



# The COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Northern Lake County Illinois Chapter

February 2024 Newsletter



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

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## *Chapter Leader Notes from Susan*

Dear Friends,

Moving along to the month of February. This month brings us the holiday of Valentine's Day. One day that is dedicated to love. This day has many meanings for each one of us. It's a holiday for love, joy, and celebrating. It also can bring a little bit of sorrow for those of us who have experienced the loss of a child. In our sorrow, let us not forget that one emotion ~ love, which above all else, can comfort and console us. Even today, my son Westley is always with me, he is always just there next to me, in my thoughts, my heart and all around where I travel. Sometimes, I find myself in tears and very sad, missing Westley. I stay there for a little bit and then I take a breath and I move forward as best I can.

I think for all of us who have lost a child, at any age and any type of death, it's important for us to find joy and peace. It will happen in very small moments even though you will always grieve for your child. I know many of us keep items that remind us of our child; we might put them on a shelf, in a small dish on our dresser, maybe stored in a drawer, some in your closet and some of them are worn. They are items that your child loved, things that belonged to them. The items can bring us comfort. We will treasure them always,

because these items belonged to them, and they remind us of our child.

While we will heal and joy will be restored in our lives, we are forever changed. Our very personality may even change. And we will never get over losing our children. Not that we will be fully healed and complete. We will begin to heal, but we will always have a missing place in our hearts. Our children will forevermore be part of the tapestry of our lives...they are part of who we are.

Know this, there is a way, a time, a season when you will hope again, laugh without guilt, and feel something that isn't so grey as the world finds color again. When it happens, don't be afraid. It's ok, be gentle with you and take care of you. 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 one would say to not feel guilty and to love ourselves as much as they love us.

"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 towards others, and eventually, your grief will walk beside you instead of consuming you. In time..."

~Rashida Rowe

Your friend, Susan ~Westley's mom

### Lake Villa Meeting Northern Illinois Chapter TCF

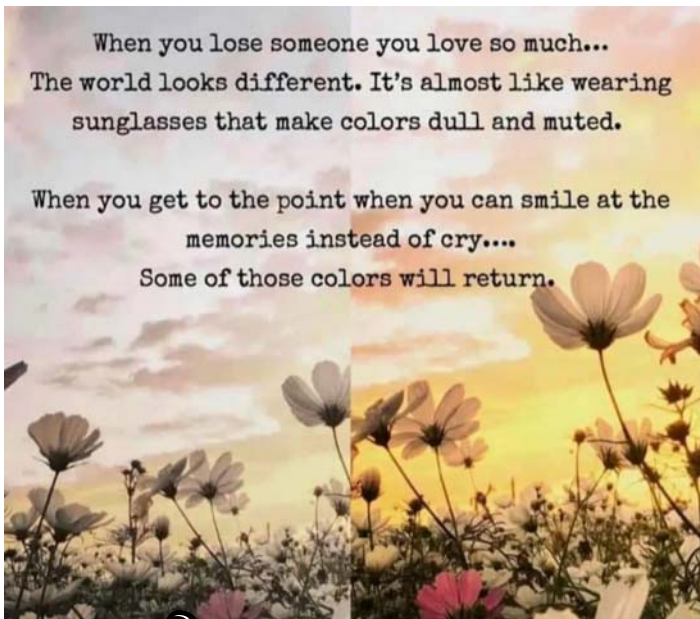
The **third Thursday of the month** meeting will remain as an in-person only meeting. The location is at the:

Millburn Congregational Church  
19073 West Old Town Court  
Lake Villa, IL 60046.

Park in the parking lot behind the church, enter through the double glass doors.

### Holy Family Church

The **first Thursday of the month meeting** will remain a Zoom meeting only. This will change to in-person the date is to be announced.



## Dates to Remember

February 1, 2024 - is our Zoom meeting at 7:00pm. I will send a link by email. Thursday February 15 is our in- person meeting at the Millburn Congregational Church. The meeting topic for the month of February is "Meet my loved one".

I invite you to bring a picture to share and a favorite item or story that has a special memory of your loved one.



## Valentine's Day

It is that time again. February 14 is approaching. If your sad heart has been in mothballs, it's time to air it out and use it. Well all miss the darling little valentines from our children and the buying of heart candies and the various ways we showed our love for each other. But we still have all those precious memories. You say you've lost the feeling, you feel nothing inside, Valentine's Day has lost its meaning for you. I remember the love I felt for my son. I still have the capacity to give love to someone else.

