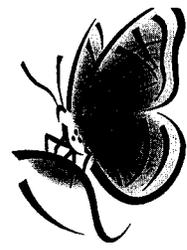


The COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Northern Lake County Illinois Chapter
October, 2008 Newsletter



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

Chapter Leader Notes From Jenny & Rick



Who am I? Where am I now? Where am I going? What is it all about?

I was reflecting on those early days of intense grief after the deaths of Lila and Danny. Complete confusion was the order of the day for a long time. I distinctly remember the surreal feelings that came and went with every passing moment.

Did this horrible thing really happen? Couldn't it be just a bad dream? Would we survive?

The death of a child is one of the greatest burdens I believe anybody can have to endure. It puts a stranglehold on all relationships. It makes the most routine actions seem monumental, and at every turn there are great obstacles to be faced. Getting up in the mornings seemed intolerable.

We went out to Raven Glen Forest Preserve last week to see our Woodland Walk. We hadn't been there in a long time. I sat on the boulder while Jenny took some pictures. It was a beautiful early fall afternoon and the only ones there besides us were a man walking and his three dogs, which came running to us in the parking lot. Lila had three dogs when she died. One of the man's dogs was a Yorkie, which was like the one she had, and one was a big mutt, like she had also. We notice things like that!

There was a bit of thunder, and some dark clouds, but no rain. I thought about how far we have come in the almost six years since they have been gone. Yes, it really happened. No, it wasn't just a dream. Yes, we are surviving.

Often what seems like a great mystery turns out to be fairly simple. Yes, our lives have changed, more than we ever could have imagined, but we have learned that we are exactly where we are supposed to be at this stage of our lives, and I guess so were they. I can accept that today, and use that as a compass for the days to come.

Musings on Halloween's Past and Present



On the evening I type this, the nip in the October air is a

reminder that the major holidays are just around the corner. Halloween decorations have been in the stores since July and Christmas décor even as early as August. For those of us who are bereaved parents, siblings and/or grandparents this means the sooner they are "in our face" the longer we have the constant reminders that we will be facing the holidays without our child. Whether it is your first Halloween following your child's death or years down the road, such as in my situation, the holiday season stirs the emotions bringing varying levels of sadness, anxiety and sometimes even anger. With Halloween, there is the sorrow of no longer having to find that perfect costume or witnessing the delight in your child's eyes when you found just the right one.

Many parents find Halloween a particularly hard one to get through. In the past, I always thought of it as innocuous enough; there were the costume parties with bobbing for apple, children excitedly dashing door-to-door trick-or-treating, pumpkin carving, and the occasional harmless prank. However, after my daughter Nina died, I became acutely aware of things that I never gave a second thought to in the past. For instance, my former neighbor made her whole front yard into a graveyard scene, complete with fake headstones that said R.I.P. with scary or silly epitaphs as well as hideous ghosts coming out of the earth with bony bloody fingers. Before Nina died, I too found the cemetery "creepy", but now I look at it differently, even with a sort of reverence, and no longer have a problem going out to my daughter's grave-site, even in the middle of the night. I find the solitude of the historic countryside graveyard where she is buried peaceful and dignified and worthy of respect, and I was hurt by what I felt

(Continued on page 2)

GIFTS OF LOVE



A love gift is a gift of money or the Compassionate Friends. It is usually in individuals who want to honor a relative or 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.

of time given to the Northern Lake County Illinois Chapter of memory of a child who has died, but donations can also be from 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 to all who contribute.



(Musings on Halloween's Past and Present continued from page 1) was apparent ridicule and disdain for the final resting place of our loved one's physical bodies to the point of

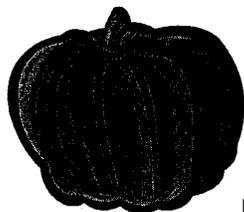
tears and anger. Moreover, some of the masks and costumes portrayed faces of death in a way that I found highly offensive, especially since I knew many who lost their children to some of the means depicted. I took it personally and didn't appreciate what I perceived as a mockery of death.

