



# The Compassionate Friends NEWSLETTER

Manhattan Newsletter

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reprinted from "First You Die"

## BROKEN DREAMS

by Marie Levine

Recently, someone asked me to write down some of my thoughts about Peter. Who he was, how he was and how he impacted my life. At first thought the project appeared to be a breeze. The question was also asked of Phil. The inquisitor wanted to get a man's view, a father's take, as well as mine. In the almost seven years since he's been gone, I've written and spoken volumes about Peter. To me, writing about him has kept him alive. But now, more than describing him, defining the loss of him may be a more accurate view.

To describe him is easy. He was an adorable child. He was bright, articulate beyond his years, funny and captivating. He grew into a young man of considerable charm, was a caring human being, considerate of his family and sensitive to his friends. Over the years he and I developed a particular rapport. He was so like me, I could anticipate his every response. And my ability to do that always knocked him out. We delighted in each others' company to the point where Phil often felt left out of our little party. I thought Peter was the greatest thing since sliced bread, and he thought I could walk on water. It was a mutual admiration society beyond all explanation.

Peter was still living at home when he died. He had been away at college, but having just graduated, he had not yet gone out on his own. His world was contained within mine. I would still not fall asleep until I knew he was safely home. I was still the one to enjoy all the tales of his day each evening. Though he was a lover and had a significant girlfriend from the time he was 16, my position as the most important person in his life had not yet been compromised. In truth, on the eve of his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday he had been jilted by a college sweetheart who, he believed, was going to be "the

*(Continued on page 10)*

## WHAT I WISH MORE PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD ABOUT LOSING A CHILD

By Paula Stephens

Four and half years after the death of my oldest son, I finally went to a grief support group for parents who have lost children. I went to support a friend who recently lost her son. I'm not sure I would've gone except that when I was in her shoes, four years ago, I wish I would've had a friend to go with me. Losing a child is the loneliest, most desolate journey a person can take and the only people who can come close to appreciating it are those who share the experience.

The meeting was a local chapter of The Compassionate Friends, an organization solely dedicated to providing support for those who have lost children, grandchildren or siblings. The facilitator was a tall gentleman who had lost his 17 year old son eight years ago. He opened the meeting by saying that dues to belong to the club are more than anyone would ever want to pay. Well, he couldn't be more correct: no one wants to belong to this group.

The group of incredible survivors included parents whose children had been killed by drunk drivers, murdered, accidental overdose, alcoholism, suicide and freak accidents. The children's ages ranged from 6-38 years old. When hearing the stories, I had a visceral reaction to being part of this "club," but was also humbled by the greatness of these mothers and fathers.

Most of what I share in this article came from this meeting, but also from my own experience of having lost a child and being four years into that lifelong journey of healing from deep grief. The following five tips can be your compass to help you navigate how to give support to grieving parents on a sacred journey they never wanted to take.

### 1. Remember our children.

The loss of children is a pain all bereaved parents share, and it is a degree of suffering that is impossible to grasp without experiencing it first-hand. Often, when we know someone else is experiencing grief, our discomfort keeps us from approaching it head on. But we want the world to remember our child or children, no matter how young or old our child was.

*(Continued on page 11)*

**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) 414-1780jacquienytcf@verizon.net .

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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.*

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## BEREAVED PARENTS DAY

by Nora Yood

Dear Reader,

I hope you will accept this message I want to share. This year, I am offering myself and all of you a special greeting card. It should arrive sometime in the spring. It is sent with love and compassion, solidarity and sadness, and acceptance of what was and steadfastness in honoring what always will be. It should arrive special delivery, and will be labeled confidential and personal, sensitive material, not appropriate for the general population. I hope it will bring comfort and support.

This greeting card is designed for Bereaved Parents during this highly emotionally charged period between Mother's Day and Father's Day. It is a decidedly non-commercial, non-cheery missive dedicated to a group, often isolated and invisible, at no time so strikingly outcast as during this interval when it seems the whole American media and market place is obsessed with a public celebration of parenthood. The cards, the flowers, the department store advertisements describing perfect presents for smiling moms and proud dads from loving (and of course, living) offspring make this month long shoparama more like a painful, money making marathon than a silly, shallow Hallmark moment.

