



The Compassionate Friends

Fargo/Moorhead Area Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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The F-M Area Chapter of The Compassionate Friends meets the 2nd Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. at
FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH
127 2ND AVE E
WEST FARGO, ND
Please enter on the west side. Our meeting is in the Fellowship Hall - lower level, west side

**Meetings are quarterly
instead of monthly**

Next Meeting & Topic

December 14, 2023 - Candlelighting Ceremony, bring your child's or your favorite Christmas treat to share.

March 14, 2024

Weather cancellations will be posted on WDAY, KVLV, KFGO and the Fargo Forum online at
www.inforum.com!

Dates to Remember

Mom's meeting - 6:30 pm on December 28th @ Randy's Diner Too
Annual Worldwide Candle lighting - December 10th at 7 p.m. local time
Angel Of Hope Memorial Service
December 6th at 7 pm

Our Mom's group generally meets on the 4th Thursday of the month. This month we are meeting at 6:30 pm at Randy's Diner Too, 641 32nd Ave W, West Fargo. Our gatherings are very informal as we meet to talk about our children, books, recipes, jobs and whatever else comes up in conversation. We all have times when we need the listening heart of another mom or grandma. Please join us this month on Thursday December 28th. For more information, please contact Sheryl at 701-540-3287 or visit our website at tcffargomoorhead.org.

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 becomes 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 others 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. ©2007

LOVE GIFTS

Neil & Kathleen Prochnow & Family in memory of their son, Reed Joel Prochnow
Richard & Clara Elless in memory of their daughter, Tari Elless Heller
Carol & Wally Blomberg in memory of their daughter, Bridget Chisaka
Kim Armbrust in memory of her son, Calvin J Armbrust
Pat & Denny Wateland in memory of their daughter, Tracy Ann Wateland
Jim & Suzie Hill in memory of their son, Jonathan Poitra
We are deeply grateful for the LOVE GIFTS given this month.
Our chapter and all chapters are financed solely through your Love Gifts.
Donations make this newsletter, postage, books, tapes, etc. possible.
Thank you for your tax-deductible gifts.

A Note from our Chapter Leader:

Sheryl, Nancy and I have all decided that it is time for us to step down from our roles and let someone else take over our Compassionate Friends Chapter. Sheryl will be leaving her position as Secretary, database administrator and webmaster at the end of this year. Nancy will be stepping down from her role as Newsletter Editor at the end of June 2024 and I will be stepping down as Chapter Leader at the end of March of 2024. We are all very thankful for TCF and all of the support we received when we lost our children and all of the wonderful lifetime friends we have gained through the years.

We would love to talk to anyone who is interested in taking over these positions and give you an outline of our duties. Please feel free to contact me or Sheryl.

If no one is willing to volunteer, we will unfortunately have to close our chapter in the spring of 2024.

~ Kara Bailey

THE GIFTS FROM WITHIN

For those of you who are further down the road in your journey through grief, the holidays can be a time to re-discover the gifts that lie deep within you, deep within your heart and on your minds. Those gifts are the precious memories that our child has left us with. Take time throughout the coming holidays to remember those memories however brief they are – it is these memories that will keep our children alive within our hearts and will help us make it through the challenge of facing these days without the child who cannot be physically here.

Take some time to quietly remember those things that you and your child may have shared in the “good times” and hold those thoughts close to you to help you get through the days ahead.

One of my last memories of my son is the day we spent shopping with the family – literally hours before he died... I will always cherish the memory of the cookie he bought me – knowing just which one I would like and taking time to sit at the food court and have a snack during the bustle of the holiday shopping.... memories such as those are what help me get through the days ahead. I wish you all sweet memories of your children to sustain you throughout the coming holiday season.

