



The Compassionate Friends

Greater Omaha Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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**Jan-Feb
2017**

Mission Statement: When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

VALENTINE FACES OF GRIEF

Though winter's delicate, lacy snowflakes may remind us of the lace-trimmed hearts of February's Valentines, the "mourning" heart seems frozen in time. The bitter winds of loneliness blow mournfully through our souls. Death has tapped us on the shoulder, introducing his brother, Grief, who has moved into our hearts to take up unwelcome residence. Wearing and exhausted by our pain, we have little energy to evict the intruder. It's hard for us to remember that the sun still faithfully shines behind the clouds that have obscured our vision.

"Love" is apparently the thought for the season, and we are reminded of its tenderness at every turn. But a piece of the fiber of our lives has been torn away, and love seems a vague and unfulfilled promise that belongs only to others. Hearts and flowers, lace and love, romantic verse and melody seem to have abandoned us as we grope in the darkness of our beloved's absence.

Will the pain ever end? Will the hope of joy and renewal once again warm the frozen places in our hearts? Gradually, as the hurt begins to soften, and the thawing relief of healing slowly begins to melt the icy grip of our pain, hope does begin to "spring eternal."

Roses, traditional in February's favorite holiday, remind us that summer will return (even if it is not on the traditional calendar's schedule!). It's unlikely that we will ever again perceive the usual symbols of love in quite the same way as before, but in many ways our concepts of genuine love will be stronger, richer and less assailable. Frivolous and shallow affection are absent from our thoughts. Deeper commitments and more demonstrative attention have become our new marching orders.



In costly lessons, we've learned firsthand how fragile and fleeting life can be, and we are now resolute in our determination to announce to our remaining dear ones the importance of our bonds with them. We abandon the intimidation of "limits" such as the archaic notions that a "man" mustn't cry or say, "I love you," or that we're too busy just now to pay better attention to someone's needs.

As little by little our pain softens and recedes, and we learn that suffering is but for a season, we also learn that LOVE doesn't die. In our emotional lives, Valentines can now take on a new significance as precious reminders of the love that still exists on both sides of life. Love lives within our hearts, and even Grief cannot steal it away. Love is our bridge over the rainbow.

— Andrea Gambill BEREAVEMENT MAGAZINE

SUPPORT MEETING TIMES AND LOCATIONS

For parents, grandparents and siblings over 18

Omaha

1st Thursday 7-9 pm

New Cassel Retirement Center
900 N 90th Street, Auditorium Level 2

Fremont

2nd Thursday 7-9 pm

Fremont Health 450 E 23rd Street

Lincoln

3rd Thursday 7-9 pm

The Space 5900 S 58th Street Suite, Suite H

If You Had One Day With Someone Who's Gone...

by Mitch Albom | Sep 17, 2006 | Parade Magazine |

Her world shattered in a telephone call. My mother was 15 years old. "Your father is dead," her aunt told her.

Dead? How could he be dead? Hadn't she seen him the night before, when she kissed him goodnight? Hadn't he given her two new words to look up in the dictionary? Dead?

"You're a liar," my mother said.

But it wasn't a lie. Her father, my grandfather, had collapsed that morning from a massive heart attack. No final hugs. No goodbye. Just a phone call. And he was gone.

Have you ever lost someone you love and wanted one more conversation, one more day to make up for the time when you thought they would be here forever? I wrote that sentence as part of a new novel. Only after I finished did I realize that, my whole life, I had wondered this question of my mother.

So, finally, I asked her.

"One more day with my father?" she said. Her voice seemed to tumble back into some strange, misty place. It had been six decades since their last day together. Murray had wanted his little girl, Rhoda, to be a doctor. He had wanted her to stay single and go to medical school. But after his death, my mother had to survive. She had to look after a younger brother and a depressed mother. She finished high school and married the first boy she ever dated. She never finished college.

"I guess, if I saw my father again, I would first apologize for not becoming a doctor," she answered. "But I would say that I became a different kind of doctor, someone who helped the family whenever they had problems.