I fear an unpleasant tone might be seeping into to my message, which is definitely not my goal. Still, even as the years pass, and the truth that our children are no longer physically part of our existence necessarily integrates into our consciousness, we never truly become comfortable with that incomprehensible reality. I know that on the surface, time moves on with its rhythm and busyness, but on a deeper level,

there is always the awareness that I lost my child. I try to practice an attitude of gratitude for the gift of my wonderful son's life, cut short well before his journey on this earth should have ended. But, admittedly, at times, my inner feelings of being cheated, unjustly treated and defeated by life manifests. This negativity can reveal itself in gallows humor satirizing the superficial complaints of clueless (regular) people, unresolved guilt (even though I know I do not have control over death), a sense of being viewed as a pariah or object of pity example, when I answer the innocuous query, How many children to you have?, the permanent status of grief as part of my psychic makeup.

In an effort to endure this difficult season, I've decided to give myself and all my Compassionate Friends a BP (Bereaved Parents) Card. No sentimental images, specious verse, cutesy musical ditties, or inspirational messages to be included. No price tag listed on the bottom of the back page. No postage stamp necessary. Just an affirmation that we still are mothers and fathers; that our children will always be with us in spirit; that our sons and daughters are loved and missed; that their lives mattered; that their memories are a blessing; that they continue to enrich and ennoble our lives every single day of the year. They bequeath to us each of us, uniquely and distinctively, their Mother's day and Father's day wishes, in a profound, mystical and transcendent way.

BP cards are for our hearts only. They are our silent, inexplicable and inalienable legacy.

### The Same To Me

You'll always be the same to me  
as when I knew you last.  
You've no tomorrow in this world  
but live in recent past.

So I will watch your sisters,  
your classmates and your friends,  
grow to their adulthood  
and dream-filled ends.

And soon they'll have their families  
and years will pass them by.  
Still I know what I shall hold  
and cherish in mind's eye.

I'll see others get grey-templed  
and paunchy in the waist.  
And doing in slow-motion  
what once was done in haste.

And they will all be care-worn  
from their many daily trials.  
As taxes, jobs and housework  
erode those youthful smiles.

But I'll take comfort having  
what time can't tear apart.  
For you'll be that forever teen  
to keep within my heart.

~Ken Falk, TCF Connecticut

**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.

**Leslie Kandell** In memory of her daughter **Elinor Friedberg Blume**, forever 41

**Lynn & Mitch Baumeister** In memory of their son **Matthew Baumeister**, 4/5 - 5/11, forever 19

**Marilyn Maras** In memory of her son, **George David Maras**, 5/1 - 12/13, forever 39

**Siblings** - 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©

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FROM BEREAVED SIBLINGS

**All of a sudden I burst in to tears and cannot control crying.**

You have the freedom to cry when you need to. Crying is a normal reaction. You may feel embarrassed, but most people will react with sympathy and wish for themselves that they could cry freely. Crying is a natural outlet to grieving.

**Why am I so mad at my sister for dying? She left me alone. I know it wasn't her fault, but I feel so guilty for feeling angry.**

At some time everyone is angry at the person who died. Anger doesn't mean you loved them less; it means the loss is so great that you want the terrible pain to end.

**I can't concentrate. I can't think and I can't remember anything. I think I'm losing my mind.**

You're not losing your mind, although it may feel that way. Your mind is probably overloaded. Not only do you have to continue to go through your daily routine, but your mind is flooded with thoughts and feelings for your brother or sister. This is temporary; your memory and concentration will return over time.

**I have terrible nightmares. Sometimes I dream I am dying. I can't tell anyone because they will think I am crazy. Am I?**

Some grieving people experience intense dreams. Dreams serve as a healthy outlet for the intense feelings

you have during the day. As time goes on and you deal with your feelings, your dreams will become less frightening.

