



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



We need not walk alone.

Volume 7, Issue 12

Tyler, Texas

December 2006

Monthly Group Meeting

Tuesday, December 19, 6:30 p.m.
707 W. Houston St., Tyler, Texas

Contact

Phone: (903) 258-2547

Web Site: www.TylerTCF.org

E-mail: info@TylerTCF.org

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 9714 • Tyler, TX 75711

Chapter LeaderTina Loper

Chapter Co-LeaderPat Settle

Newsletter/Web SiteMary Lingle

Steering Committee: Tina Loper,
Pat Settle, Sam Smith, Sherri Tutt
Margie Newman, Mary Lingle

Jim & Karen Roach, Regional
Coordinators, (817) 244-0116

TCF National Organization

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.

In This Issue...

Welcome	2
A Sibling Dies	2
Love Gifts/Announcements	3
Birthdays	4
Anniversaries	5
First Christmas	5
As the Holidays Approach	5
Christmas Without My Child	6

Life Can Be Good Again

Learn to communicate value to spouses, friends, surviving siblings, our love for whom seems shrouded behind the totality of our grief. Find ways to give expression to our need to somehow memorialize our child, be it through writing a book, planting trees, sustaining scholarships, or any number of ways. Our need to preserve and safeguard our child's memory is real and deserving of our attention.

A time comes for many to find new homes, jobs and purpose. These are often part and parcel of any significant change in our lives. Surrender to time, giving ourselves space within it to do our work. Use time to foster healing within, to enable us tomorrow with hope. No recovery will return us to life as we knew it while our child lived. That life is forever gone and, to a certain extent, we may well have to accept that, as we perceive life today. The finest days of our lives may well be a part of our past. Somehow, we must recognize that this is not unique to surviving our child's death, but is often a portion of the human condition.

Olin is dead. As much as I would wish it otherwise, it will never be. He is not forgotten. His voice, his laughter, his joy, and his shortcomings live on in me. No day passes without thinking about him. I am grateful for his touch upon my life. Yet, joy is again mine. Pleasure is no longer a forbidden or guilt-producing element in daily living. I live, gladly and with purpose, with Olin both behind me in time, but with me internally. Is this not our goal—to heal, to find the strength to love both yesterday and today? Our children have been the richest part of our lives and today should reflect the grace of that love in all that we are today.

Don Hackett~ TCF, Hingham, MA

Author & Speaker, Susan Duke

Please join us Saturday, December 2 from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the White Oak Community Center for a casual dinner and guest speaker, Susan Duke. Susan lost her son, Thomas, 10 years ago. Susan, a national speaker and the author of numerous books, will share her uplifting story. Her newly released book, *Grieving Forward*, is a must-read for any grieving parent.

There is no charge for the evening. Please RSVP to Margie Newman at (903) 561-1447 so we will know how much food to prepare. If you need a ride, please let us know. We hope to have a good turnout from our TCF of Tyler group.

Annual Candle Lighting Ceremony

Our Annual Candle Lighting Memorial will be December 10, 2006 at The Carpenter's Cross Church, Hwy 155 South and FM 344, Flint, TX. The service begins at 6:30 p.m. Family and friends are welcome. Candles are lit in memory of our children at 7 p.m. For 24 hours straight, candles stay lit in every time zone around the globe for one hour to remember our NOT FORGOTTEN children.



...that their
light may
always shine.

Light a candle for all children who have died.
2nd Sunday in December, 6:30 p.m.

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.

"Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. Love still stands when all else has fallen."

—Author unknown

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.”

A Sibling Dies

by © L. Nicole Dean (for Don)

It is January first. My heart twinkles once again because the holidays are over. How can a season of light bring so much dark? Thirty years ago, on Christmas morning, my brother died in our home by suicide in a very violent manner. He was 23; my other brother was 24; and I was 19 years old. Our family of five was irretrievably shattered. Don, my brother who died, was so much a part of us. He brought so much joy in his living and then so much pain in his dying. Who am I to grieve him still?

The memories well up every December like a deep dark night unbidden. Anger, sadness, rejection, guilt become my Christmas ornaments. “Give me back my family—give me back my Christmas, you creep—give me back your laughter!” I want to shout at him. Who am I to miss him? Who am I to rage when he was the one in the grips of a pain so untenable that he could not speak of it, but only act upon it? Who am I to cry? Well, I’m entitled. I’m a survivor after all. One doesn’t get there on a water slide, if you know what I mean.

When Christmas rolls around, I do my dance with grief once again. Some years, it’s a waltz; other years a tango. It doesn’t seem to matter if it’s two, twenty or thirty years since my brother died, I get out my dancing shoes. I don’t go looking for pain like some wacky masochist. It finds me. Some years I announce around November 25th, “I’m over this.” I act accordingly. I shop for Christmas cards and don’t go near my dancing shoes. It doesn’t matter. They find me.

