



# The COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Northern Lake County Illinois Chapter

January 2021 Newsletter



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

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## Chapter Leader Notes from Susan

### See You Later, My Friends . . .

Dear Compassionate Friends of Lake County,

I am very pleased to announce that Susan Banks, Westley's mom, will be the new leader for our Northern Lake Co IL Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. Many of you already have the pleasure of knowing her. She has been responsible for the virtual monthly meetings during the pandemic as well as organizing and facilitating the virtual candle lighting ceremony in December. I have found Susan to be very committed to our chapter's purpose and to extending its reach to help more families in the future. I wish her only the best and am confident that all of you will help her as she works to improve and move our chapter forward.

I am happy and a bit sad about resigning my position as leader of the Northern Lake Co IL Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. New energy and ideas will keep our chapter active and relevant. I have not only served as leader for a *long* time but I have a chronic health condition that zaps my energy and breath making it difficult to be very physically active.

I joined TCF in 2006, one year after my daughter, Rachel, died in a car accident in Minnesota. I was lost and an emotional mess when I attended my first meeting, not able to stop crying or speak intelligibly. Through those meetings I learned that I was normal and accepted and everyone present understood my feelings. I remember thinking, "I found my people". The little group meetings on those hard chairs in the church community room proved to be a soft place to fall and help with my healing.

I have served as the leader and recently co-leader from April 2012 to January 2021.

I will continue to serve in honor of my daughter, Rachel, my sister, Susan, and brother, David on the steering committee as well as the monthly mailing

of the newsletter. My involvement has brought personal growth and peace at heart that has helped my grief journey. I hope the same for all of you I would like to thank all of the wonderful people that I have worked with and who have helped to keep our chapter viable, past leaders Jenni Selle, Darlene Muno, past treasurer Forest Anderson, newsletter editor Vicki Szech, current treasurer, Tammie Barera and the many members who volunteer for the chapter's events and /or attend the monthly meetings where we talk "across the kitchen table" about love and loss and how to move forward in the future.

I will close with the last lines I wrote for my letter of introduction in the May 2012 chapter newsletter.

*It is important for all of us to remember that we do not walk alone. Together we strengthen each other.*

*Your friend, Toni Nesheim*

Dear Friends,

I would like to introduce myself to our Compassionate Friends Chapter of Northern Lake County and share my story of how I found this chapter. My name is Susan Banks and I'm not a new member, as I came to my first meeting in June 2017. My



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husband, Michael and I have 3 children; Landan is our oldest - 27, he is in his 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Medical School at U of I Chicago. He is most likely to become a surgeon. Our daughter, Marllys is 22 and attending Marquette University Graduate School - she is completing her degree as a Speech and Language Pathologist. Westley was 21 and attending U of I at Urbana/Champagne. He was a Musicology Major, he was composing and writing music, learning to play many instruments and teaching. I close my eyes, because I'm hoping not to cry as I write this, but my story tugs at my heart and stirs up so many memories and thoughts. I think of the future, and the many parts of my life; my family, my siblings, my friends, my teaching, and my leadership role with our chapter. All the while my mind does a full circle to embrace my son, Westley and brings me back to the day he died. That is the day I began my journey of grief and all the ebbs and flows that are a part of this lifelong journey.

My son, Westley, took his life on April 19, 2017. It was a day of immense sorrow, unrelenting shock and frustration. We did the check list of duties as best we could after Westley's death. Once done, I found myself alone and not really sure how or even what to do next. I went back to school and teaching, I continued to care for my family and home, and I went for a lot of long walks. One day at school, a woman I work with approached me and shared her story of the death of her son, many years ago. She mentioned to me that I might want to attend a Compassionate Friends meeting. She said the meetings and the people were a blessing to her and she thought maybe I would find the meetings helpful. I found the information on the Compassionate Friends website and went to my P.E. office and called Toni. As Toni answered the call, I truly did not know how to begin; but somehow, I did, and Toni

invited me to the next meeting. I remember walking through the doors, and I was greeted by Toni and a handful members, who are now dear friends. As the first meeting came to an end, I had found an odd comfort and for the first time in many days I truly knew, I was not alone anymore. This is the most difficult thing I have ever done, this grief journey of mine. I am only able to function one breath at a time to this day and I am hyper vigilant of my thoughts and emotions. The death of my son, Westley is the most painful emotion I have ever had to experience. I hope as I follow in the footsteps of Toni that I can bring comfort and hope to all and to all a safe place to be, to rest, to share, to listen and to be alright for a short period of time with others who truly understand.

