



**THE  
COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS**

# SEPTEMBER and OCTOBER 2010



Seattle King County Chapter P.O. Box 66896 Seattle, WA 98166 206-241-1139



## **We Made It Through the Summer**

Pam Duke, TCF, Dallas, TX

**We made it through the summer;  
Another season has passes.  
When I look back now,  
I did not think I had the courage  
To reach this point in time.**

**The worst may not yet be over,  
But things seem better than yesterday.  
I've realized it's all right to with for you  
Daily... and nightly...**

**It's my prerogative as your parent.**

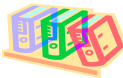
**I do not have to look forward to the  
seasons coming soon, but I will...  
because I know it's what  
you would want me to do.**

**Just please know, I still love you  
As though you were in our home.  
That love will never die.**



## **SCHOOL STARTS**

Mary Cleckley, TCF, Stone Mountain, GA



Strange things happen to you when your child dies. You'll fail if you try to make sense of most of it. Both my children had finished high school when my son died, yet I found the beginning of school – especially the first year – to be difficult. The bus stops in front of my home for the neighborhood children. Suddenly, as they all gathered to wait for the bus, I found myself reliving those simpler, happier days of old; longing for them actually. It was a peaceful time.

Now if I, whose children are grown and gone, had a problem with school starting, those of you who do have school age children must know that your pain is normal. It's another reminder that life goes on – with or without our children – and acknowledging that hurts!!! I came to the conclusion that it is all right to pine for happier times and it was nothing to get upset about. As with many remnants of grief, I recognize it, allow it and then get on with my life. Maybe you're like me, you'll always be a little nostalgic about school starting. That would probably have been true even if my son had lived. Maybe you, too????

## **COPING WITH OCTOBER**

Tracy Stackhouse, BP/USA, Central Arkansas



*The coming of autumn with the beautiful colors of the leaves and their falling will bring different emotions to different families. Maybe your family had a tradition of driving through particularly scenic areas. Maybe the child you lost was the one who raked the leaves. Perhaps all of this will simply be a reminder that winter and a barren landscape are coming.*

*Halloween is a favorite holiday for most children, but it can be hard for bereaved parents. This formerly innocent holiday, the yards decorated as graveyards with markers and ghosts and skeletons, the stores of unhappy spirits that must walk the earth, all have a completely different impact on us now.*

*Many of us have opened the door to give out treats and been faced with a costume so similar to one our child wore for a Halloween past that either we really want to pull aside the mask to see the face behind or we want to dream that this was one last visit from our precious child.*

*Some parents have surviving children who still want to join in the fun – and, oh, how hard it is to “trick or treat” when you feel the victim of the ultimate “trick”.*

*Stop and think – What can you do differently? For autumn and its beauties and chores, what routines can you change? Hire someone or ask a friend who has been offering to help and asking for specific tasks. Maybe you could do it together. For Halloween, take surviving children to a carnival (many schools and churches sponsor these). Or, if a carnival was an every year event, go to the zoo or go door-to-door this year. If you don't have surviving children wanting to celebrate, maybe you can leave your house dark and go to a movie and skip the holiday. In any event, planning ahead will help you get through a difficult time.*

## **CAN IT BE FALL AGAIN ALREADY?**

Kathy McCormick, TCF, Lower Bucks County, PA

Here we go again, that downward spiral into Fall that every bereaved parent dreads. For as sure as we turn the calendar page to October, here comes Halloween, followed by Thanksgiving and then (oh, NO!) Christmas and Hanukkah. As I contemplate my fourth fall without my child, I can tell that the pain will be less intense and come less often. This does not mean I love her less. It just means that no one can grieve as intensely as in the beginning for very long. Your body couldn't sustain it.

Take care of yourselves. Learn to be selfish if you need to be. Tell those closest to you what you need in order to get through this time. You will survive, whether you like it or not. We're here if you need us, your compassionate friends.



# 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](mailto: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](http://www.tcfseattle.org)**

Look for us on **Facebook**, too: **The Compassionate Friends Seattle, King County Chapter**

**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) (website has link to Facebook)

♥ **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

**The Compassionate Friends** is about transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope. It takes people out of the isolation society imposes on the bereaved and lets them express their grief naturally. With the shedding of tears, healing comes. And the newly bereaved get to see people who have survived and are learning to live and love again.

