

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Livonia, Michigan Chapter



December, 2019
Volume 31, Number 12

The Compassionate Friends is an international self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved parents and siblings.

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Meeting Information

When: First Thursday of
each month. 7-9 p.m.
Where: St. Timothy's Church
16700 Newburgh Road, Livonia,
East side of Newburgh, 1/4 mile S. of
Six Mile

Coming Events:

NEXT MEETING- December 5 -There will a candle lighting at our December meeting. People are asked to bring a small dish to pass. There will be shortened sharing sessions and then the candle lighting will be during the last hour.

December 8 - Annual Compassionate Friend Candle Lighting - Kellogg Park

December 17:-6:30 pm TCF Dinner-at Richard's Family Restaurant, 39305 Plymouth Rd., Livonia 48150. Sign up at meeting or call Kathy 734-306-3930 or katjrambo@gmail.com

No craft Day



The Compassionate Friends
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all
children who have died

**Worldwide
Candle
Lighting®**

... that their light
may always shine.

**Sunday, December 8, 2019
7 PM Around the Globe**



Livonia Chapter Annual
Candle Lighting
Where - Kellogg Park
Plymouth, Michigan
When - December 8 - 7 PM
Candles are provided

Lighting a Candle

A heart broken by the death of a child can never be healed. As parents we try every way that can be thought of to cope with the loss, but the void will always be there. At first that emptiness seems to take your breath away and most times we wish it would.

This becomes different with the passage of time. It never goes away, but at some point we learn to live with it and in fact this horrible feeling becomes a lifeline of sorts. One of our biggest

fears is to forget our children.

Our hearts force us to find ways to fill that void to maintain our role as parents. Some are as simple as visiting the cemetery and some are as complex as changing our entire lives, dedicated to the memory of our child. In between are the many rituals we create or borrow from others to honor the memories and to keep our child's name alive.

Lighting a candle and saying a child's name keeps their memory burning bright. It means we are struggling to cope with this unwanted role of bereaved parent in the only positive manner we can. We will most certainly shed tears every time and we will still miss our child, but we are doing something that allows the world to hear our child's name and for one moment the candle means oh so much more than anyone else could ever understand.

For a fleeting second that is our universe and every memory we have comes flooding to us as we see the flame through tears, distorting it into something magical. It's the only gift we can give our children. This is as close as we can get to our child now. A tiny, flickering flame can warm the heart and it's nice to think that perhaps they can feel us also. It's a beacon, our light in the window, our shining star in the darkness. It's an opening of our hearts and a way to share our grief.

(Continued on page 4)

Our Children Loved and Remembered Always

This month, we remember the children who are so deeply and sadly missed. Please take a few moments to place them and their parents in your thoughts.

Let Us Remember Them Always

| <i>Child</i> | <i>Parent, Grandparent, Sibling</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Age</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|

Names withheld to protect privacy.



Let Us Celebrate Their Births

*Softly ... may peace
replace heartache
and cherished memories
remain with you always on
your child's birthday*

Memory Tree

My nephew Alex, 18, was killed in a car accident January 31, 1996. He was like a son to me. My brother, Lowell (Alex's dad) died by suicide July 1, 1999. After Alex died, I decorated a "Memory Tree" and have continued to do so every Christmas since 1996. And now, I do the same for my sweet, loving brother.

I decorate the tree with cards, pictures of Alex, baby shoes, hand prints, angels, gifts, doves from the funeral and floral arrangements, little handmade ornaments given to me by Alex ... anything personal I have received or collected over the years from him. Of course, I decorate with lights ... lots of lights which make the "memories" stand out. The tree topper is a huge bow with the last picture of Alex attached to it.

The tree gives me comfort each time I pass by it and it's a reminder to my friends and visitors that YES, this person made a difference in my life and his life counted as much as anyone's ... and the memories live on.

*Martha Grogan,
Cumming GA*

We gather to honor the memories of our children and to share this bond of lighting a candle for the children all over the world. We miss them so much.

Jim Lowery

Sugar Land/SWHouston Chapter TCF

Gifts, Garland, and Grief

I remember our first Christmas after. It began the first week of November in 1997, three short months into our worst nightmare, but a lifetime into missing our child of eighteen years. He had died suddenly, one of those “in the wrong place at the wrong time” things, and he took our hearts with him when he left. Summer screeched to a halt and autumn came and went without our participation.

