



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

March-April 2026

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

Private Facebook Page: Eastern Jackson County TCF

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IT

I will never get over IT
IT is the love
IT is the missing them
IT is the memories
IT is part of who I am now
IT is part of who I will always be

By Alan Pederson



I Tried to Hold on to You....

I tried to hold on to you, but you
slipped through my grasp,
Like a whisper in the wind, too
fleeting to last.
I fought against the tides, desperate
to keep you near,
But life had other plans, and now,
you're not here.

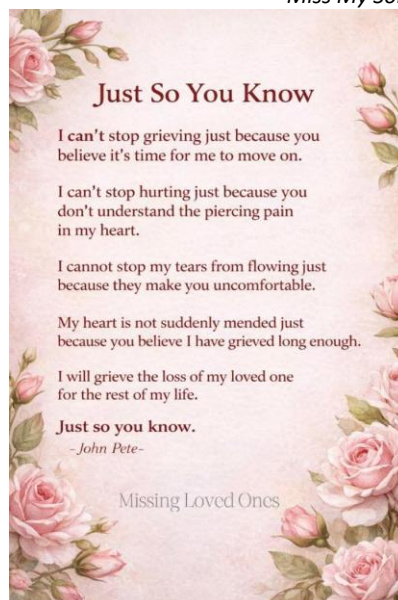
I couldn't stop the clock, no matter
how hard I tried,
I couldn't change the story, no
matter how much I cried.
The weight of what I couldn't do still
sits within my soul,
A reminder of love so deep, yet
beyond my control.

If love alone could build a bridge,
you'd be right by my side,
If love alone could heal the ache, I'd
never have to hide.
But now I carry your memory, a
piece of you in me,
An eternal bond that time nor loss
can ever set free.

You are the quiet in the storm, the
stillness in my day,
The gentle nudge reminding me love
never goes away.
Though I couldn't save you, and the
ache still remains,
I'll honor your light, even through
the pain.

Grief doesn't ask permission, it just
settles in our chest,
But love gives us courage to find
moments of rest.
For in every tear that falls, your
presence softly stays,
that for ever you'll always be in my
Heart & your memory
will never fade away.

*Beautifully written by Tania Perez at I
Miss My Son*



Grief is an understatement to
child loss. This is evisceration.
Being split open and stitched back
together, then told to stand upright
and carry on. Grief hollows you,
ribs to spine. A vacancy shaped like
your child.

No one talks about how unsightly
the interior becomes.

Bitterness takes root and grows
thorns.

Tenderness dries into something
brittle and sharp-edged.

Other people's happiness clangs
against your chest.

You don't recognize yourself. You
don't particularly like yourself.
You're no longer governed by
gentleness, but by survival. Your
child is dead and the world still
expects courtesy.

Child loss recalibrates reality
around a grave. Every complaint
sounds thin and ridiculous. Every
inconvenience feels profane. You
listen to people catalogue their bad
days and think, you still get to kiss
your child goodnight. You shouldn't
be allowed to speak this loud. The
thought blooms anyway. Shame
follows. The thought returns,
unchanged.

Grief is feral. It will pace inside
you, restless and snarling. Your
chest perpetually tight, as if bracing
for impact that never comes.

People offer language like
bandages but every word burns.

You imagine screaming until your
throat gives out. You imagine
breaking something just to hear a
sound loud enough to match the
rupture inside you.

Grief makes you cruel in small,
invisible ways. You vanish. You stop
answering. You let friendships rot
quietly because you can't water
them anymore. Love feels heavy.
People feel optional. If they leave,
fine. Everything leaves. You learned
that lesson early.

No one talks about the physical
wreckage. Exhaustion settles into
your bones like damp cold. Your

memory slips its gears. Your heart gallops and plummets without warning. This isn't weakness. This is a nervous system that witnessed the unbearable and never recovered its footing.

Watching the world continue is its own kind of violence. Holidays arrive like taunts. Time passing feels like theft.

There is an uglier truth still. You want to torch your former life. You resent the person you were before you knew this kind of loss, soft and unsuspecting. You don't care who you're becoming, only that you're still breathing.

Child loss exiles you. Even among other mourners, you're speaking a dialect no one else is fluent in.

You're hollow now. Not poetically. Practically. You smile with a sinkhole behind it. You speak and hear the echo before the words land. When you laugh, it startles you, like a sound borrowed from a past life.

People wait for you to mend. To evolve. To move forward. They don't understand this is permanent interior damage. This isn't a wound that closes. This is an amputation the body keeps reaching for.

You didn't become ugly. The loss stripped you down to bone.

