

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



NORTHEAST BALTIMORE CHAPTER
WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE
VOLUME IX #4 FALL 2004

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www.baltimoretcf.com

GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

Holidays are especially hard times for bereaved parents. We all looked forward to sharing these occasions with our children and it wasn't supposed to be this way.

The anticipation of the sadness of the actual day is almost always worse than the day itself. Here are some suggestions:

- Rethink holiday traditions. There is no rule that says the holidays need to be treated the same way every year.
- Give the extended family plenty of warning so they don't impose their schedule and expectations about you and their holiday plans.
- Tell others what you need. If you want them to mention your deceased child at any gatherings, tell them. People simply assume that mentioning our children will "remind" us and make us sad. (As though we need to be reminded about something we can't possibly forget.)
- If there are other children in the family, they may need to talk about the holidays too. Ask them what they are looking forward to, what they are not looking forward to about the holidays.
- New surroundings may help. Our first year after Jasmine died a large contingent of our family went to Colonial Williamsburg for the week. I knew this would tie Williamsburg to memories of a sad Christmas, but I didn't mind. Another year, just the 4 of us spent a cold Christmas day in the Okefenokee Swamp—another place that was good to be just one time.
- Light a candle to remember your child. Remember the Worldwide Candle Lighting to Remember our Children on December 12.
- If you want to fill a stocking for your child, go ahead. We did this one year and then sent all of the toys to a charity that promised to donate them to poor children in Egypt.
- Other ideas: One mother buys a Poinsetta to remember her child, many donate to a charity in their child's name, others buy a living tree and plant it or decorate memorial trees to place in their child's room at the graveside.
- Remember that for Mary and Joseph, Christmas was the birthday of a child they would only get to spend a few short years with. I wonder if they spent Christmas lighting candles and remembering the pain of losing their son.

If you have something you would like to appear in the Newsletter, send it to me by the 1st of the month.

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VOLUNTEER

to help keep the group going call Michelle Backe 410-486-8716 or Michelle Pooner 410-526-5956

WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING

Sunday, December 12, 2004 at 7 pm. Light a candle. Others will to all around the world. Held annually on 2nd Sunday in Dec. at 7 p.m. local time for one hour in each time zone around the globe—a 24-hour remembrance of all children who have died.

OUR CHILDREN REMEMBERED

Anniversaries and Birthdays are difficult times for bereaved parents, but... As long as we live, they too shall live for they are part of us in our memories. In the days ahead, we lovingly remember these children, and we send our love and support to their parents.

Joshua Matthew Belanger 9/30/90-4/9/98
Parents: MaryAnn Weatherholtz & George Belanger

Jasmine Bishai 2/23/94-9/17/96
Parents: Annie & David

Joseph Allan Caskey, Jr 12/16/86-10/12/87
Mother: Joan

Owen Charles Gehr-Edwards 10/14/1998
Parents: Fred & Kate

Matthew Norris Gemmill 9/17/73-
Mother: Barbara

Aaron Christopher Grogan 6/29/96-9/22/96
Parents: Patrick & Michelle

Halley Alexandra Lambert 7/27/92-2/10/93
Mother: Christina Woodard

Barry L Marchio, Jr 7/4/72-9/28/96
Parents: Barbara & Barry Sr

Rachel Lynn Orr 7/11/80-12/03/95
Mother: Penny

Bob Palese 4/1/56-9/4/97
Parents: Bob & Aline Sister: Sherry

Brearah Karli Stevens 7/3/99-10/11/99
Mother: Heather Ramsey

Ariel Dominique Swanson 11/28/90-7/17/95
Parents- Maureen Henry & Maurice Swanson

James "JC" Taylor III 10/17/95-1/25/96
Parents: Kimberly & James

Andrew Joseph Wohlfort 10/13/1996
Parents: Ricky & Christina

MEETING SCHEDULE

Northeast Baltimore Chapter Meetings

First Wednesday 7:30 pm
Dec 1, 2004 Regular Meeting
Jan 5, 2005 Regular Meeting

Annual Candlelight Service

Dec 6, 2004 Monday 7pm
RSVP Angela Sriram 410-889-7251 to include your child in the reading

Brown Memorial Church, 6200 N Charles Street Towson

Directions: Beltway to Exit #25 Charles Street; South on Charles St approximately 2 miles to church on the right, directly across from 7-11 For information on other area chapter meetings please call 410-560-3358 or visit The Compassionate Friends online.

A Walk With Sorrow

I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And not a word said she,
But, oh, the things I learned
When Sorrow walked with me.
—Robert B. Hamilton

Nothing Gold Can Stay
Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf,
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day
Nothing gold can stay.
—Robert Frost



Photo by Ellen Lu

SOMETHING I COULDN'T TELL YOU

Something I couldn't tell you about happened at least a decade ago. It was October—a brilliant day of sunshine and quick changes. Clouds raced across the sky, and the sun went blank, then reappeared—such light as one sees when leaves have quickly left the trees and all is bare.

