



The Compassionate Friends



El Paso Chapter

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



Welcome to our
Holiday Candlelighting Ceremony

Date: Sunday
December 12, 2010

Time: 6:30-9:00 PM

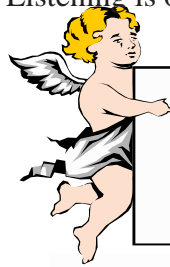
Place:
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
1000 Montana Avenue
El Paso, Texas

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

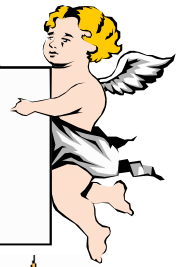
Mark Your Calendar For Future Meetings

January 26: Regular Meeting
February 23: Regular Meeting
March 23: Regular Meeting
April 27: 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



The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting®, held annually the second Sunday in December, this year December 12, 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 candlelightings are conducted in homes as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten.

Mail all Entries to: Eric Winkelman
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www.compassionatefriends.org

Visit Our Website: www.elpasotcf.org

Worldwide Candle Lighting

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting®, held annually the second Sunday in December, this year **December 12**, 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.

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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 2009 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.



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 12, 2010, 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...



A special gift to all of us in Remembrance of World Wide
Candlelighting and National Children's Memorial Day -
Dec. 12

A FORGIVING THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving, unlike Christmas, there was no pressure of giving that just the right gift! Thanksgiving Day brought family gatherings and good food. Late on those afternoons, we would return home full from over-eating and satisfied that our family relationships were intact. It was also a day that reminded us of everything for which we were thankful.

We are supposed to be thankful, our families, our comfortable life, etc. The death of a child changes our perceptions, however. When the family now gathers around the Thanksgiving table, I now see a missing plate that no one else sees. When our nieces and nephews are laughing or crying, I hear a voice that no one else hears. When a family recounts a story about something his or her child did last week, I wish for a story to tell. (Of course, when I say no one else I exclude my wife and daughter. I'm sure that they see, hear and wish what I do, although probably at different times.)

We still have much to be thankful for, we bereaved parents, and we should remember that. But now Thanksgiving Day has an additional observance for us too, doesn't it? It is a day of forgiveness also. We must forgive others who cannot acknowledge the missing child, for whatever reasons. If family and friends cannot understand us, then we must exhibit tolerance, forgiveness and understanding. On a day which we offer thanks, we can climb another step on our ladder to recovery. I hope you have a forgiving Thanksgiving.

By **Jim Hobbs, BP/USA of Northern Texas**

"Light a candle this holiday season and keep renewing it in loving memory of your child, siblings or grandchildren who have died. Think of them as having gone just steps ahead of you and sometimes returning – in thought...in spirit...in a loving unseen embrace – when you need them most."

– **Charmaine Stickel, TCF/Pittsburgh, PA**

A HOLIDAY MESSAGE

You won't read "Have a great Thanksgiving", "Merry Christmas" or "Happy New Year" in these pages. But you will read, in every line, we hope, an affirmation of hope and struggle toward a tomorrow in which each of us can cope and where we can feel again the touch of joy our departed children gave to all of us. Most of all, we hope this newsletter says to you, "Take heart, have courage." Though the days are long and full of trial, you are not alone. We are here, to be your friend, for just a while or as long as you need us. We have walked your road and fear the shadows too. Like you, we strive not to be alone. Through The Compassionate Friends, we all can be held by a friend, and know that in spite of all the pain and hurt, companionship and love still exist in the world. – **Don Hackett, TCF/South Shore, MA**

THANKFUL

At this time of year, when it is oftentimes hard to find things to feel thankful for, we are all truly thankful for the following: **THANKS** to those who had the courage to walk through our meeting room doors for the first time, as well as those who continue to come to meetings - not only for themselves - but also to reach out to newly bereaved members. **THANKS** to those members, family and friends who support our chapter with their donations (Love Gifts) to help ensure that our chapter will exist for those who need us now and in the years to come. **THANKS** to those who share their children, siblings, grandchildren with us at meetings through their personal stories, their tears, and, yes, laughter. **THANKS** for those with their ready hugs, listening ears, and shoulders to cry on. **THANKS** to past and present Chapter Leadership/Steering Committee members and all the Volunteers who have helped keep our chapter a supportive and hopeful place for our members. **THANKS** to those who share treats with us at meetings, and help us setup and clean up after. All of you are truly appreciated!

