



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



We need not walk alone.

Volume 8, Issue 8

Tyler, Texas

August 2007

Monthly Group Meeting

Tuesday, August 21, 6:30 p.m.
707 W. Houston St., Tyler, Texas

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Toll Free: (877) 969-0010
www.compassionatefriends.org

The Meeting Agenda

6:30 p.m.
Meeting will begin with refreshments followed by announcement of birthdays and anniversaries and reading of the Credo. We will then have open discussion.
8:00 p.m.
Meeting will close by recognizing our childrens' names. Feel free to visit after the meeting or check out books from our library.

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Life is a Cycle—Part of a Whole and Death is Part of Life

Nature can be very healing for our spirits and souls. Many of us have had experiences that draw us closer to nature for healing. It seems so much easier to feel closer to God in the great outdoors. In the days after my son's death, I found myself drawn to the outdoors by digging and cleaning the flowerbeds and feeling the moist fragrant earth beneath my fingers. It seemed to ease my intense pain and shock. Others viewed my behavior as strange, but at this point I realized that my healing would come from Nature. I needed the assurance that life does renew itself even in the face of death.

That summer I found myself hiking on the Colorado Monument every chance that I had. I would lie on the rocks and feel the heat come up through my body and warm me. That winter I would cross-country ski on the top of the grand Mesa. The quietness was almost deafening and the only sound was the singing of the birds as they perched on the bare branches of the trees. The snow glistened in the sun and felt crisp beneath our skis. The stillness and openness would work its magic on my tortured soul and a peace would fill me.

When we moved from Colorado to North Carolina, my black lab and I took many enjoyable walks in the numerous rural parks. Having always lived in the West with its desert terrain and scarcity of trees and greenery, the abundance of trees and greenness was overwhelming and stifling until we became accustomed to it. While walking through a dense ceiling of branches, we came upon an area where the trees had been cleared. On one side was a fenced area and as we approached, I saw many graves. Some had headstones and many just had large rocks with writing on them. On closer inspection, I realized that this was a cemetery for the children of two families in the 1800s. The ages ranged from infants to 18 years of age and there were over a dozen. I remember that it gave me such a feeling of sadness and grief, but also of being connected, as I felt such a bond with these parents who had also suffered the loss of children. This somehow lessened my own loneliness and I realized that life was indeed a cycle and that we are all part of the whole. Life does keep renewing itself. Think of all the children who had been born since these had died.

Life is constantly renewing itself. The tender new leaves on the barren trees, the crocus, tulips and daffodils poking up through the earth represent new life and Springtime. My son died in the Spring, but it is still my favorite time of year and in the succeeding years I have learned that Life does indeed renew itself each Spring regardless of how dead and lifeless I may be feeling.

Renée Little ~ TCF, SLC

The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.



We need not walk alone.

“Let us all heed the quiet message heard so softly in that maelstrom of the spirit. Forgive...forgive...forgive until forever. Let love enfold our anguish, helping us to learn to grow and strive beyond this hour to a rich tomorrow.” —*Don Hackett*

Welcome

We extend a warm welcome to those who attended their first TCF meeting last month.

We deeply regret the circumstances that brought you to our TCF Chapter. The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance, not-for-profit, self-help organization that offers support and understanding to families who have experienced the death of a child. You are cordially invited to attend our monthly meeting (always the third Tuesday of the month). The meeting is open to everyone and free of charge. You are free to talk, cry or to sit in silence; we respect the individuality of mourning. Comments shared in the meetings remain confidential.

Our chapter is operated entirely by volunteers dedicated to furthering the work of TCF. Your voluntary, tax deductible donations honor your loved one(s) in a meaningful way by enabling us to print and mail this newsletter and meet other expenses involved in reaching out to other grieving families (100% of funds are used for this outreach). Donations, along with the name of the person being honored, may be sent to:

The Compassionate Friends of Tyler
P.O. Box 9714
Tyler, Texas 75711

To Our New Members

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But, you have nothing to lose and much to gain. Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. The second, third or fourth meeting might be the time you will find the right person—or just the right words spoken that will help you in your grief work.

To Our Old Members

We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick. Each meeting we have new parents. Think back—what would it have been like for you if there had not been any “oldies” to welcome you, share your grief and encourage you? It was from them you heard, “Your pain will not always be this bad; it really does get softer.”

The Storms of Grief

I've often thought about how differently grief affects those left behind when someone has died. To me there are three groups of bereaved. There are those that lose someone they loved very much and are most affected. The middle group are those that cared about the person and will miss them, but their death doesn't change their lives. The third group are sorry that the person has died, but are largely unaffected by their death.

