



The Compassionate Friends



El Paso Chapter



December



January



February



Welcome to our
Winter Meetings

Date: Wednesdays
January 26, 2011
February 23, 2011

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

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

Board Of Directors:

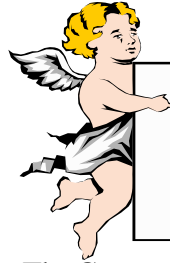
Chairman and Meeting Facilitator:
Susan Crews 542-0908

Secretary and Treasurer:
Lou Cain

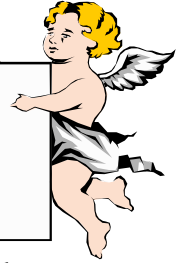
Newsletter, Website, Copies &
Mailing: The Winkelmans

Mark Your Calendar For the Spring Meetings

March 30: Regular Meeting
April 27: Regular Meeting
May 25: Regular Meeting



Editor's Notes



The Compassionate Friends, Inc. is a mutual assistance, self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved families. Anyone who has experienced the death of a child of any age, from any cause is welcome. Our meetings give parents an opportunity to talk about their child and about their feelings as they go through the grieving process. There is no religious affiliation. There are no membership dues. The purpose of this support group is not to focus on the cause of death or the age of the child, as it is to focus on being a bereaved parent, along with the feelings and issues that evolve around the death experience of a child.

To Our New Members

Coming to the first meeting is the hardest, but you have nothing to lose and everything to gain! Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not The Compassionate Friends will work for you. At the next meeting you may find just the right person or just the right words said that will help you in your grief work.

To Our Members Who are Further Down the 'Grief Road'

We need your encouragement and your support. Each meeting we have new parents. THINK BACK – what would it have been like for you at your first meeting if there had not been any TCF “veterans” to welcome you, share your grief, encourage you and tell you, “your pain will not always be this bad, it really does get better!”

YOU NEED NOT WALK ALONE.

WE ARE THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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 Website at: www.elpasotcf.org

Another Year Without My Child

It's a new year and I am marking it, for the fifth time, without my child. Last month was the fourth anniversary of his death. This is one more milestone in the journey of a bereaved parent. The new year brings the promise of new adventures, happiness and prosperity to others. To bereaved parents it adds another dimension to our loss. It also brings the opportunity to look at where we are and how far we have come.

I remember the first new year's day without my son. What an empty, hollow feeling I had on January 1, 2003. My world had ended, the shock was still systemic in my mind and body, and I counted the days since he last walked, talked and laughed on this earthly plane, dwelling on the passing of days, hours and minutes since the moment of his death. I was frozen.

Looking back at that time, I recall just how the pain felt; unlike other pain, the pain of losing a child is never forgotten. I feel the familiar jolt that rocked my mind and body each time I awoke to remember that my son had died. I remember the misery of slogging through endless, meaningless days. I remember the tears, the second guessing, the anger, the guilt...I remember it all. I still bounce in and out of those emotions; this will never end. It has moderated greatly, but it never ends.

Now I am more focused on my son's life. Details about his life spring into my mind...happy times, maturing times, good times and funny times. I remember it all with the clarity that only a mother can possess. And so, that is how I will begin this new year...remembering the life of my child but never forgetting the loss.

I am a different person than I was before my son died. I feel as though a lightning bolt struck me on the day of his death, and now I perceive the world from a different vantage point. I have simplified my life from what it once was. I have many new friends who share the experience of losing a child; I have permanently removed old friends from my life who simply couldn't accept my grief and were fearful of talking about my child. I have a new understanding of the problems that other parents face....problems that a mother of one never has to address. I have become more solidly spiritual. I have gone through Dante's seven circles, walls and gates of hell and emerged as the unique person I should have been all along. People change. Bereaved parents change a great deal.

