

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Livonia, Michigan Chapter



May 2018
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The Compassionate Friends is an international self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved parents and siblings.

Chapter Leader

Sally Cassidy
Joyce Gradinscak
Catherine Walker
734-778-0800

Newsletter Editor

Brenda Brummel
10531 Calumet Trail
Gaylord, MI 49735
231-585-7058
bbwriter59@aol.com

Treasurer

Rhonda Temple
25164 Hanover St.
Dearborn Heights, MI 48125

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 - May 3 -- Annual
Balloon Lift - see page 7**



May 19 - Craft Day - see page 8
May 15 - 6:30 pm TCF Dinner-at
Brann's Steakhouse (39715 6 Mile,
Northville, MI) sign up at meeting
or call Kathy 734-306-3930 or
katjrambo@gmail.com.

Save the Dates:

September 6th - Alan Pedersen will be
coming to perform for our meeting.

That First Mother's Day

I will never forget the first Mother's Day after my son's death. Robert died in January in a helicopter crash, and we were all still caught up in the shock, numbness, and paralyzing pain of those first months.

My daughter, then twenty-five, was grappling with the loss of her only sibling, her brother who had been such a part of her life since she had been a toddler. Concerned about my pain at facing a Mother's Day without my son, she bought me several small gifts in an effort to protect me from the starkness of having only one gift to open. Most notable among the gifts was a coffee mug with a cartoon cat and the inscription, I love you, Mom. I cherish that cup to this day, and every time I drink from it, I remember that first Mother's day and my daughter's loving concern for me through her own sorrow.

All day I tried desperately to stay busy and not be a downer. It wasn't easy. That evening my husband took me out to dinner. I kept my stiff upper lip through the meal, but dissolved into tears in the parking lot. "Mother's Day will never be the same again," I sobbed into his arms. How could it be, with a vital link in the chair of my life missing?

As the years have passed, the pain has softened and I am able to enjoy

Mother's Day once again, although my instincts in the parking lot were correct — it truly will never be the same again.

My son is always with me in my heart and I can feel his love, taking comfort in the knowledge that we will be together again. In Don Hackett's beautiful *Say Olin*, written after the death of his only son, he writes:

*What he is in spirit stirs within me
always.*

*He is of my past, but he is part of my
now.*

He is my hope for the future.

If you are facing your first Mother's Day without your child, I wish for you a day filled with peace, love, and hope.
*Carole Ragland,
TCF Houston-West Chapter, Houston, TX*

Bread Crumbs

Finding Our Way Back

Bread crumbs are all we have. They are what is left behind after the death of our child. They are our memories and our mementos.

A bread crumb is the little answering machine cassette tape that says, "Hi, it's just me. Leave a message at the beep." We may be the only people with a cassette tape in our safe deposit box. It's not much, a few quick words, but it's his voice—a small crumb from the original.

(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

Child Parent, Grandparent, Sibling Date Age

Names available only to members.



Let Us Celebrate Their Births

A bread crumb is his favorite shirt that I still can't part with so I wear it for good luck on special days. A bread crumb is the last Father's Day card he wrote in his own hand before he went off to college.

"Thanks for everything, Dad, especially the \$. My years at home were better than words can say and I never took anything for granted. I've had the best childhood anyone could have. Thank you for the ideas and opportunities I grew up with. I love you. Mark."

I call these things crumbs because they are a disappointing piece of the real thing, but treasured because they are all we have.

I also think there is a second way of looking at this. Bread crumbs are a part of a children's story, symbolizing signposts along the way to help lead us out of the forest—to find our way back to the land of the living, at least if the birds don't eat them.

I like to think that the return from grief is like finding our own way out of the forest. The way is marked by great changes or signposts if we will only follow the bread crumbs. I think of them as gifts left behind by our children. They change us and they lead us out of the forest—but at a very different place than we first went in. Here are three I have found. Maybe you will find others.

