



The Compassionate Friends

Sugar Land/SW Houston Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2016

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

Monthly Meeting:

February 10, 2016

Always the second Wednesday

Time: 7:30 p.m.

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

Topic: What we Love Most about Our Children

**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.

Chapter Co-Leaders

Tricia & Donald Scherer
donaldraysdad@Yahoo.com

Marguerite Ward

Chapter Contact

Sandy Crawford
(281) 242-5015

Chapter Email Address

sugarlandtcf@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor

Marguerite Ward
P O Box 231
East Bernard, TX. 77435
Phone: (979) 335-6070
E-mail: mjward0123@gmail.com

Love Gifts should be sent to:

Treasurer

Douglas Ledkins
431 Old Colony Dr.
Richmond, TX 77406
Phone (281) 341-5985
E-mail:
Doug_Ledkins@whitetucker.com

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Just A Thought...A Clean House

By: Traci Cooley Bereaved Mother, Tampa, Florida

Since my daughter died almost three years ago, my house is not as clean as it once was. I used to clean constantly; even the baseboards were dusted on a regular basis. When Malena died I just did not have the energy to do as much housework, so I did what I could and hoped that no one would notice the baseboards.

I also realize that my surviving children did not care how clean the house was, but they really seemed to enjoy that mommy spent more time with them, reading, talking, snuggling and playing. Before Malena died I felt that a clean house and dinner on the table were what made me a good mom. After she died, I wished for more time to read and play with her. I changed my priorities very quickly, the house will be clean when the children go to college or get married. I will never live in a Martha Stewart or Better Homes and Gardens house.

A few weeks ago I was cleaning the house because guests were coming that night. I cleaned the common areas of the house, only what the guests would see, the rest would be hidden behind a closed door and a hope that no one would notice that I haven't dusted or mopped for a while. As I cleaned, I realized that this house is now a reflection of my life. My life fell apart when Malena died; I have worked to put it back together. The end result is a life that seems "normal" on the outside to the casual observer but if you look real close the hurt and pain are still there. What the world sees is a person who has triumphed over the death of her child, because they only glance. Those who look closely, in the cracks and crevices where the dust settles, see that there is forever a changed person, who will never be complete again until she is reunited with her child.

This article was taken from the Bereaved Parents of the USA newsletter, *A JOURNEY TOGETHER*. Their website is www.bereavedparentsusa.org

DEATH OF A CHILD: WHAT'S IT LIKE AT 10 YEARS?

By Richard Edler

January 11, 2002 ... Ten years? Sometimes it seems like yesterday. Sometimes it seems like it never happened. Most of the time it is somewhere in between.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Rich Edler, 58, past president of TCF's national board, author of Into the Valley and Out Again and treasured friend to many in TCF's extended family, died suddenly and unexpectedly on February 16, 2002. He had completed this article for We Need No Walk Alone, TCF's national magazine, just over a month earlier.]

It has been 10 years today since Mark died. When I wrote Into the Valley and Out Again I chronicled first one day, then one week, then the first month and year. Now it is 10.

Here are my thoughts:

The hurt never goes away. We never forget. We never get over it. We don't want to. We hurt so much because we loved so much. But the focus on death and the event fades and the warmth of good memories replaces it. Oh, we can still go back there in an instant. Back to the call, the moment, the good-bye. Back to the night that will forever separate our life between "before" and "after." But we now go back less and less. Time helps a lot.

I have fewer friends. Better friends, mind you, but fewer. I am out of the circle now. My Rolodex is cold. My networking, which used to be razor sharp, has atrophied. My power lunches have become tuna fish sandwiches. But the amazing thing is how much I don't care. I miss some special people so I go out of my way to stay in touch. And that is enough.

I have new and different priorities. I move through life a little slower, a little more tuned to life around me, and to life gone too soon. I brake for sunsets. I hurt for the people who share this walk with me. Since Mark died, hundreds and then thousands of children have died. I feel for them and for their families in a way I could never have understood before. I value people more than things, moments more than milestones, and I no longer equate what I do with who I am.

I am not having the life I expected to have. I recall an old saying, "Man plans ... God laughs." Dennis Prager, an author and Los Angeles radio talk-show host, said that unhappiness equals image minus reality. What he meant is that you are unhappy when your image of where you should be is dramatically different from where you really are.