~ Cindi Bolivar, TCF/Boston-No Shore

Frost

On a cold winter's day
Frost etches a beautiful artistry
On everything it touches every blade of grass
It glitters and sparkles and for moments
Before the sun comes out and the master piece evaporates before
our eyes we stand memorized cherishing the wondrous sight
Like frost our children were only here for a brief moment
But while they were here
Whether it was moments in the womb
Days, months or many years
They etched their beautiful artistry of love
On our hearts and lives and all of those they touched.
Unlike frost what they etched is forever
It is something that we can cherish and hold onto always
We stand here tonight lighting a candle to remember children we
will never forget
Their light their spirits their artistry lives on
And like the flame of the candle gives warmth on a cold winter's
night and light in the darkness
The love our children gave us still remains
It keeps us warm when the cold winds of grief blow
It lights our way through the darkness and loneliness
That we feel
And it gives us hope

~ Julie Short

2007 Southeastern TCF/Candle Lighting Ceremony

GRANDPARENTS GRIEF

Grandparents have the loss of a beloved grandchild and the pain of seeing your child suffer and you can't “fix it”. And so they must deal with their own grief and still try to be helpful to the child. It seems like two hard tasks, but must be handled at the same time. If you have had a child die yourself and/or a sibling this may bring back a flood of emotions to re-handle. Grandparents may also have to deal with “survival guilt”. Why did my grandchild die before really enjoying life and I'm still here?”

- Author Unknown

A Christmas Wish

I'll miss you at Christmas
When laughter's everywhere,
When church bells chime
In merry rhyme
And warmth is in the air.
I'll think of you at Christmas
Of when you were with me,
Of simple joys and silly toys
And days that used to be.
I'll miss you at Christmas
When children's faces glow,
And gaze in childish wonderment
At Santa and presents in a row.
I wish a Christmas miracle
Could bring you back this way,
And we could be together
For one more Christmas day.

~ Lily deLauder

WHERE IS CHRISTMAS?

Where is Christmas? Where can it be found?
I've tried and I've tried, I have looked all around.
Is it hiding in some forgotten space?
Have I misplaced it? I can't find a trace.
Up in the attic in boxes stored away?
I try to find it, it will soon be Christmas Day.
As I sit and ponder my lost Christmas plight.
My mind drifts back to long ago Christmas Eve night.
When did I lose it? Where did I lock it away?
Why can't I find Christmas this Christmas Day?
Years before it was so readily found
But now I can't find it, it is no where around.
And as I remember it comes clear to see
When I lost Christmas inside of me.
For Christmas is born from a joy deep within
But since you are gone, I don't know where to begin.
The feelings of joy have been replaced
By the pain of longing to see your sweet face.
Yes, Christmas is here, but the joy gone away
And try as I may, I can't find Christmas,
this Christmas Day.

~ Sheila Simmons, TCF/Atlanta, GA

Missing You

I just can't believe it . . . The sun still rises and sets. The moon and stars still shine. The flowers still bloom. The birds still sing. I expected a change in everything. I just can't believe it . . . It still gets dark and light. The ocean still has waves. The rain still rains. The wind still blows. Is it because they do not know? I just can't believe it . . . I thought the world would stop. When in my house I found an empty chair, a missing smile. I thought it would stop for just awhile. I just can't believe it.

~Gretta Vinney, TCF/Austin, TX

“There are no magic formulas for surviving grief. There are a few recognized patterns for grief, but even those are only guidelines. What we do know is that the emptiness will never go away. It will become tolerable and livable—some day.”

~ Darcie D. Sims

Christmas is the Hardest Holiday!

Why is Christmas the hardest holiday? Is it because of all those traditions that mean so much but NOW lie broken and empty in my heart? Is it especially hard NOW . . . because of all the tinsel and tissue? Because of all the crowds dashing madly in and out of stores, buying something wonderful for someone wonderful? Is Christmas hard NOW because I don't need to shop or bake or decorate anymore?

It's been a long time since I endured my first bereaved holiday season. But even NOW, my heart sometimes still echoes with emptiness as I roll out the cookie dough or hang his special ornament on our treasure tree. I think that hurt will always be with me, but now I know it only as a momentary ache . . . not like the first year when grief washed over me in waves, each new wave hurling me deeper and deeper into despair.

And it's not like the second year's hurt when I found myself both surprised and angry that IT hadn't gone away YET. I grew anxious about my sanity in the third year when my hands shook as I unwrapped the precious ornaments. When was I going to get better?!! When was the grief going to end?!! Was I doomed to suffer miserably at every holiday for the rest of my life?!!

