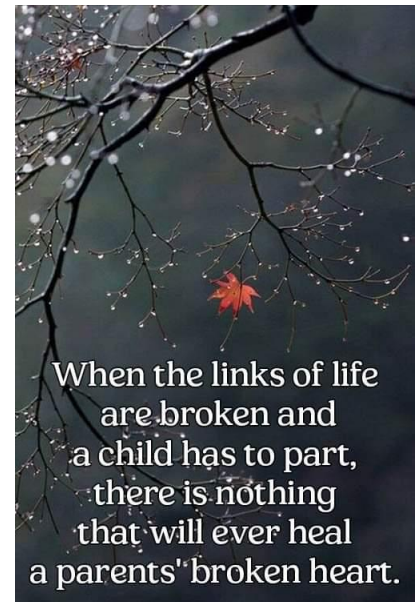
I had looked at that tree many times since Daniel left us, remembering how he played by it, rode his Cozy Coupe under it and ran around it. Just the other night when looking through the hundreds of pictures we have of him, I found one with him at age three in a hat and funny sunglasses, holding the tree. 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.*



## 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  
around

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

## Tradition, Tradition, Tradition

Even in normal times, tradition isn't always what it is cracked up to be, and sometimes "tradition" gets in the way of sanity. Often, we cling to tradition because it's easier, we don't want to offend others, we don't want to be embarrassed, or we don't know what else to do. When you are a grieving parent, giving in to tradition can drive you over the edge.

I found myself in the "tradition predicament" regarding putting up a tree the first Christmas holiday after my son, Chad, died. I didn't want, need or have the energy to put up a tree. Yet other family members wanted a tree, and they wanted it as it always had been big, bright, and decorated with ornaments they had purchased or made through the years. What eventually took place changed our holiday forever, and it has been a good thing for everyone involved.

I don't remember the exact circumstances of how our "new tradition" came into being that first year, but I do remember frustration, tears, and upset people. I also remember my daughter saying to me it was her Christmas too, and *she needed a tree*. It was her older brother—the one she remembered getting up with every Christmas morning when she was little—who was dead, and she had to have something so she could deal with the emptiness. So, she came up with a plan. She and her father would go find the tree, and she would take care of the decorations all by herself.

That was ten Christmases ago, and this year, once again, my husband and daughter will leave early in the morning a week before Christmas to hunt for a tree, just the two of them. When they come home, I will prepare breakfast while they get the tree in the holder and move the furniture. We will sit down together and enjoy our meal, and then my husband and I will leave for several hours. During that time, we will do whatever we feel like doing. We have gone to the cemetery, taken walks, gone to the bookstore, visited friends, etc. When we return, my daughter will have decorated our Christmas tree and the whole house!

Every year the tree has been different, limited only by my daughter's imagination and the

budget we keep her on. She didn't use our regular ornaments for a while, and when she did, she told me ahead of time and said how meaningful it was for her to be the one who put Chad's ornaments back on the tree. We have continued this "new tradition" to this day.

Now I find angel ornaments to put on the tree to honor our missing angel, and—along with my husband, sons and family—enjoy my daughter's traditional tribute to her brother. This "changing tradition" has been so healing. Our family has had the brightness and beauty that a lighted tree can provide, and I have been able to save my energy for other things I wanted to do.

During the next few weeks, I hope you will make the activities of the season as stress-free as you can. I hope that you will feel free to experiment with new traditions, knowing there is no "right way" to go through this season—only "your way." I hope that you will remember Christmas is only one day, and that the time leading up to it will probably be more difficult than the actual day. And finally, I hope for peace in your hearts, if not today then tomorrow or the tomorrow after, or the tomorrow after that. Take care....

--Sue Anderson

## Coping with Grief: Winter Blues

When the weather gets colder and the days get shorter, we often find ourselves feeling low. Some people call this the Winter Blues. When you are grieving, those blues can feel overwhelming. Grief itself *is* hard to cope with, and cold winds and dark nights can make those feelings seem more intense. Here are a few ideas that may help you cope with the Winter Blues:

Winter only lasts a few months. Use this *time to reflect* on your relationship with the person who died. Sometimes in our efforts to deny our loss, we rob ourselves of precious memories.

*Reach out to friends or family* when you can. Often our isolation is worse because we do not allow ourselves time with others. You are not alone. There are many other people going through a similar

experience. Although your relationship with your loved one is special, other people can understand. Take the risk to ask someone over for coffee or tea. Share with them.

Take time to look through picture albums. Gather family to *share stories* when holidays are over, and the pressure is off. Make a new tradition during the dreary months of winter for family to gather for an evening of remembering. Maybe other people are feeling the same way and are afraid to talk about it.

Try a *grief support group*. Sometimes all we need is to know other people hear us and understand. A group can help you to know you are normal.

*Read:* favorite stories, comedies, novels, or information about grief to understand your own reactions better. Somehow reading about topics helps us know we are not alone. You can find grief materials in your local library or hospice office.

*Take good care of yourself.* Eat right, rest and pamper your body. This goes for any season. Your body is under a tremendous amount of stress in adjusting to this loss.