- Simon Stephens, founder of The Compassionate Friends



## My Gifts From Amy

Suzanne Owens, TCF, W. Columbia, SC

I recently experienced the one year anniversary of my precious daughter Amy's death, a day that we as parents never want to happen. I was distressed as it really sank in that this was real and very final. Last year at this time I had been in such a state of shock that now, looking back, I began to realize the daze I was in for several months. This year I was in no such daze – the pain was all too real.

What could I do with this day? How could I make it through? In my pain I remembered one of the first things I had said when Amy died. I had expressed thankfulness for all the things she had taught me by being in my life. As I thought of this now, I began to write down all the many things. Soon I found I was taking my list a step further and listing all the things I had learned since Amy's death. I began to see my list as a list of gifts from Amy.

Before Amy's death I had thought of myself as a religious person, going to church, believing in God, even knowing several Bible verses by heart. I was wrong. I have only now begun to see the difference in religious and spiritual. Only now, after Amy's death, have I embarked on my very own spiritual path. What greater gift could my child have left me!

I took my list and put it in a box, wrapped it up and tied it with a bow. I put the box in my closet. This time next year I will open the box and celebrate all the wonderful gifts my daughter has given me. And I'm sure I will add more as the years go by.

*"We remember our children with love and gratitude. We feel sadness because we miss their faces, their voices and their smiles. But we do not forget."*

## Because

Beth Oldani, TCF, Arlington Heights, IL

*Because you can't feel me,  
doesn't mean I'm not there.  
Because you can't see me,  
doesn't mean I'm not near.  
Because you can't hear me,  
doesn't mean I don't speak.  
Because you can't touch me,  
doesn't mean I'm out of reach.  
Because I am dead,  
doesn't mean I am gone.*

**When you are dead, your sister's tears will dry as time goes on, your widow's tears will cease in another's arms, but your mother will mourn you until she dies.**

- an Arabian Proverb

## To Love and To Mourn

When someone you care about dies your capacity to love dictates your necessity to mourn. Work with thousands of bereaved persons, combined with my personal losses, have convinced me of one thing: *you cannot heal without mourning or expressing your grief outwardly.* Denying you grief, running from it, or minimizing it only seems to make it more confusing and overwhelming. To lessen your hurt, you must embrace it.

Reconciling your grief does not happen quickly. *Grief is a process, not an event.* Consequently, you must be patient with yourself. When you come to trust that pain will not last forever, it becomes tolerable. Deceiving yourself into thinking that the pain does not even exist will make it intolerable.

(An excerpt from *Understanding Grief, Helping Yourself Heal* by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.)

## The Older Child

For so long I've wanted to write about being the bereaved parent of an older child. How my heart is broken just as if he had been still-born, died in infancy, as a youth, teenager or young adult. Leland was 42 and one of the above, but he was my child.

At the holidays I think so much of him. He loved Christmas and would have bought and wrapped all his gifts early. The decorations would be ready and he'd be eager to start putting them up right after Thanksgiving. In this way he was like a kid again.

Too often when we hear of bereaved parents we think of a young person or infant. We forget that we are parents of children no matter the age. I read the obituaries now, looking for adult children, and seeing the parents as survivors. And my heart aches for them as I know what they are going through. Their hearts are as broken as mine is, and it will never heal. Sure, time makes the pain less intense, and the tears come less often. But the hole in my heart is still there and always will be.

Too many parents of older children who have died are reluctant to join groups such as Bereaved Parents or Compassionate Friends. We often feel that we can tough it out alone or with family. And the small numbers of older parents at these meetings make it even harder to attend. I wish it were different and the word was out to any bereaved parent that all are welcome no matter the age of the child. He or she was their child.

Whenever I talk to the bereaved parent of an older child, I feel such a closeness, and I can empathize with them because I know that our pain is just as great as any bereaved parent. We just seem to be sitting in the shadows more. God bless us all.

