



We Need Not Walk Alone

Compassionate Friends Greater Baltimore Chapter

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Our address:

Compassionate Friends
c/o Jodie Virago
4300 Bedford Road
Baltimore MD, 20208

info@baltimoretcf.com
(410)560-3358

New Harford County Meeting!!

There's a new Harford County Meeting the third Wednesday of every month at Mountain Christian Church, 1824 Mountain Road, Joppa, Maryland 21087. For more information or directions, call our hotline number or visit our website.

Meeting Dates for 2008

We meet the first Monday of every month, at 7:30 pm.

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

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.

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*

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.

Chapter Steering Committee:
Chapter Facilitators:
Garrett Tollenger
Barbara Allen
Website:
Barbara Allen
Treasurer:
Tom Allen
Newsletter Editor:
Jodie Virago
Phones/Welcome Table:
Carol Bozman
Library
Melissa Virago

National TCF Info:
PO Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3639
Toll-free: 877-969-0010
www.compassionatefriends.org

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 grown.

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

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.

Ava Grace Bryant 1/11/06
Parents: Gina and Roy Bryant

Sariah Anaweg Cochran 12/9/73 - 7/25/85
Mother: Nancy Daugherty

Yves Cubillos 4/12/85-5/8/05
Parents: Ledda Moraya-Hope and Oscar Cubillos

Jesse Elkins 7/29/88 - 5/13/06
Mother- Toni Elkins Fowler

Shane Foster 6/24/78-8/17/03
Parents: Angel and Rob
Siblings: Aaron and Jeremy

Matthew Norris Gemmill 9/17/73-1/20/01
Parent: Barbara Gemmill

Jamshid M Ghannad 1/7/69-6/29/99
Parent: Heideh Shirazi

Marc Rory Goldberg 2/17/88 - 8/25/06
Parents: Denise and Neil
Sister: Alyssa Goldberg

Deanna Green 3/21/92 - 5/05/06
Parents: Anthony and Nancy Green

Sean Hayes 11/10/83 - 8/28/06
Parents: JD and Carol Hayes

John "Jack" Lulie 4/1/92-8/6/06
Parents: Debra & Doug Lane and Richard Lulie
Brothers: Quinn, Alex

Ruairi McCracken 6/02/05 - 11/11/06
Parents: Tracy and Kieran McCracken

Abigail Calvano McGuire 11/4/01
Parents: Sharon Calvano and Maureen McGuire
Twin sister: Madeline C. McGuire

Melissa Posner 10/13/98 - 12/07/06
Parents: David and Nancy Posner

Marlene Rosoff 6/1/67 - 9/5/06
Parents: Sheldon and Dolly Rosoff

Daniel Vincent Staib 5/15/83-6/20/06
Parents: Donald and Linda Staib
Siblings: "Duffy" and David Staib

James Stallings 1/16/68-3/19/03
Jessica Stallings 8/15/73
Parents: Barbara (Stallings) and Tom Allen

Allison Taylor Stevens 3/31/84 - 7/7/00
Parents: Beth and Michael Stevens

Ashley Paige Tollenger 5/1/89-8/10/01
Parent: Garrett Paige Tollenger

Nigel Adonni Tyson (Donni) 6/21/86 - 12/23/05
Parents: Nigel and Darlene Tyson
Siblings: Nykole, Nyle, Alexis, and Cedric

Elijah Joseph Virago 9/21/99-12/10/05
Parents: Melissa and Jodie Virago
Sister: Olivia Virago

Jeffrey V. Wade 11/18/64 - 10/12/05
Parents: Howard and Linda Wade

I Wonder

I gaze out of the kitchen window to the always-empty playground and I wonder....
Does it ask where did the beautiful girl go who spent hours playing on me?

When the wind blows and the swings move I wonder....
Do the swings miss holding you and hearing your laughs?

I look at the empty still unmade bed and I wonder....
Does the bed miss you and your curly hair against the Winnie the Pooh pillowcase?

I see the stuffed animals on the bed and I wonder....
Are they lonely and do they miss your arms around them and your all night hug?

I sit across from your chair in the living room and I wonder....
Does it hope that the footsteps it hears belong to 12-year-old girl who snuggled in it?

