



The Compassionate Friends
Manhattan Chapter
 Supporting Family After a Child Dies

A GIFT OF TIME

I've been thinking a lot lately about how far I've traveled since Peter died. Sitting quietly it is so easy to travel back to those early days. I remember feeling trapped in my despair. There was no relief, no respite from the unremitting pain. Time has shown me that, although we each suffer a unique loss, the results seem now to be pretty universal among bereaved parents. And though no one could have convinced me back then, I know now that time itself is a gift.

A few weeks ago at a meeting there were several newly bereaved parents. While speaking to two of them before the meeting, in their individual distress they both tearfully said the same thing to me. It took me back, to hear two different people voice the same query...they each said "this kind of thing doesn't happen to me!" I was astounded to hear this vocalized twice within minutes. Of course I understood. I think I thought the same thing so many years ago although I don't believe I ever said it. Of course we understand. This is the kind of thing that only happens to "other people". Unless of course, as my friend Maddie Kasden wrote in her famous poem, you become 'other people'.

We recognize as time goes on that even the unique experience each child's death is, no matter the cause, the result is that they are permanently gone from our sight, from our touch, from our hearing. Their presence was so big in our lives, their subsequent absence leaves a black hole that constantly beckons. It almost seems to vibrate so that we fall into it and begin a process of writhing in agony while wrapped in what once was. I

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ACCOMMODATING GRIEF

Every day, I make accommodations for this grief. Every. Single. Day. Without exception.

On a "good" day, that might look like excusing myself to the bathroom at work where I can cry in private, if only for a few minutes, until I can get the emotions under control again. On a "bad" day, that might look like hastily excusing myself for the remainder of my shift and bolting to the car where I come so desperately unglued in the parking lot that I need my husband or daughter to talk me down so I can actually drive home.

On a "good" day, I might get dressed and allow myself to wear just a little bit of makeup out. On a "bad" day, I don't get dressed at all, and the idea of makeup or going anywhere farther than the bathroom is so ludicrous it's almost laughable. On a "good" day, I might be willing to talk to a friend or family member, check in, have a conversation that revolves around more than just how depressed I am. On a "bad" day, I probably won't even answer the phone.

These accommodations are ever-shifting because grief is a living, changing thing. What works today may not tomorrow. Today, it may be kinder to ignore the dog hair and dirty floors and hug the couch until the sun goes down. Tomorrow, it may be kinder to get up and try to tame my space, so that I can feel productive and functional and human. I have to check in with my grief constantly, like an overbearing house mother. Is it okay to go out tonight? How long is too long in the company of others? What time do I need to be in bed? How much can I manage to eat today? Is work realistic? Is dinner? Is showering?

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TELEPHONE FRIENDS - When you're having the kind of day that you feel only another bereaved parent or sibling can understand, we are willing to listen and share with you. Don't hesitate to call our Manhattan Chapter phone for meeting information (212) 217-9647. However, if you need to speak with someone please call one of the following volunteers: Jacquie Mitchell (eves) (347) 414-1780 jacquienytcf@gmail.com.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MEETINGS are always the second and fourth Tuesday of each month.
Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church,
 55th and 5th Avenue. Enter at 7 West 55th street.
We start PROMPTLY at 7:00PM.

The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. We are a group of bereaved parents who are seeking support in our grief or are able to give it. Among us, your religion, your race, your politics, your job or social standing are not important. We care about your grief—the tragedy that each of us has shared—and how we can grow through it, not back to the person we were but to the person we can become.

THE UNIQUE ASPECTS OF SIBLING GRIEF

Posted on September 28th, 2018

From the shadows we come, the surviving siblings. We are all ages: younger, older, twins and subsequent children. We have our own story to tell, one that is often brushed aside in the concern for our parents, the spouse, and even the children of our sibling. We are grieving, experiencing the same intensity of pain, but not always acknowledged by others. When a child dies, a future is lost; when a parent dies, it is the past which is buried. The death of a sibling is the death of a friend, a rival, an antagonist, a confidant, and perhaps a co-conspirator. It is important to help give siblings a voice as we struggle in the shadows, searching to find light in the darkness.

My mother would tell you that when my brother, Big A died, “the world went dark and silent. No longer did life seem worth living, the sun grew cold and the music died. There were no happy sounds in our house anymore and the sun cast only shadows of sadness.” When Austin died, we all thought the sun had left forever. But much to our dismay, the sun kept coming up and we had to keep going, even though we didn’t always know where we were going! My mom used to tell people that the only reason she got up after my brother died was because I needed cereal. There is a little more to the story.

