



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

SUGAR LAND/SW HOUSTON CHAPTER

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

MAY AND JUNE 2013

A self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved families that have experienced the death of a child.

Monthly Meeting:

May 8, 2013

Always the second Wednesday

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Registration of new members and library opens at 7:00 p.m.

Topic: How can we honor the memory of our child

**First Presbyterian Church
502 Eldridge Road
Sugar Land, Texas**

Directions: Eldridge Rd. (FM 1876) intersects Hwy. 90A two lights west of the Sugar Land exit of Hwy 59. The church is north of 90A, just past the RR tracks, the second building on the right. Enter the double doors at the back of the building.

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THE STORM OF GRIEF



It comes like a huge thunderbolt – shocking and deafening you to all else around you. Suddenly the world that has been so bright is black and desolate. There seems to be no hope.

The tears come like torrential rains. The winds of reality come, and your body is torn by the pains and fears caused by the storm. Even when the tears stop for a while, the dark clouds loom over you, threatening you with more tears and more pain.

Most passersby can't help you through the storm because they have never been caught in one like it – and some don't seem to care. There are a few who will reach out their hand and try to pull you from the storm, but the storm must be endured. And then there are the special ones – the ones who are willing to walk with you through the storm. Usually these are people who have been there before and know the storm can be survived.

After a time, the torrential rains turn to showers, and then the showers come less often. But the clouds don't go away. The sadness and pain remain, but they become more bearable.

Eventually, as the clouds begin to part, there may even be a rainbow – a sign of hope. And as the sun begins to shine a little more, flowers of memory will blossom to be enjoyed. I don't think the showers will ever end, but I believe as they get farther apart, the sky will get bluer; we will see more rainbows, and the flowers will bloom more and more.

Perhaps it's even good to have a shower now and then – to cleanse our souls and to revive those special flowers of memory.

Mary Jo Pierce
TCF Tuscaloosa, AL

“Everyone was eating, talking softly, glancing at me, hugging me, eating. It was as if someone had turned the volume down. Everything looked normal, but the sound was muted. Death did this, set all this weirdness in motion, made people appear out of nowhere carrying casseroles, saying 'I'm sorry' over and over, death muffled their voices.” — Joan Ablove, *Saying it Out Loud*

We cannot wait for someone else to turn on the light. We have to do that for ourselves. *Darcie Sims - 1993*

Welcome

We extend a warm welcome to those who attended their first TCF meeting or received their first newsletter last month. We deeply regret the circumstances that brought you to our TCF Chapter. The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance, not for profit, self-help organization that offers support and understanding to families who have experienced the death of a child. You are cordially invited to attend our monthly meeting (always the second Wednesday of the month).

Meetings are open to everyone and free of charge. The purpose of our support group is not to focus on the cause of the death or the age of the child. It is instead a place to focus on being a bereaved parent, along with feelings and issues that evolve around the death experience of a child. You are free to talk, cry or sit in silence, we respect the individuality of mourning. Comments shared in the meetings remain confidential.

To Our New Members

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But, you have nothing to lose and much to gain. Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. It may be the second or third meeting before you find the right person—or just the right words spoken that will help you in your grief work.

To Our Old Members

We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick. Each meeting we have new parents. Think back—what would it have been like for you if there had not been any “oldies” to welcome you, share your grief and encourage you? It was from them you heard, “Your pain will not always be this bad; it really does get softer.”

Lovingly Lifted from TCF –Tyler Texas Newsletter

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Visit our Chapter Webpage.....



I would like to invite you to check out our chapter website at www.sugarlandtcf.org. Patricia Scherer, one of the co-leaders of our chapter, has taken over as our chapter Webmaster. She has created a new look and has put lots of helpful information on there for anyone who might be interested. The site will be updated regularly with information about meetings and chapter events.

We would like to thank Joyce Andrews for being the Webmaster for our chapter since it was created. Joyce and her husband Basil were founding members of our chapter and also had active roles in National TCF events. They have done so much for our chapter and for those of us who were traveling the journey of grief after the death of a child. In loving memory of their beloved daughter, Rhonda, they continued to generously give of their time, expertise and money even after they moved to Austin. They are very special people.

