

Summer 2012

Dear Family Members,

Since our Spring Newsletter, it *is* the time for the hot, hazy, and humid days of the Maryland summer! It's been absolutely crazy. In one week we've gone from the daily high of 103 degrees to the high being only 72. What a roller coaster ride it's been so far and it's not even July. What's next? I think I know. I can't help but relate this to our emotional temperature, or should I say the roller coaster ride of our temperament. Our temperament and emotions can rise and fall as quickly as the temperature for a number of reasons. On this journey, we're so aware of other families. It's that time of the year where folks pack up the family vehicle and head out on vacation. Some of the families are complete. Some are incomplete. Those of us with family members never to join us again are caught in a dilemma. We have uncomfortable questions to face when we plan our trip outside of our comfort zone. Where do we go, now? Do we continue our traditional trip? Do we do something entirely different? Are we dishonoring our loved one whatever we decide? Maybe it's a day trip or a long drive to a destination we wished was a lot closer. It took time but I've learned there is no "right" or "wrong" answer to this. It is what it is. We make the best decision we can and we need to give ourselves a break. If our choice doesn't work this time, we'll try something different the next. I've found mixing new experiences with old traditions to be what works best for me. Finding my balance didn't happen overnight but I've learned to be patient with myself. When it's right, it's right. I've shared before that my daughter, Ashley, and I spent a lot of time in Ocean City. I've been spending more time there lately with friends. I still do some of the "old traditions," sharing the memories with my friends. I'm also open to **building** on the old ones to create new ones. I may never give up all of the old traditions. This is my journey and, **"It is what it is."**

There's another side of other families going away we deal with. It may be selfish, but we're watching our support team leave us. Those folks who were there for us with a quick phone call or available over a cup of coffee are leaving with their family....their **intact** family. We're now faced with **another** dilemma. Do we make that phone call for support or not? With technology being what it is, most everyone has a cell phone and can be contacted even when they want to be left alone. We don't want to bother our friends while they're away with their families. After all, they're our friends and we don't want to bring their family time down. What should we do? When we lost our loved one some of us found our circle of friends and family shrinking. Calls may have stopped. Those who would normally speak to us in social situations have suddenly forgotten they know us. Because we feel isolated, we can isolate ourselves even more. That's when we need to have some really compassionate friends and **The Compassionate Friends**. I was very fortunate and had both. I'm sure there were a few people who "forgot" me. I really don't remember them so I guess they didn't truly matter in the first place. I received a phone call Father's Day Sunday and Monday. It was friends I used to work with before leaving Verizon in 2003. That was nearly nine years ago, two years after Ashley's death. Our loved ones still matter to us and to others. They always will. If you find your circle of compassionate friends shrinking, share your thoughts in the newsletter, join us at the meetings to build friendships and share your **Compassionate Friends**.

We're getting close to The United Way of Central Maryland campaigns. While our agency number is 719 we are **not** on the list this year for the union members with the Federal, State, Baltimore City, and the surrounding county governments. United Way has changed their procedures. Applications must be submitted each year for each government organization. We're working on being included next year. We **should** be on the list for private employers. Remember we exist solely through the donations of our family members, businesses, and other organizations. I encourage you to approach your employer or organization to see if they have a program in place to support 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. If so, please nominate us. If not, try starting one. All gifts are truly appreciated.

Garrett Tollenger
Chapter Leader



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Greater Baltimore Chapter
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Newsletter

Summer 2012

Dear Compassionate Friends:

The dog days of summer are here and often bring with them new challenges. Recently, I went on vacation with my extended family. While there was certainly a lot of fun and laughter, there were many moments when I could not help but think about who was missing---my grandson. I pictured him with my nieces and my youngest daughter (each are two years apart). I pictured my daughter, also missing as she has never recovered from losing him, enjoying the beach with him. I wished for the life I was now never going to have even though I know that can be a dangerous line of thought because the only direction life moves is forward. Summer seems to be filled with cookouts, down time, family picnics, and reunions. It also can be a time when I feel a little forgotten or simply don't want to be the "downer" at someone else's party.

Thank goodness Compassionate Friends is here to give us a place to share our feelings with a group of people who understand---really understand.

Please remember this is your newsletter. It is an opportunity for additional support outside the meetings, maintain a connection with members who cannot always get to meeting, and provide outreach to those who may not be ready to attend a meeting. We welcome your:

- Poetry (original or poems you've read)
- Book reviews (what books have helped)
- Fundraising/events (in memory of your child or in support of national organizations)

All input can be sent via email to:
newsletter@BaltimoreTCF.com

The deadline for the next newsletter is July 31.

