



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

January-February 2026

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To the Parent Who Feels the Same
Grief as Me,

Most of you I have never met, but yet we visit the same place every day. We all walk down the same unguided dark path. We cling to memories as if it's our life support. Our minds drift off to that same place, the place that temporarily distracts us from our grief.

You're the one person who knows the way my stomach feels — the unhealed knot in the center of my gut. You know the hollowness in my heart. Your tears are the same shape as mine, and they roll off the cheek without warning. You smile just like me. It's a smile that has been perfected so others would stop wondering about your state of health and when or if you would pull through this.

Our deep exhale has been performed countless times, since the reminder to breathe is still necessary.

Only you understand the box in the closet where we keep the little things — the items that most people wouldn't find a connection to. But we do. We can find that connection. Maybe it's a ribbon, a stone or a piece of paper someone had written your child's name on. An article of clothing that was last worn as we try desperately to preserve their smell.

This isn't the same box with all the newborn items in it. This is a different box than the cutely decorated one that holds baby blankets, hospital bands, old pacifiers and first haircut clippings. This box is kept much further back in the closet, almost hidden as if it's a secret.

You are the only one in this world who can look me in the eyes and say, "I get it." Dear friend, how I wish you didn't get it.

Like clockwork, I lie awake in my bed every night. I know you're probably doing the same. As lonely as I feel sometimes, I know you're feeling lonely, too. As indescribable as my pain is, I know you understand. It's like a silent language that neither one of us wants to speak.

Our children's stories are most likely different. The paths that led us here are probably nothing alike. It's what happened in the after that forever bonds us now. It's the pain of burying our child that makes our scars the same and our paths cross.

I wouldn't wish this feeling on anyone, but yet to know you exist is somewhat of a selfish comfort for me. It's the only place I find acceptance — to know that someone out there is just like me. I know with you that my tears aren't measured and my sadness is never judged. The length of the time I grieve will never be rushed, all the wrong things will never be said and you understand sometimes silence is enough.

My sadness will never make you uncomfortable because our words fit together like a puzzle. Even though I'm a stranger, my heartache brings you to tears. You live with that forever emptiness, too. So as I pray my nightly prayers, I always include you — the parent I'll never meet. You're the other person out there who shares my same grief. I hope you find some comfort in knowing you're not alone and that there's someone out there like you. ♥

~ Written by a Grieving Mom

*A bereaved parent will miss every birthday,
holiday, milestone, and life's success to be shared.
Some weddings will never be;
a mother and father's pride and excitement
seeing their child grow and flourish are gone –
an entire generation of people are irrevocably altered.
Missing the future is why grief lasts forever.
The ripple effect lasts forever.*
~ Ronald Ross



compassionatefriends.org

From Your Child, As the Year Turns

**Mama,
as this year ends and a new one
begins,
please don't feel like you're
leaving me behind.**

**I am not in the pages you turn—
I am in the love you carry forward.**

**I see the tears you try to hide
and the strength you didn't ask for
but still hold.
Every time you say my name,
every time your heart aches,
I am there.**

**You don't have to be brave for me.
You don't have to be ready.
Just keep loving.**

**When the world celebrates and
you feel quiet,
I am close.
When you step into a new year
unsure how to breathe,
I am still with you.**

**Walk forward, Mama—slowly if
you need to.
I go with you.
Always.**



May this year be gentle with you.
Not loud.
Not demanding.
Not insisting you be more hopeful
than your heart can manage right
now.

This new year arrives quietly,
unfolding without explanation, full of
shadows you can't name
and unknowns that already make
your chest tighten.
I won't call it happy.
Because happiness feels like a dare
when you've buried parts of yourself
in last year's soil.
Because hope, some days, feels
dangerous,
like reaching for something that
might disappear again. Like trusting a
sunrise after too many nights taught
you not to expect one.

