



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

North Oklahoma City Chapter

May 2019

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The cut-off date for the next newsletter is the 15th of the prior month

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JOIN OUR CHAPTER'S MONTHLY MEETING

THURSDAY: May 9th, 2019

Location: Mayflower Congregational Church 3901
N.W. 63rd Street

(Between NW Expressway and Portland)

Parking is in the back of the church We meet on the
second Thursday of every month.

Sign In: 7:00 p.m. **Program Starts: 7:30 p.m.** FOOD
AND FELLOWSHIP FOLLOW THE MEETING

Upcoming Events

Next 3 meetings:
May 9th, 2019

Special guest speaker June 13th, 2019

Scott Davis

"Surviving the suicide of your child – A Conversation"
Mayflower Congregational Church 3901 N.W.
63rd Street , Oklahoma City

July 11th, 2019

Please join us for:

Freddy's Family Fundraiser night

May 16th, 4-9 PM ,

at 7401 N May Avenue, OKC

Mention TCF and we will get a cut of the profits
for the evening.

We are still looking for volunteer(s) to help with
the Chapter Newsletter.

Please contact gary.clark@cox.net

THE LANGUAGE OF SISTERS

I don't expect it's this way with all siblings, but Wendy and I could talk to each other about almost anything. We didn't always agree; in fact, it was often the opposite, but we could communicate in that way I always imagined only certain siblings possibly can – without fear of alienation, without risk. No matter what was said, we would always be connected, and even in the midst of disagreement, we would understand one another. We could talk about our parents and our shared history, we could talk about our friends, and we could talk about our fears. When she died, I knew I would never have that again.

I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what I would find. It was summer in Los Angeles and I had agreed to go to a conference. My mom had heard about an organization. "We should check it out, she said, the conference is in Hollywood. It is 10 minutes from your apartment so I can just come out and stay with you. See if we like it. See if it helps." It sounded good to me. It was worth a shot; anything was worth a shot. Wendy had been gone for almost four years. I had been thrust into only childhood as a 26 year old. We were finally done with murder trials, the ones responsible put away for good. The driving purpose we'd had since her murder to see justice served was about a year and a half gone. I didn't have a job or a direction. I had just turned 30, on the cusp of what was supposed to be the next decade, the next era of my life. I was living in limbo. The hallways were filled with people. On the first day, I sat by myself in the back of rooms filled with chairs. I sat in circles without talking. I drank too much wine in the lobby bar with my mom. I bid on some things in the silent auction and listened to speakers at a luncheon in the middle of a banquet room on Hollywood Boulevard and thought, this is not my life. In my life, Hollywood Boulevard means a crazy night out with Wendy that ends with her in the back of a tattoo parlor getting a tongue piercing. It means me laughing with her and she sticks her swollen tongue in a cup of ice from the convenience store across the street. That is my life. I don't know what this is.

