

Dear Family Members,

I don't know about you but it's hard for me to believe that a month has passed since the Holidays. Amazingly it's been a month and a half since our Worldwide Candlelight Memorial. The saying, "*time flies*" is so true. I was talking about this with a friend of mine the other day. As a child she lost her brother about 20 years ago. She was stunned when she realized 365 days had elapsed since her dad's passing. It wasn't the one year anniversary on the calendar; it was the "lost" days. She wondered what she did with the time. Sound familiar? I told her in two words, "*Grieving*" and "*Healing*". Of course that was the simplistic answer. We went deeper into all of the things that encompassed and talked about the things we go through. We talked about "The Fog" and how exhausting grieving on its own can be. When we pile all of the every day things that we have that need to get done on top of that it's very easy to lose the perspective of time. We can also realize some things just aren't that important anymore while other things move to the top of our list. Thankfully by the time we finished she didn't, in her words, "feel like a failure for not getting more things done". I encouraged her to be kinder to herself.

There's another part of perspective that's been on my mind a great deal lately. I can't remember ever having a conversation directly about it. Maybe we've talked "around" and "about" it at our meetings but we haven't put a word to it. My thought is about "*Expectations*". In time, what do we expect? I share with others that I never **expect** to be "over" the death of my daughter, Ashley, or stop missing her. My hope, when the fog cleared, was to be able to continue with my life and share the love my daughter taught me. I **expected** I would know what this looked like to me when the time was right but I **was** looking. Please don't misunderstand. This question and thought won't apply to everyone but the seed has been planted. Early on this journey we're just surprised when we can put one foot in front of the other and others are happy if we can brush our teeth. I think there comes a time on our journey when we can and should step back and ask, "What do I do with this?" I feel its part of the journey and, yes, an important part of the healing. I often remind others to, "*Be active in your healing*". Sometimes this can come as an intentional decision, such as a scholarship. Sometimes it's being a better person for the gift of love we've been given. Sometimes it's helping others on our journey. Of course, like our journey, this is individualistic but I do believe it's a choice. This can be difficult because we can feel that when this time comes we're leaving our loved one behind. My perspective is just the opposite. It can be a celebration and a way of saying, "**You still matter**". Change and moving to a different place can be very hard in the best of situations. We can get comfortable with what we know. We may not **like** where we are but we **know** where we are. Please remember we all have something to offer. After all, we've gotten this far. The question is do we step back and see what that looks like no matter where we and they are. Again, it's perspective. What's yours?

I want to invite you, all of our family members, to a meeting on Sunday, March 10, 2013 at Brown's Memorial Woodbrook Presbyterian Church from 2-5 PM. This is where we have our Towson meeting and it's at 6200 N. Charles St. This is an opportunity for you to help determine the direction of your chapter. Some of the topics for discussion will be leadership transition, the direction and needs of our chapter. We have three immediate areas where we can use help. They would be fund raising, outreach and someone to coordinate social events. Please bring your thoughts and ideas.

Speaking of the Memorial, I hope you take the time to read Judy E. Harris' experience at the event along with her poem. For those who weren't able to attend, it will bring you closer to the moments we shared. My hope is that you'll put Sunday, December 8, 2013 on your calendar today and try to attend. It's always the second Sunday in December and we begin at 7:00 PM. We look forward to seeing you, our family members. Remember, "*time flies*" and it'll be here before you know it.

Garrett Tollenger
Chapter Leader



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Greater Baltimore Chapter
P.O. Box 2103
Ellicott City, MD 21041-2103
410-560-3358
www.baltimoretcf.com

Newsletter

Winter 2012/2013

Dear Compassionate Friends:

It's been a while since my last meeting (November); sometimes I just cannot rally. This year my grandson would have been four years old. I cannot believe it's been nearly four years since I last held him. It seems impossible. Though the last four years have certainly had moments of joy and laughter, I feel an ever-present cloud of sadness. Sometimes it is a dense fog, other times it is easy to walk through. Always it is present.

Please remember that this newsletter is for you to provide an opportunity for additional support outside the meetings, maintain a connection with members who cannot always get to meeting, and provide outreach to those who may not be ready to attend a meeting.