"My father was my pal, and I would tell him I missed having a pal around the house after he was gone. I would tell him that my mother lived a long life and was comfortable at the end. And I would show him my family—his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren—of which I am the proudest. I hope he'd be proud of me too."

My mother admitted that she cried when she first saw the movie *Ghost*, where Patrick Swayze "comes back to life" for a few minutes to be with his girlfriend. She couldn't help but wish for time like that with her father. I began to pose this scenario to other people—friends, colleagues, readers. How would they spend a day with a departed loved one? Their responses said a lot about what we long for.

Almost everyone wanted to once again "tell them how much I loved them"—even though these were people they had loved their whole lives on Earth.

Others wanted to relive little things. Michael Carroll, from San Antonio, Tex., wrote that he and his departed father "would head for the racetrack, then off to Dad's favorite hamburger place to eat and chat about old times."

Cathy Konkurat of Bel Air, Md., imagined a reunion with her best friend, who died after mysteriously falling into an icy river. People had always wondered what happened. "But if I had one more day with her, those questions wouldn't be important. Instead, I'd like to spend it the way we did when we were girls—shopping, seeing a movie, getting our hair done."

Some might say, "That's such an ordinary day."

Maybe that's the point.

Rabbi Gerald Wolpe has spent nearly 50 years on the pulpit and is a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Bioethics. Yet, at some moment every day, he is an 11-year-old boy who lost his dad to a sudden heart attack in 1938.

"My father is a prisoner of my memory," he said. "Would he even recognize me today?" Rabbi Wolpe can still picture the man, a former vaudevillian, taking him to Boston Braves baseball games or singing him a bedtime prayer:

Help me always do the right □ *Bless me every day and night.*

If granted one more day, Rabbi Wolpe said, he "would share the good and the bad. My father needed to know things. For example, as a boy, he threw a snowball at his brother and hit him between the eyes. His brother went blind. My father went to his death feeling guilty for that.

"But we now know his brother suffered an illness that made him susceptible to losing his vision. I would want to say, 'Dad, look. It wasn't your fault.'"

At funerals, Rabbi Wolpe often hears mourners lament missed moments: "I never apologized. My last words were in anger. If only I could have one more chance."



Maury De Young, a pastor in Kentwood, Mich., hears similar things in his church. But De Young can sadly relate. His own son, Derrick, was killed in a car accident a few years ago, at age 16, the night before his big football game. There was no advance notice. No chance for goodbye.

"If I had one more day with him?" De Young said, wistfully. "I'd start it off with a long, long hug. Then we'd go for a walk, maybe to our cottage in the woods."

De Young had gone to those woods after Derrick's death. He'd sat under a tree and wept. His faith had carried him through. And it eases his pain now, he said, "because I know Derrick is in heaven.

Still, there are questions. Derrick's football number was 42. The day after his accident, his team, with heavy hearts, won a playoff game by scoring 42 points. And the next week, the team won the state title by scoring—yes—42 points.

"I'd like to ask my son," De Young whispered, "if he had something to do with that."

We often fantasize about a perfect day—something exotic and far away. But when it comes to those we miss, we desperately want one more familiar meal, even one more argument. What does this teach us? That the ordinary is precious. That the normal day is a treasure.

Think about it. When you haven't seen a loved one in a long time, the first few hours of catching up feel like a giddy gift, don't they? That's the gift we wish for when we can't catch up anymore. That feeling of connection. It could be a bedside chat, a walk in the woods, even a few words from the dictionary.

I asked my mother if she still recalled those two words her father had assigned her on the last night of his life.

"Oh, yes," she said quickly. "They were 'detrimental' and 'inculcate.' I'll never forget them."

Then she sighed, yearning for a day she didn't have and words she never used. And it made me want to savor every day with her even more.

A LOVE GIFT is a donation given in memory of a child who has died. It can also be in honor of a happy event that you would like to acknowledge. Your contributions can be in any amount, are tax deductible and are a source of income for our non-profit chapter.

You may make a donation at meetings, on our website, or by mail.

Love Gifts Received October 1—November 30

General Fund

Outreach

Memorial Programs

To protect the privacy of our members, this information has been removed from the public version of our newsletter.

