



# The Compassionate Friends



El Paso Chapter



December



Welcome to our  
Holiday Candlelighting Ceremony

Date: Sunday  
December 14, 2008

Time: 7:00-9:00 p.m.

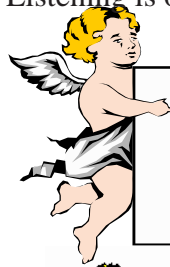
Place:  
St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
1000 Montana Avenue  
El Paso, Texas

**Board Of Directors:**  
Chairman: Susan Crews  
542-0908  
Sec/Treasurer: Lou Cain  
Newsletter, Copies & Mailing:  
The Winkelmans

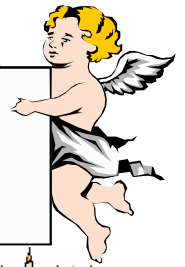
## Mark Your Calendar For Future Meetings

January 28: Regular Meeting  
February 25: Regular Meeting  
March 25: Regular Meeting  
April 29: Regular Meeting

**THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS** is a self help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. The purpose of TCF is to aid parents in the positive resolution of the grief experienced upon the death of their child and to foster the physical and emotional health of bereaved parents and surviving children. The El Paso chapter meets in donated church facilities, but no religious creed or affiliation is involved. There are no dues and no one is required to talk at any meeting. Listening is okay! Please join us, together we can make it.



## Editor's Notes



## HAPPY HOLIDAYS



We want this newsletter to be *your* newsletter. To do that, we need your help. You are invited – actually, you are strongly encouraged – to contribute to this publication. I'm hoping that one of your New Year's resolutions might be to send in something for the newsletter at least once this coming year. Please write and share your stories of your child or your sibling. Some of us get to know each other's children through the monthly chapter meetings. But, this newsletter also can be a forum for us to share. Writing is a form of therapy. It will help us get to know each other a little better and it will help us to heal a bit, too. We all have favorite memories that we can share – things that have helped us over the days, months or years. I hope you'll share them with us. It doesn't even have to be a full article. Sometimes, brief paragraphs of memories or thoughts are perfect.

Mail all Entries to: Eric Winkelman  
5337 Hunters Glenn  
El Paso, TX 79932  
[ejwinkel@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ejwinkel@sbcglobal.net)

National Office: TCF National Office  
PO Box 3696  
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696  
(630) 990-0010 or (877) 969-0010  
[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

Visit Our Website: [www.elpasotcf.org](http://www.elpasotcf.org)

# Worldwide Candle Lighting

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting®, held annually the second Sunday in December, this year December 14, unites family and friends around the globe as they light candles for one hour to honor and remember children who have died at any age from any cause. As candles are lit at 7 p.m. local time, creating a virtual wave of light, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memories of children in a way that transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious, and political boundaries.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, a gift from TCF to the bereavement community, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten.

The Worldwide Candle Lighting started in the United States in 1997 as a small Internet observance but has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world of the remembrance.

The 2007 Worldwide Candle Lighting saw information on services received from 21 countries outside the United States. Joining TCF last year were chapters of several bereavement organizations including MISS, Twinless Twins, MADD, Parents of Murdered Children, and BPUSA and services were held in all 50 states plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico.

A Remembrance Book is available during the event at TCF's USA national website. In that short one day span, thousands of messages are received and posted each year from every U.S. state and Washington D.C., every territory, as well as dozens of other countries. Some are in foreign languages.

Here in the United States, publicity about the event is widespread, being featured over the years in Dear Abby, *Parade Magazine*, Ann Landers column, *Guideposts* magazine, Annie's Mailbox, and literally hundreds of U.S. newspapers, dozens of television stations, and numerous websites and personal blogs.

Please help spread the word about this tremendous event and invite anyone who is unable to attend a service to light a candle at 7 p.m. for one hour wherever they may be.



**THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS**  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all  
children who have died

**Worldwide  
Candle  
Lighting®**

*... that their light  
may always shine.*

**Sunday, December 14, 2008  
7 PM Around the Globe**



Please **bring a candle** for each member of your family, a **memorable picture** of your child and your **favorite holiday dish or dessert** to share after the ceremony.