On the second day, I saw a workshop; "On Becoming an Only Child After the Death of a Sibling." That's me, I thought, starting to wrap my head around my new normal. So I sat in the circle and a girl with impossibly long black hair started to talk about her sister, Emily, and how she died in a car accident when she was only 16. How suddenly at 20, her life wasn't the one she recognized anymore. Her name was Kim. She swore and laughed and talked with her hands for the next hour and fifteen minutes. And something clicked. I felt a moment of connection and belonging, found a place free of judgment and fear. Kim and I talked in the hall. I thanked her. The next summer, the conference was in Boston. This time I met more siblings and Kim was there again. Staying at the hotel and not in my apartment was more inclusive, and so I started to find more connections with brothers and sisters from everywhere. Deep friendships formed, ones that continue to exist outside of the conferences and outside of our shared losses, but the one with Kim was something different. A place I never expected to find. We spent more time together that year, talked about the challenges of holidays and she invited me to Raleigh for Thanksgiving. That following fall, I just up and went. It was still too hard for me to be home with my own family so I welcomed the invitation to borrow hers. And we discovered new things. That I was born in April, the same month that Emily died, and that Kim was born in October, the same month Wendy was killed. Kim and I are six months apart in age and so were our sisters. She was 20 and I was 26 when the deaths happened but we had both been adults, living on our own, albeit in very different ways. These things are all just the uncanny coincidences. The fact that she purses her lips the same way Wendy did when she's thinking. The part where she is so much like Wendy, not just in her features, but in her adventurous and outgoing nature, the part where she tells me as much as she is wild like Wendy, that I am serious like Emily, these are all certainly remarkable. And maybe these are all parts of the why, but ultimately incidental to the biggest thing. I have close friends, the ones I've known my whole life, the ones I lived with in LA, went to college with, talk to every single week, see all the time. They are all pieces of my heart, but Kim is a piece of my soul. We don't need to talk every week or even every month. We don't see each other every year, though we are getting better at that again. But I can tell her things that I can't tell anyone else. Can talk to her in ways I can't talk to anyone else; ways that are only like how I talked to Wendy. It doesn't matter if time has passed; we never have to catch up or reconnect, beyond recapping the facts of any missed time. We don't share the same family, but we share the same pieces of being a family, of losing parts of our family. We don't share the same past, but our pasts are connected. We live lives we once didn't recognize as our own, and somehow, I think, that helps us to recognize one another. Almost from the get-go, we spoke the same language. It's that one of sisters. The one I thought would never exist again. It's not exactly the same, but it's as near as I can imagine something could be. If my thought is this is only something I can talk to Wendy about, I know that means that I can call Kim. It isn't like having Wendy back with me, nor do I imagine that it is like having Emily back for her. But it's a consolation prize like no other. A gift handed over to us from Emily and Wendy. Wherever they are, I imagine them sometimes together, looking on, laughing, and nodding in agreement at their genius.

Karen Soltero, TCF

Sudden and Unexpected Loss:

It's Complicated

by Judith Sullivan

On December 14, 2001 my 25-year-old daughter, Melissa, suffered a cardiac arrest followed by a coma. She died fourteen days later. Her doctors concluded that the ultimate cause of her death was due to complications of an undiagnosed eating disorder. Suddenly and unanticipatedly Melissa dropped out of our lives.

I immediately discovered a depth and breadth of searing emotional pain that left me flattened and disoriented. Sometimes, I found myself wanting to shake everyone in my world and scream, 'You can't believe what has just happened!' I felt like someone who thinks they have just seen a UFO and fears that no matter what they say no one will be able to understand. Early on, when my supporters turned to me with their eyes full of concern, they also wanted to know how to help. The question always went unanswered because I didn't have a clue.

As the days merged into weeks and then months, I learned much about the world of grief and began to discover some of the ways that bereaved parents survive and eventually thrive. I often found solace in the words of others. One day I began reading a book that shone a light on an aspect of my grief process that, at the time, I didn't know I was confronting. Therese A. Rando, Ph.D., in "How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies", writes about the distinction between an "anticipated death" and "sudden death." She states that if a child's death is sudden and not anticipated loved ones may have more difficulty coping.

Parents are shocked to their core when they get the news of their child's unanticipated and sudden death. They have been denied the buffer of time that could have

helped them prepare. One minute their daily life is humming along the tracks of familiar routines, then out of nowhere one of the worst things that can happen to anyone strikes. The unexpected death of their child has no context; it doesn't fit into the life they had before the news. Stunned, they become temporarily frozen in time and deafened to all but the terror and panic that is beginning to consume them.

Clearly, a sudden and unexpected death itself creates tremendous emotional stress. But that's only the beginning as the pressure builds to meet the demands and responsibilities of one's "previous" life. Perhaps one has other children to care for, a job pressing one to return, or bills on the table daring one to take a needed grief break. Other issues may haunt you as well. For example, it's not unusual for a bereaved parent to become obsessed with finding concrete answers to one question: How did this happen? It takes time and energy to try to gather information surrounding a child's death. It's also not unusual for parents to blame themselves. There seems to be a place inside most parents that always wants to protect their child, regardless of age, especially when their child has a problem or vulnerability. We may blame ourselves for not seeing the signs of impending doom and then conclude that our child's death could have been prevented—by us. This self-blame extends the grief process, intensifies it and may result in one becoming immobilized and overwhelmed by guilt and shame.