And if you're still here, furious and breathing through the ache, that's not failure.

That's survival without its halo.

--Lillian Mcgrath



I survived the day you left this world, even though nothing inside me wanted to. My body kept doing what bodies do — breathing, blinking, standing, responding — while my heart refused to accept the reality it was being forced into. Every breath felt like betrayal, like proof that time was continuing without your permission. That day taught me how strong the body can be when the soul is completely shattered. It taught me that survival isn't living — it's just not dying when you desperately want to disappear with the person you lost.

I remember moving through that day in pieces. People spoke to me, but their words never fully landed. I nodded when I was supposed to, answered when I was expected to, stood when someone told me to stand. Everything felt mechanical, unreal, distant — like my life had cracked open and I was watching it from the outside. The world kept functioning while mine ended quietly, without ceremony, without warning, without mercy.

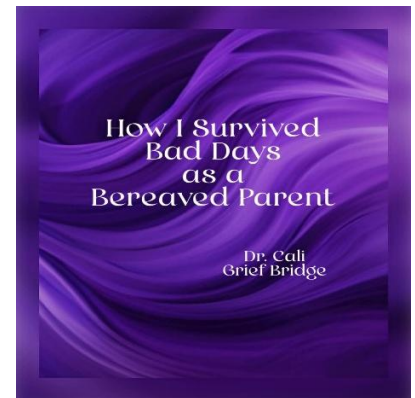
Now I wake up to a life that doesn't include you, and every morning feels like another goodbye I never consented to. I keep learning how to exist without your voice, your comfort, your steady presence anchoring me to the world. Some days I almost feel normal again — until grief reminds me who I really am now. Someone who survived losing you, but never stopped losing you after that. Because loss doesn't happen once. It happens every day you wake up and realize again that you are still here, and they are not.

I survived the day you left. That much is true.

But I am still learning how to

survive a lifetime that doesn't include you.

Love & Loss Facebook Page



How I Survived Bad Days as a Bereaved Parent

Bad days are a natural response to an unnatural loss.

After the death of my son Ben, I truly did not know how I was going to survive. Very quickly, I realized that I was going to have to find ways to cope—not to fix my grief, not to rush healing—but simply to make it through each day, one day at a time. Some days, one hour at a time.

There were mornings I woke up gasping for air, dreading the day before it even began. My chest felt tight—overwhelmingly so. The pressure was so intense, it felt as if something had exploded inside me. Anxiety consumed my body. My thoughts were scattered. It was extremely frustrating to begin a sentence and forget what I was trying to say. Even getting out of bed to wash my face felt exhausting.

This is what traumatic grief looked like in my body. My nervous system was constantly on high alert. Grief didn't just feel like sadness—it felt like extreme fear. My body lived as though it were in a war zone.

In those early days, every day felt like a bad day.

The things that helped me were not polished or planned, but they became my daily lifelines.

Learning to Calm My Body

When panic took over and anxiety flooded my chest, I learned that I had to slow my body down before my mind could follow. I would sit in a chair, close my eyes, and practice box breathing until my heart

stopped racing:

- Breathe in for a count of four
 - Hold for four
 - Breathe out for four
 - Pause for four- Repeat
- This simple rhythm helped calm my nervous system when I felt completely overwhelmed.

Finding Safety Through Sensory Comfort

Daily hot baths became another source of comfort. A hot bubble bath offered grounding when everything else felt out of control. The warmth, the quiet, the stillness—it gently reminded my body that, in that moment, I was safe.

Music When Words Failed

Music became a powerful form of emotional regulation for me. When there were no words, music spoke directly to my heart.

The year after my son died was also the year Steven Curtis Chapman lost his daughter. He released an album called *Beauty Will Rise*. One song in particular—about finding beauty in the ashes—stayed with me.

I would put that song on repeat and lie on the floor, sometimes from sunup to sundown, listening to it again and again. I wasn't finding beauty in my son's death—there was none to be found—but the music steadied my nervous system. It quieted my panic enough to help me get through another day.

Music has a way of regulating breathing, heart rate, and emotional overwhelm—especially when grief has thrown the body completely off balance.

Moving the Grief Out of My Body

There were days when nothing helped and the pressure in my chest felt unbearable. These were days that I did not understand how a body could endure so much pain and still survive. On those days, I ran.

I ran until I couldn't run anymore.

Physical movement helped release

what my body was holding.

Research tells us that intense movement helps metabolize stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. For me, exhausting my body physically brought relief that words could not. After running, the panic often loosened its grip for several hours.

When grief lives in the body, sometimes the body needs movement more than conversation.