I hope to lead our Chapter with the same warmth, grace, love and dedication as Toni. I will follow in her footsteps and with her guidance and support I look forward to leading our Chapter in all its parts; monthly meetings, the newsletter, Out-reach, Adopt-a-Highway, HEART Remembers, Woodland Walk Memorial and the Annual Candle Lighting Ceremony. There are many more parts that will need my attention and in the future newsletters and meetings I hope to reach out and share any needs our chapter might have. May the new year be gentle and kind to you and your families. I look forward to talking with you at our next meeting. Please be gentle with yourself, rest and pause to take a breath.



Sincerely,  
Susan Banks



## **OUR CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN, AND SIBLINGS LOVED, MISSED AND REMEMBERED IN JANUARY & 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, as long as we remember them and celebrate their lives.*

### **BIRTHDAYS**

<b>Mitchell Carlsons</b>	<b>January 1</b>	Son of Tina Carlson Grandson of Cheryl Armstrong
<b>Andrew Naydihor</b>	<b>January 1</b>	Son of Kelly Kozel
<b>Anna Smith Miller</b>	<b>January 3</b>	Daughter of Carol Smith
<b>Michael Curtis</b>	<b>January 4</b>	Son of Sonya Curtis
<b>Eric Wiatr</b>	<b>January 5</b>	Son of Debbie Eposito
<b>Nathan Enright</b>	<b>January 7</b>	Son of Martin Boyle
<b>Casperin Hernandez</b>	<b>January 10</b>	Son of Colleen Ramos
<b>Michael Lee Brandon Frederick Hamilton</b>	<b>January 13</b>	Son of Jan Frederick Grandson of Sharon Frederick
<b>Gabriel Murphy, Jr.</b>	<b>January 16</b>	Son of Arvine Murphy
<b>Matthew Tisch</b>	<b>January 17</b>	Son of William & Barbara Tisch
<b>Brain Scott Engle</b>	<b>January 19</b>	Son of Louise Engle
<b>Justin Cody Ortega</b>	<b>January 20</b>	Son of Susie Meggs
<b>Keegan Cray</b>	<b>January 21</b>	Son of Kristin & Ken Willis
<b>Kevin Pomianek</b>	<b>February 4</b>	Son of Brenda & Eugene Pomianek
<b>Jeff Wagner</b>	<b>February 4</b>	Son of Mary Wagner
<b>Aaron Barrera</b>	<b>February 6</b>	Son of Tammie & Ernie Barrera
<b>Micah Musich</b>	<b>February 10</b>	Son of Heather Musich
<b>Kal-El O Sexton</b>	<b>February 13</b>	Son of Derry Sexton
<b>Roderick Young</b>	<b>February 13</b>	Son of Scarlet Austin Grandson of "Charlie" Johnson
<b>Heather Donnelly</b>	<b>February 26</b>	Daughter of Daniel Donnelly
<b>Megan Candice Grace</b>	<b>February 24</b>	Daughter of Tim & Marilyn Grace
<b>Anne Thomson</b>	<b>February 25</b>	Daughter of Nancy & Tom Thomson