Love is still there waiting inside us, ready to give whenever the occasion demands it. It's selfish and self-centered not to use it. In fact, love has to be given from the heart to be replenished, just like blood; it comes right back! So if we don't continue to give it, we're filled with lonely feelings, empty thoughts, and NO valentines. Love begets love; it is that simple. Someone you care for would be delighted to receive your valentine. You know and I know this to be true. Go make your valentine list and send those love missiles flying in all directions!

Gloria Gersten  
TCF Miami



**OUR CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN, AND SIBLINGS LOVED, MISSED  
AND REMEMBERED IN FEBRUARY**

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, if we remember them and celebrate their lives.

**BIRTHDAYS**

Jeff Stirnichuk	February 4	Son of Mary Wagner
Aaron Barrera	February 6	Son of Tammie & Ernie Barrera
Daniel A. Middaugh	February 8	Son of Jim & Julie Middaugh
Micah Gerald Musich	February 10	Son of Heather Musich
Scott Levin	February 11	Son of Lynda Levin
Kal-El O Sexton	February 13	Son of Derry Sexton
Roderick Young	February 13	Son of Scarlet Austin Grandson of "Charlie" Johnson
Megan Candice Grace	February 24	Daughter of Tim & Marilyn Grace
Anne Thomson	February 25	Daughter of Nancy & Tom Thomson
Felicity Patrick	February 26	Daughter of Nicole Patrick

**ANNIVERSARIES**

Danny A Middaugh	February 3	Son of Jim & Julie Middaugh
Susan Nesheim Allbee	February 5	Sister of Toni Nesheim
Micah Gerald Musich	February 10	Son of Heather Musich
Darien Wilson	February 11	Son of Tammy & Tim Olvera
Rafael Villanveva	February 12	Son of Victoria Villanveva
Delilah Vivian Butler	February 13	Daughter of Aileen & Chris Butler
Kelly Klawonn	February 14	Son of Raymond & Dorthy Klawonn
Tommy Howe III	February 15	Son of Tom & Margaret Howe
Ashley Seay	February 18	Daughter of Mike and Shannon
Seay		Granddaughter of Dennis & Georgene Manley
Mary Margaret "Maggie" Miles	February 19	Daughter of Jim & Mary Lou Miles
Zachary Taylor ams-Taylor	February 24	Son of Mike Taylor & Karen Ad-

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](mailto:vszech@comcast.net) - 847-337-4168



## "FEBRUARY: AN ARROW THROUGH THE HEART"

by Susan Arlen, M.D.

Dr. Arlen is the medical director of the Hospice at Somerset Medical Center. She is board certified in rehabilitation medicine, and she is a psychotherapist, specializing in the losses associated with death, disability and life-changing illness.

In the month of February, we are still in the firm grip of winter. Bone-chilling winds whip around bleak, bare trees, gray days alternate with bright, blue skies, but give little warmth. Having survived January, we have learned to conserve our energy, and we have grown accustomed to the weather. □

Though we may still intensely dislike the wintertime, we have learned to take pleasure in the bright sun and the clear, blue sky. The stark landscape may even be appreciated for its unique beauty. Why does this happen? Why do we accept the bundling up and the shivering of winter? How is it that we can find pleasure and beauty in our misery? The answer is a paradox; We have a choice, and we have no choice. We can continue to wish for balmy air, laden with the scent of flowers, or we can mumble about the cold and grumble about the necessity for bundling up to face the chill days. If we focus only on what we don't have, or long for the past warmth of summer or the future rebirth of spring, we tend to lose any ability to notice the aspects of this month that might engender some pleasure. Try as we might, it is impossible to change the course of nature.

We cannot bring back the summer anymore than we can fast-forward the seasons. By focusing on what no longer is, we lose the capacity to find beauty, happiness, or pleasure. If we continue to bang our heads against unchangeable situations, it only increases our feelings of helplessness and futility.

□ Our alternative is acceptance. By February, we recognize that hoping, wishing and dreaming will not bring back the summer's warmth, so we accept what is. We learn to live with reality of the situation. It's not that we don't remember the various beautiful times of the summer, it's not that we don't yearn at times for them again; but now, we recognize that has passed. Though our souls may be warmed by the memories of □ summer, summer is gone. Now, we are free to live in the reality that is today. We enable ourselves to find beauty and joy in February. The mid-winter landscape has a quieter and more tranquil beauty. Rarely flamboyant, it does not overwhelm the senses; and the ability to recognize and appreciate this soft beauty can give us a sense of peace.