Crumb One: We pick up a new sense of what is important and what is not. We suffer fools, superficial cocktail parties, and convenience friends poorly. We seem to develop an immediate impatience for the meaningless and the trivial. On the other hand, we pick up an incredible sensitivity to the world around us that we did not have before. We watch the news differently. We value people more than things. We live more in the moment and less in the future because we know that sometimes "tomorrow" doesn't come.

Crumb Two: We find our real self on the road back. After the loss of a child and a period of emptiness, we do eventually come back. But we come back differently—and I believe bet-

ter—than the person that entered that awful forest. With our new understanding of priorities, we listen again to "that still small voice" that we silenced in the race to climb the career ladder or have the "perfect life" or do what our parents or teachers thought we "should" do. We find new courage to be the person we really are.

We begin living from the inside out instead of the other way around—from a sense of what is important, not what is expected. From a life of "what's in it for me?" to "how can I help you?". We discover new and compassionate friends, and sometimes drift away from the old ones. We go from a thousand name Rolodex of contacts to a handful of people we love. We often also find our spiritual center and an inner peace. We become unafraid to die. At the same time we are beginning to live again.

Crumb Three: We pick up one more gift that I have noticed. We seem to get anointed with an ability to help someone else. You know what I mean. We didn't want it. We didn't ask for it. But we got it, anyway. It's almost like a giant invisible radar screen gets mounted on our head and we now pick up vibrations from other people in need. And we find out that we really can help. People seek us out. People who don't know what to say when a child dies call us and ask: "Could you please go over?". We know we can and will, if only to listen.

I am reminded of the story of a little boy who arrived home late from school. "Where have you been?", his mother asked. "I was helping Timmy who broke his bike," the child answered. "But, Honey," the mother said, "you don't even know how to fix a bike." "I know, Mom," came the reply, "But I was just helping him cry."

Sometimes we can just help someone else cry, and that is enough. Unlike most other people, we can walk directly up to a bereaved parent or sibling, look them in the eye and say, "I know how you feel." That is what TCF is all about. And in helping another person, we help ourselves heal too.

So what do we do with these new gifts or bread crumbs left along the way for us? New priorities. A new sense of self. And the ability to help someone else.

These are definitely good things. They did not come from the death of our child. As Rabbi Harold Kushner said in Seattle: "There is no silver lining." But there is change. These changes come after the death, when we recognize that we can't change what happened, but we can change what we do about it.

One day our surviving son, Rick, put his arms around us in a family hug and said: "Okay Mom and Dad, now that we are a family of three instead of four, we each have to live our lives one-third better." That, more than any other moment in our grief, marked our turning point.

My wife has a reoccurring dream. She is in Heaven many years from now, and she greets our son. "Okay, Mom," Mark says. "So tell me everything you did after I died?" On that day she will be proud to answer: "I lived the rest of my life one-third better in your name."

I suspect most bereaved parents divide their lives into those two distinct stages of time: before and after the death. What we do in Stage Two we do in our child's name.

And because we do it, the world after our child died, in some small way, is changed forever. And when the world, in some small way, is changed forever, then our child's life continues to make a difference.

And when our child's life continues to make a difference, he or she is never entirely gone.

Richard Edler
TCF, South Bay/LA, CA

Parental Grief when a Child is Born Still

When trying to share my grief with other bereaved parents I began to wonder how could I possibly tell them, especially ones with more years of experience than I, how to accept others who lost children at different ages? I can only speak of my own experience, and relate how I feel.

Can the number of years, months, days, minutes or seconds you have

your child define parental grief? Not in my opinion. Although the pain we feel is our own, we all know that awful pain of losing our child. For me that pain began the day my son Sean died. I began loving my son the moment I conceived him, and will continue to love him and to mourn his death the rest of my life.

When I look at the “parental bereavement community,” I see, for the most part, very compassionate people. Although all of us tend to gravitate towards those who lost in the same fashion as we did, I still see the bond we have — a bond that can’t be broken. We all have had one or more of our children die. I believe regardless of the child’s age, or the circumstances of death, our losses are similar.

