



The Compassionate Friends

Greater Omaha Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

www.tcfomaha.org
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 402-571-4011
 P.O. Box 540852
 Omaha NE 68154

May-Jun
2017

Mission Statement: When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

Filling In Holes

Today, my husband and I went to the plant nursery and bought some flowers and bedding plants to go in our gardens. Spring is here, and the weather is beautiful. Not cold at all, but also not so hot that the thought of puttering in

the garden brings a groan of dismay.

I remember my first spring in this house. We were so excited. Our family was nearly complete. Our third son was on his way, and we had just had a house built. We were at the plant nursery at least once a week. Our life was busy, bright, and untainted by grief.

I remember our second spring in this house. How winter hung on, tenacious, unyielding, both outside, and in our hearts. I remember the first warm spring day. I came home from work early, determined to make SOMETHING grow in my

life. Maybe I couldn't get my son to live, but I was going to make something live. Grief was a raw, open wound then, and my anger was deep. I was angry at the world, at God, and at everything. And so I approached my yard, shovel in hand. I decided I had to have a garden in the middle of my yard. I began furiously digging out the grass, making an oval in the center. It took me hours digging out that oval. But I wasn't through. I then decided I wanted a garden right by my doorway, so I dug out that area, too. And then I made big holes, and tore out all the roots and stones and other junk.

I made big holes in my yard that day, and in the weeks to come I DID fill them with things.

Funny thing, as I dug those holes and pulled on the grass, my anger drained away. My salty tears mixed with the sweat of exertion and the dirt, and ran off my

arms undetected to the outside world. Digging those holes provided an outlet for my anger and my hurt.

Today I dug some more holes. But this time, my holes were smaller. And I filled them with small, delicate flowers, purple and white. I put bulbs in the ground, too, filling other small holes. And I reflected back on another hole, the hole in my heart. No, I can't ever fill it with what "should" be there ... my son "should" be almost seven now, full of energy, and wanting to plant flowers with Mom. But I have filled that hole with other things; with love, healing, memories, and with the lessons and the gifts my son gave me. I never saw those gifts that spring, as I was digging out holes in my yard. And though I would rather have that hole filled with my son's presence, I am grateful for the gifts he gave. And so I will go on, filling holes. -Lisa Sculley, reprinted from TCF Troy, MI

SUPPORT MEETING TIMES AND LOCATIONS

For parents, grandparents and siblings over 18

Omaha

1st Thursday 7-9 pm

New Cassel Retirement Center
900 N 90th Street, Auditorium Level 2

Fremont

2nd Thursday 7-9 pm

Fremont Health 450 E 23rd Street

Lincoln

3rd Thursday 7-9 pm

The Space 5900 S 58th Street Suite, Suite H



All parents, grandparents, siblings, and friends please join us for dinner and a walk in memory of our children. Each family is asked to bring a dish to share (and your own drinks). TCF will supply the tableware. This is a time to reaffirm the love that we share for our child with our friends and family. Remember to wear your picture button of your child. You are invited to read a poem or tell a story about your child. Everyone is required to sign a waiver of liability prior to the walk.

Friday, June 16, 2017

Pot-Luck dinner 6 pm Walk 7 pm

Hitchcock Park, 45th & P, Omaha

A LOVE GIFT is a donation given in memory of a child who has died. It can also be in honor of a happy event that you would like to acknowledge. Your contributions can be in any amount, are tax deductible and are a source of income for our non-profit chapter.

You may make a donation at meetings, on our website, or by mail.

We are so very grateful for the Love Gifts listed below. Thank you for caring and sharing!

Love Gifts Received in February and March

General Fund

Angel of Hope Children's Memorial at Boys Town

Outreach

Memorial Programs

To protect the privacy of our members, this information has been removed from the public version of our newsletter.

The Storms of Grief

I've often thought about how differently grief affects those left behind when someone has died. To me there are three groups of bereaved. There are those that lose someone they loved very much and are most affected. The middle group are those that cared about the person and will miss them, but their death doesn't change their lives. The third group are sorry that the person has died, but are largely unaffected by their death.