The year the little satin balls wouldn't stay on the tree, I gave up. Even the Christmas tree died! As my daughter and I dragged the brittle (and shedding) mess out into the snow drift on Christmas morning, I knew we had reached the bottom. He had died, but we were alive. Had our grief so permeated our house, our lives that even a Christmas tree could not survive? His death was more than enough . . . had we lost love, too?

That was the year we began to understand. And that was the year we decided to keep Christmas any-way. So what if our new completely bare tree was stuck in the snowdrift, already waiting for the garbage men? So what if the cookies were still a bit too salty with tears?

So, in the middle of that Christmas day, we returned to that forlorn, frozen stick of a tree. Carefully, we hung the bare branches with popcorn strings and suet balls (not quite the same as satin!). I'm sure we were a strange sight that afternoon, but with a mixture of tears and snowflakes, we began to let the hurt out and make room for the healing to begin.

With each kernel strung, we found ourselves remembering. Some memories came with pain. Others began to grow with us . . . warming heart — places we thought had frozen long ago. By the time we were finished, we were exhausted. Memories take a lot of work! At last WE had a tree, although it was not the one we were expecting. But we had one, decorated with tears and memories, sadness and remembered laughter.

And now we've grown older (and maybe a little wiser) and we've learned that love isn't something that you toss out, bury, pack away or forget. Love isn't something that ends with death. Life can become good and whole and complete once again . . . not when we try to fill up the empty spaces left by loved ones no longer within a hug's reach, but when we realize that love creates new spaces in the heart and expands the spirit and deepens the joy of simply being alive.

We saved a tiny twig from that frozen tree . . . to remind us of what we almost lost. That was the year we chose to let Christmas come back. Now we don't have to wait for joy to return. For now we know it lives with us . . . where Christmas is EVERY DAY.

~ Darcie Sims

Coping with Grief: Winter Blues

When the weather gets colder and the days get shorter, we often find ourselves feeling low. Some people call this the Winter Blues. When you are grieving, those blues can feel overwhelming. Grief itself is hard to cope with and cold winds and longer nights can make those feelings seem more intense. Here are a few ideas that may help you cope with the Winter Blues:

- Winter only lasts a few months. Use this time to reflect on your relationship with the person who died. Sometimes in our efforts to deny our loss, we rob ourselves of precious memories.
- Reach out to friends or family when you can. Often our isolation is worse because we do not allow ourselves time with others. You are not alone. There are many other people going through a similar experience. Although your relationship with your loved one is special, other people can understand. Take the risk to ask someone over for coffee or tea. Share with them.
- Take time to look through picture albums. Gather family to share stories. Make a new tradition during the dreary months of winter for family to gather for an evening of remembering. The holidays are over and the pressure is off. Maybe other people are feeling the same way and are afraid to talk about it.
- Try a grief support group. Sometimes all we need is to know other people hear us and understand. A group can help you to know you are normal.
- Read . . . favorite stories, comedies, novels, or information about grief to understand your own reactions better. Somehow reading about such topics helps us know we are not alone. You can look for grief materials in your local library, church, or local TCF chapter.
- Take good care of yourself. Eat right, rest and pamper your body. This goes for any season. Your body is under a tremendous amount of stress in adjusting to your loss.
- Since grief affects us physically, paying attention to our bodies is important. Whether you prefer to do things alone or with others, physical activity helps. Taking a walk, doing simple aerobics, indoor swimming, playing racquetball or other activities can help you keep your body ready for the continued adjustment to loss. Feeling better physically can make a difference.
- If you feel sad and need to cry, know that is a normal reaction. You are not weak if you need to show your emotions.
- Write a letter to your loved one. Sometimes we need to communicate with them. Going to the cemetery is okay and normal. If the weather prevents that, a letter can be very helpful.
- Remember that you will survive this loss. The pain and ache can seem like it will last forever. The intensity will lessen in time, although you will always remember your loved one. Time does not necessarily "heal" all wounds, but it can help us adjust to the change. Take it minute by minute . . . then day by day. From TCF Newsletter, Pittsburgh, PA