**I no longer want to be with people. Their conversations are so trivial and shallow. Can you believe my friend thought the end of the world had come because her boyfriend dumped her? The real disaster is that my brother is dead? Why am I so intolerant?**

Many people believe the second year is more difficult than the first year. You feel less numb and more vulnerable to feelings of sadness and helplessness. You have begun to confront painful feelings and memories you worked hard to avoid during the first year when you were coping with the reality of the loss.

**I feel so guilty for the way I yelled at my brother. We would fight about the silliest things. I'll never be able to tell him how sorry I am.**

Brothers and sisters in every family quarrel and don't apologize after every argument. Even though you fought, you still loved each other.

**Suddenly my parents expect me to parent them. I just can't handle it.**

This is truly one of the most unfair positions your grief puts you in. Try to share these feelings with your parents. Hopefully you will be better able to understand one another.

~ TCF, Baltimore, MD

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## The Hair Fairy

by Thea Amena

*Thursday February 18th, 2009.*

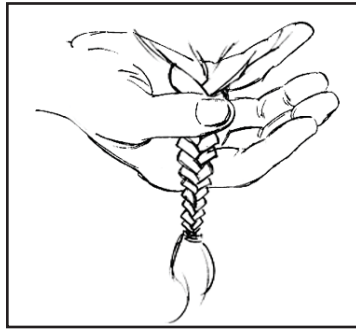
I returned to her room late one afternoon after getting a coffee downstairs in the cafeteria. The familiar smell of lysol and hand sanitizer greeting me as I opened the door. Then I noticed, halfway under the bed on the floor. WHAT THE HELL? Yuck, how could that be? It resembled a rat tail. I was horrified. This was impossible. I made sure her room was spotless. I had to, she was extremely neutropenic.

Anyone entering had to wash their hands, take their shoes off and leave their coats outside. Even gifts had to be sanitized before packages were allowed to enter. But as I bent over to take a closer look, my heart sank. The cruel reality hit me like a brick in the face. Horror, shock, fear merged as a tornado in my consciousness.

I stood there frozen, trying to process this absoluteness.

I picked it up, caressing its familiarity while tears rolled down my cheeks. Unable to stop, feeling my knees weaken, I let myself collapse into her bed. For these past few weeks, I'd taken pride in the fact that she had NOT lost her hair. Even her oncologist was baffled, double checking with his staff if indeed the correct amount of chemo had been administered. She'd always been so strong, never sick and possessed an abundance of energy. She had been here for over a month now, consistently in great spirits. Dancing, playing, laughing and enjoyed clowning around with the nurses. This was no surprise to me, as she had been an exceptional child since the day I held her in my arms the very first time.

Obviously I knew this would happen eventually but somehow, it had not occurred in the amount of time I was told it would happen. I still hoped it was no more than a bad dream. If not, I secretly liked to believe my child would be THE exception. The doctors



would realize they had made a BIG mistake and we live happily ever after as we did before that dreadful cold winter morning when I took her to her pediatrician with a little itchy bumpy thingy on her foot.

Except for the fact that her mouth was swollen and showed some sores on her lips, there was no external evidence that her perfect little body was being injected with a daily dose of aggressive chemicals. So there I was, unable to stop crying holding dearly onto a chunk of her hair. I had not noticed any hair loss since her hair was braided. One hundred and eight braids to be exact of which one hundred and seven were now barely hanging on to a few strands of remaining hair about to be doomed by the same inevitable fate.

I was your typical European mom with an African American child. Clueless what to do with these course curls. I used all the oils and creams friends recommended to get a comb through it but it still took me an extra half hour to get her ready for school in the morning. Once I joked to another adoptive mom how much simpler my life would have been if I had adopted a Chinese girl instead. Thinking back, I hate myself for having said that. She had always been a girly girl, craving long hair like Mama. So every three months, we took the A-train to Harlem's 125th street where a pair of lovely West African ladies, one on each side, braided her hair. Long beautiful shiny braids we could manipulate every which way. Ponytails, pigtails, fancy up

do's and I even braided the braids. It was perfect.