Thank you, Maura

Monthly Meeting Information-NOTE CHANGE FOR JULY

Baltimore County-The First Wednesday
Brown Woodbrook Memorial Presbyterian Church
6200 N. Charles St. Baltimore
7:30-9:30PM—**JULY MEETING-JULY 11 at
7:30**

Harford County-The Third Wednesday
Mountain Christian Church
New Life Center Room 124-126
1802 Mountain Rd. Joppa
7:00-9:00 PM

TCF Chapter Contact Information

Chapter Leader: Garrett Tollenger,
410-879-5422, info@baltimoretcf.com
Newsletter editor: Maura Taylor,
newsletter@baltimoretcf.com

The Sibling Corner

Our Towson chapter meeting hosts a sibling group, which coincides with our regular meeting time. There are so many special issues that occur when you lose a brother or sister. This group will offer a safe place for you to share your challenges, concerns and successes when walking this path. Siblings age 16 and over are welcome and encouraged to attend. This will be facilitated by siblings for siblings.

To Our New Members:

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. We do understand.

To Our Seasoned Members:

We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick.

Upcoming Meeting Topics

What would you like to talk about? We'd love to hear your topic suggestions. Please email chapter leader, Garrett Tollenger, with your suggestions at info@BaltimoreTCF.com.

Remembrances

June Birthdays

Brittany Leigh Ey
Ashlie Lynn French
Daniel Carl Torsch
Meghan Ann Murphy
Tyler Hamrick
Christopher William Diehl
David Michael Kappes
Rachael Marie Wade
James R. Cullum
Anna Marie Stickel
Kelsey Elaine Brown
Daniel James Russell, Jr.
Chip Carroll Wyrde
Rowan Grace Maisey-Brownfield
Larry Schultz, III
Paul J. Schmitt
Heather Anderson
Christopher Black
DJ Knight
Jacob Edward Ramos-Grey
Matthew Sam Young
James Walter Babcock

June Heaven Days

Jennifer Nicole Schissler
Zakary Aaron Osiris DeGross
Tyler Hamrick
Wayne Granger
John Christopher Adams
James R. Cullum
Michael Orien Colotti
Christina Lee Boles-Fitch
Daniel James Russell, Jr.
Nelson Yargar, III
Emily Ann Higgins
Benjamin Thomas Huxtable
Steven Gregory Radford
Kayla Anna Boone
Stephen John Schultz, III
James Theodore Smith
Stephen J. Schultz
Aubrey Christina Wiseman
Daniel Vincent Staib
Jamshid Ghannad
Joshua Matthew Eisner

July Birthdays

Travis Anthony Jenkins
Chase Smith

Corinne Palo Ferguson
Brearah Karli Stevens
Wayne Granger
Amanda Kay Arnold
Amelia Gresham
Sunshine Marie Royston
Phillip Holmes
Joe Harlee
Hope Lorden
Marcel Mitchell
Stephen John Schultz, III
Wyatt Duff
Aiden Joseph Johns
Stephen J. Schultz
Jonah Alexander Respass
Jesse Hollen Elkins
Rachel Lynn Orr
Trenton B. Reightler
Chamara Ashby

July Heaven Days

Marcie Elizabeth Warch
Ashlyn Marie Sutherland
Kallie Lynn Esquer
Julie Ann Webster
Jason Robert Kuzniarski
Joseph Miranda
Amelia Gresham
Michael Cipres
Stephanie Sanzone
Andrew Alton Dowley
Hope Lorden
David L. Murphy
Amelia Panuska
Brooklynn Wilhite
Ali Muhammed
Wyatt Duff
Keteylan Garner
Jose Luis Perez, II
DJ Knight
Aiden Joseph Johns
Jacob Edward Ramos-Grey
Barbara Anne Basener
Tiffani Rose Wiberg
Jason Verfaillie
Robert Lee Johnson

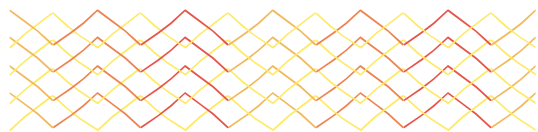
August Birthdays

Zakary Aaron Osiris DeGross
Emily Elizabeth Blische
Anna Tresseder Bettenhausen

*Alex Elste
Julio Speedy Gonzalez, II
Robin Tonette Thomas
Michael Leo Swift, III
Rebecca Hild Caudell
Jason Robert Kuzniarski
Vicki Gail Sears-Hube
Emily Ann Higgins
Elisa Guibas
Kareem Kelly Guest
Brandon Zoch
Michael-John Ludwig Heick
Jessica Stallings*

August Heaven Days

*Eric Nolan Ramey
Brendan James Truffer
Anna Tresseder Bettenhausen
Alex Elste
Carl Edward Palo
Sarah Alexandria Hinton
Lillian Naomi Johnson
Rachael Marie Wade
Lawrence Dunmore, IV
Nickolas Benjamin Phippen
Jordon Proulx
Shannon Lynne Van Gilder
Heather Anderson
Jeffrey Alston
Michael-John Ludwig Heick
Karlee Marie Andrews
Wanda Louise Lulu Huester
Ashley Paige Tollenger
Marc Rory Goldberg
Carmen Odessa Dixon
Jessica Stallings*



*It's good to leave each day behind
Like flowing water, free of sadness,
Yesterday is gone and its tale told,
Today new seeds are growing.*

