



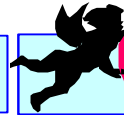
The Compassionate Friends



El Paso Chapter



January



February



Welcome to our
Winter Meetings

Date: Wednesdays
January 31, 2007
February 28, 2007

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

Meeting Facilitators: The Footes

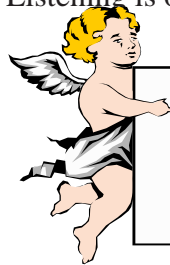
Sec/Treasurer: Lou Cain

Newsletter, Website, Copies &
Mailing: The Winkelmans

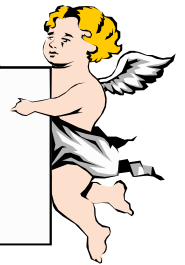
**Mark Your Calendar
For Future Meetings**

March 28: Regular Meeting
April 27: Regular Meeting
May 30: 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



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.

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Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
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www.compassionatefriends.org

Visit Our New Website: www.elpasotcf.org

Winter of the Soul

By Margaret Brownley

In the autumn known as death, friends and family swirl around us like leaves in the wind, surrounding us with warmth and providing comfort for our grieving souls. But all too soon “winter” arrives, and there’s no sign of life around us. Friends go back to busy lives; neighbors don’t want to intrude. And so we trudge through winter alone—waiting for the first signs of a spring that might never come. No one means to desert us. No one means to stay away. Some people really believe they are being thoughtful and kind when they leave us alone and neglect to call. Only those who have journeyed through grief can fully grasp the winter of the soul. Life’s fragile patches must be carefully reworked into a comfort.

Marilyn Hochheiser knew about this winter when she wrote her poem, *Survivor: After the death comes the dying the release of breath, the letting go of moments that sear when exposed to sunlight.*

Friends can slow down if not altogether stop the dying that comes after death. They can provide support enough to help us weather the worst emotional blizzards. The fires of friendship must be stoked. If we keep insisting we’re fine and need no help, the fire soon sputters and dies and the long cold “winter” stretches on. If your friends stop calling, call them. Ask for help getting through the holidays; give them something tangible to do. A friend can ease the pain of Christmas shopping or sit with you while you write out Christmas cards, especially if they involve breaking the news of a loved one’s death to out-of-state acquaintances. We have no control over the seasons of the year, but by reaching out to others for help, we can control the seasons of our grief. Inviting friends into our life can turn the winter of the soul into eternal spring.

Winter Gloves

—Bonnie Harris, TCF, Richmond, VA

When the season changes to fall each year, you know that winter is just around the corner. This is the time that you put away all the sunnier clothes and bring out the sweaters, coats, boots, and other heavy gear for the weather to come. This all boils down to possibly cleaning out a closet, a job that no one likes.

Few people would understand how long it takes a person to accomplish this task (or any other for that matter) after losing a child. Your mind puts everything on hold.

The power to concentrate and remember is retarded for a long period of time. For me it has been over two years and what little memory I used to have is just now slowly coming back. Cleaning out a closet has been put off and only the most important items taken out when needed. I have been lucky, just to remember to hang up things through most of my grief period and some of the packed up boxes stored away, have things in them that I put away before Kim died. It is firmly time to challenge myself to complete a larger project other than just dusting, vacuuming or mopping, the kitchen floor.

Once the job is started, I feel I can handle it and see something all of the way through from start to finish. As I open each box (luckily there are only, three small ones), I must go through each item and decided whether to save, donate, or throw away. For the most part, the decisions are easy ones, but then came the box with Kim’s gloves, car muffs, and scarves.

At first I thought I would just quit and leave everything sitting in the middle of the floor just outside of the coat closet. But the more I looked over these items, the more pleasant the task became. It is not that I care that much for house work; it was the fact that I had found a treasure. To me, finding anything that belonged to Kim is a treasure, worth more than anything else I own. The discovery of these “treasures” made my chore at hand more important and easier to complete. I placed the things that had special meaning in the cedar chest in Kim’s room and the others I planed on using myself to keep her memory as close to me as I can.

