



The Compassionate Friends



El Paso Chapter

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



Welcome to our
Holiday Candlelighting Ceremony

**Date: Sunday
December 11, 2011**

Time: 6:30-9:00 PM

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

Board Of Directors:
Chairman: Ray Gallardo
Sec/Treasurer: Lou Cain
Newsletter, Copies & Mailing:
The Winkelmans

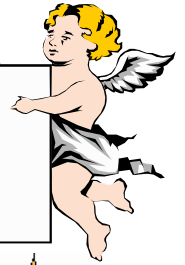
Mark Your Calendar For Future Meetings

January 25: Regular Meeting
February 29: Regular Meeting
March 28: Regular Meeting
April 25: 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 11, 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.

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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 11**, 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 11, 2011, 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...

Helping Yourself Through the Holidays



By Dr. Lee Drake, Ph.D.

The stores and malls are already filled with many of the signs and sounds of the holidays. Each year the frenzies of buying and selling seem to begin earlier and earlier. The merchants want to get as much possible out of this time of the year, so the world is bombarded with the “sights and sounds” of the season.

Most individuals look forward with a certain amount of anticipation to Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, and Christmas. The one who has lost a sibling or a child this past year or even years before looks to this time of the year with great dread and even fear.

They wish, in a way, that they could go to bed on November 1st and wake up on January 2nd of next year.

The first holidays after the death of a loved one may be especially difficult for the survivors. If you or someone you know is facing the holiday season and dreading feelings of emptiness, there are a number of things you can do to cope. Don't be afraid to grieve, if you need to, and set aside time to be alone if you want. You can also relive the happy memories by talking about your loved one to those who care.

It has been suggested that people do what they want to do, whether that means staying home, going to religious services or visiting family or friends. If you seem to enjoy this time or a special event, don't feel guilty. Experiencing joy is giving and receiving. This doesn't mean that you have forgotten your child or sibling or that you loved him or her any less.

The griever enters this time of the year with a number of questions about their grief. They have a num-

ber of fears and concerns. Let's look at some of them so we can get a better understanding of what the griever sees in most cases:

First, there is the anticipation of the pain of the holidays—The pain of facing “the first” holiday without that very special child or sibling. Then there is the fear and pain of other people being happy and joyous when you are not and are very alone. We live in a family society and while everyone else will be with family, you will be alone or missing a family member! Solution--try to plan ahead and be with someone and spend the day or a few days with those you love. Don't make it a taboo to talk about your loved one, and balance your time with others with some time alone for yourself.

Second, the fear of preparation for the holidays—Grief is very tiring and taxing. It drains those who are grieving. The holidays are also a very busy and tiring time, as we all know—the sending of cards, the buying, wrapping, cooking, and giving of gifts. The holiday parties and even the special holiday music and programs seem to make the griever not have any energy at all. They want to be alone and not involved.

Solution--No one says that you have to do any of those things. If it makes you feel good to cook and bake and buy--do so--if it doesn't, don't. Don't allow others to put you into their mold.

If you decide to do things—make a plan and work it. Send out a few cards a day—buy a gift at a time, and not all at once. Pace yourself—don't over do it! It is most important that you don't impose things on yourself that you can't do.

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You might want to use special ways to memorialize your love one. Suggestions may be:

- Give a gift in memory of your child, brother, or sister.
- Attend a special memorial service and pay respect to those you love and miss.
- Make a special ornament and hang it on a tree in memory of your loved one.
- Do for others and it will make you feel good.
- Organize your shopping with a specific list and a budget.
- Divide responsibilities for meals, decorating, or wrapping with your family.
- Take time for others--contact your local churches or charities for information about serving food to the homeless or collecting gifts for needy children. This may be especially helpful if you're away from loved ones during the holidays.
- Take time for yourself—enjoy the holiday season as best you can. The purpose of the season is to create happiness. And if you are happy, those around you will be, too!•

Be careful of “should”—it is better to do what is most helpful for you and your family. If a situation looks especially difficult over the holidays, try not to get involved.

And don't forget: Anticipation of any holiday is so much worse than the actual holiday.

Keep a balance in your life and remember that you are loved.

Dr. Drake, a bereaved sibling with a long background on the subject of grief and grief recovery, was a much sought after speaker and was a writer as well as a public relations director for a funeral home group in Florida, prior to his death in 2005.

