



We Need Not Walk Alone

Compassionate Friends Northeast Baltimore Chapter

Volume X Issue 2

www.baltimoretcf.com

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We'd love to include your original poems, reflections, essays, etc. For inclusion in the next issue please send your submission(s) to:

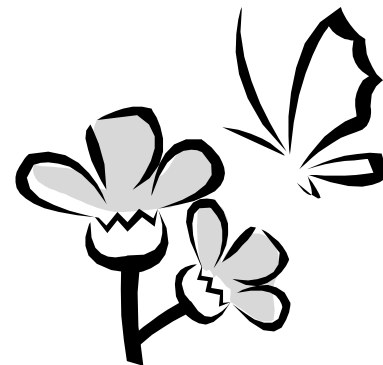
Jodie Virago

*4300 Bedford Road
Baltimore, MD 21208*

*Or send material to
newsletter@baltimoretcf.com*

To Our New Members

If you are receiving your first Compassionate Friends newsletter, we wish to welcome you. We are sorry that you are eligible for membership in The Compassionate Friends. We are here if you need help, and we hope you find some measure of comfort from reading our newsletters, printed material, or by attending one of our meetings or activities. We know that it takes courage to attend a first meeting, but those who do often find an atmosphere of acceptance and caring among parents who have had or are having the same kinds of experiences or feelings. We come in different ages, shapes and sizes, but we share in the devastation associated with losing a child and struggle to find a way to "pick up the pieces". We realize that putting our lives back together and making sense of our loss is not easy, but it is easier on the mind to know we do not travel alone. You are not alone and you can survive. If you are hesitant to come to your first meeting, feel free to bring a friend or family member along with you.



Oklahoma City Site of 2007 TCF National Conference

While the afterglow from the TCF National Conference in Dearborn, Michigan still remains, a dedicated conference committee has already been hard at work for nearly a year in preparation for the 30th TCF National Conference which will be held in Oklahoma City July 20-22, 2007. There will be a pre-conference Professionals Day July 19 and the (eighth) Walk to Remember© the final day of the conference, as with past conferences.

Oklahoma City has a rich historical background and offers year-round sunshine. With a billion dollar renovation of the city in place, Oklahoma City ranks as one of the "Best Places to Live in North America," according to Places Rated Almanac. The conference will be held at the Oklahoma City Convention Center in the historical downtown area.

Mark your calendars and watch for more information.

Chapter Steering Committee:

Chapter Leader:

Sharon Calvano

Chapter Facilitators:

Garrett Tollenger

Barbara Allen

Sharon Calvano

Website:

Barbara Allen

Treasurer:

Tom Allen

Newsletter Editor:

Jodie Virago

Phones/Welcome Table:

Carol Bozman

Library

Melissa Virago

Meeting Dates for 2007

We meet the first Monday of every month, except December, when we meet at 7:00 pm.

Jan 3	July 4
Feb. 7	Aug. 1
Mar 7	Sept. 5
Apr 4	Oct. 3
May 2	Nov. 7
June 6	Dec. 5

Directions

---- Off the Baltimore beltway (#695)
---- Exit # 25, Charles Street
---- Head South on Charles Street approximately 2 miles to the church
---- On the right side of the road, Brown Memorial Church is across the street from a 7-11 market.

National TCF Info:

PO Box 3696

Oak Brook, IL 60522-3639

Toll-free: 877-969-0010

www.compassionatefriends.org

The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

Remembering our Children

As long as we live, our children shall live in our memories. In each day that lies ahead, we lovingly remember these children, and we send our love and support to their parents.