By Linda Bishop, Excelsior Springs, MO,  
mother of Leland Sharp, 1962-2004,



## THE ROLLER COASTER

By Annette Mennen Baldwin  
Written in memory of my son, Todd Mennen



As a child I enjoyed the thrill of the roller coaster: gliding up the giant track, reaching the top with a momentary anticipation and the thrill of the quick dropping roll to the bottom of the track. The deep turns, first to the right and then to the left were designed to heighten the anticipation of the next climb and drop. In my childhood mind, these curves, climbs and drops were an isolated experience, temporary and fun. The ride would end.

A few months after my son's death, I dreamed of the roller coaster. But this time it wasn't fun. It was a nightmare of fear, anxiety and pain; I was so paralyzed that I couldn't breathe, that dream was the simple symbolism of life since my son died. Now I ride a different sort of roller coaster. The climb to the top is a slow, difficult rise to normalcy. The rapid descent to the bottom is yet another terrible setback. I hang onto the bar of sanity on the curves, first one way, then another. I really want to stop this ride, but it is forever. This ride won't end.

Today I recalled that roller coaster dream, in all its vivid detail, and I compare it to the roller coaster that is my life now. Are the highs lower and the lows higher? Are the curves softening? Yes, I believe they are. It's been two years and two months since Todd died. I still weep. Tiny tears still fall unexpectedly. I still have anxiety. I still feel as if the earth has dropped from under me. I still miss talking with my son. I miss seeing him. I ache for that special hug that only my child can give. Yes, I miss my only child very much. My heart has been shattered; my definition of myself has been altered and my loneliness is incomprehensible. But something has changed on the roller coaster of this life.

That something is, of course, me. I work through my grief in many, many ways. I have consciously shifted the paradigms of my life. I have learned to evaluate people from a different perspective. I have become so sensitive to the pain of other parents that I feel it as if it were my own. I have stopped anticipating how I will handle stressful events, anniversaries, birthdays, holiday. I have learned to keep negative energy and negative people at a far distance. I have learned that a routine provides necessary structure. I have learned to live in the moment, to take joy in simple things, to talk openly about my child's life and to acknowledge the things I cannot change.

As time move forward, I will continue to accept what is given and give what I can. I know the roller coaster will level out eventually. For as long as I live, I will keep my child with me, in my heart. That's all I can do as I ride this changing roller coaster that is now my life.



### FEAR

Tom Crouthamel, TCF, Sarasota/Bradenton, FL



Fear is the constant, nagging companion of every bereaved parent who has surviving children – and there isn't a darn thing we can do about it.

A surviving child needs to live a "normal" growing-up child's life. As parents, we **MUST** hold back, **MUST** "let go", and **NOT** be so "overprotective" of our child(ren) so that we screw up their growing-up time and deprive them of the experiences they need to mature into adulthood. Our hell of the fear of loss of another child must not become their hell of being overprotected.

Fear. It doesn't go away.

WE must control it ... but please don't ask *me* how.



### Back to School – Suggestions for Helping Our Children

Pat Pruss, TCF, Southern Maryland



Children experience some of the same challenges their bereaved parents know all too well – difficulty concentrating, memory lapses, and poor attention span. Grieving siblings may find these make learning more difficult. Here are suggestions to consider to make the school year less daunting for your grieving child.

- Talk with his/her teachers. Teachers may not otherwise understand changes in our child's grades or behavior. Sensitive teachers will often have suggestions – ensuring homework assignments are written down, including due dates, for example.
- Take your child's lead, especially with older children, on whether to communicate details of their sibling's death with teachers and other parents or peers.
- Provide structure at home to help your child stay organized. Create a spot in the house for drop-off of lunch boxes and book bags when coming home, and where items can be placed each evening so they aren't forgotten in the morning rush out the door.
- Consider posting a family calendar with school dates, as well as doctor appointments, parent-teacher conferences, etc. We all need extra reminders.
- Ensure there is after-school time for your child to relax and be free of the demands of keeping on a good face. Grief requires a lot of energy, and everyone needs time to take a break, including your child.



