



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Sept-Oct 2016

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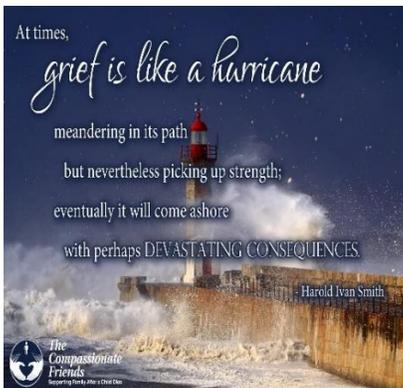
September

Time between summer and winter.
Time under changing skies—
muted and heavy with foresight,
or endless blue, smiling at butterflies.

Time between summer and winter.
Time between laughter and tear—
harvest of beauty remembered,
and voices (Where are you?) to hear.

Time between summer and winter.
Thoughtful and painful and wise--
muted and heavy with losing,
but also—smiling at butterflies.

--Sascha Wagner



Can It Be Fall Again Already?

Here we go again, that downward spiral into Fall that every bereaved parent dreads. For as sure as we turn the calendar page to October, here comes Halloween, followed by Thanksgiving and then (OH NO!) Christmas/Hanukkah. As I contemplate my fourth fall without my child. I can tell that the pain will be less intense and come less often. This does not mean I love her less. It just means that no one can grieve as intensely as in the beginning for very long. Your body couldn't sustain it.

Take care of yourselves. Learn to be selfish if you need to be. Tell those closest to you what you need in order to get through this time. You will survive, whether you like it or not. We're hear if you need us, your Compassionate Friends.

--Kathy McCormick, TCF, Lower Bucks County, PA

Observations

A little boy skipping down the grocery store aisle, carrying a box of Boo-Berry cereal, thinking of how to convince his mom that it's really good for you, --and there is a mother with tears in her eyes.

A little girl with long brown hair held back by pretty barrettes, squirming impatiently on the church pew, smiling shyly at the people in back of her, and there sits a mother with tears in her eyes.

Three little children riding brightly painted horses that go round and round for 25 cents outside the discount store, pretending they're cowboys or circus stars, and there stands a grandmother with tears in her eyes.

A little blond-haired boy picking out a Care Bear lunch box, excitedly telling his mom that soon he will get to ride the big yellow school bus with his friends, and there is a mother with tears in her eyes.

It's so hard to observe these simple childhood acts after you lose a little one!

--Betty George, grandmother of Timothy, Montgomery, AL

Cemetery Visits

Are you one of those people who have a need to go to the cemetery often? The non-bereaved frown on that, as a rule. Many people feel there is something morbid about those visits; that you're obsessing. Unless you know the pain of losing someone you love better than yourself, you can't understand that need.

Some people need to visit every day; others go now and then, and some never go back once the funeral is over. There are no rules. If it makes people uncomfortable when you make your cemetery visits, go alone. Don't feel you need to get anybody's permission or approval.

It is important for you to know that how often you go to the cemetery has absolutely nothing to do with the length and depth of your expression of your grief. It is also important to know that you have the right to do whatever comforts you. It may not seem right to your sister, your brother-in-law or your friends, etc., but that's their problem.

If you try to please everybody by the things you do and say, you'll find you are

not taking care of your needs—and there are no more important ones right now. You won't always require visits this frequently, and when you no longer feel this urge to go so often, don't feel guilty. It just means you are getting better. Accept it as that, and more forward with your life when you are able. For right now, do what makes you feel better.

—Fay Harden

To See the Gold

Autumn's here when trees turn to gold; It's the prettiest time of the year, I'm told. Then I think back, Denny, to that September day, When all of a sudden you were taken away. That is when the color left the trees for me, And grief set in and I could not see.

But now that years have passed, my son, The memories of you are happier ones. Even the colors of the trees are beginning to unfold,

Now, I know someday soon, I may see the gold.

--Gwen Kearns, TCF, Valley Forge, PA

I Don't Wear Make-up Anymore

I still shower every morning,
Brush my teeth just like before,
Comb my hair, polish my nails,
But I don't wear make-up anymore.

There's a black dress in the closet.
Wore it once, but not once more.
Not today, perhaps tomorrow,
And I don't wear make-up anymore.

I still want to look professional
Check the mirror on the door
Heels & hose & matching jewelry
But I don't wear make-up anymore.

Turn the key and start the engine
Slowly exit the driveway
Shifting gears, glide into traffic
So begins another day.

Just another day without you.
You, the apple of my eye,
Who gave me joy, now sadness.
"Oh God, why did my son die?"

I can feel the pressure building
And I know what is in store...
Gushing forth the tears of heartbreak.
That's why I don't wear make-up anymore.