Though I still don't pretend to understand the allure of the above-mentioned Halloween depictions, they aren't as painful to me as they were the first few years after Nina died. During the early grief years, we become very hypersensitive to our surroundings and more keenly conscious of anything related to death. It is pretty hard to look past the general non-bereaved populations seeming nonchalance about something we take so personally. Though we wish there was more empathy and understanding, we also know all too well that they cannot truly sympathize unless they also have walked in our shoes. It is easy to forget that we too, before our children's deaths, may have shown the same indifference. I believe that we would like to think that we wouldn't have been so callous because we now personally know how much this hurts those affected; however, before we lost our "innocence" truth be told, we probably didn't give any of it much thought. That being said, oftentimes it is still easier said than done. On this 10th Halloween without Nina, I pretty much ignore all the ghoulishness surrounding this time of year. If I do find I am having difficulty, I try very hard to focus on positive and precious memories of Halloween's past, such as her belated birthday/Halloween party where our base-

ment became a makeshift haunted house where giggling blindfolded costumed witches and princesses plunged their hands into bowls full of peeled grape "eyeballs" and wet macaroni "brains" to the shrieks of "Yuck!" or the photo taken of Nina on her last Halloween. No longer of trick-or-treat age, she stayed home to pass out the candy and carve an awesome Jack-O-Lantern that she is pictured proudly along side, with her ever present smile and that wonderful twinkle in her brown eyes. Or the photos I have of her in her costumes over the years from Care Bear to Punk Rocker. Because of my photographs and precious memories, I also realize that I was one of the "lucky" ones in that regard. There are those whose children died before they ever had the opportunity to create memories; there is the sorrow that they were never able to experience even one holiday with that child, yet alone several, and that saddens me very much.

For those with a missing trick-or-treater this Halloween or the conspicuous empty chair at Thanksgiving dinner this year, the first ones are the most difficult. Though I find they are easier to bear as time goes on, you never really forget the absence from the family holiday gatherings of one loved so much, nor do you want to forget, really. Please try to remember that this roller-coaster grief ride each year brings different feelings. It is important that you just allow those feelings and let them happen. Try not to be waylaid by other's expectations of you. Trust your instincts and go with them. Truly, only you know what you can or cannot handle.

With gentle thoughts,
Cathy Seehuetter
TCF/St. Paul, MN
peachy3536@comcast.net
~reprinted



OUR CHILDREN LOVED, MISSED AND REMEMBERED IN OCTOBER & NOVEMBER

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

Matthew David Stolarick

October 13, 1977 - December 6, 2005
Son of Kathy and the late David Stolarick

Kelly Klawonn

October 23, 1968 - February 14, 1969
Son of Raymond & Dorothy Klawonn

Jim O'Connor

November 6, 1963 - April 7, 2000
Son of Kay OConnor

Carrie Seger

November 10, 1971 - September 30, 2006
Daughter of Sandy Seger

Jeremy M Govekar

November 12, 1976 - March 2, 1999
Son of Maggie McGaughey

Douglas Ramsay

November 17, 1969 - February 12, 1987
Son of Carlene Ramsay

Zachary Taylor

November 30, 1998 - February 24, 2007
Son of Mike Taylor & Karen Adams-Taylor

ANNIVERSARIES

Renaldo Curtis St. James

September 26, 1968 - October 4, 2005
Son of Arlene St. James

Jonathon E Grymkoski

September 24, 1987 - October 23, 2006
Son of Peter Grymkoski

Lila Ruffolo

June 12, 1978 - November 1, 2002
Daughter of Jenny & Rick Selle
Granddaughter of Diana Runyon