Now envision those groups on a mountain. When my son died, I felt like I was on a mountaintop, alone with a storm raging around me. Thunder and lightning filled the sky, thick clouds enveloped me, and a cold hard rain fell upon me. Winds buffeted my body from every side. There was no shelter, no place to sit or lie down. Others who were suffering as much as I (my husband and daughters) were on their own Mountaintop, and we could derive no comfort from each other. I stood there, sometimes railing against God, sometimes feeling as if my heart had been ripped out, sometimes just feeling an emptiness so deep, I feared I would drown in it. Days, weeks, months passed.

The middle group of people stood on the side of the mountain (close friends and relatives). They also were caught in the storm, but they had some shelter and each other. They wanted to comfort me but the path upward was winding and rocky and I could find no path down to them.

The last group of people were at the bottom of the mountain in the valley. There, the sun was shining and the breeze was gentle. They could see the storm I was caught in, but could do nothing to help me.

Sometimes the storm would subside and I could see something besides dismal gray and I had respite from the wind and rain. But this would be followed by another raging storm. Back and forth, I never knew what to expect.

Eventually the sky would clear and I was able to find a path to those that cared and could offer me hugs and a shoulder to cry on. The storm was still there, but there was also shelter and I wasn't alone.

It has been 12 years since Todd died and I have been able to come completely down off that desolate mountaintop and live in the valley of sunshine. Sometimes I stay there quite a while. Sometimes I climb that mountain and experience that same emptiness and sadness.

We all know that this kind of storm may brew on those special days - birthdays, holidays, family events. We are also blind-sided by those times that just take our breath away. . . being in a place they loved, hearing their music, smells, movies, ballgames, seeing their friends. We really have no control over these unexpected, sudden storms.

I have learned to give into them and let the tears fall. I can live with these storms and accept them as part of my life because my child lived and I loved him with all my heart. I cannot change the fact that my child has died and I will not change my love.

Barb Seth ~ TCF, Madison, WI



We need not walk alone.

"Eventually the sky would clear and I was able to find a path to those that cared and could offer me hugs and a shoulder to cry on. The storm was still there, but there was also shelter and I wasn't alone." —*Barb Seth*

Love Gifts



Charisse Smith in memory of Ben Smith

Dolly Mobley in memory of Shannon Scheffler & Shane Crim

David & Teresa Terrell in memory of Andy Terrell -
use of a storage building

College-Bound Solutions for allowing TCF of Tyler
to use their facilities as our meeting place -
in memory of Nathaniel Peter Bolom



Newsletter Submissions

TCF Tyler welcomes all submissions to our newsletter. Send articles, poetry, love messages and scanned photos to:

TCF Tyler • 5401 Hollytree Drive, 1204 • Tyler, Texas 75703
Or e-mail text and photos to: info@TylerTCF.org

We reserve the right to edit for space and/or content. Deadline for submissions is the 3rd Tuesday of each month. TCF Chapters may copy articles from this publication provided credit is given to the author and the original source. Errors and Omissions: Please notify us if any of your information is incorrect.

TCF of Tyler Memorial Quilt

If you would like to have your child's photo included on the third memorial quilt, please mail a \$25 donation to P.O. Box 9714, Tyler, TX 75711. For more information contact us at (903) 258-2547, or email us at info@TylerTCF.org.

Thanks to Teresa and David Terrell for donating their talent and time on these beautiful quilts which will be displayed in our meeting room and at future special events.



Announcements

Our Annual Candlelighting Ceremony will be held on December 9th.

CALLING ALL CRAFTERS! We are planning to participate in the Green Acres' Craft Fair in October. We appreciate those who are willing to donate craft items for us to sell during this fundraiser, and those who might want to get together with other TCF members to work on new craft projects to sell. Call (903) 258-2547 for more information.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED! We welcome your help with meetings, special events, the newsletter and fundraising. The Compassionate Friends of Tyler relies solely on the volunteerism of our parents. If you are ready to make a difference and help others who have joined us in this walk of grief, please contact us at (903) 258-2547. Giving back is another way to help with healing.

If you would like a phone friend, please call Margie Newman at (903) 561-1447 or Mary Lingle at (903) 581-4566.

Catching Butterflies

by Dottie Williams ~ TCF, Pittsburgh, PA

It often hurt to come upon reminders of
my son
Tho' often since I lost him I would search
around for one
Which always brought on sadness and
the tears that I would shed
Were caused by names or faces, all
things that I would dread.

But then one day I came upon a man
who'd lost his son
I found that things I ran from, he
wouldn't even shun.
But rather he would treasure and I said
I wondered why
He told me that he called them "Catching
Butterflies."