When a child dies, the reality of the life we are going to have is altered forever. I am no longer going to be Mark's dad. I am no longer going to join him at UCLA football games. I am no longer going to be a grandfather to the children he will never have. If that gap between image and reality is a recipe for unhappiness, well, then the reverse is also true. If you "solve" the equation of happiness, happiness equals image

matched closely with reality. So I have had to change my image to match the new reality. I like my new life better. This makes me feel guilty because I would trade my life in an instant if I could have Mark back. But I really do like the person I have become since Mark died. I don't even know that person from 10 years ago. Back then my life purpose was to run a large advertising agency

Today, it is to give back in gratitude for the joy of the life I have been given. I want to make Mark proud. I want to be a blessing to others. And I want to enjoy the journey, too. I still have a grief that goes unspoken. Who will listen at 10 years? Yes, I still miss Mark. But I miss him quietly and silently. I grieve for his loss; for the loss of the person he would have become (he would be 28 now, but instead is forever 18); and also for the loss of the life I would be having if he were here.

I have an overwhelming sense of gratitude. I have been blessed beyond measure. I have a surviving son who has given me more joy than I could imagine any parent having ... and now a beautiful daughter-in-law, and a granddaughter. Gratitude is one of the most helpful and healing things you can do on your grief journey. And with gratitude comes thanks. So in gratitude, Kitty and I made a list this week of the people who were there for us when we needed them most. These are the people who dropped everything in their lives on a moment's phone call and rushed to our side. These are the people with whom we are joined forever, and who, no matter how far they drift, or what unimportant spats we might have, will always have a special place in our heart. You make your own list. Then find those people wherever they are, and say thank you.

I choose joy over sadness. If there is one overriding thought in these years, including 10 TCF conferences in a row, it is simply this: Grief is inevitable; misery is optional. It does no good to sit in a hole. It does no good for the loss of one life to lead to the loss of two.

What does do good is doing good. To decide to lead the second part of your life differently and better than you would have before ...in your child's name. When we do that ... when we do one small act of kindness we never would have done before ... when we reach out to other bereaved parents because we can and because we have been there ... then the world is changed in some small way for the better, and then the actions we take become a living tribute to our child's life. And then that child is never entirely gone. And that, my fellow compassionate friends, is how it looks at 10 years for me.

Brandi Nicole Ward
 12/30/1980 to 2/17/16
10 years since you passed away and I still think of you every day and miss you so much. I know, however, that your spirit is forever with me in my heart.

Precious Valentine Memories

The lace has grown yellow with age. The edges are tattered and the glue that held the pieces together has long dried up, leaving only a slight stain on the faded red paper. It is much smaller than I remembered. Perhaps time has caused it to shrink. It seems so fragile, resting here in my palm. The words have nearly faded and even the heavy crayon marks have lost their luster over the years. There's a smudge of unknown origin on the back, near where the paper was rubbed dangerously thin by the uncounted erasure marks. The name is barely legible, the pencil lines so weak that only the mind can read the letters.

I found it the other day, while doing one of those winter chores: cleaning closets. It's nearly 25 degrees below zero outside and it seemed like a good idea to clear away some of the trappings of a thousand years.

February is a middle-of-winter month and most of us have fewer choices in this month than in any other. For those of us here in the Great North, it is either shovel the walk or clean the closets, and it's warmer in the closet (although not by much!) So, armed with a dust rag, trash bag and the radio, I opened the door and slipped in...not really wondering about what I might find. I thought I was just going to clean the closet.

But, that first box sent me spinning. I found things I hadn't even remembered I'd lost! I finally found the holiday gift bought for my sister last year and then so carefully had hidden away. I found snow boots and sand pails, a beach towel, three old paperbacks, a pile of magazines (all saved because I wanted to clip something "important"). I found shoelaces for shoes no longer "alive" and several other things that had once been alive.

I found half a chocolate-covered cherry and part of a deck of cards. It was quite a treasure box, filled with junk that once had had some meaning to someone, maybe even me.

I sorted through the coats and clothes, painfully aware that "someday" would probably not arrive in my lifetime. The too short hemline and the too-small waist would not be mine again. I packed those things away, mindless of the hours and the drifting snow outside the windows.

When I found the box of scrapbooks, I sat down, now that the closet had some actual floor space. I touched the bindings, not quite sure I possessed the courage required to open the pages. The phone rang and forced me away from that decision. I left the closet and did not return until now.

That's when I found the old paper Valentine, tucked away between the pages of a life lived long ago. As I held that once sticky, but now only stained, piece of construction paper, I felt a connection with other Valentines, in other lifetimes. I heard a whisper of another voice: my own mother's exclamation over my offered gift.

It blended with my voice, speaking across the generations of children bringing home paper messages of love. OH! I had forgotten THAT....it had become lost in the pain of my loss.