I no longer dread each new day. I no longer weep silently every night. I no longer ache from head to foot with the pain of losing my child. I read, I write, I stay active in the community. I work in my small business, doing what I want to do and what I must do. I go to museums, to movies, to stage plays. I listen to music, watch television and work in my home and yard. Amazingly, my word recall and memory are returning. Forgetting names, events, people, destinations and other critical factors of daily life was something I dealt with for over three and half years. I thought I had lost my mind until I started talking to other parents. I have begun doing memorization exercises....something I probably should have done three years ago. I am learning that the journey through grief lasts for a lifetime. Each stage is different, each sudden, poignant memory is paralyzing and each new day brings an opportunity to evaluate progress.

Much has changed during the past four years. Much will change throughout my life. Each of us experiences the loss of our child at the deepest level of our psyches. Yet each of us comes to this place with a different set of experiences and a unique genetic composition. I cannot compare myself to others. I can only mark my tiny steps forward with a sense of wonder at the resiliency of the human mind and spirit while simultaneously accepting that I am not in control....at any moment a flash of the past might bring me to my knees. I have learned to go with it.

I have found hope for the future. It certainly isn't the future I had envisioned. There will be no late night talks with my son, no holidays or birthdays shared, no participation in my son's children's lives, no cards, no handmade gifts. That door was closed by lawsuit happy former in-laws who have no standing in my life today. I have crawled through the minefields and dodged the bullets of some pretty mentally unbalanced people and survived. I have faced the abyss of losing my only child while enduring the cruelest of sniping, the worst of intentionally inflicted pain. I did none of this with grace and finesse....I merely got through it. I survived. I became stronger by letting go of my anger. I found hope by remembering the goodness that is my son and by leaning on friends who had lost their children. These friends were there for me when I so desperately needed the comfort of kindred souls: Compassionate Friends who reached out to me gave me the glimmer of hope when all seemed forever lost and living was almost intolerable.

Now the healing process has completed its circle. I am here for those parents who need me. Strangely this helps me to heal as well. I reach out to others who are new to the process of grief, and I tell them that there is hope. One day the sunrise will again be beautiful and you will find peace within yourself. You will remember your child's life, you will honor your child's life and you will forever be changed by your child's death. But always, always, your child will remain in your heart. This is my truth to all who wish to know. Lean on us, for we have been where you are today. We will walk with you on your journey toward hope, peace and resolution. It is in this place that the healing will begin. This is a new year.

*Annette Mennen Baldwin, In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
From the TCF North Shore, Boston Jan, 2011 Newsletter*

Happy New Year

New Year's Resolutions For Bereaved Parents

I resolve...

That I will grieve as much, and for as long, as I feel like grieving, and that I will not let others put a time table on my grief.

That I will grieve in whatever way I feel like grieving, and I will ignore those who try to tell me what I should or should not be feeling and how I should or should not be behaving.

That I will cry whenever and wherever I feel like crying, and that I will not hold back my tears just because someone else feels I should be "brave" or "getting better" or "healing by now."

That I will talk about my child as often as I want to, and that I will not let others turn me off just because they can't deal with their own feelings.

That I will not expect family and friends to know how I feel, understanding that one who has not lost a child cannot possibly know how it feels.

That I will not blame myself for my child's death, and that I will constantly remind myself that I did the best job of parenting I could possibly have done. But when feelings of guilt are overwhelming, I will remind myself that this is a normal part of the grief process and it, too, will pass.

That I will not be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help if I feel it is necessary.

That I will commune with my child at least once a day in whatever way feels comfortable and natural to me, and that I won't feel compelled to explain this communion to others or to justify or even discuss it with them.

That I will try to eat, sleep, and exercise every day in order to give my body the strength it will need to help me cope with my grief.

To know that I am not losing my mind, and I will remind myself that loss of memory, feelings of disorientation, lack of energy, and a sense of vulnerability are all normal parts of the grief process

To know that I will heal, even though it may take a long time. To let myself heal and not to feel guilty about feeling better.