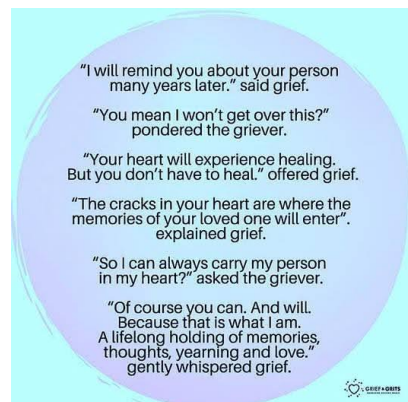
So instead, let this be whispered
over you:
May this year be gentle.
Gentle with the wounds you carry
forward,
the grief that didn't stay in its
calendar year,
the tears that still surprise you in
grocery aisles and quiet rooms.
Gentle with the parts of you still
learning how to breathe again, the
parts that flinch at joy because loss
once followed close behind.

May this year not rush you.
May it not shame your slowness.
May it not demand resolutions from
a soul that is still recovering.
If growth comes,
let it come softly.
If change arrives,

let it knock instead of breaking the
door down.
If joy returns,
let it sit beside your sorrow without
trying to replace it.

May this year hold space for your
honesty,
for unanswered prayers,
for faith that looks more like clinging
than celebrating.
You don't need fireworks.
You don't need confetti declarations.
You need mercy in the ordinary.
You need grace in the mornings.
You need a God who walks slowly
with you
and does not confuse quiet
endurance for lack of faith.

So you step into this year without
pretending.
Still aching.
Still believing.
May this year be gentle.
And if gentleness is all it offers,
then maybe—
that will heal what the last one
broke.



The Valentines of Yesterday

In my lifetime I have received many
valentines. Parents, grandparents,
aunts, uncles, school friends, good
friends, boyfriends, acquaintances
and my husband have showered me
over the years with lovely valentines
which I have so appreciated. The
tradition of declaring friendship and
love on Valentine's Day is a very
fond memory.

However, the sweetest valentines I
have ever received are from my son.
From the first days in nursery school

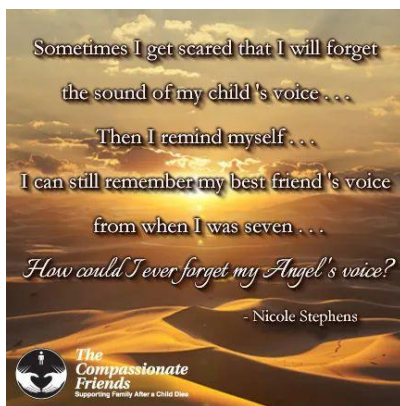
when my son made a hand plaque
and a drawing on construction paper
to the final valentine in 2002, I
cherished these gifts of love from my
only child. I have kept every
valentine my son ever made for me
or bought for me. I have every
Valentine gift he ever gave me.
These are the treasures that remind
me how special my love for my son
love truly is.

There is no love to compare with the
unconditional love we give our
children. I think my son knew that
nobody in the world would love him
as much as his mother did. He also
knew that he would love his children
in just this same way. This
unconditional love that we give our
children is the most precious love in
life. It is always our hope that they,
too, will find the joy of this love with
their children.

When our child dies, we cling to our
unconditional love as we feel the
anguish of a final separation on this
earthly plane and a tsunami of
betrayal as the devastation of this
incomprehensible loss sweeps over
us. The pain is real. It is physical,
emotional, psychological, and
forever embedded on our psyche.
Yet without that unconditional love,
there would be no pain. Who among
us would trade the most infinitely
rewarding love and the subsequent
pain of loss for a life of lukewarm
relationships?

And so, on Valentine's Day this
year, I looked back at this love, at the
good times, the wonderful handmade
childhood valentine cards and gifts,
and the carefully selected cards of
adulthood that my son gave to me.
His words, his love, his appreciation
for all that we had shared as mother
and child are reflected in these
treasures. There were tears, certainly,
but they were tempered with the
many wonderful, sweet memories of
my son and his life. It is these sweet
memories which sustain me, give me
hope, and bring me gratitude for all
that was given to me. My son is
forever in my heart. He is with me
every day and every night, and
especially, he is with me on
Valentine's Day

—Annette Mennen Baldwin, TCF, Katy,
TX—In memory of her son, Todd Mennen



A Father's Pain

Sometimes a father wishes
That time could rewind
And that the sands
Of an hourglass could rise.