I touch the things in your playroom where the dust has gathered and I wonder....
Do they hope it's the fingers of the aspiring singer and piano player, missing your touch?

I hear the sounds of the waterfall spilling into the pond and I wonder....
Do the fish see one face and ask where's the pretty one?

I see myself in the mirror and I wonder....
Does anyone still miss you the way I do?

-Garrett Tollenger
Daddy of Ashley
Greater Baltimore TCF

SEASONS OF THE HEART

By Peggy Walls ~ TCF, Alexander City AL

Your special days are unchanging
Seasons of the heart I celebrate.
Your birth, forever spring,
Tender memories relate,
New and green, a dream
From which too soon I awake.
The summer of your life was bright
Laughter needed no reason,
Seemingly endless days of sharing.
Sixteen summers. Short in season.
Your death brought winter without warning,
What sense in all this can be found?
Summer dreams replaced with mourning.

Where is hope now?
But the heart knows what
The mind cannot accept
That when all is lost,
It is love that is left.
Love knows no barriers
Time or distance recognize.
Love does not diminish,
But is constant in our lives.
And like a summer breeze
Uplifts and inspires us
With healing memories.

*By Peggy Walls
For son Eddie (2/18/745—5/30/90)*

Circle

How do you bear it all?
The cry came from a mother
Whose son had died only weeks before.
We were in a circle, looking at her,
Looking around, looking away,
Tears in our hearts, in our eyes.
How do we bear it?
I don't know,
But the circle helps.
... by Eva Lager, TCF/Western
Australia (Eve's daughter Milya
Claudia Lager died by suicide on 4
March 1990.)

FEED THE CAT???????

My son is dead - and you expect me to feed the cat??? Isn't it amazing how society is so rigid in their expectations? "There are rules you know...Steps we must all take..."
Whoever set these standards obviously has never lost a child, the core of your heart and soul. It just doesn't work that way.

Simple every day tasks are impossible to complete. The only constant in your upside down world is pain, unlike any pain you have ever known. Shortly after your child's death, you are expected to return to your job, take care of your household, pay the bills, and yes, feed the cat! It has been a year for me, since I lost my son, and I still go blank mid act. I stand in a store with no idea what I came in for, or I cry over bananas, because Lee loved them. I can go from laughter to tears in 1.1 seconds.

The Compassionate Friends has been a life saver (or perhaps a heart saver) for me. Only those who have experienced the same heartache will understand when you say I need to be alone - but I can't stand to be alone! Each grieving parent must heal in his or her own way, in his or her own time. One step forward, 15 back, spin around and start over, only to repeat the same progress, one step forward, 15 back, spin around...You get the picture. But you don't have to heal alone. You need not walk alone. Join us, we know you're not crazy - just a grieving parent. We do care.

by Ann TCF Roseburg, OR

Oh, Elijah

Oh, Elijah, I miss you so much,
I wish you were here with me,
so I could hold you,
as you rest your sweet head on my shoulder.

My precious baby boy,
Such soft sweet skin.
I miss your beautiful little face,
So happy and mischievous.

How you would tell me a silly joke,
or listen to me just be silly.
How we'd sing silly songs,
and make silly sounds,
Riding in the car on the way to school,
or on the way home.

You were such an incredibly smart child.
You made me prouder than I could ever wish for.
You amazed me every day,
with your insight, your charm,
and your precocious wit and wisdom.

You could make me smile,
or just bust up laughing,
even when I was upset,
or trying to be strict with you.

I think of you over and over,
each and every day,
and I mourn all the times,
I thought I would get to spend with you.

But, every day I know,
you're not here with me, physically.
It hurts me so much to know,
I'll never see your precious face,
or feel your tender skin again,
for all the days that I remain,
here on earth.

And I can no longer witness and enjoy,
you growing and experiencing such simple things in life,
like brushing your teeth or reading a book,
doing your homework or watching a cartoon on TV.