To remind myself that the grief process is circuitous - that is, I will not make steady upward progress. And when I find myself slipping back into the old moods of despair and depression, I will tell myself that "slipping backward" is also a normal part of the grief process and these moods, too, will pass.

To try to be happy about something for some part of every day, knowing that at first, I may have to force myself to think cheerful thoughts, so eventually they may become a habit

That I will reach out at times, and try to help someone else, knowing that helping others will help me to get over my depression.

That even though my child is dead, I will opt for life, knowing that is what my child would want me to do.

Nancy A. Mower

TCF - Honolulu, HI

For the New Year:

Where there is pain,
let there be softening.

Where there is bitterness;
let there be acceptance.

Where there is silence,
let there be communication.

Where there is loneliness,
let there be friendships.

Where there is despair,
let there be hope.

In compassionate
friendship,

Cathy, Nina's mom

Not Another Flower

There was a day when the sun ceased to shine. You may have missed it; it didn't make the headlines of any national paper. February 2, 1997, to most, was only Groundhog Day. For me, it was nothing as trite as whether the furry creature did or did not see his shadow. Forget the promise of spring, what did it matter now? My life as I dreamed it stopped when my four-year-old laid lifeless in my arms.

How I remember those early months after his death. I wanted to be like my Victorian ancestors and wear black, even a veil. Then my clothes could shout to my neighbors, those in the grocery store lines, and the many at church — look at me, I am a parent doing the impossible: living without her child.

I remember those who helped us as we put one foot in front of the other on the rocky path. My husband, three children, and I couldn't walk it alone. Friends, with embraces as strong and wide as eagle wings, circled us, cried with us. They brought meals, sent cards, provided listening ears, and took care of our young children.

Then there were those uncomfortable with our grief. During the first weeks they joined our tears, but as the months dragged on, their expressions and subtle hints were shouting, "Get back to normal. Look at the joyous side of life. Heal your broken heart!" For some reason, as you may know, people put a timeline on grief. I think the general consensus is that you're only allowed two to three weeks of sorrow.

When you are new to grief, even simple tasks can be laborious. Your energy and patience levels are low. But hear a comment or two that is completely out of line for anyone to say, and suddenly, you are propelled by anger. How can I forget the older lady in our church that called me every day for two weeks? She'd start off by asking how I was doing. My guts felt like they were stripped out of my body and my heart, mangled. I'd say, "It's hard."

One afternoon this woman told me with all the sincerity she could muster, "God needed another flower in his garden in heaven and took Daniel." I nearly dropped the phone. This was supposed to provide comfort? I eventually did hang up, but politely. My frustration flared. I got a lot of laundry done that afternoon — throwing clothes into the washing machine, banging the lid shut, flinging socks and shirts into the dryer.

I am bolder now. When people tell me certain lines, aimed to help me and they don't work, I let them know. My new mantra is, "Cry with me. Don't pretend you understand why my child died. Don't try to rationalize why my son was diagnosed with cancer at the age of three and died at four."

Those who have helped are the ones who continue to remember his birthday and think of how hard it is to live the holidays without him. I appreciate the friends who join me at the cemetery, named by my children "Daniel's Place", and lift a helium balloon into the sky with me. Watch it soar.

I believe my son is vibrant and alive in Heaven now. I hope the balloon reaches him. Don't tell me it pops when it gets out of sight. Let me be like a child and not know the laws of the stratosphere. Let me wish he knows how much I love and miss him. Let me believe he is alive and touching the face of God.

The sun does shine again in my world. Although the hole in my mother's heart is always present, I'm grateful for the times I can tell Daniel's story. Remembering him, writing about him, even sharing his jokes with those I meet, brings healing. I place flowers at his grave. But Daniel is not another flower.

~ By Alice J. Wisler

Picking Up The Pieces

By: Linda Flatt, Henderson, Nevada

Our lives are much like a very large jigsaw puzzle with thousands of pieces - each piece representing a relationship or an event. Significant people (close relationships) and meaningful experiences occupy more pieces of the puzzle and as those relationships change, so does the puzzle.