Sometimes he craves
That the moments he's lost
Could be found again
And hope restored.

Sometimes a father needs
The music to be unwritten
And somehow the winter
Changed into spring.

Sometimes he wants
To be made young again
And that his future is
Still in front of him.

Sometimes a father wishes
That the pain in his heart
Could be replaced with
The smiles he's lost.

Sometimes he longs to
Once again feel all the hugs
He cherished so much
When he was welcomed home.

Sometimes a father's spirit is
So deeply scarred
That his mind could never
Find a way to heal his heart.

Sometimes a father cries
And can't believe that
There isn't a way
To see his children again.

Sometimes a father realizes
That the only way
To do all of this
Is to join his girls in Heaven.

*By Don Batson South Kansas City
TCF Chapter*



This is what grief is.
A hole ripped through the very fabric of your being.
The hole eventually heals along the jagged edges that remain. It may even shrink in size.
But that hole will always be there.
A piece of you always missing.
For where there is deep grief, there was great love.
Don't be ashamed of your grief.
Don't judge it.
Don't suppress it.
Don't rush it.
Rather, acknowledge it.
Lean into it.
Listen to it.
Feel it.
Sit with it.
Sit with the pain. And remember the love.
This is where the healing will begin.

— Monica Bobbitt



There is No Goodbye

You're the sunrise in the morning;
You're the star that shines bright in the night;
You're the gentle breeze across our face;
At the darkest times you're our light;
You're the courage we have to stand tall;
You're the strength to keep our heads held high;
You're the power and will to carry on.
With the love you gave us there are no goodbyes;
Its been so long since you went away;
But we still feel you up from above;
During the hardest times, we know you're there;
Giving us your courage, strength and love.
You're the unspeakable deadness in our eyes;
You're the tears that stream down our cheek;
You're the constant heartache that we feel;
You're the happiness we hope to seek.
We remember all the love we had for you;
On this day we always dread;
But today we forget that horrible time and reminisce...

About the good memories of you instead.
You will always be tucked away;
Deep inside our broken hearts,
But you will never be forgotten or replaced;
Because we can never again be torn apart.
So the next time we feel that gentle breeze;
Or the tears that start to warm our eyes;
We will smile and always remember...
With the love you gave us;
There is no goodbye.

WHEN I GO

When I go
don't learn to live without me
just learn to live with my love
in a different way.

And if you need to see me
close your eyes
or look in your shadow
when the sun shines

I'm there.

Sit with me in the quiet and you will know
that I did not leave.

There is no leaving when a soul is blended
with another.

When I go
don't learn to live without me
just learn to look for me in the moments.

I will be there.

Donna Ashworth, from 'LOSS'



The Memory Keeper

Grief sits beside me
but so does love
folded into the small corners of my memory
where your voice still hums
where your touch still lingers

I walk with both the ache and the gift
of what remains
it is my memory of you that softens
the sharp edges
that steadies me when silence feels
too loud

I am the memory keeper...
the one who carries your light
forward
and who lets your story breathe
through mine
and in the holding of the memory
I am held too

A Reflection for the Memory

Keeper:

Sit quietly and close your eyes.
Breathe in slowly, and let yourself
feel the presence of the one you love.
Call to mind a single memory that
makes you smile, or that feels like
their essence.
Notice how it warms you, even
through the ache of loss.

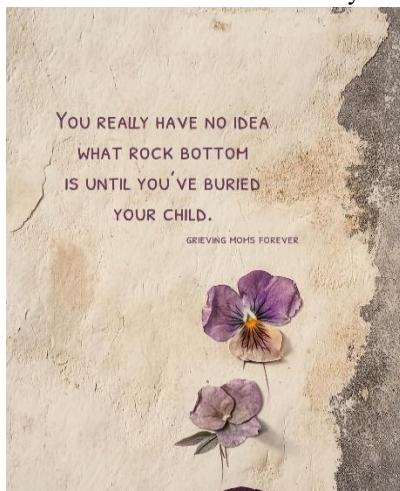
Whisper to yourself:

"I am the memory keeper. And in the
holding of the memories, I am held
too."