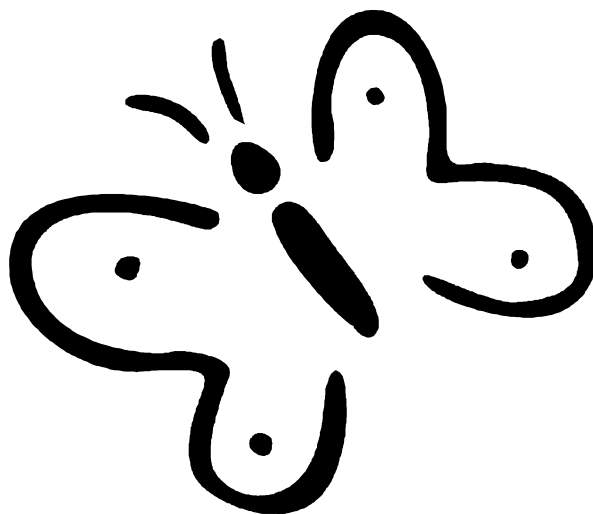
I don't know the day,
when I will be with you again.

But, I can only pray,
That as God blessed me once,
in being your mom,
and spending time with you,
during your short time on earth.

Once again God will bless me,
when I see you again in heaven.
Whenever that time may be.
I love you always, Elijah,
and I miss you desperately,

My precious angel.

Melissa Virago
Eli's Mom
Greater Baltimore TCF



I Will Miss You

I feel great anxiety now that your time is growing short.
Seven weeks since we first heard the word "Cancer".
The time is way too early—
Days, weeks, and years too early.
What of our plans?
I love you. I want you to stay.
Please Lord let her stay with us.
But I also feel your pain.
I see it on your face.
I see it in your body.
Your sad eyes say you want to stay.
With all your might you want to stay.
But the pain is great—overpowering.
How helpless I feel.
Sitting by your bed.
Holding your hand.
Watching you sleep.
I will miss you.
Memories come to me.
I smile then sadness washes over me.
I cry.
Finally I realize...
Your breathing is quieter and much slower now.
Peace has relaxed the anxious lines on your face—
Your beautiful face.
At last relief has come to you...but not to me.
Your soul spirit is lifted.
He has taken you home.
I will miss you. Oh, how I'll miss you.

Linda Jo Palo
In loving memory of my sister, Corinne (7/6/50 –
4/26/07)

My Brother, Carl

We once shared a bunk bed in the same room.
I looked up at you.
Dad played the name game.
I was: Linda Lee Leveskoko Leveskoko Lupsus.
You were: Calla Ca Cavelliko Cavelliko Cupsus.

You watched over me when we went out to play.
You said I could jump it but
I landed in that rosebush anyway.

In the car traveling north on 75
Three of us sat knee-to-knee
Singing, "There's a hole in the bottom of the sea."
To the Bootjack Camp where everyone came for a boost
Mom hung a sign saying "Relatives' Roost"

Later you traveled up with your own family—
Big Wanda, Little Wanda, and Kristin Jo
Fishing, picking berries, tanning, and more
Your rock hound, Ginger, sat gull-like on the pier.

You launched your Bass boat and fishing gear
As you calmly explained to the nephews
How to bait the hook and throw in the line
Shhh! Be patient! You'll scare all the fishes!

Around the bonfire, night after night
You entertained with your many stories and adventures
To everyone's delight.

Over the years we both grew closer
Trusting each other more and more
Visiting with each others' friends and families
Sharing a meal, a paperback book or two.

But this last summer I knew...
I knew to treasure these precious moments...
The ones that are now so dear.
It's hard to think of them without shedding a tear.

The time to move on came too swiftly
As we looked deep into each other's eyes
Neither wanting to say "Good-bye"
We held each other in warm embrace
With each "I Love You!" an extra squeeze.

You always were kind of special, Carl,
Someone to look up to. I Love You.

Linda Jo Palo

In loving memory of my brother, Carl (2/18/43 –
8/19/05)

"A CRISIS OF FAITH"

Where were you g-d, when our children left our home,
I thought they'd be much older when they finally had to roam.

And where were you g-d, when disease snuffed out their being,
And why'd you let them take that final drug when you're all seeing?

Were you even watching when they climbed inside that car,
With a friend they thought that they could trust, who had just been
in a bar?

I was taught when it comes to kids that you would ease their strife,
was their something more important to do when they took their own
life?