Journaling: Giving my Grief a Place to Go

Daily journaling became one of my most powerful tools.

I wrote every day:

- My thoughts
- My emotions
- My son's name, over and over again
- Scriptures that brought comfort
- Letters to my son
- All the would've, could've, and should've—again and again

Writing the same things repeatedly helped me process my pain at my own pace. In my journal, I could tell my story as many times as I needed to. I didn't have to worry about being misunderstood, dismissed, or hurried along.

Journaling gave my grief a safe place to land so it didn't remain trapped inside my body.

Most importantly, I spent my days crying out to the Lord. I called on Him constantly and he carried me through those bad days. I called out to Him in my box breathing. I talked to Him when I listened to music. I prayed when I was running. And I wrote those prayers down in my journal.

I've learned that bad days do not mean you are going backward. They mean you loved deeply.

Grief is a journey of trial and error. It is a process of learning how to live all over again in a world that has been forever changed—a world that now has a hole in it. A world that looks different, feels different, and even smells different.

My Gentle Reminder to each of you on this journey today.

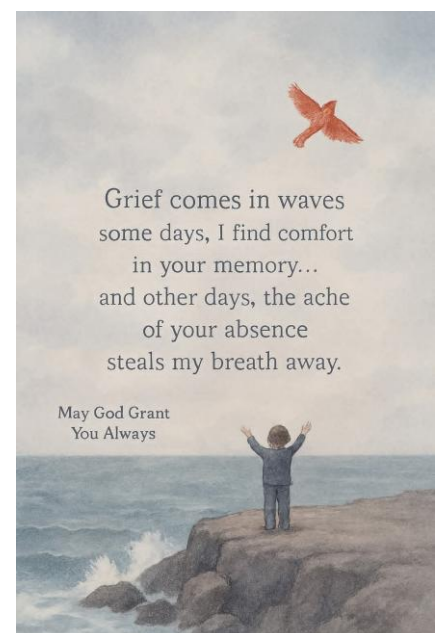
If today feels heavy, choose just one small thing:

- One breath
- One song
- One page
- One step
- One prayer

That is enough for today.

Follow your heart, not the unrealistic expectations of the world

*Dr. Cali Anderson
Bereaved Mother, Bereaved Parents Advocate
Grief Educator Compassionate Friend*





If my grief makes you uncomfortable...

imagine how it feels to live inside it.

I don't bring up my child to make things awkward.
I don't talk about my loss to get attention.

I speak their name because silence hurts more than discomfort.

Grief doesn't turn off when the conversation changes.
It doesn't pause because others don't know what to say.
It lives in my body, my breath, my mornings, my nights.

If hearing about my child makes your chest tighten for a moment, please know I carry that weight every second of every day.

This is what child loss looks like.
Not drama. Not weakness.
Just love with nowhere to go.

And if my grief makes you uncomfortable,
please don't ask me to shrink it so you can feel better.
I already carry enough.

April Song

*It's getting to be a habit, mourning
through April,
This lovely month, this bitter month
as winter coils around spring.
April sings its song of death;
April sings its song of birth.
And how dare the flowers bloom
in the midst of my grief.*

--Lynn Marti Avant, Ames Iowa



"I will not forget you"...

**"I will not forget you.
you are in my waking thoughts,
my sweetest memories , my
dearest dreams.
I will not forget you.
You have touched my soul , opened
my eyes,
changed my very experience of the
universe.
I will not forget you.
I see you in the flowers , the sunset
, the sweep
of the horizon and all things that
stretch to infinity.
I will not forget you.
I have carved you on the palm of
my hand.
I carry you with me forever..."**

--Victoria Erickson

Art by Laron G. S. via Midjourney

Planting Hope

I knelt beside the Japanese maple and grasped a slender, brittle branch. It felt dry in my hand. I twisted it gently, and it snapped. I tested another, larger branch. It too broke off with a sharp crack. I hung my head. Only a few months old, and the tree was already dead. All around it plants were thriving. Delicate-leaved azaleas. Hydrangeas with their mop-like blooms. But the Japanese maple was supposed to be the centerpiece of this backyard garden. A memorial to my son Danny, who was killed a few months earlier in a robbery. I had nurtured the sapling so carefully. *Is this your last blow, God?* I asked. *Am I going to lose anything else? Are you even listening?*

I stood and surveyed the rest of the garden. I had planted it myself in the weeks after Danny's death. Literally carved it out of our back lawn. Most everything else had taken during the hot, humid Georgia summer. Everything but this maple, which sprouted from the soil just a few feet from a bench at the garden's heart. I had done all I could to keep it going. Watered it carefully. Added fertilizer. Put mulch around the base. Nothing worked. It's like Danny's life, I thought bitterly. Nothing we did worked there, either. Maybe I just need to accept that what's gone is gone—and that's it.