Now here I was, holding one braid in my hand which had been on the floor like some filthy piece of trash, illustrating my new grim reality. I did not have the heart to tell her. I had to come up with a plan to ease her into it. She was at an age where a few of her friends were already losing some of their baby teeth. She knew about the Tooth Fairy. That was it! a Hair Fairy!

The next day I stopped at the bank, asked for one hundred and eight single dollars bills to put under her pillow in exchange for her hundred and eight braids. I made up a story about a delightful fairy with bedazzled wings from the forest who treasured pretty hair. I kept elaborating and encouraging her to believe in this world of fantasy that I knew would make her happy and I strongly believed happiness was one of the best medicines.

The concept made her eyes light up with excitement in a way only a child can express. She became thrilled with the idea of experimenting with all the different variations of wigs that she was going to play with. Red hair like Ariel, the mermaid, blond hair like Cinderella, dark hair like Snow white and long brown hair like Mama.

By evening, she told me she was ready. I looked at her, my vision impaired due to my tears.

It was confirmed, I was now officially... a cancer mom.

I went to the nurse's station to borrow a pair of scissors and crawled back in bed with her.

"Mama don't cry"

Slowly, yet very carefully I cut one by one, the remaining one hundred and seven braids.

**Jasmina** lost her battle with leukemia January 27th 2010.



## SINCE I LOST YOU

I awaken every morning  
Drowning in the pain  
and the incredible realization  
that I won't see you again.

My heart is very heavy  
the grief is so immense,  
no physical ache or pain on earth  
could be as agonizing or intense.

The doctors found no answers.  
I can't fathom any plan.  
Was robbing you of the rest of your life  
an act of God or man?

How can you be gone for good?  
There's no reason nor no rhyme.  
They tell me not to question why;  
that my wounds will heal with time.

Time is what you didn't have,  
time to laugh and cry.  
Time to learn and time to love  
before your time to die.

Faith is what I used to have,  
when I still had my son.  
Anger and doubt have destroyed my faith.  
My hell has just begun.

Life as I knew it has ceased to exist,  
my world is not the same.  
I cry and curse and rage and scream.  
Where do I place the blame?

Do not weep on my behalf,  
we all have paid the cost,  
for a noble life that was not to be  
and the light the world has lost.

**Madelaine Perri Kasten**  
in loving memory of **Neill Perri**, 1995

## Your Favorite Café by Marilyn Maras

"A double espresso  
that's what I need"  
you used to say,  
to start the day.

Your favorite café,  
sipping frappés,  
remembering Greece  
back in the day.

I pass your café,  
I can still see your face,  
sipping frappés  
back in the day.

My heart remembers,  
my mind replays,  
each precious moment  
of each precious day.

Sometimes I would join you,  
but most times not,  
for this was your haven,  
your favorite spot.

I think that in Heaven  
you're sipping frappés,  
relaxing and smiling  
at your favorite café.

(Lefkos pyrgos, Astoria) 4/09/08  
*Dedicated to my loving son, **George David Maras***



If you are planning to attend our National  
Conference in Dallas this summer,  
be sure to go online to  
[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)  
for complete registration and hotel information.  
The hotel fills up fast so don't delay!

## BURDEN OF GRIEF

As I struggle with words to find answers  
Reading and writing my pain  
The pages grow blurred before eyes that are tired  
from this crushing emotional drain.  
The relief that comes from the writing  
Parallels what I feel when I read  
To open myself to the torture of loss  
Seems to soothe this unbearable need.  
There's no pleasure in life at this moment  
It's an effort to get through the day  
And I labor to stay above water...  
But the shoreline is so far away.  
So I pick up a pen, or a book about grief  
And it serves as a raft for a while  
And I hope, as my tears fall on pages of pain  
That I'll learn to swim towards the shore of acceptance  
I pray for the peace of belief  
That heaven's your home and you're waiting for me  
Then I'll finally be free of this grief.