Complicated grief can also result in an emotionally vulnerable and/or dangerous state of mind. Some parents may even become traumatized depending on the circumstances surrounding their child's

death and their own life experiences. On the British website, www.suddendeath.org.uk, a list of common traumatic symptoms, as well as other related information, can be found. The symptoms include, among others, feelings of irritability, insomnia, nightmares, feelings of personal responsibility for the death, a belief that the world no longer makes sense, hopelessness regarding the future, isolation from others, and a decreased level of functioning in general. Whether or not the bereaved parent actually meets the criteria for a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnosis by a mental health professional, it is clear that any combination of those symptoms could easily interfere with one's ability to cope. Although some of these symptoms are experienced in most significant losses, when the symptoms are intense, last longer than what is typical, and interfere with daily functioning it is important for the bereaved to be assessed by a professional. If they are having persistent thoughts about not wanting to live, feeling hopeless about the future, and not seeking help on their own, it is very important that loving supporters respectfully encourage them to meet with a professional for at least an assessment.

It is crucial for the grieving parents and their supporters to know that professional help may be needed, is available, and can help in ways that other resources are unable to. My husband and I saw a psychologist for quite a long period of time. She helped guide us through the most difficult aspects of our grief process and it made all the difference. In addition to the professional help that my husband and I received, we experienced invaluable support and comfort from several

Sudden and Unexpected Loss *Continued*
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other sources. These included: 1) Active support from family and friends through consistent ongoing contact. For example, at first we were invited to brief, simple activities such as going out for coffee or tea. Later invitations to a concert or a regularly designated dinner date were offered. 2) Attending a series of grief groups. These groups provided a weekly structure that was very valuable during the first several months of grief. Interacting with other bereaved parents allowed us to take off our social masks for an hour and a half and be open about our misery with others who understood. 3) Engaging in activities that were distracting and preoccupying thus temporarily relieving stress. Early on I volunteered at The Nature Conservancy doing simple tasks for goals I believed in. Also, doing things like jigsaw puzzles, crossword puzzles, and Sudoku gave my emotional brain a much needed break. 4) Doing activities that helped to temporarily transcend (rise above) my loss. The source(s) of transcendence are unique to each person. I felt transcendence whenever I explored prairie lands with big blue skies, waving grasses and native wildflowers or while photographing almost anything that was part of the natural world. 5) Engaging in activities that began a process of transforming our past relationship with our daughter to a new one. As a family, we established a scholarship in our daughter's name and held fundraisers to support it. My husband, who loves tulips, expanded his tulip garden and transformed it into a memorial garden for Melissa. The possibilities for people to process their sorrow and honor their deceased loved one are endless. The rich mixture of all these sources of support—from short simple conversations over coffee with a friend to sessions with our psychologist to whom we brought the most serious issues—helped us survive and eventually thrive again. Grief work is the most demanding work that I have ever done; and, as anyone knows who has loved a child and lost them forever, this work will go on as long as we live.

Judith Sullivan, Retired LP, MA in Counseling

IN THIS PLACE

Brave hearts, you are here. You have traveled a dreadful distance. You have come,
seeking solace, understanding, hope,
threads to patch what death's so cruelly undone.

In this place you can relax and breathe ...
the coats of others' expectations taken off.
Walk into these few days as into an oasis where draughts of
love and memories can be quaffed.

In this place all names can be spoken;
in this place each one's story can be told.
We will not be discouraged by your sorrow;
in this place ALL feelings, we enfold.

Here laughter does not mean we are forgetting;
we do not count how many tears are shed.
Both fuel us, fellow travelers, give us courage,
for the long and winding road we see ahead.

And those we love are pleased we are together, smile down
on us, and bless these days,
glad for every tiny step we are taking
as they send their light to guide us on our ways.

Traveling with us as we journey onward,
sending strength for what the miles may bring,
they are a part of everything we do that matters — in every
dance we dance, and every song we sing.

by Genesse Bourdeau Gentry

written 23 July 2004 for the First Timers to the 2004 TCF National Conference

A past conference attendee said this on the TCF Facebook page:
"Best thing I ever did for myself. I cannot explain how comforting it was to me. In a place where you would expect so much sadness there wasn't. Nothing but smiling faces, welcoming you to share stories of your child. And the workshops are so therapeutic and oh so plentiful. Attending this conference was a gift to myself that I will always cherish."