Danny had been a wonderful child—bright, good grades, well-behaved. Then, in high school, he struggled to fit in — until he found the wrong crowd. He began hanging out with kids who did drugs. He tried marijuana, then moved on to LSD and, later, cocaine. Before we quite knew what had hit us, he was addicted.

We battled those drugs for eight long years, starting when Danny was just 15. We tried counselors, hospitals, tough love, kicking him out, moving him back in. And prayer. Lots of prayer. I prayed every day that Danny would find healing. That we all would. That somehow, he with our help, could kick this terrible

addiction. But those prayers never seemed to get answered.

The day Danny was murdered, he was hanging out in a motel room. A few fellow drug users had come to the room to do some cocaine with him. Thinking that he had some money, they decided to hit him over the head and rob him. But they hit him too hard and he died. Police caught the killers a short time later.

The afternoon two plainclothes officers showed up at our door, I was sitting at my desk, getting started on our taxes. It was April, when the sun shines and the air is fresh in Atlanta. Just the day before, my wife, Sharon, and I had gone to a nursery to buy spring plants—including a 15-dollar Japanese maple sapling, all of 18 inches high. The officers walked into the living room, asked if Sharon could come downstairs and told us in matter-of-fact voices what had happened. Numb, I went to find our daughter, Laura, who was living at home then while attending Emory University. Then came the phone calls to our families.

The following weeks were chaotic with the funeral arrangements to be made, calls from the police about the murder case, friends and family visiting. Sharon and I were overwhelmed. Every task reminded me of the years of ache and helplessness. *God, I asked, is this how you answer prayer? Have I been praying into a void?*

One day I wandered out into the garage, where I had been putting all of the condolence gifts. There, scattered on the floor, was yet another chore: bunches of plants, sent with cards in pretty pots. They were thoughtful, but even contemplating disposing of them depressed me. I walked back inside to the family room, which looks onto our backyard. It was a clear day, and the lawn shone green in the sunshine. I stared at it for a while, until a thought began forming: *What if, instead of throwing those plants away, I put them in the ground?* I like gardening, and I could picture a neatly bordered oval alive with blooms and deep green leaves.

Maybe a path and a bench. A memory garden. A place to remember. But also a place we might find peace. Peace we hadn't felt in eight long years.

That evening, I discussed my gardening idea with Laura and Sharon. "That's a great idea, Dad," said Laura. "I think it will help you too." Sharon, who had grown withdrawn since Danny's death, said only, "I guess. But it seems like a lot of work. If it were up to me, I'd just throw them away."

But I needed that garden. The very next day I walked out to the backyard with a shovel and a 20-pound post-hole digger. Over the next week-time off I had after the funeral—I dug up a 20-foot-by-30-foot section of lawn, setting aside any rocks I found to use as a border. Sweating in the warm sun, I chiseled the ground and prepared it for planting.

After agonizing over the right balance of sun and shade, I took the plants out of their pots, spread soil and fertilizer and began putting roots into the ground. Those first days hacking into Georgia's hard clay dirt, I found myself cursing and railing with nearly every swing of the shovel. I cursed the drugs, the murderers. And I called out to Danny and God. *Why? Pound. Why? Pound. Why?*

As the garden progressed, though, my anger started to subside. I went back to my job at work and began doing most of the planting in the evenings. Working by twilight, I arranged azaleas into eye-catching patterns of white, coral and red. I grouped the hydrangeas to set off the other plants. I bought a bench and situated it beneath a canopy of dogwood branches. The stones I had dug up earlier worked perfectly as a border, and I used others to make a path from an arched trellis to the bench. Sometimes, bent to the ground, my hands in the soil, I looked back and saw Sharon watching me from the kitchen window. *Maybe when I'm done we can sit on this bench together and enjoy these flowers,* I thought.

When the last azalea had been placed in the ground and the last stone laid, I stood back and examined my handiwork. It looked pretty good. But it still lacked one thing. A focal point. I looked around and then saw the Japanese maple sapling, still sitting in its pot. *Perfect!* I thought. I'll plant it next to the bench. We had bought the little tree the day before Danny died. It would be like a part of him were still alive, still with us.