We tried every kind of glove made to keep her hands warm a dry when she would go outside in the winter. Once, we even tried the plastic gloves. When she was younger and played in the snow with friends, the only thing that would get her to come back home sooner that I figured, was the wet and cold hands. We could have five pairs of gloves lined up across the hearth of the fireplace, at any given time. Kim would stand there trying to get her hands to warm up and her gloves to dry fast so she could go back out again. As she got older, she preferred the pretty leather fur lined gloves for longer lasting warmth.

I decided to use one pair of Kim’s gloves as the “every day” pair, for walking the dog, trips outside, etc. The nicer pair with the special lining is saved for going to work and any other more special occasions. I chose another pair to keep in my car as a “just in case” spare. As with all of the other articles of Kim’s clothes, when I wear them she is closer to me and I am comforted with that feeling.

I don’t know what will happen when these “special “treasures” wear out and can no longer be worn. I will decide what to do, when the times come, hoping that at that place in my life I will be ready to let go of these things and still remain somewhat sane. But for now, I will warm my hands against the cold winds and snow with Kim’s gloves, holding onto my memories to warm my heart.

Happy Valentine's Day

It is Time for Love

February has fewer days than most months, and that may be of a special significance to us, as our children had fewer days than most. When we think of this month, the most outstanding day, perhaps, is Valentine's Day. It is a time for love. When we were school-aged, we had a special chance to give and receive cards in those decorated boxes in our primary classrooms. Perhaps it is the one holiday that children can really do something for everyone.

Addressing a card to each and every classmate made you think of how you felt about each one and wonder about how they felt about you.

Love is found in every day of every year, but February and Valentine's Day are very special. I wish I could remember just how it felt to get a "nicer" Valentine from someone I had sent a "nicer" one to. It is so long ago, and there have been so many, much more significant happenings in my life. But sometimes, I'd like to remember just how it felt.

I am sending along this Valentine's Love Note to each of you right now and hope that you know it is one of the "nicer" ones, because each of you is very special to me. Somehow I don't wonder how you feel, somehow I know. As we grieve the loss of our children and one another's, we begin to find a different kind of love than we ever expected to experience.

Rosalie Baker

Love's Road

By Paula D'Arcy

I shall be telling this with a sign

Somewhere ages and ages hence; two roads diverged in a wood, and I - I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.

~Robert Frost from *The Road Not Taken* During the first months after the death of my husband and child I locked myself inside my apartment. When the phone rang I stared at the receiver until it was still. Friends knocked at my door, calling my name and I wouldn't answer. If my arms could not hold the ones for whom I longed, then I wanted them empty. My angry choice. And my private choice, too. For I was building hard barriers inside of me. In subtle, secret ways I had begun to say "No" to all of life because part of life had hurt me. Then one day, unexpectedly, my mail contained a letter from a young man in Kansas. He was suffering from a painful and incurable illness and he wanted my friendship. To my chagrin he would not accept any of my "Public" faces, nor would he honor my walls. He hammered into my life demanding that I be there. Without regard he pushed past the shadows and the memory-filled half person I was willing to become. His insistence was like a scream that I be alive. In effect he was forcing me into the yellow wood and demanding that I face its reality; one inviting road of memories and shadows; and the other, rough road of love. No one grieves without standing at that same fork, waiting to decide. For it's never that we can't love again. It's that we won't. I knew. I had refused for a long, long while.

The experience of this encounter was the beginning of my fearful steps toward all the possibilities which might be waiting in my new, altered life. It was when I began to live for the new day. It was when I agreed to say goodbye to what had been. It was when I first started re-accepting life. Life in general, and my life in particular. During those hard weeks when my choices were made I assumed that their significance reached only to my future. Today I see that I was very mistaken. For how we choose to survive casts as much light (or darkness) on our treasured past as it does on our anticipated future. Here is the key: Nothing can give lasting life to the loves of yesterday except our willingness to carry the experience of that love onto the new roads sent for us to travel. In denying the new we bury the old. For when we cling to memory and live only with regret we do not really have that which we so tightly grasp. Nothing is ours until we let it go. That's the mystery of life and death both. Lord, give each one who reads these words the courage to take love's road.



Moving Forward, Even When You Feel Like You are Standing Still

Shirley A. McArthur's son, Neal McArthur Jr., was killed on Aug. 23, 1998.

Jay, as everyone called him, was in his second year of college at Savannah State University. He was driving his car to the video store with a friend of his when another car drove by his car.

One shot was fired through the driver's side, hitting Jay. The person in the other car was a complete stranger to Jay and to his friend.