The month of February is similar to the completion of that long, middle phase of bereavement that results in acceptance of what has occurred. The memories of precious times will always be there to warm our hearts, and they will continue to bring tears and pangs of yearning, but realization of the finality of the loss had also occurred.

It takes a long time to accept situations that we do not want as permanent. It takes much time and heartache to recognize that we cannot change situations. It

(Continued on page 5)

**(FEBRUARY: AN ARROW THROUGH THE HEART  
continued from page 4)**

is a long process during which evolves a changed concept of ourselves, the world, and our place in it. It is not that the world has really changed, but with the death of a loved one, OUR world has changed. Again, we have a choice. That long and painful middle portion of the bereavement process may remain with us for a very long time as we struggle to maintain our old ways of being in spite of the agonizing loss.

□ If we become fixed or stuck at this time, there is a double tragedy. Life is lived in the past and the present is filled with yearning for what should have been and what has been stolen from the survivor. Certainly, we are not "happy" about the situation, but slowly we realize that things will never again be the same and that as survivors, we must go on. After a time, which varies from situation to situation, we accept the finality of the loss. With this acceptance, the ability occurs to perceive beauty without feelings of disloyalty. □

Though Valentine's Day does not have the same tradition and resultant dread of Christmas and other holidays, it can still bring a great deal of pain. The very symbol of this day, Cupid's arrow piercing the heart, can feel quite literal for the bereaved whose hearts feel as if they have been broken. Old, tattered, cherished cards will be wept over, as well as bits of lace, red satin ribbon, and the poetry of a spouse, parent or sibling that is especially precious. □



Red roses and red valentine hearts are symbolic of the invisible blood that the bereaved have shed over their loss. When we feel despondent, isolated or cheated on Valentine's Day (or any other day), the pain we are feeling is because of the great love we had. The experience of that love will never die, the memory of that love, of that loved one, will live on in our hearts. We must now live on—for the sake of ourselves and our loved one.

□

We must give ourselves permission to enjoy again, even through tears. Let's remind ourselves of the blessings that we have had, despite the deprivation, and let's not deny others their blessings.

□ We should seek things that will bring us peace. A snow-covered landscape can be beautiful, glistening, and pure. Any view of a situation takes on the meaning that we assign to it. If we choose to believe that a scene or a situation is bleak, it will be bleak. If we focus on one aspect of beauty, we see beauty.

Borrowed from TCF Atlanta Newsletter  
Jan/Feb 2000

## **Hidden Gifts - Learning to Find Meaning Without our Missing Pieces**

□ After running across an oil painting I painted over 20 years ago, it reminded me of a story of a young woman. I would like to share that story with you now.

I was in my late twenties with two small children and taking life and all it is for granted.

(Continued on page 6)

**(Hidden Gifts - Learning to Find Meaning Without our Missing Pieces continued from page 5)**



I have always loved "art" and as I passed an art store, I saw the most beautiful oil painting of daisies and butterflies. The colors and texture were lovely. There was a sign with the painting "Oil Classes next week".

I went in and inquired and they said the instructor would be having a class next week and we would be painting the picture in the window. I had painted a few pictures but certainly was only an amateur. I immediately signed up for the class.

Next week arrived and I was eager to get started. There were six ladies in the class. We all had our easels, canvas, and paints ready to go. As our instructor entered the room, everyone became very quiet. Jeannie, the instructor, was a beautiful young lady just a few years older than me. We all knew Jeannie was a gifted artist, but what we did not know was Jeannie only had one arm.

Jeannie was very aware of how people reacted to her physical appearance. I chose not to use the words "handicap" or "disability" because as the story continues you will realize these are not synonyms.

Jeannie knew we all were wanting to know her story and looking back on it now, I am sure she wanted to share it.

Jeannie had been diagnosed with bone cancer six years earlier. She was in her early twenties at the time and married. The cancer had spread and they had to remove her right arm about six inches above her elbow.

Needless to say this devastated Jeannie's life. This was the worst thing that had ever happened to her and she couldn't imagine anything any worse. She shared with us feelings of not wanting to live, anger, depression, isolation, denial, struggles and final acceptance. (Does any of this sound familiar?) She was broken. How do you recover? How do you learn to live again?

