



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

SOUTH SHORE CHAPTER HINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

WINTER 2008

The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families in the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child and to provide information to help others be supportive

MEETINGS at St. Paul's Parish House, 20 Fearing Road, Hingham (across the street from Citizen's Bank) at 7:30 PM on First and Third Mondays of the month.

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PHONE FRIENDS

If you are having a bad day, or need someone to talk to, call a friend below

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The TCF Worldwide Candle Lighting is held every year on the second Sunday in December, at 7:00 PM in every time zone. As candles burn down in one time zone, they are lighted in the next, creating a 24-hour wave of light that encircles the globe.

This year our chapter will hold its annual memorial on December 14th to coincide with the worldwide remembrance. ***Please note that our memorial begins at 6:30 PM.*** It is open to all family and friends. I hope you will take the time during a busy season to join us in remembering all our children who gone too soon.

As we have done in the past, you are welcome to bring an ornament in you child's memory. Place you child's name on the ornament and your name and phone number if you wish and bring one home in memory of another child. This is optional. A light snack would be appreciated for our collation after the service.

Children are welcome to attend and there will be babysitting available so that all who attend may devote their full attention to the children who are no longer with us.

Sunday December 14, 2008, 6:30 PM

First Parish Church

24 River St., Norwell MA.

(Just beyond the state police barracks at Norwell Center)

**Questions or Directions- call one of the phone friends
Snow Date Tuesday December 16**

If there is severe weather conditions call 781-749-3401 and there will be a message if the service is postponed.

FROM THE EDITOR

As I look at our chapter's roster of names I think of how many are facing their first holiday season as bereaved parents— or second which may be more painful as the shock that encompassed us has faded. No matter how many years have passed we look at everyone rushing about gathering “stuff” and feel as if we live in another world, which is exactly what we do.

We anticipate and worry about how we will survive the season . The lights, music and memories all seem to accentuate our sadness. We know that the only gift we want will never be ours and feel we have nothing to give our children who have left us. But maybe this might be a year when we discover a new type of gift.

Some parents finds gifts from their children very early on in grief, perhaps in the form of a sign that they are OK, a dream, a happy memory shared by a friend or relative, or a new found talent that has changed their lives. . Some have the gift of surviving children or perhaps a grandchild to connect them with their son or daughter who has died. Some have neither. Some are still searching for a sign, wondering if it will ever be found. The first time I heard the words “finding the gifts and finding joy again” I did not understand what they meant. Since then I have come to believe that searching for gifts that our children leave us and sharing them with others is a major part of our grief work. Sometimes we have to shed some of the anger, guilt, resentment and bad memories that we all harbor in order to make room in our hearts for these gifts.

Regardless of our individual circumstances we all share one great gift that we receive and give— that is the gift of each other. We all share in our TCF family and that is a gift to be valued. During this difficult season I hope those of you who are early in your journey will make use of the many TCF friends waiting with outstretched arms. Those of you who are further along-give someone the gift of your experience, share the strength you have gathered along the way and encourage those who need encouragement. None of us need ever walk alone.

Over the last six years I have come to anticipate the Candle Lighting Memorial as the focus of the season. Here we may all share the memories of our children, honor them and keep their memories alive. It is a day that everyone who attends will leave uplifted, supported and united with so may bereaved parents throughout the world.. As we light candles in our children's memory may we all share in a moment of peace as we recall our children's lives as well as their deaths.

As the calendar year draws to a close I hope each of us may enter 2009 a little less hopeless, a little more supported, a little bit stronger, and a little more able to reach out to give and to receive.

*Peace,
Rick Mirabile*

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS

Beyond the twinkling lights, the red and green candles,
the poignant aroma of evergreen...
Beyond the Christmas trees, angels and stars and beloved carols...
Beyond the presents, the shopping, baking, cooking...
Beyond all of these sights and sounds of Christmas..
Beyond all of these... **there is hope.**



A SEASON'S GRIEF

Trim the tree with tears, if you must
Admire their sparkle, but do not let them
Quench the flames on the candles you lit.

My gifts to you have been delivered
Find them, search in my hiding places,
Unwrap them, peel away the obscuring
layers
And reveal the treasure within:
My love for you is sturdy and durable
You may ear it for any occasion
And share it with others

Give me the only gift you can: Remember me.
Remember me as I was.
Do not try to make me better or smarter or
prettier
Or any way something other than
The person who is me.
Keep me alive in your heart

By Robb Holmes— Rockland County NY

It is hope that sustains us through the days of grief and
anger and frustration and loneliness
The hope that someday the pain of the deaths of our
children will be eased
The hope that some day our smiles will be real
The hope that once again we will laugh and love and cry
completely without fear and hollowness
The hope that someday we can remember our children with a
tenderness merely tinged with sorrow and not overwhelmed by
it.
So it is for each of you that I would wish hope, peace, compas-
sion, love sympathy, understanding, sharing and listening.
In the sharing of our grief with one another and in the emotional
support we give to one another, we receive and learn all



TO BEREAVED GRANDPARENTS



I am powerlessness. I am helplessness. I am frustration. I sit here with her and cry with her. She cries for her daughter and I cry for mine. I can't help her. I can't reach inside and take her broken heart. I must watch her suffer day after day and see her desolate.