~ Rumi

JASON'S UNVEILING: MY REMEMBRANCE

By Baltimore TCF member, Shirley

Sunday November 13, 2011 is a beautiful day
A mixture of sun and clouds
With gentle breezes of warmth and chill

Today is Jason's Unveiling
My dear son gone away so soon
To a permanent safe place in the universe

A green plot near my mom and dad
In a cemetery a century old
His resting place is one of peace
Quiet and meditative in scope

Nancy Ginsberg, our Cantor
Joyful in spirit, beauty in song
Praising God for our existence
Singing ancient Hebrew chants
That cleanses the air with each breath

My family saddened by memories of
Our unfulfilled helplessness, undoing
Memories of forgotten joys
Of smiles on Jason's handsome face
Singing his much loved rock and roll
And pretending to be a favorite star

To my dear daughter Esther,
Know that our Jason is loving us from afar
Much as he did in life
Forgiving us not understanding his pain
Nor recognizing his shame to do better

I will love you Jason thru eternity
Time without end
And hold you forever
In my heart

We love you Jason
And know you are at peace
Gliding swiftly thru the sky
Watching us forever.

**On a personal note from Linda Staib member
of the TCF Harford County Group.....**

June 20th marked six years since the death of my son,
Daniel Vincent Staib at the age of 23.

The coroner reported that in his system was a muscle
relaxer and methadone. It was a small amount of
prescription pills, but the combination made it a lethal
dose. He came home, went to bed and never woke up.
For all of us, the shock, the horror, the disbelief and
especially, the heartbreak... continues.

Dan had everything going for him. He was loving,
good looking, smart, artistic, creative, strong, social,
and fun! He liked to draw, cook, and entertain. He
wanted to be a graphic designer. He was a wonderful
son, brother, grandson, uncle, nephew, friend. And yet,
he used drugs!! WHY???

All of us who loved Dan are still asking the why
question. Why did Dan make the choice to use drugs?
For us there is no real answer. Many of you who are
reading this article are struggling with drug use in your
family. For those involved, it can be a difficult path,
many times just too hard and too overwhelming. I think
of you all and hold your children in my heart. I wish
them all a safe and lasting journey through their
process of recovery. If you would like to know more
about my son, Dan, please visit his memorial website.
www.DanielStaib.com

The site was set up by his older brother, "Duffy" in
memory of Dan. When you enter the site you can scroll
down and view the slide presentations, read the articles
and my eulogy for my son.. I invite you then to go to
the Guest Book and leave a comment. Knowing that
you have visited the site is a comfort to us and makes
you part of the remembrance of Daniel.

A poem for my son,
DANIEL VINCENT STAIB
(May 15, 1983 to June 20, 2006)



Missing Dan for 6 years now and forever!

Six years now since you've been gone
Caused by a bad decision...
A pill called methadone.
For all of us,
Our lives turned to grief...
How we came to hate...
That drug.... that thief!!

Drugs robbed us of a beautiful son,
One precious boy, his life undone.
Our world now dimmed without our "sun!"
We grieve for you, our so loved son..
Our middle born, but second to none!

For 23 years, you enriched our lives.
Your love, your hugs, your spirit still abides.
You were so fun, you made us laugh,
The joys you brought remain in depth.

With your life we were so gifted,
And the memories of you keep our spirit lifted!!
Imperfect life times, sometimes made us cry,
But never, ever, did you, or us
Think you could die.

With no thought of dying that night in your room all alone...
You suffered the consequences of that killer methadone!
With loved ones so close, but not aware..
Your breathing so shallow, you slept into death,
Leaving us all in unending despair.

Oh, Dan, with so much to live for and a future so bright,
All of it lost because of a drug that last night.
Methadone, forever, took you away....
And left us in mourning these forever days.

And though we know in spirit that you
Touch us from the other side,
And in our hearts forever,
Your love will abide....

You should be here to breathe, and live
To talk, to hug and love, to grow
To enrich our lives and make us smile,
But without you here, our tears just flow.

In missing you, Dan, we grieve
For all the days, you'll never see,
For the husband, and father you can never be
If only drugs had set you free,
To live, to love.....and with us to be!!!

Love you forever, Dan!
Missing you always and all ways!
MOM
(by: Linda Ann Staib..June 20, 2012)
LASgold@aol.com
www.DanielStaib.com

July 4th—"Freedom" for Bereaved Parents?

July 4th . . . Independence Day . . .

A day most Americans celebrate their freedom. For bereaved parents, unfortunately, freedom of the body is far different than freedom of the mind. Before our children died we knew we had the freedom to...

- watch them take their first step.
- listen for their first word.
- watch them step onto the school bus for the first time.
- watch them go on their first date.
- watch them graduate.
- watch them walk down the aisle to be married.
- see our grandchildren be born.

For bereaved parents these freedoms are gone forever.

Why did we have to lose these freedoms? Sometimes we lose these freedoms because the world has the wrong priorities. Sometimes we lose them because people abuse their freedoms.