Borrowed from *We Need Not Walk Alone*, the national magazine of The Compassionate Friends. Copyright 1997-2011

There is a real bitter-sweet to this for us as grieving mothers, but I hope that somewhere, somehow perhaps it is even more true for us.



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 became more than a distant ray of light. It changed to a glow that lighted my way. -
Written by Eloise Cole

A Christmas Story

When I was just a little girl
Around the age of three
I remember a Christmas
When Santa came to see me
A doll wrapped up
In a pretty bright red bow
Long golden hair to stroke
Oh my, how my heart glowed
And then came a Christmas
Later on in time
When I shared my first Christmas
With a son that was all mine
A few years later down the road
When he was only five
I didn't know it would be
The last Christmas in my life
Now on Christmas
As many in all these years
I spend my days at a grave
Shedding many tears
The Holidays come every year
That, I cannot change
But through all my memories
My memories I can rearrange
I can remember all the good years
That he and I had shared
I can still here the giggles
When he got that talking teddy bear
I can remember the hugs and squeals of
"OH MOM"
As each gift he opened on that day
I can sit back and smile remembering
Before the angels took him away
Now I am older than I once used to be
But my mind drifts back
To what once was on Christmas
When my son was on earth with me
I tuck my head to fight the snow
As I wade through the fenced in graves
I've got my gift to give to him
On this years' Christmas Day
Sharon Bryant
In Memory of my son, Andrew Frank Dunbar

'Twas the Night Before Christmas

(For Bereaved Parents)

'Twas the month before Christmas
and I dreaded the days,
That I knew I was facing - the holiday craze.
The stores were all filled with holiday lights,
In hopes of drawing customers by day and by night.
As others were making their holiday plans,
My heart was breaking - I couldn't understand.
I had lost my dear child a few years before,
And I knew what my holiday had in store.
When out of nowhere, there arose such a sound,
I sprang to my feet and was looking around,
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash
The sight that I saw took my breath away,
And my tears turned to smiles in the
light of the day.
When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a cluster of butterflies fluttering near.
With beauty and grace they performed a dance,
I knew in a moment this wasn't by chance.
The hope that they gave me was a sign from above,
That my child was still near me and
that I was loved.
The message they brought was my holiday gift,
And I cried when I saw them in spite of myself.
As I knelt closer to get a better view,
One allowed me to pet it - as if it knew -
That I needed the touch of its fragile wings,
To help me get through the holiday scene.
In the days that followed I carried the thought,
Of the message the butterflies left in my heart -
That no matter what happens or what days lie ahead,
Our children are with us - they're not really dead.
Yes, the message of the butterflies still rings in my ears,
A message of hope - a message so dear.
And I imagined they sang as they flew out of sight,
"To all bereaved parents - We love you, goodnight!"
By Faye McCord - TCF, Jackson, MS



"Merry" Christmas

I question if Christmas can ever be "merry"
Except to the heart of an innocent child —
For when time has taught us the meaning of sorrow
And sobered the spirits that once were so wild,
When all the green graves that lie scattered behind us
Like milestones are marking the length of the way,
And echoes of voices that no more shall greet us
Have saddened the chimes of the bright Christmas Day
We may not be merry, the long years forbid it,
The years that have brought us such manifold smarts,
But we may be happy if only we carry
The Spirit of Christmas deep down in our hearts.
Hence I shall not wish you the old "Merry Christmas",
Since that is of shadow-less childhood a part,
But one that is holy and happy and peaceful,
The Spirit of Christmas deep down in your heart.



How Many Stockings Shall I Hang?

What a torment! Funny how you worry
what your friends will think. For days
I worried...and finally hung three stockings on
the fireplace and laid one gently on the mantle.
But that was last year. This year I shall hang
all four above the fireplace. For this year,
the confusion of my mind has found new answers
with conviction. Whether my oldest daughter lives
in Tucson, or my youngest son is dead - these are
my children - our family - and as long as we hang
the Christmas stockings, we shall hang them
all - with love.