We welcome your:

- Poetry (original or poems you've read and like)
- Book reviews (what books have really helped you?)
- Fundraising/events (either in memory of your child or in support of national organizations)

All input can be sent via email to:
newsletter@BaltimoreTCF.com

Thank you, Maura

SPECIAL STEERING COMMITTEE MTG.

March 10, 2013 from 2:00-5:00 PM
Brown Woodbrook Memorial Presbyterian Church at 6200 N. Charles St. in Towson. All are welcome to join. We need your help to plan the future of our chapter.

~Monthly Meeting Information

Baltimore County-The First Wednesday
Brown Woodbrook Memorial Presbyterian Church
6200 N. Charles St. Baltimore
7:30-9:30 PM

Harford County-Meeting has been suspended at this time. Please check our website for future updates

TCF Chapter Contact Information

Chapter Leader: Garrett Tollenger,
410-879-5422, info@baltimoretcf.com
Newsletter editor: Maura Taylor,
newsletter@baltimoretcf.com

The Sibling Corner

Our Towson chapter meeting hosts a sibling group, which coincides with our regular meeting time. There are so many special issues that occur when you lose a brother or sister. This group will offer a safe place for you to share your challenges, concerns and successes when walking this path. Siblings age 16 and over are welcome and encouraged to attend. This will be facilitated by siblings for siblings.

To Our New Members:

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. We do understand.

To Our Seasoned Members:

We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick.

TCF is here to welcome you, share your grief, share the love you still have in your hearts and encourage you.



Worldwide Candle Lighting

Reflections by Judy Harris, Baltimore TCF

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude for all that I experienced at the Candlelight Program in December 2012. Since I first started this journey of attending the Candlelight Program three years ago, I have tried my best to make sure that it continues to be a part of my life every year. I do not have enough words to express what this organization has meant to me, along with the wonderful leadership of Mr. Garrett Tollenger and his faithful assistants and volunteers, who all give so freely, even while enduring their pains and losses. Their unselfish acts of kindness to help others who are trying to find a firm foundation again has truly influenced my life in helping others on this journey even more.

Truly it is a lifetime journey and the Memorial Services will never be the same from year to year, because there will always be new losses and new families to embrace, as we share heart to heart. I find such joy and peace in being able to hold on to another who is walking my lonely path, knowing I'm not alone. I truly hoped that I portrayed this to all that I have held in my arms and cried with at this wonderful service. Being able to hold another Wounded Soldier, as we walk a path like nothing we could ever have dreamed of, has given me hope that there is a great joy for my still being here. This is what this Memorial Service has done for me. As I have been able to participate with writing poetry to express my love for Josh, I can only hope that it helps another rise up from their confusion and anguish, and decide to live for their loved one by honoring a life that was taken too soon. I have found that I have to give away the love I still carry for him because he would want me to. I receive so much in return, even if Still I Cry!

I had the pleasure of bringing a neighbor with me who had recently lost her sister. Kathy was able to drink in all that this service held for those needing an answer to a question that might not be asked. I showed her the beautiful Butterfly Garden where I

coaxed her to do a butterfly for her sister and for another loss she had. It gave me great joy to direct her to the joy of doing this and finding a beauty in this garden like nothing ever before made. This garden reflected so many joys of recreating a happy object of affection to show love, by the many butterflies that it held. Just to be able to create something to add to all the others was glorious. I must confess that I have not yet been able to do a butterfly for Josh, but I know that I am going to be ready when the Candlelight Service comes this year. I now have a desire to, and will be excited about fulfilling it and releasing some more of my pain. It is time!!! I have for the last three years had the awesome joy of bringing my handsome son's picture to display on the Memorial Table. He looked so at peace with all of the other jewels that were placed on that table. The expressions of love that others shared were heart-warming and reminded me of the special pictures I have that I can now share the next time also. I truly want to thank those who shared their loved ones with me. They reminded me of some of the happy times I spent with Josh, and had forgotten. Thank you for the reminders.

After the beautiful Memorial and Candlelight Service, I went to the wonderful Reception and Fellowship that followed. It felt like family, being able to share and talk and laugh together and feel like it was OK to be human. The encouragement that I received from those who enjoyed my poem warmed my heart and encouraged me to realize that truly I was able to help others through sharing my feelings. I needed the warm comments and love, as I still try to help and not add any more sorrow. The food was exceptional and always seems to be more than enough. The joy of being able to be together was like a family reunion of those who are still growing on this path. Thank you all for what you gave me as I continue to know that I'm not alone and neither are you all. My prayers and love will continually be upon my lips as I try to complete my life, loving my memories and being Happy because he was a part of my life. How blessed I am!.