I listen to her tell me over and over how she misses Emily, how she wants her back. I can't bring Emily back for her. I can't even buy her an even better Emily than she had, like I could buy her an even better toy when she was a child. I can't kiss the hurt and make it go away. I can't even kiss a small part of it away. There's no Band-Aid large enough to cover her bleeding heart.

There was a time I could listen to her talk about a fickle boyfriend and tell her it would be okay, and know in my heart that in two weeks she wouldn't even think of him. Can I tell her it'll be okay in two years when I know it will never be okay, that she will carry this pain of "what might have been" in her deepest heart for the rest of her life?

I see this young woman, my child, who was once carefree and fun-loving and bubbling with life, slumped in a chair with her eyes full of agony. Where is my power now? Where is my mother's bag of tricks that will make it all better? Why can't I join in the aloneness of her grief? As tight as my arms wrap around her, I can't reach that aloneness. Where are the magic words that will give her comfort? What chapter in Dr. Spock tells me how to do this? He has told me everything else I've needed to know. Where are the answers? I should have them. I'm her mother.

What can I give her to make her better? A cold wet wash cloth will ease that swelling of her crying eyes, but it won't stop the reason for her tears. What treat will bring joy back to her? What prize will bring that "happy child" smile back again?

I know that someday she'll find happiness again, that her life will have meaning again. I can hold out hope for her someday, but what about now? this hour? this day?

I can give her my love and prayers and my care and my concern. I could give her my life. But even that won't help.

Margaret Gertner, St. Louis, Missouri

Emerson said it well: **“Rings and jewels are not gifts. The only true gift is a portion of thyself.”**

We give of ourselves when we give gifts of the mind: ideas, dreams, ideals, principles, plans, projects, and poetry. We give of ourselves when we give gifts of the spirit: prayer, peace, and faith. We give of ourselves when we give the gift of time and when we give words of encouragement, inspiration and guidance. We, in TCF meetings give of ourselves every time we gather in our meeting room in our circle—we share our innermost thoughts, we surely give each other encouragement and strength--something most of us thought we had forgotten to do at the time we entered the room for the first encounter. We give each other hope to carry on our shattered lives—hope that there really is a future for each one of us out there somewhere. Together we go forward month after month continually giving of ourselves to each other. Remarkable isn't it? No doubt about it. This is what TCF is all about.

I AM THE NEW YEAR



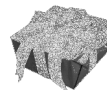
I am the New Year. I am unspoiled, without blemish. I stretch before you three hundred sixty five days long. I will present each day in its turn, a new leaf in the Book of Life for you to place upon it your imprint.

It remains for you to make of me what you will: if you write with firm, steady strokes, my pages will be a joy to look upon when the next New Year comes. If the pen falters, if uncertainty or doubt should mar the page, it will become a day to remember with pain.

I am the New Year. Each hour of the three hundred sixty five days, I will give you sixty minutes that have never known the use of man. White and pure, I present them: it remains for you to will them with sixty jeweled seconds of love, hope endeavor, patience and trust in God

I am the New Year. I am here- but once passed I can never be recalled. Make me your best.

Author Unknown



THE TEN TOP GIFTS

HUGS.... to someone who is lonely
LOVE... to someone who has nothing to give in return
PATIENCE...to someone who is struggling with life
FREEDOM. To someone who needs to find his own destiny
GUIDANCE... to someone drifting in a sea of anxiety
UNDERSTANDING...to someone who is confused
TOLERANCE...to someone who doesn't see things as you
KINDNESS.... to someone in pain
FORGIVENESS...to someone you feel has harmed you
SOFTNESS... to someone who has not yet removed his hard shell

TCF West Houston

TCF Rochester NY



MICHAEL JONATHAN BURAK



September 9th has come and gone. It has been 4 years since my son, Michael, passed. That seems to be the “politically correct” term that is used to describe a death...a passing. But by whatever name it is called, the cold hard fact remains that my son, my daughters’ brother, my grandchildren’s uncle, is no longer with us physically on this earth. We have all been hurt, injured, and although time has passed, the wound remains fresh. Michael’s spirit is with me, his mother, every day. Sitting here at my computer, his computer, writing these words, brings him closer. And so I write to share my thoughts, to pay tribute to my boy, my “Beautiful Boy”.