OUR BELOVED CHILDREN REMEMBERED BIRTHDAYS

CHILD		PARENTS
LIAM SAMMIE ABRAHAM.....	4	CHANOA FENROY-PARKER
MEAGAN BAUER	38	SUSAN & BOB MARGHEIM
NICOLE ANNE BLILIE.....	34	SCOTT & RUTH BLILIE
JODIE BREND.....	54	DORIS RHEAULT
BRIDGET CHISAKA.....	39	WALLY & CAROL BLOMBERG
CHLOE LOVE CONN	21	JEROD & STACY CONN
STEVEN DUANE COOK	55	SHARON COOK
JOEY GAUSLOW.....	37	MARK GAUSLOW
SARAH FRANCES GUNDERSON.....	37	JEROME & RAMONA GUNDERSON
DAVID WILLIAM HALLMAN.....	35	LYNETTE MYROLD
KATHRYN "KATIE" HANSON	41	JEANETTE & DENNIS HOLLAND
KARL HELFTER.....	53	MARK & HELLA HELFTER
JEFFREY ANTHONY JAEGER.....	44	ROGER & CHERIE JAEGER
TODD MICHAEL KESTER.....	60	JANICE KESTER
JESSE ANDREW KOLNES	38	LEOBA KOLNES
TONY MILLER	35	SHAWN & JIM MILLER
CHARLES "CHUCK" NELSON	68	RAVENIA NELSON
NICHOLAS ORVIK.....	29	KIRSTEN ORVIK
CONNER SANDER.....	28	KELLY SANDER
JOSE DANIEL SAUVAGEAU.....	27	MARY BJERKE
GREGORY SEARS.....	36	LORI & JERRY BRADY
JANESSA "JAYE" NICOLE SMITH.....	43	KEITH & MARY GOHDES
TRACY ANN WATELAND	52	PAT WATELAND

ANNIVERSARIES

CHILD		PARENTS
LIAM SAMMIE ABRAHAM.....	3	CHANOA FENROY-PARKER
CALVIN JACOB ARMBRUST.....	4	KIM ARMBRUST
CALVIN JACOB ARMBRUST.....	4	DAN & SHELLY ARMBRUST
RENEE ANN BERNIER	6	KENNETH & PATRICIA BERNIER
NICOLE ANNE BLILIE.....	16	SCOTT & RUTH BLILIE
ERIK JOHN ERDMANN	1	CAROL ERDMANN
JULIE M ERICKSON.....	9	JANET ERICKSON
CONNOR RAY FORDE.....	1	RON & KARLA FORDE
RYAN P GOERTZ.....	7	JAMES & CHERI GOERTZ
BRADLEY KARL GRABER	3	CONNIE GRABER
PETER H M GRIFFIN.....	2	DAVID & MARY GRIFFIN
SARAH FRANCES GUNDERSON.....	11	JEROME & RAMONA GUNDERSON
DAVID WILLIAM HALLMAN.....	30	LYNETTE MYROLD
TAMARA JO "TAMMY" HINES.....	5	SHARON COOK
BRANDON NILES	5	MARY & MARK TUTTLE
MICHAEL "MIKE" ROY NORBY.....	6	LAROY NORBY
JANZEN PETERSON	5	JULIE & JAY PETERSON
JONATHAN LEVI POITRA	13	SUZIE & JAMES HILL
KYLE ROOS.....	3	CHUCK ROOS
MASON ROTH.....	2	PATRICK & BARBARA ROTH
CHERYL L SAMSON.....	12	PATRICIA SAMSON
MICHAEL ROBERT WAGNER.....	3	ROBERT WAGNER
PAIGE WIGHTMAN	7	DAVID & MICHELLE WIGHTMAN
MELINDA JOY WINTERROTH	4	MONTY & JOANNE WINTERROTH

Please check out our Chapter website's page for 'Our Beloved Children'. If you would like your child's picture and a poem or story posted on this page, please submit them to us at tcf1313@hotmail.com or mail them to our PO Box (listed on the back of the newsletter). Photos and poems/stories sent to the PO Box will be electronically scanned and then returned to you so please remember to include a return address.

SIBLING PAGE

A VERY SPECIAL CHRISTMAS TREE

Once upon a time in a big Christmas tree orchard with a lot of big trees, I was a little new sprout just 15 inches tall. The year was 1989.

One day a man, woman and a boy came and chopped me down. They took me from all my friends. I was sad and lonely. The next day, the boy and woman came home with a coffee can. They put some soil in the bottom with some plant food. They put me into the can; then they filled it with some more soil.