Yves Cubillos 4/12/85-5/8/05

Parents: **Ledda Moraya-Hope and Oscar Cubillos**

Shane Foster 6/24/78-8/17/03

Parents: **Angel and Rob**

Son: **Gage**

Siblings: **Aaron and Jeremy**

Jamshid M Ghannad 1/7/69-6/29/99

Parent: **Heideh Shirazi**

John "Jack" Lulie 4/1/92-8/6/06

Parents: **Debra & Doug Lane and Richard Lulie**

Twin Brother: **Quinn**, Brother: **Alex**

Abigail Calvano McGuire 11/4/01

Parents: **Sharon Calvano and Maureen McGuire**

Twin sister: **Madeline C. McGuire**

Daniel Vincent Staib 5/15/83-6/20/06

Parents: **Donald and Linda Staib**

Siblings: **"Duffy" and David Staib**

Nieces/nephews: **Cierra, Alyssa, and Delaney Staib**

James Stallings 1/16/68-3/19/03

Jessica Stallings 8/15/73

Parents: **Barbara (Stallings) and Tom Allen**

Ashley Paige Tollenger 5/1/89-8/10/01

Parent: **Garrett Paige Tollenger**

Elijah Joseph Virago 9/21/99-12/10/05

Parents: **Melissa and Jodie Virago**

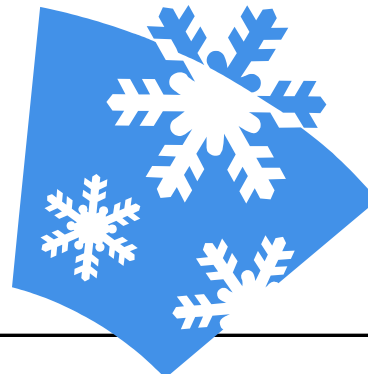
SNOW

Every snowflake that falls is unique and has its own individual design. There are beautiful patterns in each snowflake and even the tiniest of flakes have their own markings. These patterns change again and again—even after the flake touches the ground. Each snowflake is a cause for wonder, each flake is one of a kind. No two are exactly alike. Like the snowflake, our beautiful children were each unique and special; some we only dreamed about and some danced upon the earth. They filled our lives with wonder and transformed our world. We held them too briefly, but we will hold them in our hearts forever. We shall remember them always. At this time of remembering, it may help to reflect upon how our lives

have been enriched by the love we have given and the love we have received from our children. Our children leave treasures behind that time can never take away.

Written by Denise Falzon, TCF Lake Area, MI

In loving memory of her son, Brian Falzon



The Gift We Give Ourselves

Six Christmases later, I think I have run the gamut of emotions. Of course, the first two Christmases after my daughter Nina died were pretty much a blur. I do remember the first one; so desperately trying to go through the motions and determined that my family would have as unchanged a Christmas as possible. I would momentarily lapse into my grief stupor, only to pick myself up by the bootstraps and zombie-like, plod onward toward my goal to "normalize" an anything-but-normal Christmas.

Nina adored the holidays. She could scarcely wait for the day after Thanksgiving so we could pull out the holiday music tapes, get out the cookie press so she could make her favorite Spritz cookies, and decorate her daybed frame with tiny Christmas lights. Therefore, I was positive that Nina would want us to go on with Christmas as if the numbing and life-altering tragedy that had befallen our family had never occurred. I had convinced myself that it is what she would have wanted. So out came the Christmas tree and all the ornaments. Shopping commenced as usual, plowing my way through crowds of cheerful people, full of the spirit of the season. I wouldn't allow myself to see that I didn't belong amongst them -at least that year. Eventually, the charade took its toll and I paid for it for weeks afterwards. Then again how could any of us know how we should feel that first Christmas, or what we should or shouldn't do during the holidays after our child died? For most of us, we had never experienced the death of a child before. There are no step-by-step rule-books on how to grieve. And even if there were, each of our children is unique and therefore so is our grief.

That second Christmas I didn't have enough energy to even run on empty. I felt drained and barely made it through neces-

sary day-to-day tasks. The Christmas tree made it out of the box that year, but sat undecorated in the middle of the living room floor. Only when my son asked about five days before Christmas, if we could either put some lights on it and sit it in its customary corner, or just put it away that Christmas did I make an effort to do anything with it at all. That year I didn't attempt to sugarcoat my emotional state of mind I didn't pretend that everything was "normal."