My son was born still (I prefer that term to the more common “still born”) when I was 39 weeks pregnant. He was a baby, my baby, though he never breathed the air. He was, and is my child! Yet it has been my experience that even the bereaved tend to put a “price” (if you will) on the pain of others. Though my grief comes from the death of my son — a baby born still — my anguish is as sharp and debilitating as one whose child died at a few weeks, a few months, a few years or at 45 or 65. Does it matter WHEN we lost? We all lost our child, and all of us need and deserve the support and compassion of others.

It may be true that I didn’t have a chance to know my son for as long a period of time as those who lost older children. Yet I DID know him. I knew what he liked, and what he didn’t like; I knew when he wanted to sleep and when he wanted to play. I knew this because I am his mother; I carried him for 9 months.

We have all paid a BIG price to belong to this club that none of us wanted to join. Isn’t that enough of a price to pay for others to accept us with open arms?

Thank you to all of my “Compassionate Friends” who have done just that!

In loving memory of Sean Michael Evans, born still November 8, 1997.

Kathy Evans

TCF Atlantic County NJ Chapter

Being the Mother of a Child Who Died on Mother’s Day

I am the mother of a child who died. And that makes Mother’s Day very hard.

Recently I was talking to a mother whose child had just died. “What about Mother’s Day?” she asked, through tears. It was hard to know what to say, because it’s a terrible day for those of us who have lost a child. Other days of the year you can maybe make it a few hours without thinking about your loss; other days of the year you can pretend that you are an ordinary person and that life is normal. But not on Mother’s Day.

On Mother’s Day it’s in your face that your child is gone forever. On Mother’s Day you can’t pretend you are ordinary or that life is normal. All the hoopla, all the Hallmark hype, the handmade cards and flowers and family gatherings, make it almost excruciating.

Our town has a Mother’s Day road race for which I am eternally grateful -- especially because, in a demonstration of grace’s existence, the start and finish are next to the cemetery where my son is buried. On my way I can visit his grave and say what I need to say and look yet again at the name we chose for him carved into stone. At the end of the race, they give all the mothers a flower; on my way home, I go back to the grave and lay my flower there. And then I move forward with the day.

See, that’s the real challenge after losing a child: moving forward. It’s almost impossible to envision in that moment of loss; how can life continue after something so horrible? But life does continue, whether we like it or not. There are chores to do and bills to pay; morning comes, again and again. So you pick yourself up and you live, but you are never the same.

At first, we are different because of our raw sadness. But over time, the sadness moves from our skin into our

bones. It becomes less visible, but no less who we are. It changes into a wisdom, one we’d give up in a heartbeat to have our child back. We who have lost children understand life’s fragility and beauty. We who have lost children understand that so many things just aren’t important. All that is important is those we love. All that is important is each other. Nothing else.

It can feel very lonely, being the parent of a child who died. Especially on Mother’s Day or Father’s Day. We feel so different from those around us, all those happy people with children the same age our child was, or would have been. But over the years, I’ve come to understand that I’m not alone at all.

There is a wonderful Buddhist story about a woman whose son gets sick and dies. She goes to the Buddha to ask him to bring her son back to life; I will, he says, if you bring me some mustard seed from the home of a family that has not known loss. She goes from house to house but can find no family that has not lost someone dear to them. She buries her son and goes to the Buddha and says: I understand now.

That is what I understand now. It doesn’t make me miss my son any less, or Mother’s Day any easier. But it helps me make sense of it; loss is part of life. There are no guarantees, ever. Our children, and all those we love, are gifts to us for however long we have them.

I understand now too that we are together in this, all of us, in joy and in loss. It’s the connections we make with each other that matter -- it’s the connections we make that give life value and help us face each morning. As G.K. Chesterton wrote, “We are all in the same boat in a stormy sea, and we owe each other a terrible loyalty.”

Years ago, I chose words to say each time I go to my son’s grave. It makes it easier to have a ritual. And over the years, the words have come to mean more to me. They aren’t just about grief anymore. They are about who I am, what I have learned, and what I can give.