It’s not like I didn’t have therapy. I’ve had dance therapy, art therapy, regular therapy, travel therapy, friendship therapy, biofeedback/hypnosis therapy, creampuff therapy, swimming therapy, forgiveness therapy, spiritual community therapy, law school therapy. Law School therapy? The fun had to end somewhere.

Seriously, losing a sibling is heart wrenching and no laughing matter. It took me ten or fifteen years to truly laugh again, let alone make light of myself. That just happened this year. No doubt, because I am writing of it, rather than speaking of it, which I rarely do. It feels safer to write. Other than to therapists, I’ve spoken of his death to three people in thirty years. Who could understand, I felt, and why diminish his being or expose myself?

I adored my brother Don—he made me laugh like a monkey. I adore both my brothers; as a child they were my world. Not very healthy perhaps, but it worked for me. Home life was chaotic and quite frightening because my father was more than a little nuts. My mother’s energy was spent containing his insanity and keeping our bodies and souls together. She was part steel, part angora.

We never spoke of Don after his death. The community ostracized us; my father took a trip down devil’s lane, and my mother mourned my brother until the day she died. I’m sad to say that we never had Don’s picture in our home again, because the pain was too severe. It seems we could not get past it. We went to our separate corners and quietly mourned. It was different years ago; so much remained hidden. Self-healing groups were non-existent, shrinks were stigmas, and the Catholic Church unforgiving.

I couldn’t save him. I was the last person he talked with on Christmas Eve. For months, I barely spoke and relived the shock daily. I ate a lot. Death by mashed potatoes. That was sure to bring him back. I retreated into a private world for several years where if I wasn’t dead, I’d sure like to be.

This is grief. And it does soften over time. It softens like water softens rock, in its flowing, gentle, rushing, mysterious way. It softens like a sweet whisper of a memory that lulls you to sleep, knowing that love knits the bones of despair together, tighter, stronger, more curious, more delicious than ever before. Knowing that the fires of your being burn the dross of despair. Knowing that the chamber of the heart is strong beyond measure and can take it and transform the pain into joy.

Joy for having known this person, for a day or ten years or two months. Joy for having the courage to be. For knowing yourself in many garments. For taking a risk to love anyone again: a neighbor, a friend, a cat, a lover, a stranger, yourself. The broken heart opens and mends itself.

In the middle of the night, when no one is there but many are listening—joy seeps into me. After all—I’m entitled. I’m a survivor.

Permission to reprint granted to TCF



We need not walk alone.

"You loved; therefore, you grieve. You may succeed in postponing your grief for a time, but it will resurface some day in some way. You are encouraged to deal with it now so that it won't be waiting ten or fifteen years down the road for you." —*Mary Cleckley*

Love Gifts



David & Teresa Terrell in memory of Andy Terrell - refreshments for the December meeting

Janet St. Clair in memory of Brian St. Clair

Christina Ramirez in memory of Bryce Ramirez Cooksey

Danny, Pat & Stephen Settle in memory of Stephanie Settle

Tina Loper in memory of Christopher Loper

Mary Lingle in memory of Jake Higgins

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 Library Hours

Mon, Tue, Thur: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.

Wed: 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Fri: 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

The Library is located in our meeting location, the College-Bound Solutions offices, at 707 W. Houston Street, Tyler.



Please share your stories, poems or love messages for inclusion in our newsletter.

Announcements

Our Annual Candlelighting Ceremony will be held on Dec. 10th, 6:30 p.m. at Carpenter's Cross Baptist Church, Hwy. 344 and 155 S. Please contact Tina Loper at (903) 594-2132 or Margie Newman at (903) 561-1447 for more information. The media is invited to attend. Please let us know if you would like to help this year in honor and in loving memory of your child.



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

We are accepting canned food at the meetings through November for the Lack's Christmas tree food drive.

Plan to attend a special February 20, 2007 meeting. We will have a speaker, live music by Alan Pedersen, refreshments and volunteer recognition. Please bring a friend. Alan's music and story are at www.everashleymusic.com.

Editor's Note: Shane Crim's birthday was listed in the November newsletter as 11-25-91. The correct date is 11-25-71.

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.



Thanks to all who helped decorate the Christmas tree at Lack's Furniture. Stop by Lack's to see the TCF tree decorated with our children's photos and drop off canned goods, in their memory, through December 17th. The tree is beautiful!





We need not walk alone.