Still standing in confusion at the threshold of grief, we were stunned when the stores replaced the gloomy ghosts and goblins with sparkling ornaments and cheerful decorations. Neighbors strung lights on their houses, friends sent cards wishing us joy filled holidays, and not one person mentioned Jason’s name. Closing our drapes, we huddled in our cocoon, waiting for his return.

Thanksgiving passed. I recall the empty chair, the unbroken wishbone, and more turkey than three of us could eat. There was an unwatched football game and a failed attempt at gratitude. That was our day, and it was good enough. It was inconceivable that we would ever enjoy another holiday, much less be thankful for it.

Snow fell, Carols rang out, lights twinkled, church bells pealed. Our thoughts were of Jason, fixed more acutely on his departure than on his arrival eighteen years before. Memories of prior Decembers pervaded our present. Jason ice fishing. Jason sled-ding. Jason’s birthday. Jason opening gifts, Jason throwing tinsel on the tree, on his brothers and on the dog. Every memory brought tears but every tear brought Jason closer to us. We found him in the pain, the only place we knew how to get to. I believe that first

Christmas had to be that way. Showing up was the best we could do.

But now it is six trees, six silent nights, and six who grieve. I’d like to share some things that might help:

- Believe that your loved one is with you. Include them in your celebrations and in your sadness. Include them when you talk with others about old times and holidays past. If you don’t mention them, no one else will.

- Talk to THEM. They hear your thoughts...and if you listen, you can hear their replies.

- Light candles. For six years now I have lit a special candle for my son. This year I will light five, one for each of us, living or not. Why perpetuate the myth of separation? Jason is still a part of this family.

- Do good things in celebration of your loved one’s life. Random Acts of Kindness

- Buy anonymous gifts, scoop snow from a stranger’s sidewalk, or light candles at unmarked graves.

- Connect with your loved one who has died.

- Buy yourself a holiday wreath to take to the cemetery.

- Or take a meditation class; create a special place to go to where you can feel their presence.

- Call a newly bereaved friend or neighbor and invite them to reminisce with you. Cry with them, listen to them, share your journey.

- Give to an organization that your loved one supported.

- Make a memory tree. Buy a small tree and decorate it with tokens of their life.

- Don’t worry about what others will think. You are solely in charge of this journey. It’s all yours.

Love someone who is grieving? Lost as far as how to help them through this upcoming season? Any of the above suggestions can be adapted (i.e., give money in celebration of their loved one’s life and tell them about it, make them a memory tree, etc.) to fit your needs. However, there are two gifts that you can give to a person deep in

the pit of grief that will mean more than anything else: 1. Undivided attention 2. Unconditional acceptance of their journey, wherever it leads them.

I won’t end this article with a wish that you have your merriest Christmas ever. I know that, for some of you, that is not possible or even desirable. Instead, my wish for you is this: That you find a quiet moment during the sometimes magical but often horrendous season upon us and relax. That you take a few deep breaths, close your eyes and envision your child, sibling, or grandchild. That you accept that dead doesn’t mean GONE. That you send out a “Merry Christmas” and “I love you” and then BELIEVE when you hear his or her whispered reply of “I love you too, Merry Christmas.”

Sandy Goodman

Author of “Love Never Dies”.

May I Be Excused

Please God, I have my hand up
may I be excused
for a while

from this huge classroom where we
live and learn the lessons of life
I am finding the lessons of this world
too hard to learn,
can I stop off for a while
to rest in a quiet place?

As you know I have lost my child
and I am so tired of this day play that

I’m in
the role is too hard
the words are false

my face is a mask and my smile is
unreal
the only truth I see
is love.

So please God
may I be excused
of traveling on this road for a while?
I’ve had my hand up
for a long time ...

Jan Efford

TCF – Adelaide, Australia

My New Christmas

I brace myself as the holidays approach, playing out my season greeting,

I remind myself it needs to sound

heartfelt and cheerful even if it is not sincere.

I keep myself busy picking out special gifts for my children who grieve with me,

I must remember to paint that smile on my old face a little brighter this holiday.