It was a peaceful hour in that closet, listening to the sounds of my life, lived long ago and now remembered through the pages of the scrapbooks. I found my own laughter and that of my friend, joining the laughter of my own children, seeking the laughter of tomorrow's bearers of paper hearts. Time does pass on. Generations of hearts have been delivered and received. Generations of love have been shared just as generations of hurt have been endured. It felt timeless in the closet...as if when I opened the door, the giver of this Valentine would still be waiting!

Perhaps that is exactly what is happening, perhaps the engineers of all of our hurts and happiness are still waiting - waiting for us to claim that love and bring their light back into being. There were so many years when I could not bear this exchanging of paper hearts! There were so many years when I counted FIRST what was missing, never realizing that in the measuring of my losses, I was truly losing what I did have.

The snow had drifted deep across the yard: only the tips of my flamingos' knit-capped, covered heads are visible in the white. But my vision has been cleared somewhat this afternoon by a visit in the closet where I found a memory that no length of time could fade. The lace is faded, the edges tattered, but the heart always remembers and through the tears, the sounds of love given and received echo back to me.

So now, this little paper message from both my past and my future sits on my dresser, reminding me each morning to make room for the happy memories as well as the hard ones.

I had "lost" that Valentine from so long ago, but the bearer of that most precious gift of love has NOT been lost to me. Our loved ones die, but the love we share between us can NEVER BE DESTROYED. Love continues past all change and becomes the memory trace that guides the human spirit. Love isn't enough, but without it, the world grows cold and frozen, and the sidewalks never get shoveled and the closets never get cleaned, and the memories get lost in the confusion of pain not healing.

Go find a Valentine, clean a closet, rummage through a drawer, search for some tangible evidence that, indeed, your love DID LIVE - and what a sweet treat that will be!

Darcie Sims Lovingly lifted from
Sunflower Chapter, Wichita, KS

Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape.

*From A Grief Observed
by C. S. Lewis*

ARTICLES FOR NEWSLETTER

Chapter members are encouraged to write about their grief journey and submit for publication in this newsletter at mjward0123@gmail.com

"Think of your child, then, not as dead, but as living; not as a flower that has withered, but as one that is transplanted, and touched by a Divine hand, is blooming in richer colors and sweeter shades than those of earth."

~Richard Hooker, British theologian

Some Day

*Pain like this, I never knew existed
until one fateful day,
Life so cruelly and unfairly insisted
without giving me any say.*

*Derek, Cody, and Taylor, you were the loves of my life.
You gave me such joy and laughter.
My heart is broken, cut by the sharpest knife.
I no longer have my babies to look after.*

*They say time heals so I'm trying to go on,
with your memories etched in my heart.
Your pictures I so longingly look upon,
to sustain me while we're apart.*

*I hope to see you again some day,
I have to believe it's true.
That day, when upon you, my eyes lay,
this pain I endure will finally be through.
I love you my angels.*

Always and forever your mommy

Teresa Delgado
TCF, Nashville, TN

Another Year

This is another year just beginning—afresh with new days, new opportunities, new challenges. It occurs to me, however, that it is a very difficult task to keep from concentrating on past years and the sadness we endure just because it is a new year and the calendar has flipped the page.

Moving on to a brighter tomorrow and letting go of the pain of yesterday is a gradual process. We cross that threshold one step at a time—a small one at first, faltering and stumbling—but somehow getting there. With patience, effort, and persistence, once again we will be able to celebrate life as the year stretches on before us, putting behind us our sadness, our guilt and failures and our pain.

We will be able to smile again. We will be able to remember our precious children in life rather than death. We will recognize in our days many little blessings and will be able to share our joys with others.

Whenever that “New Year” begins for you, I celebrate with you that marvelous accomplishment, and wish you great peace, courage, and comfort.
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Alice Weening TCF, Cincinnati, OH

“Sometimes life is your opponent and just showing up is a victory.”

— John A. Passaro

In the Zone and Other Sports Essays

Don't be reckless with other peoples hearts, and don't put up with people that are reckless with yours.

Kurt Vonnegut



The Compassionate Friends

Sugar Land—SW Houston Chapter
P. O. Box 231, East Bernard, TX. 77435

Honoring 20 Years of Support and Friendship
for Bereaved Families



JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2016



LOVE AND HOPE

Kerry Marston, TCF, Grand Junction, CO

On a cold winter day the sun went out
Grief walked in to stay
I turned away from the unwanted guest
And bid him be on his way.

Grief was merciless, he brought his friends,
Loneliness, Fear and Despair.
They walk these rooms unceasingly
In the somber cloaks they wear.

Every so often now,
Love pays a call
She always has Hope by her side
I welcome Love as well as Hope
For I thought surely they had died.

Love counsels Grief in a most gentle way
Bids him be still for a while
Then Love walks with me through memory's hall
And for a time...I can smile.