## El Paso Chapter Annual Candlelight Remembrance Service

### Special Invitation

**Sunday, December 14, 2008, arrive at 6:30 p.m., to commence ceremony precisely at 7:00 p.m., St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 1000 Montana**

Our Candlelight Remembrance Service is an annual event to honor and remember our children and siblings who have gone too soon.

Please bring a candle for each member of your party. After the service, we will have a potluck and a memorial picture presentation of our children and siblings in the basement.

We also want to invite our members to bring their favorite holiday dish or desert to share at our fellowship after the service. We look forward to seeing everyone and sharing this special evening with you, your family and your child.

**May their Lights Continue to Shine...**

# Thanksgiving

## GIVING THANKS

As we gather together on a day to give thanks,  
Reflections of years passed mirror in our memories -  
Times of joy, laughter and blessings,  
and also times of grief, despair and unwelcome changes.  
We've experienced personal challenges, health issues,  
Exciting opportunities, and joyous celebrations.  
We gaze back to the past as we build on the future,  
Take what we've gained  
From whom we've lost,  
Especially James, Tommy, Ed, and Bob.  
Yet there's always the present  
Full of hope, faith and love with family & friends,  
To keep us believing in the promise of the future.  
So today we give our thanks  
For life, loves, family and friendships we now have  
While remembering what once was.  
And we are ever grateful for  
The threads of memories and lives gone by,  
The strands of hope, faith, love, joy & courage,  
to enrich the fabric of this,  
The life we know.

By Meg Avery  
[memoriesr4ever@hotmail.com](mailto:memoriesr4ever@hotmail.com)

In Memory of my son James Avery, 7/15/83 - 9/22/97,  
my brother Ed Stempien, 8/24/51 - 2/2/94,

## THANKSGIVING PRAYER

I'm thankful this Thanksgiving  
That my grief is not so new.  
Last year it was so painful to  
Think of losing you.  
Death can't claim my love for you  
Tho we are far apart,  
Sweet memories will always be  
Engraved upon my heart.  
Time can never bring you back  
But it can help me be  
Thankful for the years of joy  
You brought our family.  
To all the parents with grief so new  
I share your loss and sorrow  
I pray you find with faith and time  
The blessings of each tomorrow.

-Charlotte Irick  
TCF Idaho Falls, ID

~reprinted from the St. Paul, MN Nov/Dec/Jan 2008  
Newsletter

<http://tcfstpaul.org/Newsletter.htm>

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## THANKS

- Thanks to the friend who did know the right words to say: "There is a group in town that might help you."
- Thanks to the parent who somehow found the courage to call that phone number and find out about "that group."
- Thanks to the mother who went to that first meeting knowing it would really hurt to talk - and talked.
- Thanks to the dad who said after the first meeting that he could never come back - but did.
- Thanks to the parent who, at the fifth meeting, put her arms around a "new one" and said: "They really can help."
- Thanks to the mom who, for the first time, was again able to bake cookies - for her "Compassionate Friends."
- Thanks to the homemaker who could never talk in front of people - who became a facilitator.
- Thanks to the six-foot father who cried in front of the other men - and didn't say he was sorry.  
Because of you, we will be able to help someone we don't even know - next month.

- By John DeBoer ~ TCF, Greater Omaha NE

~reprinted from the St. Paul, MN Nov/Dec/Jan 2008  
Newsletter

<http://tcfstpaul.org/Newsletter.htm>

# Handling the Holidays

The holidays are among the most difficult times for bereaved families grieving the death of a child. Below are some helpful suggestions that may aid you in surviving the holidays.