“Beautiful Boy” is the title of a book that I am reading right now written by David Sheff. In it, the author shares the story of his journey through his son’s addiction. I see so much of myself, of my husband, in that story. And yet, my son has passed and the author’s son is alive. My son, Michael, once said to me, “thanks for never giving up on me”. I had responded, “Michael as long as you live I will never give up on you”. I never did.

At Michael’s Memorial Service, my husband, Al, of Blessed Memory, said, “My wife and I did what we could for our son to help him with his illness. The disease of drug addiction is the same as the sickness of cancer or any other disease; only the cure rate is remarkably lower.” In fact there is no cure...the best you can hope for is for the addict to live in recovery, one day at a time. Our son Michael had this disease and he lived with it for a number of years before he finally accepted that he was powerless against heroin and accepted treatment.

After Michael’s death, we spoke openly about Michael’s addiction and his battle against the “demon of heroin”. People, many of them strangers to me, have come to me and applauded me for recognizing openly the nature of Michael’s death. They act as if we did something brave by “telling it like it was”. You see, so many times deaths from a drug overdose are not acknowledged. Obituaries refer to a “sudden passing”; but seldom recognize the source. I don’t feel very brave. We would have been truly brave had we spoken about Michael’s addiction while he was alive. But we didn’t. As I reflect back, I have to admit that we were ashamed that our child was an addict. After all, if Michael were an addict and we were his parents, that must have meant that somehow it was our fault. And how could it have been our fault? After all, as parents Al and I thought we were doing the right thing for all our children. Certainly we loved them, cared for and supported them. When a child has an accomplishment, oftentimes people say to the parents, “Well, you must have done something right”. If that is the case, is the reverse also true? If a child “messes up”, did the parents do something wrong? In “Beautiful Boy”, the author asks “What had happened to my beautiful boy! To our family? What did I do wrong?”

Michael was an exceptionally caring and compassionate man who always looked to help others. He always had a “twinkle in his eye” and a powerful smile. He was incredibly creative and, as a young child, his imagination was incredible. As he matured to adulthood, Michael continued to have an idealistic idea of the world and many times the world disappointed him. In many ways, he was a mystery to our family, never truly telling us what was on his mind. Michael had choices to make, as we all do, and his choice was to use drugs. What originated as a choice, soon became an addiction and Michael was powerless against the “demon of heroin”. Although he entered and graduated from a program at Spectrum Residential Rehabilitation in Westboro, ultimately the addiction was more powerful than Michael had realized. On September 9, 2004 Michael lost the “battle of his life.” And although Al and I, as Michael’s parents, would have done anything to save our son, ultimately Michael was the only one that could win that battle. For it was his battle and his alone.

In “The Year of Magical Thinking”, author Joan Didion writes in reference to her daughter who is very ill, “I’m here. Everything’s fine...I would take care of her. It would be all right. It also occurred to me that this was a promise I could not keep. I could not always take care of her. I could not never leave her. She was no longer a child. She was an adult. Things happened in life that mothers could not prevent or fix.”

I know this. I couldn’t fix my son’s problem. But what I can do is talk about it and tell Michael’s story. For although Michael didn’t “win the battle”, he fought “the fight of his life”. The feeling of shame that I had felt was for the addiction, not my son, and he, like so many addicts, was powerless against that illness...that demon! I am proud, and always have been, of the beautiful child he was and the caring, compassionate man he became. I am proud of the fact that, when dealing with hard choices, Michael fought to make “things right” and seek help. Michael touched and changed so many lives. Michael was a challenge; but he was also a Gift...a gift that once given can never be taken back. Love never dies, and as I reflect upon the past four years, I recognize the impact that Michael has made on my life and on all the lives that he touched. In life and in death, Michael truly made a difference. He taught me that drug addiction is a disease and needs to be recognized as such. He taught me that addiction knows no boundaries and that no one is truly immune against the disease. Michael fought the toughest battle of his life and lost. The battle continues in the lives of those who are waging that same war. May we all look forward to a time when drug addiction is recognized as the illness that it is and when new solutions are developed that will change the lives of the many that are in this war. May Michael’s life continue to make a difference and may his memory be a blessing.

Rest in peace, my son.

WHEN YOU LOSE AN ONLY CHILD

The loss of an only child is neither greater nor less than the loss of one of many children. However, the loss of an only child is experienced differently. It is different because you lose your parenthood, which is such a large part of the life of any parent.