I could tell you about the garden—just how barren it lay except for the cherry tomatoes, which happened to cling to the dry vines whose crinkled leaves smelled of declining life that cool October day when a child, trailing a scrap of blanket went outside to eat tomatoes.

The changes made that day are with us still: they change us even now. I couldn't tell you how bare that day has made me. Such a blankness should come to all who think they know what happens next, and next, and after October comes November. Unplanned events can leave us detached, cut off, untried, like leaves blown here and there. I won't tell of changes. I'll only say what happened in October when stopping work, a cold I couldn't bear came over me. Running out, I happened to see my face reflected. It was blank, pale, afraid, soon to gain a new blankness. I ran to the pond, dyed dark with leaves, dyed red with the shirt of him who happened to be floating there. If only I could change that day, the hour, the harvest I would dripping wet and cold from the water, that old October.

I was a mother for three years and four days in October. On the fifth day, I rested blankly from mothering. I cannot bear to tell you any more. New leaves have greened and grown. New changes, children since then, have happened. Since that October, countless other leaves have blanketed the pond, changed it from October's reds and browns. I've barely noticed.

Susan Pitner TCF-CINCINNATI, OHIO

ADJUSTED

"It's been several years since your son died,"
They say, "Surely, you must have adjusted by now."
Yes, I am adjusted—
Adjusted to feeling pain
And sadness and grief
And guilt and loss.
Adjusted to hurting and unexpected tears.
Adjusted to seeing people made uncomfortable upon
hearing me say "My son died."
Adjusted to losing my best friend because
I'm not always "up."
Adjusted to people acting as if grief is contagious
And TCF meetings are "morbid."
Adjusted? Oh, yes, to many things.
Knowing I won't hear his voice, but listening for it still.
Knowing I won't see him drive his Toronado,
But staring at every one I see.
Adjusted to feeling empty on his birthday
And wishing for just one more time with him.
Adjusted: As life goes on—
To realizing I cannot expect everyone I meet
To wear a bandage—just because I am still bleeding...

Shirley Blakely Curle

LITTLE GIRL LOST

Little girl lost, No hand to hold. The swings are quiet, The weather's grown cold. Forever young, ne'er to grow old. Little girl lost, No hand to hold. Flowers that bloomed, Now start to fade. Memories of my little girl, Grow stronger each day. The pain and the thoughts, Will not go away. Consumed by memories,	Night and day. Little girl lost, No longer to play. Days of my life are, Not the same Thoughts of your future, Are no longer here. Only your memory Is always near. Little girl lost, When I grow old I will go with you and Your hand I will hold. From the poem by By Bob West TCF, Hingham, MA
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THE LESSON OF A CHILD'S SUICIDE

From *The New York Times* Sunday, May 1985, by Barbara C. Crafton

The burial service had just ended. I crossed the carpet of artificial grass that surrounded the plain coffin about to be lowered soundlessly into the ground and shook hands with the parents of the dead young man, looking into their numb eyes and murmuring, "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

Everything was golden: the sunlight, the mound of white, yellow and orange flowers (a florist's expression of masculinity), the beautiful blonde hair of the mother.

The parents, brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins watched as the coffin slid into the hole in the earth that had been prepared for it, watched as all that remained to them of a boy they had loved disappeared into a dark and silent new home.

Finally, we all turned and began the walk back to the waiting limousines, shepherded with solemn correctness by the funeral director in his dark suit.

This was not the first suicide I had consigned to eternity with the authority and blessing of the church. There have been too many, really, for the short time I have been a priest.

It was the beauty of the day, and the beauty and elegance of the grief-stricken-mother and father, that fixed this one in my mind and keeps it there still. It was jarring—to me and to them—that one among this prosperous and generous family had found life to be beyond bearing any longer.

A year of pain was beginning for the mother and father, a year of questions that haunted their dreams at night and wouldn't leave them alone during the day:

How could this have happened?

What caused it?

What did I do to cause it?

There must have been one pivotal moment of failure, my failure. When was it?

What was it that I could have done and didn't, what was it that he needed that I withheld from him?

As the weeks and months went by, special occasions came and went, each with its own special pain.

At Easter, there were images of a little blond boy in short pants searching diligently for colored eggs in the green grass of the backyard.

His birthday.

Halloween (a 10 year-old in a skeleton suit disappearing into the night with his father and a flashlight, and returning laden with chocolate bars and candy corn).

Thanksgiving (the family around the table, but the places rearranged so there would be no empty spot where he should have been, instead of his sitting with his brothers and eating as only a young man can).

The family had been close. It had not been a family that ignored its children. It had been like a charmed circle, a safe camp in a hostile world.

The mother had always felt it was a warm, glowing place, their home. Had she been wrong all those years? Can't I try again? And the answer of time, sternly: "No, you can't have a second try."

As the rate of suicide among young adults in the United States rises amid growing alarm among mental-health professionals, some parents face with brutal suddenness the impossible task of coming to grips with the deaths of their children by their own hands.

There is no drive stronger in parents than the drive to protect their children, no matter what the cost. Most people, faced with the choice between their own lives and those of their children, would not hesitate for a moment in making that choice.

