



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

LAWRENCEVILLE, GEORGIA CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

Meg Avery, Editor SUMMER 2012
March, April and May

A non-denominational self-help support group offering friendship, understanding and hope to bereaved families who have experienced the death of a child at any age, from any cause.

"The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families in the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child and to provide information to help others be supportive."

CHAPTER MEETING AND CONTACT INFO:

Gwinnett Chapter- 7:30 PM on the 3rd Thursday of every month. **next meetings: June 21, July 19 and August 16.**

Trinity Christian Fellowship, 1985 Old Fountain Road, Lawrenceville, 30043.

We meet in the 100 Building, the first building on your left.

For TCF Gwinnett: contact June Cooper by phone 770-757-4927, or email jc30044@flash.net or tcfgwinnett@yahoo.com

TCF Atlanta website: www.tcfatlanta.org

GA Regional Coordinator Sandra Stinson, sandrastinsontcf@yahoo.com

The Compassionate Friends National Office:

1-877-969-0010

www.thecompassionatefriends.org

Dear Friends,

The Gwinnett Newsletter is available both in print and by e-mail. If you have received this issue in print and would prefer to receive e-mail instead, please notify us at tcfgwinnett@yahoo.com. This will help keep our postage and printing costs down. We welcome your suggestions to improve our chapter newsletter.

We would love your input for the newsletter, Poetry, articles and comments submitted by parents, siblings and grandparents are an import part of each issue. Our next issue, Autumn 2012 will cover the months of September, October and November. We will also continue to recognize birthday and anniversary dates as times of special remembrance within our TCF family. Please communicate these important dates to us if you have not already done so.



The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance, self-help organization offering friendship, understanding and

hope to bereaved families. Anyone who has experienced the death of a child of any age, from any cause, is welcome. Our meetings give parents an opportunity to talk about their child and about their feelings as they walk the grief journey. 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, as it is to focus on being a bereaved parent, along with the feelings and issues that evolve around the death experience of a child.

Our Credo...

We need not walk alone.

We are The Compassionate Friends

*We reach out to each other with love,
with understanding and with hope.*

*The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many
different causes, but our love for them unites us.*

Your pain become my pain,

Just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life,

From many different circumstances.

*We are a unique family because we represent many races,
creeds and relationships. We are young, and we are old.*

*Some of us are far along in our grief, but other still feel a grief
so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see
no hope. Some of us have found our faith to be a source of
strength while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some
of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression,
while others radiate an inner peace.*

*But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The
Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we
share with each other our love for the children who have died.*

*We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for
ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together.
We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as
the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as
well as the doubts and help each other to grieve as well as to
grow.*

We need not walk alone.

We are The Compassionate Friends.

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VACATIONS



Choosing the Right Spot

Vacation time is upon us again. You may be having trouble with that very thought. The following suggestions may be of some assistance to you as you plan your annual vacation.

Consider going where it is the most comfortable for you. Large places with many people may not be the answer this year. Conversely, many people may help you to forget for a moment. Small places with fewer people may provide just the right atmosphere for you, if many people doesn't feel quite right. Family-oriented spots may help surviving children enjoy their vacation a little more, but is it worth it if it makes you more sensitive to your missing child's place in the family?

If you have locked into plans that involve other people made before your child died, this may cause you to hesitate to change these plans. It is important, however, for you to be with people who understand that life is different for you and your family. Warm and caring family or friends who are sensitive to your feelings can be the most comforting. On the other hand, it may place an uncomfortable burden on you if you must try to create a sense of normalcy for their sake. You may have to cancel those plans made earlier, for it is important for you to do what is best for you and your family.

Keep your vacation simple, with a back door through which you can escape occasionally when you need to be alone for solitary reflecting. Too much togetherness can be overwhelming. Whatever you do and wherever you go, try to remember it won't always be this painful. With a little practice, most bereaved parents find vacations become easier. You and your family deserve and need this time away. Putting aside your grief, however temporary, is good for all of you, and it doesn't mean you've forgotten or don't care or are "all over it." I hope your vacation is a peaceful one.

By Mary S. Cleckley

Lovingly lifted from the TCF Potomac Chapter
July/August 2000 Newsletter

SUMMER MEMORIES

Summertime is a happy time for most people in this country: vacations, holidays, family reunions, relaxed days at the pool, evenings in the backyard talking with family and friends, the smell of a fresh rain, the long days, the cooling nights, fresh mown grass and flowers that bloom profusely. Despite Houston's heat, summer has become a treasured time for me. My son was a child of summer. Born in May, he loved the summer sun on his face and the wind in his hair as he first rode a tricycle, then a bicycle, then drove a car. Those were wonderful times for him. The summer solstice on June 21 was a favorite day for us both. Since the summer solstice is the longest day of the year, Todd particularly loved to watch the sunrise and sunset. I found myself doing that again this year. As I looked at the sun directly overhead at noon (1:00 DST) I made the comment that this is the one perfectly balanced day of the year. Later as I watched a beautiful solstice sunset, I remarked to my husband about the light...the gorgeous light. I was seeing Todd in that light. He was laughing, chasing lightening bugs, running and spinning and turning, filled with the joy of summer. He was happy.