1. With the death of an only child, you lose the one person who could use all of the love you had to give every hour of every day. One of the secrets of parenthood is that from birth, children teach us that we have a greater capacity for unselfish love than we thought possible. When your only child dies, you may feel that you are drowning in the parental love your heart continues to generate for the child you have lost.
2. With the death of an only child, you lose so much of your own future that was tied to your child's future. The first day of school, sports, learning to drive, a first crush, a first date, a first heartbreak, high school, college, career, marriage, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren. Your only child lost all of this from his or her future. And so did you.
3. With the death of an only child, you suffer many tiny losses that cause pain only another grieving parent can comprehend. You have lost the joy of checking the cereal aisle to see if Cocoa Puffs are on sale. You have lost the reason to keep up with the top ten hits on the pop music charts. You have lost the joy of caring what prize is in a box of Cracker Jack. You have lost the joy of getting up early on a Saturday morning for kids soccer, basketball, or bowling. You have lost the reason to hope for a December snow. You have lost the person who thought you made the best cocoa on a cool December evening. For me, I lost a gentle, kind, generous child who loved, watched for, and shared beautiful sunsets.

The loss of an only child is a devastating loss. Your child has lost his or her life. And you have lost an important piece of your own life, your parenthood. *The Compassionate Friends* chapter near you is there to help you acknowledge and grieve these losses by sharing your pain with others who have known their own pain.

by Bill Snapp, Atlanta (Tucker) TCF
in memory of his son Billv Snapp



CANDLES IN THE NIGHT



A heart broken by the death of a child can never be healed. As parents we try every way that can be thought of to cope with the loss, but the void will always be there.

At first that emptiness seems to take your breath away and most times we wish it would.

This becomes different with the passage of time. It never goes away, but at some point we learn to live with it, and in fact this horrible feeling becomes a lifeline of sorts.

One of our biggest fears is to forget our children. Forget how they looked or how their voices sounded. The smiles and tears that blur together to make a child. This emptiness in effect becomes a constant yearning to remember our children. Our hearts force us to find ways to fill that void to maintain our role as parents. Some are as simple as visiting the cemetery and some are as complex as changing our entire lives, dedicated to the memory of our child. In between are the many rituals we create or borrow from others to honor the memories and to keep our child's name alive. Lighting a candle and saying a child's name keeps their memory burning bright. It means we are struggling to cope with this unwanted role of bereaved parent in the only positive manner we can.

We will most certainly shed tears every time and we will still miss our child, but we are doing something that allows the world to hear our child's name and for that one moment the candle means so much more than anyone else could ever understand. For a fleeting second that is our universe and every memory we have comes flooding back to us as we see the flame through tears, distorting it into something magical. It's the only gift we can give our children. This is as close as we can get to our child now. A tiny, flickering flame that can warm the heart and it's nice to think that perhaps they can see it also. It's a beacon, our light in the window, our shining star in the darkness. It's an opening of our hearts and a way to share our grief. We gather to honor the memories of our children and to share this bond of lighting a candle for the children all over the world. We miss them so much.

Jim Lowery ~ TCF, Sugar Land/SW Houston Chapter



LOW FAT, LITE HOLIDAYS

Darcie D. Sims, Ph.D., CHT, CT, GMS
Puyallup, Washington



I'm tired of low fat; I'm tired of fat free. I'm tired of thinking rice cakes are good; they're not the same as Oreos! I'm tired of trying to be creative in my thinking, my eating, my living, and I'm tired of dreading the holiday season. In fact, I'm just plain tired! The holidays will be here soon enough. I think they actually start right after the 4th of July because that's when the clothing ads feature sweaters and winter coats. WHO can think of wearing wool when it's 103! Am I crazy or is the rest of the world nuts? I'm tired of dreading almost half of each year because some marketing expert thinks it would be "cute" to have Jingle Bells echoing through the frozen food section in the middle of August. If I have to start thinking holiday in July, and it takes more than a few weeks to "recover" from The Holiday Season after it's over, then I really am spending almost half of each year coping with the holiday blues. And I'm tired of that!

Most people think the holidays start sometime in November, but for me, they never really stop. I can get depressed any time of year and blame it on the holidays (except for the month of August). There are no holidays in that poor month, but just being August is reason enough to be depressed. My reds and greens can turn to blue at any moment. It only takes a few notes of a song, a whiff of real food (low fat does not smell heavenly) or a trace of a memory to send me into the dumps. We can recycle pain anytime, but somehow, once the displays are up in the stores and the weather turns cooler than before, the downhill slide towards The Holidays intensifies. By Halloween, I'm bracing for those days and by Thanksgiving, the thought of being cheery is often simply too much to bear. Gifts? Right! What could I possibly find, wrap, give or get that would lighten this load? Icicles form around my heart and The Holidays are only colored with despair. I've forgotten where I stashed the gifts I did manage to buy during the sidewalk sales last summer, and that recipe for low-fat fruitcake was copied down and promptly misplaced (for which my family and friends should be eternally grateful!) By November, I've run out of options, however, and no matter how creative I am, there is no denying the approach of those days when the rest of the world looks far happier than I have been or will ever be.