### **ANNIVERSARIES**

<b>Casperin Hernandez</b>	<b>January 1</b>	Son of Colleen Ramos
<b>Noel Wendell Hernandez</b>	<b>January 1</b>	Son of Colleen Ramos
<b>Rachel Elizabeth Szech</b>	<b>January 2</b>	Daughter Vicki Szech
<b>Chris Houchin</b>	<b>January 5</b>	Son of Scott Houchin & Heather McDonald
<b>Lea Ann Knuth</b>	<b>January 16</b>	Daughter of Leslie & Shirley Heise
<b>Joey Frase</b>	<b>January 20</b>	Son of Cathy Frase
<b>Jacob Randall</b>	<b>January 21</b>	Son of Lauri Randall
<b>Eric Wiatr</b>	<b>January 21</b>	Son of Debbie Esposito
<b>Alyssa Carranza</b>	<b>January 22</b>	Daughter of Luz Barrer and daughter of Angel & Raquel Gasco
<b>Reneé Rochelle Powell</b>	<b>January 30</b>	Daughter of Terry & Jeanette Powell
<b>Michael Sean Gaede</b>	<b>January 31</b>	Son of Maureen Gaede
<b>Susan Nesheim Allbee</b>	<b>February 5</b>	Sister of Toni Nesheim
<b>Micah Gerald Musich</b>	<b>February 10</b>	Son of Heather Musich
<b>Darien Wilson</b>	<b>February 11</b>	Son of Tammy & Tim Olvera
<b>Douglas Ramsay</b>	<b>February 12</b>	Son of Carlene Ramsay
<b>Rafael Villanveva</b>	<b>February 12</b>	Son of Victoria Villanveva
<b>Michael Stice</b>	<b>February 13</b>	Son of Dora & Gary Stice

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(Our children, grandchildren, and siblings loved, missed and remembered in January & February continued from page 3)

**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**

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.

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Lending Libraries and Resources, Memorial Services, Candle Lightings, Telephone and Outreach, and Dues to the National TCF Office. Thank you.



## The Holidays are Behind Us

It is the new year. The holidays are behind us. We did with them what we could. Whether they were a time of sorrow, a time of joy, or a combination of both, they are now a part of our memories. In a strange way, as a memory in our hearts and in our minds, our child's place is there among all the other memories of the season. There is hurt along with the memory, but also a thankfulness for the memory.

Now we look out at the winter landscape. The earth is cold, the land sharply defined. Yet underneath the hard crust, the energy and warmth of our earth is guarding and providing life to all that grows. We may personally know the coldness and hardness of a grief so fresh that we feel numb - a grief so hurtful that our body feels physically hard, our throats tight from tears shed or unshed, our chests banded tightly by our mourning heart.

If we are not now experiencing this, our memories recollect so easily those early days. Yet, as we live these days, like the earth from which we receive our sustenance, we too, in our searchings, find places of warmth and change and love and growth deep within. Let our hearts and minds dwell in these places and be armed and renewed by them and let us have the courage and love to share them with our loved ones, to talk about even that first dim shape of new hope or of new acceptance or of new understanding or of new love. These are the new roots, born of our love for our child, that are forming and stirring within, gathering strength so that our lives, at the right time, can blossom once again and be fruitful in a new and deep way.

~Marie Andres TCF So. MD Chap., MD



## GIFTS OF LOVE

A love gift is a gift of money or of time given to the Northern Lake County Illinois Chapter of the Compassionate 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.

Thanks to Renee & Alan Ewing  
 for their donation  
 in loving memory of  
**Scott Ewing**

"Gifts of Love" in remembering our children and siblings help to pay for Newsletters, Postage, Books for our



## Winter Gloves

--Bonnie Harris, TCF, Richmond, VA

When the season changes to fall each year, you know that winter is just around the corner. This is the time that you put away all the sunnier clothes and bring out the sweaters, coats, boots, and other heavy gear for the weather to come. This all boils down to possibly cleaning out a closet, a job that no one likes.

Few people would understand how long it takes a person to accomplish this task (or any other for that matter) after losing a child. Your mind puts everything on hold.

The power to concentrate and remember is retarded for a long period of time. For me it has been over two years and what little memory I used to have is just now slowly coming back. Cleaning out a closet has been put off and only the most important items taken out when needed.

I have been lucky, just to remember to hang up things through most of my grief period and some of the packed up boxes stored away, have things in them that I put away before Kim died. It is firmly time to challenge myself to complete a larger project other than just dusting, vacuuming or mopping, the kitchen floor.

Once the job is started, I feel I can handle it and see something all of the way through from start to finish. As I open each box (luckily there are only, three small ones), I must go through each item and decided whether to save, donate, or throw away. For the most part, the decisions are easy ones, but then came the box with Kim' gloves, earmuffs, and scarves.