Love Gifts · Address Change · Authorizations

Mail to: The Compassionate Friends , PO Box 540852, Omaha, NE 68154

Your Name _____

Address _____ Email _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Date _____ Gift of \$ _____

DIRECT MY GIFT TOWARD:

- Outreach -printing, postage, phone, web Angel of Hope Memorial Programs

In Memory of _____

Message: _____

Join our chapter e-mail list to receive timely notices, writings, articles, special information and more. This is an important communication tool throughout the month for our members.

Update or unsubscribe:

www.tcfomaha.org/contactus

25 Years of Lessons from the Heart By Elaine Stillwell

Our Compassionate Friends Chapter recently celebrated its 25th birthday since its very first meeting in 1987. When my husband Joe and I founded this chapter after losing our two oldest children, 21 year old Denis and 19 year old Peggy in a 1986 car accident, we never gave it a thought how long the chapter would exist or dream that we'd still be Chapter Leaders 25 years later. Our meetings have grown from 36 bereaved parents at that very first meeting to over 70 who attend each month 25 years later. Counselors, social workers, hospitals, schools, churches and agencies refer bereaved parents to TCF of RVC because of its long-standing, sterling reputation earned from years of reaching out to so many persons.

We have met at the same local college, same time, same night, never canceling a meeting in all those years. Whether the death is from heart, cancer, car accident, overdose, suicide, homicide, or other cause, parents find the blessing of not having to walk alone. They generously share what helps them cope and what knocks them over during our discussions each month. They proudly adopt the chapter's mantra, "If their song is to continue, then we must do the singing."

At our monthly meeting celebrating this milestone occasion, our members shared what they learned at TCF meetings and via our newsletter that helped them cope and survive the loss of their child. Their comments certainly validated that "grief is an education." Perhaps their thoughts will help you make your grief journey a little easier. Here are a few of their suggestions:

Tell your story. *Talking is the best medicine. "Share your child with the world," as I call it, so that the death becomes "real" to your heart and head and also to insure they will never be forgotten. Tell their story again and again, on the grocery line, bank queue, or to the captive person in the window seat on the airplane, making sure your child's memory is never "erased."*

Express your feelings. *Don't be afraid to tell people that you are struggling to survive, that you really are not "fine." Be honest so you can help educate others to understand the grief process. It takes time to find the right words and to be comfortable explaining your feelings, rather than folding and biting someone's head off with a snappy answer.*

Reach out to your spouse. *Venus and Mars do collide. Even though you grieve differently and feel like you are living on different planets, respect each other's method of grieving and be sure to spend time together each day, even if it is just for a hug, holding hands, a quick kiss, walking around the block, watching TV, or sharing a cup of coffee. Give yourselves time to get on the same wave-length and to avoid the blame game. Dwell on what you love about each other, what made your heart go pitter-patter in the first place.*

Cry. *Release all those emotions instead of stuffing them down inside to explode later. Crying is healing and is a vital part of our mourning. You never have to apologize for crying because it is the price we pay for loving someone.*

Read grief books. *Visit the public library or book store, 155.937 section, and discover those wonderful books written by persons who "walked your walk" and find out what helped them survive. Inspiring words and stories will fill you with positive ideas, validate your feelings, suggest useful coping skills and offer hope to have a meaningful life again.*

Choose Life. *You have a choice to dwell on the death or to choose life, honoring your child by living your life with honor, compassion and enthusiasm, making them proud of you.*

Pamper yourself. *Take good care of yourself, not out of selfishness, but out of wisdom. Do what helps you the most. Carefully pick and choose things that are refreshing to you. Avoid situations that drag you down, until you are stronger and can handle them skillfully.*

Keep a journal. *Try to write your thoughts and feelings each day in a special notebook. Record what brings you a moment of joy or what causes turmoil in your life. Write the things you wished you had said, ask for forgiveness if that is necessary, or simply tell what your days are like now. Your journal will become a roadmap of your feelings, your own GPS for survival.*