Even their voices are cheery as we slip past each other on the icy sidewalks! It grows dark at 4:30 in the afternoon, and there is little comfort in a carrot on a wintry day. I'm tired of low-fat substitutes for happiness. I'm tired of bracing for the memories that flood back to better times and for fearing the sights and sounds that only serve to remind me of what isn't anymore. Can anyone stop the holidays please? Can anyone find a fat substitute that really tastes like mom's pumpkin pie? Can anyone figure out a cure for the pain of these memories? Probably not. So, as long as we are stuck with the approaching holidays and as long as we remain

determined to be healthy and keep up the good low-fat fight, what can we do to turn this season of despair into a season of hope? Where are the beacons of light (recipes?) that make low fat anything acceptable?

Handling the holidays is not deciding how to eliminate the fat, the pain, the memories from our lives, but rather, learning how to live with the hurt instead of being consumed by it.

BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF

Know that hardly anyone is as happy as you think they might be. We all have our hurts to hide. We are always in a hurry. We want things to be better now. Do what you can this season and let it be enough.

BE REALISTIC.

It will hurt, especially if there is an empty chair at the table. Don't try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Lay in a supply of tissues (a roll of toilet paper is more efficient). Anticipation is often far worse than reality. Let those hurting moments come, deal with them and let them go. Leave the word "ought" out of this holiday.

PLAN AHEAD.

Grieving people often experience a lack of concentration. Make lists. Prioritize everything. Decide what is really important. (Breathing and potty time rank right up there!)

REDEFINE EXPECTATIONS.

Be honest in what you expect to be able to do. We live in a world of oughts and shoulds and suffer from guilt because we cannot meet our own expectations. You can't buy away grief, although you might be tempted to try.

BE KIND AND GENTLE TO SELF

Figure out what you should do, balance it against what you are capable of doing and then compromise. forgive yourself for living when your loved one died.

LISTEN TO YOURSELF

Find the quiet space within where all the answers live. as you become aware of your needs, tell family members and friends. Keep some traditions; choose which ones. Don't toss out everything this year. You can always try changing a routine. Try whatever pops into your head. You can always scrap it if it doesn't work.

TAKE CARE OF SELF PHYSICALLY

Eat right (toss some chocolate chips into the oat bran; gift wrap some broccoli; ban low fat for one glorious meal!) Exercise (or at least watch someone else). Jog your memory!

HOLD ON TO YOUR POCKET BOOK and CHARGE CARDS.

SCREEN ALL HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES.

- . Will it be the holidays without it?
- . Why do you do this activity? Tradition, habit, obligation?
- . Do you have to do this, or can others do it for you?
- . Do you like doing it?
- . How could this activity be done differently?

GIVE YOURSELF THE GIFT OF EMOTIONS.

Put the motion back into the emotions. Toss a Nerf brick when you're angry, or pound a pillow. Go outside and yell while you shovel snow. Find a way to express the intensity of your feelings in a personally, nondestructive way.

BUY A GIFT FOR YOUR LOVED ONE.

Give it away to someone who would otherwise not have a gift. It is the giving, the exchanging of love that we miss the most. When you share love, it grows.

HANG THE STOCKINGS; PLACE A WREATH ON THE GRAVE.

Do whatever feels right for you and your family.

SHARE YOUR HOLIDAYS,

Ride the ferry, visit a soup kitchen or nursing home, spend an evening at the bus station. There are lots of lonely people who could use your love and caring.

WORK AT LIFTING DEPRESSION.

Take responsibility for self. We cannot wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it to us. We have to do that for ourselves. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat. (One cookie will not cause mounds of fat to be deposited on your hips—a dozen, however, might!)

UNDERSTAND THAT HEARTACHES WILL BE UPACKED.

As you sift through the decorations, appreciate the warm, loving memories of each piece. Don't deny yourself the gift of healing tears.

ASK FOR HELP

Make a help-on-a-stick sign and stand on the porch, waving it. Someone will notice (but may not stop). Just because you ask for help does not guarantee you will get some, but if you never ask, no one will ever know how much you might need a hug.

LEARN TO LOOK FOR JOY IN THE MOMENT.

Learn to celebrate what you do have instead of making mental lists of what you're missing. Change the way you look at things.

LIGHT A SPECIAL CANDLE.

Not in memory of a death, but in celebration of a life and a love shared! Never forget that once someone loved us and we loved back. No one can deny that gift exchange!

LIVE THROUGH THE HURT.