"When your mind cannot find an answer,
open your heart and ask for peace."
—sascha

December Birthdays



Jonathan Reynolds
12-14-98 ~ 11-16-02

Son of Addison & Debra Reynolds



Erica Smith

12-21-88 ~ 10-25-03

Daughter of Todd & Sabrina
Thoene



Zackery Browne

12-14-89 ~ 4-13-02

Son of Timothy & Kay Browne



Heath Hopson

12-8-87 ~ 4-23-01

Son of Karen Hopson



Renee Seale

12-21-63 ~ 7-13-90

Daughter of Lana Kay Taylor



Daniel Anderson

12-27-79 ~ 5-15-95

Son of Kerry & Cheryl Anderson



Christopher John Fisher

12-18-82 ~ 6-22-03

Grandson of Grace & Tom Fisher



Adam Knott

12-20-79 ~ 3-20-03

Son of Bobby & Virginia Knott



Stephanie Settle

12-22-81 ~ 5-27-98

Daughter of Danny & Pat Settle



Salvador Estrada

12-11-79 ~ 11-3-01

Son of Charlotte Estrada



Phillip Kuhn

12-28-73 ~ 3-27-03

Son of Carolyn Kuhn



Jeremy Simpson Brown

12-27-77 ~ 12-12-04

Son of Shari Brown



Tiffany Johnston

12-29-81 ~ 2-20-98

Daughter of Sherrel & Greg Smith



Ryszard Spakovsky

12-2-80 ~ 2-20-98

Son of Sherrel & Greg Smith



Tiffany LeAnn Tanner

12-2-94 ~ 8-24-05

Daughter of Kathy LeAnn Tanner



Sarah Harvey

12-12-89 ~ 4-26-04

Daughter of Brian & Lisa Harvey



Shannon Scheffler

12-21-70 ~ 8-22-03

Daughter of Dolly Mobley

Another saying of the Warm Spring Native American tribe is to compare the death of a loved one to a landslide. "When your road is blocked by a landslide, you clear it by taking away one rock at a time." In a time, when we want definite answers or a quick fix we should heed the wisdom these legends impart and let us work through grief at our own pace.

Reference: Tafoya, Terry, "The Widow as Butterfly, Innovative Approaches for Bereavement Based on Native American Tradition," The Director, February, 1998.



We need not walk alone.

“When I come to the end of my journey and I travel my last weary mile, just forget, if you can, that I ever frowned, and remember only the smile.”
—Author unknown

December Anniversaries



Jake Higgins
6-29-77 ~ 12-4-03
Son of Donna & Joel Griffin



Gena Forest
8-22-62 ~ 12-9-98
Daughter of Joice Bass



Tosha Nichole Minatrea
8-11-82 ~ 12-30-99
Daughter of Tim Minatrea



Christopher Loper
4-28-94 ~ 12-21-00
Son of Tina Loper



Cheryl Graebner Cook
4-25-73 ~ 12-10-02
Daughter of
Connie Graebner



Jocelyn McCormick
1-11-04 ~ 12-7-04
Granddaughter of
June McCormick



Matt Thomas Crooks
4-17-78 ~ 12-24-03
Son of Sylvia Crooks



Theresa Kay Talley
9-16-78 ~ 12-20-05
Daughter of W.A. & Ruby Talley

First Christmas

It can't possibly be Christmas without her being here.
Yet the world is singing 'round me, joyful tidings and good cheer.
Though I try to put on armor and brave the sights and sounds,
a few moments worth of shopping, and the tears are spilling down.
I pray for strength to do it, find a path through holidays,
look for shortcuts, good ideas, some directions through the maze.
Then I find at last the answer: I'll include her symbolically.
And the giving becomes perfect; her love's flowing down through me.

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry
From *Stars in the Deepest Night—After the Death of a Child*

As the Holidays Approach

When the holidays are fast approaching, we who are bereaved always have mixed emotions about having a nice holiday when our child or loved one is no longer with us. We wonder if we will ever be as happy and if we can ever again celebrate the holidays or any meaningful family occasion, especially the first birthday, first thanksgiving, or first Christmas since our loss. We try to look ahead to how we are going to feel when the time arrives, but it is usually not as hard as we had anticipated. Still, the occasion may not be as enjoyable as we'd like it to be or as we remember it from the past.

I would like to offer a few ideas for what we can do to make our holidays a little better. Consider buying gifts for less fortunate children, adopting a child/family at Christmas time, or inviting a lonely person to share your holiday meal. Make your child's favorite foods and discuss your loved one as you share the meal. Some people like to volunteer to serve holiday dinners for the homeless. Some bereaved parents want to visit familiar places their child loved to go, while others want to travel where their child had never been.

Several of our Compassionate Friends members put a small Christmas tree at the cemetery and decorate the graves with Christmas flowers and/or a grave blanket. Making a grave blanket is very fulfilling; we did that for 10 years after our daughter Teresa died. Attending a Candlelight program is a wonderful way to honor your child or loved one.