Now envision those groups on a mountain. When my son died, I felt like I was on a mountaintop, alone with a storm raging around me. Thunder and lightning filled the sky, thick clouds enveloped me, and a cold hard rain fell upon me. Winds buffeted my body from every side. There was no shelter, no place to sit or lie down. Others who were suffering as much as I (my husband and daughters) were on their own Mountaintop, and we could derive no comfort from each other. I stood there, sometimes railing against God, sometimes feeling as if my heart had been ripped out, sometimes just feeling an emptiness so deep, I feared I would drown in it. Days, weeks, months passed.

The middle group of people stood on the side of the mountain (close friends and relatives). They also were caught in the storm, but they had some shelter and each other. They wanted to comfort me but the path upward was winding and rocky and I could find no path down to them.

The last group of people were at the bottom of the mountain in the valley. There, the sun was shining and the breeze was gentle. They could see the storm I was caught in, but could do nothing to help me.

Sometimes the storm would subside and I could see something besides dismal gray and I had respite from the wind and rain. But this would be followed by another raging storm. Back and forth, I never knew what to expect.

Eventually the sky would clear and I was able to find a path to those that cared and could offer me hugs and a shoulder to cry on. The storm was still there, but there was also shelter and I wasn't alone.

It has been 12 years since Todd died and I have been able to come completely down off that desolate mountaintop and live in the valley of sunshine. Sometimes I stay there quite a while. Sometimes I climb that mountain and experience that same emptiness and sadness.

We all know that this kind of storm may brew on those special days - birthdays, holidays, family events. We are also blind-sided by those times that just take our breath away. . . being in a place they loved, hearing their music, smells, movies, ballgames, seeing their friends. We really have no control over these unexpected, sudden storms.

I have learned to give into them and let the tears fall. I can live with these storms and accept them as part of my life because my child lived and I loved him with all my heart. I cannot change the fact that my child has died and I will not change my love.

Barb Seth ~ TCF, Madison, WI

Winter into Spring in Grief's Garden

February's rainy days -
 March's lions and lambs -
 spring's new beginnings
 dance o'er the land.
 And how are you doing?
 Is your heart full and sad?
 How much of life's renewal
 is your soul allowed to have?
 As spring comes creeping towards you
 does the darkness sweep in too?
 Does pain o'ertake the beauty
 with its bleakness and the ruin
 of your life - now in shambles
 of your future - so much lost
 of your dreams - shell-less, empty things
 of toys touched only by dust?
 All around you life is growing.

Can you feel it too?
 Do you know that deep inside
 there is growth? Yes - in you.
 Your child's left a hole in you
 so deep that you feel hollow,
 needing years to fill it with new life,
 new dreams amidst the sorrow.
 And within that new life,
 is your ever living child -
 the love and the memories -
 her laugh or his smile!
 All that you grow
 from now to your death
 will contain seeds of his life,
 will hold her love's breath.
 It is you who is growing
 and its not a betrayal.
 It's acknowledging the bond
 with your child will not fail.

As her spirit surrounds you
 or his love soaks you through,
 you try new ways of living
 honoring him, honoring you.
 And where you found bleakness
 and darkness and ruin,
 you will find new life budding
 and new meaning, a new you.
 This growth may take years
 to see it as gain,
 but know it is happening
 amidst all of the pain.
 You. You, will spring forward
 growing tall towards the sun
 and within your new beauty
 is your daughter or son.
 from Catching the Light - Coming Back to
 Life after the Death of a Child
 by Genesse Bourdeau Gentry

Save the Date!

- May 4—Guest speaker Wendy Everson, PLMHP “Stress Management”
- June 1—Men’s and women’s sharing groups
- June 16- Walk to Remember, Hitchcock Park, 40 & P, Omaha
- July 6– Guest speaker JoAnn Smith “Misconceptions of Grief”
- July 28-30, National Conference Orlando FL
- September 17– Annual brick dedication

May 4 Guest Speaker

Dealing with stress, anxiety, or just overwhelmed on some days and looking for strategies to manage life? During the May meeting, I will facilitate a 20-minute presentation utilizing mindfulness and cognitive behavior therapy to help you to experience a sense of calmness and balance during the difficult times in your life. This will be an interactive presentation.

