



The Compassionate Friends

Marin County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies



NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2016 ISSUE

Vol 37, No. 6

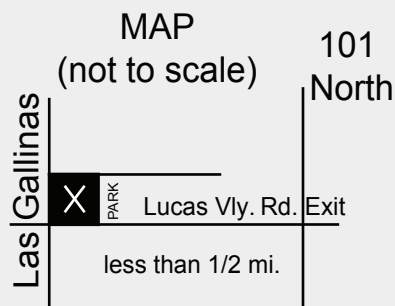
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This issue of the TCF Marin Newsletter is sponsored by love gifts from our members.

Please call the TCF Hotline (415-457-3123) if you have any questions.

TCF Marin Email:
tcfmarin@gmail.com

TCF Marin Monthly Meetings:
Group meetings will be held on the third Monday of the month from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Lucas Valley Community Church conference room
2000 Las Gallinas Avenue
(at Lucas Valley Road)
San Rafael, CA
First time attendees are encouraged to arrive at 7:00 for orientation. All attendees arriving before 7:00 p.m. are asked to sign in and be seated in the lobby until the meeting room is ready. The TCF Newsletter and informational pamphlets will be displayed for attendees to browse and take as desired.



Meeting Calendar:

Monday, November 21, 2016
Monday, December 19, 2016
Monday, January 16, 2017

The Gift of Giving

In the Hope of Helping Others -
The Compassionate Friends

After the death of our daughter Lori, I was completely devastated. Everything I believed about life was tossed out the window and I was filled with despair. It felt as if grief would destroy me. Much of that time is now a blur, too painful to remember. But I do recall clearly my feeling of disconnection from most of the world of the living. My life had been ruined and I had no idea what to do. The friends with whom I'd surrounded myself before Lori's death had no way of knowing how to befriend me in this and I had no idea how to ask for the help I needed. So into my overwhelming grief was added hurt and loneliness because friends who didn't know what to do or say often opted to do and say nothing.

Then my husband and I found the monthly meetings of The Compassionate Friends (TCF), a support organization for families that have experienced the death of a child. I won't say the meetings were immediately a perfect fit for me, because they weren't, or that I felt comfortable as I attended, because I didn't. I was a very private person; I had had no experience crying on anyone's shoulder. My tears had always been in solitude. I'd never learned to express my feelings in words. So when someone asked me how I was feeling, I'd almost panic. How DID I feel? And after listening to the others in the circle, by the time my turn came, I was often overwhelmed with feelings. Like many others, I can't cry and talk at the same time, which caused people to have to wait as I tried to get the words out . . . I hated all the eyes on me while I tried to gain enough control to speak.

So why did I keep going? At the beginning it was because my husband, Bill, wanted to go and it was there that I learned more about how he was feeling. I was also learning from the more seasoned grievers ways of coping with my loss. All too soon I learned that TCF was actually a sanctuary, the rare place where I could try to explain my feelings or talk about Lori and her death without people trying to change the subject because they were being made uncomfortable by my words. And it was such a relief to find out that not only was it ok to voice my darkest thoughts and feelings, but others often felt the same way too. They understood! (cont'd p 2)

Additional Support Sites

opentohope.com
bereavedparents.com
bereavedparentsusa.org
survivorsof suicide.com
griefspeaks.com

Other Grief Counseling Resources

Hospice by the Bay offers individual and group grief counseling.
Marin and SF (415) 526-5699
Sonoma (707) 931-7299
Email: griefsupport@hbtb.org
Website: www.hospicebythebay.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
www.afsp.org
Ph: 415-751-0521

TCF Sonoma County Chapter

tcf.sonomacounty@gmail.com
(707) 490-8640

TCF RESOURCES:

TCF Marin County, CA Chapter

P.O. Box 150935
San Rafael, CA 94915
www.tcfmarin.org

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TCF National Website:

www.compassionatefriends.org
(offers supportive services and chat rooms)

(from p 1)

Some months I had to overcome my lethargy to get into the car and drive the half hour to get to the meetings, but every time I went I was thankful that I had. Looking back now, I realize that the meetings, and the friends made at the meetings, probably saved my life.

But by the spring before the second anniversary of Lori's death, we were no longer attending every meeting. I regularly spoke with TCF friends, but didn't feel I needed to go every month. I had come to the point, as so many do, where I felt I'd received most of the help I would get from TCF. I might soon have stopped going to the meetings altogether. Now I can't even imagine who I would have become if that had happened. Instead I was given a gift, a reason to keep attending the meetings. Our facilitator was moving out of the area and I was asked to facilitate the local meetings. I said yes and found there was a whole new world of healing when I stopped going only for myself and began to attend meetings to help others. I can't overemphasize the importance of this turning point in my life.