If possible, we would cut out November, December and January 1st out of our calendars--just close our eyes and wish it away. But since we can't, we have to do the next best thing--we need to give ourselves a gift this holiday season. And in doing this, we give our family and friends a gift as well. That gift is taking care of us through this trying holiday season, to do what feels right to us. We can try to spare ourselves any unnecessary stress. That could mean doing away with the old family traditions and making some new ones. It could mean having Christmas dinner at a restaurant. That gift to us might be to go away for the holidays; for others that may be just staying home and doing nothing. Maybe a relative or family friend could help with any preparations or gift buying that we feel we might want to do this year. Possibly they could involve any surviving siblings in their holiday happenings so that they too feel like they are participating in something for the holidays. So often our family and friends feel helpless and desperately want to find some way to assist us and this is one way that they can. ~from the TCF Chapter in Tuscaloosa, Alabama said "No matter how many people or how many presents, the pulsating void that seems too large for your heart to hold keeps on drawing your attention back to the child who is missing. As others laugh and play, your thoughts fly away - to Christmases past or a snowy cemetery. Give me a special gift

this year... let me weep."

The friendship and understanding of other bereaved parents is one of the most helpful gifts we can give ourselves. Other bereaved parents will let us reminisce of happier Christmases' past; will allow us to speak our child's name without hesitation; and will let us cry and not be uncomfortable with our tears. It is so consoling to be able to share your feelings with someone who understands that, for us, grief does have a place in our holiday. In turn, by being a listening ear for them we have given them a gift as well.

When I think back, I am not sure if I found comfort in hearing that the holidays would get easier in time. I think I was so preoccupied (and with good reason) with the fact that my Nina was gone and the holidays would never be the same. But I have learned to know what I can and cannot handle. I have learned how to say, "I just can't do that this year". I have learned that, although I couldn't imagine it then, with each passing year the holidays have become a little easier to deal with. And I absolutely believe that Nina does understand my need to alter Christmas since she died. That she would want me to change what I need to in order to get through the holidays. Nina would want me, as all of our children would want us, to be gentle with ourselves and to take care of our tender hearts. That gift we give ourselves is also a gift we give to them what they would want for us: for us to find as much peace in whatever way that we possibly can.

We have many new TCF members this year who will be facing that first Christmas without their child I will, as I know all of us will, keep them all close in our thoughts and hearts these next two months.

With love, peace and gentle thoughts this holiday season, Cathy L. Seehuetter St. Paul, MN - TCF

New Book Published on Sibling Grief

A new book has just been published on sibling grief entitled, *Sibling Grief: Healing after the Death of a Sister or Brother*. It has been written by the director of the Sibling Connection, an organization that provides resources for bereaved siblings. *Sibling Grief* is endorsed by the Bereaved Parents of the USA. Called by Compassion Books "a moving, very readable guide -- one of the finest resources available on sibling grief, for individual or professional use."

From the back cover:

Author P. Gill White, PhD, was only fifteen when her sister Linda made her swear not to tell anyone about the pain Linda had in her side, because she thought it would spoil an upcoming family vacation. Linda died four months later from a rare form of cancer called rhabdomyosarcoma. White and her family never talked about the loss until decades later when memories began to haunt her. Sibling Grief is White's validation of the emotional significance of sibling loss. She draws on clinical experience, research, and wisdom from hundreds of bereaved siblings to explain the five healing tasks specific to sibling grief.

White identifies the effects of this profound loss on daily actions and emotions and describes the dream patterns of bereaved siblings, showing how healing is reflected in the dream state. Throughout, she illustrates the long-lasting connection between siblings—a connection that death itself cannot sever.

COURAGE

My brother died three years ago when he was seventeen years old. It was an accident when he fell while hiking in the mountains. I was fifteen and my brother was my hero. I would do anything to make him proud. When I lost him, I could have just given up. I have the courage to love people even though I know that I could lose them. I had many opportunities to just forget everyone else and lose myself. My brother was my best friend and when he died I could have too.

