



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

Greater Baltimore Chapter
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Newsletter

March/April 2011

Dear Compassionate Friends:

Hopefully, the longer days and the renewal that spring brings help to lift the darkness that often surrounds us after our loss.

Please remember that this newsletter is for you to provide 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 and like)
- Book reviews (what books have really helped you?)
- Fundraising/events (either in memory of your child or in support of national organizations)

All input can be sent via email to:

newsletter@BaltimoreTCF.com

Or via hard copy mail to:

The deadline for the monthly newsletter is the 25th of each month.

Thank you.

Linda, Diane and Maura

"When the child you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure."

~Author Unknown

Candle Lighting Ceremony

Below are a few pictures from our December candle lighting ceremony. If you did not attend last year, please mark your calendars for next year's ceremony, which will be held on December 11. It is a truly moving experience and a wonderful way to remember your loved one.



Monthly Meeting Information

Baltimore County-The First Wednesday
Brown Woodbrook Memorial Presbyterian Church
6200 N. Charles St. Baltimore
7:30-9:30 PM

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

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.

TCF Chapter Contact Information

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March/April Remembrances

In March and April, we remember the following children.

March Birthdays

Casey Santana Butler
Michael Orien Colotti
Lance Locklear
Kimberly A. Hummel
Deborah Ann Tipton
Matthew J. Lewis
Michael Cipres
Stephanie Sanzone
Angela Cheek-Barnett
Michael Ryan Atkins
David Franklin Howell, Jr.
Alexia Jo Bock
Angela I.A. Jones
Michael James McQuaid
Richard Frank Galentine
Martin Barry Sollien
Christopher Stephen
David Alexander Stratton
Margaret Kelly Lane

March Heaven Days

Ryan Michael Sheahy
Michael Leo Swift, III
Kathy Ermatinger
Phillip Holmes
Natalia Erin Miller

Brennan Michael Doll
Daniel Scottodifrega
Christopher Gregory
James Stallings
Sallie Pattillo
Richard Frank Galentine
Martin Barry Sollien
Christopher Stephen
David Alexander Stephen

April Birthdays

Lauryn Marie Little
Julie Ann Webster
Joseph Miranda
Dillon James Shelton
Chelsea Rae Propper
Alan Greenbaum
Genevieve Wilson
Gene Rossmark, Jr.
Daniel Scottodifrega
Amelia Panuska
Joseph Edward Benham
Yves Hugo Cubillos
Bob Palese
Hayden Bradley Hoffman
Channing Lane Wiles
Isabella Sue Pennel
Steve Posedenti, Jr.
Carmen Odessa Dixon

April Heaven Days

Hugo G. Jeffrey Orbach
Ramie Lamont Mays, Jr.
Garrett Nelson
Matthew Janis Johnson
Rowan Grace Maisey-Brownfield
Evan J. Weichert
Mason Griffin Medicus
Christopher Ryan LePore
Cathi Faye Horst
Jonah Alexander Respass
Galen Harig-Blaine
Michael James McQuaid
Joshua Matthew Belanger
Hayden Bradley Hoffman
Channing Lane Wiles
Isabella Sue Pennel
Steve Posedenti, Jr.

***Please let us know if anyone was left off the list. We are still updating our database.

Breathings of Your Heart

My name is Diane. I lost my son Nickolas Benjamin to complications from his leukemia treatment. Nickolas was diagnosed in May of 2008 when he was 25 years old. After fifteen months, Nickolas lost his battle with blood cancer and died on August 13, 2009.

Throughout Nick's illness, I discovered I needed an outlet for the pressure cooker of emotions that comes with cancer treatment. When Nick was first diagnosed, I began writing a blog to express the myriad of feelings and thoughts that come with having your most precious child critically ill. Since Nick's passing, the writing on my blog now chronicles my journey through the dark and melancholy world of child-loss. I write what I think, what I feel, what I need to write, not what others think I "should" write. I don't worry about making it pretty or nice. I let my emotions spill onto the page, pouring out of my heart and soul like the rain from the clouds and the tears from the eyes. These words will carry the burden of grief for a while, giving me a brief respite from my pain.