From then on, every month I had to look outside myself into the hearts and minds of others and try to give them hope. I found the intensity of my own raw pain began to take a backseat to that of others more newly bereaved than I. Because I needed to find words for THEM, to try to help ease THEIR pain, a floodgate was gradually opened in me and words, amazing words, began to fill my life. Feelings, with the words to describe them, began to well up from my innermost being, feelings from the past, from those first months after Lori's death, and feelings in the present, words in the form of poetry, poems to help me understand myself and poems to help others. Truly, I believe this would not have happened if I hadn't opened my heart to my newly bereaved compassionate friends.

I believe there is the potential for something like this to happen to all who become actively involved in the "helping" aspect of The Compassionate Friends. I don't mean that everyone begins writing poetry. But I do believe that the greatest healing derived from TCF is this outward movement, this growth away from the self-centeredness, self-absorption of grief, towards the open hearted hope of helping others.

It comes to me that parenthood, itself, does something like this. From our self-centered, self-directed lives before our children are born, we learn the awesome responsibility of another person's life when we first gaze upon them. Our lives change focus and their survival and growth become our highest purpose; our hearts become larger because our children are in them. When our children die, we not only hurt because the most important, most loved people of our lives are gone, but that intense focus is gone and our sense of great purpose. We wander in a wasteland, searching for what has been lost.

(continued on page 6)

Carol's Corner

by Carol Kearns,

author of "Sugar Cookies and a Nightmare"



Columns for The Compassionate Friends

I have found great solace volunteering for The Compassionate Friends, a hard-working group that supports families seeking "the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child" (www.compassionate-friends.org). My columns discuss topics of continuing concern in the Marin County CA newsletter. - Carol

Making the Holidays Meaningful After Your Child's Death

For most of us the holidays are a time for family and close friends. There is no way after our child's death to make these times easy. We can't pretend that everything is the way it once was, yet we can't ignore them. Most of us started getting holiday catalogs in July. In early October I was shopping at Union Square and noticed that some of the stores already had Christmas tree ornaments and decorations.

Even without the death of a loved one I think we need to make the holidays more meaningful and not get caught up in the commercialism. Children make holidays special. Even when our family has grown, we look forward to the holidays when we gather together. After our child's death we may have a need, especially in the early years, to do something entirely different. This may mean going to our relatives or friends homes instead or going completely away to a place we've never been before.

My daughter Kristen died in November of 1976. Thanksgiving was a blur. I felt little to be thankful for. A friend had us for dinner, but we had duck instead of turkey and no emphasis was put on the fact that it was a holiday. Christmas was different. I couldn't begin to think of a tree, gifts or decorations. My nine year old surviving son and I planned to go to my parents. I decided to let them figure out Christmas and they did. The only thing I did for Christmas that first year was find a magic set for my son. Michel had decided he wanted to be a magician. Maybe he had the thought he could perform a magic trick and, abracadabra, his sister would reappear. Maybe it was simply because nine year olds like magic.

When we arrived at my parents, a two hour plane ride away, they had all the traditional decorations that I remembered as a child. However, next to the big family Christmas tree my mother had placed a small tree on a little table decorated in tiny white lights with an angel on the top, and a picture of Krissie with a vigil light below. She told me that that was the Krissie tree. I would never have thought of that myself, but it was perfect and very symbolic. Kristen was with us but separate. I couldn't believe how many times I caught myself staring at that tree. Funny how a little evergreen can comfort you and get you through a hard time.

The first few years are difficult but hopefully we can find a way to have our future holidays meaningful. This is especially important if we have surviving children. They have just lost a sibling. Their lives already changed forever, they don't need to lose important family times as well. The death of a child demands a real sorting process to rebuild meaning into our lives. Our challenge is to create something positive from the love we have for our child who's died, and equally for the love we have for our surviving children.

"The sorrow we feel when we lose a loved one is the price we pay to have had them in our lives."

— Rob Liano

(from page 2)

When Lori died, we still had our 15-year-old daughter Megan at home, but I felt so crippled as a mother. How thankful I am that Megan was somehow able to get through those early years with a mother so distracted by grief - and emotionally distanced by fear. I was half a mother in more ways than one.