I listened to the neighbors' children playing, and I thought about all the wonderful summer days I had spent with my son. I am thankful that I had that time. I am thankful that my child was a son of summer. He found much joy in nature, in the outdoors, in activities that took him out of the ordinary and into the sublime. That's how it is for bereaved parents. We eventually come to a place where we realize that our joyful memories have overtaken the pain of the loss of our child to death. We wouldn't trade the time we shared with our children for anything or any other experience. We have many relationships in our lives, but the unique nature of the parent-child relationship is so special, so deep, so life changing, that we endure and even embrace the pain because we had, for that time in our lives, a relationship of pure love and pure joy with our child. There is no way to measure the depth, width or volume of a parent's love. It exceeds every other human relationship. Yes, we miss them terribly. We weep silently into our pillows at night. We light candles, take flowers to the cemetery, wear their favorite colors, treasure pictures of our children and keep them forever in our hearts. This is a big part of life for every bereaved parent.

Somehow, on the summer solstice, I felt my child's presence in the light of the day and the beautiful rose color of the solstice sunset. I could hear his voice, see his smile and feel his emotions. Peace slips into our hearts in extraordinary ways.

~ Annette Mennon Baldwin, TCF/Katy, TX in memory of her son Todd Mennon

WE REMEMBER BIRTHDAYS

*The light of life never goes out, and so we remember
their birthdays*

June

Justin Todd Stephens... June 1st
Don Walton.... June 4th
Blake "BJ" Jolly.... June 4th
Xavier Hayes... June 6th
Natascha Roebuck.... June 6th
Jamie Ann Quillen.... June 7th
Emanuel Mitchell... June 10th
Scott Michael Malone.... June 17th
Mitchell Dean Orr.... June 19th
Chanda Leigh Wooden.... June 20th
Christopher Reed.... June 22nd
Christian Nicolae Moise.... June 24th
Stephen Varzaly... June 24th
Joseph Beatty.... June 25th
Ryan Michael Sharp.... June 26th
Brian Devine.... June 26th
Adam Lee Jones.... June 27th
Cathy Hayes.... June 28th
Jessica Rose Riley.... June 29th

July

Charlie Smallen.... July 1st
Monta Hunt "Tay" ... July 1st
Adyson Claire Smith.... July 1st
Robbie Schmeelk.... July 5th
Amanda Lynn Harned... July 6th
Raleigh-Jacqueline Clebert.... July 7th
Jason Pettus.... July 8th
Justin Cates.... July 12th
James R. Avery, III.... July 15th
Johnathan England.... July 17th
Christopher Gabriel Patton.... July 17th
Fara "Nicole" Choate.... July 27th
Adam Sawyer... July 28th
Michael Clayborne Montgomery.... July 29th
Noreen Keenan.... July 29th
Genna Watson.... July 30th
Arnesa Darlene Royster.... July 31st

Birthday Invitation

Every month we have a Birthday Table and you are warmly invited to please come share your child's birthday with us when his/her birthday is that month. This is your chance to tell us a favorite story, or share a poem or thoughts that either you or your child wrote, or whatever remembrance you choose in memory of your child. Our child's or grandchild's or sibling's birthday will forever be a very special day and we at TCF know how important that day is and how helpful and healing it can be to share with others.



Please plan on attending the meeting of your child's birthday and filling our Birthday Table with pictures and/or mementos. You are also more than welcome to bring his/her favorite snacks.

August

Jessica & Von Justin Windsor... Aug. 3rd
Gabrielle Pierre Louis.... Aug. 6th
Chris Morrow.... Aug. 6th
Clint Price.... Aug. 6th
Ronald Bruce West.... Aug. 6th
Jacob Meadows.... Aug. 10th
Amanda Sullivan.... Aug. 14th
Stephen Owens.... Aug. 14th
Eric Amend.... Aug. 17th
Wendy McMain.... Aug. 18th
Justin Evans.... Aug. 19th
Ryan Gilbride Aug. 19th
Jarod Robert Wills.... Aug. 22nd
Todd Wehunt.... Aug. 23rd
Edward Leonard Stempien.... Aug. 24th
Jeremy James White.... Aug. 25th
Rachael Fouquet.... Aug. 25th
Johnia Berry.... Aug. 26th
Michael LaVierge.... Aug. 27th
Brittany Hopkins ... Aug. 28th
Brian Hatchett... Aug. 29th
Tommy McDonald.... Aug. 31st

AM I A FATHER? YES, FOREVER...