My name is Wendy Everson, MS, LMHP (licensed mental health practitioner) with certification in Gerontology, in private practice for two years at Arbor Family Counseling - www.arborfamilycounseling.com
 Thank you for this opportunity to be part of your evening and I look forward to being with you on May 4th!

June 1 Separate discussion groups for men and women

During this program, the entire group has our opening together. Following the preliminaries, we split into groups by sex to discuss issues that are gender specific. We have found that this is a very helpful program for both men and women, but especially for the men. In a same-gender group they seem to feel more at ease in expressing anger, guilt, frustration etc. The women also found that they felt freer to discuss problems they have had with their spouses in dealing with their child's death in an all-woman group.

Love Gifts · Address Change · Authorizations

Mail to: The Compassionate Friends, PO Box 540852, Omaha, NE 68154

Your Name _____

Address _____ Email _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Date _____ Gift of \$ _____

DIRECT MY GIFT TOWARD:

- Outreach -printing, postage, phone, web Angel of Hope Memorial Programs

In Memory of _____

Message: _____

- List my child in the newsletter for birth and death remembrances.
 Name _____ birth _____ death _____

Remembering Our Children...Always

Birthdays

Anniversaries

To protect the privacy of our members, this information has been removed from the public version of our newsletter.

We Are the Childless Parents

I am the childless mother
Lost between loving and pain
Lost to the promise of children
Searching for answers in vain.
I am the childless mother
caught between courage and fears
Left without bridge to the future
Finding no sound for my tears.
I am the childless father
Caught between courage and fears
Left without bridge to the future
Finding no sound for my tears.
I am the childless father
Lost between loving and pain
Lost is the promise of children
Searching for answers in vain.
We Are the Childless Parents
Sharing the grief and the night
Sharing the darkness together
Waiting to walk in the light. —Sascha

If you would like your child listed here,
please update your permission annually.
Use the form on Page 3 or update online

<http://www.tcfomaha.org/subscribeauthorizations.html>

Please send
email

us address and
changes.





The Omaha Chapter is offering \$250 reimbursement for **first time** conference attendees. Inquire early to reserve yours. (Limited number available.)

Attending a Compassionate Friends Conference is a deeply rewarding and healing experience. The sense of community and love is overwhelming.

Hundreds of people want to hear about your child and care about your real feelings. Plan to attend, and share the power of compassion with another grieving parent.

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/event/40th-tcf-national-conference/>

Registration, travel, hotel and meals are the responsibility of the applicant.

Chapter member

Requirement 1:

Attend at least 4 support group meetings of TCF Omaha 2016-2017

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Conference Workshops and dates attended:

Requirement 2:

Attend at least 2 conference workshops per day, the candle lighting banquet, and the opening and closing ceremonies.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Share your experience

Requirement 3: Write a short story or article about how the conference helped you, and be willing to pay it forward in some small way.

When all three requirements have been met, return application and a copy of your conference badge to:
TCF Omaha, PO Box 540852, Omaha NE 68154



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Why You Didn't

Fail as a Mother

I have to tell you this. You didn't fail.

Not even a little. You are not a horrible mother. You didn't choose this. You didn't want this to happen. You didn't do anything wrong. It just happened... To you. Despite your begging, pleading, praying, hoping against all hope that it would not. Even though everything within you was screaming, no no no no no no no no no no!!!!

God didn't do this to you to punish you, smite you, or to "teach you a lesson". That is not God's way. You could not have prevented this if you: tried harder, prayed harder, or if you were a "better" person. Nor if you ate better, loved harder, yoga'd more, did x, y, z to the nth degree or any other way your mind tries to fill-in-the-blank. You could not have prevented this even if you could have predicted the future like no one can.

