



**THE  
COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS**

**Seattle-King County Chapter**  
P.O. Box 66896 Seattle, WA 98166

# May and June 2010



[www.tcfseattle.org](http://www.tcfseattle.org)

206-241-1139

## ***Am I Still A Mother?***

Annette Mennen Baldwin, TCF, Katy, TX

It has been more than three years since my only child, Todd, was killed in an automobile accident. The circumstances of the accident included my husband as the driver of the vehicle. Following the accident my former daughter-in-law filed a wrongful death suit against my husband and me. She has also terminated our relationship with Todd's children and eliminated any possibility of normal grandparent time spent with our three granddaughters. In the past two years we have seen our granddaughters for 5 hours and the time spent was meaningless. The message has been sent that we are no longer a part of Todd's children's lives.

My husband has held up remarkably well as long as he isn't forced to replay the accident in his mind over and over again. I don't want the details and have never looked at the pictures of the vehicle. To this day I do not want to know the extent of my child's injuries or the amount of suffering he underwent. I wonder about his last moments, his last thoughts. And then I wonder: Am I still a mother?

I was a good mother to Todd; my life centered on raising him to persevere and be the kind, gentle, goal oriented, loving man that he became. My relationship with him as an adult was so rewarding, so full of joy. I enjoyed listening to my adult child and exchanging ideas with him. I shared the important facets of his family life, the birth of his children, babysitting on a moment's notice or when no one else would, so that he and his wife could take some time off for a vacation. Discovering who my grandchildren were and how they perceived the world was enlightening and fulfilling. Watching his children grow and become individuals was a great joy to me. Watching him become a strong and gentle parent made my heart sing.

And so I wonder: Am I still a mother? My son no longer lives. I defined myself as a mother for over 35 years. My finest accomplishment was raising my son to become the fine man that he was. Now the bond between mother and child is broken. Life's paradigm has shifted. Or has it?

Am I still someone's daughter and someone's granddaughter? Of course I am, even though I have lost my parents and grandparents. So, I am still a mother. I think of my son each day, and I remember the good and bad times, the tough decisions, the structure, the letting go, the building of ideals and sense of honor and duty to family. But most of all I remember my child's love and my love for my child and the incredible journey of raising my child.

So, when people ask me if I have children, I say, yes, I have one son and four grandchildren. I am a mother and a grandmother. Circumstances and the actions of others have altered my reality, of course. I realize, too, that my son's legacy and influence will have little impact on his children. But my son is my son forever. I am a mother. I am Todd's mother.

*In memory of my son, Todd Mennen.*

## ***Who Was That Person?***

Rich Edler, TCF, South Bay/LA Chapter

*An eight year retrospective...*

**Who was that person?** He looked like me. But I don't think I know him any more.

**Who was that person?** He had so many friends. He was popular at cocktail parties and told good jokes. Today, he seeks out one person he can really talk to and that is enough. His telephone rolodex is a lot smaller, but so much more important.

**Who was that person?** He had such different priorities. He stated over life, like an ice skater on a frozen pond. He never thought about how cold the water was. How he has a totally new perspective on the world. He reaches out to people who hurt because he knows how they feel. He has been there. He has felt the ice water.

**Who was that person?** He had an orderly chronological sense of time. Now the world is divided forever into simply "before" and "after."

**Who was that person?** He used to rush through dinner or cut the family vacation short to get back to the office. Now he thinks back to the family times as the most wonderful times of his life. He knows what is irreplaceable.

**Who was that person?** He used to worry about so many imaginary troubles, most of which never happened anyway. Now he spends most of his time in the present. He appreciates today's sunset, daisies, simple things and good friends. He knows how precious each moment is.

**Who was that person?** He used to think about what he wanted to get out of life. Now he thinks about how grateful he is for the gifts he has had.

**Who was that person?** He used to measure his goals in terms of where he is going. Now he focuses more on what his life will have been about. He asks less and less why his child died, and more often, "Why did he live?"