- 1) Call a family meeting and discuss your plans for the holiday season, understanding that it would be unusual for you not to feel emotionally, physically, and psychologically drained. Don't set your expectations too high or you may find yourself disappointed.
- 2) Well intending friends and family may want to include you in their plans, believing it best for you to "get away" from grieving your loss. They do not understand that you cannot escape the grief that you feel. There is no obligation to say "yes." Only participate if you truly want to.
- 3) Try to take care of your health. It's important that you eat and drink properly, exercise, and get plenty of rest.
- 4) Take time to do the things you as a person want to do. You may want time alone to reflect or to write your thoughts.
- 5) Consider eliminating such things as the festive decorations, cooking, and baking that you may normally enjoy. People will understand if you're not in a merry or joyous mood or simply don't have the energy. You may try placing an electric candle in your window in memory of your child. Don't feel obligated to send out holiday cards.
- 6) If it is necessary for you to buy gifts, consider ordering them over the Internet or by phone. Most who are bereaved find it draining to go out and fight through crowded stores bustling with holiday cheer.
- 7) Many families that are in mourning may use the money they would have spent on gifts for their child to buy gifts for a child who would not be able to celebrate the holidays otherwise.
- 8) It is not unusual for you to want to include your child during the season. You may want to do something like: Ask friends and relatives who knew your child to send you a story about your child that you may not have known; Ask friends and relatives to create an ornament or remembrance of some type that reminds them of your child so that you can place it around the house or on a holiday tree. If it was your tradition, include placing a stocking with those of other children in your house, even if you do not fill it like the others—this is a symbolic gesture in memory of your child.
- 9) If you have other children who normally celebrate the holidays, you may consider continuing to do so to create some sense of normalcy in the house and so they will not feel forgotten.
- 10) Consider attending a [Compassionate Friends meeting](#) or a memorial event such as [The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting](#). Most families find some comfort by being with others who have experienced a similar loss.
- 11) Remember that the anticipation of a holiday is often worse than the holiday itself.
- 12) Be kind to yourself.
- 13) It is okay to cry.

The Compassionate Friends, Inc. is a national self-help bereavement organization that supports families emotionally during the difficult grieving process following the death of a child. Call 877-969-0010 for more information or visit [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org).

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Download "[Surviving the Holidays](#)"



## “SEASONED GRIEF”

As I near the fifth anniversary of my daughter’s death, I have given much thought to how I grieve, “NOW,” compared to the very beginning and each year that followed. When I found my daughter drowned in her bath tub Tuesday, the evening of April 13, 2004, I naturally went into shock. To this day, I don’t know how I held myself together and actually did everything that should have been done. I know for sure, at the very moment I realized what had happened to her, I did go temporarily insane.

As bereaved parents, we know our grief is unique only to each of us. I also believe, in our own time, we eventually become somewhat “SEASONED.” I have used a unique package of “SEASONED FLAVORING” to ease my pain: by praying to the Lord for strength, maintaining my daughter’s Memorial Website, a scholarship, attending The Compassionate Friends’ Walk to Remember this past July in Nashville, Tennessee, wearing embroidered Memorial clothing often and driving my car stenciled with A Loving Memorial, in my daughter’s memory, on each back window.

I have also used this special “SEASONED FLAVORING” by attending our local bereavement group, within only a month of my daughter’s death, also utilizing individual and psychiatric counseling, including medication, all with the hope of soothing excruciating pain and finding some kind of solitude, an inner peace as I attempt to move on in an unfamiliar life. Yet I don’t believe I will ever truly know an inner peace as long as I live on this earth because my family will never be as it once was, a complete family again.

“SEASONED GRIEF,” lately I have thought often about those two words. I will be 60 years old in a few months and I think of myself as also “SEASONED” in age, pondering where all the years, along with the agonizing past 4 1/2 years, have gone. I seem to live in the past more, remembering the good times, especially when my husband and I were raising our two children. If only to go back in time, to be that young again, have those Blessed Gifts, both my daughter and son in my life. I know I would hug them more often and small problems, such as a messy bedroom, would not be worth mentioning. Of course, if I could go back, I would have the one Precious Gift I no longer have in my life, my beautiful daughter.

When I ponder on these two words, “SEASONED GRIEF,” I think how far I have traveled since the tragedy of April 13, 2004, the tragedy that took my daughter’s life. I even notice how others are also very affected by my “SEASONED GRIEF,” many I may see at work, while shopping, at the doctor’s office. I sometimes feel as though others may think my pain is over and I have moved on, living life fully without my daughter. Life does go on, right? Only bereaved parents know that we never get over our child’s death. We never again live life as we once did before we were given absolutely no choice in becoming bereaved parents.