OUR ANNUAL

BALLOON LIFT OFF

WILL BE HELD ON

JUNE 12, 2013

It is normally held in July but because of unforeseen reasons we had to change it to June. Hopefully it will not be an inconvenience for anyone.

Meeting Dates and Discussion Topics*

May 8, 2013—How can we honor the memory of our child?

June 12, 2013—Balloon Lift Off

(We do not always stay on the topic offered for our meetings. We are here to discuss whatever you need to discuss to help on your grief journey.)

Mothers' Day, "Before" and "After"

While sorting through boxes and bags, it is not unusual for me to find something unexpected. It happened just the other day. Shifting through a box, I came across a wrinkled, somewhat yellowed piece of lined school paper. I carefully unfolded it only to find a drawing of a stick-Mom and stick-daughter standing alongside a mammoth daisy. The mom and little girl were holding hands with huge lop-sided grins on their faces. In her little girl just-learning-to-print handwriting were the words, "Happy Mother's Day, Mommy. I love you, Kristina."

Even six years later, little "gifts" such as these can bring fresh tears. It is times like these that I am glad that I was an incredible pack rat, especially when it came to saving things that my children have made. I can picture my then-blond, petite little Nina (her nickname), with the wispy hair, bent over the kitchen table, crayon in hand, creating that handmade card filled with love. Memories of breakfasts in bed, only to return to the kitchen after finishing the "gourmet" meal served with tender care, to find it in such disarray that it took hours to clean up! Even through the tears, these are the sweetest memories.

As I type this, I look at another gift from a Mother's Day past; a little statue of a harried mom, surrounded by mop, broom and bucket, that says, "World's Greatest Mom", chosen for me at a neighborhood garage sale. I came across it accidentally shortly after Nina's death, unearthing it from its hiding place. I wondered to myself, why had I packed it away. Did Nina know that I did and did she think that, by doing so, I hadn't appreciated her gift? Did I ever thank her for it along with the other garage sale items that she proudly brought home to me, or did it show on my face that I really didn't need any more "junk" around the house? Sometimes resurrecting these treasures can bring unpleasant feelings of guilt as we wonder if our children knew how much their little gestures of love meant to us. When our child dies, it becomes easy to second-guess ourselves, trapped in our fixations and exaggerations of the negative things that may have occurred during our child's life.

The first Mother's Day after Nina died was a grief numbing blur, as it occurred only three days following her death. Unlike previous joyful dinners out with my four children pampering their mom, we spent the day making funeral arrangements and choosing a casket for one of them. In the early evening, I overheard it said to someone else, "Happy Mother's Day." I turned to my own mother and apologized for having forgotten.

I could not imagine ever celebrating another Mother's Day again. I am sure the dads have these same feelings on Father's Day. My heart goes out to them, because I think we forget that they, just like us, grieve and hurt, too.

For those mothers and fathers who have lost their only child, I have been saddened by stories told to me by them of attending church on Mother's Day Sunday and when the pastor asked the mothers in the church to please stand, they were undecided on whether they should stand or not. I hope that they will always remember, and the fathers as well, "Once a mother,

always a mother; once a father, always a father." We are forever their parents.

If we are fortunate to have surviving children, they are often forgotten as well. In the early days, we become obsessed with the one who is missing. My own children showed quiet patience with this. I often wonder if they thought "What about us? We're still here!" Now with almost seven Mother's Days behind me, I try to accentuate what I do have. This does not happen overnight. I found that in celebrating my surviving children, I could still honor Nina's memory and find ways to include her as well. I have developed a ritual where I get up early on that morning and bring flowers out to the cemetery. I bring a flower and a note to some of the mothers that I know who have buried children there to tell them I am thinking of them and their child. There is something very healing when reaching out to others. I then sit by my daughter's grave-site on the spring-green grass listening to the sweet call of a robin. I bring her a flower and write in her journal telling her how thankful I am to be her mother, how much I love and miss her. That is our private time together; the rest of the day is spent honoring my other children.