By **Sally Migliaccio**, TCF Babylon, NY  
from Tracy, An Extraordinary Child ©1988

With the death of a child we as parents experience the ultimate failure - we are supposed to be invincible where our children are concerned and now we have failed to keep our child alive! Suddenly our belief system is shattered. The suddenness of the death has robbed us of our confidence in ourselves. We have low self-esteem; we suffer from lack of motivation due to our severe fatigue. We have nothing left to believe in, not even God for some. We are totally insecure. We are placed in the position of continuing to deteriorate or to begin to rebuild our lives by rebuilding our beliefs, our self-confidence and our self-esteem. The choice is ours. Choose to live. Our children would want us not only to just live, but continue to grow and love.

~ **Faye Harden**, TCF Tuscaloosa, AL  
Reprinted from *We Need Not Walk Alone*

## A Mothers Thoughts...

Yesterday...

We dreamed of how our future would be,  
of times we'd share, my child and me.  
Whether joy or pain, laughter or tears,  
we'd stand together throughout the years.  
A promise of what life should always be,  
for a child so dear, ever loving me.

Today...

My heart sobs with uncontrollable grief,  
I search for answers but find no relief.  
The skies have darkened, no longer bright,  
for my child is gone forever from sight.  
The dreams we shared can never be,  
They're left to linger in my memory.

Tomorrow...

My heart will push aside this cloud  
that darkens my life like a heavy shroud.  
Once again I'll see the dawning light  
and know my child's love still burns bright.  
I'll remember the moments that we both shared;  
I'll remember our love and how we cared.  
I'll remember my child now lives in me,  
and his yesterdays shall always be.

~ **Carol Cichella**, Rockfort, IL



*If you have occasional spells  
of despondency and self-pity,  
if once in a while you begin  
to feel sorry for yourself -  
don't despair.*

*The sun has a sinking spell every night,  
but it rises again the next morning.*

**Richard C. Hertz**,  
TCF Lexington, KY

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## REFLECTIONS ABOUT TIME & CHANGE

I often wonder what people are thinking when they say, “you’ll get over it”.

Sometimes it sounds to me as if they are talking about a case of mumps or my despair at income tax time. But what can they mean when they say it about my grief? Maybe they mean that grief is just an interruption in life. Their theory seems to be that life is basically happy – buying stuff, working, watching TV – but that a time of death and grief is an unnatural sad time in that happy life.

I cannot agree with that view.

Time can lessen the hurt, the empty place we have can seem smaller as other things and experiences fill our life; we can forget for periods and not feel as if our child didn’t die, we can find sense in the death and understand perhaps this death does fit in to a bigger design in the world; we can learn to remember the good and hold on to that.

But we can’t “get over it”, because to get over it would mean we were not changed by the experience. It

would mean that our child’s death made no difference in our life.

There is an interesting discussion in the Talmud, an ancient Jewish writing. Those Jews had the custom of rending their garments – literally tearing their clothes – to symbolize the ripping apart that death brings. But the question was raised, after the period of mourning, could you sew the garment up and use it again? The teachers answered yes, but when you mend it, you should not tuck the edges under so it would look as if it had never been torn. This symbolized the fact that life after grief is not the same as before. The rent will show. The next question was, can you sell the garment? The teacher answered no. The rending and mending of our life is ours and others cannot wear it.

No, we don’t get over it. We change and grow. Our life has a difference that is ours alone. Perhaps as compassionate friends, we can help each other make that difference, the kind of difference that increases the world’s supply of compassion, love and healing.

**Dennis Klass**, TCF, St. Louis, MO



### SEASONS

The change of seasons is difficult. It reminds me that I must change if I am to live again. We can become stuck in our grief, full of self-pity and overwhelmed with pain. I do not believe our children would want us to live the rest of our lives in pain and misery. It is so easy to fall into the “black pit” and never have the strength or courage to crawl out – because crawl out we must...on our bellies.