42ND TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE
July 19 - July 21, 2019

Hope Rings Out in Philadelphia

OUR CHILDREN *Loved...*

Missed... Remembered...

Birth Day

3 CRAIG E. MILLER (BENEDICT)
5 JOSHUA LANGO
5 TRENT AARON BARNES
7 REBECCA ANN STAFFORD
8 JULIE GRANT
9 BRIAN MATTHEW JONES
9 JUSTIN RYAN LASSITER
10 JOE "DAN" TRIGG JR
12 BRADEN KEY (COVEY)
13 LANDON GREGORY BURGER
16 AIDAN HOOPER
17 WILLIAM PALMER
18 ANTHONY WHALEN
19 GARY GLEN WILLHOITE
19 MICHAEL GIRTY (CANADY)
21 CARL WAYNE ROSS
21 KELSEY BRANSBY
26 BRIAN TURLEY
26 JAZMINE ROZELL
28 COLE MOBLY (PAULSON)
28 RAMONE RASHAD COULTER
(GISSANDANER)
28 TRAVIS McKINNEY (MICHAEL)
30 FELICIA ESQUIVIAS (GALINDO)
31 JASON DAVID BOOKER (ROSE)

Angelverseries

1 PATRICIA JEAN BASCO-YOUNG
2 CALEB WILE
3 FELICIA ESQUIVIAS (GALINDO)

4 MICHAEL STOLTZ
5 ANGELA DIANNE "ANGY" BARNARD
5 CAMI PERRYMAN
5 TRENT AARON BARNES
6 JONATHAN PATRICK BRAGG
8 BREANNA STAR SWANSON
9 GUNNER SHULTZ
10 BRANDON LEON GARRISON
12 BRADEN KEY (COVEY)
12 DERRICK EUGENE KILLIAN (HARRISON)
13 CALLIE KAYLIN FULTON
14 JOHN ALAN COX II (CARVER)
15 CHARITY ROSE HENDRICKSON
(HATFIELD)
15 CHARLES 'CHARLIE' WILLIAM HARRIS
15 TYLER J KAMMERZELL (LAWLESS)
16 TAYLOR DON HEINTZELMAN
17 TANNER HILL
18 DAKOTAH DAWN PERRY
18 MADISON RACHEL
20 HOWARD "NICK" PERCIVAL
20 MICHAEL GIRTY (CANADY)
21 KRISTINA MACIAS
22 ROWDY GRAY
23 CORD ALEXANDER MOBLY (PAULSON)
24 SAM BOWLES
27 AUSTIN NEAL WADDLE
27 DAVID BENJAMIN YANCEY
27 MADISON WATTS
28 COLE MOBLY (PAULSON)
28 THOMAS DEAN THOMPSON
29 ANGIE WILSON
29 CASY CUNDIFF
30 KENDRA LOUISE HIGNITE



Love Gifts...A thoughtful way to remember our pre-

cious children.

A *Love Gift* is given to The Compassionate Friends in honor of someone who has died...or a memorial to a relative or friend...or simply from those who wish to help.

"To my Beloved Billy Joe Cunningham"

I love you and miss you everyday. It seems more difficult during Spring what with Easter and all. I know you had a beautiful Easter with our family & Jesus in Heaven!

Much Love, always, Moma

Dan Yancey "In Loving Memory of my Sister Janice"

Karla Killinger "In Loving Memory of Brock L Fleming 6/21/77--3/4/18"



The Butterfly!



I asked God to send me one so I would know,
She is in heaven with beautiful wings she is proud to show,
And sure enough on that day
It was fluttering around me and I knew it was her
Trying to say...
Tell everyone I'm fine,
Tell everyone I'm great,
And when it's theirs and your turn,
I'll be waiting for you at those pearly gates.
And until then I will be here
Watching over you until you appear
Until then you will know if you're smart,
I'll be forever and always in your heart.
So live like there is no tomorrow and smile everyday,
For you know you will see me,
When you spread your wings and finally come home to stay.