Mother's Day and Father's Day are holidays especially created for us. Try to get through them the best that you can, in whatever way feels right for you. Truly, only you know what that is. Whether it is alone those first few years or with people that you love and who understand, do something that you find comforting. It is your day, for you were the giver of a precious life – you held a miracle in your arms. Even as powerfully destructive as death is, even that cannot take those memories away from you - they are your child's gift to you.

With gentle thoughts and peace on your special day,

Cathy L. Seehuetter
TCF St. Paul, MN
In Memory of my daughter, Nina



"Death is harder on those who
are left behind."

— Robert La Fosse, *Nothing To Hide*

Feeling Alone on Father's Day

Written by Clara Hinton | May 24, 2007

When we use the name father, several thoughts automatically come to mind. Strong. Protector. Problem solver. Guardian. Wise. Open arms. Tender. Loving. Forgiving. Always there.

A father takes great pride in living up to these expectations. In fact, you can watch most any father's posture change to reflect the characteristics of being the strong one, the leader, and the fixer of problems for his children.

When a child dies, a father's world is turned upside down. Losing a child is something that nobody can fix – not even a father. There is a sense of failure and guilt that washes over a father time and time again. He no longer feels like he is the glue that holds the family together. A father experiences many different emotions when his child dies, but he is very seldom able to verbally express those emotions.

Men grieve quite differently than women. This is a fact that we now acknowledge, yet in society we tend to question a father in grief if he does not openly talk about his loss and pain. Verbalization of emotions is a difficult thing to do for most men, especially for a father that has lost his child.

When Father's Day approaches, there are many feelings of loss and failure that are experienced. Pictures of fathers interacting with their happy, healthy children are found everywhere – in stores, on television, in magazines, and in the newspaper. Most churches give special lessons dedicated to fathers, but very little recognition is ever given to the father that has gone through child loss.

By planning ahead for the difficult emotions of Father's Day a father can cope much better. Plan a project such as planting a flower garden in memory of your child. Build a memorial bench and stencil your child's name on it. Write a letter to your child expressing your thoughts, then release the letter with a balloon.

Above all else, remember that you will always be a father! Be especially kind to yourself as you prepare for the array of emotions you will experience on Father's Day. As you work through these feelings of loss, you are taking steps forward towards healing in this difficult journey we call grief!

"No person is ever truly alone. Those who live no more, whom we loved, echo still within our thoughts, our words, our hearts."
- Richard Fife

Getting Better?

My tears feel warm on my cheeks now—
Not burning hot.
Is this a sign I'm "getting better"?

When I cry now I am almost often alone.
In the car, in the shower.
Or sometimes taking a walk.
I do not cry in public or feel as much panic.
Is this a sign I'm "getting better"?

I sleep the night through sometimes
And awaken without tears—for awhile.
They come now while I'm brushing my teeth.
Or making coffee
And are always gone before I say "Good morning."
Is this a sign "I'm getting better"?

Yes, I think so—but when does the pain end?

Perhaps when I no longer ask
Is this a sign I'm "getting better"?

Shirley Blakely Curle
TCF Central Arkansas



Hope is not an easy word for grievers,
but we, more than most others
need to understand
what Hope can mean for us.

Hope means finding the strength
to live with grief.
Hope means nurturing with grace
the joy of remembrance.

Hope means embracing
with tenderness and pride
our own life
and the gifts left to us
by those we have lost.

by Sasha Wagner

Compassionate Friends Offers Grief Related Webinar Series

The Compassionate Friends is expanding its outreach to bereaved families by offering a series of free online grief related seminars. The webinars, to be held once per month, are on various grief topics and guests are well-known experts in the field.

Webinars have included such topics as "Handling Grief Through the Holidays," "Getting 'Stuck' and 'Unstuck,'" "Caring for Your Health While Grieving," and "Coping with Guilt During Bereavement." These webinars were recorded and are available to view on demand on TCF's national website.

