



The Compassionate Friends

Southwest Suburbs/Cleveland Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

We Need Not Walk Alone, We Are The Compassionate Friends

P.O. Box 3696 Oak Brook, IL 60522 1-877-969-0010

National Website: www.compassionatefriends.org

Chapter Website: www.tcf-cle.net



Chapter Closed Facebook Group

December, 2021 and January, 2022

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WHAT IS COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS?

Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents.

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

MISSION STATEMENT: When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

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.

December and January Monthly Meetings

December 8th and January 12th at 7:00pm: We will meet “virtually” using the Zoom video conferencing app. Please see page 11 for more information and some help preparing for this new way to meet. The discussion topics will be “General” (December) and “How did you handle the holidays” (January). As always you can raise any concerns or issues you feel the group might be able to help with. Meeting facilitators will be Joanne and Don Litvin (December) and Clayton Samels and Lori Rychlik (January). **Join the meetings from your home via Zoom!**

NOTE: MEETINGS WILL NOT BE HELD AT BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Remembering Our Children

Please take a moment to remember these children and those who love them on their birth dates and anniversaries. Although they were only here for a short time, the impact they made on their loved ones remains forever.



Birth Dates

December

- 2 - Tracy Ann Schuenemann
- 3 - David William Woods
- 4 - Michael Edward Moran
- 5 - Shelley Fletcher
- 6 - Michael T. Leach
- 6 - Lisa Simpson
- 7 - Christian Creed Hein
- 9 - Frederick M. Tschanz
- 9 - Dominic Vincent Vitullo
- 10 - David Thomas Erich
- 10 - Roderick ("Roddy") Joseph Stafford Whelan
- 16 - Kimberly Ann Keenan
- 18 - Sabrina DuPrey
- 19 - Micala Christie Hicks-Siler
- 20 - Jacques Christiaan Bosman
- 21 - Anthony S. Martino
- 21 - Randy Stock
- 22 - Justin Robert van Brakle
- 23 - Steven J. Bilecky
- 23 - Benjamin Alan Cuthbert Corliss
- 25 - Victoria Ann (Corrigan) Horn
- 28 - Robby Brandt
- 29 - Evaristo Fernandez-Rios
- 30 - Eric Justin Obloy
- 31 - Denise Ann Kohl
- 31 - Stephen John Parker

January

- 1 - Paul Christopher Kirchner
- 2 - Michael Duane Campbell
- 4 - Melanie Sue Ashwill
- 5 - Joan Marie Dolinsky
- 9 - Isabella Marie Hlynosky (Stachewicz)
- 11 - Jackie vanDaalwyk
- 12 - Maisie McCarty
- 15 - Ryan Mulvey
- 16 - Robert C. Cutler
- 17 - Hannah Elise Wernke
- 20 - Adam Joseph Semenas
- 22 - Jennifer Catherine Cook
- 24 - Terry M. Pappas
- 26 - Steven Michael Luff
- 27 - Kimberly Ann Kozar
- 28 - Jessica Marie Kossin
- 31 - Christopher Todd Brogan
- 31 - Monica Lynn Weber

Remembering Our Children

Anniversaries

December

Claire Jane Cocklin (Age 4)
 Peter Anthony DiRienzo (Age 30)
 Megan Lynn Frazier (Age 18)
 Charles "Sport" Haske (Age 22)
 Lucille Lillian Hauck (Age 12)
 Nathan Christopher Jurcago (Age 17)
 Johnny Robert Kazimer, Jr. (Age 24)
 Lisa Michele Klingbeil (Age 21)
 Kai E. Maatz (Age 26)
 Alexander Humel McCann (Age 17)
 Katherine Lynn Nemes (Age 20)
 Dina Marie Parisi (Age 32)
 Kimberly Ann Parker (Age 34)
 Michael Andrew Ruzicho (Age 40)
 Rebecca Helen Truelsch (Age 18)
 Dominic Vincent Vitullo (Age 1 day)
 Mark Anthony Weber (Age 19)
 Dustin M. Zarobell (Age 35)

