



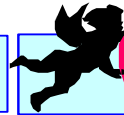
The Compassionate Friends



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

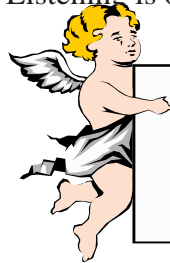
Sec/Treasurer: Lou Cain

Newsletter, Website, Copies &
Mailing: The Winkelmans

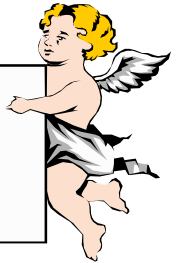
**Mark Your Calendar
For Future Meetings**

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.

Mail all Entries to: Eric Winkelman
5337 Hunters Glenn
El Paso, TX 79932
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

Visit Our New Website: www.elpasotcf.org

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.



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

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>

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