What freedoms must be changed?
...the freedom of cancer to strike our children
...the freedom of a drunk driver to be put back on the road with a slap on the wrist
...the freedom of AIDS and other diseases to run rampant
...the freedom of criminals students to obtain guns and kill their classmates
...the freedom of drivers to ignore the speed limits with impunity
...**and on and on and on.**

When these freedoms are exercised and we are unable to stop them, the deaths of our children destroy our freedom to pursue happiness in our lives.

Our country, of the people, by the people, and for the people, must wake up to the fact that freedom is a fragile commodity. As bereaved parents, we have become a living testimony to this fact.

Wayne Loder
Lakes Area MI TCF Chapter



Summertime

It sounds so easy. A soft, warm word—time to run barefoot, time to leave windows open all night. Summertime. Somehow it seems, doesn't it, that it's especially meant for children. Children on beaches, children on swings, children in large pools, children in tiny tubs.

We who do not have all of our children with us may feel the summertime in two ways. One is to remember shared events and adventures—there were so many. Long rides in a hot car, a nap in the back seat. The famous question, "Are we there yet?" Everything from a heat rash to ice cream cones and sand castles.

For us, another way to feel summertime is the special emptiness brought about by children who are no longer on this earth. They used to trot along on hikes in the hills; they used to gather wood for an evening fire. Now summer brings us again the melancholy awareness of their absence. Have you ever walked on some unfamiliar path, surprised about not having been there with the children? Even when there's nothing to remember, we are reminded of the children's absence.

We have been diminished by death. Some of us may still have living children. Other parents have no children left. They have lost an only child, perhaps. Or all of their children died. And here we are, grateful for the warmth of summer mornings, aware of the ripe beauty of nature, trying to deal with our children's absence with all the grace of which we are capable. Often we do not want to burden others with our grief. Or we may be convinced that others don't wish to share our distress. We have learned, after all, that the world around us is not always able to understand how we feel.

Besides, we were taught to be brave. Many of us will do everything we can to appear "normal" after our loss. But we were also taught to be honest. And when you feel the hurt, when you seem almost to be lost in the shadows of this golden summertime, don't hide your sorrow. The grief of your spirit can perhaps be kept a secret on the outside. Yet, your deepest feelings, unexpressed, can burn into your existence with harmful force.

You can be both brave and honest. You know that it's brave to share grief, be it old grief or new grief. And revealing that sorrow is also honest. Of course, nothing can wipe away much of your pain, but sharing grief is helpful. You will know that after you have expressed the painful sorrow you once kept hidden, and you find yourself, finally, smiling at the memories and the blessings of past summertimes.

Sascha Wagner

From bereaved parent to national TCF Board member...Barbara Allen shares her journey.

Standing outside the parlor at Brown Memorial Church in Towson, MD, I did not want to go into this meeting of The Compassionate Friends. It was June, 2003 and my son, Jim, had died in March from an overdose of heroin and alcohol. A long twenty two year battle with the disease of addiction and he was gone. I needed hope but mostly I needed to know if others experienced the same agonizing pain I felt at such a horrific loss.

My family doesn't do support - not in the good and certainly not in the bad of life. Books were helping but they talked of support. Searching around there was support if I had lost a parent or spouse; otherwise, not so much. Then TCF was mentioned. Searching online I found the national office and learned of a local group. Why was there no website of information? Leaving a message locally, I ultimately received an ancient photocopied letter with a slip of paper stapled to the top. The meeting time was on the slip but the words on the letter told me I might have found the right place.

And, so, hating it but trusting in the words in that letter, Tom and I crossed the threshold into the world of TCF. We've never left. Finding exactly what both of us needed, in our own ways, we didn't miss a meeting for years. Immediately I began work on the chapter website, learning about all the people behind the scenes that did the candle lighting, newsletter and more. Launching the website in fall of 2003, it was the beginning of giving back.

As the awesome Michelle and Michele needed to step away from facilitating the group, I attended a Chapter Leadership Training Program (CLTP) in New Jersey. My respect for the national organization exploded. Run with a deep abiding clarity of mission, on a tight budget, with safe guards in place to stay focused on bereaved parents, I was impressed. Equally I learned of the many activities and efforts other chapters offered its members.

Balancing life with what I was learning about leadership within a TCF chapter, I had found a home. Tom was equally supportive and took on the chapter finances serving as treasurer for the last six years. Appointed as Regional Coordinator for Maryland and Delaware, I continued to meeting other bereaved parents, learned more about the loss of a child and chapter leadership. In 2007 I was asked to lead a workshop at the national conference on losing a child to addiction. In Oklahoma City, we met hundreds of parents who shared a similar journey. Equally we came to see the enormity of pain across the US.

In 2008 we were asked to join the planning committee for the 2010 conference to be held in Arlington, VA. From there a lot opened up for us. Two years of intense work fund raising, brain storming, begging for donated water and arranging for an army of volunteers came together. In the end, the committee members simply rocked! Tom and I met so many amazing families as attendance soared over 1500, saw countless hours of selfless service and ultimately fielded almost 700 volunteers over five intense days of effort. Exhausted, we also knew that together with so many willing hands, mountains can be moved and hearts healed.