I decorate my home to illuminate Christmas and all its meaning, Going through all the familiar motions that I have done so many times before.

As my children wish for St. Nick to visit them to load up their stockings with this and that,

I sit in front of my Christmas tree wishing a Christmas wish just for me... an Angel.

Not any Angel of course, a very special Angel, one who entered my life many years ago,

One that had a smile that was brighter than all the stars of Bethlehem.

I sit and wonder how many other mothers are out there who share my wish,

A wish for a sign of hope, love and of course peace from their Angel Child. My boys will leave cookies and milk for Santa as well as carrots for the reindeer,

I leave a letter I wrote to my son in his stocking as I did the year before.

After kisses & hugs have been given and Christmas books have been read, I go downstairs for one more look at the heavens to see if perhaps,

Just maybe my beautiful Angel is waiting to wish me a Merry Christmas. I sigh and think there is always tomorrow.

I wake to the screams of children asking if Santa had arrived,

And smile thinking that excitement never gets old.

After the gifts have been opened and countless toys have been filled with batteries,

I look once more at the heavens wondering where my Angel is...

I sigh once more thinking there is always next Christmas.

Wherever you are my Sean... Merry Christmas...

Christine Torricelli, Sean's Mom

The Shining Light Of Chanukah

Hanukah is a happy time. It is one of the many Jewish holidays that are joyous occasions. It is a time for melodious songs, potato latkes, spinning a dreidel, sharing happy times with family and friends and, of course, gift giving.

It is also a time to tell our children the story of Chanukah. The story tells of the Maccabees' victorious fight against the Syrians for the freedom of their people. They defended their Temple and won the battle even though the odds were against them.

The story then goes on to tell about the miracle of the oil. There was only enough oil to burn for one day to light the Temple, but miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days.

To celebrate this miracle, we light the Menorah. Chanukah lasts for eight days and the Menorah is lit the first night with one candle and every evening until all eight candles are lit. Chanukah candles come in bright colors - in blues, reds, greens, and yellows. Next to opening his gifts, my son, Adam Hirsch, loved to pick out the different colors for the Menorah each evening.

The warm glow of the candles' bright lights seemed to illuminate the smile on Adam's sweet face as he proudly lit the candles and recited the prayer.

Now, I wonder about the miracle of the oil lasting eight days. I wonder why Adam couldn't have the miracle of his cancer being cured. I wonder why my son, who died on April 17, 1990, shortly before his seventh birthday, could not have a miracle of his own. I wonder why Adam couldn't have defeated the odds as the Maccabees had done.

Adam was a brave and courageous boy - a true warrior. And, as I often told him, he was the bravest soldier I shall ever know.

Yet, in my heart, I know Adam truly was a miracle. I shall always be grateful for the pleasure and privilege of being Adam's mom.

His spirit, his sense of humor, his courage, and the everlasting effects his brief life had on so many are all tributes to this wonderful little boy.

The miracle of his being here on earth and the love and memories he left behind are what I shall always cherish. Adam will always be my shining light of Chanukah!

*Bonnie Spiegler,
Lower Bucks, PA*

Somewhere You Haven't Been

First, I experienced the loss of the most precious thing I could imagine, but it didn't stop there. As I've gone through my grief journey, I have realized that not only did I have to deal with the death of my infant son, but with other losses in my life, as well.

It was January 13th, 1994, during a bitter cold winter when Christopher was born. But tears of joy and happiness soon turned into tears of anxiety, anger, emptiness, and finally, loss. Words could not express the feelings we had, initially. Perhaps shock and disbelief were the first emotions to surface.

When it first happened, people were all around us, visiting, calling, sending cards - the right things to do. It seemed to hold us together. But very soon the phone calls became fewer and fewer and the visits less frequent as people went on with their own lives. They didn't realize that our lives had been changed forever. Before, I had been happy and full of life, but my life had been changed forever, and all my dreams were shattered. I would never be the same.