Since grief affects us physically, paying attention to our bodies is important. Whether you prefer to do things alone or with others, *physical activity* helps. Taking a walk, doing simple aerobics, indoor swimming, playing racquetball or other activities can help you keep your body ready for the continued adjustment to loss. Feeling better physically can make a difference.

If you feel sad and *need to cry*, know that this is a normal reaction. You are not weak if you need to show your emotions.

*Write a letter to your loved one.* Sometimes we need to communicate with them. Going to the cemetery is okay and normal. If the weather prevents that, a letter can be very helpful.

Remember that you will survive this loss. The pain and ache can seem like it will last forever. The intensity will lessen in time, although you will always remember your loved one. Time does not necessarily "heal" all wounds, but it can help us adjust to the change. Take it minute by minute...then day by day.

--Lifted with love from the Sugar Land-Southwest Houston TCF Newsletter.

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

### On a Night in December

As days moved on towards winter and trees were going bare,  
 we were faced with shopping malls where carols filled the air.  
 And thoughts all turned to loved ones,  
 those present, and those not.  
 For us, whose lives were drained of light, it was solace that we sought.  
 And so, began a journey of candles round the earth  
 bringing light to darkness and honoring the worth  
 of children held so dear to us but never to grow old,  
 whose lives filled our life tapestries, with threads of finest gold.  
 Now we gather on this night and watch the candles burn,  
 see their pictures, say their names one by one, in turn.  
 And our children, brothers, sisters, for whom we gather here,  
 let us know, in the candles glow, that they are always near.  
 Their light will still surround us; their love will always flow.  
 As we leave may we remember that this is ever so.

by Genesse Bourdeau Gentry.



### On Hanukkah

The Jewish winter festival of Hanukkah is about light, as befits a holiday that is timed to arrive sometime close to the winter solstice, the shortest, darkest time of the year. My memories of Hanukkah have to do with light as well— lighting candles in the menorah, the nine-branched candelabra which is both the symbol and the essential instrument of Hanukkah.

As luck would have it, both of our children were born in mid-November. Each was a babe in his or her mother's arms when we first introduced them to the Hanukkah rituals, and we have photos in our family album of their fascination with the flickering candle flames.

Virtually every Jewish home has a menorah, to use once a year at Hanukkah time. We own several. We have an inexpensive tin one my wife and I used when we were in college and a lovely silver one given to us by members of my former congregation. One that has special meaning for me consists of nine empty wooden spools of thread glued to a board and spray-painted gold. Our son made it in nursery school. This was our son Aaron, who died when he was 14, and whose death prompted me to write *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

We can all be artists like that. We can take things of no apparent value and transform them. We can transform tragedy

into a lesson in courage and compassion. Each December, when we pause at the darkest time of the year to light first one, then two, and finally eight Hanukkah candles, I am reminded of that lesson and my soul is warmed.

--By Rabbi Harold Kushner

### The Island of Misfit Parents

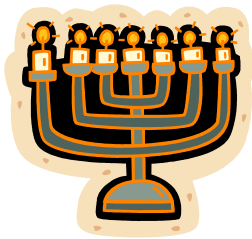
In the Christmas animation "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer," Rudolph and his friends go to an island full of "misfit toys." The toys are stuck there because they are different. The choo-choo train has square wheels, and the jack-in-the-box doesn't have a spring. These toys are broken and left alone with no hope. As a bereaved parent, those have been my feelings exactly. For many years I too could not see beyond my island.

Eventually Rudolph returns safely to the North Pole. He tells Santa about the island and the broken toys. Santa goes to the island with his elves, and the toys are repaired. They don't look all shiny and bright like new toys, but they do have hope beyond the island now.

Had I written this article prior to this year, I'd have stopped at the fact that the toys were broken and saw no hope. For most bereaved parents, that is quite true for some length of time. Now my ending tells me (and you) that there is hope beyond our island. We won't be shiny and brand new, for we all have gone through many changes. But after much time for repair, we can experience the feeling of "hope" once more.

Holiday Blessings.

--By Linda M. Trimmer, York, PA



### We Can Make It

During the holiday season, both Christians and Jews light candles in celebration of their respective faiths. As they do so, even the darkest rooms become 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--and it can be a mental and spiritual darkness as well as the darkness of a winter night - -we need to be reminded that it 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 make the darkness and fears flee. A little bit of light is all that most of us need, but oh we need that little bit so badly.

--Bettye & Sam Rosenberg, Louisville, KY

When we walk to the edge of all the light we have and take that step into the darkness of the unknown, we must believe that one of two things will happen--There will be something solid for us to stand on, or we will be taught how to fly.

--Patrick Overton

**The good that we have lost** must be kept alive and acknowledged; and so, we give the dead their just tribute by the simple act of conscious memory: we call them back to tell them that their lives, however short, were not wasted, that life itself is not a waste, that part of our life is their living on among us.

This is not a recipe for painlessness, tranquility, or evading the fact of death.... For me it is a way of being able to face what happened, to look into the flames in which my children's lives were extinguished and say: All is not lost. It is a way of telling them that I still love them, that I owe my capacity for love to them; and that what I learned about loving from them is what has enabled me to survive. --John Tittensor



"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.

### 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](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.