One bright fall day in 2011 I got a call from Polly Moore. Her sweet, Tennessee accent always enhanced my day. She was calling to ask if I would consider running for a seat on the national Board of Directors. The 2010 conference was my highlight and it certainly was enough. Tom was stepping onto a board position with his Rotary club; maybe this was time for both of us to give back in larger ways.

Figuring I had little to lose and a lot to learn, I agreed and submitted the paperwork. In TCF you are not allowed to campaign. You run on your reputation... how others in the organization know you and what you write for the ballot. There are no polls, no debates. Your efforts for the greater good of TCF speak for themselves. Selected as a final candidate, I could only wait. It would be five months before the results were known. Our national TCF process is nothing if not well thought out and deliberate. Rash judgments are not part of the organizational ethic.

And so it is, I have been elected and will be sworn in at the conference in July. I'm brain deep in policies, procedures, programs - insurance, communication, disaster - financial statements and meeting minutes. My head spins as I think of the responsibility of representing parents who have lost children from any cause, from all areas of the US, across any barriers.

When I stepped across the threshold at Brown Memorial Church in June, 2003 I wanted sanity and hope. I got this and so much more. I found a huge community of souls who matter deeply to my husband and myself. TCF has changed our lives, given us a home we didn't know existed. Now I step forward to offer what I can to keep this community and hope moving forward into perpetuity. Sadly there is no end in sight for the need of TCF. The door of hope remains open and I pledge my best to ensure this remains true.

Forever a part of the Greater Baltimore Chapter of TCF, yours in service, Barbara Allen

January, 1994

Dear Compassionate Friends,

I wrote this letter for my co-workers and posted it in the office where everyone would see it because I found that although everybody had been extremely kind and generous during Laurie's last brief illness, some of them didn't seem to know how to deal with me or what to say after she died. The idea for the letter and some of its contents are from a book on grief work by Bob Deits. (Editor's note: the book referred to is *Life After Loss: A Personal Guide Dealing With Death, Divorce, Job Change and Relocation.*)

Marcia Davis, TCF, Contra Costa County, California

*Dear friends and co-workers:
I want to thank all of you for your kindness and support during the last few months. I have experienced a loss that is devastating to me. It will take time, perhaps years, for me to work through the grief I am having because of the loss of my daughter, Laurie. Although Laurie was our oldest child, she was the child of my third pregnancy, so she was very much wanted by the time I gave birth to her. She was also the child who was most like me, both in appearance and personality. Perhaps because of this, I actually feel I have lost a part of myself. I would gladly have given my life in exchange for hers, had I had that option.*

I will cry more than usual for some time. My tears are not a sign of weakness or a lack of hope or faith. They are symbols of the depth of my loss and, I am told, a sign that I am recovering. I find that I become angry without there seeming to be a reason for it. My emotions are all heightened by the stress of grief. Please be forgiving if I seem irrational or unfriendly at times.

I need your understanding and your friendship more than anything else. If you don't know what to say, just touch me or give me a hug to let me know you care. Do not be afraid to mention Laurie's name - she is gone from this life but she will never be gone from my memory or my heart. And please don't hesitate to call me - it is reassuring to hear from supportive friends.

If you, by chance, have had an experience of loss that seems anything like mine, please share it with me. You will not make me feel worse. And if I get emotional or tear up - you are not making me cry - I am crying inside all the time anyway!

This loss is the worst thing that could happen to me. But, I will get through it somehow and I will live again. I will not always feel as I do now - I will laugh again.

Thank you all for caring about me. Your concern is a gift I will always treasure.

Sincerely, Marcia

*In memory of Laurie
TCF, Contra Costa County, CA*

A Stepparent's Story

My wife, Kathleen, knew George, but not well. He had been living on the Mainland when we got together, and they never had much chance to get to know each other.

When George was killed in a motorcycle accident just before he turned 19, his mother and I came together immediately, in trying to cope with our tragic loss. In the still-dark morning hours following his death, we lay together wordlessly in George's bed with our younger son Konti for a few hours of fitful sleep. Upon awakening, we began to make the painful phone calls to friends and relatives. Later that day, still numb, but with the support of friends who had rushed to George's and his mother's home, we began planning his memorial service. Kathleen remained at our own home, alone.

The isolation she (much later) told me she had been feeling at the time is said to be not uncommon for a stepparent when the biological parents are brought together by the death of a child. "It was a terrible time for me, too," she told me. "The sense of isolation was so severe, and I had to be so patient and so tolerant for a very long time."

In the four years since George's death, there have been times she has felt excluded—"shut out," as she puts it—when I'd withdraw in my grief, unable to talk to her. She has also worried about my relationship with Konti. Can I talk to him about George? Am I trying? When she feels the time is right, she lets me know what she is feeling. But patience and tolerance—again—are what have served her, and our relationship, so well.