This tragedy hit my life, my child, my first born son, rather my only son. My first response was, "It cannot be true." I thought, "Is this real? Then someone needs to pinch me quickly – ouch that hurts."

"Am I imagining this? Please burst this bubble.

"Am I dreaming about this? Yes that must be it, I'm dreaming. Wake me up; oh, I am awake.

"Am I watching a movie? A horror movie. I do not like horror movies." But I asked, "Can I be in this movie please, please? A script can be changed as well as characters. Well, write my son back in my life with me. If you must have someone die, then write me in his place. It's that simple, right?"

"Is this a joke? Terrible as it would be to play on me. It is not a funny joke; maybe in poor taste. Well, I'll laugh at this joke honest. I will if it will make this situation right again."

Sadly, the answer to all of the above was an emphatic NO. I looked in the mirror – swollen eyes and all – to face reality that day. "Yes, your child died." Boy, how hard it was to even say the word. Very hard! It felt like trying to swallow that nasty tasting medicine that your Mom, Grandmother or Auntie felt you needed to make you feel a lot better. You, on the other hand, did not think that you would feel better taking the medicine so you just held it in your mouth smiling and refusing to swallow. You would spit it out forcefully or drooling. Mom would get you cleaned up and then proceed to give it to you again and again until you swallowed it. There all done! That's how hard it was!

Move. Move where, when, how? How do I move let alone move forward? You are kidding, right? Do you know that my heart has been ripped out and is lying on the table? You want me to move and move forward? Right! But how do I do that? I developed these steps.

The following are some realistic and practical suggestions that helped then and now.

Rely on family and friends.

❖ Do not expect much of yourself. Do not hesitate to let others help if they offer to do so and you can really use some assistance.

❖ Understand that it may be their way of showing you

how they feel; perhaps they cannot find the right words.

❖ Allow family and friends to pamper and care for your needs, as well as your children's and spouse's needs as well.

Take care of your health.

❖ Grieving can wear you out; especially in the beginning.

❖ Your body needs sufficient rest, healthful exercise and proper nourishment, more than ever.

❖ Get a checkup by your family doctor.

Psychosomatic complaints are very common: headaches, body aches, irritable bowels, etc.

Postpone major decisions.

❖ If possible, wait for at least some time until you are thinking more clearly before you decide on important issues.

❖ If decisions must be made, speak with your spouse and closest family members for reassurance.

❖ Do not give away personal mementos too soon. In spite of what others may say about getting rid of "those" things that hurt you, those are your memories to come.

❖ Keep your outside commitments to a minimum for at least the first few months.

Be patient with yourself.

❖ Grief often lasts longer than people in general realize. Special pictures, songs or even a smell can trigger the tears.

❖ You will swing dramatically and swiftly from one feeling state to another.

❖ Avoidance of reminders of the child may alternate with deliberate cultivation of memories for some period of time.

❖ Cry and share your joy with others. Tears release emotional pain and help to prevent physical ailments.

❖ Make time to grieve.

Make allowances for others.

❖ Try to be patient with others.

❖ Realize that it is awkward for them.

❖ Not knowing what to say, they may clumsily say the wrong thing.

❖ Share what you are going through with others, especially those who do not know what you are feeling.

Beware of using medications or alcohol to cope with

your grief.

- ❖ Know that any relief offered by drugs or alcohol is temporary at best.
- ❖ Medication should be taken only under a doctor's supervision, but be careful. Many substances are addictive.
- ❖ Medication and alcohol may delay the grieving process, which drastically hinders you from moving forward.

Get back into a regular routine.

- ❖ You will have to push yourself at first to go to work, shopping or to take care of other responsibilities.
- ❖ Keep busy in your regular activities when you feel the urge to do so.
- ❖ When you return to work, discuss with your supervisor what you have been through and currently are experiencing.
- ❖ Discuss realistic expectations regarding your work schedule and performance.
- ❖ Make a plan for where you can go when you need a few minutes of privacy.
- ❖ Continue your church and religious routines.
- ❖ Make time to attend a support group.

Do not be afraid to let go of acute grief.

- ❖ Strange as it may seem, some bereaved ones are afraid to let go of the intense grief.
- ❖ The belief of some is that it may indicate their love for their deceased child is diminishing. That is simply not the case. Letting go of the pain makes way for treasured memories.