"And a Happy Father's Day to all of our dads flying with us today on Southwest Airlines." I wondered out loud to my wife on that Father's Day 2001, on a trip to Las Vegas, if I was still a father, and she assured me I was, that you never stop. But that past April, my daughter Erica's life was cut too short in a car accident in Arizona. That Father's Day was my first since her death, and my first thought was to "get out of Dodge," avoiding the IHOPs and brunches where throngs of dads go. But this day, I thought: "There's no one to call me on Sunday."

I imagined I would always be a father, and that I would use every opportunity to parent, maybe not my child but someone else's, through being the kind of person I am. Dads like us love, nurture and never stop being what we are. We are fathers.

That day in April 2001, I joined a club. It's very select. They don't have dues. They don't have a clubhouse. They don't have a secret handshake. They don't have a membership card. But the cost to join is high, and while everyone can afford it, no one wants to be inducted. It's 2010, and another Father's Day is upon me. I still struggle sometimes to find my way back to "normal," whatever that means. And while the people mean well, they say stupid things like "she's in a better place." Well, if it's such a great place, then that's where you should go when you are 80, not 18.

We know what to do when we lose a job. We know what to do when we have a flat tire. We know what to do when we see someone in trouble. We don't know what to do when we lose a child. Nothing prepares us for what we have to do, or feel. Sometimes, we don't feel at all, and we feel bad when we don't cry. And when we do cry, we feel it's not enough.

Nine Father's Days later, there are still a lot of things I don't understand. I don't understand a lot of the things I am feeling, or not feeling. But I do know I miss Erica. I loved her more than I can ever say. They say a father's love for his daughter cannot be described in words. . . . I cannot find the words. The love is in my smile when I will think of her, in my tears when I think of her, in my laugh when I think of her. I will forget when the dishwasher is not emptied and wonder why Erica forgot to do it, and then I will stop and remember why. And give anything to have her back.

And for the rest of my life, I will have to make sense of this jumble of emotions.

When we are young, we know all the answers. When we get older, we know all the questions; we just don't

have all the answers. I wish I knew the answer to "Why?"

I will remember Erica forever, and I ask that you do the same for all the Ericas of dads out there today. To the dads, for whom the pain will always be there: Don't let people tell you it will take time. We should not let time heal all wounds. We have all been wounded, hurt and saddened, and if we let time heal, we will forget these people - and that is something we must never do.

I ask of all of you reading this for Father's Day to do all us dads a favor. Walk down the hall and hug your kids goodnight, or if they are away at school or living on their own, pick up the phone and tell them you love them. We need to know that. If you know a dad who lost a child, call and tell him you know Sunday will be a difficult day, but you were thinking of him. We need to hear that. And if you are out and about, stop and give a moment's recollection of the children who are gone. Believe me, wherever we are, we dads will feel that. And for all those moms and dads and others out there who wonder if we still want to celebrate today and if this day is ours - it still is our day and always will be. Happy Father's Day.

~ *Barry Kluger*, *Excerpt from A Life Undone: A Father's Journey Through Loss*

Lovingly lifted from the 2012 TCF St. Paul May/June/July 2012 Newsletter

Father's Day---Feel Me Near

Hi dad! I wish I could be there, for your special day,
I'd give you a big hug, so much that I'd like to say!

You've been so sad since I left,

yet you try to be so strong

But if you cry when you miss me,
it truly won't be wrong.

Your voice is music to my ears, so smile as you speak,

And remember I am listening, all seven days a week

Don't worry about how I am, I have no need or fright
One day we will join again, when the time is right.

So look for some little signs,
like a butterfly, flower or bird,

This is how I'll contact you,
and hope that I'll be heard!

I love you more than ever, I hope you feel me near,
For I am with you each day, all throughout the year.

- For Dads, Fathers Day 2003 – by Dan Bryl, Jessica's dad

In Memory of Jessica Bryl, 1/19/77 - 4/3/00

June, July & August Anniversaries

So that their lives may always shine, our children are remembered. As long as we live, they too shall live for they are part of us in our memories

June 1 st	Richie Petzel
June 2 nd	Nathanael Tate
June 3 rd	Christopher Downs "CJ"
June 6 th	Xavier Hayes
June 8 th	Billy Foulke
June 12 th	Heather Helms
June 14 th	Linda Strauss
June 16 th	Matthew Hinson
June 16 th	Richie Yee
June 18 th	Scott Michael Malone
June 18 th	Melissa Dennis
June 20 th	Cory Bute
June 28 th	Jason Edward Palmer
June 28 th	Angelo Larocca "Al"