In my case, over the years, a twenty six-year marriage and two growing children filled large defining pieces in the puzzle of my life. As the children matured and began to build their own puzzles, and when the marriage ended, the picture of my life changed dramatically. Adjusting to an empty nest and recovering from a divorce resulted in a shift in quite a few puzzle pieces, but the overall picture remained intact.

On June 29, 1993, my life was shattered by the suicide of my twenty five-year-old son, Paul. As I worked to put the pieces back together, I began to realize that my life had changed. The pieces of the puzzle no longer fit the way they had before the suicide. The reality was that there would never be any more "Paul" pieces. Paul was no longer physically present in my life and, because of the circumstances of his death, I would never be the same. All I had left of my son was the memory I carried in my heart and in my head. It was now up to me to heal from my emotional injuries, adjust to my loss, and restore my energy and my life.

With God's help and the support of loving family and friends, I have reconstructed the puzzle of my life, and I am once again whole. Though forever changed by a suicide, I am determined to make those changes positive forces in my life. I have survived - and I am stronger than ever before!

Jessica Handler: Remember Your Siblings for Who They Were

Jessica Handler, author of the book "Invisible Sisters," was the sibling speaker at last month's Candlelight Service. She shared the text of her remarks with us and – for the benefit of siblings who were not able to be with us that evening – we are reprinting her remarks here, edited slightly for space.

I am the oldest of three sisters, and by the time I was 32, was the only one living. My sister Susie died of leukemia when she was eight, and I was 10. Our younger sister Sarah was four when Susie died.

Sarah was born with a blood disorder called Kostmann's syndrome, so rare that it's only found in about 1 in every 2 million people. She wasn't expected to live through elementary school. She died at 27.

Our father was a Civil Rights attorney in Atlanta in the 1960s, and one of the questions we faced as a family was "how do you save others when you cannot save your own?" *Invisible Sisters* is about growing up and learning to be, as my sister Sarah predicted, "the only one left." The book celebrates my sisters and our family, and the girl I was then, and the voice that I found for myself.

"Do you have any brothers or sisters?" is such a common question, but for most of my life, I didn't know how to answer that. Being truthful was often too difficult, because it led to more questions – how did they die, how did you handle it – and my honest answers might be more than the person bargained for. They presumed they were asking a simple question! But I couldn't deny my sisters. I have two sisters, I've learned to say, but they are deceased.

I was asked to share my thoughts with you about how to cope with those first few moments, days, years of loss, and I'll be honest. I have no simple answers. We all grieve differently. What I will do, though, is give you some of the markers from my own road map, and I encourage you to use what works for you. When I was 10 years old, on the morning that my sister Susie died, my father told me that death is hardest on those left behind, and that what we can do in the face of loss is honor the people who have died in the way we live.

That was a big concept for a little kid. So I did what kids do – I kept living my life, and missing my sister, who was 18 months younger than me, with whom I had shared a bedroom, shared toys, and teased and played and fought. Sometimes on special occasions, our mother had dressed us alike.

And after a while, I stopped being able to hear her voice. We had twin beds, side by side. Her bed, moved against the wall, became a couch. Susie's college fund bought books for our elementary school library. The end-of-year photographer called me "Susie-Q," to get me to smile, and I burst into tears. Poor guy, he didn't know what was wrong with me.

My little sister Sarah was four when Susie died. As Sarah and I grew up, we never spoke about Susie – the things she liked to do, what we were like as three sisters. In the late 1960s, at least in our family, talking about death wasn't openly done. This was before family therapy was common, and our parents believed that the right thing was to move on, and keep living. And so we did.

But I told you that I am the only surviving sister. Sarah died 23 years after Susie, after a lifetime of living with a chronic and fatal illness. Sarah and I were close – closer than Susie and I had a chance to be. Sarah and I were also both young adults at the end of her life, which meant that we experienced more of life together: boys, dating, drivers' licenses, high school and our parents' divorce.