Even if you did nothing more, you are already the best mom there is because you would have done absolutely anything to keep your child alive. To breathe your last breath to save theirs. To choose the pain all over again just to spend one more minute with them. That, is the ultimate kind of love. You are the ultimate kind of mother. So wash your hands of any naysayers, betrayers, or anyone who sprinted in the other direction when you needed them the most. Wash your hands of the people who may have falsely judged you, ostracized you, or stigmatized you because of what happened to you. Wash your hands of anyone who has made you feel less than by questioning everything you did or didn't do. Those whose words or looks have implied that this was somehow your fault.

This was not your fault. This will never be your fault, no matter how many different ways someone tries to tell you it is. And especially if that someone happens to be you.

Sometimes it's not what others are saying that keeps us shackled in shame. Sometimes we adopt others' misguided opinions and assumptions about our situation as our own. Sometimes it's our own inner voice that shoves us into the darkest corner of despair, like an abuser, telling us over and over and over again that we failed as mothers. That if only this and what if that, it would never have happened. That you woulda, shoulda done this or that so your child would not have died.

That is a lie of the sickest kind. Do not believe it, not even for a second. Do not let it sink into your bones. Do not let it smother that beautiful, beautiful light of

yours.

Instead, breathe in this truth with every part of yourself: You are the best damn mother in the entire world. The kind of mother who people write books about. The kind who inspires the world. No one else could do what you do. No one else could ever be your child's mother as well as you can, as well as you are. No one else could let your child's love and light shine through them the way you do. No one else could mother their dead child as well as you do. No one else could carry this unrelenting burden as courageously. It is the heaviest, most torturous burden there is.

You have within you a sacred strength. You are the mother of all mothers. There is no one, no one, no one that could ever, ever replace you. No one. You were chosen to be their mother. Yes— chosen. And no one could parent them better in life or in death than you do. So breathe mama, keep breathing. Believe mama, keep believing. Fight mama, keep fighting, for this truth to uproot the lies in your heart— you didn't fail. You are not a failure. Not even a little.

For whatever it's worth, I see you. I hear your guttural sobs. I feel your ache deep inside my bones. And it doesn't make me uncomfortable to put my fingers as a makeshift Band-aid over the gaping hole in your heart until the scabs come, when and if they do.

It takes invincible strength to mother a child you can no longer hold, see, touch or hear. You are a superhero mama. I see you fall down and get up, fall down and get up, over and over again. I notice the grit and guts it takes to pry yourself out of bed every single day and force your bloodied feet to stand up and keep walking. I see you walking this path of life you've been given where every breath and step apart from your child is a physical, emotional and spiritual battleground— a fight for your own survival— a fight to quiet the insidious lies.

But the truth is— you haven't failed at all. In fact, it's quite the opposite. You are the mother of all mothers. Truly the most inspiring, courageous, loving mother there is— a warrior mama through and through. For even in death you lovingly mother your precious child still.

~excerpt from Still Standing Magazine, <http://stillstandingmag.com/2013/06/why-you-didn-t-fail-as-a-mother/>

Grieving Heart

There are three major points for you to keep in mind as you go through your "work of mourning" :

You will have your own unique way of

expressing and experiencing grief. As long as it is changing, and moving, and "fluid", it is normal grieving.

You are in for the roller coaster ride of your life. It is the nature of the beast. Grief is not orderly and predictable. It will wax and wane. You may reach a period of relative calm, and a break from the tears. "What a relief" you'll think, "Maybe I'm finally reaching the stage of acceptance". And then, WHAMO! Brought to your knees again by intense grief. And you'll wonder if you are making any progress at all. You are. The passage of time assures this. It really will come to an end. In its' own time. You will come back to life with loving remembrance in your heart, ready to embrace life again without your beloved at your side. You will gradually feel stronger and more in charge of your life. It really does end.