Think Positive. *Put on those rose-colored glasses and look for the silver lining. God did not take our children, but lovingly received them. Instead of thinking, "I'll never see my child again," each day say, "I'm one day closer to seeing my child." Practice gratitude for the years you had with your child rather than complaining about their absence.*

Give anger a voice. *Anger is part of grief so channel it in the right direction. The good part of anger is that it catapults you into action, reinvesting all that love you have for your child. We do things in memory of our children that help others, like working for safer roads, speed limits, driver, liquor, drug, boating and mental health legislation, joining groups like MADD, McDonald House, Cancer Care, AFSP, Scouting, sports teams and church committees, and funding scholarships. This helps us feel our children did not die in vain, that something good came from it.*

Wear a Linking Object. *Feel the comfort of wearing something your child loved, a favorite sweatshirt, tee shirt, bathrobe, jacket, baseball hat, watch, bracelet, necklace, school ring, whatever can bring you some joy and make you feel closely connected to your child.*

Join a support group. *Find one that makes you feel comfortable and not alone, a safe place to talk about your child*

with people who understand your pain, a place to receive hope and encouragement and get energized, a place to make new friendships, to get helpful info and resources, to offer a forum for healing and to provide avenues for reinvestment. We all found *The Compassionate Friends*.

Enjoy a pet. They are gentle therapy, their loving presence and unconditional love help fill the void in your life. They bring noise and antics to your home, they snuggle, offer loving companionship and are a healthy distraction. If you are lucky enough to have a dog, they get you out of the house a few times a day which is a feat in itself and help you notice the beauties of nature like flowers, trees and change of seasons while giving you a chance to wave to neighbors – helping you be social again.

Develop new routines/traditions. Create a “New Normal.” Do things in a different way. Try some new things that develop new pleasures, whether it is new seats at the table, new hobbies, new ways to celebrate the holidays, delighting in new friends, doing all those things you put off or just taking time “to smell the roses.”

Lean on your hobby. Use a favorite activity to renew your spirit, to give your grief a little rest – knitting, gardening, painting, writing, cooking, photography – whatever is dear to your heart and provides a happy distraction.

Exercise. Enjoy an activity that gives you a way to refuel or a way to empty your anger and frustration –chopping wood, tennis, racquet ball, jogging, swimming, rock climbing, golf, planting a garden or simply walking the dog.

Collect comforting items. Sometimes we discover things that make us smile; could be angels, butterflies, rainbows, frogs or getting a tattoo. Whatever works for us, we learn to do. For me, it was collecting angels, inscribing them and giving them to everybody to remember my Peggy and Denis.

Delight in music. We find that music can soothe an aching heart and talk to our grieving soul. Poignant lyrics or simple melodies can add a glow to our life. Joining a choir or group dancing lessons allows us to express those deep seated feelings that scream to be expressed releasing frustration and pain.

Pray. Praying is simply talking and talking is healing. Pray to God, our Loving Listener who is always with us, or your higher power, or to your child and feel the strength that enfolds you and carries you through tough days and when making difficult decisions.

Find prayers that help you. A prayer for those people who hurt us with their insensitive comments is our TCF chapter’s most popular prayer, lifted from a Lenten liturgy: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Assholes, Amen.” It empowers you to no longer feel like the victim, since insensitive comments are the #1 complaint of bereaved parents.

Enjoy. This is our birthday gift to you, twenty- five years of “life-giving” wisdom from the experts – parents who have lost a child and know the pain and struggles to survive and have a meaningful life again.

(Reprinted with permission from *Grief Digest*, Centering Corporation, Omaha, Nebraska, 866-218-0101. Their website is www.centering.org)

About the Author: Wife, mother, grandmother, educator, author and speaker, Elaine E. Stillwell, M.A., M.S., shares her gifts of hope and inspiration with the bereaved, simply telling what she has learned to cope and survive following the deaths of her two eldest children, twenty-one-year old Denis and nineteen-year old Peggy, in the same 1986 automobile accident. In addition to being Founder (1987) and Chapter Leader of *The Compassionate Friends of Rockville Centre, Long Island, New York*, (along with her husband Joe), she is also a Charter Member of *Bereaved Parents/USA* since 1995. She is the author of two crafts books for grieving children, *Sweet Memories* and *A Forever Angel* (Centering Corporation), a pamphlet of spiritual meditations, *Stepping Stones for the Bereaved* (Liquori Publications), and a book filled with suggestions for parents who have lost a child of any age, *The Death of a Child* (ACTA Publications).