**Light a quiet candle, send a quiet kiss,
Say a quiet fare-thee-well, to the one you miss.
Light a quiet candle, shed a quiet tear,
Sing a quiet lullaby
And the quiet Christmas star will hear.
- Sascha Wagner**

THOSE DIFFICULT "FIRSTS"

I remember New Year's Eve, December 31, 1994. Nina loved any opportunity that called for a celebration. She invited a couple of her high school friends over, planned games, tried some new recipes, and bought her customary bottle of sparkling apple cider to drink out of plastic champagne glasses. Nina rivaled Martha Stewart when it came to her enthusiasm for entertaining! Her friends stayed overnight and their joyful laughter could be heard well into the wee hours of the morning. Luckily, I have such a sweet, pleasant memory of what turned out to be the last New Year's Eve with our Nina, as December 31, 1995 became what was the first New Year's Eve without her.

Because of those "Lasts", we are faced with the "Firsts". With only two days left of the year 2000, I was tempted to write about New Year's resolutions. However, since I make my resolutions on the 1st and notoriously break them by the 2nd, my credibility is definitely in question! But since Monday will be January 1st, it seemed like a good time to mention what for many of you will be the beginning of those difficult "Firsts" - the first holidays, first birthday, first death anniversary, the first family vacation without your child, brother or sister, or grandchild, and so on. Unfortunately, this is an area that I am qualified to write about because, of course, I have "been there."

In particular, I know that those who are newly bereaved face the new calendar with apprehension because of those "Firsts." Whether there is a major holiday in that month or not, each one brings its own emotional challenges. For those whose children sadly died before they had memories of what their child had done the year before, the calendar speaks to them of shattered dreams and hopes that died along with their child. For the rest of us, it is the bittersweet recollections of years' past. With February comes, memories of handmade Valentines with childlike scribbles of "I love you Mommy & Daddy." Maybe March brought attempts at kite flying and April dying Easter eggs. Then there is May and June with Mother's and Father's Day and the stab of pain in your heart that your child is not there to celebrate such important days with you. There are Fourth of July celebrations and summer vacations, school clothes shopping, the excitement of meeting new teachers and new friends. In October, carving pumpkins and trying to decide what costume to wear trick or treating. And then to those most painful of months where in a short time span we are thrust into family-centered Norman Rockwell-like celebrations of Thanksgiving and Christmas where our loved ones who are missing are so conspicuously absent. When we enter in our child's birthday and the anniversary of their death it is frankly overwhelming. It is no wonder that at each meeting we hear the same words spoken over and over again: "This has been a very hard month."

I cannot imagine facing these "Firsts" without the support of The Compassionate Friends. I am sad to think that even a few decades ago there weren't any groups like TCF to assist those whose children had died. Those unfortunate bereaved parents were only allowed the time of the funeral to grieve. Then the expectation was—especially if they had other children—to get on with their life for those surviving family members. They buried their child and many times, because they weren't allowed to, never spoke of them again...as if they had never existed. They didn't have other bereaved parents to walk the grief path with them and to validate that what they were feeling was "normal", well, normal for us anyway. They didn't have another parent who had been down that same path available to tell them that though the "Firsts" are difficult, most often the anticipation of the day is worse than the day itself. They didn't have the veterans of TCF to assure them that they too would rediscover the ability to laugh and find reasons to live again.

Though it is unrealistic to think that the holidays and any of the other special days will ever be the same again, I and so many others in our group of The Compassionate Friends are here to tell you that they do gradually become less difficult to bear. Undoubtedly, the holidays will always be tinged with sadness for the loved one absent. But we, who have made it past the "Firsts" and the "Seconds" and beyond, are present at each Compassionate Friends meeting, and/or only an e-mail or phone call away. We are here to support and help those of you who are on this grief journey. Please remember always - you are not alone.

- written by Cathy Seehuetter - TCF/St. Paul, MN

Editor's note: I wrote this in 2000, five years after Nina died. It felt like a good time to rerun this article with so many new members who are now facing their first holidays without that precious person with them. My heart and thoughts are with all of you this season; especially those who are dealing with all the "Firsts". Please try to be gentle with yourself.

That first holiday season...
hope flickered like the flame
of a distant candle; I could
see the flame, yet I could not
seem to get close to it. As
healing came, hope become
more than a distant ray of
light. It changed to a glow
that lighted my way.
- Written by Eloise Cole

HOLIDAY CHEER

How are you doing with the holidays nearly here? Do you wish your mailbox would yield something besides cheery letters about your friends' All-American families and how things are going great for them? One bereaved father wrote me, "I get so mad when those letters come! I feel like writing our family letter and saying...It's Christmas and time to write about our family. We don't have much to say about Amber...she's dead.' I wonder what they would think then?"