## **THE STORY OF THE CHINESE MOTHER**



*There is an old story from China of a woman whose son had died. She went to*

*the Buddhist temple and begged the monk to bring her son back for her pain was just too unbearable and she could not go on with it. Rather than scoff or scold her for her request, the monk told her to go out and find one family who had not experienced a loss, and then he could stop her hurting.*

*So she set out to look for that family. The first place she decided to stop was at a very large castle on a hill. "Here," she thought, "these people are so rich and wealthy, surely no loss or pain has ever come to them." So she climbed to the castle and told her story to the servant who brought his mistress and master to talk to her. They told her such a sad story, and were in so much pain, that the woman thought, "I can help them! I've already been through this part of the pain." So she stayed for awhile and helped this family. Soon, though, she resumed her search.*

*The next house, and then the next, and all those that followed, told her of such sad stories that at each one she stayed awhile to help them with their grief. Then one day she looked at herself, and she found that through helping so many others, her grief was not now so overwhelming and so painful. She still missed her son terribly, and still cried for him in the night, but she no longer was consumed in her own grief.*

*She found that by helping others, she had helped her own healing from this most painful loss.*

*This is the idea of The Compassionate Friends and other support groups - to give support to those who are newly bereaved and lost in the fog, then as they grow, to reach out to help other who are hurting.*

*Together, we can make it through this journey down life's most painful and darkest road. Together, helping one another, we will survive.*

*~ lovingly lifted from the newsletter of the Orange Coast Chapter of TCF*

## **I Will Never Be the Same Person...**

-Tonya M. Sandoval, TCF, Pueblo Ark Valley, CO

I will never be the same person I was before my oldest son was killed while riding his motorcycle. The other driver didn't see him before he pulled in front of him.

When Eli died, the monstrous size of my grief caused me to have different thinking patterns, and definitely it caused a different outlook on what is and what isn't important in my life. Suddenly, I inherited a different personality or two. I became very forgiving of circumstances that I wouldn't have tolerated before. Most issues became really insignificant to me. I would say "don't sweat the small stuff." The matters which had been very traumatic to me at the time were so petty in comparison to my grief. It has been almost two years since Eli died, and once again I am taking a different view of what's important to me. I still think that most issues are "small stuff." But I am slowly becoming aware of my life and I am able to "sweat some stuff" now and again.

The other personality was very unsympathetic and had no empathy for other people's distress. I regarded everybody else's problems small in comparison to mine. Therefore, I had no compassion for their hurt. After all mine was bigger. When the impacts of remembering other people were suffering too, I was humbled. In the pain and grief of losing my child, I couldn't see or understand anyone else's pain. Perhaps they didn't lose a child, but their suffering was as real as mine. I also discovered there is a 'Before Eli died and an After Eli died' sequence in relation to any event. I either say it, or think it before I start a sentence. At first I counted the days Eli had been gone, then it was the weeks. Now I am going to begin counting the years ... it seems impossible.

I now have hope that maybe time does soften the edges of my grief. I will never be the same person I was before Eli died, but this different person will be fine.

## **The Reason for TCF Meetings**

N. Hunt, TCF, Sioux Falls, SD



One could ask, "Why go and listen to the woes of other people when it is easier to get wrapped up in our own?" It is not to compare tragedies, nor assess the right or wrong means of grieving, nor to pressure or complicate or confuse a bereaved parent with timetables of grief. This is not the reasoning behind TCF meetings.

When a child of a family dies, the emotional pain can be intense. It is tempting at times to try to run either into solitude or avoidance. A balance is needed to survive and live more than a resigned existence. Finding a way isn't easy when the "rest of the world" rushed by, taking little notice that our life has changed.

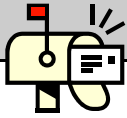
The monthly meetings of The Compassionate Friends are a special time we can set aside to gain and maintain our balance. We need a lot of encouragement to endure and experience our emotions and to express ourselves while grieving. Coming to a meeting can help alleviate the feeling of being alone in sorrow. The environment of other bereaved parents offers a means of keeping in touch with reality, in which there can be a sharing and mutual understanding. There is sustained support knowing that others are willing to acknowledge that though a child's song might be over, the melody of memories will remain woven throughout the remainder of our lives.

♥ TCF asks for donations in memory of our children who have died. ♥

Our chapter is funded solely through donations; therefore we sincerely appreciate your support.

♥ Please help us help others by making a LOVE GIFT today. ♥

All donations are tax deductible. You and your child's name will be noted in the next newsletter



## Love Gift Form

Love gifts are **tax-deductible donations** made to the Seattle-King County Chapter of TCF in memory of your beloved child, sibling, grandchild or loved one.