We are different now, with different priorities and goals. We must find a new purpose for going on, and we must accept the changes in our lives – including ourselves, for we are different now. We cannot go backward, though there are times we yearn to. We

must move forward. If we don’t, we stay stuck at the point that our world changed. I used to say “ended.”

Change is difficult. To accept the loss of our child is the most difficult of all. Our comfort comes from believing that the love we shares will go on for all eternity and that we will be reunited again – and each day brings us closer. We must learn to live again, love again, feel joy and peace again – or our survival will be without value to ourselves or others.

**Renée Little**

*Fort Collins, Colorado ~reprinted from  
Denver Area October 2005 Newsletter*

### YOU’RE STILL HERE

At the finest level of my being  
You’re still with me.  
We still look at each other  
At that level beyond sight.  
We talk and laugh with each other  
In a place beyond words.  
We still touch each other  
On a level beyond touch.  
We share a time together in a place  
Where time stands still.  
We are still together  
On a level called love.  
But I cry alone for you  
In a place called reality.  
How I miss you....

**Richard Lepinsky**  
TCF, Winnipeg, Manitoba

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**BROKEN DREAMS...** (continued from page 1)

one". When she left him, it was to me he came and wept. During that last year of his life, he worked hard to get over a broken heart that he exposed to me...his mother..in all it's merciless pain and ego smashing cruelty. We became even closer in that year, if that is possible.

And so, to have seen him robbed of his life before he could even heal from the devastation of a lost love so important to him...to know he was gone into some unknown never never land where perhaps on some level he might be conscious of my torment...this prince, this lover, this marvelous, beautiful, sensitive, caring, tender creature...how do I now try to bring my 7 year old loss into some perspective to those who are fairly convinced that Phil and I are well on our way to (oh, dare I say it?..) "closure".

Peter was the most miraculous thing that could ever have happened in my life. I am blessed (or cursed) with an inordinate instinct about life. I always had a sense of life being much bigger, much more than my small place in it. Growing up, they said I had a "maturity" beyond my years. History always intrigued me, especially that of my family. The endless conversations I listened to between my mother and her mother, the family "gossip" and speculation of the goings on among the family's historical, long gone ancestors were recollections I had always hoped to put into a journal for our heirs. As Peter grew, he became the young participant, listening as my mother and I continued the family tradition...carrying tales of the past into a future that Peter now had in hand. It would fall to him to carry these family sagas down to the next generation.

And then, suddenly, in a microsecond, it was all over. Peter killed on a dark, rainy night, the driver of a careening container of death and destruction, blissfully unaware of his possible cosmic impact on the lives of so many innocent victims. As has happened countless times before, and countless times since, Peter, Phil and I were caught in what we all think of as an impossible event. Something that only happens to other people. Something that had never happened to anyone we knew. Something that could never happen to us. Simply said, our world ended.

People say time heals. People say we have much to live for. People say we must get on with our lives. People say we were lucky to have had him for 22 years. People say lots of things. And because of what people see, much of what they say has some truth in it. We look okay, if considerably older (we've both put on about 50 pounds). We seem to be getting on with our lives. We are definitely lucky to have had Peter at all. He was, as it turns out, what life was all about. Now, we simply go on. Some days, we even have a few laughs. And if life, as we now know it, appears to have some good time, those in the know recognize the reality of what is missing. It is joy.

Peter used to regale me with his daily adventures. This handsome person, fully grown, that I clearly remembered as a blob requiring care and feeding, entertained me daily

with recollections of his daily experiences of discovery. He shared with me all of his hopes, his dreams...all the promise his future held. He kept me young. He chastised me when I came home late. I reveled in his caring for me. And during the stupid years, when young adults realize that only they have all the answers, and that parents are a miracle in that they have survived at all without the sage advice of their children, I used to love being told the right way to do things by my treasured child. I loved being his Mom. And I loved being loved by him. No matter what I did, history guaranteed he would still love me. People can say what they will. The loss of that unequivocal love defies description.