Am I going crazy? No, you're not going crazy. And you are also not alone in feeling like you are "losing it". When you think about the overwhelming loss you've experienced, it is indeed a miracle that you don't lose your sanity! But there's a safety net built into the wondrous grief cycle that somehow keeps you safe in the storm. You will survive this, sanity intact, and eventually go on to reclaim your life and some degree of joy, despite your loss.

There are many ways in which grief can touch you-- physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It's an all-encompassing thing, you know? You need to understand that there are a wide range of "grief symptoms", and you may wonder what is "normal" and what is not. Rest assured that almost ANY symptom you might have, although it would be considered alarming otherwise, is perfectly normal during grieving. --www.recover-from-grief.com

Better Than

We've Ever Been

"There's been a lot of things said about me, since that awful day. I'm not the person that I used to be, and that I will never be the same. That's true—no doubt; But I know more what life is about..."

The above is the first verse from a song called Better Than I've Ever Been by Cindy Bullens from her CD, Somewhere Between Heaven and Earth. I had the great pleasure of meeting Cindy at the TCF National Conference in Arlington, VA. She sang at the Friday evening banquet and held a fantastic workshop on music in grief, which I attended. Her daughter Jessie died on March 23, 1996, shortly after her 11th birthday. Cindy is a singer/songwriter and, outside of her family,

music had been her life. When Jessie died of Hodgkin's only months after her diagnosis, Cindy swore that she would never write another song. But approximately four months after Jessie's death, she picked up her guitar and began "aimlessly strumming cords just to hear the comforting sound of the instrument." Somehow without any thought on her part, a song emerged which became the title of her CD. She said that she was "at once horrified and energized"; on the one hand, she was energized by the making of music, which was so much a part of her, but horrified at the same time that she had just written a song about her child's death. She soon realized that her only inspiration would be her "absolute love for Jessie and the absolute agony of life without her."

I think we can relate to that in different ways. In the early days, months and even years of our grief, we can't begin to imagine that we could ever do anything meaningful again. We had lost our greatest gift. We had invested so much love in this person to whom we gave life and who, for some incomprehensible reason, is now gone. Life, for us, had lost its purpose; what was the point? As Cindy sings in the song, "I've Got to Believe in Something"—"Everything I planned didn't work out like I thought it would." So many hopes and plans for the future, our dreams for our children shattered. We visualized a world for them with the thought that some day we would see and be part of the milestones of their lives; watch them go off to school and maybe college, fall in love, perhaps marry and have children, our grandchildren. We never envisioned a world that did not include these things.

How do we reinvest our lives, rethink a future very different from the one we had hoped? This is not something that happens quickly. It is a long journey with many peaks and valleys—that roller coaster ride of emotions that we so often talk about. Sometimes we wonder if we are making any progress at all. Others may see it, but we feel we are only moving forward at a snail's pace, if at all. My friends helped by accentuating the positive steps that I had made, ones that I could not recognize. As the saying goes, we can't see the forest from the trees; in our case, because we are so consumed by our own sadness it is hard not to be blinded by it. They pointed out how I was making progress by getting through an entire day without crying; when my first thought in the morning was not that Nina was dead; when I could go down the macaroni and cheese aisle at the grocery store without having to flee, and many more. All may seem insignificant to those who have not "been there", but to us who have, are very significant indeed. Every

one step forward, two steps back, we are still gaining, even if just a little.

After the reality hits that we cannot control what happened, we can then decide what we are going to do with this new life we have been handed. We aren't the people that we used to be, nor will we ever be the same. We are changed in ways we would have never imagined. We have learned where our priorities should be. We sweat the small stuff less, put less importance on materialistic things, and value each other's uniqueness. We prize our family and close friends. We are more compassionate and less impatient. We know how precious and, too often, how fleeting life is. As one of the members of our group said, "I had to decide whether I was going to be bitter or better, and I chose better." What better way to honor our children than to be a better friend, a better family member, a better citizen; to reach out our hand or give a shoulder to cry on to a newly bereaved parent, in a way that only we as bereaved parents can do. I truly believe that these things make our children very proud of us.