Upcoming Meeting Topics

What would you like to talk about? We'd love to hear your topic suggestions. Please email chapter leader, Garrett Tollenger, with your suggestions at info@BaltimoreTCF.com.

Member Corner.....

A letter to my son, Jason

By: Shirley Rubin-Rollins, Jason's Mom,
Baltimore TCF member

As I was concluding my Tai Chi form in front of a flowing water fountain, the healing energy and sound of the water extended my soul into another realm. I looked out at the beautiful raised vegetable gardens of the Weinberg Village Senior Housing Community and the exquisite colors of fall; with the last of the vegetables and flowers reflecting the season end. As I relaxed into the sights and sounds of my little world I thought about my son Jason and wondered if I could arrange to have a memorial in this lovely setting to honor his life. In talking with management a couple days later, a strong interest in obtaining an arbor with an attached bench was discussed and decided upon to my delight. The arbor and bench will be located in front of the vegetable gardens, several yards away from the water fountain. The arbor was ordered and a volunteer would need to be found that has carpenter skills.

I had lunch with my friend Melanie and informed her of my wonderful news. She looked at me and said, "I assume that the arbor will need to be assembled." She quietly told me her husband had e-mailed Kayam Farms recently to offer his help as a carpenter on a volunteer basis. They in turn told him Weinberg Village needed help assembling an arbor. As I told Melanie that the arbor in question was a memorial to Jason, we both were misty eyed and unbelieving. She and her husband Trevor knew my son and were delighted to be part of this endeavor.

I remember at our Compassionate Friends meetings we sometimes talk about "loving connections" with our deceased children and siblings that give us a sense of peace. It is significant to me to be sharing a part of this memorial for Jason with someone who knew him. Trevor has found a suitable plaque for my dedicati on:

*We will love you Jason thru eternity
Time without End
And hold you forever
In our hearts.*

In loving memory of Jason Patterson

AND STILL I CRY!!!

I cannot go back where you left me;
And Still I Cry!

Because you are Never coming back!!!
And Still I Cry!

You were a beautiful Gift, heaven-
sent by God, and given to me;
And Still I Cry!

Which touched my life to Love in
Ways I didn't know I could!
And Still I Cry!

Now, Finally, after nine years, I
realize that YOU are my Gift
that keeps on giving!
And Still I Cry!

So, I give My Love for You to Others,
and My Heart finds Relief
and Joy . . . while missing you!
And Still I Cry!

Now I can be HAPPY, like I know
that You would want me to be; and be
Grateful that God gave me a way to
Share Your Love each day, until I die!

Your SMILE adds more love to Mine
and I will Never be without You!
And Still I Cry!

I know now that My Heart can
SMILE; Even Sometimes when
I MUST CRY !!!

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TCF

Four Candles

The first candle represents our grief.
The pain of losing you is intense.
It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.

This second candle represents our courage
To confront our sorrow,
To comfort each other,
To change our lives.

This third candle we light in your memory.
For the times we laughed,
The times we cried,
The times we were angry with each other,
The silly things you did,
The caring and joy you gave us.

This fourth candle we light for our love.
We light this candle that your light will
always shine.

As we enter this holiday season and share
this night of remembrance with our family
and friends.

We cherish the special place in our hearts
that will always be reserved for you.
We thank you for the gift your living brought
to each of us.
We love you.
We remember you.
-Unknown Author

Thought for the Day

It is not easy returning to the world of normalcy when your world is so upside down. It is not easy to stop being a mother or father to your child that has died. The thought for the day is a word — patience — patience with yourself who suddenly and powerlessly has been thrown into this horrid nightmare; patience with your spouse who always seems to be having an up day when you are having a down day; patience with relatives and friends who wish to help but seem to hurt with hollow advice and logical words; and patience with time, for it takes time to adjust, and time can move so slowly. PATIENCE!