July 3 rd	Aaron Stephens
July 4 th	Jennifer Hardy
July 4 th	Jeremy James White
July 5 th	Kyle Harrison
July 12 th	Stephen Varzaly
July 12 th	Genna Watson
July 13 th	Jonathan Ayers
July 14 th	Michael Dunn
July 19 th	Misty Autumn Dubose
July 23 rd	Christopher Boyd
July 28 th	Noreen Keenan
July 28 th	Melissa Morrow
July 30 th	Ronald "Scott" Long

August 1 st	David Arthur Braund
August 1 st	Brett Lykins
August 3 rd	Jessica & Von Justin Windsor
August 5 th	Michael Clayborne Montgomery
August 8 th	Melissa McDonald Weber
August 9 th	Blake Hinson
August 11 th	Clint Price
August 13 th	Chris Morrow
August 19 th	John Andrew Sims
August 20 th	Emanuel Mitchell
August 21 st	Jenny Gryzinski
August 22 nd	Jeffrey Lopilato
August 27 th	Trevor Aaron Jones
August 28 th	Ryan Michael Sharp
August 30 th	Amanda Lynn Harned
August 31 st	Todd Wehunt

Remembrance

I see your smile in the brightness of the summer sun.
A gentle breeze is the touch of your hand on mine.
A wave breaks softly on the shore, and I hear you whisper,
"Remember me."

A winged bird begins its flight into the distant sky.
The sound of children's laughter fills the air,
The evening stars become your eyes,
And I reply -
"You are ever near."

By Priscilla D. Kenney, TCF, Kennebunk, Maine
Lovingly lifted from the Kansas City TCF Newsletter, June 2000



Summerwind

*The one who owns this summer
is not here,
not here to know the tender
summerwind,
not here to share the glowing
and the song.*

*The one who owns this summer
did not live,
not live to touch the richness
of this day,
this day in summer
when you are alone.*

*Weep to the summerwind,
weep and love again
the one you remember.*

*By Sascha Wagner, from her book "The Sorrow and
The Light"*

Grief Support For Siblings

When a child has died, siblings are often referred to as “the forgotten mourners.” While parents usually receive much support, siblings usually receive little—often being asked “How are your parents doing?” The Compassionate Friends is an organization that is not just for bereaved parents. It’s also for bereaved siblings (and grandparents). Some chapters have sibling subgroups while many welcome adult siblings to their meetings. Contact your local chapter to find out their policies on siblings and their meetings. On The Compassionate Friends national website, you will find support in a number of different ways.

[Online Support Community](#) (live chats) allows you to talk with other bereaved siblings from across the country during the Online Support Community sessions held every week. These sessions are limited in number of participants and have trained monitors who are also siblings. Check out www.compassionatefriends.org and go to Resources/Siblings.

Teen Loses Brother to Suicide, Learns to Cope

At the age of 16, Carl David suffered the loss of his 22-year-old brother by suicide. In his words, “The effects on myself and my family were devastating, beyond description. We had but two choices; to pull together or tear each other apart. We chose the former and used every bit of strength to rebuild our lives. The challenges were monumental as every day was day one. We had to start over with each sunrise because the after-effects were so persistent and the pain so ever-present that at times it seemed insurmountable. We wondered if we would ever be able to move forward and regain some semblance of life.”

He recalled, “It impacted our family in a myriad of ways but we ultimately found our way back to daylight with the help of our family, friends and professional help. It’s human instinct to survive. We don’t forget or get over it; we just learn to live with it as best we can. This kind of lacerating experience becomes part of our soul, embedding itself into our very psyche. Our unconscious keeps a permanent record of every moment of our life and reminds us of them vigorously when we try to erase or repress them.

“We eventually realized that life does go on, with us or without us, and that we had to forge on and live for ourselves and for my brother. He’d have wanted that and we knew that whatever the cause that pushed him to that final edge of desperation, if he’d known the

pain that his loss would cause he never would have ended his life.”

Carl continued, “Everyone knows someone who committed suicide; far less than six degrees of separation.”

In Carl’s latest book, *Bader Field: How My Family Survived Suicide*, he shares his emotional journey describing how he and his family survived the loss of his brother.

Carl’s message, “Kids need to know that no matter how desperate they feel, they are loved, there is help for them and suicide is not the answer. It’s a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Life is a gift and every day we wake up is a blessing. No matter the difficulty, we get a redo. We have the luxury of choice in how we will spend our time.”