By Caitlin Daniels, April 26, 2004 - TCF Tyler, TX!



Because TCF is a non-profit organization, *Love Gifts* are an important means of financial support, which enable us to continue to reach out and support bereaved families. **We are so very grateful for the *Love Gifts* listed below. Thank you for caring**

Peggy Gibson, was one of those wise old souls that I had the pleasure to meet at several TCF Nation Conferences. She always had words of wisdom and encouragement. Here is one of the things she wrote:

Graduation Day

"It's June and graduation time again. Your child would have been among those wearing the cap and gown, walking down the aisle to the ever-stirring "Pomp and Circumstance". Now there will be a vacant spot in the line. Should you attend? Can you stand the pain? Will people think you're strange? As always, you must follow your heart. So go if you'd like to, and don't hide your tears. It's quite all right to miss your own child while celebrating the achievements of others. Just remember that your own instincts are the most important ones, that no one can make this decision for you, and that it doesn't really matter what other people think of you. It was your child who died. This is your pain, and you have the right to feel it and deal with it in your own way – and may a bit more healing take place in the doing". Peggy Gibson

Three years after the death of our son at age 15, graduation time came for his class. My wife and I knew it was the day, but each of us kept silence in the presence of yet another "elephant in the room". We spent a quiet evening at home that night. The next day we were told that in a graduating class of over 800 students, a chair had been left empty with Travis's name on it. His name was called with the rest of the graduating class, and a friend of his handed out his picture to other students to remember and honor him.

It has always been hard to know what to do on those special dates. Even though we did not attend, we cherish the "Kindness of Strangers" who did not forget our son.

Gary Clark, North Oklahoma City Chapter TCF

Sometimes when grief overwhelms us it is comforting to know that someone who cares is just a phone call away. A Loving Listener is someone who is willing to talk on the phone with another bereaved Parent, Sibling or Grandparent. A Loving Listener's phone number will be published in the newsletter as another resource to our bereavement community. Names will be listed along with special circumstances, such as auto accident, illness, suicide or homicide.

If you are willing to be a Loving Listener please let me know and I will add you to the newsletter. Contact Gary Clark at gary.clark@cox.net.

Loving Listeners



- Gary Clark: Skiing Accident 405-691-7144**
- Melinda Heidling: Infant Death 405-885-2739**
- Sharon Ellington: Drunk Driver 405-721-6939**
- Robi Long: Unknown 405-408-2102**



*** PLEASE CONSIDER HELPING ***

We all want to help when we can. It is a BIG part of our healing process. Being helpful, productive people is key. Our chapter very much needs to strengthen our steering committee. The Steering committee meets once every other month, and perhaps once or twice a year for special projects, such as the Walk to Remember and the December Candle Lighting.

WE NEED YOUR IDEAS, YOUR CREATIVITY, YOUR NETWORKING SKILLS.

WE NEED YOUR INDIVIDUAL TALENTS.

Our chapter has been operating with just a few volunteers for sometime now and we have not been able to do the Outreach to the community and Public Awareness that was once our strength. We know there are so many hurting families in our community who have not heard of us.

We can all probably help a little, which will help our chapter a lot. If you can help please contact Sharon Ellington at 405-721-6939 , or Gary Clark at 405-691-7144, or come to our next meeting and talk to us. We will be very happy to have your help.

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.

We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us.

Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances.

We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships.

We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers.

Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace.

But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. ©2007

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
NORTH OKLAHOMA CITY CHAPTER
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TCF "Online Support Community" Offers Opportunity for Grief Sharing
The Compassionate Friends national website offers "virtual chapters" through an Online Support Community (live chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child. The rooms supply support, encouragement, and friendship. The friendly atmosphere encourages conversation among friends; friends who understand the emotions you're experiencing. There are general bereavement sessions as well as more specific sessions. These include "Pregnancy and Infant Loss," "Bereaved 2 Years and Under," "Bereaved 2 Years and Over," "Men Only Sharing Session," "No Surviving Children," "Survivors of Suicide." There are also sessions for surviving siblings. The sessions last an hour and have trained moderators present. For more information, visit www.compassionatefriends.org and click "Online Support" in the "Resources" column.