Joy can return to warm your heart. I'm tired of low-fat life, and I'm tired of dreading the approaching holiday season. I can't live with my entire being focused on fat grams and painful memories. So, since I can't eliminate fat completely and if I get rid of the memories, I must also get rid of the remembered joy, I'll just have to do what I can and forgive the rest. The holidays are survivable just as fat is manageable. I'll have to run a few more miles and shed a few more tears, but I'm not going to let yesterday use up today, and if I do find something wonderful to eat or a terrific memory to cherish, I'll enjoy them all.

I will not allow fat or pain or fear or sadness to ruin the entire season. It may not be the same as before we became health-conscious or bereaved, but whatever it is can be something and that just may be the beacon of hope in this season of despair. Grab the fruitcake and the low-fat turkey and get moving to the rhythms of this holiday season—the season where love and memory lighten the heart and chase the gloom. Skip the fat, shed the tears, light the candle and find the light. Make this holiday season full of lite and light and love: the best seasoning of all!

~reprinted with permission from Grief Digest, Centering Corporation, Omaha, NE 402-553-1200.

www.griefdigest.com



For most Chanukah is a joyous time
With dreidals, gifts and latkes
We once had....
But since you have died,
My heart is heavy and sad....

DIMMING LIGHTS

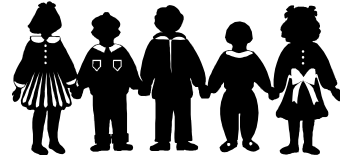
Outwardly the Chanukah candles
Are glimmering bright....
But inside of me burns only
A shimmer of blurred light



Wherever you are my dear son...
I pray you are at peace....
Seeing the menorah lights
Giving me strength to get
Through these dim and dark
Eight days....

Ceil Katz Southampton Chapter

Siblings



VERY SPECIAL CHRISTMAS TREE

Once upon a time in a big Christmas tree orchard with a lot of big trees, I was a little new sprout just 15 inches tall. The year is 1989.

One day a man, woman and boy came and chopped me down. They took me from all my friends. I was sad and lonely. The next day the boy and woman came home with a coffee can. They put some soil in the bottom with some plant food. They put me into the can then filled it with some more soil.

Everyday they would water me. One day on the morning of the 24th of December, they came into the dining room, took me off of the table and brought me into the kitchen. They put me onto the kitchen table and started to decorate me with lights (that were battery operated), a crocheted star, tinsel and some red and green Christmas balls. I looked like a million dollars.

After a couple of hours, they came back into the kitchen and took me to the car. The boy had put me on the floor of the car so I couldn't see. I went to sleep. It seemed to take hours but it only took a few minutes.

They walked a while until they came to a gravestone that is blue. The boy sat me down just behind the gravestone. I read the words on the gravestone "OUR SPECIAL SON AND BROTHER." I WAS HERE TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS with their son and brother, Michael Lee. Oh my! What a special place and they picked me to be here with him! Pictures were taken of me and Michael's place. After an hour they left.

Dark came and I was scared and cold but then I had this weird feeling. The feeling felt warm and happy. I wasn't scared anymore either. I couldn't see Michael but I could tell he was watching me and was happy too. I couldn't see him but I heard him laugh because he like me being there.

About three days later they came back and took me away. I waved bye but I made it look like the wind moved my branch. I could feel him laugh and wave bye too.

By Jeremy D. Hale

In Memory of his brother, Michael Lee Bevis-Hale

YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

Yesterday— You were here and I took it for granted that you would always be here. Telling you I loved you and was proud of you seemed unimportant. There would be time for that when we were older— when we fought less and talked more.

Today— I know that time will never come, and I will never have the chance to say these things face-to-face. So I write them and think them and how you know I mean them now and have always felt them.

Tomorrow— Each day the pain and regrets of things left unsaid get easier to deal with. I have begun to realize that you knew how I felt because you felt the same way. And as more tomorrows turn into yesterdays, I will find peace in that knowledge. Someday, somewhere, we will meet again and I will have my chance then.

Shannon Odessa Stiener, TCF Lowell, IN

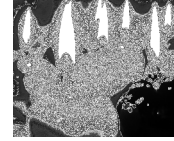
TO MY SISTER

You touched us all, you loved us all,
Forever giving, forever caring,
Forever forgiving.
Never wanting in return.

Blessed are those who shared your life
Rich are those who carry your memories.
Please rest now; your chores we will finish.
'Till we meet again . . .



HOLIDAY HOPE



I have now survived over a decade of Thanksgivings and Christmases since my daughter Nina's death in 1995. It feels surreal that it has been that long since my dark-haired angel has not been present to share her infectious enthusiasm for the holidays. Admittedly, if not for my journaling, I have little recollection of the first two. Writing allows me to see how far I have come since the bleakness of my soul those first early holidays. In the midst of a "grief storm", when I feel that I have taken one step forward and two steps back, I only need to read what I have written to see that I have made much progress, something that in early grief I did not believe was possible. When in such a dark abyss, it is almost impossible to imagine that there is even a glimmer of hope and light.