You have hurt your children g-d, I'm now talking about us,
That's the parents and the siblings who in you put their trust.

I suppose in life that sometimes trouble must abound,
But it's hard to justify the ends when your child's put in the ground.

I still believe in you, but were you testing me lord?
Or did I do something so wrong that this was my reward?

I will keep my faith in your name for my daughter or my son,
Even though what we call family is now forever gone.

But there is one thing I'll ask before I end my grouse,
When my time comes I want MY child to welcome me into YOUR
house!

Neil Goldberg

Marc's Dad

Greater Baltimore TCF



ANGER AT GOD AFTER A CHILD DIES

By The Reverend Al Miles

Many people who suffer the death of a child find themselves feeling angry at God. This anger is sometimes expressed directly: "I'm angry at God for allowing my child to die."

Most often, however, the anger reveals itself in less direct phrases such as, "Why would a loving God allow my child to die?" "Doesn't God have any mercy?" "Where was God when my child experienced so much suffering?" "With all the horrible abuse being done to children by some adults, why did God take the child of loving parents?"

It is important to understand that anger is a normal, healthy part of grief. While not all parents who suffer the death of a child feel angry at God, most will feel this way at someone or something over the long process of grief. The best support we can provide to these individuals is to listen in silence. This will allow them to work through the anger in their own time frame.

Michelle remembers the intense anger she felt at God when her daughter, Robin, died a year after being diagnosed with leukemia. "The depth of my feelings surprised and concerned me," she recalls. "I thought I was losing my mind. Although God was the chief target of my anger, I was also angry at my family, friends and strangers I'd see at the mall with their children. Even the weather affected my mood. When it rained I was angry, and the same was true when the sun shone brightly. And most of my energy was directed at God."

Michelle's anger gradually subsided. She attributes this to the permission she received from her minister to express her feelings during their many pastoral counseling sessions. "Reverend Johnson told me that God could take my anger and still love me as His child," she remembers. "This was very important for me to hear. Many other people tried to defend God, saying that He didn't cause Robin's death. I know they meant well, but I didn't find their efforts helpful at all."

Recently I spoke to a group of hospital chaplains at a medical center in the Los Angeles area. The subject addressed was death and dying. At the beginning of the workshop I showed a videotape of a woman grieving the death of a loved one. The woman said that she was angry at God for allowing her loved one to suffer with cancer for nearly two years before dying.

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At the conclusion of the video I asked the chaplains how they were going to care for the grief-stricken woman. Several of them replied that their first agenda was to get the woman's "anger off of God."

When I asked why they felt this was necessary one chaplain replied, "Because God didn't cause her loved one to suffer." I then asked the group if they thought that God could handle the anger of one hurting woman—whether or not God caused the suffering? They all agreed that God could.

Mona knows the pain of not only having a child die, but also being told that her anger at God was wrong. Her first child, Jason, died shortly after being born.

"When Jason died," she recalls, "I asked God where was His mercy? It had taken my husband, Tim, and me more than two years to conceive. It didn't make any sense that God would allow our child to die. I was definitely angry at Him."

Mona says that many people tried to shift her anger away from God. This was especially the case with her and Tim's minister.

"The first thing my Pastor said," she remembers, "wasn't, 'I'm sorry for your loss,' or some other compassionate words. Instead, he said, 'Mona, God's not to blame. Remember He, too, suffered the death of a child. We simply live in a world where tragedies occur.'"

Mona did not find his words helpful. "I know Pastor was well-meaning," she said. "But he seemed to be more concerned with defending God than caring for Tim and me. Although I continued to be angry at God, I no longer expressed my feelings out loud. Pastor seemed to imply that my anger was misguided or wrong."

Grieving people don't need their feelings about God stifled or redirected. God can handle the anger of humans without our defense or justification. Anger is a normal, healthy part of the grief process. Given the permission to be expressed, it will eventually help bring about healing and a renewed sense of wholeness.

The Reverend Al Miles is the Coordinator of Hospital Ministry with Interfaith Ministries of Hawaii at The Queen's Medical Center.

"Getting on With Life"—What Does It Mean?