SIBS

Losing a Part of Myself

If you're anything like me, you grew up in a fairy tale surrounded by siblings who stood 10 feet tall. You grew up with parents who were as brave as superheroes. You grew up naïve to the world around you. Don't get me wrong; I was well aware of what the news never failed to talk about. I knew mothers and fathers could lose their battles with cancer. I knew children could be kidnapped. I knew houses burned down, and car accidents happened almost every day. But, I had created a world where my family was untouchable, where nothing could ever happen to them because they were mine.

Five years ago, a police officer knocked on our front door. It was 10 pm, and I had just gotten ready

for bed. "There's been an accident. You need to come to the hospital right away." By this point, I had seen enough TV shows to know this was not what you wanted to hear from a police officer, especially not at 10 pm, and especially not when your older brother still hadn't made it home.

I lost a brother that day. I lost a cheerleader, a mentor and a best friend. The safe space I had created so easily disappeared, and I was left to tackle the world without the one person who had always paved a path before me. There's no word to describe the loss of a sibling. If you lose a spouse, you're a widow or widower. If you lose your parents, you're an orphan. But if you lose a sibling, you just become the girl who lost her brother. My therapist described it as losing a limb. If someone tells you it gets better with time, the person's lying to you. Yes, cuts get

better and wounds do heal, but when you lose an arm, it's foolish to await the day it "gets better." You simply learn to live with one arm.

I learned to do the things I know he would have liked. I learned to listen to the songs we sang together in the car without breaking down in tears. I learned — and am still learning — to function normally without him just a phone call away. However, "normal" has lately been like a blanket too short for a bed. Sometimes it covers you just fine, and other times it leaves you shaking in the cold. I've come to find the worst part is I never know which one it's going to be when I wake up.

It's been almost five years since that day. Some days the ache is a little less than before, but other days it makes me want to lock myself in my room. And some days, I still feel like I am stuck in a void.

There is no statute of limitations on grief. There is no time limit to waking up crying, or having to leave the grocery store because you see your sibling's old friends. There is no special cure for those dull aches in your heart that don't seem to ever go away. But, coming from a sister who thought she would never find the light again, know there will come a day when the thought of that loved one brings a smile to your face instead of leaving you gasping for a breath you cannot find. There will come a day when you find yourself talking about your sibling and you do not feel uncomfortable. There will come a day when the universe sends you a sign to let you know your sibling is doing OK.

And there will come a day when the 19 years you were able to have with your sibling becomes enough for the 19 more you'll never have. There is no other love like the love *for* a brother, and no other love like the love *from* a brother. And if you're lucky to have a brother who was also your best friend, that love is going to cover you during the best of times and hold your hand through the worst.

Kady Braswell

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 Thursday7-9; Tina@586-634-0239

Pinckney TCF Chapter: The Christian House of Prayer, 9949 McGregor Road, Pinckney, MI; 2nd Monday of the month, 6 - 8 pm; Jimmy Batchelor - 734-277-9705

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



Things Happen in Threes

How many times have I heard, “things happen in three’s?” Good or bad, but in three’s!

Losing my beloved son, Nicholas “Nicky” Jr. three days before his 53rd birthday – in 2014. Unexpected and shocking!

He was traveling to his vacation retreat in Canada (over 25 years) – then, on the road, he ended having fatal heart attack... Having to go to the hospital – identify him – and everything that had to be done.

Our grandson, eighteen years of age, Blaise Christian was such a blessing and helped with the funeral and so many details; Blaise did it all!

Then, three months later, I lost my brother, George – younger than me. Again, unexpected.

The worst is yet to come!

Almost three months to the day, our dear, dear grandson, Blaise Christian joined all of the deceased souls – angels in heaven – three months after his nineteenth birthday.

“Why, dear God, to this day”, I still cry out, “Why?”

Each funeral became harder to bear – there are not words to describe what

one goes through.

Blaise Christian’s funeral was attended by so many from Eastern Michigan University, Divine Child High School; friends from many walks of life and family. The procession of over 100 cars to the cemetery showed how this young soul touched so many lives.

All we have left are memories – deep, deep heart breaking remembrances of our beloved, departed souls.