These treasured memories will no doubt always remain with you while the acute pain will subside.

Do not be unduly anxious.

- ❖ You may find yourself worrying. Some questions may include: "What will become of me now?"
- ❖ Live more on a day-to-day basis. It really helps. Never be anxious about the next day, for the next day will have its own anxieties.

- ❖ During the day, take a second at a time...then a minute...then an hour. Before you know it, the day will have come and gone. Time to start all over.

Make time for your children.

- ❖ Allow your children to express themselves through anger and crying.
- ❖ Children will draw away when they see you cry. Let them know why you are crying and tell them that it is ok for them to cry.
- ❖ Be a good listener.
- ❖ Give honest answers to their questions – relative to fears of their mortality.
- ❖ Allow your children to have normalcy as soon as possible. After all, they are alive. The least amount of disruption to their routine as possible will foster healing for them.
- ❖ Give your children the attention that they need and deserve – the hugs and kisses.
- ❖ Bring your children to a support group that will allow them to hear other children going through the same sibling loss feelings.

Remember your child.

- ❖ Pray to forget the events surrounding their death.
- ❖ Look through your photo album of your child's pictures.
- ❖ View videos of your child.
- ❖ Look through those mementos that you saved.
- ❖ Acknowledge your child's birthday.
- ❖ Light a remembrance candle on the anniversary of their home-going.
- ❖ Understand that if you cry, this is healthy.

Keep a journal of your feelings and thoughts.

Later, much later, you will want to read all you have written. Continue to make entries especially when you are having those rough days.

The above suggestions are realistic, practical and durable.

January Warmth

Like a tree in the winter
Which has lost its leaves
We look ahead to spring
For new growth and
Warmth of the sun
To heal the pain
In our hearts.

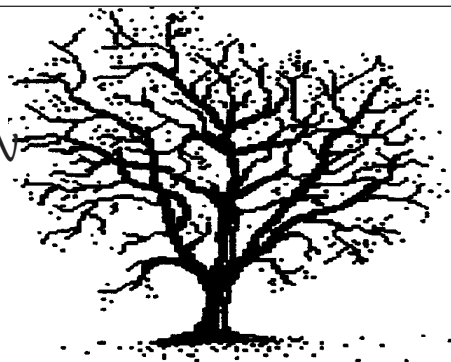
Let us make January a time
To reach out to each other
And give that warmth
From our hearts,
And in return,
We will all show new growth.
Pat Dodge

How Has My Grief Changed Over Time?

"I can take deep breaths and it does not hurt my chest anymore. I can finally say that my son died. Over time I have been able to communicate my grief with others."
Shirley McArthur

Our Children Remembered

LIKE LEAVES IN AUTUMN



HERE AND THEN GONE

BUT ALWAYS REMEMBERED

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Child</u>	<u>Age:</u>	<u>Parents</u>
1/14/91	Richard	19	Son of Josie Sanchez
1/14/98	Carly Raquel	18	Daughter of Carlos and Rachel Martinez
2/2/03	Joshua Chavez	1 Mo.	Son of Amanda and Marc Ovalle
2/9/80	Greg	20	Son of Sidney and Bobbi Cohen
2/11/05	Dametri	23 Mo.	Son of Charmine Jackson
2/12/05	Elijah	2	Son of Charmine Jackson
2/15/95	Michael	17	Son of Eddie and Laurie Knipp
2/17/91	Evan	14 Mo.	Son of Al and Eva Dominguez
2/19/95	C. J.	20	Son of Mary Jane De Cutler

Winters of Our Lives

By Mary Wildman ~ TCF, Madison County, IL

Someone has said that it is in the winter, when the trees have dropped their leaves, “revealing the diversity and uniqueness of each ridge and valley” — when the hills bare their innermost selves — that we get to know them — what is really out there.

And so it is with people. Most of the time we wear our masks. But it is during the difficult times, during the winters of our lives, that there is the strong need to shed our masks and be able to reveal the hurting and turmoil that is really there. “It is in these moments that friendships are formed and we experience one another as few others ever will.” So it is among

The Compassionate Friends! WE CARE!