To reserve a seat for the next webinar (or to view the previous month's webinar), go to www.compassionatefriends.org>News & Events>Special Events>Webinars. Webinars are being archived in TCF's Webinar Library, accessible from the webinar page.

Compassionate Friends Unveils "Create a Memorial Website" Program

When you ask bereaved parents their greatest fear, you're likely to hear that they're afraid their child will be forgotten.

That fear can now be put to rest through The Compassionate Friends new "Create a Memorial Website" program. In partnership with online memorial leader Legacy.com., the new Compassionate Friends program allows you to easily create an online memorial website so that your child, sibling, or grandchild will always be remembered. A portion of the proceeds from the memorial website you create will also go to support The Compassionate Friends and its many national programs designed to aid families going through the natural grieving process following the death of a child.

With these unique, easy-to-create memorial tributes, you can: customize the design, yet create a site in five minutes using Legacy.com's four-step process; include photos, videos, stories, and more; add music; invite family and friends to contribute and join in celebrating the life of the child you're remembering; and much more.

There is a 14 day free trial period and 25% discount off the first year's sponsorship. To learn more and to take advantage of these offers, visit www.compassionatefriends.org and under "Resources" click on "Create a Memorial Website."

Memorial websites make a great gift that shows you care!

Our sorrows and wounds are healed only
when we touch them with compassion.

Buddha

If you're going
through hell,
keep going.

Winston Churchill

Grief can't be shared.
Everyone carries it
alone, his own burden,

Anne Morrow Lindbergh



Reading Corner

Silent Grief: Miscarriage-Child Loss: Finding Your Way Through the Darkness

By Clara Hinton

Almost 200,000 couples in America each year suffer through the tragedy of miscarriage. And that statistic only tells us about first trimester miscarriages. The emotional pain of longer-term miscarriages, and the untold numbers of mothers and fathers who keep silent about their hurt, make this form of child loss especially cruel.

But in Silent Grief, author Clara Hinton brings a clear message of hope through the cold mourning. Writing of her own grief, and interviewing scores of women and men, she offers not pat answers, but instead show us this: You are not alone.

Additionally, the author touches the tears of other forms of child loss: stillbirth, missing children, and adult children who succumb to accident or illness.

The moving, honest responses to these interviews tells the reader that through the tears and rage and awful silence, God still loves us and knows our children intimately.

Book Description from Amazon.com

Books on Grief

Looking for a particular grief book? Look no further than Centering Corporation, the official recommended grief resource center of The Compassionate Friends. With the largest selection of grief related resources in the United States, Centering Corporation will probably have just about anything you're looking for-or they'll be able to tell you where to find it.

Call Centering Corporation for a catalog at 402-553-1200 or visit their website at www.centering.org. When ordering, be sure to mention you are with The Compassionate Friends and all shipping charges will be waived.



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**Honoring 20 Years of Support and Friendship
for Bereaved Families**



MAY AND JUNE 2013

Mother's Day...Father's Day... Graduations...Proms

Spring comes – and with it comes the uneasy awareness of difficult days ahead. For those who are still going through all the “firsts” without your child, we share with you some special ways other parents have coped and managed.

Mother's Day...Father's Day...graduations...vacations... these are special family times which often catch us unaware and bring unexpected tears and painful memories of young lives cut short. It does get better! And you can make these special days better with some planning and with encouragement from those who have already been there.

Whatever the “special day” that lies ahead for your family, try to focus on doing something meaningful and tangible in remembrance of your child. Share as a family thoughts and suggestions about planting a tree or starting a rose garden, donating a book to the library or school, putting flowers on the altar, lighting a special candle or taking that long talked-of vacation. Tears and moments of sadness are okay, for they are expressions of love.

Remember: Take one day at a time. Keep things simple by playing down the holidays and special days, while they are so painful. Change your routine from past years. Make plans to be “busy” during at least part of the day (go out to lunch or to a movie, or visit friends). Give your older children some “space.” They not only feel your extreme sadness at these times; they also have their own feelings to deal with.

The anticipation is often worse than the day itself!

From Fox Valley TCF Chapter, Aurora, Illinois