American parents, especially, have found themselves able to protect and enhance the lives of their children far beyond the capabilities of parents in many other parts of the world. We are free from hunger, free from childhood diseases, free from dangerous political unrest.

Parenting in the United States is a competent round of pediatrician visits, good nursery schools, good grammar schools, private lessons, organized sports. We are more able than any other people on earth to give our children the raw materials of a happy life.

But into this orderly progression of possibilities comes the news, sometimes, that a young person with everything to live for—as we tell each other in shocked disbelief—has found himself unable to live any longer. We look at our own moody teen-agers with apprehension.

How do we know that this might not happen to them? And if it did, how on earth could we ever bear the pain of it?

THE LESSON OF A CHILD'S SUICIDE (Continued from Page 4)

The bitter truth, all of our love and good intentions and capability aside, is that there are arenas of our children's lives we cannot control. However much we seek to make our homes a charmed circle, our children must one day step out of them and walk in the world alone.

However hard we try, we will make mistakes. And however few mistakes we make, the world will still be a hard place for them, as it was for us. Hard in different ways, maybe, but hard just the same.

The same rich sense of possibility that we are able to impart to our children—the very notion that the sky's the limit—can be the oppression they cannot shake.

To be young is to be unsure of one's capabilities. To be surrounded by competence and saturated with the message that they can, and should, do great things can be a source of despair at ever measuring up to the hopes and dreams of others for them.

Perhaps the greatest gift we can give our children is the sense that we are delighted with what they are, not that we are anxiously pinning our hopes on what they will be.

Perhaps our quiet empathy in times of failure is more important than our loud cheers at their successes.

Children and young adults need to know that failure is the primary way human beings have of learning, a difficult message to hear in a culture that worships success and its trappings, as ours does. And a more-difficult message to send from a parent who wants the best for her child and has worked hard to provide it to a child who wonders, in his heart of hearts, if he can ever return the best for the best.

Picking up the pieces of her broken life, the mother wondered. She wondered about the last moments of her son's life.

What had he been feeling? He had been all alone in his apartment.

Had he tried to call her? Had she been out? Her heart twisted inside her at the thought of him tormented by a pain she could not soothe, and she wished herself back with him on that day, calling out to him:

"Hang on—try! Call again. Call me, call somebody. Anybody. Don't go. Don't."

But the outcome of this daily fantasy was always the same: alone and probably crying (and at that her heart twisted again), he went.

In her mind, he was frozen forever in that moment of anguish; it was as if his pain in that moment was eternal, as if his spirit still wandered, crying out its silent pain to a world that could not hear.

She joined a group of parents whose children also had taken their own lives. In some of their stories, she saw herself, in some, she did not. But in all of them, she recognized her own pain, and the simple fact of being with people who had known the same unnatural pain was a surprising source of comfort and strength.

As the days went by, she began to feel a change within herself. Although she fought it, the sharp edge of her grief softened a little. The memories that flooded her dreams changed from being pure agony into moments of a sorrow that felt almost holy.

She had been obsessed with the moment of her son's death; now, it seemed, she had regained his life, and she could fish around in her memory and even smile at what she saw there. She could talk to people again without hating them for having what she no longer had and then being ashamed of that hate.

It was as if she had handed her son over to the care of the universe, larger than herself, and there was in her a peace she had thought she could never feel again.

Nothing is as awe-inspiring, for those of us who are privileged to witness it, as the power of the human being to recover from tragedy.

However beautiful this woman was, however capable and competent, nothing she had ever done was as beautiful and powerful as her healing from a wound that she thought would kill her.

She said that the strength she discovered in herself during this healing process was the final gift of her beautiful son.

AND SHE WAS RIGHT.

Peggy died the morning of November 6, 1915.

The joy in the fullness of life went out of it then and has never quite returned. Deep in the hidden realm of my consciousness my little girl has continued to live, and in that strange, mysterious place where reality and imagination meet, she has grown up to womanhood. There she leads an ideal existence untouched by harsh actuality and disillusion.

Men and women from all classes, from nearly every city in America, poured upon me their sympathy.... Women wrote of children dead a quarter of a century for whom they were still secretly mourning, and sent me pictures and locks of hair of their own dead babies. I had never fully realized until then that the loss of a child remains unforgotten to every mother during her lifetime.

—Margaret Sanger

PHONE FRIENDS— If you need someone to talk to, we are here.

Michelle Backe 410-486-8716

Michelle Pooner 410-526-5956

Kate Gehr 410-444-4998

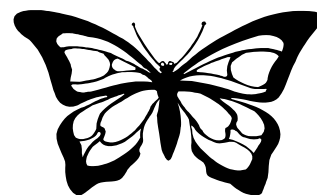
LOVE GIFTS—

a monetary donation to our chapter

*lovingly given by family or friends in honor of a child who has died.
Love gifts help to maintain our newsletter and mailing.*

*Postage donated in loving memory of **Andrew Robert Ritchie**
grandparents—Margery and William*

*Website construction donated in memory of **James Stallings**
by parents—Barbara and Tom Allen*



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