A Solitary Journey by Helen Steiner Rice

Grief is a solitary journey. No one but you know the gaping hole left in your life when someone you know has died. And no one but you can mourn the silence that was once filled with laughter and song. It is the nature of love and of death to touch every person in a totally unique way. Comfort comes from knowing that people have made the same journey. And solace comes from understanding how others have learned to sing again.

Carrying Memories Into The New Year

With the church bells' ringing
 the new year enters
 echoing the days of yesteryear
 memories of happiness
 the smiles of our children
 the sunlight within each face
 Who will remember these dear ones
 far from our yearning arms

Who remembers all they were
 the way she danced, the hat he wore
 With the old year gone, will they no
 longer be known?
 We will remember them, each one
 We will hold them in our hearts
 as we carry memories
 into this new year.

We will allow the memories to
 make us laugh, to make us sing.
 Their lives will fill the air
 as the church bells ring.

Winter of our Souls

By Sandy Goodman

It is winter today. There is no sun, not even a flash of light to focus on. The air has become murky as if it has solidified, losing its clarity. Ice covers everything, smothering any life that might have been. Staring out my window, I compare the bite of winter to my grief: the coldness, the shadows, and my reluctance to breathe in any more discomfort. Grief, like winter, appears uninvited and unwelcome. We abhor the pain and wonder why we must endure the distress, while all along we feel the imminent arrival.

Winter compels the earth to rest. Everything stops struggling, stops performing, and sleeps. Abruptly, nature's need to "do" is gone and "being" is all that is necessary. All that was living before appears lifeless. The leaves disappear from the trees, flowers no longer grace our gardens, and the grass is entombed by snow. But what is going on beneath that which we see? Are the flowers really gone, or are they only changing . . . becoming new, becoming different? I ponder how much further I dare go with this. Can I contend that grief, like winter, is a gift? Can I talk about the metamorphosis of grief, and contemplate gratitude for its presence? I do not know, but that is where my thoughts are leading me.

Grief necessitates a sabbatical from living. We stop struggling, stop performing, and freeze. Our compulsion to "do" dissolves, and "being" is all that is possible. Our life as we knew it disappears, dreams are shattered, and our hearts are ripped from us in the blink of an eye. We are gone, lost in our grief. But what is transpiring in our heart? Is everything gone, or is it only changing . . . becoming new, becoming different?

Grief is harsher than winter. The tasks of daily living are amplified, and what was once soft and blurred becomes sharp and ragged. While winter invariably ends and I remember that spring will arrive, grief makes no such promise. I must wait without assurance. There are moments when winter is beautiful: a blanket of fresh snow on Christmas morning or the surprise of a warm breeze in February.

There are nights when winter is hard and ugly, when temperatures plummet and the howl of the wind threatens our sanity. Grief is the same. A special memory comes into my heart and grief becomes bittersweet . . . beautiful. Then, a letter addressed to my son arrives in the mail, and I am back to the harsh reality that he is gone.

My grief transformed me. It tore out everything within me and said There! It is GONE! What are you going to do? You have NOTHING LEFT TO HANG ON TO! You must begin again. You must change. And change is what I did. As winter alters the earth, my grief changed me. It gave me a period of time to step back from living and just be, a space in my existence to feel only that which I needed to feel. It was a time for reflection, reprioritizing, and searching.

Without it, I would remain as empty as a garden that never rests. "But it was painful, horrifying, and devastating," you say. "How can you be thankful for such a thing?" Grief, like winter, freezes our world. Both appear painful, horrifying, and devastating, but it is our preparation for, reaction to, and perception of that creates our discomfort. It is our need to judge which labels discomfort as bad. If we deny that death is possible for those we love, we will be stunned and terrified by its occurrence. If we react to the first blizzard of winter with panic and fear, we will be too afraid to honor its power. If we perceive a fatal ice storm as an act of God, we will shake our fist at Him and spend more time than we have asking why. And if we distinguish death as the end of a loved one's existence, we will be eternally saddened by their absence. The path to spring, to the end of winter, requires only our patience and perseverance. The path to healing requires that and more: it requires that we learn to think differently. We are a society that fears death. We consider it an end to life, love, and all that came before. Those who die either cease to be, or they exist in a place that is unavailable to us. It is not surprising that fear is present. However, if we alter our beliefs, we can then change our preparation for, reaction to, and perception of death. If we come to know that death is a change in form and not an end, we will not eliminate the winters of our grieving, but we will lessen our suffering.