At first I thought I would just quit and leave everything sitting in the middle of the floor just outside of the coat closet. But the more I looked over these items, the more pleasant the task became. It is not that I care that much for housework, it was the fact that I had found a treasure. To me, finding anything that belonged to Kim is a treasure, worth more than anything else I own. The discovery of these "treasures" made my chore at hand more important and easier to complete. I placed the things that had special meaning in the cedar chest in Kim's room and the others I planned on using myself to keep her memory as close to me as I can.

We tried every kind of glove made to keep her hands warm and dry when she would go outside in the winter. Once, we even tried the plastic gloves. When she was younger and played in the snow with friends, the only thing that would

get her to come back home sooner that I figured, was the wet and cold hands. We could have five pairs of gloves lined up across the hearth of the fireplace, at any given time. Kim would stand there trying to get her hands to warm up and her gloves to dry fast so she could go back out again. As she got older, she preferred the pretty leather fur lined gloves for longer lasting warmth.

I decided to use one pair of Kim's gloves as the "every day" pair, for walking the dog, trips outside, etc. The nicer pair with the special lining are saved for going to work and any other more special occasions. I chose another pair to keep in my car as a "just in case" spare. As with all of the other articles of Kim's clothes, when I wear them she is closer to me and I am comforted with that feeling.

I don't know what will happen when these "special treasures" wear out and can no longer be worn. I will decide what to do, when the times comes, hoping that at that place in my life I will be ready to let go of these things and still remain somewhat sane. But for now, I will warm my hands against the cold winds and snow with Kim's gloves, holding onto my memories to warm my heart.

*"To honor your grief is not self-destructive or harmful, it is life-sustaining and life-giving, and it ultimately leads you back to love again. In this way, love is both the cause and the antidote."*

*~ Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph. D.*

## Love's Road

By Paula D'Arcy

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence;  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

~Robert Frost from The Road Not Taken

During the first months after the death of my husband and child I locked myself inside my apartment. When the phone rang, I stared at the receiver until it was still. Friends knocked at my door, calling my name and I wouldn't answer. If my arms could not hold the ones for whom I longed, then I wanted them empty. My angry choice.

And my private choice, too. For I was building hard barriers inside of me. In subtle, secret ways I had begun to say "No" to all of life because part of life had hurt me.

Then one day, unexpectedly, my mail contained a letter from a young man in Kansas. He was suffering from a painful and incurable illness and he wanted my friendship. To my chagrin he would not accept any of my "Public" faces, nor would he honor my walls. He hammered into my life demanding that I be there. Without regard he pushed past the shadows and the memory-filled half person I was willing to become. His insistence was like a scream that I be alive.

In effect he was forcing me into the yellow wood and demanding that I face its reality; one inviting road of memories and shadows; and the other, rough road of love. No one grieves without standing at that same fork, waiting to decide. For it's never that we can't love again. It's that we won't. I knew. I had refused for a long, long while.

The experience of this encounter was the beginning of my fearful steps toward all the possibilities which might be waiting in my new, altered life. It was when I began to live for the new day. It was when I agreed to say goodbye to what had been. It was when I first started re-accepting life. Life in general, and my life in particular.

During those hard weeks when my choices were made I assumed that their significance reached only to my future. Today I see that I was very mistaken. For how we choose to survive casts as much light (or darkness) on our treasured past as it does on our anticipated future. Here is the key: Nothing can give lasting life to the loves of yesterday except our willingness to carry the experience of that love

onto the new roads sent for us to travel. In denying the new we bury the old. For when we cling to memory and live only with regret, we do not really have that which we so tightly grasp. Nothing is ours until we let it go. That's the mystery of life and death both. Lord, give each one who reads these words the courage to take love's road.

## 5 Tips to Manage Grief in The New Year, Mindfully

by Heather Stang

[www.mindfulnessandgrief.com/](http://www.mindfulnessandgrief.com/)

While most of the world is celebrating the start of a new year, those of us who are grieving may be feeling not so joyous. As with other holidays, anniversaries, and days that end in -day, feeling sad, angry, anxious, resistant, confused, detached, or any other difficult emotion is par for the course when you are grieving. Instead of fighting the reality that things are different, let go a little, and allow yourself to do things a little differently from before.