--Alice C. Osborn, Rolla, MO

Halloween (and other) Masks

The month of October brings with it a smorgasbord for the senses. We hear the crunching and crackling of leaves under our feet. We see brilliant reds, oranges and yellows splash the earth. We feel the magical approach of winter in the air. October also brings Halloween, a date synonymous with masks.

As bereaved parents we have, at various times, worn many varied masks. We have masked our feelings of despair, sorrow and anguish for the sake of our loved ones, friends and acquaintances. We have masked our feelings of anger and bitterness for the traditional belief that a kind God would not do this to innocents. Most importantly, we have masked the person we have become, the person that has evolved after living through the death of a child.

Let us celebrate the month of October by beginning to take off some of our masks. A very positive and helpful way to begin this process is to attend the next Compassionate Friends meeting. Share your sorrow, your fears, your bitterness and disappointment. Above all, share your progress and triumphs through the arduous journey of grief. When you enter a room full of caring and supportive people who have shared your grief, there is no reason to wear a mask.

--Cathy Crawford, *Camden County Chapter*

The Mask: "A Way of Life for a Bereaved Parent"

People say, "Oh my, oh my,
It's amazing how you're getting by.

I don't think that I could be
So strong if such a thing happened to me."

But such persons are never around
When I remove the face of a clown,
And there for all the world to see
Is a person destroyed by tragedy?

So I look at these people and give a grin
Hiding the sickness, I feel within,
And hope that I will find a way
To get me through another day.

--Laraine Rodriguez, *TCF, Staten Island, NY*

There Is No Goodbye For Tracy, my special angel

I close my eyes and you're a newborn in
my arms,
Already I was promising to keep you safe
from harm.

I blink and you're a toddler taking your first
step,
So proud of you I could have wept.

I look again and you're starting school,
Already learning how other hearts to rule.
Before I know it you're graduating high
school,
So wise, so young, no one's fool.

Now you're ready to face the world,
Off to college no obstacle too big to hurdle.
No longer would you be mama's little girl,
In front of you lay the whole wide world.

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

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

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

Reflections

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

--Missy's mom, *Alice Micke*

I Grieve

By Rabbi Earl A. Grollman, *DHL, DD*

Often people will say to me, "Since you
are a grief therapist, isn't it great that when
there is a personal loss you are spared the
lacerating pain that others may experience."

Let me tell you something,....Intense
feelings of loss are just as real for us as well.
When someone we love has died, part of us,
too, has been buried with our loved one.
Pain and fear may wash over us in waves.

As the great poet Heinrich Heine wrote, "Sorrow
is like a toothache in our hearts."

For all of us, the only cure for grief is to
grieve, for grief is the price we pay for love. We
cry when we have to; we laugh when we can. Our
minds, bodies and souls require time to heal. We
need to share our inner selves with those who will
accompany us on the piercing pilgrimage. All we
can do is to resolve to survive each day (each
minute) the best we are able.

But we must offer all our departed love ones
more than testimonials of tears and monuments of
grief. There is an inscription above the Sorbonne
Medical School that reads, "Here is where death
is made to serve the living." We can live for them
and the ideals, principles and values they
cherished most. We can make of their memories
living beacons that show us the way to kindness
and sensitivity to the hurt and needs of others.
Yes, we miss our beloveds. We grieve for them
and now we must find ways that will permit our
sorrow and grief to serve the living.

The Older Child

For so long I've wanted to write about being
the bereaved parent of an older child. How my
heart is broken just as if he had been stillborn,
died in infancy, as a youth, teenager or young
adult. Leland was 42 and none of the above, but
he was my child.

At the holidays I think so much of him. He
loved Christmas and would have bought and
wrapped all his gifts early. The decorations would
be ready and he'd be eager to start putting them
up right after Thanksgiving. In this way he was
like a kid again.

Too often when we hear of bereaved parents
we think of a young person or infant. We forget
that we are parents of children no matter the age.
I read the obituaries now, looking for adult
children, and seeing the parents as survivors. And
my heart aches for them as I know what they are
going through. Their hearts are as broken as mine
is, and it will never heal. Sure, time makes the
pain less intense, and the tears come less often.
But the hole in my heart is still there and always
will be.

Too many parents of older children who have
died are reluctant to join groups such as Bereaved
Parents or Compassionate Friends. We often feel
that we can tough it out alone or with family. And
the small numbers of older parents at these
meetings make it even harder to attend. I wish it
were different and the word was out to any
bereaved parent that all are welcome no matter
the age of the child. He or she was their child.

Whenever I talk to the bereaved parent of an
older child, I feel such a closeness, and I can
empathize with them because I know that our
pain is just as great as any bereaved parent. We
just seem to be sitting in the shadows more.