She shared stories of how difficult the simplest things were. I remember her trying to demonstrate how she would curl her hair with hair curlers with only one hand. For those of you old enough to remember, it took two hands - one to curl the hair on the roller and one to hold it while the other hand would reach down and get a pin to hold the roller in place. Imagine doing this with one hand. Could you do it?

Jeannie said it took a lot of practice but she did manage to learn to curl her hair with one hand. I went home and tried to do it and thought to myself - this is impossible and I am glad I don't have to learn how to do this because I don't think I could. I remember thinking "I couldn't do as well as Jeannie has done...I just don't know what I would do". (Has anyone ever said that to you before?)

Jeannie was sharing that she stayed in denial and deep depression for several

(Continued on page 7)

**(Hidden Gifts - Learning to Find Meaning Without our Missing Pieces** continued from page 5)



years until someone suggested her getting some paint and brushes and practice using her other hand making brush

strokes. At first she said "no" but the friend purchased her everything she needed and Jeannie began practicing....learning to use her other hand. The more she practiced the better she got until four years later she was painting the most beautiful oil paintings.

In reflecting back on Jeannie's story, I can see so many things that are so similar to that of a bereaved parent's journey. After Jeannie's surgery, she was no longer physically whole as we are no longer whole after the death of our child. Her loss was visible though ours is not. All of us now have a part of our heart missing only it is not visible to someone else.

Jeannie's life changed that day as our changed when our child died. We all experienced similar emotions and feelings...denial, anger, depression, and guilt. We all have to work through those emotions. We all begin to "mend" the body and mind and soul without the missing piece.....realizing it can never be like it was before. Jeannie's arm will never grow back, as our child will never return to us in this life, but she chooses to accept that and finds different means in which to function...to have quality and meaning back in her life in spite of her missing part.

She focused on abilities she did not know she had. She realized a Gift of Painting that she would never have discovered had her life altering experience not happened. We as bereaved parents can also relate to that. We now have the Gift of Understanding and Compassion to those who have lost a child which very few of us would have had if our life experience had been different.

Another comparison Jeannie also shared was even though her arm was gone she was still able to feel it. It would itch and she would reach to scratch it only to realize it was gone. We as bereaved parents also have those feelings. We can feel our child's presence only to look and realize they are not there. Gone only physically, same as Jeannie's arm, but NEVER to be gone in our minds and hearts and souls. (Maybe if Jeannie had been born with only one arm as if we had never had our children - ONLY then would we NEVER miss what we did not have.)

The holes in our heart and soul will never grow back, like Jeannie's arm, but we can choose to find alternate ways to find meaning in our lives. I think all of us, including Jeannie, would gladly give all these gifts back if we could have our children back or Jeannie could have her arm back, but since that is not an option, I think all of us want to find a way to find meaning to how our lives are now.

Reflecting on this story, I can parallel so many emotions and struggles that we

(Continued on page 8)



## GIFTS OF LOVE

A *love gift is a gift of money or of time given to the Northern Lake County Illinois Chapter of the passionate Friends. It is usually in memory of a child who has died, but donations can also be from individuals who want to honor a relative or friend who has died, a gift of thanksgiving that their own children are alive and well, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help in the work of your chapters. Love gifts are acknowledged each month in the newsletter.*

*"Gifts of Love" in remembering our children and siblings help to pay for Newsletters, Postage, Books for our Lending Libraries and Resources, Memorial Services, Candle Lightings, Telephone and Outreach, and Dues to the National TCF Office. Thank you.*

**(Hidden Gifts - Learning to Find Meaning Without our Missing Pieces** continued from page 7)

as bereaved parents go through. As I look at the painting of daisies and "Butterflies" I wonder if it was just a coincidence or was that part of a Master Plan. As I listened to Jeannie's story over 20 years ago, I could only try to imagine what she was feeling yet I retained everything she shared. It has been stored in my subconscious and only until I pulled out that old painting several weeks ago did I begin to make comparisons of our losses.

I feel I can understand Jeannie's loss much better now. I admired her determination to move forward back then and thus I am hopeful I will be able to use Jeannie as an example and I hope I can find my "hidden" strengths and gifts I did not know I had before my son died. Our lives here are Our Journey - most things we have little control over but we all have control over some things - things such as "finding meaning deep in our soul because of our child's death".