**Who was that person?** He had never heard of The Compassionate Friends. Now they are his best friends. And he knows that by helping someone else through TCF, he also helps himself. *Who was that person?* I don't think I know him any more.

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# The Compassionate Friends

## Seattle-King County Chapter



**The Compassionate Friends (TCF)** is a *non-profit mutual assistance, self-help* organization offering *friendship, understanding, and hope* to bereaved parents and families. Anyone who has experienced the death of a child of any age, from any cause is welcome. Our meetings provide an opportunity to talk about their child and about their feelings as they go through the grieving process. There is no religious affiliation. There are no membership dues. The purpose of this support group is not to focus on the cause of death or the age of the child, but to support bereaved parents, grandparents and adult siblings in the positive resolution of the grief feelings and issues that revolve around the death of their loved one and support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health.

### TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Coming to the first meeting is the hardest, but you have nothing to lose and everything to gain! Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. At the next meeting you may find just the right person or just the right words said that will help you in your grief work. Try to attend three times before deciding if TCF is right for you.

### TO OUR MEMBERS WHO ARE FURTHER DOWN THE "GRIEF ROAD"

We need your encouragement and your support. Each meeting we have new parents. THINK BACK – what would it have been like for you at your first meeting if there had not been any TCF 'veterans' to welcome you, share your grief, encourage you and tell you, "your pain will not always be this bad, it really does get better!"

### INFORMATION REGARDING OUR MEETINGS

PLEASE come to a meeting. We are here to discuss whatever is on your mind. This is YOUR group and we are here for each other. You do not have to talk at meetings. We welcome your participation in our group, but it is not a requirement. Coming to listen to the other members is okay, too. Our meetings are open to parents, grandparents, adult siblings, or adult family members such as aunts and uncles.

### WE NEED YOUR HELP

This group belongs to you and cannot survive without assistance. You can help with refreshments, setting up before a meeting, send out reminders for the next meeting, help with the newsletter, send thank-you notes, become a facilitator, volunteer to help with Chapter activities or serve on the steering committee.

*Part of getting better, sometimes is being there to assist others, too, through this journey.*

**If you'd like to help, please contact us.**

**Chapter Co-Leaders: Mike McLeod: 206-369-7366 and Marge Tomlinson: tcfmarge@aol.com**



## KEEPING IN TOUCH



Seattle-King County Chapter **Phone: 206-241-1139** (TCF Line)

Seattle-King County Chapter **Mailing Address: P. O. Box 66896 Seattle, WA 98166-0896**

Seattle-King County Chapter **Website: www.tcfseattle.org**

**Phone Support:** Having a rough moment? Need someone to talk to? Call Robyn at 360-259-8006 ♥

Western Washington Regional Coordinator: Jacqueline Russell 360-457-7395

TCF National Office Phone: 877-969-0010

TCF National Mailing Address: P. O. Box 3696 Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696

TCF National Website: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

♥ **TCF Online Support** - Please visit the National website to get the session schedule for the following groups:

♥ Parents / Grandparents

♥ Pregnancy / Infant Loss

♥ Survivors of Suicide

♥ Siblings

♥ No Surviving Children

♥ Men Only

### Working Your Way Through

Tears are not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength. Our tears testify to our life. And loving calls for great courage, for in loving, we always risk getting hurt.

We cry – women and men – because we've lost someone or something precious. While every loss is an invitation to new life, growth is always scary. But the tears that spring from our love can help us find healing and renewal.

And with healing comes new courage, enabling us to say, "I am determined to honor myself and those I love by going on and living!"

**GO AHEAD AND CRY – TO RELIEVE STRESS**





I awoke suddenly and looked at the clock. I felt as though someone had shaken me. I struggled to get the fuzziness out of my mind. What day was it? What time was it? What's happening? As my eyes focused on the clock, I saw that it was 11:44 p.m. I quickly moved to the living room where my husband was sitting. I asked, "Isn't he home yet? Something must be wrong!"