Allow yourself to stay in that
moment for a few breaths, letting the
memory both hold you and be held
by you.

When grief rises, return here, always
returning to the lantern of memory,
soft against the dark.

Gabby XO



Snowflakes

Have you ever stood outside,
with your head tilted back and your
mouth open wide, trying to catch a
snowflake? Snowflakes fall
everywhere, on your hair, your chin,
your eyelashes, even your nose, and
some even manage to land on the
very tip of your tongue, only to
finish before you can really get a
taste.

Each snowflake is a completely
different design and pattern. No two
are ever created exactly the same. It
is a mystery that continues to delight
“snow catchers” everywhere. There
are very few things that are so
lovely, delicate, perfect, and
different, yet disappear so quickly,
never to be reproduced in exactly the
same pattern again.

Sometimes it seems as though
people are like that, too. Those we
love are so lovely, so delicate, so
perfect, so different—and they
disappeared too quickly, too.

Each of us is as unique as those
childhood snowflakes. We each have
a unique look, sound, smell, touch.
We are cut from unique patterns,
assembled in an endless variety of
shapes, styles, combinations. We
look, sound, talk, think & act
differently than anyone else. There
are no identical matches just as there
are no perfectly identical snowflakes.

We know this, but when it comes
to grieving, we demand that
everyone grieve the same way. Some
of us will talk our way through the
iciness of our grief while others
prefer more solitude. Some want to
read everything they can about grief
while others wish to submerge
themselves in work. Some cry
endlessly while others never shed
tears. We are as unique as
snowflakes drifting from the sky.

There is no right or wrong way to
grieve, although there are some ways
that are a bit less dramatic. Just as
the snowflakes find their way to their
destination, so too will each of us
find our own way through grief.
Frozen hearts and numb minds do,
eventually, thaw. Icy memories that
chill to the bone can grow warmer as
we begin to move through our grief.

Whatever pain we are carrying
begins to weave itself into our very
being, and eventually it becomes a
part of our history. We begin to
become the sum total of our
experiences, our unique patterns
reflecting our unique journeys.

We carry souvenirs of our hurts,
each stored away until time to add
them to the next hurt, thus piling up
one hurt after another, all to be
carried forever in our being. These
hurts leave scars, some big, some
small, but all significant in their pain.
Each scar must have a place in our
being. We become a carefully
organized mass of layers, as delicate
and intricate and individual as a
snowflake.

Sometimes, especially in the
early months and even years of grief,
all we can remember is the pain and
horror of our loved one's death. Pain
overshadows everything. These

shadows seem to make every day
harder, and in winter, the shadows
seem longer, deeper, darker. The
snowflakes seem small, less
beautiful.

The magic of winter's
decorations only leaves us cold and
barren. If we begin as frozen beings,
the journey through grief becomes a
process of thawing. And each of us
will defrost in a pattern as unique
and individual as the snowflakes that
drift across the windowpane, leaving
little icy streaks of memory on the
heart.

So, be patient with yourself this
winter season. Recognize your own
unique emotions and hurts and learn
to identify the tracings of your own
snowflakes of grief. You will survive
these winter days and this winter
season. You will begin to defrost
eventually, and it will be far less
painful if you will begin to cherish
your differences rather than use them
as weapons and yardsticks of
judgment.

Surviving really isn't too hard.
Living can be. No matter how crazy
the world or out of “sync” you feel,
don't lose the treasure of your loved
one's presence in your life. You
don't have to say goodbye. You
don't stop loving someone just
because he died.

Claim your grief and your unique
way of surviving. Do whatever it
takes to remember the life of your
loved one, not just the death.