It is true, I was hungry. But what she didn’t tell you is that at first, she moved the cereal down to a lower cabinet, to make it easier for me to reach. And then she put the milk in a smaller container so I didn’t need help pouring it. Then the TV was moved to a shorter shelf so I could turn on my own cartoons. By now, all the possible accommodations had been made for me to be “self-sufficient,” — mind you, I was 4. But every day I came back, needing something else. Finally, my mom, exhausted and looking to grieve in peace, asked me what more could I possibly need?

I told her that I needed my brother back. We cried together while she explained patiently to her 4-year-old daughter for the thousandth time that he could not come back. Then I asked her when our family would be fixed, “unbroken.” I didn’t have the words then that I do now, to say that I was hungry for more than cereal. I had lost my brother...and we were at risk of losing so much more...

It was then, in the early hours of a Saturday morning, that we came to realize that in our own unique struggles to find a way to breathe in those early days, we had lost each other. We didn’t lose my brother, he died. But we were at risk of losing the support of our little family. This was the spark for us, the start of our commitment to find a way to reach through our differences in our losses to find some common ground.

Our story is not unique. One of the most difficult parts of being a bereaved sibling is the loss of the family we knew.

Our parents are consumed by their own grief and while we certainly understand why our experience is that none of our supports are the same. Siblings are the people who have known us and our family the longest. Our friends may not know how to help and may shy away. Extended family is primarily concerned with our parents, and the family that we knew is shattered seemingly beyond repair.

How can you help a bereaved sibling?

Acknowledge that Sibling loss is devastating – often sibs feel we are the “Forgotten Mourners.” We may be asked how their parents are handling the loss. Many times, we feel that our loss is not given as much weight by supportive others. Take the time to ask surviving siblings how we are doing.

Encourage us to seek and accept emotional support for ourselves – sometimes we feel driven to support our parents. Many siblings report putting their own grief on hold to care for parents or out of fear that their grieving will make things worse for their grieving parents who “have enough to deal with.” This can result in siblings feeling isolated and alone within their own families. We may need reminders and permission to grieve and to accept our own support.

Allow us to grapple with our guilt – the truth is that all sibling relationships are not perfect and even great ones come with some not-so-hot moments of rivalry or ugly words. Grief has a unique quality of playing back newsreels of the worst moments between us and our siblings when we are feeling down. Remind us of memories where we were kind to our sibling. Help us put into perspective our normal sibling relationships. It would be weird if every moment we had with them was actually perfect. We may need you to help us to remember this.

We are surviving siblings. We face many challenges, sometimes alone. But with support and a lot of grief work, we can emerge from the shadows. We can claim our roles, and live the legacies we have chosen of our loved ones with pride (colored with sadness).

Am I Still a Sister? You bet I am! And just as my little family learned in the wee hours of a Saturday morning, crying over breakfast cereal, I hope our TCF family can find that we are all bereaved, we are all hurting, we are many things, BUT WE ARE NOT ALONE. Together we can become a family circle, broken by death, but mended by love.



ALICIA SIMS FRANKLIN

Alicia Sims Franklin, LCSW, CHT, GMS is a certified grief management specialist, a clinical social worker, a bereaved sibling, and a certified hypno-behavioral therapist. She is the author of Am I Still a Sister? and co-author of A Place for Me: A Healing Journey for Grieving Kids, a guided imagery audio tape for children. She is a contributing author for Dear Parents, The Dying and Bereaved Teenager, In Accord Magazine, and Bereavement Magazine.

A LOVE GIFT *is a donation given in memory of a child who has died, or sometimes as a memorial to a relative or friend. It can be in honor of a happy event that you would like to acknowledge. Your contributions can be in any amount, are tax deductible and are a source of income for our chapter that helps us to reach out to bereaved parents and siblings through books, programs, meetings and this newsletter. In this issue we want to thank and acknowledge the following for their generous support of our chapter and especially, our newsletter. Note, on advice from our National office, because of concerns about identity theft we have changed our format and eliminated years from birth dates and anniversary dates.*



- Claudette Hannibal** In loving memory of her son **Troy Myers**, 5/30 - 12/20, forever 33
- Irma Schubert** In loving memory of her son **William E. Schubert**, 6/21 - 5/2, forever 34
- Leah Peskin** In memory of **Phil Levine**, and in loving memory of her son **Gavin Peskin**, 5/2 - 11/5, forever 35
- Marie Levine** In memory of **Phil Levine**, Peter's dad - together at last 5/8/2018
- Lynne Rosenthal** In loving memory of her son **Alan Rosenthal**, 11/26 - 7/5, forever 44
- Lynn & Mitch Baumeister** In memory of **Phil Levine**, and in loving memory of their son **Matthew Baumeister**, 4/5 - 5/11, forever 19
- Renee & Herve Sande** In loving memory of their grandson **Caleb Sande**, 12/29 - 9/3, forever 6

BEING THANKFUL

It's not easy being thankful when you're no longer here. It's not that I'm ungrateful, just that death makes life unclear.