Thanks to the friend who did know the right words to say: "There is a group in town that might help you."

Thanks to the parent who somehow found the courage to call that phone number and find out about "that group."

Thanks to the mother who went to that first meeting knowing it would really hurt to talk—and talked.

Thanks to the dad who said after the first meeting that he could never come back—but did.

Thanks to the parent who, at the fifth meeting, put her arms around a "new one" and said: "They really can help."

Thanks to the mom who, for the first time, was again able to bake cookies—for her "Compassionate Friends."

Thanks to the homemaker who could never talk in front of people—who became a facilitator.

Thanks to the six-foot father who cried in front of the other men—and didn't say he was sorry.

Because of you, we will be able to help someone we don't even know—next month.

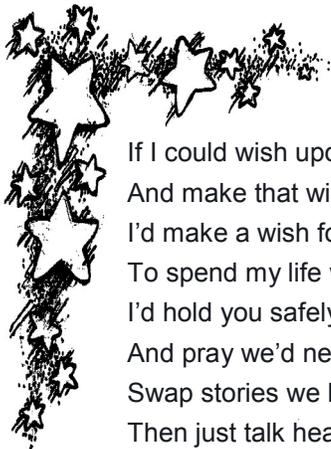
~ John DeBoer, TCF, Omaha, NE (Co-Founder of Omaha Chapter 1979)

Remembering Our Children....Always

Birthdays

Anniversaries

To protect the privacy of our members, this information has been removed from the public version of our newsletter.



If I could wish upon a star
And make that wish come true
I'd make a wish for one more day
To spend my life with you
I'd hold you safely in my arms
And pray we'd never part
Swap stories we had never shared
Then just talk heart to heart
I'd make you laugh, tickle your sides
Drown in your smiling face
Snuggle, cuddle, with all my might
To feel your embrace
If only stars somehow could feel
And wishes could come true
I know all Stars would grant to me
To have that day with you -

Jeanne (Carlton)Walters

I Never Left You

By John F O'Connor

I watch you every day
I am always very near
I know deep in your heart
You realize I am here
I watch you while you sleep
In your bed at home
I hear you when you speak to me
When you are on your own
You cannot understand why I have gone
But I will never leave you
I am there to keep you strong
Talk to me I hear you
Though you may not see
We share an unbroken bond
That will always be
Death won't keep us apart
For our love is forever
Just remember me in your heart
And one day we will be together
Live your life and live it full
Don't waste a single day
Remember I am with you
Every step of the way



THEY CALL IT A "JOURNEY" IN THIS PLACE

I am trying to understand why so many people call our new state of life a "Journey." This word doesn't seem to capture what we are going through. Querying "journey" on The Compassionate Friends web site brings up 77 different references. Webster's defines "journey" as ... "the travel or passage from one place to another... travel over or through."

Does this definition imply that the traveler gets to a destination?

Our journey began at a place called, "Every Parent's Worst Nightmare." A place we never dreamed of being and worked to avoid at all costs....to a place that seems undefined....to a place some of us might not reach....to a place where we can rest....to a place where we can manage life's continuous hum.

At the beginning we are covered by a heavy cloak of overwhelming sadness and pain. Feeling unable to cope with the loss of our son or daughter. Continually asking why did this happen....was it avoidable....why our son or daughter....where am I....I can't stop crying....grief and questions just fill the soul. Where is this destination? Does this journey ever end?

How do we find and maintain peace, try to move thru this journey, when the ripple effects of our loss continue to crash against our emotional shores? This journey is certainly not a straight path forward.

Some of us feel like we have been pulled into a black hole where the pressure is so extreme upon our mind and body

that we feel we cannot survive the moment, hour, day and so on. Webster defines a black hole as, "...a point in space where the pull of gravity is so strong, not even the fastest thing, light, can escape." Neither can we.