These suggestions are things we feel we can still do for our child, but they are not reserved for bereaved parents only. All of them can be done for any member of a family or a friend who has died. After someone dies we must keep going and doing things that lift us up. We can't always try to please any people who feel we should act in a certain manner.

Jackie Wesley ~ TCF, East Central Indiana & Miami-Whitewater Chapters

Recently, a couple in our church lost a 19-year-old daughter to an accident where a drunk driver crossed the median and hit Sarah's car. Sarah died instantly. When I visited the couple in their home, I felt their heavy heartache. I knew what they were going through for the early days of Daniel's death manifested themselves. I saw the potted plants and flowers from florists and remembered our house after Daniel died. Dozens of vases of flowers sent by family and friends crowded the dusty dining room table. Meals brought over by friends were wedged into the refrigerator. And my heart was breaking, more and more each moment. For what I really wanted to appear at my front door was not a potted plant or a casserole, but my son. How would I live now?

Alice J. Wisler ~ Daniel's House Publications



We need not walk alone.

"In time, we learn there is no loss without gain and no sorrow without joy. As death closes doors behind us, new doors open before us." —*Joanetta Hendel*

Christmas Without My Child

Last night we held our Compassionate Friends chapter meeting for November: the topic was Holidays and Grief. We met in small groups to discuss how we are going to get through this most difficult of times. While we found no single answer, we did make some discoveries about ourselves. We also found some basic ways to take control of our lives.

In our group of eleven were several newly bereaved parents. Deep sorrow and anxiety were apparent in each face as we opened the dialogue—a discussion of the holiday season without their children. This anxiety and deep sorrow immediately became mine; I am that parent, I am still on the first leg of what may be a long journey without my child. Their tears were mine as we talked.

As the discussion progressed, I could see a bit of each parent's tension slowly release. I felt as if I could read their minds: give me some answers, tell me I will survive this, tell me how you did it. The answers were all different; the reassurances of parents who had lost their child and survived that first heartbreaking holiday were there. Some of the answers came from the newly bereaved as they explored their inner feelings.

We found consensus on one important factor: we must give ourselves permission to do what makes us most comfortable. We are not the caretakers to the world right now; we must take care of ourselves. If established traditions bother us, then we must turn to something else. What is the point of pouring salt into this open wound? Perhaps next year or the year after, when the wound is not so fresh, we will want to return to former traditions. Perhaps not.

Through tears and some light laughter, we realized that we are not invincible. We are not responsible for the happiness of friends and extended family. We do not have to meet the expectations of others. We must accept our emotional limitations and the psychological and physical toll that grief takes on us. We must slow down and change our perspective. We must do what is right for us, especially during the holidays.

Most of those who had been through at least one holiday season without their child felt that making changes for the first year or two was a positive step forward. We found that talking honestly with our family about our feelings might make them feel temporarily uncomfortable but it did clear the air about expectations. We agreed that limiting our casual social relationships negated the need to make explanations regarding our lack of interest in holiday celebrations. By "dropping out" we also eliminated obligations in many areas. This gives us the freedom to choose simplicity over stress, essentials over hassles and flexibility over anxiety. This gives us the opportunity to live in the moment, go where our emotions take us and listen to our hearts.

While we all agreed that the holidays are overwhelming for parents whose children have died, we also agreed that we are each individuals and we each perceive the world differently. Some of us want and need the old traditions during the holiday season. Some of us need to be with people who are not part of our grieving process. Others among us felt that solitude and simplicity were the answer.

The answer to the question of how we get through the holidays is found within each one of us. We each have our own truth. The challenge, we decided, is to honor that truth and hold the line against external pressures. A few of our newly bereaved parents could barely choke out a word or two. Others were more vocal. While grief consumes some of us for many, many years, others appear to "go with the flow" of life very early in their grief. What feels right for one of us may be abhorrent to someone else.

One universal truth did emerge from our conversations: we miss our beautiful children and love them as deeply as when they walked beside us. We live in this purgatory each day of the year, but during the holidays it seems most oppressive. Our children have been torn from our lives forever. Daily life and special traditions will always reflect the deep void that has become our reality. We need our Compassionate Friends at the holiday season. We need to know that others have walked this road, have lived this nightmare and have managed to survive. We each continue to rediscover hope through our Compassionate Friends. And in finding that hope we have given and received the purest gift of the season: the possibility of peace.

*Annette Mennen Baldwin ~ TCF, Katy, TX
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
November 9, 2005*



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



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

P.O. Box 9714
Tyler, Texas 75711



We need not walk alone.



www.TylerTCF.org