I'm thankful for a mind that still remembers you so well, and the life we shared together left stories I can tell.

I'm thankful for the things I have, reminders of your life; childhood drawings, baseball cards, your writings and scout knife.

I'm thankful for all family, now gone, and those still here, the many friends now in my life, 'twas death that brought us near.

Why does this season cause me pain when thankful for so much, and knowing you're still with me, simply out of sight and touch?

Please know I'm not ungrateful if not up to holiday mirth. For I'm thankful that I shared the life you lived when on this earth.

~**Georgia A. Cockerham**
from "Why? Why? Why?"



THE HOLIDAYS

With the changing of the seasons the holidays come once more. Busy shoppers, joyous laughter, pretty wreaths hung on the door.

Though I pause in the twilight hour, and hear the children play, my joy is forever silenced, by the dreadful day in May.

My love of the holiday season, now lives in another time, memories of past Christmases, when all of my life was fine.

The tree lights no longer sparkle, my heart is cold inside. My holiday joy ended the day my only child died.

I stand outside now, looking in, to a world I no longer know. My tears flow like a river, and melt the falling snow.

I turn now to the meaning of what Christmas really is - My pain softened by believing, in spirit, he will always live.

~**Vicki Tushingham**
TCF, Los Angeles, CA

A GIFT OF TIME... (continued from page 1)

daresay that even though we truly believe our own pain is unique to us in the beginning, we discover in time that just about every parent who has this experience suffers the same degree of agony.

I was sure during those early days that no one felt what I did. Had I chosen to grieve alone, I might never have discovered how universal my despair was. I might have gotten stuck and spent the rest of my days agonizing and stuck in my grief. I'm glad I made the choices I did...to read all I could about the experience, to come to meetings at the compassionate friends where I met, talked and learned from others on the same path as mine, that I wrote and wrote and wrote about what I was feeling so I could refer back to my journey and begin to recognize how I was changing. I'm so glad I met all the people who like me, were learning the same lessons in this academy of grieving. It really does help to not grieve alone.

I'm glad I recognized early on my journey, how reaching out to others had the most healing power for me. I'm grateful too, that through my experience I recognize that though Peter is no longer in my physical world, he is ever present in my life. He is not forgotten, he's not just a memory. The love I have for him remains constant and I don't hesitate to refer to him daily. Peter has had the biggest effect on my life. It is Peter who made me who I've become. I am convinced his love continues to surround me and I continue to want to make him proud. He will always be my greatest achievement. He enriched my life beyond all measure. He truly is a gift that keeps on giving.

Peaceful holidays, once again.

Marie Levine

ACCOMODATING GRIEF... (continued from page 1)

It's all over the map from one day to the next. And the dance required to keep up is exhausting. But I must perform it. I don't have a choice. Because one wrong step can crater me, can send me back months in my progress, can shut me down for days on end. If I don't accommodate my grief, if I don't accommodate this newly shattered woman in her newly fragile body with her newly aching heart, she will not survive. Of that, I am sure. She will not remain. She will not be here for the people who need her. She will not be here to anchor Evelyn's spirit in this world of living matter, of flesh and bones and blood. So the question of accommodating my grief is not a question at all. It's a command. It's an imperative.

But as time marches on, I wonder where people's patience will run out. Will my job still be okay with me calling in a "grief day" in six months or six years? Will my family still understand if I skip out on the Christmas celebrations for the next year or the next decade? Will my friends understand if I can't go to their kid's birthday parties or graduations or weddings ... maybe ever?

How much space does my wounded heart have a right to ask for? How much time? How much patience? How much forgiveness? When will society expect me to stop identifying as a "bereaved mother"? Do I get to mourn her for ten years? Or twenty? What is the expiration date for grief? What is the shelf life of a dead child? Who makes those calls? Who sets the numbers?

Any grieving parent will tell you, your inner circle shrinks as those around you reset their expectations until they decide, once and for all, they can reset them no more.

I think, for those who have not lost a child or experienced a similar trauma, that it's easy to slip into a place of impatience. To believe that we dance to the tune of our loss out of selfishness or coddling or a sense of entitlement. To believe that we are weak or lazy or obsessed. I think, for some of those people, because they have not experienced the random senselessness of child loss or a similar trauma, that they need to place blame. Blame makes sense. It makes the world more manageable. Surely, if we are struggling, it must be our fault somehow. It must be someone's. It seems easy, from that place, to point to cause and effect. To draw clear lines between events. To make someone ultimately responsible. To shift from patience and understanding to "knock it off" when accommodating our grief ceases to be easy or comfortable for them.