And I appreciated him. Without Peter I would never really have understood what my mother and father went through raising my sister and me. It was living through his life that I came to understand my own. And losing him has defined what I have become. I live every day with death as my companion. There is no getting away from it. It colors everything. I see young people, the children of my friends, marrying now. And I watch and wonder what tragedies will befall them in their lives. I hate when that thought jumps into my head. I'm shown photos of the young children of my co-workers and I wonder---will they live into adulthood? Stop! Stop! I tell myself. Someone I know suffers a death in their family. Everyone gets upset. I shrug. I wish I could commiserate more. But I can't. When someone loses a mother or father, I can't be sad. I think of them as having been lucky enough to die without ever burying a child. My perspective on life and what is important has shifted dramatically. And having to conclude how insignificant my life is, with no child or grandchild to remember me or be impacted by my having lived brings on an almost palpable sadness.

I spend an inordinate amount of time wondering about and planning my own end. I fear for Phil, if I die first and I fear more for me if he dies first. Nothing seems to matter anymore. My passion is gone. I surround myself with pictures of my past. Peter smiles down at me from everywhere. He is ageless. I live in a future I could never have imagined, looking back upon a past that was far too short. There is never anything beyond today. Thinking of the future makes me wistful, often sad. The future is filled with "what might have beens". I try to stay in the moment and am daily brought back to what once was. Peter will never call me again. He will not suddenly appear at the door. He will not marry, he will not enjoy even the little that Phil and I have. He won't have a career; he won't make an impression on his children. He will never be a man in full. He will never have my grandchildren. He will not do so much more than he ever did.

Yes, we are getting on with our lives, living while sparing everyone around us what has become our daily reality. But the truth is life has become quite a balancing act.

**Marie Levine, March 2000**



**WHAT I WISH...** (continued from page 1)

If you see something that reminds you of my child, tell me. If you are reminded at the holidays or on his birthday that I am missing my son, please tell me you remember him. And when I speak his name or relive memories relive them with me, don't shrink away. If you never met my son, don't be afraid to ask about him. One of my greatest joys is talking about Brandon.

**2. Accept that you can't "fix" us.**

An out-of-order death such as child loss breaks a person (especially a parent) in a way that is not fixable or solvable — ever! We will learn to pick up the pieces and move forward, but our lives will never be the same.

Every grieving parent must find a way to continue to live with loss, and it's a solitary journey. We appreciate your support and hope you can be patient with us as we find our way.

Please: don't tell us it's time to get back to life, that's it's been long enough, or that time heals all wounds. We welcome your support and love, and we know sometimes it hard to watch, but our sense of brokenness isn't going to go away. It is something to observe, recognize, accept.

**3. Know that there are at least two days a year we need a time out.**

We still count birthdays and fantasize what our child would be like if he/she were still living. Birthdays are especially hard for us. Our hearts ache to celebrate our child's arrival into this world, but we are left becoming intensely aware of the hole in our hearts instead. Some parents create rituals or have parties while others prefer solitude. Either way, we are likely going to need time to process the marking of another year without our child.

Then there's the anniversary of the date our child became an angel. This is a remarkable process similar to a parent of a newborn, first counting the days, then months then the one year anniversary, marking the time on the other side of that crevasse in our lives.

No matter how many years go by, the anniversary date of when our child died brings back deeply emotional memories and painful feelings (particularly if there is trauma associated with the child's death). The

days leading up to that day can feel like impending doom or like it's hard to breathe. We may or may not share with you what's happening.

This is where the process of remembrance will help. If you have heard me speak of my child or supported me in remembering him/her, you will be able to put the pieces together and know when these tough days are approaching.

**4. Realize that we struggle every day with happiness.**

It's an ongoing battle to balance the pain and guilt of outliving your child with the desire to live in a way that honors them and their time on this earth.

I remember going on a family cruise eighteen months after Brandon died. On the first day, I stood at the back of the ship and bawled that I wasn't sharing this experience with him. Then I had to steady myself, and recognize that I was also creating memories with my surviving sons, and enjoying the time with them in the present moment.

