



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

of Green Bay

A Bi-Monthly Newsletter by and for Bereaved Parents

Nov/Dec 2009

Our Mission Statement:

The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance, self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved families who have experienced the death of a child. The primary purpose is to assist them in the positive resolution of the grief experience upon the death of a child and to support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health. The secondary purpose is to provide information and education about bereaved families. The object is to help those in their communities to be supportive, including family, friends, employers, co-workers and professionals.

Thankful versus Thankless

Jeanne Davis, Chapter Leader

It's that time of year when many of us bereaved parents start saying out loud what newly bereaved parents have been thinking about for weeks and weeks – "I'm really dreading the holidays."

And why not? Sometimes our grief is so new that we haven't had the necessary time to acknowledge life as it is now, Or the time is there; but, our feelings are mixed. Sometimes there are those of us who have had the necessary time and proper support who are able to observe the holidays in a less painful way. We have kept some of the old traditions that warm our hearts and dropped those that are either too painful or meaningless now. We're different now, doing different things because losing our child forced us into that position to survive in an emotionally healthy way.

The words thankful and thankless usually follow one another in the dictionary – so close in a book yet so far apart in meaning. When you think about it, the differences between the two words are full and less. For those of us who have had more time, our lives still do have a fullness because we have learned to be thankful and appreciate that which we have left - people and memories.

As we approach the holiday seasons, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, New Years, etc., whatever you are feeling is okay, whether you are further along in your grief or newly bereaved. If you haven't reached the transition from thankless to thankful, I hope that this will soon be coming for you, for that will mean that some peace has returned to your life.

I wish you peace during the holidays.



The Green Bay Chapter of The Compassionate Friends

meets the third Thursday of each month at 7 p.m.
at First United Methodist Church, 501 Howe Street, Green Bay.
(Enter the parking lot off Monroe at Doty)

For further information contact:

Jeanne Davis, Chapter Leader, 920-496-0629

Phyllis Calder, Programs, 920-468-4820

Jeanne Davis, Newsletter Editor

Bruce Shafer, Treasurer, 920-469-1661

Sue Van Straten, Remembering our Children

Mickey Schmeisser, Remembering our Children

Dan Davis, Webmaster, 920-496-0629

Rev. Dave Wilkinson, Chaplain, 920-391-0734

E-mail: admin@tcfgreenbay.org

Website: www.tcfgreenbay.org

Monthly Support Group

Thursday, November 19, 2009, 7 p.m.

We will be watching the video "Coping with the Holidays", hosted by Kathleen Braza. There will be sharing afterwards.

Thursday, December 17, 2009 7 p.m.

Tonight, we will be "Asking the Basket". This is your time to get some of those questions that you have answered. Find out how others handle a situation, etc. There will be sharing afterwards.



EIGHT HOLIDAY GIFTS TO GIVE BEREAVED FAMILIES AFTER THE DEATH OF A CHILD

When a child has died, the normally festive holiday season can be one of great sadness and pain for the family that finds itself with an empty chair at the dinner table.

Friends and family so often ask us what they can do to help those mourning the death of a child at the holidays. There are many gifts that cost very little for friends and family to give; but, can be very helpful to the bereaved at this time of the year.

Some of those gifts include:

*The Gift of Remembrance – When you send a card or talk with the family, remember the child by name. While you might think that this would bring pain to the family, there is more pain when it appears that the child has been forgotten.

*The Gift of Understanding – Realize things will be different this holiday season than before the child died. Tasks which were routinely completed in the past may now go undone.

*The Gift of Self – Help the bereaved with some of those routine things that need to be done such as shopping and preparing meals. Bring some holiday goodies.

*The gift of a Memorial Donation – Make a donation in remembrance of the child to a favorite charity that the family may find important in their lives.

*The Gift of Hope – Make them aware of a local self-help bereavement organization whether it be The Compassionate Friends or another group where the members have gone through a similar loss and are ready to help families that are grieving.

*The Gift of Kindness – If there are children in the household, offer to take them shopping for whatever holiday presents they may wish to purchase. The hustle and bustle of the stores with holiday music blaring can be overwhelming to bereaved parents.