I am also “SEASONED” mentally and physically which, I realize, is part of being a “SEASONED BEREAVED PARENT.” I have asked myself the question as to when I actually knew I was “SEASONED” in my grief, but I can’t remember. I have sprinkled and poured “FLAVORED SEASONING” in every direction during my horrific pain attempting to ease my anxiety, my fears, knowing I am the only person who can give myself what I need to go on with my life. I struggled to help myself, exploring every option available in support of bereaved parents and will probably continue doing so. I believe that recovery from our child’s death is an ongoing battle, a battle we must face, as we travel every “SEASON” of time, of life, of our own unique grieving for many long years to come. We are always “RECOVERING BEREAVED PARENTS.”

At least, after almost five years now, others do not avoid me as though I have a disease because they actually believe I am perfectly fine, won’t break down crying and won’t mention my daughter’s name. I am treated more normally than a few years ago. Maybe that is good in a way because unless we are bereaved parents, there is absolutely no way to understand the magnitude of this kind of grief and until we actually BECAME bereaved parents, we too were the others I mention now, the others who stammered for the right words, avoided uncomfortable situations with those who had lost a child, those “THEN RECOVERY BEREAVED PARENTS.”

I still cry, still hurt, still wonder why, still feel confused, still become angry, still feel cheated, still want the impossible, still blame God at times, but I also have Faith and ask for the Lord’s help. I will always carry my daughter in my heart, am “SEASONED” in dealing with the loss of my daughter which brings me to my own conclusion, I am most assuredly “SEASONED IN MY GRIEF.”

written by Dianna (November 08)

[mykanda@yahoo.com](mailto:mykanda@yahoo.com)

In Memory of My Daughter

Kanda Michelle Jacobs

5/24/73 - 4/13/04

<http://www.kandamjacobs.com/seasonedgrief08.htm>

(webpage for “SEASONED GRIEF”)

# Happy Holidays

## REMEMBER YOUR CHILD DURING THE HOLIDAYS

We generally associate the December holidays with festive decorations, gift giving, and the laughter of little children. For a parent who has lost a child, just the word holiday can cause great emotional pain. It is difficult to walk into a store and be bombarded with all of the reminders of children. The toys, holiday clothes, colorful children's gift wrap, and the holiday music being sung by young children all bring on waves of grief that are difficult to bear.

Often parents who have lost a child find themselves falling into a depression around holiday season time. It would be far easier to avoid the holidays than to face the season without the joy of your precious child. With some planning prior to the holiday season, the pain of loss can be softened somewhat.

At some point, though, it becomes necessary to face the reality of the holiday season as being very different. Parents need ways to remember their child during this time of the year. By doing something special, parents will find it a bit easier and far more healing to face the otherwise empty holiday season.

It is quite healing to remember your child by lighting a candle in memory of your little one. The candle can be placed on a decorated table in a special place in your home where you will feel your child is still very close to you. There are many types of memory candles one can buy, and you can place small mementos of your child on the table with the candle. This might be painful to see at first, but it will also create an atmosphere for healing.

Remember your child by placing a special ornament on the tree. There are many stores that will do creative engraving, which you might find to be a desirable option for you. Have a special phrase or saying engraved along with the date of your child's birth and death. The keepsake ornament will become treasured all the days of your life.

Remember your child by creating a memory box that can be shared with others during the holidays. Use your imagination as to what you want to place in the memory box. You can even decorate the memory box together as a special time of gathering the family together to remember.

Many parents find it very healing to hang a stocking with their child's name on it by the fireplace mantle. Fill the stocking with some small gifts that were memorable of your child. Also, it might be very healing to write a letter or poem to your child and place it in the stocking. During a family meal, have someone read the letter, then place it in the memory box you've created. Each year a letter can be added. This will one day become a family treasure.

If you have some sewing ability, a wonderful way of remembering your child is to create a small quilt from some of your child's clothes. This quilt will be cherished for years to come, as it will remain a priceless remembrance of your special child.

As you think of ways to remember your child during the holidays, do things that will be healing to your heart. Remember—there is no right or wrong way to remember. Do those things that are healing specifically to you! By remembering and including your child in the holiday, you will promote an atmosphere of healing and hope.