- TCF Hinsdale, IL Shirley Melin

WINTERSUN

There are those days in winter
When your world is frozen
Into a vision of eternal ice,
When earth and air
Are strangers to each other,
When sound and color seem forever gone.
There are those days in winter
When you feel like dying,
When life itself surrenders you to anguish,
To total mourning and to endless grief.
And then it happens: from the bitter sky,
A timid sun strides to his silent battle
Against the grey and hostile universe -
It changes ice to roses, sky to song.
And then it happens that your heart recalls
Some distant joy, a gladness from the past
A slender light at first, then larger,
braver,
Until your mind returns to hope and peace.
Let memories be beauty in your life,
Like song and roses in the winter sun
-written by Sascha Wagner
from her book, Wintersun

Wintersong

Season of lights,
Season of love and peace,
Season of shadow,
Season of memories
Season of warmth and joy,
Season of secret tears;
Give us the courage to laugh again
Give us the vision to hope again
Give us the power to love again
For all our new seasons and all our
new years.

- Sascha Wagner
from her book, Wintersun

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

WHEN CANCELING A HOLIDAY IS NOT AN OPTION

Holidays and other special days are times that we miss our loved ones more acutely. It is these family gatherings where everyone is joyful that make the void feel more enormous.

After suffering through my first Easter, first Mother's Day, my daughter's birthday, my birthday and all of the other special days, I knew Christmas would be unbearable. I didn't know how I could possibly survive it.

The first Christmas of my bereavement, I wanted to keep the spirit of the season at least for our surviving son who was experiencing more pain than any 18-year-old should ever have to bear. So I compromised and decorated our home differently. I replaced the red lamp-post bows with purple bows and streamed blue lights on the front shrubbery in lieu of the sparkling clear ones. This was consistent with my blue mood. I managed to put up our traditional Christmas tree, all the while tears slowly fell on many of the ornaments. I was broken-hearted.

Our traditional Christmas Day dinner was not something I was willing to consider. In fact, I could not bear the thought of spending Christmas at home without Kandy, who was always the sunshine of my life. I arranged for the three of us to leave town

on Christmas Eve, and we traveled to a nearby resort to hideaway for the next few days.

My Christmas gift to the family was a videotape of Kandy's life, made especially for the occasion by a friend. I showed it on Christmas morning, hoping it would help ease the hurt of Kandy's absence. None of us really saw it. We sat like three zombies, each in our own private hell. I did survive that dreaded first

Christmas, even though the sunshine was gone.

After trying unsuccessfully to cancel the second and third Christmases, I always made a point of inviting someone new to join us for Christmas dinner. This was helpful in giving me a reason to prepare for the holiday. I also made a point of reaching out to others through special financial contributions to charities such as Salvation Army and Toys for Tots in memory of our daughter. I also contributed financially to floral arrangements at our local church in memory of our daughter. Other bereaved individuals have served meals at soup kitchens and homeless shelters. One bereaved parent provides an annual Christmas party complete with a clown, a Santa and gifts, for all of the children at the local Children's Hospital in memory of her daughter.

In retrospect, it is doing something different, reaching out to others and establishing new traditions that help make the season more bearable and lessen the feelings of loss.

I also include my daughter in our Christmas celebrations by participating in the Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle lighting every second Sunday in December. All of these activities have been helpful when canceling Christmas was not an option.

Now, nearly 12 years since the sudden death of our beloved 21-year-old daughter, I still feel the pain of her absence. However, the Christmas season no longer holds feelings of dread. Even though she is no longer with me physically, she is forever in my heart.

- Coralease Ruff, Ph.D., TCF/Washington, D.C.



Another Year

Another year has come,
and you, so far away from me
now;

but in my heart still.

Forever, I will hold you close.
Each smile, laugh and tear I've
cried,

a testament to your presence.

I will always love you,
no matter what happens.

Your death cannot separate us.

I'm right here, loving you as
always.

My heart is true and strong.

I will never forget your spirit.

I am no longer afraid.

To live or die is the same for me.

You are with me on this journey.

I raise your light to the heavens,
and smile.

- Written by Brenda Penepent, LPN
Permission to print given by the author

How Many Stockings Shall I Hang?



What a torment! Funny how you worry what your friends will think. For days I worried...and finally hung three stockings on the fireplace and laid one gently on the mantle. But that was last year. This year I shall hang all four above the fireplace. For this year, the confusion of my mind has found new answers with conviction. Whether my oldest daughter lives in Tucson, or my youngest son is dead - these are my children - our family - and as long as we hang the Christmas stockings, we shall hang them all - with love.

- TCF Hinsdale, IL Shirley Melin



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