God bless us all

--Linda Bishop, *mother of Leland Sharp (3/2/62-
9/8/04), Excelsior Springs, MO*

And That Was the Deal

Michael Gartner wrote about the sudden loss of his 17-year-old son Christopher to juvenile diabetes:

Tim Russert of NBC called, devastated as we all are, and said the only thing that has helped: "If God had come to you 17 years ago and said, 'I'll make you a bargain. I'll give you a beautiful, wonderful, happy and healthy kid for 17 years, and then I'll take him away,' you would have made that deal in a second."

And that was the deal.

Back to School

As I passed the fourth anniversary of our son's death, I felt as though I had been through it all, and there would be no more "surprises" that would blind-side me with that horrible grief that I felt in the beginning. How wrong I was!!

I thought that this year would be a little easier for some reason. As I sat in church the week before school started, the priest talked about the "difficult" things that some people had to face in the next week or two. Such as what classes to take, what brand name of clothing to buy, which name brand sneakers would be "in" this year, and all the other "tough" choices kids and parents had to make to start school.

As I sat and listened, I thought, I wish I had tough choices like that to make, and it suddenly occurred to me that my little boy, the "baby" of the family, would have been a senior this year. And all those feelings from four years ago came rushing back. I had been through four times of not sending him to school, and this year was the most difficult. We were not going to be able to experience all of the fun things that go with being a senior—homecoming dances, football games, the prom, a special date. All of the fun things we did with his brother Tom & sister Elizabeth—we wouldn't have the chance to do. His brother Mike also missed out on those fun things—his little brother had just died, and nothing was fun. I felt as though we had been robbed twice.

As the first day of school approached that week, I became more miserable. I missed my son, and the last opportunity to have him do what he should have been doing. I didn't know how to get past this terrible grief that I was feeling.

The day before school started, one of Joe's friends called, just to talk. We had a wonderful conversation, about school starting, and all that was happening. I'm

sure that call came straight from heaven. It was nice to have a little input into "a senior's" plans for the year.

The next day—the first day of school—I went to the bank to have a check made out for the recipient of Joe's scholarship. I thought how appropriate that it happened to fall on this day, that I happened to be there to get the money. It was a good feeling to be able to do something in Joe's memory on a day that was very difficult for me.

That should be the last first day of school I have to worry about, but I've learned through the wonderful people at TCF that I don't have to go through this alone, and there will be more events that blindside me, but we'll make it through together, and we have someone who understands. As I talked to people this past month, I realized that there were many more than myself who had the same "problem" with that first day of school. These are the "special days" that other people don't think about, and they can sometimes be most difficult!!

--Janet Keller, TCF, York Chapter "In loving memory of our son and brother, Joe Keller."



Out of the Blue

"How is it several years down the road?" I'm sometimes asked. Maybe they want to hear that I'm "all over it" and that everything is hunky dory in my life now that this much time has elapsed. I have to admit in all honesty that, though it is much better where I am now, as compared to way back there where fresh, raw and bleeding grief abides, I do still have to deal with the remnants of grief from time to time. It comes and sits on my shoulder and says, "Here I am, deal with me again," and I do, for denying the remnants doesn't work anymore than denying the fresh grief works.

The main difference is that I have had eight years to learn about my needs on those yearly special events, such as birthdays, death days, Mother's Day, holidays, etc., and I know how to handle those times.

Practice hasn't made me perfect, but it has helped. Those days don't devastate me as they once did. I don't anticipate them weeks ahead of time as I did when I was learning to create a life without my child. Long ago, I created my new life, my new normal.

The things that cause me to deal with the pain again are not things I am able to anticipate. Instead, they come "out of the blue" to mow me down...not kind enough to give me warning. For example, occasions such as the birth of a baby boy...to my brother's son and his wife, seeming to assure that with good luck my family's name would be perpetuated. Although I knew intellectually that my husband's family name would die with him, since our son had not married when he died, I had not dealt emotionally with that fact. As I looked at that beautiful baby boy there in the hospital nursery, there was no way in the world I could have anticipated my painful response as I admitted that we would never have that particular grandchild to carry on my husband's family name.

It is a one-time experience. Once you have dealt with that "out of the blue" event, it becomes, like the yearly special days, familiar. So much so that when my nephew's second son was born two years later, there were no remnants hanging about. So I know this was yet another first I had put behind me. I also knew there would be other firsts I would have to face.

--Mary Cleckley, Atlanta, GA

A Scar That Just Won't Heal

The room you once lived in
doesn't look the same.
The people who used to call you
never mention your name.
The car you used to drive,
they may not make anymore;
And all the things you once treasured
are boxed behind closet doors.