Geoffrey Ruff

September 18, 1967 - November 2, 1989
Son of Judith Ruff

Andrew C Perkins

August 12, 1975 - November 3, 1992
Son of Richard Thelma Perkin

Rachel Salomonson

May 2, 1986 - November 15, 2005
Daughter of Toni Nesheim & Denny Salomonson

Robert Joseph Landers

March 3, 1987 - November 17, 2007
Son of Deborah & Michael Landers

Megan Candice Grace

February 24, 1984 - November 18, 1999
Daughter of Tim & Marilyn Grace

Sven Christian Reinhard

May 28, 1962 - November 22, 2001
Son of Astrid Reinhard

James Matthew Wieser

September 28, 1982 - November 23, 2005
Son of Joseph & Nancy Wieser

Mark Yates

December 20, 1979 - November 24, 1996
Son of Richard & Linda Hegg

Elizabeth Mary Foresta

March 8, 1974 - November 28, 1985
Daughter of Al & Mary Foresta

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 - 847-573-1055



GRIEF OF THE NEWLY BEREAVED

The news that our child is dead thrusts us into an experience that is horrendous beyond our wildest imagination. Our child, literally a physical part of our bodies at one time, is torn from us by death and we are left with the seemingly impossible task of learning to live without him or her. And absolutely no one is ever prepared for it. Few bereaved persons are ever prepared for the experience of grief — certainly bereaved parents are not. One learns to cope with grief and eventually return to some normalcy. This takes much time and considerable grief work that we must learn how to do, but it might be helpful to discuss some aspects of grief that are special problems for the newly bereaved.

The most common phrase heard from the newly bereaved is, "I feel like I'm going crazy." The pain and the accompanying emotions are so intense that it doesn't seem possible that a normal human being can experience them and still live. You may believe that you are going insane, or at least on the verge of it, but you are not. You are experiencing the normal physical and psychological reaction to a deep loss. With your child's death you have experienced the ultimate loss, therefore you will experience the ultimate grief, which is deeply, deeply painful, and all the emotions will be in the extreme.

Another surprise in early grief, (by early grief I mean any time up to approximately the first anniversary of your child's death), is that you may not experience the most painful part of your grief in the beginning. Many parents have said, "I thought it was bad in the first few months, but it got worse around three to six months." In the first few days most of us are in deep shock that prevents us from facing reality all at once. This protects us for a short time, but then that begins to wear off slowly and the pain begins. Oh yes, we know in our heads very soon that our child is dead, but at a deeper level we are still expecting him/her to come home or that this is all a nightmare that we will soon wake from. The full reality sets in some months later. It is then that the real pain of grief begins. As a matter of fact, grief that heals CANNOT begin until we know at a deep level that our child is dead. It isn't for a few months that that happens, therefore the deepest pain comes later.

Another aspect of grief that is a surprise to the newly bereaved is the intensity of the emotions felt. Grief consumes us. It takes us over so completely that we feel we are the epitome of pain and anguish. We radiate pain from within and without. We feel we are a totally different self. Nothing is familiar. It is as if the me I have been all my life no longer exists and that someone else has taken over my body. It is as if I am standing alone, vulnerable and defenseless. It is as though only I exist and all the world is looking at me. This feeling has been described by bereaved parents as having "an aura around me," or as having "the words 'bereaved parent' tattooed on my forehead." We feel "different" and exposed, and alone.

Another unimaginable experience follows from this feeling of aloneness and vulnerability — that of amazement that others are so insensitive to your feelings or to your needs. You will be amazed that the world keeps turning and that people continue to go about their everyday lives as if nothing had happened. There is a "centeredness on self" in grief that few of us have ever experienced in our lives before. You may be shocked and angered over and over again by the comments and innuendoes made by others. They will expect you to function as if nothing was different. It is likely that others will be uncomfortable around you and it will be the rare person who will speak your child's name or allow you to do so. Generally people see you as "sick" or abnormal, and you may be amazed that those from whom you expect some understanding and empathy will be unable to give it to you. People will tell you what you should and should not do to make your hurt go away, and when their advice doesn't work (and I can guarantee you it won't) they will tell you that you are not trying hard enough. Unfortunately, you will be expected to be the one to understand, ignore, and/or forgive them. The result of this insensitivity will add considerably to the normal anger and hurt of your grief, because, try as you may, you will not be able to understand, ignore or forgive them for a long time.

No one gets "used" to grief, but as a newly bereaved parent you have been thrust into an experience that is different beyond your wildest expectations. From a comparatively comfortable existence you are thrown into a pit of the most devastating and debilitating pain that anyone will ever know. Those of us who have been bereaved

(Continued on page 5)

(Grief of the Newly Bereaved continued from page 4)

for a year or longer have experienced these "surprises" and have found ways to protect themselves and to survive.