This view of his intrigued me; I wanted
to hear more
And learned that he took all of them and
carefully would store
All of the reminders that I chose to push
away
He would tuck deep down inside his
heart each and every day.

Now a name or likeness when catching
me off guard
Does not upset me as it did and I don't
find it hard
For now instead I see these times as
opportunities
To see my son awakened in these new
fresh memories.





We need not walk alone.

“So what do we do? Give ourselves TIME—to hurt, to grieve, to cry. TIME to choke, to scream. TIME to be “crazy” and TIME to remember. Be nice to yourself! Don’t measure your progress through grief against anyone else’s. Be your own time-keeper.” —*Darcie D. Sims*

August Birthdays



Brennen Applegate

8-10-69 ~ 1-22-01

Son of C.R. & Kathryn Applegate



Gena Forest

8-22-62 ~ 12-9-98

Daughter of Joice Bass



Crystal Greene

8-6-82 ~ 11-13-01

Niece of Audrey & Claude Mapps



Tosha Nichole Minatrea

8-11-82 ~ 12-30-99

Daughter of Tim Minatrea



Ron Mitchum

8-3-70 ~ 4-15-00

Son of Glenda Mitchum



Christal Murphy

8-14-72 ~ 4-22-03

Daughter of Debbie Johnson



Scottie Baker

8-3-86 ~ 11-29-04

Son of Steve & Julie Baker



Quinn Martin Muirhead

8-12-82 ~ 4-30-05

Son of Alice Fiedler



Lori Campbell

8-27-78 ~ 2-28-00

Daughter of Pam Johnson



**Calan Cameron Decker
McKeethan**

8-10-00 ~ 11-29-01

Son of Mary Decker

The Death Anniversary

On June 1, 2007, my 82-year old aunt unexpectedly and suddenly died. She and I had always talked frequently, even though she lived in Washington and I live in Texas. The last time I saw her was at my Dad’s funeral in 2000. But we kept in touch, and shared a mutual interest in the family genealogy.

Many nights I would call her and we would talk for hours about the death of my son, Todd. She would always reassure me that I was the best mother a child could have. Her opinion meant much to me as she raised three sons who became very responsible, loving adults. Her life was well lived, her advice always sound.

In the spring of 2006, my aunt lost her husband of 60 years. Her three sons helped her for a while then she suggested that they get on with their lives. Moms are like that. But she and I talked about her loss, my loss and the differences between the two.

When the first anniversary of my uncle’s death was approaching, I sent her a card. I wanted her to know that I remembered this sad anniversary date. I wrote about her husband, their relationship, how much I admired them, and that I was keeping her in my thoughts and prayers on this sad day.

She e-mailed me right after she received the card. She thanked me over and over for the card and reiterated her absolute certainty that I was a good mother for Todd. Her sons had called to talk with her. However, they didn’t bring up the anniversary, even though it was obvious that they were thinking about it. “Men are like that”, she told me. Her sisters called and talked to her about her husband, the anniversary and more. My dad’s sisters are special people. I’d like to think that I have learned from them. We must talk about our feelings; death cannot be ignored. If one of us breaks down and cries, the “girls” are there with an understanding that transcends distance. They listen; they talk about the loss, the life, and the sadness. They encourage us to take our loved one with us. That’s what they did when they lost children, parents and their husbands to death.

Bereaved parents understand the importance of death anniversaries to the family, especially to each parent. When we have lost a child, that date takes on a significance that cannot be measured. That is a date that we will never forget. A month before the date, bereaved parents begin anticipating the anniversary date. Anxiety sets in. Depression can sweep over us. We count days until the date finally arrives. Then we go with it. We let the day take us where it will. We receive cards from our Compassionate Friends. We receive some telephone calls. Sometimes our families call or send a card. Sometimes friends come over and talk. Sometimes we hear from very few people and find that to be just fine. This is a day for us, the parents who have endured the worst, to reflect, to cry, to remember, to honor our child.

Each month I read the names and death anniversary dates of the children of our Compassionate Friends. Each month I sigh, shed tears for the upcoming pain and then begin to edit the newsletter. Yet each month I feel as if, somehow, we are each lightening the burden of the others. Our presence, our concern, our acceptance of each grief journey—no matter how that road twists and winds, are meant to give each parent the light of hope. We don’t walk this road alone. We are connected to each other with an invisible golden thread that touches each heart. This is our journey.

Annette Mennen Baldwin, In memory of my son, Todd Mennen, ~ TCF, Katy, TX



We need not walk alone.