Everyday they would water me. One day on the morning of the 24th of December, they came into the dining room, took me off the table and brought me into the kitchen. They put me onto the kitchen table and started to decorate me with lights (that were battery-operated), a crocheted star, tinsel and some red and green Christmas balls. I looked like a million dollars.

After a couple of hours, they came back into the kitchen and took me to the car. The boy had put me on the floor so I couldn't see. I went to sleep. It seemed to take hours but it only took a few minutes. They walked awhile until they came to a gravestone that is blue. The boy sat me down just behind the gravestone. I read the words on the gravestone "OUR SPECIAL SON AND BROTHER." I was here to celebrate Christmas with their son and brother, Michael Lee. Oh my! What a special place and they picked me to be her with him! Pictures were taken of me and Michael's place. After an hour they left.

Dark came and I was scared and cold but then I had this weird feeling. The feeling felt warm and happy. I wasn't scared either. I couldn't see Michael but I could tell he was watching me and was happy too. I couldn't see him but I heard him laugh because he liked me being there.

About three days later they came back and took me away. I waved goodbye but; I made it look like the wind moved my branch. I could feel his laugh and wave goodbye too.

~ Jeremy D Hale, TCF/Hutchinson, KS

Gifts I Would Leave for You

The gifts I would leave beneath your tree
Aren't those you could touch or see
Not wrapped in Christmas tissue gay
But a gift of life to live each day.
The fit of love, warm and true
And health your whole life through
Smiles, and happiness and cheer
To keep us happy through the year.
These are the gifts I'd leave for you
Though I know your life is through.

~ Jeffrey E. Meredith

December 2002 Sibling Corner
TCF/Phoenix, AZ

Not the Same

He was a very nice man, like so many others, and yet he was so different.

His quick smile and gentle ways were like those of others and yet, he was so uncommon.

He was kind and loving with unshakable faith like others, and yet he was so unique.

He was a dutiful soldier who gave his life like many others, and yet he was so special.

The same as others? No

Not to those who knew and loved him.

He was himself, and individual, and he was my brother!

~ Pam Miller Farrell, TCF/Evansville, IL

THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED

On February 3, 1959, parents would lose children, siblings would lose brothers and grandchildren would die. This was the day a plane crash took the lives of singers J.P. Richardson (The Big Bopper), 28, Buddy Holly, 22 and Ritchie Valens, 17. Since all three were so prominent at the time, February 3, 1959, became known as "The Day The Music Died."

At the time of his death Ritchie Valens was a young man with superstar potential who, even though was still in his first year as a recording artist, had already made a name for himself in the music industry.

Growing up music would become a large part of my twin brother Alan's life. His interest in "The Wizard of Oz" would lead to an admiration of Judy Garland and in time Liza Minelli. He had seen many of Liza's concerts often sending her mail-grams of well wishes much to my mother's disapproval. It was her fear that he would get arrested for harassment. We would travel often to other concerts as well including Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, Diana Ross, Whitney Houston, Kenny G and even Yanni.

Alan's interest in music and the arts began in high school with the artistic productions. After graduation from Temple University he would become entrenched in the Philadelphia cultural scene. Much of his free time was spent volunteering for arts, dance and theatre organizations. His name would be listed in the credits of many artistic productions. He, like Ritchie Valens, was just starting to realize his dreams. Then came June 25, 1992. Alan had died of an AIDS-related brain tumor that had started not more than two months earlier. This was-for me-the day the music died.

Don McLean immortalized the February 1959 tragedy with his 1972 hit "American Pie", a song that took Alan and I years to understand and memorize. I would mark my personal tragedy by constantly changing the radio station. So much that I thought I would break the buttons. A break-up song would remind me too much of my loss. While in a friend's car I had him turn off the radio rather than risk crying.

Then one day a few years later, upon leaving the cemetery, on the radio I heard Whitney Houston's "The Greatest Love of All". Alan and I had recorded an awful rendition at a Hershey, PA amusement park recording studio. We agreed that no one else would hear the dreadful outcome. I switched stations twice only to hear the song two more times. It was my reflection that Alan was telling me to enjoy the music once again. To take pleasure in life and to do what we enjoyed doing together. I hear Alan's voice saying the words inscribed on Ritchie Valens grave "Come On, Let's Go."