Rose Moen
TCF Carmel-Indianapolis, IN

But Your Son WANTED to Die – Mine Didn't

I cringed as once again I heard this remark, repeated so often since Warren took his life 3½ years ago. Even now, when I thought I had steeled myself to the harsh meaning of the words, they still left me hurt and demolished. Is it all that simple? Could anyone 'feeling good' just choose to die like that . . . if they knew the pain and suffering that then engulfs their surviving family?

How can I explain why he died when I do not really know myself? How can I make anyone understand his emotional pain, increasingly obvious to us, so skillfully masked from others? Our son was so handsome, intelligent and sensitive. It is still incredible that he shot himself one morning after returning from the hospital 'cured' of his terrible depression. Our beautiful first-born baby grew into a perfect son, but somewhere, somehow, our masterpiece had a flaw as cruel and as tenacious as any disease that strikes any other young person.

So, until research proves otherwise, we have to go along with the words of Professor Erwin Ringel that "SUICIDE CANNOT REALLY BE CHOSEN – since an intense and overwhelming inner compulsion renders any free choice null and void."

Our loss is as great as any other parent. We grieve just as deeply. Remember this and do not judge, we beg.

We, and all the Survivors of Suicide suffer too much already from a horrendous tragedy that can, and does, happen to anyone.

Our Kids Loved Us – And We Love Them!

Maureen Hargreaves
TCF Melbourne, Australia
In Memory of my son, Warren

A Sibling's Feelings

The pain of a sibling is so real we sometimes hide it deep inside of ourselves. As we watch our parents hurting we see the pain in their eyes. We are also hurting not only for the loss of our brother or sister but also for our own parents. We need to reach out to each other to let each other know we are hurting inside.

Our lives have all changed forever. I know they lost a son but I lost my younger brother I loved, and as siblings we share a special bond that will never have anymore for he no longer lives...my brother, my friend.

I will always miss you and I will never forget you for you will always live in my heart, and I have wonderful memories no one can ever take away from me. In my heart you will stay, love you forever.

Marie Porreca
TCF Rockland County, NY



Gifts of Love

A love gift is a gift of money to The Greater Baltimore Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. It is usually in honor of a child who has died, but it can also be from individuals who want to honor a relative or friend who has died, a gift of thanksgiving that their own children are alive and well, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help in the work of the chapter. Some people contribute in memory of other's children...this is a wonderful way for others to say, "I am remembering your child." Other "Gifts of Love" are evident by all other compassionate and giving volunteers we have within our TCF Baltimore organization. If you would like to support the work of The Greater Baltimore Chapter of The Compassionate Friends by making a love gift, please send your check to:

The Greater Baltimore Chapter of TCF, P.O. Box 2103, Ellicott City, MD 21041-2103. Please indicate to whom you would like your gift dedicated. All gifts are tax deductible.

All chapters within TCF are totally dependent on funds from our families. We DO NOT receive funds from the National Office. Everything we need to operate our local chapters is paid directly from our local resources and our local family contributions. Thank you to all who contribute and support your local chapters.



The following donations are in support of the Baltimore Chapter of The Compassionate Friends.

Jerry and Carol Gatto
*In memory of their granddaughter
Kelsey Elaine Brown*

Mary Weatherholtz
*In memory of her son
Joshua Matthew Belanger*

Kathleen Sharps
*In memory of her son
Chester Kirk Drew, Jr.*

Shirley Rubin-Rollins
*In memory of her son
Jason Patterson*

Judy Harris
*In memory of
Joshua Elisha Harris*

Allison and Holly Enders
*In memory of their daughter
Christine Enders*

Jean Edwards
*In memory of
Gregory Thomas Le Sueur
Ashley Paige Tollenger*

Armour Settlement Services, LLC
*In memory of
Kyle Richard Canter*

Joyce Rossi and Erick and Lynn Petterson
*In memory of their grandson and son
Chad Petterson*

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The Bustle in the House (1108) by Emily Dickinson

*The Bustle in a House
The Morning after Death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon Earth —*

*The Sweeping up the Heart
And putting Love away
We shall not want to use again
Until Eternity —*

How Many Children do You Have?

How many children do you have? A simple, innocent question, but one a bereaved parent struggles with.

If we don't include our children who died when we answer the question, we feel as if we are denying their existence. One mother told me that she cried for hours because she told someone she had no children (her two children had been killed earlier that year). If we do include our deceased children when we answer, somehow we fear the response or discomfort that is felt by the person hearing the news.