January

Monica Judith Ann Adams/Bittner (Age 33)
 Gregory Charles Brown (Age 15)
 Joseph Troy Brown (Age 17)
 Sean Daniel Byers (Age 21)
 Robert C. Cutler (Age 34)
 Richard Charles Devrient, Jr. (Age 22)
 Sabrina DuPrey (Age 17)
 Shelley Fletcher (Age 34)
 Dawn Nicole Fordu (Age 15)
 Andrew Domonic Franklin (Age 30)
 Michael B. George (Age 20)
 Anthony Gordon (Age 16)
 Victoria Ann (Corrigan) Horn (Age 42)
 Ryan Johnson (Age 26)
 Matthew Josef-Arthur (Age 23)
 Charles Junke (Age 49)
 Dustin Kalstrom (Age 26)
 Matthew Kolesar (Age 21)
 Rick Marano (Age 33)
 Maisie McCarty (Age 1 day)
 Gregory Charles Christopher Musichuk (Age 24)
 Andrew Joseph Picone (Age 16 months)
 Aliyah Jean Ramsey (Age 7)
 Bradley Ryan Riggins (Age 25)
 Russell Todd Simon (Age 18)
 Amy (Cudney) Sobolewski (Age 30)
 Sean Somoles (Age 40)
 Fannie Marie Thomas-Lewis (Age 22)
 Wendy Ann Toennies (Age 51)
 Justin Robert van Brakle (Age 20)
 Michael James Wohl (Age 28)

Newsletter Dedications



Michael Benjamin Kurtz (Age 17)

My son, my big brother, my friend ... in 17 short years you lived, laughed, played, grew, comforted, protected and loved. You unconditionally loved us. An unfinished life. Forever loved - Forever missed.

*Love,
Mom, Adie and Mark*



Steven Michael Luff (Age 19)

Steve,

Time goes fast — Time goes slow. But time doesn't change our love for you. We are so blessed to have you as our son and brother and will love you now and forever.

*Mom, Dad,
Scott and Lisa*



The October or November meeting was the first for these bereaved mothers. It is very difficult to attend a first meeting and we applaud them for having the courage to come. We hope we were of help, and that they will return and work through their grief journeys with us.

First Meeting

Mary Blank, remembering her beloved daughter Jennifer Catherine Cook (Age 52)

Charlotte Enochs, remembering her beloved daughter Jacy Enochs (Age 42)

Sheila Kern, remembering her beloved daughter Denise Kanan (Age 51)

Love Gifts

Love gifts are donations that are made to our chapter to support the continuation of the chapter as well as the newsletter. We would like to thank these people who donated to our Chapter in memory of their loved one(s).

~ Sheila Kern ~ In loving memory of Denise Kanan (Age 51)

~ Kathryn Kurtz ~ In loving memory of Michael Benjamin Kurtz (Age 17)

~ Judy and Bill Luff ~ In loving memory of Steven Michael Luff (Age 19)

~ Sharon & Douglas Wohl ~ In loving memory of Michael James Wohl (Age 28)

“...a bear wedged in great tightness.”

“In a tape called, ‘To Touch a Grieving Heart’ there is a wonderful little reminder of the *Winnie the Pooh* story by A. A. Milne. You may recall that Winnie goes to visit Rabbit and eats too much honey. Coming out of Rabbit’s hole, he gets stuck tight – so tight he can’t even sigh. He asks his friends to stay with him, read him a story, and offer words of comfort...and thus to help ‘a bear wedged in great tightness.’

Notice that Pooh does not ask to be pulled out of the hole, he asks only for company so he is not alone. I think Grief is like being ‘a bear wedged in great tightness.’ And, while we cannot make the grief go away for each other, The Compassionate Friends starts and stops with the core idea that we will be there for each other; that ‘we need not walk alone.’

*Opening remarks of the late
Richard Edler’s keynote speech at the
1996 TCF National Conference*

TCF National News

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS VIRTUAL WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS WILL OFFER A VIRTUAL WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING ON DECEMBER 12 STARTING AT 6:45 PM FOR EASTERN, CENTRAL, MOUNTAIN AND PACIFIC TIME ZONES.

To join in The Compassionate Friends National Worldwide Candle Lighting, please click on the link for your time zone below. Complete the registration form with your name and email address. A link to join the candle lighting will be emailed to you. Please share with family and friends who would like to participate in this special remembrance.

