



The COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Northern Lake County Illinois Chapter

February, 2019 Newsletter



A self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents

Chapter Leader Notes



Guilt and Grief

Guilt, it seems, is the constant companion of grief. After listening to bereaved parents and siblings for years, I've learned that the majority express some sort of guilt with regard to the loved one that died. The guilt may come from many directions such as the death event or from incidental things from the past. Whether it is rational or irrational, guilt seems to creep in and complicate the grief experience.

As parents, our brains and emotional systems are wired to care for and nurture our children. We grew used to being responsible and fixing things in our child's life, whether it was a bruised knee or a broken friendship or maybe a fender bender. We could assess the problem and figure out a solution – a kiss and a bandage, a long talk about what friendship is or filing a claim with your auto insurance. As parents, we could usually help and guide and make things better for our child.

So when a tragedy strikes and the consequence is the death of our child, we automatically transition into the parental mode of “how can I fix this?,” or “what can I do to change this?” We lived in a world that we thought we could control. We lived in a world where we usually had options. But when faced with the hard reality that our child is gone forever, we also realize that the world is unpredictable and we have much less control than what we thought. By blaming ourselves and feeling guilty, we may be trying to reclaim some control over what was a devastating circumstance that took your child or sibling too soon. We seek order in our lives and that order is smashed when a child dies.

Accepting the death of a child, regardless of age, is one of the most difficult mental and emotional canyons that a parent can face. We can't help but think

“I shoulda told him . . .” or “If I woulda just . . .” or “I coulda done . . .”. Fill in the blank. Should'a, Would'a and Could'a follow grieving parents and siblings like shadows.

There is a blog, “What Is Your Grief” that listed some insightful tips about coping with guilt that may be helpful:

1. Acknowledge that guilt is a normal grief emotion and don't let others minimize the validity of your grief experience.

2. Consider what your guilt is all about. Is it rational? Is it irrational? Is it about control?

3. Talk is over with others. You don't want people minimizing your feelings, talking about guilt can help you reflect on your grief. A counselor or support group is a good place to discuss your feelings of guilt.

4. Examine your thoughts. Often our guilt thoughts, whether rational or irrational, start to consume us. They can drag us into a bottomless, black hole of isolation and despair. In order to adjust your thinking, you have to know what your guilt thoughts are and notice them when they arise.

5. If your guilt feelings are irrational, admit it. This doesn't mean that you are dismissing your feelings of guilt. It means acknowledging that, though you may feel guilty, you may not actually be guilty. Some common examples are acknowledging that you did the best you could with the information that you had at the time, you couldn't predict the future, there were many factors at play beyond your behavior, etc. Being honest with yourself about your guilt is important and accepting that grief is sometimes irrational can be helpful.

6. Find positive thoughts to balance your guilt thoughts. “**Think stopping**” is a technique used when you notice a **negative thought** (i.e. *guilt*) taking over, make a conscious effort to stop and replace the thought. Though it may not be simple, there is value in having positive thoughts to balance the negative ones. For example, if you are feeling guilty about not being there at the moment of your loved one's death, be prepared with thoughts about the many times you were there.

7. Forgive yourself. Easier said than done, right? Remember, forgiveness does not mean condoning or excusing. Forgiveness can mean accepting that we may have done something we regret but finding new attitude and perspective toward ourselves in

(Continued on page2)

Meetings

Northern Illinois Chapter TCF February 21

Millburn Congregational Church
Grass Lake Road & Rt. 45, Millburn, IL

Waukegan meeting March 7

– 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Holy Family Church
450 Keller Street, Waukegan, IL
Meeting in Room 4

Open discussion

Enter by church office then down the hall to
Room 4 on right.

"Tenemos un cuarto nuevo para las reuniones-
Salon 4. Entre por la oficina de la iglesia y sigue
en el pasillo al Salon

(Chapter Leader Notes continued from page 1)

relation to that action. It doesn't mean that we forget but means we find a way to move forward.

8. Figure out what you have learned. Guilt often teaches us something. It can be something about ourselves or the world. We can learn and grow from almost any emotion so take the time to consider what your guilt has taught you.

9. Do something with your guilt. Whether rational or irrational, you can use your guilt to help others. What you do may come out of things you have learned. Whether it is educating others so they can avoid the mistakes you feel guilty about, raising awareness about the causes of death or encouraging others to talk with their family about end of life wishes, you can use many guilt experiences to help others.

10. Consider what your loved one would tell you. Get yourself in a space to truly focus on thinking about your loved one. Imagine telling them how you are feeling – your regrets, your guilt, all of it. If there are things you wish you had said, say them. Then imagine what your loved one would tell you.

I would like all of us to remember that we were so often ready to forgive our children when they were alive and yet we hold ourselves to almost an impossible standard in their deaths. I am sure that our loved ones would say to not feel guilty and to love ourselves as much as they love us.