And I have some sympathy for that because there is nothing about accommodating grief that is easy for the grieving. There is nothing about the steps that gets simpler or smoother or better. If I could set my grief down somewhere on this path and simply walk away, I likely would. But then, for me, this grief is woven into the bond I have with Evelyn, and I will never abandon her. So when I have to ask, and when I have to choose between accommodating or suffering more, between abandoning my child's memory and myself or being abandoned by others, the choice is obvious, but it is never, ever easy.



ANNA SILVERNAIL

Posted on September 19th, 2018



The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting® unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7:00 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon. Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the 20th annual Worldwide Candle Lighting, a gift to the bereavement community from The Compassionate Friends, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone.

TCF's WWCL started in the United States in 1997 as a small internet observance, but has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world of the remembrance. 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.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9th

our Manhattan Chapter will join the Worldwide Candle Lighting
at

THE AFFINIA SHELBOURNE HOTEL
36th STREET ON LEXINGTON AVENUE

Doors will open at 5:45

Our program will begin promptly at 6:45 so that candles will be lit at 7PM.

There will be an ongoing slide presentation of all of our children. You are invited to submit two photos a "sunrise" (young) photo and a "sunset" one taken shortly before his or her anniversary date.

Photos should be emailed in .jpg format to: photosmtcf@gmail.com

PHOTOS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN NOVEMBER 23rd

Refreshments will be served.

Be sure to bring a framed photo that can be displayed during the event

OTHER PEOPLE

Every so often
You hear about other people
Losing their child.
Sometimes there is a horrible accident
you find out about on television.
Sometimes it is a senseless murder or suicide
you read about in the newspaper.
Sometimes you learn about a deadly illness over the
telephone, because this time,
the child belongs to someone you knew.

When such a tragedy happens,
to other people,
your heart goes out to them.
You feel deeply saddened and, perhaps,
you shed a few tears.
You then continue your charmed life,
going about business as usual.

You don't forget, but,
you don't necessarily remember either.
After all, the death of a child
is something that occurs in the lives
of other people.

Unless, God forbid,
the television story or newspaper article or
telephone call
is about your child.

Unless, one terrible day,
heaven and earth and hell become one.
Unless your life loses all meaning and
nothing makes sense anymore.
Suddenly,
by a random twist of fate, or the hand of God,
you have become other people.

Madelaine Perri Kasden,

written in loving memory of her son *Neill Perri*, June 1995

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CHAT SCHEDULE

Go to: www.compassionatefriends.org, and click on CHAT. Times are Eastern Standard Time.

EDT	9:00-10:00AM	8:00-9:00PM	9:00-10:00PM	10:00-11:00PM
MON			General Bereavement Issues & Grandparents/Stepparents	General Bereavement Issues & Men's Chat
TUE			General Bereavement Issues, Bereavement over 2 years & Pregnancy Loss/Infant Death	General Bereavement Issues & Pregnancy Loss/Infant Death
WED	Newly Bereaved		September 11 Families & Siblings	General Bereavement Issues
THU		No Surviving Children	General Bereavement Issues & Siblings	General Bereavement Issues
FRI		Suicide	Special Needs Children	General Bereavement Issues
SAT				General Bereavement & Siblings
SUN	Siblings		General Bereavement Issues & Siblings	General Bereavement Issues & Siblings

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We Need Not Walk Alone
 TCF National Magazine
 1 yr. subscription \$20

Deadline for Newsletter article submissions:
 Fall: August 1st Spring/Summer: April 1st
 Winter: February 2nd Holiday: October 1st

Mark Your Calendars!
 Our next Chapter meetings are Tuesdays:

NOV 13	DEC 11	JAN 8	FEB 12	MAR 12
NOV 27		JAN 22	FEB 26	MAR 26

OUR COMPASSIONATE FRIENDLY NEIGHBORS					
Babylon	1st Friday	(516) 795-8644	Medford	2nd Friday	(631) 738-0809
Bronx	2nd Tuesday	(914) 714-4885	Rockville Centre	2nd Friday	(516) 766-4682
Brookhaven	2nd Friday	(631) 738-0809	Rockland County	3rd Tuesday	(845) 398-9762
Brooklyn	3rd Wednesday	(917) 952-9751	SmithPoint/Mastic	2nd Thursday	(631) 281-9004
Flushing	3rd Friday	(718) 746-5010	Staten Island	2nd and 4th Thursday	(718) 983-0377
Manhasset	3rd Tuesday	(516) 466-2480	Syosset (Plainview)	3rd Friday	(718) 767-0904
Marine Park, Bklyn	3rd Friday	(718) 605-1545	Twin Forks/Hamptons	3rd Friday	(646) 894-0317
			White Plains	1st Thursday	(914) 381-3389



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