Each footprint is unique, each
hurt is different, each snowflake the
only one ever created. Your love is
real, just as is your pain. But leave
the regrets behind in the slush. Bring
the joy of loving with you into this
holiday season. Let its memory light
your world. Our loved ones died, but
we did not lose them.

Time and space become
meaningless for us. The bonds
between us are too strong to let death
sever the ties. So light a candle and
whisper a *thank you* for the moments
you traveled together. Our arms may
be empty, but the heart is full. And
every time you see a snowflake or
just image one, remember to cherish
its unique design and pattern ...and
to cherish your unique footprint
through grief.

--By Darcie D. Sims

Living Valentines

February is the month for Valentines. Giving a valentine is a way of saying, "You are my special friend, and I want to be your special friend, too."

Did you know there is a way that you can give a valentine to a loved one who died? It is called a "Living Valentine." A "Living Valentine" is when you do something that would bring joy and love to your child if he/she were here now. It doesn't have to be something big. It could be simply pitching in to share a household chore with someone in your family, such as doing the dishes together and having fun with it. Or it might be putting out some food for birds on a cold wintry day, or caring for our life-giving earth by recycling paper, cans or glass. Pick something that you know you can do.

One nine-year-old boy made his "Living Valentine" by being friendly to a new kid at school whom everyone had been picking on.

Making a "Living Valentine" can leave you with a good feeling in your heart. Imagine that your child is sharing that good feeling with you.

--Yvonne Williams, *Bereavement Magazine*

To Honor You

To honor you, I get up every day, take a breath, and start another day without you in it.

To honor you, I laugh and love with those who knew your smile and the way your eyes twinkled with mischief

To honor you, I take the time to appreciate everyone I love. I know now there is no guarantee of days or hours spent in their presence.

To honor you, I listen to music you would have liked, and sing at the top of my lungs, with the windows rolled down.

To honor you, I take chances, say what I feel, hold nothing back, risk making a fool of myself, and dance every dance.

You were my light, my heart, my gift of love, from the very highest source.

So, every day, I vow to make a difference, share a smile, live, laugh and love.

Now I live for us both, so all I do, I do to honor you.

--Connie F. Kiefer Byrd, *TCF Tyler TX*

Listen

Listen, gentle people, and hear my truest needs... I hear you stumbling for words. Relax. There are no words...

I hear you remembering a funny story about my loved one and looking embarrassed, because you are laughing. Share it with me. Let me laugh. It gives me some-thing to hold on to in the middle of the night, when I feel only pain...

Be your happy self...and let me be me. On days when I can laugh, I will. On days when I can speak of my loved one, I need you to share my memories... You don't have to give me answers, as I will learn to live without them.

You don't have to pretend my loved one never existed, thinking I will forget if you do. Let me speak her name, and you speak it too. She is always there, the one I love so deeply, always part of who I am. If you take that from me, I will be less of who I am.

--Jacqueline L. Rogers, *TCF*

It's So Cold

It's so cold.

I went to the cemetery today.
50-below wind-chill.

After two and a half years
I thought I was more used to this,
But I wasn't as "healed" as I thought.

Your little place in the cemetery
So alone...So cold
I wanted to stretch out on your grave,
Cover you with my body,
Protect you from the cold.

I could almost imagine
what your voice would sound like,
"I'm so cold, mama."

Nothing I can do to protect you.

Helpless, hopeless, despair.

Logically, I tell myself this is

foolish,

you feel no cold.

Motherly, I ache to protect you.

It's so cold today.

I'm sorry Catie, I'm sorry.

--Mary VanBockern, *TCF, Sioux Falls*



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?'

There Is No Word

They call a man a widower
when he has lost his wife,

The woman is a widow
when her man does lose his life.

And orphan is the word perhaps
for the most of us one day,
For it is normal losing Mom and Dad
along the way.

But you can look both high and low
and then look far and wide

And never find a word for one
who's had a child who died.

So, is it then so rare a find for
lexicography?

And, like some unfound jungle plant,
there's yet no name for me?

Or could it be a word
that's just too difficult to choose,
And, God forbid, a nightmare curse,
too horrible to use?