- Written by Clara Hinton

## FIRST HOLIDAY

We lit a candle today,  
To fill the empty place  
Where you should be  
But aren't...  
I stood with my hands cupping  
The flame...  
And felt the heat...  
The energy...  
Empty space between fire and flesh  
Nothing visible  
Nothing to see...  
And yet I knew it was there-  
The energy touched my skin.  
And so it was with you today.  
Nothing visible-nothing to see.  
And yet I knew you were here.  
Your energy touched my heart.  
- Sandy Goodman, ©2006

## FIRST CHRISTMAS

It can't possibly be Christmas  
without her being here.  
Yet the world is singing round me,  
joyful tidings and good cheer.  
Though I try to put on armor  
and brave the sights and sounds,  
a few moments worth of shopping,  
and the tears are spilling down.  
I pray for strength to do it,  
find a path through holidays,  
look for shortcuts, good ideas,  
some directions through the maze.  
Then I find at last the answer:  
I'll include her symbolically.  
And the giving becomes perfect;  
her love's flowing down, through  
me.

- Genesee Bourdeau Gentry  
From Stars in the Deepest Night –  
After the Death of a Child



## **DEAR FAMILY & FRIENDS...**

The holidays can be especially sad, lonely times for those who are reeling from the death of a beloved child. After years of establishing family traditions, the celebration just doesn't seem to be as important. We had 25 years worth of family Christmas card photos, mailed proudly every year and then framed in groupings and hung on the wall during the holiday season. Since our son Peter's sudden death two years ago, we haven't been able to take them down from the wall and we haven't been able to send another family photo Christmas greeting. Any photo at this time would have too big a hole.

I most acutely felt the absence of Peter in getting together with extended family over the holidays. Though I know they mean well and they only want us to be happy again as soon as possible, they hurt us by not mentioning the son we've lost. Just after the first Christmas without Peter and before the first birthday after his death, his twenty-fifth, I felt compelled to reach out to family and try to tell them again explicitly how they could help us in keeping his memory alive. I enclosed a couple of photos of Peter. Though I did not get more than a couple of responses, I felt better for the trying.

### **Dear Extended Family of Peter,**

Christmas is over. We made it. Now we await his birthday, the anniversary of his death, other Christmases, weddings, other funerals. We sincerely thank you for your greetings and gifts though we did not send any to you this year. You have asked what you can do to help us. As you know, grief does not end. You surely must miss him too. After all, you knew him when he was a baby in arms, had gangly legs and arms, funny teeth, stupid antics. You can help us by talking about Peter, with us or among yourselves, saying his name aloud, sharing any thoughts and memories (and dreams if you've been lucky enough to have them) which may creep into your daily life, at any time, month to month, this year or next. Peter is ever present in OUR minds. We will not forget him. You will NOT make us feel bad or sad if you mention him or his death. In fact, talking about him helps us enormously.

We realize Peter was no more special than your special loved ones. He was devilish and sometimes selfish, as well as generous and often fun. But he met a very tragic, untimely death, which was wholly undeserved, and we have months if not years ahead of us of court proceedings in which to try to seek some justice. Please feel free to ask questions.

Nothing will bring Peter back. But talking and sharing help us remember him and memories are all we have! We need you desperately. You are among our remaining special loved ones.

With loving gratitude,  
Mary and Mark

Peter Mark Westra, age 24, died on July 8, 2001. He is survived by his parents, Mary (the author of this article) and Mark, who live in White Bear Lake, Minnesota. This article was printed in We Need Not Walk Alone –TCF National Publication.

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## **SORROW IS NOT FOREVER—LOVE IS**

So often one attempts to face the whole future at once. But we will not live that period all at once, only day by day. Don't try to face 20 years. Face today. When that has been achieved, face tomorrow. You will find more and more ways in which you can cope. The Chinese have a saying that a journey of a 1000 miles starts with a single step. There is no way you can take the 15th or the 200th step before you have taken the first.

It can be difficult to face going out again and resuming your regular activities. It can take more courage to face little things than the big things in life. Going out shopping for groceries for the first time can become an ordeal. Making the change more complete could help. Try a different store, a different day or time, and go with a friend. When it seems very hard what to decide to do first, maybe it's not very important where you start as long as you start. Choose a simple task and get started.