Our 17-year-old son Nathan had not yet returned home from a high school basketball game. He was seldom late. He always called if he was delayed. The clock kept ticking away as we started making some phone calls. After an anxious hour of trying to find him, a friend whose daughter was in the same car as our Nate told us she had just received a call from a hospital. There had been a terrible head-on collision.

We started calling hospitals and we quickly located our Nathan. The hospital spokesperson said he was alive but unable to identify himself. Within a few minutes, we were standing at the nurses' desk in the Emergency Room of a large trauma center in our area. The rest of that night was a true nightmare. The nurse would not give us any information on Nate's condition, but insisted we fill out insurance forms. No one offered to let us see Nate, but we caught one fleeting glimpse of him as they rushed him to surgery. Finally a nurse came out to talk with us, and after much, much prodding from us, she admitted they did not expect Nathan to live.

We prayed, we called everyone we knew on the only pay phone in the ER that wasn't out of order, we prayed, we tried to ask questions, but got few answers, we prayed, we hugged each other, and we prayed some more. I was talking to a friend on the phone when I saw the head nurse come around the corner into the waiting room. She handed me a brown paper bag which held Nathan's brand new Nike's, and she said, "He's dead." I quickly found my husband and watched the light go out of his eyes as I told him our precious Nathan was gone.

Those memories of that fateful night are frozen in my mind. I have shared with thousands of bereaved parents, and unfortunately far too many of them have stories similar to ours. How should professionals react when a family is having to deal with the worst news they will ever hear?

### **Acknowledge the Family**

I recently had the privilege of hearing Doug Manning speak. He stated that what we are looking for in the midst of a trauma is significance. We need to know that our relationship to the patient is acknowledged and that we don't have to relinquish our family position just because our loved one is in the hospital.

Two years ago, my father lay in ICU of a local hospital, very near death. I had never met any of the attending physicians, but when I met them that day, I was very quick to establish my significance as my father's next of kin. I let the doctors know my past experience with death and also that I write books on what doctors and hospitals do right and what they don't. (I've become bold in my old age!) Later that day as the doctor explained a medical procedure they were planning to perform on my father, I told the doctor I would consent to the procedure as long as I could be with my father during the test since it was quite possible he might die before the procedure was finished. As I stood in the room watching the doctors and nurses work feverishly to help my dad, one of the nurses said, "Perhaps you would be more comfortable out in the hall." I answered, "Perhaps you would

be more comfortable if I were out in the hall, but I'm staying right here." Then we both laughed, but I stayed in the room.

Obviously, it will not always be possible or even wise for family members to be with a patient during all life-saving procedures. However, we need to be kept informed. A liaison should be assigned to the family, someone who can explain what's happening, someone who will represent the doctor and the family well. A liaison can also offer to call a pastor, chaplain, or friend. A liaison should also help provide privacy for the family, and most of all they need to be gentle. We have just been severely traumatized, our child has died or is dying, we are in a strange environment, and we are frightened. We need someone who will establish good rapport and establish our significance.

### **Answer Our Questions**

We will have all kinds of questions. "Is he conscious? Is he in pain? What happened? What are the medical people doing right now? Why is it taking so long? Will he live?"

We need someone to explain the hospital procedures and answer our questions. A well-informed, caring staff person can go a long way toward preventing malpractice suits and at the very least promote goodwill between the hospital, the doctor, and the patient's family.

I have had the opportunity to talk with many families who have started malpractice suits. When I've asked them "Why did you decide to sue?" the answer invariably comes back, "We asked the doctor...the nurse...the hospital personnel...and they never answered our questions. When we get them to court, they will be forced to answer our questions and adequately explain what happened."

I have learned that families can handle an "I don't know" or "I did everything I could" answer much more easily than a medical person's refusal to answer or a medical person's apparent avoidance of the family. When our questions aren't answered by medical personnel, we are left to coming up with our own answers and they may well be wrong.