On the day of the candle lighting, click the emailed link to join. The link will allow you to login 15 minutes prior to the starting time of the candle lighting. Make sure to have your candle nearby to light at 7:00 pm local time. We will also invite you at that time to share the name(s) of the child, grandchild, or siblings that you are remembering.

Register now to attend the candle lighting at 6:45 PM for each time zone:

[REGISTER FOR THE EASTERN STANDARD TIME CANDLE LIGHTING](#)

[REGISTER FOR THE CENTRAL STANDARD TIME CANDLE LIGHTING](#)

[REGISTER FOR THE MOUNTAIN STANDARD TIME CANDLE LIGHTING](#)

[REGISTER FOR THE PACIFIC STANDARD TIME CANDLE LIGHTING](#)

Our Chapter News



Chapter Worldwide Candle Lighting Celebration

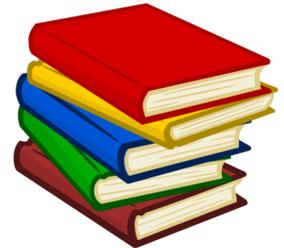
*Our annual chapter celebration **WILL NOT** be held this year due to the pandemic. Instead, we urge you to join the **Virtual Worldwide Candle Lighting celebration**, being offered by the **TCF National organization**. Please see the details on page 6, and click on the appropriate time zone to register.*

Library Notes – by Clayton Samels

I hope this finds you all well.

The holiday season is upon us. Actually, I consider the holiday season to begin on Halloween, so I've been in the season for a while, now. But the turkey leftovers are digested and the tree is up. Last year, the tree stayed up through March. Should I try for a new record?

I had the pleasure of browsing a real brick and mortar bookstore and buying a real paper and ink book recently. While my wife was having her nails done, I walked into Walls of Books at The Shoppes at Parma. I didn't get a chance to browse the entire store, but I did go through the Fantasy and Science Fiction section and spent \$20.00 on a thick paperback titled Children of Time. The author, Adrian Tchaikovsky, tells the long story of, well, I'll get to that. Anyway, after purchasing the book, I walked around a bit and then we went to dinner at Fast Eddie's, where we were seated as the only people in the back room, which, during a pandemic, is pretty good seating, right? Anyway, when I got back home, I read the first chapter of the book but then decided to see if it was available through my library or a bookstore online. I found I could buy an e-book version from Barnes and Noble for \$3. Ok, so I did that, after downloading and installing the Nook app. Yeah, like I need another app. But I have finished reading the book, which is the story of humans and bug-eyed monsters (actually just spiders) vying for the same planet. I won't spoil the plot, but you'll probably end up liking Portia, one of the spiders who appears in various spider generations, along with Fabian, her boyfriend. Many of the humans don't come off quite as well.



As for grief reading, I read a novel called There's a Hole in My Bucket: A Journey of Two Brothers, by Royd Tolkein (yeah, that Tolkein family). Royd tells two stories in the book in sort of shuffled cards order; one is about the battle of his brother Mike with ALS disease, and the other is about Royd's journey to complete a bucket list of challenges left to him by his brother after Mike's death. Most of the challenges are of the sky diving, paragliding, bungee jumping thrill activities that pump up the adrenaline. Others are more humorous, like dressing up as Gandalf, the wizard from Lord of the Rings, and greeting passengers as they board an airplane. Of course, he was mistaken for Dumbledore, the wizard from the Harry Potter series, which only adds to the humor, I guess. Now, all these bucket list activities were filmed as part of a documentary that you can view on Netflix, although I haven't done that yet. As for Mike's battle with and death by ALS, believe me, the book makes clear just what that is like. The book also makes clear the strong bond between the brothers Royd and Mike, so this is a good book to read about grief of adult siblings. And you know me, I got an e-book version for \$2.99 and read it on my Kindle app.

So there you have it for another month.

The Holidays Are Coming!