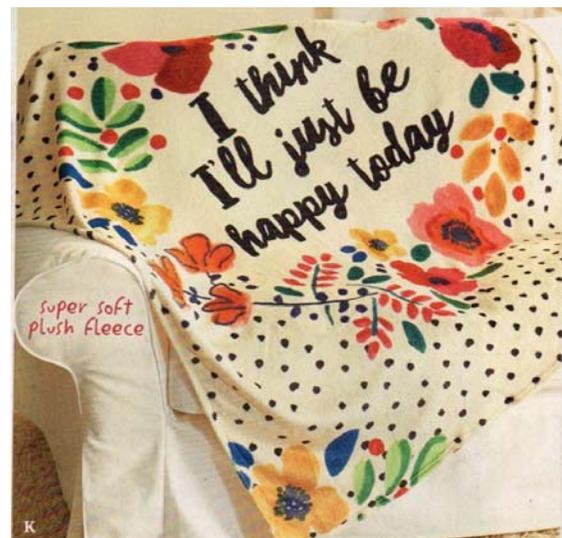
Toni

• • • • •

Anyone who has lost a loved one knows that you don't recover. Instead, you learn to incorporate their absence and memories into your life and channel your emotional energy toward others, and eventually, your grief will walk beside you instead of consuming you.

-Rashida Rowe

Below is the photo of the "so soft "happiness" blanket" that I wrote about last month but I didn't get the picture sent to Vicki Szech, our newsletter editor! So here it is a month late.





OUR CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN, AND SIBLINGS LOVED, MISSED AND REMEMBERED IN FEBRUARY & MARCH

Each month we remember the children who are sadly missed. Please take a few moments, place them in your thoughts, and remember them on their day together with their parents. None of us ever forget our special days and messages that say "I care" help us to get through them. Our children's lives will go on, as long as we remember them and celebrate their lives.

BIRTHDAYS

Ana Sofia Camacho	February 2	Daughter of Lucero & Carlos Camacho
Kevin Pomianek	February 4	Son of Brenda & Eugene Pomianek
Aaron Barrera	February 6	Son of Tammie & Ernie Barrera
Roderick Young	February 13	Son of Scarlet Austin Grandson of "Charlie" Johnson
Heather Donnelly	February 26	Daughter of Daniel Donnelly
Megan Candice Grace	February 24	Daughter of Tim & Marilyn Grace
Anne Thomson	February 25	Daughter of Nancy & Tom Thomson
Camden Frisby	March 1	Son of Dris Frisby
Griffin Schumow	March 2	Son of Jeff & Krista Schumow
Kyle Glueck	March 4	Son of Dolores Krason
Elizabeth Mary Foresta	March 8	Daughter of Al & Mary Foresta
Justin Perez	March 9	Son of Traci & Carlos Perez Brother of Samantha (Perez) Przybylski
David Sloop	March 9	Son of Charron Sloop
Rusty Anderson	March 11	Son of Forest & Christine Anderson
David Spannraft	March 18	Son of Elizabeth & Dan Spannraft
Adam Rubin	March 28	Son of Linda Rubin Brother of Nicole Rubin

ANNIVERSARIES

Susan Nesheim Allbee	February 5	Sister of Toni Nesheim
Darien Wilson	February 11	Son of Tammy & Tim Olvera
Douglas Ramsay	February 12	Son of Carlene Ramsay
Rafael Villanveva	February 12	Son of Victoria Villanveva
Michael Stice	February 13	Son of Dora & Gary Stice
Kelly Klawonn	February 14	Son of Ray & Dorothy Klawonn
Ashley Seay	February 18	Daughter of Mike and Shannon Seay Granddaughter of Dennis & Georgene Manley
Mitchell Carlson	February 19	Son of Tina VanderMeer Grandson of Cheryl Armstrong
Mary Margaret "Maggie" Miles	February 19	Daughter of Jim & Mary Lou Miles
Zachary Taylor	February 24	Son of Mike Taylor & Karen Adams-Taylor Jer
Edgar Villareal	March 1	Oziel & Guadalupe Villareal
Jeremy Govekar	March 2	Son of Maggie McGaughey
Rasheed Mariano	March 5	Son of Joan Mariano
John "Jake" Mosansky	March 12	Son of Darlene & John Mosansky Sister of Veronica Steif
Blake Logan Palmer	March 13	Son of Amber & Brian Palmer Grandson of Lois Cooper
Taylor Rydahl	March 14	Grandson of Gina Palmer
Roderick Young	March 27	Son of Carol & Keith Rydahl Son of Scarlet Austin Grandson of "Charlie" Johnson
Marc Hawkinson	March 28	Son of Mary Kay Clark

Please let me know if I have omitted a child, misspelled a name or have published an incorrect date.