The last verse says: "There's a curious feeling rising up from the dark, some kind of strength I've never had. But I'd trade it in a second to have you back, I've got to make some good out of the bad." Yes, we'd trade it in a second to have them back...doesn't that just say it all?

"I laugh louder, cry harder, take less time to make up my mind, and I love deeper, go slower, I know what I want and what I don't. Maybe I'll be better than I've ever been...better than I've ever been." (refrain from "Better Than I've Ever Been")

Though not the life we had hoped, wished and dreamed of, at some point each of us will know that with the help of other Compassionate Friends, the love of family and our children, (and lots of patience with ourselves) perhaps we too will choose to be better than we've ever been.

With gentle thoughts, Cathy Seehuetter ~ TCF, St. Paul, MN

No Applause For Raymond

by Ronald Plotkin, father of Raymond TCF Inner Loop Chapter, Houston, TX

When our children are born, we look forward to celebrating all the milestones in their

lives. Unfortunately, when our children die before us, we miss out on these celebrations and, instead, fear facing the day that would have been a happy

occasion. One of these milestones for Raymond and our family would have been his

college graduation, but I decided that I did not want to miss it.

In March, I contacted the Engineering Department at the University of New Mexico to see if there was a possibility of mentioning Raymond at the commencement. I heard back from the Associate Dean, Charles Fledderman, that he would be able to make it happen and would call me in a few days. Dean Fledderman called me and wanted to make sure that our expectations were not too high for what they would be doing. We agreed but never knew what or how they would talk about Raymond. We only knew it would last a couple of minutes or less.

I was extremely happy and was looking forward to attending the graduation. Many family and friends kept asking me if I was sure that I should attend. I told all of them yes, that this was something that I had to do for me.

May 10th came and I was on a plane headed to Albuquerque. I remembered the last time I flew there was to see Raymond in the hospital. That afternoon, I went to the Albuquerque convention center for the graduation. I was happy, but a little concerned as to how I would handle the ceremony. Seeing all the students in their gowns and proudly wearing their mortars with all their happy family and friends celebrating made me wonder if I had made the right decision.

Here I was at a graduation ceremony, yet I did not know a single graduate. The ceremony started and Dean Fledderman was the Master of Ceremonies. I wondered how they were going to mention Raymond.

He introduced 3 "Golden Grads." These were alumni who graduated 50 years earlier. Everyone applauded. Then three alumni from the 70's who graduated at the end of the fall term were introduced. In the 70's there was no fall commencement, so these people did not have the chance to "walk." Again, everyone applauded. Then the Dean said, "Finally, I would like to mention someone who didn't make it to graduation. Four years ago, Raymond Plotkin was a first-year engineering student who sadly died during the H1N1 flu epidemic during his first semester at UNM; he would have graduated with this group of students today. His parents have endowed an engineering scholarship in Raymond's name, and every fall they sponsor the "Take One for Raymond" program, which urges UNM students to get a flu shot. Raymond's father is here today to honor the memory of his son." I don't remember any applause. All I remember is silence. I was very proud and happy that I attended "Raymond's graduation."



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P.O. Box 540852 Omaha NE 68154-0852

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Help us make our newsletter more personal with content from our own members. Please send poems, articles, or book reviews for the May-June newsletter by June 1 to Newsletter@tcfomaha.org.

Join our chapter e-mail list to receive timely notices, writings, articles.

This is an important communication tool throughout the month for our members.

Update or unsubscribe: www.tcfomaha.org/contactus

We are looking for some regular writers and a newsletter editor for 2017 (3 remaining issues).

If you can regularly attend support group meetings, ask how you can help!

Omaha Gives! is a one-day community-wide event to show the area's spirit of giving, raise awareness about local nonprofits, and celebrate the collective effort it takes to make this city great.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

- Give to your favorite nonprofit – the minimum donation is only \$10.
- Schedule a donation starting May 1st or donate during the event on May 24.
- www.omahagives24.org.....search GRIEF.



OMAHA GIVES!

powered by the Omaha Community Foundation