Something else has happened in the past four years that I was not conscious of at first: She has formed her own relationship with George. Sometimes she plays the music she knows he liked. She cuts and places fresh flowers by his picture. She turns the light illuminating it on and off each day. "Maybe it's because I was an only child," she told me when I asked her about this recently. "When I was little, I had to be creative in making relationships."

The circumstances of stepparents can be vastly different, from the relationship with the child to the relationship with the other biological parent. The national office of The Compassionate Friends has produced a brochure, "The Grief of Stepparents." Please call or drop a note to our local chapter if you would like a copy.

*David Pellegrin, TCF Honolulu, HI
In Memory of my son, George*

Vacations

Vacation time can be painful for bereaved parents. Caught up with normal demands of making a living or keeping a household going, we have less time to think than we do on vacations, especially the "take it easy" kind-at a hideaway, tucked away somewhere.

In the summers following Tricia's death, I found vacations could bring a special kind of pain. We avoided going to places where we had vacationed with her. At one time, I thought Williamsburg might be off my list forever since we had a very happy time together there. I tried it one summer three years later and found that she walked the cobbled streets with me. Now that nine years have passed and the pain has eased, maybe the happy memories we shared in Williamsburg can heighten the pleasure of another visit there.

For the first few years after Tricia's death, we found fast-paced vacations at places we had never been before, to be the best. The stimulation of new experiences in new places with new people refreshed us and sent us home more ready to pick up our grief work. That is not to say when we did something or saw something that Tricia would have enjoyed, we didn't mention her. We did, but it seemed less painful than at home.

One caution: Do allow enough time for sleep; otherwise, an exhausted body can depress you.

We've said it many times: YOU HAVE TO FIND YOUR OWN WAY, YOUR OWN PEACE. Let vacation time be another try at that; but do give yourself a break in choosing the time and locale where that can best be accomplished. Don't be afraid of change-it can help with your re-evaluation of life.

*Elizabeth Estes, TCF Augusta, GA
In Memory of Tricia*

Sunshine's Angels 3rd Annual 5k Run/Walk & 1 mile family fun walk! Sunday, July 15, 2012, at 8:00 a.m.; Amoroso's, 305 Pylesville Road, Pylesville, MD

Sunshine's Angels, Inc. is the creation of Vicki Bull. This non-profit organization was founded, and the first meeting was held, in the early months of 2010.

Vicki Bull is the mother of Sunshine Royston. On September 13, 2008, Sunshine was killed in a limousine accident one week before she was to be married. She left behind three small children, 5 years, 3 years, & 8 months old, a groom, and a grieving family.

Although the grieving process continues, Vicki, from whom Sunshine no doubt obtained her big heart, wants to reach out and help others. The goal is to help children, like her own

grandchildren, who, at a very young age, have experienced trauma or grief.

The Bull family is a loving, close-knit family living in Street, Maryland, and are very involved in the North Harford Community.

To register and for more information go to the Sunshine's Angels web site:

www.sunshineangels.com

WHAT DO I DO WITH MY CHILD'S THINGS?

This is a problem that faces all bereaved parents. We discuss it from time to time at our meetings. Some of us keep the child's room just as it was before the death. We don't want anything touched or moved. Some of us find solace in giving things away to close friends or relatives. Knowing that someone we love is wearing our child's clothes or playing with his or her toys brings us comfort. Some of us find we can deal with only a few items at a time: clothes one month; books another; perhaps toys a few months later.

Some of us find that, as time goes on and we would have gotten rid of the things anyway, it becomes easier. For instance, after a while we realize that if the child were still alive, he/she would have outgrown the clothes. Then it's easier to give them away. Or he would have graduated from college this year and therefore would no longer use the study desk or clock radio. We can give these things away in the normal time sequence.

The important thing is not to let others rush us into doing something before we are ready and not to let ourselves feel guilty about the amount of time it takes us to make decisions. When the time is right and the decision is right for us, we'll know what to do.

*Nancy Mower
TCF Honolulu, HI*

My Sister

I am not sure where to start. My older sister, Lezlie, died on October 1, 1997. It has been a little more than 4 months and I still catch my breath and start to tear up when someone mentions her name. I am a private griever, I guess. When I heard the news that she was in the ER, I fell to my knees and prayed to God. I told Him I was going to put this in His hands and that it was up to Him now - as if it was not earlier. "She did not make it." These are the words that I heard my father say through a cloud of tears and pain. While holding my mother, he explained that she was gone. My immediate reaction was to cry. I really did not know what this would mean. I am slowly finding out just what it does.

What do we do now? I wanted to take immediate action, calling relatives, the minister,

and helping in a time when my parents needed someone to lean on. I was bound and determined to be the strong one for a while. And I was.

As we made funeral arrangements and memorials plans, I, like the rest of them, sat in silence as the tears and pain flowed from my eyes. It hurt. But I was determined to remain strong for my children and for my family who seemed to be crumbling right before my very eyes. A very difficult thing to do for a little girl who thinks her daddy is the strongest person she has ever known.