Writing can be cathartic and therapeutic and it allows us to document our journey. It does not have to be public; it can be very private—for your eyes only. Writing about our grief journey can show us where we started, how far we have come, and all the stops along the way. Writing allows us to share our child and their story with others; the beautiful and loving memories we are aching to share. Below is a poem I recently wrote for my son Nickolas after I had gone into his bedroom with thoughts of going through his things.

Cardboard Dreams & A Box of Twine

*Everywhere I go there are reminders of you.
Baseball cards for sale on a counter.
Memories of you as an innocent young boy.
Happily playing with cardboard dreams.*

*Your room holds all your childhood treasures still.
A little man carved out of wood.
A crazy drawing with a rabbit.
Magic cards, buttons and twine.
Nana's stories about you and Mr. Tim SunnyBear.*

*Your room holds the story of your journey from
boy to man.
Your books from college.
All those years spent studying for your degree.
Pictures of Pip and Nana, your Dad and Shu-sha.
Pip's ties and your first real suit hang in the closet.
A tool chest full of things you might need to fix
something
sits under your bed.*

*So many books.
All the things you wanted to learn.
Your mind was never idle.
Bracelets from Ecuador.
And hats...lots of hats.
Music is everywhere.
Your guitars stand in the corner, forgotten and
alone.
Do they miss you like I do?*

*Everywhere I go I find pieces of you.
A box full of twine, all wrapped up neat and tight.
When I found that box I cried and I closed it back
up.
I couldn't throw that away. Not yet. Not now.
That was just you.
Like the time you took the strap on my ipod case
and you
wrapped into a nice neat circular thing that still
hasn't come apart.
If only I could have wrapped you to me like that,
would you still be here with me now?*

*Everywhere I go there are reminders of your
leukemia and the battle
we fought so hard for so long.
Your gray scarf lies on your pillow.
It was just a scarf until you had to use it to shield
your eyes from
the harsh light of hospital ceilings and
the harsh reality of the surreal world of cancer.
Thermometers lying about like fallen soldiers in
our lost war.
A gallon size fortress of medicine bottles at the top
of the stairs.*

*Everywhere I go I am reminded that you are gone.
You are not in your room, or with your friends, or
at work.
You are not anywhere that I can find you.
Candles are burning around what remains of your
physical body.
The rosary you held in your hands each night at
the hospital is there too.
The blanket given to comfort you sits idle and with
no purpose.
Your pictures remind me of what has been lost.
Your eyes, so sad and wise, pierce my heart.*

*Everywhere I go I see young men that are now the
age
that you should be now.
I wonder where they are going.
What they are doing with their lives?
I wonder what you would be doing with yours.
I wonder what things we would be doing together.
I wonder what it would be like to hear you say,
"I love you Mom" just one more time.*

*Everywhere I go the pain of losing you grows
deeper
This dark spot needs to be cut out.
Like a piece of rotting fruit
I don't think this one can be saved.
© bigD 2011*

Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart. ~William Wordsworth

*If I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad.
~Lord Byron*

Diane's blog can be found at
www.dancindianern.blogspot.com

Interested in learning more about grief writing? Check out the site of bereaved parent Alice J. Wisler. In 1997, Ms. Wisler lost her four-year old son Daniel to cancer treatment. She has been writing ever since. Her blog can be found at www.writingtheheartache.blogspot.com

Ms. Wisler conducts workshops on grief-writing. Her workshops are called, "Writing the Heartache: Grief-writing for Healing, Health, and Hope." Her website can be found at www.alicewisler.com/writing-the-heartache-workshops.

The Book Nook
The Truth About Grief by Ruth Davis
Konigsberg
Review by Maura Taylor

In her book The Truth About Grief, author Ruth Davis Konigsberg challenges the reader to step out of the conventional teachings, therapies, stereotypes about grief and perceptions of what is "normal" and what is not. In particular, she calls into question Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief--denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. She notes that Kubler-Ross developed these stages, which are not research based or supported, 40 years ago, when working with terminally ill patients. The stages were initially designed to apply to those confronted with their own mortality, not to the survivors of loss. Konigsberg's carefully researched book chronicles the history of grief in the United States, and looks at some of the differences among cultures.