The clothes you set the trends by
are surely out of date.
The people you owed money to
have wiped clean the slate.
Things have changed and changed again
since you went away,
But some things have remained the same,
each and every day.

Like this aching in my heart,
a scar that just won't heal,
Or the way a special song
can change the way I feel.
Brother, you must know that the music bonds us
and will always keep us close;
Because secretly I know deep in my heart,
it's the music you miss most.

So let the world keep on turning
and time can take its toll.
For as long as the music keeps playing,
you'll be alive and dancing in my soul.

--Stacie Gilliam, TCF, Oklahoma City, OK



I do not ask that you forget your I do not ask that you forget your dear departed. I want you to remember. I only ask that you remember more than the moment of death, more than the funeral, more than the house of mourning, *Remember life!* Remember the whole life, not the final page of it.

--Rabbi Maurice Davis, TCF, Baltimore MD

Forever 13

He would have been a junior
He should have been
on the football team
He could have been a wrestler
He might have been ...

He would have been 17 this year
He should have been laughing and
running about
He could have been chasing the girls
He might have been ...

He would have been blowing his
French horn
He should have been giving his
teachers a hard time
He could have been learning how to
drive
He might have been ...

Except now he is forever 13 ...

--Lorrie Beyl, Colo. Springs, CO, TCF

How Long Will The Pain Last?

How long will the pain last?" a broken hearted mourner asked me. "All the rest of your Life." I have to answer truthfully. We never quite forget. No matter how many years pass, we remember. The loss of a loved one is like a major operation. Part of us is removed, and we have a scar for the rest of our lives. As years go by, we manage. There are things to do, people to care for, tasks that call for full attention. But the pain is still there, not far below the surface. We see a face that looks familiar, hear a voice that echoes, see a photograph in someone's album, see a landscape that

once we saw together, and it seems as though a knife were in the wound again. But not so painfully. And mixed with joy, too. Because remembering a happy time is not all sorrow, it brings back happiness with it.

How long will the pain last? All the rest of your life. But the thing to remember is that not only the pain will last, but the blessed memories as well. Tears are proof of life. The more love, the more tears. If this be true, then how could we ever ask that the pain cease altogether? For then the memory of love would go with it. The pain of grief is the price we pay for love.

I'm feeling a little bit better right now

These mood swings have been so severe

One minute I'm happy, the next one I cry

And I never know when or where

I know that my son is with God right now

That he is okay. I believe

he's happy to be there, enjoying himself

Does he ever think about me?

I long for the day that I'll see him again

That day will be ever so sweet

I can't wait to be there, to hold him so close

and that will then end all this grief

I can't help but wonder just what it is like

for him but I know I must wait

But I think that it's wonderful, better than I

could ever imagine, how great!

But right here and now it is all I can do

to be patient and keep keeping on

To accept the deep sadness whenever it

comes

and be happy the moments it's gone.

--Jenny Donaldson, South Kansas City, MO, TCF

Instead of thinking
I need to get back
to the old "normal,"

perhaps I need to embrace
how I am changed forever
by the death of my loved one.

To do this I have to acknowledge the reality
of the death

and be willing to connect
to the deepest parts of myself.

That's when grief becomes
a growth process
the turmoil of change.

I am new;
I am changed;
I am reborn.

--Alan D. Wolfelt,

The Journey Through Grief

Where Do I Go?

Now that you're gone, where do I go
to see your fair smile
to hear your tinkling giggle
to smell your damp hair after a swim
to listen to your questions
to touch your gentle cheek
to feel your bear hug?

Where do I go

to share all my years of wisdom
to find someone who'll tell me the truth
to answer the phone that won't ring
to tell you I'm sorry
to know that I am loved and
to pour out my love and my tears?

I shall go

to the pictures that hold you forever
to the books we shared
to the music you taught me to love
to the woods we explored as one
to the memories that never fail
to the innermost reaches of my heart
to where we are always together.

--Marcia Alig, TCF, Mercer, NJ

Love Gifts

Thank you for the donation made by Ken and Kathy Wilcox in memory of their son, Jeff.

Please remember that you can give to The Compassionate Friends through your United Way pledge at work or as a single gift, but you MUST WRITE IT IN.

TCF asks for donations in memory of our children who have died. Our activities support the grief work of many families. We also work to educate members of our community about the grief process & how they can support bereaved parents.

Please help us help others. Make a LOVE GIFT today. Tax deductible Love Gifts may be sent to: TCF, P.O. Box 2204, Independence, MO 64055

For Remembrance dates please visit our website at www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org Find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1582699755290182>

We have several volunteers who write remembrance cards to families on birthdays and death dates. Just a reminder if you have an address change please email phillipsplace@aol.com or mail a note to TCF, P.O. Box 2204, Independence, MO 64055 so the roster can be updated.