I know how important it is to bereaved families to have their children remembered. vszech@comcast.net



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 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 hid 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 a 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 losing you.

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 give 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.

(Continued on page 5)

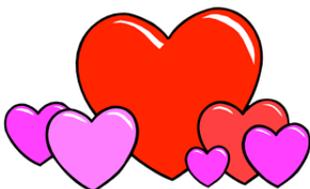
(Precious Valentine Memories continued from page 4)

I had "lost" that Valentine form 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!

- by Darcle Sims
~ lovingly lifted from Sunflower Chapter, Wichita, KS
Feb Newsletter

Heavenly Sounds
<http://www.tcfatlanta.org/Valentine.html>



Some Quiet Valentines

While watching an evening sunset
Fade in the western skies,
We know that when tomorrow dawns,
From the east the sun will rise.

Although it may be hidden
By veils hanging low,
We're sure it will appear again
And we'll feel its warming glow.

And so it is with life,
When seen through misty eyes,
When our world is suddenly dimmed
And we plead and ask those whys.

It is then we learn, 'no man is an island,'
As someone wisely said,
As we travel life's uncharted course
And by an unknown hand seem led.

To walk that path of sorrow,
Enduring life's great loss,
But by chance or fate that someone's
Path we are guided to cross.

That someone through kindness
In his or her way does impart,
A warmth and a tenderness
That so lifts a sad heart.

For it's the depth of their smile
That lifts this sorrow of mine,
And by far they are best suited
To be our Valentine.

We may be someone's Valentine
And never be aware,
In these caring, still-grieving hearts,
Our children's love is there.

THE HOLIDAY OF LOVE

By Art Rogers, Hinsdale IL Chapter
of BP/USA

Valentine's Day is a day of remembering our loved ones with small gifts and great feelings. When your child was living, did you often remember him/her on Valentine's Day with a card or a balloon, perhaps a gift of candy or something special that was wanted? So, why stop that tradition?

Remember your child with love on this special day; a single rose left at a grave; a special holiday balloon to float around the house, reminding you each time you look; a special photo in a nice frame to sit on the mantle. These are ideas in an article from an old BEREAVEMENT MAGAZINE.

It seems like a pretty good idea too! What a better way to celebrate the Holiday of Love than by enjoying fond memories of your child. Try making his/her favorite dinner and treating the family. Use special photos scattered around the table to talk about some fun facts about him/her. It's important to show the others in the family how much they are also loved so don't forget some small Valentine's gifts for them too!

Just because our hearts are broken, we don't need to ignore "The Holiday of Love".



A Moving Experience

We are sorting through and packing up for a move. It's worse than your usual move from one home of 10 years to another; the house we live in now is the last one we shared with our son, Aaron. We are sorting through and packing up memories, along with the tools, dishes, and books.

I have heard other bereaved parents talk about moving after their child died. For some, it was too painful to stay in a house that held so many images. They spoke of not being able to get away from the sorrow, of running into the pain every time they walked through the door. We never felt that way about our home. This was a place Aaron loved, and we have been very happy here—the last earthly house that Aaron knew.

I know that we will be happy in our new home as well—but *that* house won't hold a breath of him, as this one does. Now, I can walk out onto the patio and still see him in my mind's eye, drifting across the pool on a raft. I can easily imagine him coming out of his bedroom door, calling —*Mom*—as he so often did. The new house won't have any history with Aaron, and so there is a feeling of loss in leaving this old place.

I know that Aaron goes where I go; he is a part of me always and forever. Nonetheless, I will miss walking familiar streets where once he walked. I will miss the feeling of connection as I lie on the side of the hill at the park and watch the clouds drift by. I will miss the scent of his closet and the view from his window. There are stories in these rooms and this neighborhood, stories woven from the fabric of my son's life. I may carry the stories with me, but I am leaving behind the props.

We have packed up his baby book, the special school projects, and the box of cards we received when he died. Hannah still has his treasured rocks in her room, and the boxes of comic books so carefully preserved and alphabetized are ready for transport. Paul is going through the collections of action figures and baseball cards to determine what can be sold or given away, and I expect that his raggedy old —"bud" from infancy, No-Way Noah will take up residence somewhere in the new house.

But how do you pack up his passion for life? I know what to do about *things* I can hold in my hands;

what I want to know is – how am I to carry his heart?