There were portions of the book when Konigsberg's very clinical, somewhat dispassionate approach made me think she did not understand grief--real grief. But, as I read on, the book challenged me to ask some really difficult questions. Was I falling prey to conventional wisdom about how I should feel? How much did society influence me? What is normal? How much money does the grief industry (counselors, funeral directors, thanologists) make by espousing certain treatment modalities (most of which have

little to no research basis)? Konigsberg carefully dissects various theories, treatments, and assumptions--many of which have become "truths" in our society in terms of how we deal with grief. She explores how the language of grief has changed over the decades, the current push to have Prolonged Grief Disorder added to the upcoming DSM-V, what is complicated or traumatic grief vs. grief, some research based data, and pretty much every school of thought on the topic of grief.

One of the cultures Konigsberg explores is the Chinese. She interviews a monk, Shih Benkong, who says Buddhism teaches "Not so much how to deal with grief, but what we can learn from death, which is to realize your own impermanence. The idea is to remember, *As you are losing this person, so are you going to lose everything in life: your job, your kids, your body.* That doesn't mean that you shouldn't care about any of those things, but that you should cherish them while you have them." One of my favorite quotes in the book was from Buddha who said, "Not from weeping or grieving will anyone obtain peace of mind; on the contrary, the pain will be greater and his body will suffer. He will make himself sick and pale, yet the dead are not saved from his lamentation. People pass away, and their fate after death will be according to their deeds...He who seeks peace should draw out the arrow of lamentation, and complaint, and grief. He who has drawn out the arrow and has become composed will obtain peace of mind; he who has overcome all sorrow will become free from sorrow, and be blessed."

Overall, though the book mainly uses examples of spousal loss, I found it very interesting. It is not typical self-help book, but a book that causes the reader to challenge the conventional wisdom. And, I think, to come to the ultimate conclusion that grief is individual, very individual--regardless of what any research finds. In fact, the title is an interesting one, The Truth About Grief, because I finished the book believing there are actually no truths about grief, except that it is painful to lose someone you love. The paths we take to feel better, to make ourselves whole, to soldier on are varied and many, and there is no correct route. We each feel our way through the dark as best we can.



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.

Sign up for Compassionate Friends E-Newsletter

The Compassionate Friends National Office publishes a monthly e-newsletter designed to keep you up-to-date on what's going on with the organization and its 630 chapters.

Published once a month (as well as occasional special editions), the e-newsletter includes information on such things as TCF National Conferences, the Walk to Remember, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, regional conferences, and other events of importance.

Each e-newsletter also includes a story specially selected from a past edition of We Need Not Walk Alone, the national magazine of The Compassionate Friends. For the siblings, the e-newsletter features a past question and answer column by Dr. Mary Paulson.

All you have to do to receive The Compassionate Friends e-newsletter is sign up for it online by visiting The Compassionate Friends national website at www.compassionatefriends.org and clicking on e-newsletter at the top of the Home page.



Save the Date: TCF's 34th National Conference will be held in Minneapolis/St. Paul July 15-17, 2011 at the Sheraton Bloomington Hotel. You will find it to be another great conference with around 100 workshops, sharing sessions, special keynote speakers at the Opening, Closing and Friday Afternoon and Saturday Evening banquets, Hospitality Room, Butterfly Room, Reflection Room, a completely stocked bookstore, special Friday evening entertainment and a Remembrance Candle Lighting. TCF's Walk to Remember will be held Sunday morning.

Reservations can now be made at special conference rates for hotel rooms for the 2011 TCF National Conference at the host hotel, the Sheraton Bloomington Hotel, Minneapolis South. Reservations can be made online or by calling a special reservation number. For more information, please see www.thecompassionatefriends.org and click on News & Events.