I decided that he would not have wanted me to throw my life away. I try my hardest to work hard in school and live up to what his expectations would have been. I am not living just for him. I am living for myself. A lot of people like to escape their problems by drinking or doing drugs. Alcohol and drugs only make problems worse because escaping a problem is not solving the problem. Self-respect means knowing who you are and treating yourself with dignity. I

want people to look at me and to respect me. Staying in school and working to my potential is essential for respect. People cannot respect those who do not respect themselves. As Shakespeare said, "This above all else, to thine own self be true."

I do not make choices based on what the popular decision is. I base my thoughts and ideas on what I believe is right and important. I know that my brother would have been proud of me, because I made it through the most difficult time in my life, without him. I kept living when I lost the most important person in the world to me. Courage is to keep fighting even though it looks like you are going to lose. When he died, I felt the world crash down on me. Everything I ever hoped for just seemed empty. Even now sometimes it will just hit me that my brother is gone. I have to keep on living and facing the world because that is what life is all about. Sometimes things happen that seem impossible to face. If I do not face my problems, who will?

Life is not supposed to be easy but it is not devastating either. There are so many wonderful things that happen and I have to have the courage to realize it. Life is not just a long line of problems. It is also a long line of answers. I need courage and self-respect to find these answers. I have to trust myself and my future that everything will work out. It always does. The answers to life's problems can only be found through hard work and belief in yourself. My belief in myself comes from a big brother who always had faith in me.

Patricia Kelley

TCF ~ Richmond VA

In loving memory of my brother, Sean
8/24/76 - 8/28/93



.....
: How can my daughter Alison go play volleyball?
: How can Carolyn audition for the school musical?
: How can they be out and about,
: while I'm stuck here in the quicksand of a mother's grief?

.....
: Because they are separate from me.
: Physically, mentally, spiritually,
: they are living their own lives.
: Now I get it-they are separate from me.

.....
: That's how Barbie and Tommy could die without me.
: They were living their own lives long before I let go.
: Now they're dead-but I am not.

.....
: Now I get it-my children are a part of me, but we are separate.
: I don't have to die, I can go on living.
: But how?

.....
: Carol Bozman
.....

What Might Have Been ... What Is

I want what might have been...
And I want what is.
I want the child I do not have,
And I want the child that has come after.
I cannot choose
One or the other,
My heart wants both.
What might have been,
A sturdy lad,
Baseball bats,
Football helmets,
Squiggly worms on hooks
Dirt and mud and
Burps and booms.
What is now,
A charming girl,
Raggedy Anne,
Stuffed bears,
Curls and ribbons on hair
Tea and cookies and
Squeals and giggles.
How can I choose
From two blessings,
One gone too soon,
One here by a miracle?
I cannot ...
But if I could...
I would want both ...
What might have been ...
And what is.

Lisa Sculley
In memory of Joey Sculley 7/16/92 to
10/7/92 SIDS
And with love to Leslie Sculley,
Born 3/19/99, ours 9/8/99

A STEPPARENT'S THOUGHTS

I am a bereaved stepparent – *Stepfather* to be exact. Robin Ann Craney, my step-daughter, was killed at the hands of a drunk driver on June 8, 2001. She was 17 years old.

I have a son named Greg. His Mom re-married so I saw him on weekends, did the trips, and long summer visits as many divorced parents do. I did not get the chance to be a part of his life and see him every day.

I got to hear about his activities and accomplishments *all* after the fact. When you marry someone with kids, you get another chance.

After several months of dating my (now) wife Cindy, I finally met her kids, Chris and Robin. Robin was almost 7 years old at the time. I remember that first meeting clearly because she wasn't feeling so good. She ended up getting sick and had to go home. What a first meeting that was! After that, I became totally involved in the lives and activities of both of the children. I remember one of those nights well! Cindy and I attended parent-teacher conferences for both kids, a Cub Scout Pack Meeting and a Girl Scout Brownie Meeting...not

bad for a single guy, who had been un-married for 13 years!