I've had a vision of these rooms, empty of all our things: I am doing one last walk through, taking one last look, saying one final goodbye. It is a scene that brings with it a gentle sorrow, and though I know we are moving forward and that all is well, in my heart there is a sense that I am somehow leaving Aaron behind. It makes me think back to those first months when I could not leave the house, even overnight. I told Paul, *I know this sounds crazy, but I feel that if I leave I might come home and find a note on the door that says, "Hi Mom! Sorry I missed you. Catch you later. Love, Aaron."*

Six years later, I am not anxious about leaving home; I don't worry that I might miss a visit. The shock and dis-belief of early grief has passed away and the reality of Aaron's death has settled on my soul. Though I know that I will never again see my son walk through the door, I also know that I know—I will never leave Aaron behind. He goes where I go. Still, I will be leaving a piece of my heart in the old house. Should you visit, listen for the gentle beat. You might sense its rhythm somewhere about—gazing out a tree-shaded window, lingering over a bloom in the garden, or drifting gently across the sky. And you will know that at home holds more than the stuff of memories. A house can hold a heart.

Frankie Wilford

TCF Carrollton-Farmers Branch, TX
In Memory of my son, Aaron

(Continued on page 7)



Like a Tree in Winter

Like a tree in winter which has lost its leaves,

we look ahead to spring for new growth and the warmth of the sun to heal the pain in our hearts. Let us make January & February a time to reach out to each other and give that warmth from our hearts and in return. We will all show new growth.

~reprinted from Kansas City (MO-KAN) Region Newsletter, Jan/Feb 2004

LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY



By Darcie D. Sims

"Why does it hurt so much? Why is this grief so incapacitating? If only the hurt weren't so crushing." Sounds familiar? All of us have known hurts before, but none of our previous "ouchies" can compare with the hurt we feel. Nothing can touch the pain of burying a child.

Yet most of us have discovered that the sun still comes up. We still have to function. We did not die when our child did, even though we wished we could have. So we are stuck with this pain, this grief, and what do we do with it? Surely we can't live like THIS forever!

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.

TIME, the longest word in our grief. We used to measure TIME by the steps of our child – the first word, first tooth, first date, first car. Now we don't have that measure any more. All we have is TIME, and it only seems to make the hurt worse.

So what do we do? Give ourselves TIME to hurt, to grieve, to cry. TIME to choke, to scream. TIME to be "crazy" and TIME to remember. Be nice to yourself! Don't measure your progress through grief against anyone else's. Be your own timekeeper.

Don't push. Eventually you will find the hours and days of grief have turned to minutes and then moments. But don't expect them to go away. We will always hurt. You don't get over grief. It only becomes tolerable and livable. Change your focus a bit. Instead of dwelling on how much you lost, try thinking of how much you had. Try letting good memories come over you as easily as the awful ones do. We didn't lose our child. HE [SHE] DIED. We don't lose the love that flowed between us. It still flows, but differently now.

Does it help to know that if we didn't love so very much, it would not hurt so badly? Grief is the price we pay for love. And as much as it hurts, I'm very glad I loved. Don't let death cast ugly shadows, but rather warm memories of the loving times you shared. Even though death comes, LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY!

THE FIRST IS THE WORST

By Michelle Ramsey
BP/USA, Tampa Bay, FL

They say the first is the worst.

I know the pain of not having my child.

I know the pain of not being able to hold her.

I know the pain I went through to have her.

I know the pain of burying my child.

I know the pain every time I go to the grave.

But no one said how the pain would increase when the

**First Valentines Day came
First Easter came
First Mother's Day came
First Father's Day came
First Birthday came.**

All the holidays that come during the first year are really very hard after your child dies. I know the pain of those "first's."

**You will get through them.
Believe me – I know.
I'm halfway there –**

Then I'll have to face the "Two's."



LOVE GIFTS

Enclosed in a check in the amount of _____ to be used as follows (check all that apply):

In loving memory of _____

In honor of _____

Sponsor the newsletter for _____ (month) (\$25 pays ½ monthly cost)

Pay for a book for the chapter's Lending Library _____

Check here to keep receiving the newsletter _____

It is important for our children to be remembered. Please understand that in order for your child to be included in the "special days" list each month in the newsletter, you must fill out this form that gives us permission to list this information. If you are making a donation please make the check payable to **The Compassionate Friends. Return to Tammie Barrera, 821 Roberts Road, Winthrop Harbor, IL. 60096** Julyson2@gmail.com

We welcome your comments and/or items submitted for use in the newsletter. Short articles, poems, or book reviews are always appreciated. Please include author of any written works. Send your items for the newsletter to Vicki Szech at vszech@comcast.net or 31023 Prairie Ridge Road, Libertyville, IL 60048.

The Compassionate Friends is a non-profit, self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved families. Its' mission is to assist them in the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child and to provide information and education to help others to be supportive
TCF National Office, P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522 3696 - PH 877-969-0010 - Fax: 630-990-0246

The Compassionate Friends home page can be found at www.compassionatefriends.org
There are seven TCF Internet chat sessions weekly. To participate, visit the TCF home page and select the "Chat" button.

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