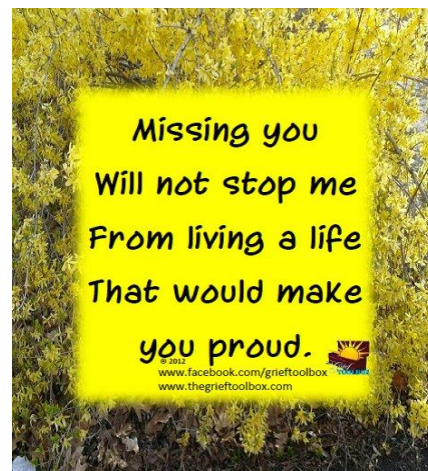
He described his heightened parental awareness today, “As a father, my perspective had become ever more profound. While our children were growing up, the haunts of the past were always there and our caution flags were always on guard. We never spoke of my brother’s death until they were of sufficient age to understand and not freak out, as this is a very sensitive issue. We needed to let them know, almost as insurance, so that by understanding the degree of destruction such an act leaves on a family, that they would never even consider it.” Carl’s closing words, “I am on a mission to save lives, even one!”

Learn more about Carl at:

[Http://www.authorsspeaking.ning.com/profile/carldavid](http://www.authorsspeaking.ning.com/profile/carldavid)

Posted by Kathy Williams, from Open to Hope, www.opentohope.com

The *OpenToHope.com* website is an online community where people can find and share inspirational stories of life, loss and love. We encourage our visitors to read, listen, share, and contribute with honesty and compassion



"And the Rockets' Red Glare"

I watched the spectacular burst of colors. It was always such a treat. The starburst, the swirly ones, the straight ones, making their noisy, hissing, banging trajectories into the night time sky.



Throughout these exciting displays, tears rolled down my face. Inconceivable that I am here to enjoy this and you, my beautiful Cheryl, are not.

Then new thoughts rolled through my mind. Perhaps you are viewing these fireworks and many more from a higher vantage point, where the colors and designs shine more vividly. Perhaps you are seeing and understanding things that I can neither see nor understand. Perhaps your world is filled with rainbows and flowers and butterflies, rabbits and other beautiful animals that wander free. Perhaps you are surrounded by love, music, beauty and unbounded joy.

Perhaps, my love, I can only hope.

By Carol Silverman, TCF Elkins, PA
Lovingly lifted from the Minneapolis Chapter TCF
Newsletter, July/August 2000

Welcome To Holland

As Bereaved Parents we are often faced with trying to get other people who have not shared this uniquely painful experience to understand and imagine how it feels. Here is a good analogy I've heard:

When you have a child.....from day one, it's like planning a **FABULOUS VACATION** to Italy. You buy a bunch of Guidebooks in advance and make many wonderful plans of places to visit and to experiencefor instance, the Coliseum, Michelangelo's David, the Gondolas of Venice, Vatican City. You even learn some of the Italian language so you can communicate with the people. It's all very **EXCITING!**

After months of eager anticipation and planning, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go to the airport. Several hours later, the plane finally lands. The Pilot makes his announcement over the speaker saying "Welcome to Holland!"

"Holland?!!!" you say. "What do you mean Holland? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life, I've dreamed of going to Italy - never did I want to go to Holland!"

The Pilot replies "There's been a change in the Flight Plan. We've landed in Holland and it is here you **MUST STAY**".

Now, since this is a different place then you had intended to be at this time in your life, you must go and buy all new Guidebooks.....you must learn a whole new language. You will meet a whole new group of people that you would never have met and wish you didn't have to meet. It is just a different situation altogether. Holland is slower-paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy.....but after you have been there for a while and you catch your breath, you take a look around and you begin to notice that Holland has Windmills, Holland has Tulips, Holland even has Rembrandt. But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy. And they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life you will say "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That is what I had planned for."

The pain and disappointment of that will **NEVER, EVER** go away because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss. You now know you will never be able to make plans to go to Italy again. So your choice is, you can spend the rest of your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to go to Italy.....or you can just learn to **ACCEPT** the fact that you will never go to Italy and there is nothing to be done about it. But if you do choose to stop engaging in the world around you, you will never be free to enjoy the very special and lovely things about Holland and its wonderful people!

Shared by Barbara Dwyer, in memory of her son Matthew

Would you like to order a quilt made of your child's tee shirts? Deana Martin, Amanda & Logan's mom, had a beautiful quilt made and is sharing the information with us. Elizabeth Longbrake makes these wonderful high quality quilts. She can be contacted by telephone at 678-377-9404 or by e-mail at elizlongbrake@aol.com The cost for the T shirt quilts are \$150-\$400 depending on size and style desired.



GAINESVILLE SUPPORT GROUP

The Northeast Georgia Medical Center has a grief support group for parents. Meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month from 5:15 – 6:45 pm. The meeting is held at 2150 Limestone Parkway, Suite 222, Gainesville. Contact Jennifer Sorrells at 770-219-8528 or Jennifer.sorrells@nghs.com for more information.