"The Holidays are coming! The Holidays are coming!" Most bereaved parents make that observation with the same sense of fear and dread that Chicken Little had when he announced, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" We view Christmas or Hanukkah differently than the rest of the world. In our minds they become great trials to be endured. In my opinion, this trial is tougher than birthdays or death anniversaries. This is the time when love abounds. The family (and extended family) all gather together, coming from near and far, to share in this love. The only trouble with this happy scene is that our child is missing. He or she has traveled too far from us to come for the holidays! We can't buy gifts for a photograph or hug and kiss a memory. The emptiness that this creates in us cannot be filled, no matter how many relatives gather by our hearth. To add to the pain, most well-meaning friends and relatives feel that the best way to handle the problem is to pretend that it doesn't exist. They never mention the one person that is on the minds and in the hearts of everyone. We found out early on that it is not possible to keep the "presence" of our child out of a family gathering. Trying to do so makes everyone uncomfortable and causes us as parents to feel disloyal.

The first Christmas after our son died, we did it "their" way. Never again! Now we make sure that he is very much a part of our holiday. For starters, we decided once again to hang all three stockings. We don't fill them, but just seeing them all hanging together is right for us. The tree was very important to Blake. Every year he took the responsibility of stringing the lights for us. Now it is important to us to see that Blake has a tree. We have a very special one, about 3 feet tall, that we weight heavily at the bottom. We decorate it with weather-proof ornaments and place it at his grave. We leave the tree there until spring so it can mark the gravesite when the snows are deep. We also have a lovely candle that we burn on special days. This is our way of including our missing son in the family circle. But most important, we talk about him. We don't do it obsessively, but we don't hesitate to recall memories of him as often as we recall those of other children in the family. Because we talk of him in an easy and natural manner, the rest of the family has taken our cue. They now bring up his name naturally. It is all so much more comfortable than the way we tried to handle it that first year.

Another couple in our chapter had a wonderful idea for the first holiday after their daughter died. Their greatest fear was that no one would mention her, so they compiled an album of her pictures and casually left it out on the coffee table. It wasn't long before people were looking through it, recalling favorite memories of her, and the ice was broken.

There must be so many other ways that you can make your child a part of your holiday—ways that seem right and comfortable for you. You may choose to keep your thoughts private rather than share them with others. But the most important thing to remember is that the choice is yours. Do what makes you comfortable, not what others think should make you comfortable. If you follow the dictates of your heart and that gives you comfort, those around you will see that it is so and follow your lead.

*Marge Frankenberg
TCF Arlington Heights, IL
In loving memory of my son, Blake*

***You can shed tears that he is gone, or you can smile because he has lived.
You can close your eyes and pray he'll come back or you can open your eyes and see all he has left.
Your heart can be empty because you can't see him or you can be full of the love you shared.
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.
You can remember him and only that he's gone, or you can cherish his memory and let it live on.
You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back, or you can do what he'd want - smile, open
your eyes, love, and go on.***

~ Author Unknown ~

What Is A Love Gift ?

A love gift is a gift of money to The Compassionate Friends. It is usually in honor of a child who has died, but it can also be from individuals who want to honor a relative or friend who has died, a gift of thanksgiving that their own children are alive and well, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help in the work of our chapter. All local TCF chapters are totally dependent on funds from our families. We DO NOT receive funds from our National Office. Everything we need to operate our local chapter is paid directly from our local resources and our local family contributions. All monetary love gifts are tax deductible.

Thank you to all who contribute and support our chapter. Some people contribute in memory of other's children ... this is a wonderful way for others to say, "I am remembering your child." Other "Gifts of Love" are evident by all the compassionate and giving volunteers we have within our organization.

Love gifts should be made payable to The Compassionate Friends and mailed to:

Cheryl Ondrejch, 14365 Old Pleasant Valley Road, Middleburg Heights, OH 44130

Remember

Remember the children, we ask tonight,
As we continue this wave of light.

Remember the babies, never given a chance,
To grow, to play, to love, or dance.

Remember the toddlers, just starting to live,
Teddy Bears and blankies and big hugs to give.

Remember the children, who grew strong and true,
Maybe struck by an illness that devastated you.

Remember the teen-agers and the promise in each,
Taken suddenly or slowly, beyond our reach.

Don't forget the adult child, fully grown,
Whether 18 or 80, we still called them our own.

Our grandchildren, sisters and brothers have died,
For nieces and nephews and cousins, we've cried.

Some of us say, "I've lost my dreams,"
While others say, "my memories."