**Send checks and forms to:** Seattle- King County TCF  
Love Gifts  
P.O. Box 66896  
Seattle, WA 98166-0896

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number (if we have any questions): \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

In memory of (name of child): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Death: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Message: \_\_\_\_\_

**Send checks and forms to:** Seattle - King County TCF  
Love Gifts  
P.O. Box 66896  
Seattle, WA 98166-0896



## With Love, We Remember Them...

In Memory of ...

**KEVIN S.**

May 1983 – December 2008  
from Ken and Jennifer S.

In Memory of ...

**TIMOTHY L.**

February 1971 – January 2001  
From Patti L.

In Memory of ...

**KYLE S.**

February 1999 – February 2009

"Holding you in our hearts forever. Thank you for giving us nine years of special memories ... miss you "Little Guy."  
From Dwight and Shirley S.

In Memory of ...

**AMBER W.**

from the Kevin W. family

In Memory of ...

**LAURA M.**

**ANDREA M.**

"We still remember."  
from Anita M.

In Memory of ...

**MATTHEW NICKELL**

July 1958 – August 1978

**MONTEY NICKELL**

March 1960 – January 2004

"I love you boys. Such nice boys they were."  
From Judith H.

♥ **Thank you to all who make donations to  
Seattle-King County TCF!**

Love Gifts help bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings. Your generosity allows us to continue printing and mailing newsletters, purchasing brochures, pay the phone bill, buying postage and to cover the many other expenses to help grieving families in our community.

**TCF is an IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.**

- ♥ All gifts are tax deductible.
- ♥ Ask your employer if they participate in a "Gift Matching" program. You may be able to double the value of *your* gift through this program.
- ♥ For our chapter to be a recipient of United Way funds you **MUST** specify The Compassionate Friends (TCF) of Seattle-King County when you fill out the United Way form at your workplace.

## The Compassionate Friends

Seattle-King County Chapter  
P.O. Box 66896  
Seattle, WA 98166-0896



**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

**NON-PROFIT ORG**

**U.S. Postage Paid  
Seattle, WA  
Permit #1037**



*September & October  
2010*

**Newsletter supported by:  
BRIM PRESS  
206-433-8811**

### **MY GRIEF RIGHTS**

Alan D. Wolfelt

- 1. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO HAVE MY OWN UNIQUE FEELINGS ABOUT THE DEATH.** - I may feel mad, sad, lonely, scared or relieved. I may be numb or sometimes nothing at all.
- 2. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO TALK ABOUT MY GRIEF WHENEVER I FEEL LIKE TALKING.** - I will find someone who will care and listen. If I don't want to talk, that's ok, too.
- 3. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SHOW MY FEELINGS OF GRIEF IN MY OWN WAY.** - I may get mad and scream, or I might cry. I might want time alone.
- 4. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO NEED OTHER PEOPLE TO HELP ME WITH MY GRIEF, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT ME.** - Please pay attention to me, to what I am saying and feeling. Love me no matter what.
- 5. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO GET UPSET ABOUT NORMAL, EVERY DAY PROBLEMS.** - I might feel grumpy and have trouble getting along with others.
- 6. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO HAVE "GRIEFBURSTS."** - These are sudden, unexpected feelings of sadness that just hit me even long after the death; these feelings can be very strong.
- 7. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO USE MY BELIEFS ABOUT MY GOD TO HELP ME DEAL WITH MY FEELINGS OF GRIEF.** - Praying might make me feel better, closer to the person who died.
- 8. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHY THE PERSON I LOVE DIED.** - It's okay if I don't find the answer.
- 9. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO THINK AND TALK ABOUT MY MEMORIES OF THE PERSON WHO DIED.** - Memories might be happy or they might be sad. Either way, these will keep alive my love for the person who died.
- 10. I HAVE THE RIGHT TO MOVE FORWARD AND FEEL MY GRIEF AND OVER TIME TO HEAL.** - I'll go on to live a happy life, but the life and breath of the person who died will always be a part of me.

*We all have the right to grieve individually and differently. We are all unique individuals with our own personalities and identities. So why wouldn't our grief be unique to the person that we are? There is no right or wrong way to grieve. It is a process and a lifelong journey when it involves losing our children. Be kind to yourself and true to yourself as you travel the path of grief.*