As I began to realize that people shied away either because they didn't know what to say or because it could be a reality for them that they couldn't deal with, other feelings of loneliness also began to sink in. People who knew what had happened either ignored me or said some thing inappropriate. They didn't realize that this is not something I would get over in a week, a month, or a year. It's something I

(Continued on page 7)

SIBS

A Sibling View of the Holidays

The worst time of the year for me is the holidays. I guess the worst part of the holidays is the changing of the seasons. My brother, Sean, always loved Fall. For him it was a romantic time of the year. Sean's birthday is November 11, the height of the Fall. So, the holiday season begins for me with the first leaf falling off the tree.

As Sean's birthday approaches, I find myself getting sadder and sadder. I never know how much I really miss him until I realize he's missed another birthday. As the other holidays grow nearer, I begin to dread them more.

The first year, no one wanted to have Christmas, but we felt we needed

it for my daughter. Her birthday is Christmas Eve and she turned two that year. Doing Christmas for her makes it a little easier, but at the same time makes it that much more difficult.

Sean thought we needed holidays all year long. While helping my Mom put up Christmas decorations, I looked at our family picture above the piano, the last of the five of us. I told my Mom that we would never be that happy again. I know that is a sad thing to say, but I know a part of me will always be missing.

Each year I feel a numbness set in over the holidays. The numbness begins around Sean's birthday and ends after the first of each year. The year of Sean's death, my Mom didn't know what to do with the ornaments that Sean had collected over the years.

The Christmas before Sean died, my

Mom purchased a miniature tree for the family room. Sean made fun of it. The next year, Mom purchased Sean his own miniature tree for the family room. Sean's tree is filled with all of his ornaments and his used guitar strings for tinsel. Sean's tree goes up right after Thanksgiving and doesn't come down until after January 24th, the anniversary of his death. This tree has actually helped to make the holidays seem a little brighter. A part of my brother is there in that tree. I was out shopping a few weeks ago and I bought an ornament that would go perfectly on Sean's tree. The ornament is the first one I have purchased for Sean since he died. Just buying that one ornament has actually made me look forward to the holidays.

I know the holidays will never be the same without our "Holiday Clown", but we will make new memories, laugh and cry at the old ones, and just survive this time of year.

I wish you a peaceful holiday season filled with precious moments and happy memories. I also hope that you can share a smile.

Traci Morlock
St. Louis

"Do You Have Any Brothers or Sisters?"

What was once a simple question now brings so much pain. The question, "Do you have any brothers or sisters" is often asked as a part of getting to know someone new.

The answer may vary depending upon the circumstances. No matter how siblings respond to the question, they know that the relationship does not die and that they will always be brothers or sisters to their sibling who died.



Need to Talk to Someone Between Meetings?

TELEPHONE FRIENDS:

The people listed below have volunteered to take your calls:

Linda Houghtby - Long term illness - (734) 591-3062

Catherine Walker - Loss of Only Child - (248) 921-2938

Charli Johnston - Suicide - 734-812-2006

Joe Hofmann - Drug related death - 734-331-9919

Bob Vitolins - A father's grief - (313) 882-8632

Dana and Brandy Bumstead - Loss of an infant -(313) 447-8144

Kathy Rambo - Sudden Death - (734) 306-3930

Remember that our chapter has a Facebook page. It is a closed page, so you just need to search for The Compassionate Friends of Livonia, Michigan and ask to join.

TCF CHAT ROOM

www.compassionatefriends.org

The chat rooms are moderated and are open at different times. There is one open most evenings from 10-11 p.m. They are all moderated which means that all the chat rooms have a trained facilitator in them.

National Mailing Address: PO Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522; Phone: (630) 990-0010; Toll Free: (877)969-1101; Website: www.compassionatefriends.org

OTHER TCF CHAPTERS IN OUR AREA:

Ann Arbor: Mike Fedel: MikeFedela2@gmail.com; 734-998-0360 ; 3rd Sunday, 2:30 to 4:30 pm - First Presbyterian Church (Vance Room) 1432 Washtenaw, Ann Arbor

St. Clair Shores: 2nd Wed. Kathy Joerin ; 586-293-6176, KJMac21@aol.com

Detroit: Kellie West Outer Drive Methodist Church, 12065 West Outer Drive, Detroit ; 2nd Wed., 6:30 - 8:30; 734-660-9557.