Once you've begun it will be far easier to set your priorities and you will have gained confidence for already having achieved something.

—The Facts of Death by Michael A. Simpson

## Making It Through The Holidays

Both the Sacramento and Yolo Compassionate Friends discussed the upcoming holidays at their October chapter meetings. Prior to the death of a child, most holidays are intended to be a time of joy, community, gift giving, and thankfulness. When a family loses a child, holidays often become challenging times to “get through”. Helpful information shared by a Hospice counselor and the chapter members included:

### **Setting Limits for Yourself**

It’s okay to say no, when you don’t feel up to something. It’s okay to say yes, too. “Look to simplify rather than overwhelm yourself. Do only as much as you can manage emotionally and physically.”

### **Express Your Feelings**

Sharing your feelings with those close to you regarding the upcoming holidays often helps. Writing feelings down through journaling, simple note taking, listening to special music, and creating art that expresses feelings have been helpful for many people.

### **Making Plans**

Planning in advance often helps to lessen the pressure on grieving families and individuals as the holidays approach. A plan can be as sophisticated or simple as you choose. Giving yourself permission to change plans at the last minute is important, too. Sometimes you might plan to go to Aunt Sal’s for Thanksgiving, and then find yourself not feeling up to it. It’s okay to change your mind. One professional speaker offered suggestions regarding holiday gatherings, including replying to invitations “We would like to come, and we’ll try to, but we’re not really sure how we’ll feel on that day”, giving yourself permission to leave early, it’s okay to order out, it’s okay to plan something totally different.

### **Ask For What You Need**

Oftentimes people want to help, but don’t know how to. Communicate what you need. Ask for help with entertaining, shopping, cooking, and cleaning.

### **Resist Isolation**

While in grief, oftentimes we do not feel up to being around large groups. Sometimes we find that the support and enjoyment of being with people who love you can help to nourish and heal.

### **Avoiding the Holiday?**

While avoiding the holiday sounds like an interesting idea, the holiday won’t care! Every time you leave the house between now and first of the year, you will likely see some holiday reminder. A speaker suggested that “It often feels better to at least acknowledge your loss and your loved one in some special and meaningful way” than to try to skip the holiday entirely.

### **Breaking Traditions**

Especially in the first years, traditions that emphasize the absence of your child may not be appropriate. If you do keep with traditions allow for changes, such as location or guest list.

### **New Traditions**

Creating new rituals has been healing for many families. Involving family and friends may help their grief, too. Saving a place at the table for the child who has died, mentioning the child’s name, taking a moment to acknowledge their absence, sharing a memory, lighting a candle in their memory, and visiting the grave site sometime during the day are just a few ideas that families have shared as helpful.

### **It’s Okay to Change Things, and It’s Okay To Change Back**

What feels right the first or second year, may not in subsequent years. Many families find that deviating from their traditional holiday events is appropriate early on, but that returning to tradition is right for them several years down the line. It’s okay to change things... temporarily or permanently. I know that I wanted to be away for Thanksgiving the year that my son died, so I went to a place that was warm, where no turkey was served, and there were beaches. For several years, my daughter-in-law did the holiday cooking. This year will be the 6th Thanksgiving without my son, Max. This is the first year that our family will return to our traditional gathering at my house, with me cooking.

Submitted by Cecilia Gabrielli,



# Love Gifts

A **LOVE GIFT** is a gift of money or service to The Compassionate Friends. It is usually in honor of a child who has died but it can also be a gift to help in the work of the El Paso Chapter of TCF. Your gifts are tax deductible and are our Chapter's only monetary support. Your donation will help us pay for postage and labels for sending our newsletter each month.