He's right - the December mailbox can be brutal. Since one of my favorite things to do is find humorous cards, and because it's impossible to send each of you a Christmas card, I'd like to use this space to share some of my favorite "smile cards" with you. I almost guarantee you'll find yourself with a small smile or a chuckle of recognition. Since these have nothing to do with the holidays, that already makes them easier to digest.

"Once I tried to be fashion conscious, exercise conscious, money conscious, news, health and weight conscious...Now, I just try to stay conscious!"

Isn't that the truth? In grief, we're doing well to drag ourselves out of bed or find that both shoes match when we get in the car. What we wear, how it fits, how much it costs or what we weigh suddenly is insignificant. I've been amazed to discover this. Are you, too?

"When life gets too hectic, I've found that a nice hot bath can solve most problems...I've been in here since Thursday!"

This one always makes me smile! Everything is hectic when you're grieving. Maybe one reason is because grief saps our normal amount of energy, so getting dressed in the morning (or by afternoon) or making up a grocery list or trying to decipher the jargon on insurance forms exhausts us.

"Things getting to you? Well, when I'm upset, I find it helps to make a hot cup of tea...and hurl it furiously at the nearest wall!"

Amen to that! EVERYTHING upsets us, don't you agree? Even though we're dumb, we're acutely aware of our lives being totally out of sync. The bank says you didn't sign a check, the car needs a new alternator (I didn't even know it had one!), etc. Things that before grief would have been inconveniences now loom like gigantic roadblocks. Maybe that "cup of tea" theory would work!

"There are some days when I can't be sure if life is passing me by...or trying to run me over!"

We no longer can concentrate long enough to read the paper or listen to news, yet the world continues on with its problem and events, leaving us totally ignorant. We discover friends have moved, we've missed birth dates or we can't remember past events referred to by everyone else. Life seems to be passing us by AND running us over! But don't feel alone in this...it happens to all of us, and it does get better...very slowly.

"Can I help? Or is this a job for Junk Food?"

Personally, I believe even world peace could be easily achieved if everyone had enough chocolate!

- written by Charlene Vester Encroth - Spokane, WA



On a Night in December

As days moved on towards winter, and
trees becoming bare,
we were faced with shopping malls
where carols filled the air.
And thoughts all turned to loved ones,
those present, and those not.
For us, whose lives were drained of
light,
it was solace that we sought.

And so began a journey
of candles round the earth,
bringing light to darkness
and honoring the worth
of children held so dear to us
but never to grow old,
whose lives filled our life tapestries,
with threads of finest gold.

Now we gather on this night
and watch the candles burn,
see their pictures,
say their names
one by one, in turn.

And our children, siblings,
grandchildren,
for whom we gather here,
let us know, in the candles glow,
that they are always near.

Their light will ever surround us; their
love will always flow. When we leave,
may we remember that this is ever so. -

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry

Written for TCF/Marin Cty, CA
2003 Candle Lighting Program as
part of TCF Worldwide Candle
Lighting

HOW WILL I SURVIVE CHRISTMAS?

25 suggestions to Help the Newly Bereaved

The most celebrated day in our nation is Christmas. But many bereaved parents and siblings, and especially the newly bereaved, have no zeal to celebrate. Some would like to pull the covers over their heads and not wake up until after the new year.

When my son, Daniel, died I was grateful it was 10 months before the Christmas season. I didn't want to think about how a season of joy would be without my little boy.

Now, five Christmases later, being a little bolder and better equipped to deal with this season, I recall what helped me through it. Perhaps, in some small ways, you will find hope and peace, even if it is only in tidbit form.

1. Buy tissues.
2. Don't worry about decorations. If you want to place a few decorations around, do. If you don't want to, don't.
3. Spend time with a few close friends or family members and share fond memories of your child.
4. Don't tire yourself out by shopping for long periods of time like perhaps you used to do. You have less emotional and physical energy now.
5. Consider getting away for Christmas.
6. Remember Christmas signifies hope. This is the real meaning of the holiday - not presents, glitter or who can bake the best cookies.
7. Treat yourself kindly.
8. Consider online shopping for gifts.
9. Breathe in the night air and search the sky for bright stars.
10. Don't feel you should or must go to every function you get invited to.
11. Spend time writing about your child.
12. Buy candles in your child's favorite color and light them in her memory.
13. Hug those you love.
14. Write a card to another bereaved parent or sibling.
15. Rent a funny movie and laugh.
16. Talk to another bereaved parent or sibling about the loneliness you feel.
17. Make a banner that says, "We Miss You (insert your child's name) this Christmas" and hang it on your porch. Neighbors will be reminded of your child and perhaps realize it is a sad season for you.
18. Compose a letter or poem to your child.
19. Don't expect to feel like you used to. There is a clear void in your life now.