I dreaded the viewing at the funeral home. I did not want to go to the funeral home and see her like that, not even one last time. My parents insisted it would be a good thing for all of us. As the time approached, I was more and more frustrated at the prospect of falling apart upon seeing her. However, as we entered the funeral home and went into the room where her body lay at rest, something happened. I could not shed a tear. It was as if my brain and body (and soul, for that matter) went on autopilot. I sat quietly on the first row watching my father fall to his knees and sob. My mother could not speak. My baby sister holding on to them both, in tears. I was on the outside looking in on the strangest and yet saddest heartbreaking moment of my life. But that's just it: I was on the outside looking in. I was the strong one, but not by choice. I did not consciously decide to lock out my feelings and, yet, the entire episode was painful. I can't explain my reaction.

I went through the memorial service with minimal tears. I greeted those wishing to personally offer condolences because I know my family was struggling with having to look them in the eyes and share their pain along with their own. But then I saw my friend, Julie. Julie has survived through the same experience I am going through. The key word is survived. As I hugged her, my strength lapsed and I started to cry, sort of uncontrollably. This was good.

Julie told me that "things are never going to get better." I thought to myself, what a terrible thing to say to someone in my circumstance, but she was right. Her honesty now is appreciated. She was right. Things will never get better, we just learn to handle and cope. I am grateful for her kindness and friendship. We belong to a club that I hope no one will ever have to join. We have lost a piece of ourselves and our family will never be the same. This is a permanent state.

I still cry. I am able to get through a conversation using her name without crying – well, at least sometimes. But there are times, I call them "moments of truth", that I am starting to experience. The first occurred on December 1, 1997. I was sitting having lunch with my coworkers. We were not talking about anything related to my loss but all of a sudden, I blurted

out, "Oh, my God, it's been two months since my sister died." I had to get up and run. It's odd I seem to have this need to get up and bolt frequently. I mostly control it and move on to something else, but the urge is still present and strong.

There are songs, music, books, and a little newsletter published by The Compassionate Friends that will bring me to uncontrolled grieving. I sit and hold my children as I totally let go of all the pent-up pain and sadness. It's funny, I have remained strong for them and in my weakest moments they are all I hold on to.

Anyway, these "moments of truth" come frequently. The closest analogy I can think of to explain this whole experience is that I am like a child whose nose is pressed up against the window pane of life when all of a sudden, the window shatters. I am so busy trying to pick up the pieces to protect the others and ensure that no one else gets hurt that I do not realize until much later that my arms and hands are bleeding heavily. I can finally see the devastation and now feel the pain.

*Kim Bernal, In memory of Lezlie Dyane Davis
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Ten Healing Rights for Grieving Children

Author's note: This "bill of rights" for grieving children is intended to empower them to help themselves heal – and to help direct the adults in their lives to be supportive as well.

Someone you love has died. You are probably having many hurtful and scary thoughts and feelings right now. Together those thoughts and feelings are called grief, which is a normal (though really difficult) thing everyone goes through after someone they love has died.

The following ten rights will help you understand your grief and eventually feel better about life again. Use the ideas that make sense to you. Post this list on your refrigerator or on your bedroom door or wall. Re-reading it often will help you stay on track as you move toward healing from your loss. You might also ask the grown-ups in your life to read this list so they will remember to help you in the best way they can.

- 1. I have the right to have my own unique feelings about the death.** I may feel mad, sad, or lonely. I may feel scared or relieved. I may feel numb or sometimes not anything at all. No One will feel exactly like I do.
- 2. I have the right to talk about my grief whenever I feel like talking.** When I need to talk, I will find someone who will listen to me and love me. When I don't want to talk about it, that's okay, too.

3. **I have the right to show my feelings of grief in my own way.** When they are hurting, some kids like to play so they'll feel better for awhile. I can play or laugh, too. I might also get mad and scream. This does not mean I am bad, it just means I have scary feelings that I need help with.
4. **I have the right to need other people to help me with my grief, especially grown-ups who care about me.** Mostly I need them to pay attention to what I am feeling and saying and to love me no matter what.
5. **I have the right to get upset about normal, everyday problems.** I might feel grumpy and have trouble getting along with others sometimes.
6. **I have the right to have "griefbursts."** Griefbursts are sudden, unexpected feelings of sadness that just hit me sometimes – even long after the death. These feelings can be very strong and even scary. When this happens, I might feel afraid to be alone.
7. **I have the right to use my beliefs about my God to help me deal with my feelings of grief.** Praying might make me feel better and somehow closer to the person who died.
8. **I have the right to try to figure out why the person I loved died.** But it's okay if I don't find an answer. "Why" questions about life and death are the hardest questions in the world.
9. **I have the right to think and talk about my memories of the person who died.** Sometimes those memories will be happy, and sometimes they might be sad. Either way, these memories help me keep alive my love for the person who died.
10. **I have the right to move toward and feel my grief and, over time, to heal.** I'll go on to live a happy life, but the life and death of the person who died will always be a part of me. I'll always miss this special person.