Daniel Yoffee, TCF Board of Directors Sibling Representative. Reprinted from We Need Not Walk Alone

TO THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW

If you could imagine the loneliest moment in your entire life, remember exactly how your body felt in that moment, empty those feelings into an expanding pill and swallow it, then you could begin to imagine what it feels to live through loss.

I would have one hand in happiness...the memories we made together, and one hand in isolation...the world without my brother. I constantly push and pull in an attempt to firmly remember yet triumphantly live a positive life.

~ Scott Mastley, for his brother Chris, TCF/Atlanta, GA

WHEN IT HURTS TOO MUCH TO TALK. ..WRITE!

I never thought of a typewriter as a therapist until my son died. I still don't think of it as a Dr. Smith-Corona, but there's no doubt it has played an active role in resolving my grief. Maybe that's because I find it awfully hard to verbalize my deepest feelings unless I'm paying someone \$50 an hour to hear me out. And maybe it's because I don't always understand exactly how I feel until I see what I think on paper.

If some aspects of your child's death are too painful to talk about, or if you seem to be stuck at some point in your grief work, you too may find that the process of writing your thoughts out will help you clarify and come to grips with them.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of confiding in a typewriter is that the words like death and dying don't make them sweat and squirm. Bless their little keyboards, they take it all in without ever saying they know just how you feel!

Another reason is that you can write any time you need to talk, if you know how to make a pencil work. That is particularly useful in the dark of night when our struggles with grief seem to intensify and sleep eludes us. Using that time to ventilate on paper is a constructive way to use hours that would be spent tossing and turning, and the emotional release it brings is both restful and satisfying.

That feeling of release can be especially important to parents who didn't have a chance to say goodbye. One way to fill that need is to write your child a letter detailing how much their love meant to you and expressing your regret because you didn't get to tell them that. You may want to tuck the letter away with some of your child's possessions, or burn it and scatter the ashes on their grave or where you feel the wind will carry it to them.

Writing is also a safe way to discharge anger that would otherwise be directed towards our mates. Unfortunately, unjust accusations of guilt and lack of caring are a common component of grief. Painful words that are hurled at a spouse can never be reclaimed or their memory totally erased, but if they are committed to paper instead they can be burned when our rage has subsided, or hidden and reevaluated at a later date. That is one way to work at maintaining our marriages that are so vulnerable during bereavement.

An additional advantage I discovered is that writing diminished the guilt I felt over my son's death. I suspect that is frequently the case because it is so easy to list our real or imagined shortcomings when we're grieving, and so hard to remember all the good and right and special things we did to try to preserve our children's lives.

But perhaps the most compelling reason of all to write about our sons and daughters is that it preserves their memory, and that is a very special love gift to our family and our friends. As I write this I cannot help but think about my new grandson and my hope that he will learn to love the uncle that he never knew because of the book I've written about him.

Granted, that task was simpler for me because I'm a writer than it would be for those of you who aren't. But the thing we have in common is that for all of us who chose to tackle such a job, it is a labor of love. The finished product doesn't have to be bound in leather and printed in gold to be precious. It is a priceless gift even if it is handwritten and tucked in a plastic folder.

I had been a professional writer for several years before our son, Eric, died, but after his death I found it hard to write about anything except him and the way I felt. And I couldn't do much of that at one time without soaking my paper with tears. So I began by-writing - little—pieces, for our chapter newsletter. In each of those I talked about one aspect of my grief. No more.

That is one of the secrets of good writing that will help you say all you need to say. Don't try to tell your child's whole story at once, don't try to describe your grief in the space of a page. Do it bit by bit.

Start by picking up that pencil or sitting down at the keyboard and writing about one happy incident in your child's life. Don't worry about form or punctuation or spelling. Just tell about that incident from start to finish. Then go back and fill in the details. Describe the day, the setting, the sounds, the smells, the prevailing emotions, and the people involved. Rewrite, cross out, erase, fill in, correct, move words around, and use both a dictionary and thesaurus until the story sounds just right to you.