Now, because of TCF, I began to find a new focus for my maternal instincts and a new way to grow back into the loving mother I'd been before Lori died. As I tried to grow to the task of helping those more newly bereaved than I, just as I'd had to grow to the task of being Lori and Megan's mother, I was benefiting three-fold. First, my "mother" energy, which is a huge part of me, was again flowing outward. Second, as I was learning ways to help others heal, I was learning them for myself. And third, once again, I began to feel that I was doing something important with my life, that my life mattered, that my life had purpose.

When I look at other bereaved parents who seem to have survived this great loss the most successfully, I find that they too have again found purpose. And often that purpose has something to do with the child who has died. Sometimes they work towards eradicating the reason their child died: drunk driving and cancer are two examples. Some start foundations in their child's name. Some take up and even finish the work that their child started.

Many bereaved parents, like me, have regained a sense of purpose through The Compassionate Friends. My work in TCF has given me a great sense of purpose, satisfaction in helping the newly bereaved at our monthly meetings, being part of the Steering Committee, a vital part of my chapter, and Chapter Leader. As Regional Coordinator I also try to give support to my region's chapters, and the ripples go out from there.

And just as important to me, besides this sense of purpose, TCF has allowed me to keep Lori more visibly in my life. Wherever I go, whatever I do for TCF, Lori's name is mentioned; Lori is not forgotten. Because what I do for TCF matters, and because all I do for TCF, I do in her name, Lori's life continues to matter, all these years after she left this earth. Through TCF Lori remains in the forefront of all I do, the guiding star in the direction of my life. I could not have found a more loving or fitting way to honor her than I have through The Compassionate Friends. My grief and TCF have forced me to grow in ways of which I had never dreamed. And Lori has been with me every step of the way.

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry

In Memory of my daughter, Lori

From Catching the Light – Coming Back to Life after the Death of a Child and previously published in We Need Not Walk Alone, the national magazine of The Compassionate Friends.

We can endure much more than we think we can; all human experience testifies to that. All we need to do is learn not to be afraid of pain. Grit your teeth and let it hurt. Don't deny it, don't be overwhelmed by it. It will not last forever. One day, the pain will be gone and you will still be there.

- Harold Kushner When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough



In Loving Memory

Timothy Patrick McBride
by George McBride & Lois Kortum

“Beloved”

In Loving Memory

Richard Mannheimer, Jr.
by Shirlee Newman

“Your love light shines always.”

In Loving Memory

Robert Craig Wilson
by Mary Fishman

“With love forever, mom.”

In Loving Memory

Justin Daniel Reynolds
*by Gary and Carole (Reynolds) Bonnici,
Jay Reynolds*

“We love, miss and remember you everyday”

LOVE GIFT FORM

Love Gifts are “messages” published in our newsletter that honor children who have died. We are grateful to parents, grandparents and others who, by their Love Gifts donations, allow us to offer resources such as the Annual Candle Lighting Event, the newsletter, books, brochures and pamphlets at no cost to assist bereaved families. They also allow us to provide information to professionals and others who impact the lives and feelings of the bereaved. The donation amount is your choice, and Love Gifts are tax-deductible as allowed by law.

Deadlines for Love Gift information for Newsletters:

Jan/Feb issue --Dec. 15

Jul/Aug issue – Jun. 15

Mar/Apr issue – Feb. 15

Sep/Oct issue - Aug. 15

May/Jun issue – Apr. 15

Nov/Dec issue - Oct. 15

Child’s name _____ Donor’s name _____

Child’s Birthdate & Anniversary Date _____

Newsletter month _____

Message _____

Include your name, address and phone # if not on check in case of questions:

Mail the information above along with your donation (check) made payable to TCF/Marin
to: TCF/Marin Newsletter Editor, P.O. Box 150935, San Rafael, CA 94915.



The Compassionate Friends
Marin County Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2016

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Dated Material - Please Deliver Promptly



Come Join Us on December 11, 2016!

Unity of Marin, 600 Palm Drive, Novato, CA
The Compassionate Friends 20th Annual World-Wide Candle Lighting Ceremony

"A virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone"

Every year on the second Sunday of December, our TCF chapter joins thousands of families around the globe in a candle lighting ceremony to honor the memories of all children, regardless of age, who died before their time. This special ceremony features music, poetry, candle lighting and a special DVD of photos of our children set to music. Candles will be provided for everyone.

We gather after the ceremony in the community room for refreshments and conversation.

Doors open at 6:00 p.m.,
Ceremony starts at 7:00 p.m.