Now, five months later, holding the maple's dead branches in my hand, that earlier glimmer of hope seemed mocking. Yes, just like Danny. Another hope shattered, I thought. Twisting the branches in my fingers... I knew what I should do with the tree. Dig it up and throw it away. After all, hadn't counselors sometimes advised us to give up on Danny? Kick him out and dust off our hands? We hadn't—and what had our persistence accomplished?

Still, looking at that small maple, I thought about everything that it signified, and felt something stir inside me - a flicker of determination, a tiny spark of hope. I would not quit-not yet.

I'll give it one last chance, I decided. So, I dug the maple out of its spot by the bench and dragged it to a walled ledge that got morning sunlight. I scooped out a new hole, put the tree in, shoveled dirt on top, and went inside the house.

The following spring the azaleas bloomed again. Sharon, who had begun taking walks in the garden, occasionally hurried into the house to tell me about the appearance of a new, particularly beautiful flower. And in those moments, I could see her beginning to heal.

One day I was standing in the family room surveying the yard myself. Everything was bright with new spring growth. I glanced toward the maple, about 50 feet away, and saw a patch of red in it. *Is there a cardinal in that tree?* I wondered. I grabbed a pair of binoculars and looked. The red patch wasn't moving. What on earth could it be? I set down the binoculars and went

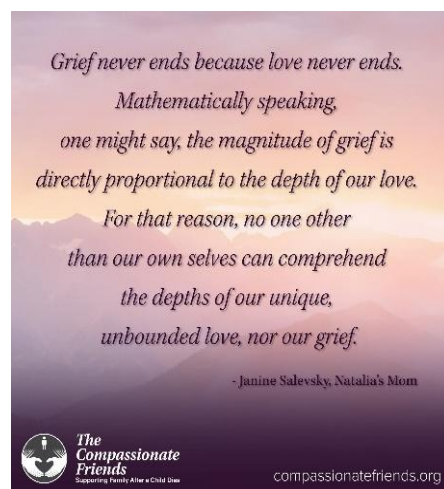
outside. I walked around the garden, past the trellis, which was laced with Carolina jasmine, and stood before the maple. A small batch of red leaves was growing from a branch. They shivered in the afternoon breeze. I reached out and touched one. It was soft and delicate. *Impossible, I thought. This tree was dead. But these leaves are alive.*

I stood, uncertain whether I should even tell Sharon. It didn't seem quite real—the maple, come back to life. And yet, looking around that vibrant, peaceful garden, I knew it was true. As true as an answer to prayer. I smiled. An image came to mind, an image of Danny, that filled me with peace and reassurance. I stood by the maple a moment longer. Then I went inside to tell Sharon.

--Chuck West, Lilburn, Georgia, from [Guideposts on-line.](#)

Flowers, Trees, Plants & Things

Sheri, Sheri, how does your garden grow?
Sunflowers, tulips and mums
Aren't we having fun?
Your garden grows full and abundant,
The dogwood trees are in full bloom,
The lilies are ready for Easter
to remind us of God's resurrection.
This world is a beautiful place,
but heaven is a much greater place
to be
With God, Sheri, angels, & a place for me
Love to my daughter at Easter
--Brenda Tomlin



A Year Without Easter

Easter didn't come for me that year, the second year since we had buried our day-old son, a child for whom we had ardently prayed. My lips formed the words of the Easter hymns. But there was no song in my heart, so cold and numb it was. I spoke the words of the Apostles' Creed, but my faith in God's goodness and the promise of resurrection was faltering. "Take comfort that your child is with God," one well-meaning friend said. But I found no comfort when all I wanted was to hold my baby. "How wonderful that your little one could go to God right at Easter," another said. But I saw nothing wonderful in that.

The jubilant hymns, the cross bedecked with flowers, these only left me feeling colder and more desolate this second Easter of grief.

Our baby girl cuddled in my arms the next year. And although my heart sang because I held her, the Easter message still didn't come to me. And it didn't for a long time. I can't remember the hour or day, or even the year, when Easter dawned again. I know only that it was a long, searching and painful journey.

But I'm grateful for the journey. It made me aware of the many others at church on Easter for whom Easter has not come. And I'm conscious of the need to speak to them in their need

- to give them words of reassurance.
- to tell them that Easter will come in time.
- to say that God does love them although they find it hard to believe,
- that there is hope for them although they despair,
- that it's alright if they don't feel like rejoicing be-cause doubt, sorrow, grief, anger and depression—and other unwelcome emotions—are all part of the journey that leads to Easter.

Tears from the faltering, the perplexed, the grieving can be just as appropriate as alleluias. And when Easter finally does come to them, it

may be more truly Easter for them than for those who don't know that a year may come when Easter will not.
—www.thelutheran.org



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.