So, at a loss to tell our loss,
we call ourselves bereaved,
For there's no word to tell of pain
that cannot be believed. --Ken Falk,
Northwestern Connecticut TCF

Can-do's for the New Year

The problems with New Year's resolutions are many, of course. They seldom last more than a few weeks, and they often seem like more of a burden than a blessing. Ever wondered why? Well, here's a guess: People make too many New Year's resolutions, and they make them too difficult.

So, let's do things differently this year. Let's just make a few medium-easy resolutions—and let's decide to stick with them, say, only through Valentine's Day. For us grievers, even such a mellow arrangement is no small task. What can we come up with that's (1) worth thinking and

planning about and (2) worth dedicating an effort to? How about some soft and easy things? (Don't get hung up on the notion that worthwhile tasks HAVE to be difficult.)

The first resolution has to do with the child or children you have lost to death. Have a conversation with your dead child, not about things or other people, but about yourself, your feelings, your problems, questions about yourself. Just focus on a question such as "Why do I need to blame myself?" and wait. Your mind or your heart will find your child's answer more comforting and less confusing than many answers you have been given so far. Such a conversation often takes some time—you may have to ask a question more than once. But then, you do that anyway, don't you?

Secondly, resolve to balance your grief with gentle, even happy memories. We have always conceded that pretending to feel good when we actually don't feel good is counterproductive. So, if you come to those painful moments of aching emptiness, let them be there, don't brush them aside or feel guilty for being so sad. Grief is a reality, no less than life and love and the weather—and of course you know that nothing is ever improved by pretending it isn't there. But when grief comes your way, and after you have held it in your mind for a while, add to it just one bright memory of something you shared with your child—how long ago. You'll probably shed an extra tear, but you'll also be surprised by an extra smile. Such is the power of love and remembering.

Well, two resolutions may be enough for this year—we said that we don't want too many, and we don't want to make them too difficult. Try this new approach to New Year's resolutions. Who knows, you may even make a healing habit out of one or the other.

Gentle New Year, everybody.
Sascha Wagner

Feel to heal.

It takes an enormous amount of energy to remain stuck in chronic grief...or sadness. Often, we try to resist these emotions by keeping a

stiff upper lip or a cheerful demeanor when we're really seething inside. This is especially true during the times of the year when...difficult emotions [are most likely to] surface, such as the anniversary of a death or birthday.

What we resist persists. Instead of trying to talk yourself out of how you feel, harness the courage to acknowledge uncomfortable emotions. Accept your regrets, anger and sadness without remorse. Just let them be. Then [eventually, you will be able to] let it go. Not only will your energy resurface, but you also [may] find sensible solutions to many of the dilemmas in your life. Your discomfort [can] evaporate like mist in the sun

Look for the positive. Every thought in our heads is accompanied by a cascade of biochemicals called neurotransmitters. In general, thoughts that are optimistic, grateful and loving result in "feel good" neurotransmitters called endorphins. The same "feel good" chemicals are produced during exercise, love making and meditation. By contrast, thoughts that are fearful, angry or hopeless increase levels of stress hormones, which make us feel tired, anxious and irritable.

Learning to focus on the positive can-do wonders for energy levels as well as improve health and longevity. Research by Dr. Becca Levy of Yale University shows that positive thoughts energize the body to walk faster. Furthermore, Levy found that an upbeat attitude toward aging extends life expectancy. It can provide the same kind of benefit as exercise, not smoking and having a healthy blood pressure, cholesterol and weight. Other research suggests that when people train themselves to feel love and gratitude regularly, their blood pressure normalizes, their heart function stabilizes, and they have more energy.

One way to practice a positive attitude is by keeping a "gratitude journal": Every day, write down three to five things for which you are grateful. Another strategy is simply to take notice when you fall into a "poor me" or martyred state of mind. Then do all you can to turn those thoughts around.

--Christiane Northrup, M.D.



We are very grateful for donations received from:

Michelle and Randy Williams in memory of Miranda.

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.