*The Gift of Time – Offer to drive the family to a remembrance service, whether it be through a Compassionate Friends chapter, another bereavement group, hospital, funeral home, or church. Your presence will show that you truly care.

*The Gift of Love – Let them know that even though the family feels very alone, there are others who care deeply about them and will truly be there to provide support along the way.

From the website www.PRNewsNow.com

Special Handling Please

I was handed a package the other day
It was wrapped securely to be mailed away.
Attached to the outside as plain as could be
Was a simple note for all to see.

Please rush through the holiday season.
Too painful to open for any reason,
Contained within find one broken heart,
Fragile, broken, falling apart.

Tried to go shopping the other day,
The hype of the season blew me away.

Sat down to write cards,
That was insane.
Couldn't find the list
Or think of my name.
People say, "Come over, be of good cheer"
"Celebrate the Holidays,
Prepare for a New Year."

But, my grief overwhelms me
Like waves in the sea.
Can they cope with my crying, an unsettled me?

I don't have any holiday cheer.

Decorations, traditions, big family meal I can't do this year.
Do you know how I feel?
Guilty and frustrated!
I've let everyone down!
Our holiday celebrations used to be the best in town.

So, just ship me away
Address unknown
When my grief is better
I might fly home. *By Mary Pinkava-TCF Bluegrass Newsletter, Nov 2008*





Steve and Mickey Schmeisser had the opportunity to attend this year's National TCF conference. Steve writes:

Mickey and I attended the 32nd National Conference of The Compassionate Friends in Portland, OR, from August 7th thru August 9th. We were able to renew acquaintances with friends we had made at past conferences.

The opening speaker was Michele Longo Eder. Her son died in a commercial fishing boat accident. He died with three other men when their boat capsized. She talked about her struggle after his death. She spoke of her book "Salt in our Blood-The Memoir of a Fisherman's Wife" and the book that she wrote after her son's death.

Mickey and I did something we had decided on after last year's conference. We skipped all the Friday sessions and rented a car and toured the Pacific Coast along the Pacific Coast highway. It was very relaxing to do that and finally take in some sightseeing that we were not able to do at past conferences. It was our way of spending some quality time with Melissa and Emily at one of these conferences.

We attended the Saturday sessions that included one on how we can make the public and community more aware of our chapter. We found out that many parents who have lost a child or children do not know that we exist. After lunch we attended a workshop by Darcie Sims titled "When is Professional Help Needed?" Her theme was that grief and depression have all the same symptoms and characteristics. It is hard to tell them apart and that you should seek professional help only when you think you need it. Also, no one can tell you when the right time to get help is. It is your decision and your decision alone. The last session before the evening banquet was one from Mitch Carmody, who we heard for the first time last year in Memphis, on "Whispers of Love, Signs from our Children." It was

interesting because Mitch showed photos of people and there were orbs in the pictures indicating that a deceased child was present. Interestingly enough a guy sitting behind me took a picture of Mitch and right there in the top right corner was an orb.

The Saturday evening banquet was again filled to capacity. We were in an overflow room with other people like last year. As always, the final ceremony of lighting the candles in memory of our loved ones is the hardest and most emotional part of the entire conference. This conference was very well attended for being on the west coast. We had heard they are not as well attended as when they are in the center of the country

Darcie Sims was the closing speaker on Sunday. As usual, she did not disappoint us with her stories and antics. As much as we all cried at the end of her talk, she had us laughing most of the time during her final presentation. If anyone ever decides to just attend one annual conference, you should make sure that she is one of the presenters. She is well worth hearing, just as we have heard her in videos at our meetings.

The 2010 conference is scheduled for Washington, DC, over the 4th of July weekend so we plan on going early and staying for the fireworks that Sunday evening. The 2011 conference will be Minneapolis, MN, and 2012 is in Anaheim, CA. Both of us hope that we will be able to continue to attend these conferences and make them mini-vacations that we take with Melissa and Emily.