There is only one thing worse than the grief we experience after our child(ren) dies, and that is to experience it in ignorance of what is normal and what is likely to be experienced. No one can grieve for us. We must do it ourselves, but we can eliminate the added anxiety that this ignorance can create. Information on the process of grief and suggestions for making the daily living of grief survivable abounds in TCF newsletters and in the many books on grief that are available. Take advantage of them. Even if you never attend a TCF meeting, you still have information available to you that will help you not only to survive your grief, but also to allow this unchosen and terrible experience to be a cause for the development of greater strength and growth.

If advice to the newly bereaved can be summed up in a few words it is this:

1. Learn about the grief process. Read, read, read.
2. Get a support system. Attend TCF meetings, or at least, find one friend who will let you talk about your child and/or your pain.
3. Know that what you are experiencing is normal. Know that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. The only "wrong" thing is to not grieve.

—Margaret H. Gerner, M.S.W., CGC

TCF/St. Louis, MO

(Margaret is a bereaved mother and also a bereaved grandmother.)

(Loving lifted from TCF/St Louis, MO - Jul/Aug 1986)

preceding years: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah and New Year's – those days that threaten bereaved parents so much. This is the fifth holiday season since my Douglas's death, yet I still have a fleeting desire to run and hide. Although last season was not as terrible as the one before, I know I'll shed tears again this year during some lonely and sad times. These are very private moments of grief for me now.

For those of you who do not attend support meetings, our newsletters may be the only link you have to other bereaved parents. Please take time for yourself during the holidays. Take time to cry and to be alone. Try not to take on assignments from other family members who cannot know the exhaustion you experience. Ask for the things you think you need. Others cannot read your mind, yet it is so difficult to tell someone that you are hurting and need something from him or her. There is no requirement to pretend you are okay, when in fact, you are not.

Healing is a slow process requiring a lot of work. I always know when others have never experienced a great loss for they will say, "Time will heal all wounds." What they do not know and cannot know is that healing a great grief requires hard work and lots of time. Time itself cannot heal anything. It is not the passage of time in itself, but the pain and suffering endured and the struggle to reclaim one's life which will make healing possible. Others see only the end result without realizing the work that went into the healing process.

Take the time you need to complete your work; to heal your spirit, mind and body; to regain your will to live. Be good to yourself. Remember that healing is possible through your own effort and determination and not simply by the passage of time.

Lovingly borrowed from the Fall 2008 newsletter of the Bereaved Parents of the USA

VALUABLE QUOTATIONS FROM RON GREER DURING THE 2008 GATHERING

When you reach the top of the elevator in your grief, remember to go back down to help others.

When a bereaved parent was asked how she was doing, she replied, "I've still got my baggage, but I am down to a carry-on."

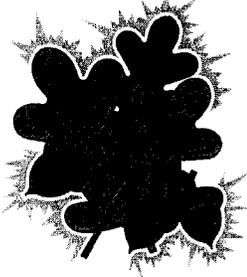
HALLOWEEN AND BEYOND

By Shirley Carrigan
BP/USA of North Texas



I was getting ready to go to the store to purchase candy for the "great Pumpkin day," which brought my attention to the holidays of

Autumn



As autumn approaches, I begin to feel invigorated and alive. I suppose that it's the crisp, cool air that makes me realize that there is some small thing inside of me that is not dead. I've always loved

autumn...the smell of burning leaves and the chirping of the locusts; bring a flood of childhood memories. Memories of a simpler, more innocent time. I long to be back there, where my biggest worry was my spelling test every Friday. Where there were no bills to pay, no car notes, no mortgage, and no broken hearts...just friends, school, and play.

Whenever I think of autumns past, the smell of my Mother's homemade soup fills my senses. I can still see myself sitting at the 1950's yellow and chrome kitchen table, doing my homework while my Mother prepared supper. Maybe part of the reason that I looked forward to autumn then was because it meant that my birthday was just around the corner...October 4. Needless to say, I no longer await birthdays with the same anticipation that I did then. But there was always something special about autumn and for me, there still is. I still look forward to the first day that I can turn my air conditioner off and open all of the windows and let the fresh, cool air inside but for some parents this isn't the case. They find this time of year very difficult because of the memories triggered by the beginning of a new school year. For them, autumn is a painful reminder of what might have been.