When we walked in to the viewing room of the mortuary after our 17-year-old was killed by a drunk driver, our family doctor was waiting for us. He was not on duty the night Nathan died and had no personal involvement in his Emergency Room care. However, after offering his very sincere sympathy and expressing his own grief over Nathan's death, Dr. Maples stated, "I went to the trauma center and I read all about Nathan's injuries; what do you want to know?" Bless his heart! He answered all of our questions. I was so indebted to him that even though we moved to another town, it took me nearly eight years before I was able to transfer to another doctor. When I finally made that decision, I sent Dr. Maples a floral arrangement for his office and stated, "I can't justify driving to another town for medical care when there is a fine clinic just three blocks from me. But I want you to know we love you and will never forget you."

### **Accumulate Helpful Information**

As medical professionals, don't become afraid of us and become evasive, just become knowledgeable. In a 1986 volume of *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* those who had experienced the death of a loved one listed the following behaviors as helpful:

Contact with a similar other: Medical facilities should be aware of volunteers from bereavement support groups who

can be called to talk with and/or sit with a family facing the death of a loved one.

Expressions of Concern: Sometimes we are afraid to show sympathy for fear the family member may “fall apart.” My thought is “So be it!” When we cry or show some other emotion, we are not doing so because you showed concern. We are doing so because someone has finally given significance to us and our situation and we feel it is safe to express our true feelings. The next behavior found helpful falls in natural order after Expressions of Concern.

Opportunity to Ventilate Feelings: It is helpful if someone shows enough concern that we know it is safe to express our feelings and our fears. Once we know it is ok to express our true feelings, the strong emotions usually dissipate quite quickly. However, when we sense it is not safe to show our emotions, we generally do everything we can to hold them in until some often insignificant situation arises and the top explodes off of our emotions like an exploding volcano.

Presence of Another Person: If a hospital can provide a caring person to stick with the family and even call and check up on them later, that will go a long way to create good will and positive attitudes between the family and the medical establishment. Many years ago when our Nathan's identical twin, Ethan, died while still in the hospital ten days after birth, a very caring nurse came out into the hall, put her arms around my husband and me and cried with us. It has been thirty-three years since she stood there grieving with us. But I still remember her name. “Nurse Mathews, wherever you are, thank you for caring. Thank you for giving significance to our grief.”

It is important that medical personnel become well versed in how to help families when things don't go the way they had hoped. Don't just read clinical material on bereavement; read articles and books written by bereaved people. I recently attended a conference for professional caregivers. I sat in on a workshop where the professionals were discussing how to help those who had lost a child. I listened for a while, was not happy with what I was hearing, and I finally asked, “How many of you have actually experienced the death of a child or other family member in an untimely death?” Not one person raised their hand. It would most definitely be my hope that none of the professionals reading this article would have to experience what I and thousands of others have experienced: the death of a precious child. However, it would be my hope that medical professionals would learn from us and ask us what they can do to help a bereaved family.

### **Allow Us To Grieve**

Don't let us leave empty handed. Don't send us home with a pair of Nike's in a brown paper bag. Gather information on support groups. Prepare a resource list of helpful books and articles. Place it in our hands. Give us a card with the telephone number of a chaplain or counselor. Send us home with some books that will address our situation. Have someone check on us periodically. I recently had a medical professional say to me, “Well, what kind of time-line can we put on grief?” My answer is, “Grief takes as long as it takes.” Give us time, and give us permission to grieve.

*Marilyn Heavilin, a popular speaker and workshop presenter, draws from her grief experiences following the deaths of three of her children, Jimmy, Ethan, and Nathan. She has authored several books including **Roses in December, December's Song, and When Your Dreams Die.***

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## *The Anger of Bereaved Parents*

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Denis Pye, TCF, UK

The anger of bereaved parents can often be seen as a reaction of feelings of helplessness and loss of control over events. Our beloved child has died, whether suddenly through accident, suicide or murder, or as a result of illness and disease – and we have not been able to prevent it.