As bereaved parents, we are constantly balancing holding grief in one hand and a happy life after loss in the other. You might observe this when you are with us at a wedding, graduation or other milestone celebration. Don't walk away — witness it with us and be part of our process.

**5. Accept the fact that our loss might make you uncomfortable.**

Our loss is unnatural, out-of-order; it challenges your sense of safety. You may not know what to say or do, and you're afraid you might make us lose it. We've learned all of this as part of what we're learning about grief.

We will never forget our child. And in fact, our loss is always right under the surface of other emotions, even happiness. We would rather lose it because you spoke his/her name and remembered our child, than try and shield ourselves from the pain and live in denial.

Grief is the pendulum swing of love. The stronger and deeper the love the more grief will be created on the other side. Consider it a sacred opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with someone who have endured one of life's most frightening events. Rise up with us.

Spring, joyous for most, can be a particularly difficult time of year for those of us who must cope with life's most painful loss. The season is a perfect time to get together with the friends we have made who share our thoughts and feelings. It is an opportunity to mix with people we have met at meetings, and make new friends who are TCF members, in a social setting. And it's a wonderful opportunity to get together once again with friends who no longer come to regular meetings. Join us for the great Pasta Lovers selected menu, great appetizers, great companionship and the support we all need during this time of the year. Space is limited. DON'T DELAY!



Date: **Tuesday, June 2, 2015**  
Time: 6:30PM – 9:30PM  
Cost: \$40.00 per person (\$45.00 at the door)  
Place: Pasta Lovers Restaurant  
142 W 49th St, New York 10019 (Between 6th & 7th Aves)

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY, DETACH & MAIL RESERVATION IMMEDIATELY  
WITH YOUR CHECK PAYABLE TO "The Compassionate Friends"  
**PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED BY MAY 20TH**

MAIL TO: Marie Levine  
370 First Avenue # 14B  
New York, NY 10010

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ (PLEASE PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my reservation for \_\_\_\_\_ persons at \$40.00 each. A check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed.

I wish to be a Subscriber @ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ In memory of \_\_\_\_\_ I cannot attend but enclose a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

In memory of \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_ Anniversary \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_ (PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)

## THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CHAT SCHEDULE

**Go to:** [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://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			<b>General Bereavement Issues &amp; Grandparents/Stepparents</b>	<b>General Bereavement Issues &amp; Men's Chat</b>
TUE			<b>General Bereavement Issues, Bereavement over 2 years &amp; Pregnancy Loss/Infant Death</b>	<b>General Bereavement Issues &amp; Pregnancy Loss/Infant Death</b>
WED	<b>Newly Bereaved</b>		<b>September 11 Families &amp; Siblings</b>	<b>General Bereavement Issues</b>
THU		<b>No Surviving Children</b>	<b>General Bereavement Issues &amp; Siblings</b>	<b>General Bereavement Issues</b>
FRI		<b>Suicide</b>	<b>Special Needs Children</b>	<b>General Bereavement Issues</b>
SAT				<b>General Bereavement &amp; Siblings</b>
SUN	<b>Siblings</b>		<b>General Bereavement Issues &amp; Siblings</b>	<b>General Bereavement Issues &amp; Siblings</b>

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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:  
MAY 12    JUN 9    JUL 14    AUG 11  
MAY 26    JUN 23    JUL 28    AUG 25

### OUR COMPASSIONATE FRIENDLY NEIGHBORS

Brookhaven	2nd Friday	(631) 738-0809	Staten Island	2nd and 4th Thursday	(718) 983-0377
Flushing	3rd Friday	(718) 746-5010	Syosset (Plainview)	3rd Friday	(718) 767-0904
Manhasset	3rd Tuesday	(516) 466-2480	Twin Forks/Hamptons	3rd Friday	(631) 653-9444
Marine Park, Bklyn	3rd Friday	(718) 605-1545	White Plains	1st Thursday	(914) 381-3389
Rockville Centre	2nd Friday	(516) 766-4682	HOT LINE		(516) 781-4173
Rockland County	3rd Tuesday	(845) 398-9762			



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