My parents and I – and Sarah – knew that she would die young, but knowing that didn't make it easier when it came.

I wrote *Invisible Sisters* more than a decade after Sarah died, and almost 30 years after Susie died. I had made a lot of false starts – short stories, poems, journal entries, and I realized that this story had to be nonfiction – it had to be true. My goal was to do what we hadn't been able to in our family when my sisters were alive. I wanted to tell their true stories, and to remember.

Our siblings are our memory. Our bond with brothers and sisters is different from our relationships with parents, and even with best friends. When we lose a sibling, we lose a part of ourselves.

In writing *Invisible Sisters*, I tried to find parts of what I'd lost. I became a kind of homemade archeologist of "stuff" from our lives.

I contacted hospitals in Atlanta, Boston and New York for my sisters' medical records, and read every page I got. I've kept journals my whole life – and I read the contents of a floor-to-ceiling bookcase. All the family mementoes that I never could throw out and toted from apartment to apartment: like a huge, ugly cabinet (that was Sarah's changing table when she was a baby) that became a linen cabinet for me, a clay figurine – more of a yellow lump, actually – that Susie made at camp, and Sarah's t-shirts and sweaters that would never in a million years fit me, but stayed in a duffel bag on my closet floor. I went through all of it, handled and smelled and examined this stuff. For me, items like these were proof of what had become a lost civilization.

Yes, this was truly heartbreaking at times. And surprisingly, sometimes there were funny moments that gave me great joy. There's always that photograph that you pull out of a box and say aloud, before you realize no one's there with you, "you did not wear that, no way!" And then you laugh! So, one of the markers on that roadmap is "stuff." I promise you, keep some of the stuff! There are some things I've kept that I still can't look at or listen to; an audio recording of Susie and me playing when we were both very little, an answering machine cassette with a message from Sarah. I'm not ready to discard these, and I'm not ready to listen to them, either. I'm on the fence, waiting to see where I land on this one.

I take back what I said before. There is one aspect of the right way to grieve that we can all take as a marker on our roadmap. It's memory. Remember your siblings for who they were, as real people; the good times and the less good times. There was that time when they did that thing... or you did that other thing.

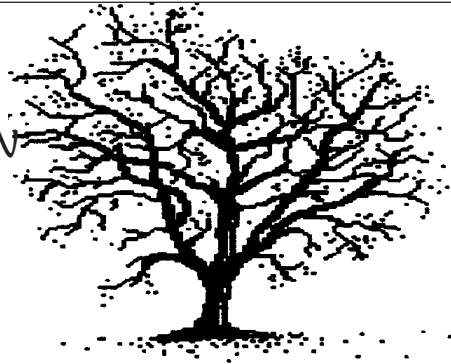
They'd remember the person you had a crush on in junior high, and you remember that weird recipe your brother or sister liked. That's another marker on the roadmap.

After a sibling dies, our own lives go on. We are changed. We have deep furrows in our hearts. There are things we can no longer