Our desperate frustration emerges in anger, either against particular others, against the whole world, or against God.

Someone must be responsible; someone must be to blame for our loss, our suffering, and our pain. After all, the inevitable process of aging cannot be an explanation for such an early death.

So, our anger is directed against those seen to be responsible, or sometimes simply against those nearest to us.

In this way, our anger may be turned on doctors and hospital staff, on police, or on the driver of the vehicle involved in our child's death.

Writers on bereavement have often mentioned the anger, conscious or submerged, which can exist against the loved one who has died.

This can present an enormous problem to bereaved parents.

How could we be angry with the child who has died? But we could, after all, be angry with our children when they were alive, and still love them, couldn't we? Better, surely, that the anger is brought to the surface rather than repressed and added to our burden of unnecessary guilt.

The worst outcome is that anger, unacknowledged and unexpressed after our child's death, is turned inwards against ourselves, gnawing at our sense of self-worth and leading to despair and deep depression. We have all felt the beginning of this descent in the temptation to blame ourselves.

Like all the welter of emotions which hit us in the terrible weeks and months following our loss, it needs to be faced and talked about with those who will listen with real empathy and understanding.

*“Grief is a passion to endure. People can be stricken with it, victims of it, stuck in it. Or they can meet it, get through it, and become the quiet victors through the active, honest, and courageous process of grieving.”*

Bereaved Parents of the USA, Baltimore, MD – August 2008

## Ask My Mom How She Is



*My Mom, she tells a lot of lies,  
she never did before.  
From now until she dies  
she'll tell a whole lot more.*

*Ask my Mom how she is  
and 'cause she can't explain,  
she will tell a little lie  
'cause she can't describe the pain.*

*Ask my Mom how she is  
she'll say "I'm alright"  
If that's the truth, then tell me  
why does she cry each night?*

*Ask my Mom how she is,  
she seems to cope so well.  
She didn't have a choice you see  
nor the strength to yell.*

*Ask my Mom how she is  
"I'm fine, I'm well, I'm coping."  
For god's sake, Mom, just tell the truth –  
Just say your heart is broken.*

*She'll love me all her life  
I loved her all of mine.  
But if you ask her how she is  
she'll lie and say she's fine.*



*I am here, in heaven  
I cannot hug her from here  
if she lies to you, don't listen-  
hug her, hold her near.*

*On the day we meet again  
we'll smile, and I'll be bold,  
I'll say "You're lucky to get in here, Mom,  
with all the lies you told."*

Written by Jo Burr, 3 months after losing her 15 year old son, Simon.  
Nelson Bay Chapter, TCF, NSW



## **TO BEREAVED FATHERS...**

*Trevor and Audrey Roadhouse, Regina, SK, Canada*



...who ache, but feel they must carry on. ...who are frightened, but can't show their fear. ...who are angry, but cannot strike out. ...who are lonely, but have to smile. ...who grieve, but must be strong. ...who love, but are afraid to show their love. ...whose tears cannot fall.

Bereaved fathers are often desperately tragic people caught in a trap of society's expectations. Our co-workers, friends and family expect that we will, indeed, be strong – that we will do all in our power to ensure that life carries on. They expect that our behavior and temperament will remain consistent, and that through our attitudes and actions others will be able to observe our will to survive despite the enormity of our loss.

Unfortunately the world does not always work the way we want. Bereaved fathers do ache. We are afraid and angry. We are lonely and we cry in silent places. We ques-



## *A Time to Remember*

Dawn Morville, TCF Sibling Representative



Memorial Day is for memories. It's a day set aside to remember all our loved ones who have died, not only the servicemen who have given their lives for our country. As a teenager, I recall putting flowers on my grandfather's grave; it was something I felt I had to do that took a few minutes of my holiday. Now, placing flowers on a grave on Memorial Day is something I want to do. The significance of the day has changed since those earlier years because now it's my brother who is buried.