Steve and Mickey Schmeisser



Getting Through the First Thanksgiving

Traditionally, Thanksgiving is the biggest family holiday of the year. More people travel home for the Thanksgiving holiday than any other time. Phone lines will be tied up, and millions of cards will be sent. Old feelings of hurt are often pushed aside so that there can be a feeling of warmth and peace as families share a time of thankful remembrances gathered around a table.

When a child dies, whether the death occurred early in a pregnancy or as an adult, the entire tone of the first Thanksgiving holiday without this precious child changes. Instead of being a time of joyful gathering together, there is a time of very real reminders that someone is now missing. The circle no longer feels complete. The table has an almost hollow feeling of emptiness. There are sad echoes throughout the home instead of only the sounds of happy laughter that once was descriptive of this fun time together as a family.

Facing the first Thanksgiving without your child can be the most difficult grief work you will ever do. Your heart has already been broken and now you will have constant, painful reminders that someone from your family is missing – you no longer feel complete. This empty spot once occupied by your child causes a sense of pain similar to a throbbing headache. Nothing seems to relieve the pain and you are left feeling like you just don't know what to do.

Talk about your child! Don't try to pretend that all is well and that this is like any other Thanksgiving you've celebrated in the past. By pretending, you only push aside emotions that must be dealt with at some time. Include your child's name in the Thanksgiving blessing offered at dinner. This will break the ice and let others know that you want your child included in this most important family day.

Bring a picture of your child to the family gathering. And share that with others when family-sharing time takes place. Maybe all you

have is an ultrasound picture. If your heart feels moved to share that picture with others, then do so! Help make your child part of a family tradition.

Some parents have found it healing to set a place at the table in memory of their child. Many parents place a candle at the table and once a blessing for the food has been offered, the candle is lit and there is comfort in knowing that their child has been included in the tradition of the day.

Read a poem or a brief letter written in memory of your child. Parents find that there is often great comfort found in having a brief reading about their child. It is somewhat symbolic of helping to make the family circle feel complete. It is most important to validate your child.

Don't apologize for tears. Your tears are an outward shedding of some of the pain held within the depths of your heart. You do not ever need to apologize for missing your child.

Be including your child in some way on Thanksgiving Day, you will feel a small bit of healing in this most difficult journey we call grief. By acknowledging your child, you will also validate your child and the grief that you still feel over the loss of your precious child.

There is great healing in saying "I love and miss my child!" This one step marks the beginning of finding your joy in living once again.

Clare Hinton, Silentgrief.com

These thoughts could apply to Christmas or any other major holiday or time that your family gathers together.



OTHER TCF CONTACT INFORMATION

The Door County Chapter meets at 7:00 p.m. on the second Thursday of the month at the Door County Memorial Hospital in Sturgeon Bay. Call 1-800-589-2669 (voicemail).

The TCF of Kewaunee County Chapter does not meet at this time.
Call Dorothy Konop at 920-863-8003 for information.

The Fox Valley Chapter of TCF meets at 7:00 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of the month in Neenah at Faith United Methodist Church, 1025 Tullar Road. Call Deb Schultz at 920-725-6340 for information.

Oneida, WI, has a new chapter that was recently chartered. They meet the 3rd Tuesday of each month from 6:30pm at Parish Hall – 2937 Freedom Road, Oneida, WI. Contact Jean Williquette at 920-469-4135 for more information.

To contact the **National Organization:**

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

P.O. Box 3696,

Oak Brook, Illinois 60522-3696

Phone Toll-free: 877-969-0010

Web site: www.compassionatefriends.org



To contact the **TCF Regional Coordinator:**

Jim Staniforth

4705 Eisenhower St.

Oregon, WI 53575

Phone: 608-835-7493

GIVING THANKS

I can not hold your hands today,
I can not see your smile.
I can not hear your voices now,
My children, who are gone.

But, I recall your faces still,
The songs, the talks, the sighs.
And story times, and winterwalks,
And sharing secret things.

I know you helped my mind to live
Beyond your time with me.
You gave me clearer eyes to see –
You gave me finer ears to hear –
What living means, what dying means,
My children, who are gone.

So here it is Thanksgiving Day,
And you are not with me.
And while I weep a mother's tears,

I thank you for the gift you were.
And all the gifts you gave to me,
My children, who are gone.