For the bereaved parent, there is really no "right" answer to this question. We must respond the way our heart and the situation dictate. We should not fear how the person we are talking to feels about the truth. We should only be concerned with how we feel at the moment we are telling it. We need to be considerate of our own feelings and, if the situation is such that we do not include our children who have died in the answer, that's okay too....because we may be at a point in our grief that doing so may be painful.

We are the only ones who need to be pleased with our response!!

-Pat Loder, Lakes Area TF Chapter, Commerce Twp., Michigan

TCF National Office Seeks Your Stories and Articles!

For many years, The Compassionate Friends National Office has provided on its Leadership Site stories and poems by TCF members that can be cut and pasted into chapter newsletters around the country. The National Office, in order to better serve its newsletter editors and members who receive support from chapter newsletters, has committed to doubling, over the next two years, the number of articles and poems available to the chapter newsletter editors.

Currently, the Newsletter Editor Database has 500 stories and 150 poems. The National Office would like to include your personal grief related stories and poems. Please submit your articles and poems to TCF's Public Awareness Coordinator, Wayne Loder at wayne@compassionatefriends.org. Please include your name and chapter affiliation.

On Cleaning Out His Stuff

It has been 18 years since my son Chris was killed in a car accident. I have been using his room as my computer room for the last six years but I have not cleaned out his drawers or closet—they were almost as he left them. After recognizing that I needed more space and the job finally "had" to be done, I decided to finally begin the process of throwing some of Chris' high school papers away. After all, it had been 18 years—surely I had progressed far enough along in my grief to finally begin to deal with "his stuff."

Surprisingly I found the task challenging and gut-wrenching. I still had a difficult time working my way through some of the items I found, as I poured over notebooks, papers and drawings. One of the papers was an evaluation from a career counselor. Just reading over her findings brought a wave of tears that was almost uncontrollable. She had captured our boy with accuracy and tenderness, sensing this was a young man of character and warmth. She talked about his smile when he acknowledged that he didn't like camping very much, so he could not see himself as a forest ranger. She saw a young man who had a quiet and gentle strength. With a lump in my throat, I shared it with my husband and both of us "choked up" with tears.

Letters from his girlfriend and his return letters back to her were comforting and lovely. His warmth, kindness and tenderness as a 17-year-old young man "in love" for the first time, came through as he wrote from his heart. Just seeing his handwriting again was such a cherished treasure. Lyrics from the many songs he wrote for "the band" were deep and inspiring. Some of his reports from school had encouraging comments from the teachers. I saved some of his childish drawings of Smurfs, "A Sweet Story" (a second-grade drawing of children running into the arms of Jesus) and his many stuffed animals—or "his kids" as he used to call them. He had named them, drew them all and then placed them in a scrapbook. What a precious gift to hold on to. I'll show it to my grandchildren some day.

Then I began the arduous task of organizing the cards, notes and words of comfort we received as the days, weeks and months after Chris' death passed by. Many shared how they remembered events he attended, and conversations they shared with our son, which we were not aware of. Some shared how they were praying for us. I saved rain and mud-soaked notes that were left on his grave—so many missed him in those early days of overwhelming grief, especially his classmates. What beautiful and wonderful human beings touched our lives so many years ago and gave us the strength in those early days of bereavement to go on. It continued to bring tears to my eyes and yet, the tears were those of gratitude for the many who had taken our grief and for a time, had cried with us and carried some of it for us. It warmed my heart to recall that so many cared and grieved with us. The prayers continued throughout the first year and beyond. We could not have made it without those human arms of love around us, listening ears, tear-soaked eyes and encouraging words.

Although I was drained after two days of tossing, remembering, crying and organizing, I was comforted for having done this job that I had dreaded for years. It brought me back in touch with my grief and I felt so much closer to Chris than I had felt in a long time. I felt as though I had had a visit with him. I was reminded of what a special young man he was and how I was privileged to have been his mom. One thing I know for sure, the love for Chris, the memories we shared with him and the compassion shown to our family will remain in our hearts far longer than "the stuff" and that is what is really important.