"The Compassionate Friends starts and stops with the core idea that we will be there for each other; that 'we need not walk alone.'" —Richard Elder

August Anniversaries



Michael Holdway
6-18-52 ~ 8-3-93

Spouse of Kathy Dowdy Holdway



Justin Dover
9-14-89 ~ 8-15-02
Son of Stacey Dover



Jill Marie Rozell
3-14-84 ~ 8-2-02

Daughter of Peggy & Terry Rozell



Shannon Scheffler
12-21-70 ~ 8-22-03
Daughter of Dolly Mobley



Joe Maland
4-2-83 ~ 8-17-05
Son of MaryAnn Girard



Cathy Key
3-26 ~ 8-19-05
Daughter of Cindy Murray



Jaime Arellano, Jr.
7-31-92 ~ 8-27-05
Son of Marie Arellano



Tiffany LeAnn Tanner
12-2-94 ~ 8-24-05
Daughter of Kathy LeAnn Tanner



Boston Kade Porter
5-27-05 ~ 8-12-06
Son of Kim Porter

A Bit Richer

I've heard it said that what you get out of a book depends not on what the book brings to you, but on what you bring to the book.

It's hard to fathom—much less accept—that we can gain anything by losing child. Once the black hole has been created, we can't imagine that any light will ever enter it. But, in time, tender mercies start to trickle in. If we keep our eyes and hearts open, we do gain a more insightful view of life. We see and feel things at a deeper level than others can even imagine.

I find as a speaker and writer, when I quote books and use examples from movies to help illustrate or clarify my feelings about bereaved parenthood—or more often, life in general—people will say, "I don't remember reading that" "I didn't get that out of it." "I never made that connection."

Little Women, Pay It Forward, Gladiator, Lost in Yonkers, and yes, the classic *Gone with the Wind* are just a few of the books and movies that portray the depths of life as WE know it while others merely read words or watch actors on a screen.

I don't like being where I am. I certainly would never choose to be here. But as I go back to favorite books and movies, I find comfort not only in the familiar, but also in the farther-reaching themes that I didn't see before.

Revisiting books and movies will never make up for the loss of my son, but it can make my life a bit richer. And long as I'm still alive, I'm going to grab whatever I can get.

Susan Larson (Loren's Mom) ~ TCF, Atlanta, GA

"...a bear wedged in great tightness."

"In a tape called, 'To Touch a Grieving Heart' there is a wonderful little reminder of the Winnie the Pooh story by A.A. Milne. You may recall that Winnie goes to visit Rabbit and eats too much honey. Coming out of Rabbit's hole, he gets stuck tight—so tight he can't even sigh. He asks his friends to stay with him, read him a story, and offer words of comfort...and thus to help 'a bear wedged in great tightness.'

Notice that Pooh does not ask to be pulled out of the hole, he asks only for company so he is not alone. I think Grief is like being 'a bear wedged in great tightness.' And, while we cannot make the grief go away for each other, The Compassionate Friends starts and stops with the core idea that we will be there for each other; that 'we need not walk alone.'"

Opening remarks of the late Richard Elder's keynote speech at the 1996 TCF National Conference



We need not walk alone.

“You will know that after you have expressed the painful sorrow you once kept hidden, and you find yourself, finally, smiling at the memories and the blessings of past summertimes.” —*Sascha Wagner*

Better Than We've Ever Been

“There's been a lot of things said about me, since that awful day. I'm not the person that I used to be, and that I will never be the same. That's true—no doubt; But I know more what life is about...”

The above is the first verse from a song called *Better Than I've Ever Been* by Cindy Bullens from her CD, *Somewhere Between Heaven and Earth*. I had the great pleasure of meeting Cindy at the TCF National Conference in Arlington, VA. in July. She sang at the Friday evening banquet and held a fantastic workshop on music in grief, which I attended. Her daughter Jessie died on March 23, 1996, shortly after her 11th birthday. Cindy is a singer/songwriter and, outside of her family, music had been her life. When Jessie died of Hodgkin's only months after her diagnosis, Cindy swore that she would never write another song. But approximately four months after Jessie's death, she picked up her guitar and began “aimlessly strumming cords just to hear the comforting sound of the instrument.” Somehow without any thought on her part, a song emerged which became the title of her CD. She said that she was “at once horrified and energized”; on the one hand, she was energized by the making of music, which was so much a part of her, but horrified at the same time that she had just written a song about her child's death. She soon realized that her only inspiration would be her “absolute love for Jessie and the absolute agony of life without her.”