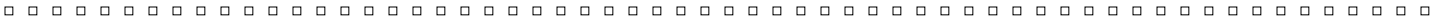
Over the years, I got to know Robin's likes, dislikes, and all of her friends – *and she had a lot of friends!* I attended and participated in all of Robin's activities, supporting her in her many endeavors – including gymnastics (her favorite). I was there when she had migraine headaches, running her to the doctor when her Mother couldn't, encouraging her, supporting her – all the things Dads do for their kids. I want to tell you in no uncertain terms, being a stepparent is so much harder. You get the responsibility and, often times it seems, none of the respect. "Mom said I could so I don't have to listen to you" or "You can't tell me what to do, you are not my dad" and so forth. I tolerated and dealt with her emotional outbursts when she became incensed at anything (sometimes it seemed everything) during the teen years. All *Dads* know how trying those times can be!

Now I am a bereaved stepparent...the one in a kind of "no man's land." I am not biologically connected to Robin; I sometimes feel like an outsider around people who were *once* a family - Mother, Father, Son, and Daughter. Many of our friends have worried about Cindy and Chris. They often

ask me "How is Cindy doing?" or "Is Chris OK?" Although I knew and lived with Robin for 10 years, very few ask, "How are *you* doing?" I am only the *stepparent*. The idea that this tragedy cannot be as devastating to me as it is to Robin's "real family" is incomprehensible. One definition for the word father is "father figure: one often of particular power or influence who serves as an emotional substitute for a father." This is what I was for Robin. She loved to push my buttons – but that was part of our relationship – as frustrating as it could be. Robin is the only daughter I will ever have. I was every bit a *father* to her. I love her and I miss her.

We, the stepparents of children who have died, grieve for our children too. *Only* society puts the "Step" in the name. *Parent* is still the biggest part of who we are. We hurt because they were our children too - often without the support and understanding that is demonstrated towards the biologically connected parents. These beautiful children with whom we developed emotional bonds are now gone out of our lives; and we, too, endure the same feelings of loss and sadness.

Tony Cinocco
TCF-Denver, CO



What is New about the New Year?

There is a lot of silliness about ringing in the New Year, and I have never been able to enter into the spirit with noisemakers, funny hats and loud hurrahs. Since the death of my son, I especially find myself wondering what this is all about. I think some of the partying and celebrating are motivated by a deep desire for a new start in our lives; a desire to leave behind some of the problems, sorrows, worries and pain of the year just ending. The short, sunless days and long, dark nights make us want something to cheer us. So we give the New Year's Eve party a try.

But it really doesn't work for most of us; we see now that we are just the same and the heaviness in our hearts, as we continue with the struggle to cope with the loss of our child, remains with us. Can we find new ways to live our lives in the New Year?

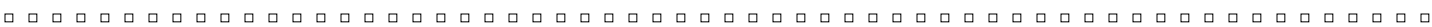
I'd like to suggest a few things we can try. Let's make an effort to find new friends. A good place to start this is at Compassionate Friends meetings. Here you are with a group of people who care about each other in special ways. We understand the pain and anger, the confusion and the inertia suffered by bereaved parents.

In the New Year, let's also find new ways to be close to the family that we have left. We feel regrets about hugs not given, letters not written, "I love you's" not said often enough. We can

do all these things now. We can establish new memories with the family we have right now. Another way to move into this New Year with a better feeling is to think about what we can do for others, because that is truly a way to help ourselves, too. If we can reach out to other sorrowing families, give a gift of our time, a note of love, a listening ear, or a shoulder to lean on, we'll grow stronger ourselves.

For those parents who are suffering the deep pain of the newly bereaved, none of the things I've mentioned may be possible yet. For you, I hold out the hope that soon your days will be just a bit better, your sorrow a little lighter, your tears healing, your friends strengthening and your memories filled more with the good times and less with the unhappiness of your grief.

Dory Rooker
TCF, Upper Valley, VT



"What would they be doing in Heaven?" my daughter Alison asked.

We had gone to Valley View Farms for a photo shoot to promote the Christmas show she and her sister were performing in at a local community theater. Only the beginning of November and already the store was full of Christmas decorations.

For several weeks I had wondered just how we were going to get through the Holiday Season. "Last year at this time..." It played through my head over and over again. "Last year at this time we had four children, and now we have only two." What happened?