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*You don't heal from the loss of a loved one because time passes;
You heal because of what you do with the time.~*

Carol Crandall

SWEET AIR PARK OUR CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND

The unfortunate death in 2005 of 4-year-old Ben Huxtable after he was hit in the chest by a baseball sparked a group of compassionate and determined women to partner with the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks to raise funds to help build a unique playground at Sweet Air Park in the Jacksonville area of Baltimore County, MD.

Jacksonville is an affluent community with a population of 7,838 people. Forty percent of its households contain children, many of whom are under the care of stay-at-home moms. The sole playground in the area exists at the Jacksonville Elementary School/Recreation Center. However, that one playground is not available for public use during school hours, meaning that parents must drive over six miles from the core of Jacksonville to avail themselves of a playground at which their children can play.

Recognizing this deficiency, the Children's Committee, headed up by members Heather Thamer, Gina Vitrano, Melissa Whatley, and Christine Huxtable, began meeting with the Department in 2006 to discuss plans for a large playground at the new park. They worked closely with Jean Tansey, chief of Capital Planning and Development, Bosco Associates Vice President John Amici, and representatives of Little Tikes playground equipment to design an expanded play area for children to enjoy. Several community fundraisers were held enabling the Committee to raise over \$52,000 towards the \$142,000 construction cost of this special playground, thereby considerably increasing its size and play value. Individuals, recreation councils, and other community organizations came together to make this expanded playground a reality.

Butterflies, the symbol of rebirth, renewal, and the human soul were chosen as the theme. The playground is dotted with butterflies, palm trees, thatched huts, bugs, and a spider web on which children can climb. An archway announcing "Our Children's Playground" with a butterfly symbol atop the name graces the entrance. In support of the Children's Committee's work, the Greater Baltimore Chapter of the Compassionate Friends donated a "Tuscarora" Crape Myrtle to the site. The playground is meant as a celebration of all children, both past and present.

The playground was completed and dedicated with much fanfare on October 26, 2010, and even in winter has been extremely well attended, enjoyed, and appreciated by young families happy to finally have a public playground. This partnership is a quintessential example of public and private entities successfully working together to provide additional amenities to help address much needed recreation and leisure needs of the community.

Tarkio Balloon-A Breathtaking Documentary

Review: Maura Taylor

In 1985, at two-months old, Dane Morgan Bernhard died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome in a small town called Tarkio, Missouri. 25 years later, Torben Bernhard jumped in his car with an 8MM camera and drove from Utah to the Tarkio cemetery his brother was buried in to understand the tragedy that shook his family when he was two-years old. Using an audio interview recorded years earlier with his mother, Bernhard paints a poetic portrait of his family's loss and explores a child's perspective of death and mourning.

It's a really amazing how much Torben Bernhard was able to convey in just a few short minutes. Having lost my grandson to SIDS, I know firsthand the devastation it brings and the challenges of explain the loss to young children. My grandson, Brennan, passed away on my youngest daughter's 6th birthday two years ago, and each year she asks why he had to die on her birthday—why he had to die. This short film evoked so many emotions for me as Torben's mother talked about the questions he asked about his brother's death. You can watch it at:

<http://www.vimeo.com/20680516>

Order Conference Memento:"Star of Hope" Online

Every year the conference committee makes available a unique memento and this year it is the "Star of Hope." A rectangular version of the conference logo is the basis for the Star of Hope and includes silhouetted pine trees, gleaming stars, and a single butterfly where the child's picture will be inserted with his or her name. That logo insert with picture will be artistically framed by a 4"X5" silver, vertical wire star-frame ornament with an attached ribbon for hanging. These will all be on display at the conference!

Minimum donation for each picture submitted remains \$10 again this year for those ordering one and picking it up at the end of the conference. If you cannot attend the conference and would like to have the picture sent to you, an additional \$5 donation is requested to cover postage and handling.

The sale of this memento helps to fund the tremendous costs involved with putting on a TCF National Conference. You may order the Star of Hope at the Photo Upload Page on TCF's national website.