The first Thanksgiving is a blur. Whether we went out for dinner or spent it with family or nuked a frozen dinner, I haven't a clue. As no one else seems to remember, I would surmise that it was the same for everyone else as well. The first Christmas without Nina was spent trying desperately to make sure that nothing was going to change. The trees would be decorated, cards would be sent, gifts bought—I believed that my daughter would not want us to be sad and that the holiday should and would play out as usual. It almost worked. But the effort of trying to achieve such an impossible task took its toll; coming home from my parents' home Christmas Day evening, the sight from the rearview mirror of the empty spot in the back seat next to my son where Nina should have been playfully sparring with her brother, was too much to bear. I spent weeks recovering from such an exhausting charade.

I learned a lesson that first Christmas because the second Christmas "after" I gave into the emptiness and pain that I felt. The artificial tree sat forlornly unadorned right where it was assembled in the middle of the living room; it seemed to symbolize the somber mood of that second holiday season. I vocalized to my family and friends that year about what I could and could not do, would and would not do, I used what I called the "five-minute rule", which meant however I felt five minutes before a holiday happening would be the deciding factor whether I attended or not. The respect for my feelings they showed me that year was the best gift they could ever have given me.

However, Christmas #3 seemed to mark a turning point. The visible evidence involved my Christmas Village. Though an inexpensive Department 59 wannabe, it was loved by my children, especially Nina. From the time she was very young, she imaginatively played with the ceramic people for hours at a time. Even as a teenager, she wanted to know when I would be putting up the Village, as it was her favorite part of our holiday décor.

The first two Christmases, I made a decision to never put up our Christmas Village again. The memory of Nina's interactions with the Village was too painful to comprehend. However, that third Christmas, as I was unpacking the few holiday items that I would display, I came upon the boxes holding the Village. I slowly opened the containers of precious memories and one by one removed and unwrapped each piece. Visions of Christmases past raced through my mind. This year, the images of Nina's wide-eyed childlike wonder and excitement each time the Village came out of its year-long resting place brought a genuine smile to my face. I brought the Village upstairs and arranged it on the ledge of the bay window, where it always had been. I sat in the dark next to the lit village houses and watched the mechanical skaters on the make-believe pond twirl and glide on the mirrored "ice". Even through my tears, I felt the warm glow of beautiful one-of-a-kind memories resurface. I realized at that moment that a corner had been turned. Whereas the first two Christmases I was unable to setup the Christmas Village because of the memories, I was now setting it up for the same reason—the memories! But with a twist this year—what I had once perceived as a painful memory, with time had become a precious memory as I remembered the delight and joy the Village brought to Nina each Christmas of her life.

Each holiday season following the third one has been gentler. We have gradually brought back some of our old traditions intermingled with the new. Though we are sadly aware that someone so loved is missing from our family gatherings, the beauty of the season can now overshadow some of the sorrow.

We will never forget Nina and she will forever be included in our holiday celebrations. I put up a special little tree to exclusively hold the ornaments I bought each of the 15 years of her life; mixed in with the angel and butterfly ornaments I have since bought symbolizing her "eternal life". We light a candle and set her picture beside it, and we speak freely of our memories of her. The TCF Worldwide Candle Lighting program our chapter has each year is an especially important time for us to step away from the hubbub of the season, to reflect, remember, and bring Nina's spirit with us into the holidays.

Though the holidays can never be as they were, we who are further along in our grief journey can offer the gift of hope with the knowledge that with time, patience, support and compassionate friendship, you will find new ways (when you are ready) to bring a measure of joy and light back into the holiday season again. Wishing you peace, hope, solace and understanding...

With gentle thoughts,
Cathy Seehutter- TCF St. Paul Chapter

OUR CHILDREN REMEMBERED



Each season we remember the children who are sadly missed. Please take a few moments, place them in your thoughts, and remember them on their day together with their parents. None of us ever forget our special days and messages that say "I care" help us to get through them. Our children's lives will go on, as long as we remember them and celebrate their lives



You will note that we no longer publish the dates of our children's days. It is a sad commentary on the world that we live in that the dates can be used for reasons other than that for which they are intended and have been instructed by the National Office at the advice of legal counsel to eliminate them. I know how much it means for parents to see the dates in the newsletter but we have no choice.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Michael Jonathan Burak
Albert P. Cassino Jr.
Bruce Cohen
Kimberly Ann Rojas
Clifton Durand
Alfred Gomez
Alan Howard Freedman
Jordan Dale Cibley
Anjuli Marie Hunter
Raymond Joseph Chappell
Emily Hathaway
Angus Alexander MacDonald
Victoria Amelia Brancaccio
Guy V. Schipellite
Christopher Smeglin