One word of caution is in order here. When you are writing, it is all too easy to remember the good things your child did and forget about the ornery, naughty things that made him or her real. Those must be included if your word portrait is to be a three dimensional picture. And besides, no sibling could or should be expected to live up to the memory of a brother or sister who was perfect.

Do this exercise three or four times and each time you repeat it, write about a different special time including at least one story you could introduce by saying, "You won't believe what he did today."

Looking at family albums and reading old letters can help you re-create those scenes. So can playing remember when with family members and friends who were involved and can help you fill in details you might have forgotten.

Getting into the swing of writing by concentrating on the good times will make it easier to wrestle with the tough emotions of grief.

One way to begin that process is to interview yourself. Pretend that you are going to write a story about a mother or father like yourself who has lost a child under circumstances almost identical to those surrounding your child's death. Make a list of questions to ask that hypothetical person and be sure to include all the ones you wish someone would give you a chance to answer. Review this list several times over a period of two or three days, and keep it close at hand so that you can add any questions that occur to you as you mentally prepare for this interview.

Arrange the questions as nearly as possible into a chronological order and tackle them one at a time, answering each as completely as you can. As you work through the list you'll remember things you wish you'd said in answering previous questions. Consequently, using a separate sheet of paper for each will make it easier for you to add to them.

I think the advantages of writing about our grief far outweigh the disadvantages, but I wouldn't be honest if I didn't admit the negatives exist. Perhaps the greatest is the fact that this exercise is painful. It just plain hurts to mine our souls and we have to dig deep if we are to get it all out. Despite that, or because of it, writing is a healing exercise. And that is a powerful incentive for continuing what sometimes seems like torture.

You and you alone must be the judge of how much you can do, and how much you can take. It is up to you to decide when to push yourself to write a little bit more and when to take a break or quit altogether.

The work can also be frustrating. You may sit at the typewriter for hours without pecking out a single word just because you don't know where to start. And once you get going, you may write and rewrite a sentence or a paragraph or a page umpteen times and still not feel that it accurately reflects your thoughts. If that happens and you're really serious about this, it's time to head for the library and check

out a few books on writing to help you over this block and through the rough spots.

Finally, the work can be emotionally exhausting. When I was writing *E.B. and I*, a book about my son, some chapters took so much out of me that I had to put the manuscript away for several weeks before I could face it again. However, the day it was finally finished, a curtain fell on my grief. After I had said everything that I needed to say, I was physically and emotionally spent, but within a few days the curtain rose and a new me stepped forth.

That's what writing about grief does for you, I think, and that's why it can be so helpful to do it. When we call that awful, powerful force by its rightful name, recognize its ramifications in our life and describe them, we can also come to grips with them and then go on to something else.

~ Judy Osgood, TCF/Central Oregon Chapter

A HOLIDAY WREATH

A holiday wreath is a traditional part of the holidays in many homes. It can be a simple arrangement of fresh greens in which four candles are placed. As you light each candle this year you may create a new ritual which will become a lasting tradition for the holiday season. We hope that this memorial will help you include your loved one in the holiday season.

As we light these four candles in honor of you, we light one for our GRIEF, one for our COURAGE, one for our MEMORIES and one for our LOVE.

This candle represents our GRIEF. The pain of losing you is intense. It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.

This candle represents our COURAGE – to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to change our lives.

This light is in your MEMORY – the times we laughed, the times we cried, the times we were angry with each other, the silly things you did, the caring and joy you gave us.

This light is for the light of LOVE. As we enter this holiday season, day by day we cherish the special place in our hearts that will always be reserved for you. We thank you for the gift your living brought to each of us. We love you.

From Holiday Help: Coping for the Bereaved by Sherry Gibson,
B.S., R.N. and Sandra Graves, Ph.D.

RIVER OF TEARS

Four years gone, my tears still flow
making a river who's rapids I know.
Tossing my heart with grief, sorrow, regret
looking to heaven my heart won't forget
those Tears

of Joy

of Pride

of Loss

Crystal Rivulets are prayers, they
strengthen the bridge

To the Gate of eternity on God's
Heavenly Ridge

~ Rose Cote, TCF/Valley Forge, PA

LIGHT A CANDLE

Light a quiet candle,
Send a quiet kiss,
Say a quiet fare-thee well,
To the one you miss
Light a quiet candle,
Shed a quiet tear,
Sing a quiet lullaby,
and the quiet Christmas star will hear.
~ Sascha Wagner, TCF/Des Moines, IA



Uncharacteristic Behaviors

When Junior, the National Zoo's resident ape went on his escape travels a few months ago, the story was recorded in the local papers. This was probably because he came close to hopping over his barrier and into the laps of his human observers, many of them children. The press called this "uncharacteristic behavior" and, in a side note, added that his long time mate, Pensy had recently died.