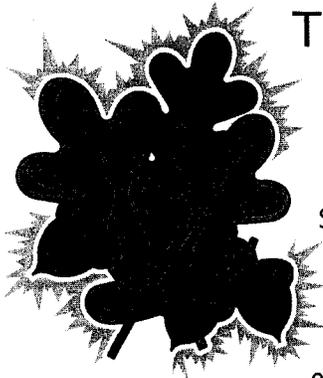
Autumn doesn't depress me...not at all! It's what follows autumn that I do not look forward to...the holidays...Thanksgiving and Christmas and the entire holiday shopping season, which begins earlier and earlier each year.

That's the part of the year that I dread ...the toy ads, the TV commercials filled with smiling, happy faces of children ...children like mine, children like yours ...children who should be here but aren't. I loath it...all of it. There are so many reminders and no way to avoid them...one less gift to buy, one less stocking to fill, one less place to set at the table. No one else on earth knows this kind of pain except those of us who have been through it. When all the world is supposed to be happy and filled with joy, we are at our lowest...out emptiest. The winter is within our hearts...cold, bleak, and long. I used to love Christmas and everything that accompanied it. Now I long for a place to hide until it is all over...until the last Christmas tree is taken down, the last decoration put away, and the last twinkling light extinguished.

Autumn is beautiful, with its vibrant colors and wind swept leaves. I revel in the patchwork quilt that nature creates every autumn. No, it's not September's Indian Summer or October's crispness but November with it's Thanksgiving Day parades and turkey and December with it's nights filled with flickering lights and plastic Santas...these are the things that bring an ache to my heart and tears to my eyes. It is this time, when the nights are lit so brightly, that are my darkest days!

Jacquelyn M. Comeaux
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of author





The End of Summer, the Autumn of Our Healing and a Harvest of the Heart

September summer has always been a time of nostalgia for me. The days are noticeably shorter with daytime temperatures beginning to cool down and the slightest chilliness of beautiful star filled evenings requiring a sweat shirt or sweater. Early morning streets are filled with children going back to school. Most everyone is finally back to work, relaxed and sharing the adventures and experiences of summer vacations. And then one day, there is a wind from the west.

And just by its feel you know these are the last days of summer and that fall will soon gently ease itself into our Rocky Mountains. Before we know it, the canyons are blazing with the fire of fall color working its way down into our valley.

It is a beautiful season and perhaps my favorite time of the year. We can sit for hours in Sugar House Park, watching the birds gather and head south for the winter and enjoy the trees now fully aflame with oranges, browns and reds so beautiful it can make our hearts sing with joy. And yet, with all the beauty that surrounds us, we as bereaved parents sometimes struggle to let it all in. For as summer wanes, and fall begins, our thoughts naturally turn to grammar school homework, high school parties and dances, college football games, shopping for new clothes, and the specter of holidays ahead without those of our children who have too soon been taken from us.

It is difficult to write about this just today. I just went to a wedding of my closest friends' son, where Jacob's cousins, nieces and nephews, brothers and sisters and past friends all came together for three days of reunion and celebrations filled with stories of the past. On Sunday, over thirty people were at my place sharing enchiladas and childhood memories of those years we were all together. And of course, the occasional, "I wish Jake were here to see this." For me, not an hour went by that I did not think of him or see his face in his young nephew who bears his name.

And yet ... and yet the season, the color, the beautiful days and evenings, the weddings, the parties and football games, and the eminent holidays now fill me with thanksgiving that Jake was part of my life for sixteen years. No small thing that. I consider myself lucky for that much time, for I know so many friends who had much less time with their beloved children. So this year, I choose to find the good and the beautiful of the season, and let the holidays come. For, it is in remembering his face and the goodness of his life and the beauty of the season, I find sweet healing for my grieving soul.