So how do we ride this journey? We've heard each "journey" is different, there is no time zone to plan around, and it is just life as we know it now and forever. Do we search for ways to get something positive out of our son/daughter's death? Is that even possible?

Are we embarking on an entirely new life span that still needs to be defined? Do we seek comfort from those similarly situated? Adopt mind sets never before entertained? Do we try our best to manage ourselves into a location where we can get through the trauma, endure the very tough days and recurring time periods surrounding our loss?

Or, perhaps do we work to embrace hope? Hope that our son or daughter is OK. Hope that at some point when the pain erupts we can think this is a measure of how much we treasured our child. We hope that others avoid our situation. Do we hope, maybe, that hope springs eternal, hope for one more connection as our "Journey's" destination?

~Dave Morrell, TCF, Fairfax, VA



Our TCF library has many books, tapes, CDs and DVDs for our members. Each one has been carefully selected by a member of our TCF Chapter. The library is available for browsing before, during and after our monthly meeting. Check-out is a snap. We encourage our members to use this wonderful resource. There is much from which to choose; check it out at the next meeting.

POWER OF CHOICE

Rachael Garrett (*Tears to Hope* Mar-Apr 2014)

Grief can be a powerful force full of signs and symptoms. Some of these include sadness, loneliness, lack of appetite, increased appetite, inability to sleep, exhaustion, irritability, lack of interest in activities that one used to enjoy, forgetfulness, anger, and frustration, just to name a few.

When grief is present these symptoms can seem to take over and consume. It can be hard for one to realize that joy and happiness can be found again. Due to these symptoms, the griever may feel hopeless and unable or unwilling to move forward. It is during these times that a decision must be made.

Am I going to use my grief as an excuse to fail or as motivation to move forward?

Although it can seem appealing to give up at times, there are always choices. The choices can range from deciding to get out of bed in the morning, to meeting a friend for lunch, to choosing to go back to work. Although each of these choices is vastly different, the theme behind each one is very similar - Will I choose to give up or keep going? Will I choose to let my grief be an excuse to fail or motivation to move forward?

Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist whose wife and siblings died in a Nazi concentration camp where he survived, worded it best... "When we are no longer able to change a situation -we are challenged to change ourselves."

You cannot change the situation that caused your grief. What you can change is how you will respond. Choices are always available, even in the midst of tragedy. It is up to you, the griever, to open your eyes to these choices and make your decisions, not based on what you feel today, but on what you want for your tomorrow.



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P.O. Box 540852 Omaha NE 68154-0852

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Please send poems, articles, or book reviews for the March-April newsletter
by February 1

Newsletter@tcfomaha.org

We are looking for some regular writers and a newsletter editor for 2017 (5 remaining issues).
If you can regularly attend support group meetings, ask how you can help!

Bits And Pieces of Grief

"I can only bite off chunks of grief in bits and pieces. How else would I manage to get out of bed?"

~Desire' Aguirre

As with a four-course dinner, we must take our grief in small bites. The totality of our loss, the shattering of our psyche and the horrific blow to our brains is just too much to absorb at one time. Shock is nature's cushion. When shock subsides, our reality is a physical pain, an ache from deep inside that radiates throughout our bodies. Once this subsides, we endure the emotional agony and the kick in the gut that comes unannounced.

This quotation is very profound for both the newly bereaved and those of us who are much farther down the road of grief. The loss of our child will be the single most defining factor in our lives. However, if we do our grief work and all that this entails, we will eventually arrive at something akin to a new normal. Life will never be the same. We will never be the same. But we carry our children forward with us in our hearts and minds, imagining all that could have been and accepting that these things are no longer meant to be.

I have managed to find a serenity and a purpose in my life, yet the thrill of living is not the peaks, the sadness is not the valleys. Life now is "steady as you go." My compassion for others is now almost automatic, my understanding of the macro perspective of life is deeper and wider than ever before. I acknowledge that there is much to be learned on this journey. But it is a painful education.

Annette Mennen Baldwin In memory of my son, Todd Mennen TCF, Katy, TX