Troy: St. Paul's Methodist Church, 620 Romeo, Rochester, MI 3rd Thursday 7-9; Tina@586-634-0239

South Rockwood TCF Chapter: Southwood United Methodist Church, 6311 S. Huron River Drive. South Rockwood, MI 48179; 3rd Tues. of month meeting - 7 pm; Sheri Schooley, Leader; Contact Karen 734-672-7469

Tecumseh TCF Chapter: First Presbyterian Church, 211 W. Chicago, Tecumseh, 4th Sunday of the month, 2-4 pm, Rose Hatchett, 517-270-3308.



Livonia Chapter Page



Our annual Candle Lighting will take place in KelloggPark in Plymouth at 7:00 pm on December 8th. Remember that this is an event that is open to all of your family and friends. To have your child's name read and an ornament made for them, there will be a sign up sheet at the monthly meetings or you may call the TCF number 734-778-0800 to register.



2018 Candle Lighting



A Love Gift is a gift of money to Compassionate Friends. It is usually in honor of a child who has died, but may also be from individuals who want to honor a relative or friend who has died, simply a gift from someone who wants to make a donation to help in the work of the Livonia Compassionate Friends. Love Gift form on back page.

♥ Judy Cappelli "In memory of my son Christopher. Happy Birthday Christopher, I've loved you all of your life & I'll miss you the rest of mine. Love you Son!"

♥ Diane Arquette "In memory of Ricky Arquette. To my beloved son, Ricky; you are in my thoughts every day and that will never go away. I will fight to keep the men in prison who took your life away. My life and my heart are empty and void, and it will stay that way. Until we meet again, my love, always Mom"

♥ A love gift from Fran Relyn

New Members

We welcome new members. We are so sorry for the circumstance that has brought you here. Although we have no easy answers, we can offer you understanding through our common experiences. We also know how much courage it took for you to attend.

Melissa Campbell whose beloved daughter, **Shelby**, Born 8/15; Died 9/27; 24 years

will carry with me for a lifetime.

I don't blame these people. Most of us don't want to deal with death – but I wish people could be more sensitive. They need to allow time to listen to us, let us cry, talk or just be silent. It's better to recognize grief than to ignore it. It did happen and my baby was real, even though perhaps to them he wasn't.

It's been nine months now, and I never thought I could have made it. Each day is a struggle in a different way. In the very beginning, there were days I didn't want to get up. Or else I cried all day. Though there were days I didn't feel I had anything to live for, I have walked through them. I have looked at my grief and dealt with it through counseling and sup-

port groups. I've been able to share my pain, and I hope that one day I can help someone else.

My life will never be the way it was before. Perhaps some people who were friends at one time will learn to accept me as the new person I am and stop trying to make me the person I used to be (or the person they want me to be).

The right thing is to listen and not be judgmental. They need to learn to allow us to grieve the way we need to. Like a roller coaster ride, there are ups and downs, and this walk is not a race. Everyone moves at a different pace. The pain is real and only time can lead us through our journey to healing and, one day, feeling happy again.

*Barbara Cuce
Mt. Sinai, New York*

First Christmas

It can't possibly be Christmas without her being here.

Yet the world is singing round me, joyful tidings and good cheer.

Through 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.

*Genesee Bourdeau Gentry,
TCF, Marin/San Francisco, CA*

TCF Livonia Chapter
Brenda Brummel
10531 Calumet Trail
Gaylord, MI 49735

December 2019

If any of you would be willing to get the newsletter via the internet,
please email me. Thanks, Brenda Brummel

LOVE GIFTS

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Love Gift Donation of \$ _____ in Memory of _____

Message: _____

Direct my gift to: _____ Outreach (Printing, postage, phone , web
_____ General Fund (90% local; 10% national)

Mail to: Rhonda Temple, 25164 Hanover St., Dearborn Heights, MI 48125

The Gift of Hope

It is the gift of hope which reigns supreme in the attributes of The Compassionate Friends. Hope that all is not lost. Hope that life can still be worth living and meaningful; hope that the pain of loss will become less acute and, above all else, the hope that we do not walk alone, that we are understood. The gift of hope is the greatest gift that we can give to those who mourn. *Reverend Simon Stephens, founder of The Compassionate Friends*