Jerry's death at age 21 in a truck accident in 1984 was unexpected and shocking. I have never felt such grief before – grief so strong that even as time tries to heal the pain, the scars remain. That's why Memorial Day for me is no longer what it is for so many people – little more than a long weekend, a day off from work, and the beginning of the swimming and boating season. The day now holds special meaning. While at other times of the year I get teary-eyed when a picture or a person brings back thoughts of Jerry, today my emotions are especially sensitive.

Memorial Day weekend is an opportunity for our family to take time out of our busy lives to reflect on Jerry's life. We share our thoughts, remembering certain things he did that made us laugh. But sadness lingers not far away. At one point, laughter turns to tears as Mom and I tell Dad about the time last year she presented me with a plastic bag that contained Jerry's white tube socks (his trademark), a cigarette lighter and a wallet. These were the last tangible reminders we had of him – taken off his body and given to us after the doctors said there was nothing more they could do for his serious internal injuries. What solemn reminders of how quickly life can turn to death. But these are moments we can talk about to keep him close in mind and heart. Thursday evening my parents and I stay up late going through a stack of memorial dippings, searching for just the right poem that will reflect Jerry's personality and capture our feelings, so we can publish it in our newspaper's memorial tributes.

Memorial Day itself is a time to leaf through scrapbooks and read the hundreds of sympathy cards we received, remembering the outpouring of love and support we got and realizing that our mourning is far from over. Sunday, as we put out flowers on Jerry's grave and a group of relatives gather around as I read two poems in memory of him and our other deceased loved ones, I feel a strong sense of family; these people understand how I feel. It is OK to cry. And as strangers drive by in cars and line the roads of the cemetery to pay their respects, I feel I am not alone. We all share something. That's what Memorial Day is all about.

tion our sanity and our will to survive. We want to run and hide from our sorrow. And we carry a heavy burden of guilt for not "living up" to society's expectations.

As difficult as it may be, take the risks and develop the courage to express the way you feel.

*In memory of Robert Tristan Roadhouse (1/15/74-2/12/84)  
From Reflections from the Heart, TCF, Canada*



## The Compassionate Friends

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## May & June 2010

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### *Dancing in the Rain*

The word dance seems to be etched in to my mind. Recently, a friend shared a quote she had come across: "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain."

Wow – what awesome words! The image of a storm is a good analogy in understanding our grief. Storms can come from nowhere, like a tornado, seemingly destroying everything in their path and leaving our lives a complete and utter shambles. The darkness and dreariness stay while lightning continues to flash, stabbing our hearts with pain. Thunder clamors constantly, reminding us that our children are gone. We can walk in fog for what seems like years as the sleet and frigid cold freeze us in our tracks. The wind howls, imitating our screams and wailing. The rain seems to be endless.

Others, who haven't lost their children, who are living in sunshine, cry out to us, "Come in out of the rain." They don't understand that often we're just not able to move. The storm has become our world, for however long we need or choose to live there. My own experience of grief tells me that our lives will always be stormier than they were before the hurricanes came and took what was most precious to us. But, we do have a choice. We can stay hunkered down under the false protection of denial. We can lock ourselves up in a protective shell and never come out. Or, we can learn to dance in the rain. However, each bereaved parent must decide what feels best to them.

I find myself thinking, "It's hard to crawl, walk or breathe without her and she wants me to dance?! She must have forgotten all those times I tried and she said, "Mom, you can't dance!" then I realized that she's not referring to my ability when I hear, "Dance, Mom dance! Dance in the rain. Dance because you can't change what has already been done. You have the choice to sit it out or dance. Listen for the music, keep your eyes wide open, go forward, follow the music and dance. Follow me. I am not behind you. I am in front of you. I'm free and I am dancing."

She taught me to hear the music and her song continues on. Without it, I couldn't dance.

I believe if we allow our children to lead us to dance in the rain that they will eventually dance us out of the severe storms of pain and into the sunshine of peace.

**And when the skies are gray because I went away,  
put on your dancing shoes, grab your umbrella, and Dance.**