What happened was a Springtime when Death came out of season. If the trees came into bud, I did not see them. If the flowers came into bloom, I did not smell them. If the songbirds returned I did not hear them. If the sun finally warmed the earth, I did not feel it. Through hot summer days, I languished with a cold heart.

But in Autumn, as the leaves surrendered their hold, the tethers of grief seemed to loosen their grip. One leaf at a time, one tear at a time, till there was nothing left but the bare truth- my children were dead. I lifted my head once again that I might catch a glimpse of them, for even when the earth is barren, the heavens are alive with new life.

We walked the aisles, my two daughters and I. They do not talk much of their grief. I know it lays dormant in their hearts, with bits of expression beginning to emerge.

"Let's buy ornaments for Tommy and Barbie" I propose, standing in front of some crystal angels. Carolyn who is much too grounded in reality sometimes, points out how expensive they are. I have to agree, it seems an extravagance, so I suggest we just wander around and admire the ornaments as if we were in a museum.

But Alison is fingering the figurine of a little boy running with a basketball in his hands.

"What would they be doing in Heaven?" she asks. "Well," I answer, "I am sure God has given Tommy strong healthy legs to play on-just like this." Suddenly we are on a mission to find just the right ornament for Barbie, too. "How about a cheerleader?" Carolyn asks, handing me the epitome of Barbie, leaping with enthusiasm for the freedom of her new life.

As we head towards the checkout to make our purchases, Alison becomes thoughtful. "I know what they are really doing in Heaven- Praising God." Hallelujah, somehow I think we are going to be just fine this Holiday Season.

Carol Bozman

NE Baltimore Chapter TCF

The Compassionate Friends
Northeast Baltimore Chapter
&

basketsofkindness.com

We have partnered together with basketsofkindness.com to help us cover our expenses. We feel that this program will allow us to raise the few funds we need in a win-win manner.

basketsofkindness.com will donate 15% of the purchase price of any gift basket

bought under the TCF-Northeast

Baltimore Chapter name to our organization. This generous donation will allow us to continue this much needed service in our community.



At your earliest convenience, go to

basketsofkindness.com to make your gift giving simple and convenient. When you are checking out, there will be a box asking for the name of the organization you wish the 15% donation to go to. Please enter TCF-Northeast Baltimore Chapter and we will receive this generous donation. It is that easy and you are done!

We are partnered with basketsofkindness.com all year, so it is a great place to find those gifts for Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, birthdays, thank you gifts for clients, etc., also.

Thank you for this wonderful contribution for our organization and our families in need. We appreciate you and the support of our efforts!

A FATHER RETURNS TO WORK

After Kathy died, I, of course, went back to work. Some of my co-workers made the stop at my desk to express their sympathy. I know I turned them off, as my pain and my denial were so great. I could not talk about what had happened and how I felt. I thanked them. Although nobody ever talked to me about it, that was okay as my pain was such, I thought, I could not bear to talk. I threw myself into my work and on occasion was confused because I could not make the kind of decisions I had been making for years. I never made the connection that this inability to concentrate was part of my grief and was normal. Lunch was the worst time. My habit was to eat with my associates, but often in the middle of the meal I would just have to get up and walk away. Although nobody ever said anything to me about this odd behavior, I do thank them at least for their tolerance. Slowly I readjusted (I thought) and in time (a long time) I was able to perform well again. But I never really grieved until I found THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS and it was here that people helped me to talk. It was almost twelve years before I found TCF as there was no such organization in 1967. My friends, let TCF help you...don't wait twelve years to talk!

Bill Errnatinger TCF-Baltimore. MD

If you have moved, wish to be included in the mailing list, or removed from the list, please let us know by writing to :

Compassionate Friends
c/o Sharon Calvano
2002 Clipper Park Rd.
Suite 110
Baltimore, MD 21211

Or emailing: newsletter@baltimorectf.com

Thanks to the following organizations for their contributions to our Dec. 2006 memorial service:



Compassionate Friends
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