I think we can relate to that in different ways. In the early days, months and even years of our grief, we can't begin to imagine that we could ever do anything meaningful again. We had lost our greatest gift. We had invested so much love in this person to whom we gave life and who, for some incomprehensible reason, is now gone. Life, for us, had lost its purpose; what was the point? As Cindy sings in the song, “I've Got to Believe in Something”—“*Everything I planned didn't work out like I thought it would.*” So many hopes and plans for the future, our dreams for our children shattered. We visualized a world for them with the thought that some day we would see and be part of the milestones of their lives; watch them go off to school and maybe college, fall in love, perhaps marry and have children, our grandchildren. We never envisioned a world that did not include these things.

How do we reinvest our lives, rethink a future very different from the one we had hoped? This is not something that happens quickly. It is a long journey with many peaks and valleys—that roller coaster ride of emotions that we so often talk about. Sometimes we wonder if we are making any progress at all. Others may see it, but we feel we are only moving forward at a snail's pace, if at all. My friends helped by accentuating the positive steps that I had made, ones that I could not recognize. As the saying goes, we can't see the forest from the trees; in our case, because we are so consumed by our own sadness it is hard not to be blinded by it. They pointed out how I was making progress by getting through an entire day without crying; when my first thought in the morning was not that Nina was dead; when I could go down the macaroni and cheese aisle at the grocery store without having to flee, and many more. All may seem insignificant to those who have not “been there”, but to us who have, are very significant indeed. Every one step forward, two steps back, we are still gaining, even if just a little.

After the reality hits that we cannot control what happened, we can then decide what we are going to do with this new life we have been handed. We aren't the people that we used to be, nor will we ever be the same. We are changed in ways we would have never imagined. We have learned where our priorities should be. We sweat the small stuff less, put less importance on materialistic things, and value each other's uniqueness. We prize our family and close friends. We are more compassionate and less impatient. We know how precious and, too often, how fleeting life is. As one of the members of our group said, “I had to decide whether I was going to be bitter or better, and I chose better.” What better way to honor our children than to be a better friend, a better family member, a better citizen; to reach out our hand or give a shoulder to cry on to a newly bereaved parent, in a way that only we as bereaved parents can do. I truly believe that these things make our children very proud of us.

The last verse says: *“There's a curious feeling rising up from the dark, some kind of strength I've never had. But I'd trade it in a second to have you back, I've got to make some good out of the bad.”* Yes, we'd trade it in a second to have them back...doesn't that just say it all?

“I laugh louder, cry harder, take less time to make up my mind, and I love deeper, go slower, I know what I want and what I don't. Maybe I'll be better than I've ever been...better than I've ever been.” (refrain from “Better Than I've Ever Been”)

Though not the life we had hoped, wished and dreamed of, at some point each of us will know that with the help of other Compassionate Friends, the love of family and our children, (and lots of patience with ourselves) perhaps we too will choose to be better than we've ever been.

With gentle thoughts, Cathy Seehuetter ~ TCF, St. Paul, MN



The Compassionate Friends of Tyler

P.O. Box 9714
Tyler, TX 75711

We are happy to send our newsletter to you. We hope that it is helpful to you to be kept informed of chapter resources and activities and that you still wish to receive our newsletters that contain excellent material relating to grief issues.

To keep our mailing list current, we do ask to hear from you each year making sure that our information is correct and that you still wish to receive our mailings. If we did not hear from you in the last year please indicate any appropriate choices below and return the form to the address at the bottom of this page.

Your Name: _____

Child's Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Birth Date: _____ Death Date: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Please check any of following that apply.

Please continue sending the newsletter.

No thank you, I'd prefer to stop receiving the newsletter.

Please include my child's name and picture in the slide presentation at the Candle Lighting Ceremony.

Please include my child's picture and information on the TCF-Tyler Web site. (www.TylerTCF.org)

I am enclosing a memorial to support The Compassionate Friends in the amount of _____
Please make check payable to TCF

In memory of _____

The continuation of this chapter's work depends on donations. If you have not taken the opportunity to give a donation in memory of your child please consider taking this time to give a gift that will help reach out to other newly bereaved parents.

We must have your written permission on file to use your child's name and/or picture in the newsletter, Web site, Candle Lighting Ceremony or any other TCF event. Permission may be withdrawn at any time by written request. This information is used to maintain our Chapter Database. It is confidential and is only utilized for Chapter activities such as the newsletter.

(Signature) Date: _____

Please return completed form to: The Compassionate Friends of Tyler, P.O. Box 9714, Tyler, TX 75711



"I don't think you ever stop giving. I really don't. I think it's an on-going process. And it's not just about being able to write a check. It's being able to touch somebody's life." —Oprah Winfrey



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