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

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From Grief to Purpose, by Barbara Allen

After the death of a child, where do we put our love and devotion? Living with my son's disease of addiction for almost twenty-two years was what anyone might expect. Any potentially deadly disease has its ups and downs. Learning about the disease, about myself and finding ways to keep Jim alive was exhausting, frustrating, exhilarating and ultimately soul crushing when he died.

As with many parents, I hounded myself with guilt, the nagging questions of "what if" and "if only". I replayed those years over and over until I simply ran out of steam and realized I was bored. Soon

enough I saw that freed up from the daily survival issues, larger questions were nagging at me. So began a project I could never have dreamt of while Jim was alive. Researching the history of drugs – legal and illegal, laws both US and international, medical research, social mores from the late 1770's to modern day – I was mesmerized.

Scouring the internet, libraries... I was getting more hopeless for future generations and society. Then one day I came across a report from a European consortium of medical, ethical and legal analyst entitled "After the War on Drugs". Everything changed that day.

I had already begun giving out wristbands: No Shame or Blame – Just Love™ in honor and memory of Jim and my brother, Bill. I was giving presentations to groups including TCF conference workshops. Others needed to know what I was learning. Nothing could save Jim or Bill but maybe we could see that as with other diseases such as leprosy, change needed to occur. Eventually I began writing articles, posting blogs and decided to establish a website where I could post what I was learning. Last year www.shatterthestigma.com was launched. It's now a very busy site and continues to grow.

The biggest issue with addiction today is the need for education and treatment. Fulfilling a promise I made to Jim, we are in the process of establishing James Place, a 501(c)3 non-profit. James Place will offer scholarships to those in need of recovery services. It is now moving through the legal and financial steps required. Today I know exactly how to use the love I hold for my son, daughter, brothers and niece – all who have gone before me. These efforts, teaching yoga and serving on the TCF national board of directors will keep me busy for a long time to come. My heart is filled with a new purpose to honor my personal mission statement: ***To reduce suffering in the world, with grace ease and dignity for all.***

Transcending Loss: Understanding the lifelong impact of grief

Grief is a spiral -- it feels as if you are going around in circles. You keep coming back around to a feeling that you thought you had finished. And yet, there you are back again. However, you are always at a slightly different plane, going higher and going deeper. So remember when you feel like you're back full circle, you are on a different level in the process.



The Compassionate Friends Credo

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope. The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us. Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships. We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.

Siblings Walking Together (formerly The Sibling Credo)

We are the surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends. We are brought together by the deaths of our brothers and sisters. Open your hearts to us, but have patience with us. Sometimes we will need the support of our friends. At other times we need our families to be there. Sometimes we must walk alone, taking our memories with us, continuing to become the individuals we want to be. We cannot be our dead brother or sister; however, a special part of them lives on with us. When our brothers and sisters died, our lives changed. We are living a life very different from what we envisioned, and we feel the responsibility to be strong even when we feel weak. Yet we can go on because we understand better than many others the value of family and the precious gift of life. Our goal is not to be the forgotten mourners that we sometimes are, but to walk together to face our tomorrows as surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends.

"Sponsor the National Office for a Week" Program Available

Would you like to have your child (sibling, grandchild, or another close relative or friend) who has died featured on The Compassionate Friends national website for the thousands of visitors every week to see?

You can by participating in TCF's new "Sponsor the National Office for a Week" program. This is a brand new program and designed to provide the opportunity for those who believe in the mission of the organization to help financially by participating. Sponsorships are \$150 and up to two sponsors are accepted for each week of the year.

When you participate, there are three parts: 1) a smaller picture of your child is placed on the Home Page, which is also viewed on almost every inside page of the website. This is linked to an inside "Sponsor the National Office for a Week" page. 2) A larger picture of the child being honored will be placed on the "Sponsor the National Office for a Week" page. 3) The page also includes a narrative provided by the sponsor that tells about the child being remembered so anyone who visits the page will be able to learn about the life of the child—what made that child special and loved.

All monies received from the program will be used to support TCF national programs which are free to all families who need them. To learn more, visit TCF's national website at www.compassionatefriends.org and click on the "Sponsor(ing) the National Office" picture on the right side of the Home Page. This is a wonderful way to honor the memory of your child on a birthday, death anniversary, or other special time. To sign up for a sponsorship, write Theresa@compassionatefriends.org.

TCF "Online Support Community" Offers Opportunity for Grief Sharing

The Compassionate Friends national website offers "virtual chapters" through an Online Support Community (live chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child. The rooms supply support, encouragement, and friendship. The friendly atmosphere encourages conversation among friends; friends who understand the emotions you're experiencing. There are general bereavement sessions as well as more specific sessions. These include "Pregnancy and Infant Loss," "Bereaved 2 Years and Under," "Bereaved 2 Years and Over," "No Surviving Children," "Survivors of Suicide." There are also sessions for surviving siblings.

The sessions last an hour and have trained moderators present. For more information, visit www.compassionatefriends.org and click "Online Support" in the "Resources" column