So tonight we remember with this candlelight,
So like our love that shines so bright.

*Marilyn Rollins
Lake-Porter County, IN Chapter
The Compassionate Friends*

Candles in December



My sadness seems reflected in the music that I hear...
 Every young one's glowing face reminds me you're not here.
 Shoppers crowd the festive stores; emotions all run high
 This world I was a part of once, before that sad July.
 This season's meant for happy times; for love, warm hearts, and cheer.
 But grieving families 'round the world remember those not here.
 We struggle through the season, lighting candles to proclaim
 Our children aren't forgotten, 'round the world our candles flame.

I slowly pass through gates thrown wide one clear, cold Christmas Day.
 No toys or playthings do I bring - those gifts of yesterday.
 I carry with me just a polished heart of granite made
 And walk with grief to where she lies in a silent, silvered glade.

"Merry Christmas, love," I whisper — the quiet words seem so forlorn.
 "I've brought my heart for you to keep, my gift this Christmas morn.
 It is filled with all my love, though this one's carved of stone...
 I'll place it here — it will be near — you'll never be alone."

We parents don't forget, my love; this month we will unite
 To honor all we'll light a wall of candles through the night.
 The world will know our memories glow with love that's deep and true
 We'll stand as one, and 'fore it's done the Heavens will know, too.

Please keep my gift, beloved child, close to where you lie,
 And know my love surrounds you 'til the day I too shall die.
 On the eleventh of December my candle's flame will light
 I pray you'll see the love we'll free into the starry night.

Sally Migliaccio

Just Flow With The Season And Take Care of Yourself

We're well into November and it's almost time to take the "January pill". After Tricia died I decided I'd invent a pill you could take the week before Thanksgiving and when you came to, it would be January! I'm still working on the invention. In the meantime, I know many of you are already dreading the approaching holidays.

The true spirit and meaning of Thanksgiving and Christmas are not necessarily exemplified by some of our "traditions". You are re-evaluating many aspects of your life so let this also apply to the coming holidays. You will not always feel as you do now. You will find joy in holiday activities, but maybe not in all the things you once thought so very important.

Flow with the season and with your sadness, knowing strength will come as you work with what you can do without overtaxing yourself. Resolve to be as generous with your energy as you can and as selfish as you have to be to protect the emerging person you will become as a result of your loss. This person can be truly beautiful and loving because of what you have learned through grief.

You will miss your child; no magic potion can wipe the pain away. Enjoy what you can—you deserve some pleasure. And may some measure of peace overtake you before this year ends.

*Elizabeth B. Estes
 TCF Augusta, GA
 In Memory of Tricia*

Zoom! Join us online for a video chapter meeting using Zoom!

Should you use a desktop computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone? They each have their benefits and their drawbacks, so pick which one you are comfortable with. In any case, you need to download the Zoom app for your device or use Zoom from within your web browser. It's probably a good idea to do a test at first with a friend or two before you actually join a meeting. Or, you can be like me, jump right into a meeting and learn the hard way.

You will receive a link to click on to join the meeting. Just click on the link and you will be put in a "waiting room" until the meeting host admits you to the actual meeting. This is a security measure to keep unwanted people from crashing the meeting. Also, the host can remove a participant from a meeting if that ever becomes necessary. You have the ability to name yourself or rename so that the other members will see that displayed. The meeting host can rename any of the participants.

You should know how to mute/unmute yourself, just in case. You should also switch off or on your video. You can leave the meeting at any time if you wish. If the meeting exceeds the allotted time limit (40 minutes) it may end automatically. To prevent that, we will probably take a break after 35 minutes and then in 5 minutes or so, the host may start up the meeting again. In that case, you can return by clicking that meeting link again.

Let's get specific: How to Zoom

1 Download Zoom for your device and install if you don't already have it and then run it. Here are some links for videos showing how to install Zoom on different devices.

Android - <https://youtu.be/1tdT35ZNGKk>

iPhone or iPad - https://youtu.be/j__a-PKrMqI

Windows - <https://youtu.be/Xp6tJOo9mmc>

Need more instructions? Search on YouTube for "zoom dottech" for some good ones.