Carole Dyck, TCF Verdugo Hills, CA
In Memory of my son, Chris Dyck

Remembrances

December Birthdays

Jack Levee
Irina Goslin
Esther Ann Brown Adler
Jennifer Nicole Schissler
Charles Dean Saenz
Judah Ahiva Blakeslee-Ringer
Kelly Nicole DallaTezza
Tony Michael Richey
Tylour Long
David J. Houck
Sarah Marie Stebbins
Keith Joseph Soskin
Aquil Abdullah
Kathy Ermatinger
Z. M. Dawson
David William deSabra, Jr.
Daniel Grubb
Mike Nelson
Jessie Badders
Christopher Gregory
Brian Speckmeier, Jr.
Michael Iwashko
Joseph Allan Caskey, Jr.
Robert James Berg
Matthew John Payne

December Heaven Days

Alexandrea Chardonay Annetta Autry
Carlzell Chauncey Chavaz Connor
Raquan Demetrius Ali Campbell
Joseph Sanfilippo
Michael Francis Gist
Daniel Carl Torsch
Emily Elizabeth Blische
Jason Louis Patterson
Bryan Bolster
Lance Locklear
Z. M. Dawson
Jessica Brower-McGonigal
Daniel Grubb
Dillon James Shelton
Chelsea Rae Propper
Melisa Rene Lisa Shamer
Daniel Keith Richardson
David Franklin Howell, Jr.
Jessie Badders
Mark Anthony Elicerio
Matthew Sam Young
Chad Petterson
Rachel Lynn Orr
Patrick Michael Butler
Robert James Berg
Elijah Joseph Virago

January Birthdays

Drew William Putzel
Gregory Thomas Le Sueur
Shanae Nicole Griffin
Joshua Matthew Eisner
Marianna Louise Freeman
Brett Hofferberth
Kallie Lynn Esquer
Ernest Bo Neeko Gales, III
Jason Louis Patterson
Matthew Salafie
Robert M. Bryant
Hugo G. Jeffery Orbach
Michelle Celeste Wade
Andrew Alton Dowley
Brennan Michael Doll
Owen Inaganti
Curtis Jake Wethington
Mark Anthony Elicerio
James Stallings
Jamshid Ghannad

January Heaven Days

Austin Damond Remines
Joshua Clark
Marianna Louise Freeman
Alexandra Ally Beaulieu
Matthew Salafie
Samuel Ying Fu Pang
Jenna Katherine Miller
Dahlia Katherine Osman
Michael Verleysen
Keith Joseph Soskin
David Michael Kappes
Irvin Bernard Lawson, Jr.
Amanda Kay Arnold
Joey Wayne DeHaven, Jr.
Bryan Canter
Michelle Celeste Wade
Anna Marie Stickel
Matthew J. Lewis
Bruce Francis Vasil
Brandon Zoch
Marcel Mitchell
Owen Inaganti
Gaebriel Patrick Kelly
Curtis Jake Wethington
Michael Iwashko
Michael Ruben Zelaya
Nathan Patrick Fenchak
Chamara Ashby

February Birthdays

Erik Pachino
Ellagrace Ann Garrison
Julius McGee
Shawn Michael Fischer
Carl Edward Palo
Janice Biondo O'Neill
Kenneth W. Link
Garrett Daniel Staib
Natalia Erin Miller
Lawrence Dunmore, IV
David L. Murphy
DeShawn Christopher Green
Mason Griffin Medicus
Jose Luis Perez, II
Reece Taylor Stevens
Jasmine Daye Bishai
Sallie Pattillo
Marc Rory Goldberg
February Heaven Days
Tylour Long
Meghan Ann Murphy
Devon Maryl Jagler
Kenneth W. Link
Garrett Daniel Staib
Nelson Yargar, III
Deborah Ann Tipton
Kelsey Elaine Brown
David William deSabla, Jr.
William Michael Hogan
Dimitra Y. Whittington
DeShawn Christopher Green
Brian Speckmeier, Jr.
Alexia Jo Bock
Justin Matthew Gregg
Chanda Leigh Painter
James Walter Babcock

Heading the Call of Life

There is tremendous wisdom that is accumulated in one's encounter with grief, and it needs to be shared. Healing takes place when we turn our pain into a positive experience and we realize that helping others is the key to helping ourselves. When that happens, our problems don't look so big. We expand on newfound strengths and we discover that as one door closed, many others have opened. The road to recovery from grief, therefore, is to take time to do things which will enable us to give new meaning to our lives.