20. Reach out to someone who is in need. It always feels good to give to the less fortunate.
21. Know that every Christmas after this one will not be this rough.
22. Don't feel you have to keep up with old traditions. If you don't want to send cards this Christmas, don't.
23. There never is, nor will there ever be, the "perfect" Christmas. Be reminded that even when your child was living, there were flaws in this season. Your neighbors who seem to "live the easy life" will not have a stress-free holiday either.
24. Create a new tradition in honor of your child - serious or silly - so that you are including him in a unique way during this month.
25. **Buy a gift for someone in memory of your child.**

- Alice Wisler, from "Tributes" E-zine.

CHRISTMAS STAR

It's here again, son, though I sought to forestall the season from arriving by waiting 'till the day before to buy the tree. Even then I refused to put it in its place before the window until all were abed: To be alone with tree and thoughts of you hoisting it over thresholds of yore with cherry cheeks and white breath. Remarkable, really, that I had no trouble placing the tree in the holder you'd made nor stringing lights, hanging ornaments - both store-bought and child-constructed - until I came to the star.

Oh, I tried more than once, but each time I could see you creating a ceremony of hanging it just right, and I could not. So, I sat down with cookies and cider to wait for the pandemonium of Christmas breaking o'er the land. Later I noticed something glowing atop the tree. Outside a star shone low in such a way its light appeared upon our tree—where I placed our star to silhouette its glow.

Thank you, son, for hanging the star.

- *Marcia Alig TCF, Mercer Area Chapter, NJ*

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

Look for Christmas Angel Visits

It is very difficult during the holidays to come out of the pain when your child is not with you...and can never be physically here. We all want and need our children with us. The first Christmas after Brad died, it had been three and one-half months - I was going through the motions - decorating and planning - my heart heavy and so very weary. With each thing I put up or cleaned, I sighed and cried. I was vacuuming with a very loud old vacuum cleaner...you could not hear the phone or the doorbell or someone talking behind you. In the midst of cleaning with the old relic, I heard a music box...I listened again as I continued and there it was again. I turned off the vacuum and there was my mother's angel turning and playing Silent Night! No one else was in the house. The angel had been placed there the day before. It did not just play a few notes...it played the entire song over a couple of times. I sad down and cried, holding onto my angel, saying "Thank you, Mom, thank you, Brad"...my Christmas angel visit. This particular angel was so very special to me. It had been my Mom's and her favorite Christmas carol was Silent Night. In 1981, as she lay dying in a coma, our family gathered around her bed singing Silent Night to her...

Brad always loved his Grandma' Lillian's Christmas angel and would play it over and over...I am so glad he came to play it again.

- Linda Moore, BP/USA, Orange County, CA

Gifts I Would Leave for You

The gifts I would leave for beneath your tree
Aren't those you could touch or see.
Not wrapped in Christmas tissues gay
But a gift of life to live each day.

The gift of love, warm and true
And health your whole life through,
Smiles and happiness and cheer
To keep us happy through the year.

These are the gifts I'd leave for you,
Though I know your life is through.
Even if my heart has no song
I feel you hear to guide me on.

- Jeffrey Meredith,
Twin Brother of Scott Meredith

Yes, Grandparents Do Grieve

Thank God, someone stepped up and said, "Hey! This child was and is my grandchild! And I hurt too! Not looking for sympathy, but wanting the world to know that yes, the mother and father are hurting from the loss of their little angels, but Granny and Grandpa loved these children with their hearts and souls. Totally unconditionally! I read these letters that are sent to me, every day. My heart hurts for these parents for the loss of their children. But, please, let us not forget any of the grandparents whose loss is two-fold. One for their child who is hurting so badly and for the loss of their grandchildren. I always thought my grandchildren would outlive me. At least that's the way it's supposed to be. It doesn't always work out that way. So yes, my heart also hurts for the grandparents too.

- By Wanda Bryant, TCF, Vidalia, GA

Stepparents Hurt Too

Daddy, I want this for Christmas...
Daddy, can I have that for my birthday?
Daddy, will you take me?
Daddy, fix my car...
Daddy, can I have some money?
I love you, Dad!
The word "step" should mean a step up,
not a step down.
For 10 years, I was loved by a little girl,
and then a young lady.
She always called me Daddy...
I am a bereaved parent and father, too.
Not just a stepparent.

- Carl Dunn, TCF/Pinellas County, FL

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

*ST. PAUL'S LUTHERN CHURCH
1000 MONTANA
EL PASO, TX 79902*

Please Pass on our Newsletter



The blessings of peace...

The beauty of hope...

The spirit of love...

May these be your gifts this Holiday Season.