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT GROUP

Meets the first Thursday of every month at 6:30 pm at The Warehouse at Family Festival, 5095 Post Rd, Cumming, 30040. The Meeting Room is located past The Land of 1000 Hills Coffee Bar, down the hall, first door on the right. For info contact Sherry 404-660-0907, sherryunwala@yahoo.com or Karen, 770-355-1024, Karen_copija@att.net

Support Group in Gainesville Rock Goodbye Angel

We are a family of bereaved parents who have come together to provide an organization serving and assisting those who have experienced a loss due to miscarriage, stillbirth, perinatal loss or neonatal loss. If you or someone you know needs support during this time, please contact us. The group meets every Monday at 7 pm at Lanier Park Campus, 675 White Sulphur Road, Gainesville. For info, contact Angela at angela@rockgoodbyeangel.com. www.rockgoodbyeangel.org



Teen Victim Impact Program and It Won't Happen To Me

will be having their 6th Annual Memory Walk **October 6th** at Tribble Mill Park in Gwinnett County. This is an event where we provide an opportunity for families and friends to Walk on behalf of their sons, daughters or friends that have died in a teen driven related car crash. Anyone that has lost a teen in a tragic car crash and would like to participate and or have their teen represented along the Walk please contact Bill Richardson at Bill@tvip.org For more information about our organization you can go to www.itwonthappentome.org

TCF Johns Creek meets the first Tuesday of each month at the Johns Creek United Methodist Church, 11180 Medlock Bridge Road, Johns Creek at 7 pm. For information contact Margy Nelson by email, support@tcfjohnscreek.org or phone 770-598-5556, or call Gail Beard at 678-787-8967

"...I have been blindly clinging to peace, the peace of familiarity and continuity, and carefully avoiding the strife that comes with discord and change. I am not the same person. Nor should I be. You do not lose a child without changing. You do not experience what I went through during her struggle with depression without it also having a dramatic effect on you.

Acknowledging the ways in which I am different both frightens and excites me. I am fearful, as I would be of any wound, hoping it does not limit me. Yet it is exciting to imagine that the changes may empower and strengthen me. It has been a slow process to allow that I am different and it takes courage to embrace these differences. But I do not want to miss the preciousness of life. I am only beginning to understand the changes I have undergone and what they might mean for my life. Painful experiences and living with loss leaves its mark in a very personal way. Just as each individual reacts to events and processes emotions differently, the resulting patina is also unique to that person. I am learning that pain and joy can hold hands without dysfunction, and my faith is growing in ways that are comforting and reassuring. Peace and strife intertwine when you live each joyful day with pain in your heart, so that the intriguing difference between them becomes almost indistinguishable.

I am different, it is true, but perhaps that very difference makes it possible to recognize and appreciate the preciousness of life even more fully...."

An excerpt from the book "*Letting Go By Holding Tight*" by Melinda Kramer, in memory of her daughter, Katrina.

Copies of this book were donated by Melinda Kramer to TCF Gwinnett and are available in our Lending Library.

NEWS FROM TCF GWINNETT

Small Sharing Groups

Monthly support group meetings are the heart of The Compassionate Friends. These gatherings provide a safe and caring environment in which bereaved parents and siblings can talk freely about the emotions and experiences they are enduring. Parents receive the understanding and support of others who have "been there." *Our small sharing groups would like to focus more on the issues and topics that bereaved parents face each day, from what to do on a birthday, how to handle tough questions, how to find the will to go on, what works and what doesn't work during the grieving journey & why or why not, to ideas on how to reinvest in living, how to rediscover joy & how to carry our child's memory and legacy through our daily lives.*

We are here to provide hope and encouragement, understanding & friendship as we all travel the grief journey. Our lives have been turned inside out & upside down and we are the walking wounded who must now figure out where to go from here, how to put our lives back together to some degree, and share coping skills and survival techniques. Together we can share our ideas and emotions, the questions and trials and tribulations that we have found ourselves in the very unwelcome world of bereaved parents. The death of a child of any age, from any cause, is a shattering experience for a family. When a child dies, to whom does a family turn for the emotional support it will need during the grief journey that lies ahead? The Compassionate Friends understands that grief for a child lasts longer and is more intense than society commonly recognizes. Other grieving parents can offer empathy and understanding of this loss, while also recognizing that each person's grief is unique.

There are opportunities to give back and to help out with the "behind the scenes" efforts for our local chapter. We need new volunteers to successfully continue the efforts begun when the Gwinnett Chapter was created in 1994. Volunteer opportunities range from helping to set up a meeting, becoming a facilitator, and making phone calls. Most especially, we need a new co-leader to help out with the organization, details and paperwork involved with our chapter.