That's when our journey through grief becomes a journey of discovering ourselves, our potential, and our resources in the encounter with life. That's when we become BETTER people, rather than BITTER people. In grief, no one can take away our pain because no one can take away our love.

That call to life is to learn to love . . . again.

Father Arnaldo Pangrazzi
TCF Muskegon, MI

New Year a Time to Search for 'Ray of Hope'

*Be my ray of hope, be my ray of laughter.
Be my song to sing that guides me on my way.
Be the arms that hold me.
Be the love that enfolds me, be my light,
Be my ray of hope today.
~Paul Alexander, songwriter*

Snowflakes drift silently to earth.

A new year has dawned. The revelry of the old year has quieted and the holiday hustle and bustle has ended

As bereaved parents, for many of us, this will be our first full year without our children. For others, the upcoming year will be another thread in the garment of life. A thread connecting the memories of our old life with the hope for "recovery" in our new life.

How often our thoughts wander back to another day and time when we were happy and full of the vitality that makes up life—a time when our child made our life complete and worth living.

Though three years have passed since becoming a bereaved parent, I still think about my children every day of my life. As I sat watching the ball atop Time Square descend, my thoughts jumped back to a time when my children lay safely in their beds as we brought a new year into existence.

Does *this* new year bring with it a time when we will hurt less—when there will be a new ray of hope? Or does it bring even more heartache because of the sadness and loneliness we find difficult to leave behind?

The answers lie deep within each of us. How we approach this new year will make the difference.

Can we be kind to ourselves? Just because others place demands on us to do whatever they feel will help us does not mean they are right. They have not walked in our shoes. We can say 'NO!'

Can we enjoy life again? Though we cannot be physically with our children, they would want us to enjoy living . . . and yes, they would want us to love again!

Can we help parents who are more newly bereaved to clear the same hurdles that seemed so insurmountable to us such a short while ago? By reaching out to others and making their burdens a little lighter, we are helping our own open wounds to heal.

*Inside of me are all the answers.
Everything I need to know
Lives inside of me.
Come behold my miracle,
Come and hear my story.*

Come and paint a memory with me.. P. Alexander

Wayne Loder
TCF Lakes Area, MI

"Ray of Hope" by Paul Alexander on the CD "The Best of Paul" at www.griefsong.com (Paul wrote LIGHT A CANDLE which has been used at many TCF candle lighting programs). Permission to use excerpts from "Ray of Hope" granted by Paul Alexander.



The Compassionate Friends Credo

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope. The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us. Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships. We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

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Siblings Walking Together (formerly The Sibling Credo)

We are the surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends. We are brought together by the deaths of our brothers and sisters. Open your hearts to us, but have patience with us. Sometimes we will need the support of our friends. At other times we need our families to be there. Sometimes we must walk alone, taking our memories with us, continuing to become the individuals we want to be. We cannot be our dead brother or sister; however, a special part of them lives on with us. When our brothers and sisters died, our lives changed. We are living a life very different from what we envisioned, and we feel the responsibility to be strong even when we feel weak. Yet we can go on because we understand better than many others the value of family and the precious gift of life. Our goal is not to be the forgotten mourners that we sometimes are, but to walk together to face our tomorrows as surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends.

TCF 2013 National/International Conference

Site of 36th TCF/USA National Conference; 6th International Gathering!



The Compassionate Friends/USA is pleased to announce that, in conjunction with the 35th National Conference, it will also be hosting The Compassionate Friends 6th International Gathering. The combined conference will be held in Boston, MA.

Reserve Hotel Rooms Now for TCF National Conference!

Reservations can now be made for hotel rooms for TCF's 36th National Conference being held at the Boston Sheraton July 5-7. Reservations for rooms at the conference host hotel can be made through an Online Reservation site linked to TCF's 2013 National Conference page. Go to www.compassionatefriends.org>News&Events>Special Events>TCF 2013 National Conference. Room charge is \$129 per night plus tax and available in King, Queen and 2 Doubles size. You also have the option of calling the hotel at 888-627-7054 to make reservations. Just mention you're with The Compassionate Friends. While a large room block has been reserved, we recommend you reserve your room early to avoid disappointment. Don't miss the opportunity to participate in a great conference with lots of activities and workshops for bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents, just like you. We will advise you when registration for the conference is available.