Here are a few ideas:

### Focus on self-care over self-improvement.

This year, you may want to skip the typical New Year's resolutions and instead, focus on self-care for your grieving mind, body, and spirit. Simple things like getting good sleep, eating nourishing food, and exercising a little bit each day will help your body and mind support you during loss, but do these things with an attitude of self-care instead of self-improvement, which is often implied in our resolutions. Don't add to your suffering by trying to attain an unrealistic goal. Instead, treat yourself as you would treat a beloved friend in the same position.

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**(5 Tips to Manage Grief in The New Year, Mindfully continued from page 2)**

**Create your own mantra to replace “Happy New Year.”** If you are like most grieving people, the idea of being happy is a bridge too far from where you are right now, but since you are going to hear these words, again and again, you may as well incorporate them into your self-care practice. Instead of feeling bad for not feeling happy, or angry that someone would assume you could feel happy, use these three ubiquitous words as a reminder to send yourself compassion. Try this: Each time you see or hear “Happy New Year,” offer yourself words of kindness that resonate with you. For example, “May I treat myself with kindness this year,” or “May I have a Compassionate New Year,” or simply “This is hard and I am doing my best.” This not only puts you back in the driver’s seat so you have a modicum of control over your experience but is a great bell of awareness that can remind you to take care of yourself.

**Know that you are not leaving your loved one behind.** When you cross the threshold of a new year without your special person by your side, it can feel like you are leaving them behind. That isn’t the case. Yes, the annual change of the calendar is a marker that time is passing, but you will never forget your special person, no matter how many years go by. Take some time out early this year to reflect on the ways you carry your special person with you. What habits, likes, dislikes, hobbies, or mannerisms do you share with them? What are your favorite memories of your time together? If they are a blood relative, in what ways do you look like them? They have left their mark on your heart, and that will never go away.

**Prioritize your grief-work with your new calendar.** Instead of just scheduling things you have to do, use your new calendar to plan what you *need* to do to support yourself this year. While none of us have a crystal ball, many people find holidays and anniversaries especially challenging. Record them on your calendar, and plan how you want to spend those special days. Whether scheduling coffee with a supportive friend on your loved one’s birthday or gathering a group of survivors together to reminisce on the anniversary of their death, knowing what you are going to do on these special grief-days may help reduce your anxiety. You can also plan ahead to attend grief support



groups and memorial events through your local hospice or grief group. Even if the groups don’t start for a while, get them on your calendar now, before work and social obligations take over. You can also block off self-care time for a massage, meditation, journaling, or just free time to do as you wish.

**Steady your mind in the present with meditation.** The human brain is rarely fully present, and this is especially true when we are grieving. Part of us wants to fast forward and leave this awful time behind, but an even bigger part wants to turn around and sprint back to the time when our loved one was still alive. The reality, of course, is that we can’t control the passing of time, but we can control what we do with our attention. In the meditation world, we call this bouncing around “monkey mind”, and although it is just a side-effect of being human, it rarely reduces our suffering. There are countless ways you can learn to tame your mind with meditation, but I find that in the early days, months and even years of grief, focusing meditation practices can be especially helpful. Try this: with your eyes open or closed, turn your attention toward your breath. As you breathe in, silently say to yourself – **In**. As you breathe out, silently say to yourself – **Out**. Do this over and over each time you breathe, for 3-5 minutes. When your monkey mind wanders off, find your breath again and start over. It doesn’t matter how often you need to begin again. After a few minutes, you may feel calmer and more in control of your own mind.

**(Loving borrowed from A JOURNEY TOGETHER, National Newsletter of the Bereaved Parents of the USA, Winter 2020)**

**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

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

**CHAPTER LEADERSHIP** Susan Banks 847-336-8375 [lanwesmar@comcast.net](mailto:lanwesmar@comcast.net) - Westly Banks Age 21 – Of suicide

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Aaron Barrera Age 29 – Auto accident due to Diabetes

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