2 Sign up for a Zoom account. Not needed to join a meeting, but you might want to sign up anyway. Their basic account is free. You can then host your own meeting with your family or friends., a good way to test it all out and keep in touch with people. Check to make sure your audio and video work, and learn how to mute/unmute your audio and turn off/on your video.

3 Click on our meeting link at meeting time to open the app and be placed in the waiting room. The meeting host will admit you to the meeting. It's that simple! (Maybe!) Try it out. If you need help, post on our chapter TCF group page and I, or someone, will try to get you going.

*Clayton Samels
TCF Southwest Suburbs/Cleveland Chapter*

To Our Family and Friends

The "Holiday Season" is a time of family – festive gatherings, worshiping together, sharing love and gifts, and cherished memories. For the bereaved parent, these aspects of the season are precisely what makes us dread its arrival.

The absence of our child when the "whole family" gathers seems to accentuate our incomplete family. We are sorely reminded of "how it used to be" and don't want to accept what is now. We need patience and understanding of our family and friends to help us through the holidays as best we can.

We may want to change the way we spend Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Hanukkah. If the family traditionally gathers at one house, perhaps the gathering place could be changed, especially if the gathering home is that of the bereaved. If we do prepare the meal, be aware that we may not have the energy we have had in the past and will need a lot of help.

Perhaps we'll try to avoid the holiday altogether by going away for a few days. Whatever our thoughts are for coping with the day, please take our feelings into consideration when you make your plans.

For some of us shopping for gifts is a painful experience. The stores' festive decorations and music belie our mood, as we feel forced into participating in the "season." We think longingly about that special gift we won't be buying this year. Again, our depression saps us of the energy to do the things we have done in the past, and we need your understanding for the things that remain undone.

Perhaps the single most helpful thing you can do for us is to include our child in the holidays. We want to hear his/her name, to have you recall fond memories of their lives, to know that you, too, are feeling their absence and remembering them with love.

Getting through the holidays is a rough task for bereaved parents. We need to handle them in a way that we feel is best for ourselves and our families. We ask for your love and support during this especially difficult time.

*Marge Henning
TCF West Orange, NJ*

*A friend is one who knows you as you are . . .
Understands where you've been . . .
Accepts who you've become
And still gently invites you to grow. ~ author unknown*

As the Holidays Approach

When the holidays are fast approaching, we who are bereaved always have mixed emotions about having a nice holiday when our child or loved one is no longer with us. We wonder if we will ever be as happy and if we can ever again celebrate the holidays or any meaningful family occasion, especially the first birthday, first thanksgiving, or first Christmas since our loss. We try to look ahead to how we are going to feel when the time arrives, but it is usually not as hard as we had anticipated. Still, the occasion may not be as enjoyable as we'd like it to be or as we remember it from the past.

I would like to offer a few ideas for what we can do to make our holidays a little better. Consider buying gifts for less fortunate children, adopting a child/family at Christmas time, or inviting a lonely person to share your holiday meal. Make your child's favorite foods and discuss your loved one as you share the meal. Some people like to volunteer to serve holiday dinners for the homeless. Some bereaved parents want to visit familiar places their child loved to go, while others want to travel where their child had never been.

Several of our Compassionate Friends members put a small Christmas tree at the cemetery and decorate the graves with Christmas flowers and/or a grave blanket. Making a grave blanket is very fulfilling; we did that for 10 years after our daughter Teresa died. Attending a candle light program is a wonderful way to honor your child or loved one.

These suggestions are things we feel we can still do for our child, but they are not reserved for bereaved parents only. All of them can be done for any member of a family or a friend who has died. After someone dies we must keep going and doing things that lift us up. We can't always try to please any people who feel we should act in a certain manner.

Jackie Wesley
TCF, East Central Indiana and Miami-Whitewater Chapters

Newsletter Dedications

A newsletter dedication is a wonderful way to remember your child, and to help defray the costs to produce the newsletter. The cost is \$30 (tax deductible). If you would like to include a dedication, please fill out the form below and either bring it to a monthly meeting or mail it with your check (made payable to The Compassionate Friends) to Bill Luff, 133 Fourth Avenue, Berea, OH 44017. If you have a picture to include or a small tribute, please e-mail it to Bill Luff at:

jbl3665@sbcglobal.net



To submit a Newsletter Dedication in loving memory of your child

Please complete this form and send with your donation (\$30). Make check payable to The Compassionate Friends.