Now you and I would put all of this into proper perspective and agree, "Of course!" And then we would reflect upon our own "uncharacteristic behaviors" following the death of our beloved (grand) child (ren).

Many times these behaviors confound and confuse those close to us. How far will we go beyond our barriers? And will we return and be "ourselves" again? I was amazed at emotions I had never felt so strongly before. I thought that anger would become a permanent part of my reactions and I welcomed any kind of release from it. Confronting it and dealing with it was difficult. Sadness settled upon me like a soggy fleece and I thought that I might never shrug it off! And the apathy with which I met each day was very concerning, indeed! Junior's escapade brought all of my own "uncharacteristic behaviors" up from the not so distant past. Amusing?...a little; but more than that I wanted to shout with the children who watched him that late summer day, and encourage him to run and run, shaking off the grief and sadness of losing his beloved Pensy.

~ Lorie Hartsig, TCF/St. Mary's County, MD

SORROW IS NOT FOREVER—LOVE IS

So often one attempts to face the whole future at once. But we will not live that period all at once, only day by day. Don't try to face 20 years. Face today. When that has been achieved, face tomorrow. You will find more and more ways in which you can cope. The Chinese have a saying that a journey of a 1000 miles starts with a single step. There is no way you can take the 15th or the 200th step before you have taken the first.

It can be difficult to face going out again and resuming your regular activities. It can take more courage to face little things than the big things in life. Going out shopping for groceries for the first time can become an ordeal. Making the change more complete could help. Try a different store, a different day or time, and go with a friend. When it seems very hard what to decide to do first, maybe it's not very important where you start as long as you start. Choose a simple task and get started.

Once you've begun it will be far easier to set your priorities and you will have gained confidence for already having achieved something.

--The Facts of Death by Michael A. Simpson

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***The
Compassionate
Friends***
Fargo/Moorhead Area Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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.

A SINCERE WELCOME TO ALL COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS. We are a nonprofit self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child. We offer group support, understanding and friendship. Our purpose is to promote and aid parents and siblings in the positive resolution of the grief they are experiencing and to foster physical and emotional health. If you have questions or wish to talk directly to a member of the Fargo-Moorhead Compassionate Friends, please call any of the numbers listed.

FARGO-MOORHEAD COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS BOARD

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN THE BOARD AT ANY TIME!

Chapter Leader	Paul & Kara Bailey	701-491-0364	Newsletter Editor	Nancy Teeuwen	701-730-0805
Newsletter Database	Sheryl Cvijanovich	701-540-3287	Secretary	Sheryl Cvijanovich.....	701-540-3287
Treasurer	Chuck Klinkhammer.....	701-298-2929	Website Administrator	Sheryl Cvijanovich.....	701-540-3287
Initial Contact	Sheryl Cvijanovich		Mailing Committee	Contact Us to Join	

LIBRARY INFORMATION: We have an extensive library available. Please feel free to check materials at our next meeting.

TELEPHONE FRIENDS

HAVING A BAD DAY OR NIGHT? Feel free to call and talk to any of the following:

Sheryl Cvijanovich (son, 23 - illness)..... 701-540-3287
Lois Gangnes (son, 24 - accident) 701-282-4083
Nancy Teeuwen (daughter, 15 hours - illness) 701-730-0805
Mark & Hella Helfter (miscarriage, son, 35-accident & son, 45-cancer)... 701-235-9622

Love gifts must be received by the 15th to be included in the next month's newsletter. If you wish to give a love gift, please complete:

Love gift given in Memory/Honor of _____

Name _____

Address _____

Relationship _____ Born _____ Died _____

NOTE: By giving a love gift, you are giving us permission to include your child(ren) in our monthly birthdays and anniversaries for a period of 18 months.