I hope I was able to share Jeannie's story in a way you could relate to. I hope we can all find our "hidden gifts and abilities" despite our missing pieces. I hope that those gifts will help ease the pain and make all our sorrows softer. Search for your hidden gifts, and hopefully in that you will find a meaning and purpose despite our missing parts.

Jayne Newton, TCF Atlanta In Memory of My Son Chad 5/21/72 - 9/3/9



FEB  
RU  
ARY

When February comes, there is finally an end in sight to the long winter. Sometimes melting snow reveals the green tips of an early crocus or even an exquisite blossom itself, a soft flower of hope invading a harsh landscape of graying snow, biting wind and an ominous sky - a small promise of new life to come.

My year, grieving for my son who died, was like that image of winter. For somehow, even during the darkest, coldest moments, an unexpected sign of hope would intrude. And as the hours and days and months dragged on, my heart finally learned once

(Continued on page 9)



**(February continued from page 8)**

again to be open to the promise of new life. Painful memories melted into loving ones. Life that seemed forever dormant once again sprang forth from my heart. In living hopefully and lovingly, the seasons of the heart can change. The living memories of your special child, like the flower in the snow, can be the beginning of the end of winter.

Maryann Kramer  
TCF, Arlington Heights, IL



## REFLECTIONS ABOUT TIME AND CHANGE

Dennis Klass, BP/USA, St. Louis, MO

I often wonder what people are thinking when they say, "you'll get over it." Sometimes it sounds to me as if they are talking about a case of mumps or my despair at income tax times. But what can they mean when they say it about my grief? Maybe they mean that grief is just an interruption in life. Their theory seems to be that life is basically happy, buying stuff, working, watching TV - but that a time of death and grief is an unnatural sad time in that happy life. I can't agree with that view.

Time can lessen the hurt; the empty place we have can seem smaller as other things and experiences fill our life; we can forget for periods and feel as if our loved one didn't die; we can find sense in the death or understand that perhaps death does fit into a bigger design in the world; we can learn to remember the good and hold on to that.

But we cannot "get over it," because to get over it would mean we were not changed by the experience. It would mean we did not grow by the experience. It would mean that the child's death made no difference in our life.

There is an interesting discussion in the Talmud, an ancient Jewish writing. Those Jews had the custom of rending their garments - literally tearing their clothes - to symbolize the ripping apart that death brings. But the question was raised, after the period of mourning, could you sew the garment up and use it again? The teachers answered yes, but, when you mended it, you should not tuck the edges under so it would look as if it had never been torn. This symbolized the fact that life after grief is not the same as before. The rent will show. The next question was, can you sell that garment? The teachers answered, no. The rending and mending of our life is ours and others cannot wear it.

No, we don't get over it. We change and grow. Our life has a difference which is ours alone. Perhaps we can help each other make that difference - the kind of difference that increases the world's supply of compassion, love and healing.

Reprinted from SURVIVING SUICIDE, Fall, 1990

**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**

We welcome your comments and/or items submitted for use in the newsletter. Short articles, poems, or book reviews are always appreciated. Please include the author of any written works. Send your items for the newsletter to Vicki Szech at [vszech@comcast.net](mailto: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 - 48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808, Wixom, MI - 48393 PH 877-969-0010 - Fax: 630-990-0246. The Compassionate Friends home page can be found at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

**Steering Committee 2022 – 2023**

**CHAPTER LEADERSHIP** Susan Banks 847-366-9375 [lanwesmar@comcast.net](mailto:lanwesmar@comcast.net) – son, Westley Banks Age 21 of suicide

**TREASURER** Tammie Barrera 847-872-9684 [julyson2@gmail.com](mailto:julyson2@gmail.com) son, Aaron Barrera Age 29 Auto accident due to Diabetes

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

**HOSPITALITY** Kris Frisby 847-366-3170 [Kefrisby88@comcast.net](mailto:Kefrisby88@comcast.net) son, Camden Frisby Age 15 of suicide.

*SECRETARY / LIBRARIAN*

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**WOODLAND WALK COORDINATORS** Christine Pado 847-455-6642 [chpado@gmail.com](mailto:chpado@gmail.com) - daughter Lindsay Wilcynski Age 29 Pulmonary Embolism

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**Northern Lake County IL Chapter #1511** <http://www.iltcf.org/index.html>

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**Facebook Pages for Siblings - The Sounds of the Siblings:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/21358475781/>

**TCF SIBS:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tcfsibs/>