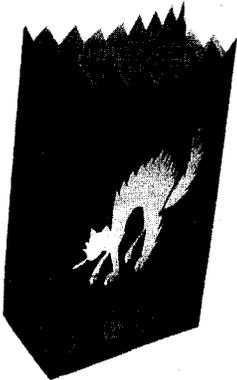
Very soon now, autumn and the harvest season will be upon us, and the bounty of summer's growth will begin to fill our barns and sheds. And this will be an opportunity for us, even though we grieve, to discover the rich harvest of memories with those of our lost children. In their season, they provided us with a bounty of their own. If we are able to accept it, this can be a fall season where we reflect on their abundance of smiles, laughter, humor, growth, learning, and sharing of love. God how we loved them, and how they loved us. Even through all the difficulties, the energetic exchanges of opinions and ideas, the heartaches, the tears, anxiety and disappointments, we cannot avoid the fact that we loved them with a measure beyond our comprehension. And in spite of the difficult times, their sweet and sometimes very short lives provided us with an abundant harvest of experiences that are able, if we let them, to bless us with healing memories to last for as long as we live.

So as we say goodbye to summer, as best we can, let us welcome the fall season and the coming holidays and all the beauty these seasons can and will bring to us. I fully realize that for those of us most recently bereaved, this will be difficult, and in our sorrow and grief, seem perhaps almost impossible. Please let me reach out my hand and my heart to you in the quiet of your reading this right now.

If you can, imagine I am looking right into your eyes with all the compassion I can muster. And in that

(Continued on page 9)

moment, I will share your tears, your agony of loss, and your grief, for I am truly one of you. I am after all, and have been a Compassionate Friend for over eleven years now. And as we share this moment, please hear the warmest feelings of my heart as I say to you this wretched agony of grief, this painful time of suffering, and this nightmare and horror you now feel will pass. At some point I promise you will begin to experience the light at the end of this painful tunnel of grief. I promise you will have summers and falls and holidays to come filled with healing memories of your children.



I promise as Halloween comes, and you are finally able to turn your porch light on to welcome trick-or-treaters, you will see your own children in the bright and joyful faces at your front door, and smile and be glad they once blessed your life. I also promise the time will come when you will move past Halloween and look forward to Thanksgiving and the December holidays.

As I wrote earlier, I realize this may be too soon for some of you. All I ask is that you be willing to let these most difficult times pass -- as I have promised they will, and allow your hearts to soften and show you their rich places where you still love your children. For it is in those painful, tender places you will begin to find the abundance of love given to you by your children which will bring healing. And when that happens, you will look forward to Thanksgiving day with its abundantly filled table, and realize an equally abundant harvest of the heart.

Whenever we are able to accept it and embrace it, the grace of healing will come to all of us. Of course our lives will never be the same. We will always have the sadness of their absence in our lives and experience those frequent bitter-sweet times when we simply miss them. But the dark pain and suffering of their passing will itself pass -- this I can promise you. For in these past eleven years I have looked into every dark and secret corner of grief, and have spent with you, all those endless weeks and months of intense pain and tears.

I have shared those endless days of self recrimination and regret and anger. And in all this I

have finally found the autumn of my healing, and have feasted in the abundant harvest of love. Yes indeed, I promise you the light of joyful memory at the end of this dark tunnel.

So may you look forward to the fall and all its beauty and grace, and anticipate the holidays' peace and joy with a sure knowledge that this present darkness will pass, and that your life will once again be able to embrace the abundance of harvest enjoyed by the rest of your family and friends. And along with Rabbi Harold Kushner, who wrote the book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, be able to say as he did of his own son's life and death, "... I think of Aaron and all that his life taught me, and I realize how much I have lost and how much I have gained. Yesterday seems less painful, and I am not afraid of tomorrow."

Erin Silva
erinsilva@earthlink.net
 TCF, Salt Lake City, Utah
 ~reprinted from Salt Lake City Sept/Oct/Nov
 2002 Newsletter

Another Year

Another year has come,
 And you're so far away from us now;
 But in our hearts still.
 Forever, We will hold you close.
 Each smile, laugh and tear we've cried
 Are a testament to our love for you.
 We will always love you,
 No matter what happens.
 Your death can not separate us.
 We're right here, loving you as always.
 Our hearts are true to you.
 We will never forget your love and spirit.
 We are no longer afraid -
 For to live or die is the same for us.
 You are still with us on this journey of
 life.
 We raise your light to the heavens, and
 smile as we remember you!

by Barbara Dwyer, TCF Gwinnett