Of all the statements and spiritual platitudes quoted at me since my son Daniel's death, the phrase that I hear most frequently makes me squirm the most. "You have got to get on with your life." Recently I quit squirming long enough to ponder the meaning behind this phrase that is usually said to the bereaved in the form of a command. Exactly what does this phrase mean? What are people implying when they say it? I was pregnant when Daniel died, and three months later I gave birth to a baby girl. Wasn't that getting on with life? I nurtured my three children, took them to school, the park and birthday parties. Now wasn't that going on with life? I even cooked dinner at least four times a week!

At first after Daniel's death, I would have liked to literally stop my life and be buried next to my son, but I kept existing. Like a plastic bag tossed about by the wind, I was fluttering, being carried by the events of life. Seasons came and went. In the spring, I planted marigolds and tomato vines. In the autumn, I jumped in fallen leaves with my children. I continued; I am still continuing to live.

Now I may be bereaved, but I am by no means a fool. As I ponder the meaning behind "getting on with life," I know exactly what those who say this have in mind. "Forget your dead child. Quit grieving. You make me uncomfortable!" Getting on with life means don't acknowledge August 25, Daniel's birthday, anymore. Forget how he slid down the snowy bank in the recycle bin, sang in the van and ate Gummy Bears. Forget he had cancer, suffered and died at only age four. Don't see the empty chair at the dinner table, don't cry, just live!

Some who are more "religious" would like to believe that a bereaved parent can claim, "My child is safe and happy in heaven. Therefore, why should I yearn for him?" Perhaps I pose a threat to certain types because I have let it be known I

question God. I weep. I have been angry. I miss my Daniel. Maybe old friends feel if they hang around me too long I might convince them that a few of their illusions about life are just that, illusions. As my cries of anguish are heard, there are those who can only think how to make me be quiet. To stop my heartfelt yearnings, they say quite sternly, "You must get on with your life."

I am living. I do move on with life with Daniel in my mind and in my heart, although he is not physically here as I continue to live and to love. To sever his memory totally from my life would cause destruction and damage that would ruin me. To push Daniel out of my life and not be able to freely mention his name or write & speak about who he was on earth would only bring more pain to my life. I'd shrivel up. Comfort for me comes in remembering with smiles how he drew with a blue marker on his sister's wall, ran outside naked and picked green tomatoes. For the reality is, getting on with life means continuing to cherish Daniel.

--Alice J. Wisler, *Bereavement Magazine*, Sept./Oct. 2000

Colorado, grief@bereavementmag.com

On Grief and Laughter

After the death of a child, how many of us, as bereaved parents, might say to ourselves, "How can I ever smile again?" I know I felt that way following the death of my son. I have heard bereaved parents, especially during the early days after the loss, say, "I suddenly found myself laughing at work. How could I have done that?" After my son died, I went back to work one week after the funeral, and one of the first things I had to do was attend a department meeting. At one point, someone made a humorous remark. Everyone laughed, except me. One of my coworkers, seeing my poker face, called across the table, "Come on, don't look so sad." There were other times, too, when people thought I shouldn't be so glum, that I should be smiling or laughing. Once, while riding in my carpool, the driver turned around to me after observing my mask-like expression in the rearview mirror, and exclaimed, "Smile!" I remember retorting with some acerbity, "You smile." But in time I did smile. I did laugh. It must be the subconscious guilt within ourselves that denies us the right to smile or laugh. It happened—I don't remember how long it was—at least several months, I think. I have seen parents at a TCF meeting, whose loss is recent, with tear-stained faces, smile when someone at the meeting says something that tickles the funny bone. How many of us have heard our non-bereaved friends say to us, "How can you go to that support group? It's all sadness and gloom." *How wrong they are!* Of course, we cry at TCF, but there are moments of laughter, too. Crying and laughter, after all, are often interchangeable, such as crying at weddings or graduations and giggling inappropriately at the sight of someone taking an unceremonious pratfall on a slippery sidewalk. Perhaps laughter is also the beginning of Nature's way of mending, of healing us.

Dave Ziv

TCF, Southampton, PA Chapter

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 Jodie Virago
4300 Bedford Road
Baltimore, MD 21208

Or emailing: newsletter@baltimorectf.com



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