Still, I ask, “Why, God? Why?”

Blaise was an angel on earth and my strength. He was an “old soul” of very deep FAITH. He had hoped to enter into the Holy Priesthood in the future.

Blaise always reminded me that we must never lose FAITH – his faith and beliefs are here – through the many tears. He reminded me of the three very important letters GOD – always remember who will really see us through.

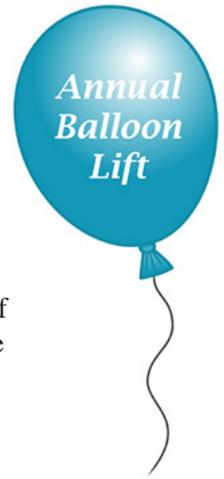
Flora Cocora and daughter, Christina Hebert

TCF, Livonia, MI

In loving memory of three generations: departed in just over six months. Nicholas Eugene Cocora, Jr.; October 3, 2014 (son, brother, uncle)

George Nicholas Subu; February 28, 2015 (brother, uncle)

Bring family and friends to our Annual Balloon Lift. Balloons are provided, as well as cards on which you can write messages. If you want, bring a small plate of one of your child’s favorite food. A shortened sharing session will follow the balloon lift.



Raffle Basket

Our TCF group would like to donate a basket from Michigan for the raffle at the National Conference in July at St. Louis, MO. If you would like to donate an item/items we would appreciate your help. Remember items will need to be shipped so we need no big glass items (like wine etc.) and we will need all items by the July meeting. Thanks for any donations you can help with. We will make a nice basket saying it has been donated from the Livonia MI Chapter in memory of all our children.

Any questions, contact Kathy Rambo or Gail Lafferty.

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.

Jennifer Stemple whose beloved daughter; **Hannah**, Died 6/6 and beloved daughter; **Hope**, Died 6/6 and beloved son; **Liam**, Died 3/16

Donna Storie whose beloved son; **Donald Craig**, Born 2/17; Died 1/17; 35 years

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.

♥ Faye Heller “In memory of John Desmond Heller II. Happy Birthday, Johnny! We love and miss you every day. Mom, Dad & Kim”

♥ Elizabeth Golen “In memory of Andrew Golen. Happy Birthday Andrew. We miss you, Love Mom, Dad, Amy, Jeff & Blair”

♥ Mary & Mike Hartnett “In memory of Michael. Happy Birthday in heaven bud. We love & miss you so much!!”

♥ Michele & Ray Schmidt “In loving memory of our niece, Erika Anstett. We all miss you & you’re forever in our hearts. Love, Aunt Michele & Uncle Ray”

♥ Dan & Mary Beth Myska “In memory of Andrew “Drew” Myska. Miss you every day. Love Dad, Mom, Molly & Bryanna”

♥ Tom & Connie McCann “In memory of Ryan “Ryfro” on his angel day 5/10”

♥ Tom & Connie McCann “In memory of Bryan “Bryfro” on his birthday 5/15”

♥ Tom & Connie MCCann “In memory of our sons; Ryan “Ryfro”, Tom Jr., Bryan “Bryfro” Soupis considered a son to our family & Mark “Sparky” Abbott, Joe Coffey, Jim “Jimmy” Vick”

♥ Flora Cocora & Christina Hebert “In loving memory of three generations departed in just over 6 months, forever loved and missed: grandson, son, brother, uncle “Blaise Christian Hebert – 5/21”, son, brother, uncle “Nicholas Eugene Cocora Jr.” – 10/03, brother, uncle “Attorney George Nickolas Subu” – 2/28”. (see article above)

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

May 2018

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



May Craft Day

Craft Day will be May 19th at St. Timothy's Pres. Church from 10 am to 1 pm. We will be making the charms with our children's photos on them. Photos of your children will need to be brought to the meeting or sent to Gail at angel4gail2016@gmail.com. If you have any questions, please call Gail or Kathy. We will need the photos to us by May 14th. You may choose to have a heart or square shape.

Limit of 4. Cost \$5.00 each.