Effective January 2013, Meg Avery will be stepping down after 10 years as Chapter Leader and co-leader. *"TCF Gwinnett has been a life saver to me, at first giving me the support, friendship, hope & comforts I desperately needed after losing my son James in 1997.*

TCF created a bridge of understanding that I could not find elsewhere. Eventually my grief journey gave me the strength to serve TCF as chapter leader to help those who seek this group for support & understanding. It has been a huge stepping stone in my healing to give back to TCF in memory of James. Now my journey must start another chapter as I step down as chapter leader. I will continue as Newsletter Editor and TCF member, but I recognize the need personally, and for the growth of TCF Gwinnett, to step down as of January 2013."

Therefore, TCF Gwinnett is in need of a new chapter leader or two co-leaders to keep TCF Gwinnett as an active chapter. There will be a steering committee meeting early January 2013. Please contact Meg Avery at tcfgwinnett@yahoo.com or by phone at 770-932-5862 if you are interested in helping TCF Gwinnett as chapter leader or co-leader as of January.

This is a great way to give back in memory of your child after you have found hope, encouragement and strength from TCF to survive & thrive in spite of life's worst tragedy. Making the change from needing help & finding help to giving help & support to new parents is another healing milestone. **Please call or e-mail June Cooper, 770- 757-4927, jc30044@flash.net, or Meg Avery, 770-932-5862 if you have questions or if you'd like to volunteer.**

THANK YOU! Many parents give back to TCF through volunteer opportunities as a means of honoring their child. Without volunteers our group would not exist. We are grateful to these volunteers: **June Cooper**, Chapter Co-Leader, in memory of her daughter, **Wendy McMMain** & in memory of her sister, **Noreen Keenan**; **Meg Avery**, Chapter Co-Leader & Newsletter Editor in memory of her son **James Avery**; **Barbara Dwyer**, Chapter Treasurer and group facilitator and **Leo Dwyer**, group facilitator and community outreach, in memory of their son **Matthew Dwyer**; **Terry Sparks**, provides newly bereaved packet info & as group facilitator, in memory of his daughter, **Natalie Sparks**; **Trina Yearby**, creating & mailing Birthday & Anniversary Remembrance Cards in memory of her children, **Gabrielle, Xavier & Malachai**; ; **Diane Wolcott**, Memorial Garden Committee Chair in memory of her son, **Jeffrey**; **Gary Fox**, facilitator, in memory of his son, **G.W. Fox**; **Joy Crowe**, Steering Committee Member in memory of her son **Brenden Elbaz**; **Claudine Nickens**, Steering Committee Member in memory of her son **David Whitley**; and **Sandy Lavender**, organizing & setting up the library in memory of her daughter **Ashley Lauren Hull**.

Gifts of Love

A love gift is a financial donation to The Compassionate Friends Gwinnett Chapter. It is usually in honor of a child who has died, but it can also be from individuals who want to honor a relative or friend who has died, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help in the work of our chapter. Love gifts are acknowledged in each quarterly issue.

In Loving Memory of:

John Andrew Sims, from his mom, Sue Whitaker

Stamps were donated by Marvin Choate, for Remembrance Cards, in loving memory of his daughter, Fara Nicole

If you make a monetary donation to TCF Gwinnett, (which is tax-deductible) you may specify whether you would like your contribution to go toward the memorial garden account, newsletter account or general account. Funds from the general account pay for remembrance cards, postage, labels, the annual picnic, expenses associated with monthly meetings and for information packets for newly bereaved parents. We do not receive funds from The Compassionate Friends National Office and we are always extremely appreciative for any contributions. Please be assured, however, that there are no financial dues to be a member of TCF.

Please fill out the information below, clip and mail with your tax deductible donation to: Gwinnett TCF, Barbara Dwyer, 4905 Pond Ridge Lane, Cumming, GA 30041. (Please make checks payable to TCF Gwinnett.)

Name _____
Address: _____
In Memory of: _____

Please specify if you would like your donation added to the Children's Memorial Account, Newsletter Account, or General Account.



35th TCF USA National Conference & 5th International Gathering

in Costa Mesa, California from

July 20-22, 2012. This

will be a very special

conference and gathering

attended by bereaved

parents, grandparents and siblings from around the

world. The conference will be held at the Hilton Orange

County/Costa Mesa Hotel and TCF has a large block of

rooms set aside.



35th NATIONAL CONFERENCE,
5th INTERNATIONAL GATHERING
July 20-22, 2012 | Costa Mesa, California

Lois Duncan is the prolific and award winning author of 48 books. But, the most difficult one she ever had to write was *Who Killed My Daughter?*, the story behind her search for the truth in the death of her 18-year-old daughter Kaitlyn Arquette in what police called a random drive by shooting.