Donor: _____
(Your Name)

Donor Address: _____
(Street) (City, State, Zip) (Phone #)

In Memory of: _____
(Child's Name)

I would like dedication to appear in newsletter for month of: _____
(1st Choice) (2nd Choice)

A Tree Full of Memories

Christmas was my absolute favorite time of the entire year. Every nook and cranny was filled with Yule adornment. Not a corner of the house was safe from this self-proclaimed Christmas Freak! One year we even hung assorted ornaments on a fake palm tree, lovingly dubbing it the “Bahama-Mama” tree, because in our family one Christmas tree was never enough. The kids even had small tabletop trees in their rooms. Our upstairs tree was the decorator tree, the one with the fancy, color-coordinated ornaments, to be handled by no one but me. The downstairs tree was the family favorite and trimmed by the children. Hanging from its branches were the ornaments that I had purchased every year for each of them from the time they were born. I always looked forward to finding just the right one that would represent their individual interests at that particular time in their lives. But as each of us knows, the holidays, as we knew them, forever changed after our precious children died. And so it was for us the Christmas of 1995, our first without Nina’s shining presence. I was quite positive that I would never decorate again. It was far too painful.

Yet, something happened three Christmases ago. One night I lay in Nina’s daybed, staring at the ceiling thinking Scrooge-like thoughts, wishing it was January 2nd and I could put the holidays behind me for another year. Suddenly, I found myself rise from her bed and walk to the closet where all the holiday paraphernalia was stored. I searched furiously until I found what I was looking for--a box marked “Nina’s Xmas Ornaments.” I brushed away the collected dust and carried it up the stairs to the corner of the living room where a forlorn and neglected-appearing 2-foot tree stood. I recall sitting on the floor in front of the tree, sighing deeply, and gingerly opening the box, I was afraid what the depth of my emotions would be when I saw those long untouched ornaments of Christmases past; afraid of the feelings that I had learned to hide so well from the rest of the world; afraid the floodgates would open and the tears would never stop.

I carefully lifted the cover and tenderly held each one in my hands. I found myself recalling the beautiful memories of previous Christmases when my beloved daughter was alive. There was the pink and white checked fabric baby buggy with pipe-cleaner handles of her first Xmas, followed by Teddy bears with Santa hats, and crocheted Sesame Street characters from her toddler days. There were the priceless picture ornaments taken by her nursery school teacher showing 4-year old Nina with the then-blond, wispy hair and blunt cut bangs grinning back at me. There were the handmade ones from early grade school that she affectionately created with felt and glitter; the violin and piano ornaments symbolizing her musical attempts; the self-explanatory Shop-til-You-Drop ornament; the more sophisticated ornaments for a teenage Nina, and finally the last one before her death at 15-years-old commemorating her reign as our city’s Miss Teen. I gently held them, reliving the stories behind each one and savoring the precious memories they brought with them as I placed them on the tiny tree. I then unearthed from hiding the ornaments bought after her death. Even then, I couldn’t bear to stop buying them for her. There I found dark-haired angels and butterflies of every shape and color, now symbolizing her new and eternal life, and appropriately hung them alongside the others.

Though tears fell as I cautiously placed them on the bare branches of the tiny tree, I felt familiar warmth radiate throughout my body, thawing the coldness in my heart and soul. I smiled, knowing in my heart that this was a Christmas gift coming directly from Nina. I felt it was her way of telling me that perhaps it was time to find some peace and hope again in the holiday season. Not that it would or could ever be the same as it was before 1995, or that I would ever stop missing her presence, but perhaps now begin to remember some of the joy found in priceless memories of holiday’s past.

If you are in the early years of your grief, you believe you will never again feel any amount of enjoyment in the holidays. However, allow myself and other seasoned grievers to be the bearers of hope. At one time we felt just like you. When you feel ready for even a spark of pleasure in the holidays, let it return to your heart again. I sincerely believe our children want us, in time, to accept their spirit gifts of renewed joy, peace, and hope sent to us from them with love.

With peace and gentle thoughts through this holiday season and always,

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In Memory of my daughter, Nina*