## LOVE GIFT

Name of Person to be Remembered \_\_\_\_\_

Special Occasion of Person \_\_\_\_\_

Given By \_\_\_\_\_

Send To: Mary Lou Cain  
5664 Beth View  
El Paso, TX 79932

### **Christmas Memories**

Jingle bells, cookie smells,  
Goodies on the tree,  
The sights and sounds of Christmas  
Are everywhere to see.  
So be not sad, or wish for one  
Who is no longer here,  
If you but pause and think awhile  
You'll find them very near.  
For none is ever so far away  
Our thoughts can't set them free  
To speed their way 'cross miles or time  
To join us here in memory.  
I don't believe that anyone  
Is ever truly gone,  
For all it takes is just one thought,  
To bring their memory home.  
So friend, if you've ever wondered  
What if she or he were here,  
All needs to be done is think of them,  
And suddenly, they're near.  
So Christmas then, or Christmas now,  
Even Christmas not yet here,  
Your thoughts and memories have the power  
To bring your loved ones near.  
Just close your eyes and think of them  
And in your mind you'll see,  
All the ones you've ever loved  
Around your Christmas tree  
Ruth Ann Mahaffey  
©Copyright 1998

### **For The New Year**

Where there is pain,  
let there be softening  
Where there is bitterness,  
let there be acceptance  
Where there is silence,  
let there be communication  
Where there is loneliness,  
let there be friendships  
Where there is despair,  
let there be hope  
~Ruth Eiseman  
TCF, Louisville, KY  
reprinted from the book *We Need Not Walk Alone*

### **FIRST CHRISTMAS**

It can't possibly be Christmas without her being here.  
Yet the world is singing round me, joyful tidings and good cheer.  
Though I try to put on armor and brave the sights and sounds,  
a few moments worth of shopping, and the tears are spilling down.  
I pray for strength to do it, find a path through holidays,  
look for shortcuts, good ideas, some directions through the maze.  
Then I find at last the answer: I'll include her symbolically.  
And the giving becomes perfect; her love's flowing down,  
through me.  
- Genesse Bourdeau Gentry  
From *Stars in the Deepest Night –  
After the Death of a Child*

## HOLIDAY SUGGESTIONS FROM TCF OF ATLANTA

I began a tradition after that first dreadful Christmas blur of hanging my daughter's stocking up along with the rest of the family. Then each year I do something special in her memory... like take a name from an "Angel Tree" at the mall or wherever and buy a gift for a needy child in her memory. I put the angel note in her stocking. I make a donation to the Salvation Army to help feed the hungry and homeless at Christmas and I put their acknowledgment in her stocking, things like that. As the years are passing, her stocking is filling up with good deeds done in her memory and things I know she would appreciate knowing were done in her name, my beloved "Carissa". It helps refocus the heartbreak of missing her into something positive and helpful.

- Debby, mom to angel Carissa

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The last two Christmases I signed my Christmas cards "In Memory Of Melanie". This year I have a butterfly stamp that I stamped each card with in red and then with green ink I wrote "Melanie" across the butterfly and then under the butterfly I wrote "In Heaven". I will always include Melanie in all my holiday, birthday and greeting cards, even if it is just a butterfly stamped upon the page with her initials, she will be included.

- Kathy, Melanie's Mom ^j^

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### Angel Hugs, Diana - Kelley's Mom

My nephew, Alex Corn, (18) was killed in a car accident January 31, 1996. He was like a son to me. My brother, Lowell (Alex's dad) died by suicide July 1, 1999. After Alex died, I decorated a "Memory Tree" and have continued to do so every Christmas since 1996. Now, I will do the same for my sweet, loving brother. I decorate the tree with cards, pictures of Alex, baby shoes, hand prints, angels, gifts, doves from the funeral/floral arrangements, little handmade ornaments given to me by Alex....anything personal I have received or collected over the years from him. Of course, I decorate with lights...lots of lights, which make the "memories" stand out. The tree topper is a huge bow with the last picture of Alex attached to it. The tree gives me great comfort each time I pass by it and it's a reminder to my friends and visitors that YES, this person lived, YES, this person was loved deeply and YES, this person made a difference in my life and his life counted as much as anyone's.... and the memories live on.

~shared by Martha Corn Grogan

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I always sign my angel's name on any card I send. I write Alyssa "in spirit". I lost my daughter in June to SIDS.

- Lindsey, Alyssa's mom

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I sign my son's Ryan's name to some cards. I can't bear to leave his name off of them either. I put a halo over his name.

~Karen, Ryan's Mom

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS  
ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH  
1000 MONTANA  
EL PASO, TX 79902