Kathy Eldon, journalist, author, producer, activist, and mother found her life changed forever when her 22-year-old son, Dan Eldon, A Reuters photographer, was stoned to death by an angry mob as he did his job in Somalia in July of 1993. Among her books are *Angel/Catcher: A Journal of Loss and Remembrance* and *The Journey is the Destination*.

Darcie Sims, always popular international keynote speaker, brings her wit and wisdom as a bereaved parent and certified grief management specialist to the podium in Costa Mesa. Co-founder of Grief, Inc., an international grief consulting firm, Darcie is a well known and respected author and speaker.

The Reverend Canon Simon Stephens, founder of The Compassionate Friends worldwide and bereaved sibling, will travel from his home in Moscow to share his thoughts with the large International and U.S. crowd that is expected to gather.

"We welcome to this conference all who are grieving the death of a child, for grief is a universal language and one that TCF'ers around the world know all too well," says TCF/USA Executive Director Patricia Loder. More than 100 workshops will be held on most topics related to grief after the death of a child. Details can be found at: www.compassionatefriends.org and click on the link under News & Events for the National/International Conference.

PUZZLED?

Through grief, and many times trauma, there are many changes that occur in one's life. Whether it is the loss of a companion, mentor, emotional support, living situation, or financial stability, all of these changes can be quite overwhelming. There is an analogy that I use with most of the individuals that I work with to help them understand the "mess" in which they see themselves after such a troubling event.

My wife loves completing puzzles. She will spread out the pieces and take days, and sometimes over a week, to complete these intricate, and many times frustrating, masterpieces. If you have ever completed a 1,000 piece puzzle, you know how much time and patience is required. Even when you have the border and some of the picture finished, it is still hard to see what the final result should be. Many times while assisting my wife, I have expressed my reluctance to believe that the pieces provided actually produce the image on the box. However, each and every time, the final product is exactly what was advertised.

Grief, and trauma, can be experienced in a very similar way. What you stood upon before, the foundation on which you trusted, is now shattered into at least 1,000 different pieces. Now all of these pieces are scattered all over the place, waiting for you to put them back together. There's only one problem... the picture doesn't look the same as it once did. Now you have the daunting task of placing the pieces back together – without the help of a picture on the box!

When helping my wife with puzzles, it sometimes takes hours to gain just a little ground in completing the puzzle. Sometimes you search and search and find only a few pieces that go together, and then sometimes, you find several that fit together nicely in only a few minutes. And then there are the pieces that connect several sections together to reveal a larger piece of the picture; aren't those pieces great! Many times, after searching what seems forever, I would get frustrated and have to walk away for a little while. Then when I return, I look again and find a piece that should have been as clear as day. While putting your puzzle back together, you will experience the same frustrations. But there are many different sides to the puzzle you are putting back together. It's like one of those 3 dimensional puzzles with more than one side. You have the "emotional"

side, the "meaning" side, the "thoughts" side, and the "nuts & bolts" side. All of these sides take a lot of hard work, belief in yourself, and patience with yourself to start seeing a picture.

Think about each side for just a moment.

- The puzzle pieces on the "emotional" side seem to have very weak connections and seem to keep falling apart. But after you keep putting the pieces back together, you find out that they start to hold firmer and longer. After a while you find that each time you work on this side, fewer pieces seem to fall out.
- The puzzle pieces on the "meaning" side seem to change shape, even after you've connected them! You might need to look at one part of your belief system and the event or events that occurred many times before you figure out where a piece goes on this side of your puzzle.
- The puzzle pieces on the "thoughts" side, no matter how hard you try to organize them, seem to always be in disarray. You can put all of the different colors together, put all of the border pieces together, walk away for a little while and find out that they are all messed up again. You probably even forgot where you put some of the pieces! But over time, you figure out how to manage by working on a few pieces at a time until the picture starts to make sense.
- The puzzle pieces on the "nut & bolts" side just make you mad. These are the pieces you never planned on using in your life, but now are required to complete the puzzle. This may be cooking when you hate cooking or cutting grass when you hate cutting grass. It can also be who will keep your children now when you need a break or not having a listening ear when you really want it. This side takes a lot of trial and error before finding the right pieces. Just a little tip, I'd suggest asking trusted friends and family to help you put this side together.

But just like the puzzle, if you sit and look at all of the pieces together, you will definitely get overwhelmed. But if you work on each side a little at a time, eventually you start to see a picture again. And just like a puzzle, the time and effort is worth the final result. The picture, although never like the one that used to be, can be beautiful.

By Matt Bunt, from **Tears to Hope Newsletter** of The Amelia Center, a place of hope for grieving parents, children and families in Birmingham, AL, www.theameliacenter.org