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

John Buononcore III
Avery Weitbrecht Crompton
Dean Alexander Hannan
Ryan Matthew MacIver Hannon
Noah Curtin
William F. Dunn Jr.
Ryan M. Davis
Mya Angel Salmons

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

James Blankenship
James Ferreira
Lynn Mirabile
Marc Jude Orlandino
Mark Shinney
Donna Adams
Steven Harris
Debra Alexa Davis

JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

Tonya Marie Barnes
Christopher McGovern
Scott Condo
Kimberly Ann Rojas
Jeremy Griffin
Brian Patrick Regan Jr.
Grant Dean Lynch
Matthew John Steuterman
Arthur Whitaker Dailey
Robert Antonio Castro
John Anthony Leary
Raymond Joseph Chappell
Natale Rose Burns Foster

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

Avery Weitbrecht Crompton
John Myrick
Clifton Durand
Dean Alexander Hannan
Jacob Orchard
Joshua Gabriel Rowan
Daniel Stuart Schlegel
Lindsay K. Pellegrino
Melissa Cunningham
Christina Mary Fenney
Elizabeth Redden Deutsche

MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

Michele Braun
Lindsay Curtin
Sean Michael Ewas
Nancy Ann Farrar-Hood
Ryan Matthew MacIver Hannon
Nancy Andreasen
Bruce Whitaker-Dailey
Angus Alexander MacDonald
Steven Harris
Michael Joseph Marmo

Correction

Last newsletter omitted the first anniversary of Donna Adams in November. My apologies to her family. I try to be as accurate as possible. Please let me know if I omit your child's special day or there is a mistake of any kind.



LOVE GIFTS

*A love gift is a living memorial to our child. Usually given on anniversaries, holidays etc. but any contributions would be welcome at any time. Since there is no charge for newsletters and meetings, we solely depend on donations to purchase books, brochures and keep the chapter running. They are tax deductible. **A wonderful way to remember your child is to sponsor either the printing or mailing costs of a newsletter. If you are interested please contact either Rick Mirabile or Martha Berman.***

In Memory Of

Dates _____

Message _____

From _____

Address _____

Mail to
Compassionate Friends
147 North Street
Hingham, MA 02043

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

- 1. I will try not to expect so much understanding
From others who have not walked the same path.*
- 2. I will be kind to myself– health, physical
appearance, and some time just to myself*
- 3. I will remember that I owe it to myself to try
to enjoy life*
- 4. I will try to be more considerate of my spouse,
children, and parents– they too are coping and
deserve my help*
- 5. I resolve in memory of my child to do something to help some-
one else. For I know that in doing this, my child will live on
through me.*



WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

*Steven & Mary Ann Davis, parents of Debra Alexa Davis
Doris Sault-D'Paiz, mother of Jorge Lisandro Paiz Sault
Ann Holden, mother of Jason Steven Keith
Jane Smeglin, mother of Christopher Smeglin
Deb Bullard, mother of Aimee Leigh Bullard
E.J. & Peggy O'Donnelly, parents of Liam O'Donnelly
Vincent J. D'Andrea, father of Vincent J. D'Andrea Jr.
Steven Burke, father of Steven Dennis Burke Jr.*

***We thank the following individuals for their
support. It is deeply appreciated.***

*Beverly Mandeville, in loving memory of **Robin Mandeville**
"If love had been the cure you would be with us now."
Love, Mom*

*Aaron & Rochelle Cohen, in loving memory of **Bruce Cohen**
"A day does not go by without a thought of you.. 18 years."
Love, Mom & Dad.*

*Eleanor Burns, in loving memory of **Mark T. Burns**- "You
are always alive in our hearts."- Mom Lyn, Brendan and
Colman*

*Denise Daley, in loving memory of **Kimberly Rojas***

NEW YEAR'S WISH



*I wish you gentle days
And quiet nights
I wish you memories
to keep you strong,
I wish you time to smile
And time for song.
And then, I wish you friends
To give you love
When you are hurt and lost
And life is blind
I wish you friends and love
And peace of mind*

Sascha

*Grieving is as natural as crying when you are hurt,
sleeping when you are tired, eating when you are hungry,
or sneezing when your nose itches!
It is nature's way of healing a broken heart.*

Rabbi Earl Grollman

**SOUTH SHORE CHAPTER
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
147 NORTH STREET
HINGHAM, MA. 02043**

GO GREEN!

These newsletters represent a major part of our expenses each year. Please help save the trees as well as our shrinking chapter donations by choosing to receive this newsletter electronically. Just email the editor (rmirabile@comcast.net). Thanks for your help.



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