When my son died in 1996, I had no other option but to change my thinking. I could not live another day presuming he no longer existed. By saying to myself often I am changing my perception of death, I announced to the universe and my higher self that I intended to change what I believed. I placed my intent, reached for it, and settled for nothing less. I began searching for and finding information to support my new perception. I read books about life after death, medium-ship, after death communication, spirituality, and reincarnation. I perused websites, subscribed to email lists, and joined chats where these topics were addressed. I found likeminded friends who understood what I was feeling. I observed medium-ship activities on television, at seminars, and on the Internet. I began to support my new belief system with knowledge. I invited experiences by talking to Jason and asking him to come to me in a dream or to give me a sign of his presence. I meditated and made myself more aware of that which isn't seen or touched. I opened up a doorway of possibility and welcomed all that came from love to enter. Finally, I accepted what happened and expressed gratitude.

When the lights went off and then on again for no apparent reason, I was quick to say "thank you." If I was only thanking the power company, it didn't matter. No one knew. The more I accepted as real, the more I experienced. We hear often that "seeing is believing," but this is about "believing is seeing." My journey has been both desolate and inspiring. There have been moments when I thought the cold and darkness would never end, and moments when tears of joy washed away the pain and light permeated my being. I invite you to walk the path of grief a little differently: to nurture winter's bleakness and look deep into its purpose. And just as we must think differently to see winter's grace, we must think differently to see the gift of grief. It is there, buried beneath a frozen crust that protects and restores while the winter of our soul . . . ensues.

~reprinted from Love Never Dies

<http://www.loveneverdies.net/newslet6.html>

Finding Spring Again

It is the end of February, which means we are nearing the end of what has often been a brutal winter. While gazing at the mountains of snow piled high in my front yard and the foot-long icicles hanging from my roof, it is hard to imagine that spring will ever come. We have endured bitter cold winds that have chilled us to the bone and treacherous roads that we have cautiously traveled. The days have been long and dark and often free of sunlight. No matter how long you have been a native of the Upper Midwest, I know we all will be glad when it comes to an end.

However, as I described these thoughts about winter, I felt as if I was describing the days of my early grief. At that point, I did not believe that a day would ever come when I would thaw from the chill that had overtaken my body and mind. The bleakness of my existence during those early months after Nina died is almost frightening to remember; it is so difficult to even conceive of that much pain. I was anesthetized from some of its cruelty by the protective blanket of numbness that blessedly shielded me from the gale force of such overpowering sorrow. How could I ever feel spring in my heart again?

Spring had always been my favorite season. The air had a certain freshness to it that I would drink in. Simply put, it always made me feel happy and light of heart. Spring was our reward for surviving the freezing winter months that preceded it. It brought a smile to my face and a bounce to my step.

However, it was the spring of the year where my heart was irretrievably broken. It was during this exquisite season of warm, lilac-scented breezes and sun-kissed mornings where my sweet daughter Nina's life would end.

I wondered if my thoughts about spring would ever be the same. Rather than anticipate with gladness the coming of

spring, I dreaded it with the knowledge that it contained the anniversary of her death. The smell of the air and the look at the sky that I once found exhilarating now brought me back to my darkest day. I know that anyone, who has lost a loved one to death, no matter the season, understands. Will spring come again to your life? In the almost six years since Nina died, has it come to mine? Looking back at my description of the winter of "my early grief," I know that I have come a long way from that time of desolation. I have found, especially after the first two years, that with each subsequent spring, I have rediscovered some of the pleasure I used to feel. I have learned that, just because I have found things to feel joyful about again, it doesn't mean I am dishonoring my daughter's memory. I now take her along with me in my mind and my heart. I try to retrieve memories of the dandelion bouquets she so carefully gathered and presented to me, the rides to the park in the Radio Flyer, our talks while sunning on the deck, and, of course, shopping for spring clothes! Her favorite pastime! I will always feel tension, apprehension and sadness as May 11 draws near, but I no longer hold it against spring.

It is a slow, difficult journey, this grief pathway we travel. It is as treacherous as the roads we maneuvered following the winter storms, never knowing when we will hit an icy patch on the road and be thrown into a tailspin. Yet, we must travel it if we are to find any measure of peace and healing.