*Sascha Wagner, from
The Poems of Sascha Wagner*

WINTERSONG

Season of lights, season of love and peace
Season of shadow, season of memories,
Season of warmth and joy, season of secret
tears.

Give us the courage to laugh again
Give us the vision to hope again
Give us the power to love again –
For all our new seasons
And all our new years.

*Sascha Wagner, from
The Poems of Sascha Wagner*

Sibling Contact for TCF Green

Bay:

Erin Lund

E-mail: EML1015@aol.com

Phone: 920-562-232

Resources for siblings:

The national organization of TCF
has resources for siblings.

Visit the online Sibling Resources Page
at
www.compassionatefriends.org

HELP US FILL THIS PAGE! If your child, of any age, would like to contribute an article, poem, drawing or website they've created about their sibling or their grief journey, please send it to us, either by mail or email. Please include your child's name and age. If you are an adult sibling reading this, we invite you to share your reflections about losing a brother or sister. It will help others on their journey.



As I Remember Him

By Daniel Yoffee

August 4, 2002

Whenever I answer an email from a newly bereaved sibling I say "My twin brother, Alan, passed away of AIDS on June 25th, 1992. There isn't a day in which I don't think of him."

The greatest joy in my life was being Alan's twin brother. The worst time since Alan's death was turning 40. As the ninth anniversary approached last year, I was very anxious. I had thought I was doing much better and couldn't understand why I was unable to decide what I should do. Afterward, I was still nervous, as I am each year between June and August, our birthday month; but, last year was worse.

As my birthday neared, I realized that would be my first "milestone" birthday without Alan. I decided I wanted to go to Philly, Alan's town. To me it would be easier than being with all of the family, all except Alan. I had figured out my family was planning a surprise party. One morning before work, I became physically sick. Even though I had survived without Alan everyone I would have wanted was already invited. Many didn't speak of Alan; but, they could see his picture button while speaking to me.

Thoughts of Alan were never far and as I walked the last friend to his car, I realized that it was an enjoyable day; but, each milestone would be an adjustment.

As I approach my 41st birthday, the tenth without Alan, I have had his initials put on my car's license plate. Each trip to a diner, I order Jello after a meal; each new state I visit I get a miniature license plate with his name. I gave his clothes to friends and charity, designed his headstone and developed a program for his memorial

service. I started a scholarship, created an AIDS quilt, web page and a backyard garden. I devoted a room, "Alan's room", with posters and articles by and about him. I donate items for AIDS & TCF auctions, write articles and volunteer for TCF, all in Alan's memory. As long as I live, I will continue to find ways to honor his memory as I remember him.



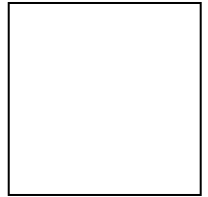
From Darkness to Light

"I will lead the blind by ways they
have not known,
along unfamiliar paths
I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into
Light before them
And make the rough places
smooth.
These are the things I will do;
I will not forsake them."
Isaiah 42:16



The
**COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

of Green Bay
PO Box 211
Green Bay, WI 54305



Our monthly
support group
meets next on

Thursday,
November 19
at 7 p.m.

at First United
Methodist Church,
off Monroe at Doty.
Call 920-496-0629
for information.

We need not walk alone!

NATIONAL NEWS



The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting, held annually the second Sunday in December, this year December 13, unites family and friends for one hour to honor and remember children who have died at any age from any cause. As candles are lit at 7 p.m., local time, creating a virtual wave of light, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memories of children in a way that transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious, and political boundaries.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, a gift from TCF to the bereavement community, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died; but, will never be forgotten.

The Worldwide Candle Lighting started in the United States in 1997 as a small Internet observance; but, has since swelled in numbers as word has spread though out the world. The Green Bay Chapter invites you to attend the Candle Lighting to be held at the First United Methodist Church, 501 Howe St., Green Bay, on the second Sunday in December 13, at 7 p.m. For more information or directions, please call 920-496-0629 or 920-437-9252.

If you have access to a computer, please check out our website at:
www.tcfgreenbay.org