Continued on Page 6

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>
12/1/06	Elisabeth	45	Daughter of Fred and Angelica Wagner
12/4/09	Scott Robert	39	Brother of Katy Raney
12/6/08	Mario Santana	28	Son of Sandra Pollard
12/13/93	Victor, Joey & Eric	16, 14, 10	Sons of Victor and Suzie Porras
12/21/08	Arturo	36	Son of Oscar & Rosina Aguliar
1/3/07	John Michael	12	Son of Kevin Lockett
1/13/09	Samual	20 Wks	Son of Matthew and Maria Silver
1/14/91	Richard	19	Son of Josie Sanchez
1/14/98	Carly Raquel	18	Daughter of Carlos and Rachel Martinez
1/21/00	Eric Lozano	20	Son of Oscar and Rosa Miranda
2/2/03	Joshua Chavez	1 Mo.	Son of Amanda and Marc Ovalle
2/7/07	Gilbert	33	Son of Rosa Minajes
2/9/80	Greg	20	Son of Sidney and Bobbi Cohen
2/11/10	Jennifer Lewis	35	Daughter of Jack and Judy Hart
2/11/05	Dametri	23 Mo.	Son of Charmine Jackson
2/12/05	Elijah	2	Son of Charmine Jackson
2/13/07	James Celaya	26	Son of Rod and Rosie Raulston
2/13/07	Gage	4	Daughter of Deborah Pankow
2/15/95	Michael	17	Son of Eddie and Laurie Knipp
2/17/91	Evan	14 Mo.	Son of Al and Eva Dominguez
2/17/80	Rebecca	22	Daughter of Carlos and Delphina Hernandez
2/19/95	C. J.	20	Son of Mary Jane De Cutler
2/21/00	Anthony J.	16	Son of Mike and Eva Lee
2/25/98	Joseph	5	Son of Irene and Oscar Duran

Continued From Page 5

do without sorrow, and there are things in which we are strengthened. My sisters and I were raised with the concept of *Tikkun Olam* – “repair of the world” in Hebrew. We could not repair our family, but at least for me, writing *Invisible Sisters* is how I began to repair my world – and myself.

My father was right. Remember yourself, too. That’s part of the road to learning to live as who we are now.

Reprinted from the Newsletter of the Atlanta TCF, Winter, 2010

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 For Winter

W. Gordon Mahan, Jr., in Loving Memory of his son Samuel Mahan who passed away on September 5, 2006

On Losing a Child

Face your feelings
Don't let them hide inside.
Confront the pain
Give it a name,
Let it roam your heavy heart.

Each teardrop you shed
becomes a crystal bead
to be added to your chain of sorrow.
Keep the chain.
Wear the beads with pride -
A badge of your courage
in facing the pain.

Face whatever may come.
Accept and be thankful
for the lessons you have learned.
Stay open to your feelings.
Soon the pain will be mixed with other colors.
You will be weaving a new tapestry.
Each strand of emotion adds richness.

Stay in the present moment.
Look to the past to fathom the future.
Keep one foot in the present
and the other in eternity.

I have children in both worlds.
I am attentive to each for their lessons.
We learn from our children.

They are our blessings.
By doing for our children
we are enriched by them.
It does not end when they
leave this earth.

We understand not with our minds,
But with our hearts.

Mariann Lindquist
In memory of Joel
From the TCF North Shore, Boston Feb 2010 Newsletter



I give you this one thought to keep –
I am with you still – I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush,
I am the swift, uplifting rush
of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not think of me as gone –
I am with you still – in each new dawn.
- Native American Prayer -

From the TCF North Shore, Boston Feb 2010 Newsletter

Hope in the Face of Death

Hope and beautiful memories. Hope brings us new possibilities. It opens dead-end streets, it allows for change, and in change it creates new alternatives. Hope encourages optimism. It assures us that, although situations aren't how we would like them to be, circumstances could change for the better. Hope has changed societies, developed science and enhanced life since the beginning.

Happily, the human mind has a way of storing beautiful moments...This forms a storehouse of memories that is always there to call upon, even at times of extreme despair. —Leo F. Buscaglia

Reprinted from South LA Bay TCF Jan/
Feb 2003 Newsletter

Like a Tree in Winter

Like a tree in winter
which has lost its leaves,
we look ahead to spring
for new growth
and the warmth of the sun
to heal the pain in our hearts.
Let us make these winter
months a time to reach out to
each other and give that warmth
from our hearts and in return,
We will all show new growth.

Kansas City Region Newsletter, Jan/Feb 2004

*Death leaves a heartache
no one can heal,
Love leaves a memory
no one can steal. ~*

Found on a headstone in Ireland

**Photos taken at the 2010 Candle Lighting Ceremony, compliments of Donnie Raney.
Additional photos will be posted on our El Paso TCF website.**