Please be patient with yourself as you are working hard to survive this winter in your heart. Trust that spring, though a much different one than the one we knew before our beloved child died, will come again.

With gentle thoughts,

Cathy Seehueter
TCF/St. Paul, MN



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

Love Gifts

Carol Winkelman in loving memory of her son Dennis and her grandson Matthew's birthday February 15

What I Learned From My Loved One...

"There are so many things that I learned from my son but the one thing that I treasure is: Neal wrote me a letter when he was 18 years old and told me how much he appreciated me for being his Mother, that he loved me for carrying him for nine months, going through labor and having him, for all the nights I sat up with him doctoring him and for raising him. He said he knew that he can never repay me but he just wanted to let me know how strong his love is for me."

Shirley McArthur

"Family was so important to Tony. He loved the holidays when everyone would get together. He loved playing in the annual Turkey Bowl (flag football game) that he, his uncles, Dad and anyone else who would accept the challenge played every Thanksgiving. He loved going to St. Simons to see his relatives there and having family come to see us in our home. During his Freshman year at St. Pius X Catholic High School, all of the students wrote their autobiography. In the essay, they talked about their dreams and where they wanted to be in their life by the time they graduated high school.

The school files the essays and gives them back to the students at the end of Senior year – so they can see how much they may have changed over the years...or how closely they still were to those earlier goals. In his essay, Tony wrote about his grandfather who had died the summer before. He said how important it is to 'enjoy being with your family because it may be the last time you see somebody.' Family always has been important to me. Tony's death reminds me just how fragile life can be at times and how important our relationships are."

Cindy Durham

Pictures From the Heart

Since we have lost our children, part of what remains of them are pictures from the heart, which are those mental images we hold so dear. For some of us these pictures are memories of what had been, and for others these pictures are dreams of what might have been. And for some of us these pictures are a little of both. For us, dreams and memories are really the same. It is the dimension where our children now reside.

In a sense, dreams are nothing more than memories of the future, because we remember our children by the dreams we had for them; and memories are nothing more than dreams of the past, because to remember them is certainly to dream of them. I believe it is incorrect to think that someone will not hurt as much because they only had their child for a little while or to think that someone will not hurt as much because their child had the chance to grow up. In these dreams and memories, these pictures from the heart, all of our children are infants and all of our children have grown up. The sadness and pain comes from the broken heart, the memories and the dreams from the pieces that remain.

Kenneth Hensley
TCF, Nashville, TN

Balloons 4 Healing Project

By Natalie Blakeslee

As I was speaking by phone to Denise Platz, the bereaved mom of a precious son named Aaron, I realized that she was now living too far away to visit her son's grave. She had moved from the Fairview-Girard PA area to California.

We spoke about the upcoming sixth anniversary of her son's passing. She had just visited home a couple of months earlier and couldn't come back again this soon. I asked myself how I could help her make the day less stressful for her, as she would be missing and grieving her child even more on that day.

And so I told Denise, "You can still lay flowers, balloons, gifts, whatever you wish, at your son's grave. I would be more than happy to do it in your place."

With her imagination as her only limitation, she was free to get her feelings out, knowing that someone who truly empathized would stand in for her and present her gifts to her son.

She called a shop near my home and placed an order for the kinds and colors of flowers and balloons that she wanted, with a yellow rose accompanying her special note.

On that Saturday I picked everything up and went to her son's gravesite. With Denise on the phone, Dr. Steve Hodack and I took pictures and made a video recording, as we released the balloons and placed the flowers on his grave. Scissors and markers were left behind the tree for any members of the family that might visit. As it rained, tears flowed. We shared stories of our children and I listened as she told me about Aaron. I had lost my eldest daughter Carrie almost a year earlier. It turned out that we were not only joined in our grief, but that our children had both passed from the same illness, leukemia.

Dr. Steve ventured out in the rain one more time to grab a few photos, one of which included the gravestone of Denise's husband, which she hadn't yet seen. Her husband, Aaron's father, had passed just one year prior. We laid balloons at his grave with a note asking him to give Aaron a huge heaven hug for her. As we drove away from the cemetery, Dr. Steve said, "I think you have developed something here that could help bereaved parents all around the world."

This was the start of "Balloons 4 Healing." For more information, go to:

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/Balloons4Healing/>



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EL PASO, TX 79902