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The Compassionate Friends
Supporting Family After a Child Dies
Oscoda Area Chapter

The Compassionate Friends of
Oscoda Area
4087 Forest Rd.
Oscoda, MI 48750
989-254-5888
Email: tcfoscodagmail.com
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ISSUE 55 NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2020

A Note from our Chapter Steering Committee.....

Sacred Heart has developed a plan for groups to meet in the Family Center. For the safety of everyone social distancing and masks are required as part of their plan. Thanks!

During these trying times please know that TCF is here for you! If you need some support, please contact



The Compassionate Friends of Oscoda Area

Our phone number--989-254-5888

Our email—tcfoscodagmail.com

Our Chapter Website www.tcf-oscoda.org

TCF National Website www.compassionatefriends.org

Please take good care of yourselves.....we want you all to be safe. We are all in this together. Remember: We need not walk alone, we are the Compassionate Friends.

Give Yourself A G.I.F.T. This Holiday Season

The holidays are a time of togetherness and family traditions. It's even been dubbed the "most wonderful time of the year." But for many in the grief community, it can be filled with grief, loneliness, and reminders of our loss. Once solid relationships with family and friends may have frayed throughout the year because our grief was too much for them to handle.

If you're fortunate enough to have been invited – and accepted – to spend the holidays with loved ones, it's important to reflect on the acronym **G.I.F.T.**:

G is for Grief

While it's perfectly normal to feel down, even as early as the holidays approach, you have to do a gut-check to be sure you aren't spiraling down a grief abyss. If your anxiety/stress is through the roof as the date of the family gathering inches closer, it's okay to check in with a mental health therapist for coping techniques.

The thought of seeing happy relatives may also cause you to question why that wasn't your reality and trigger a grief wave. It's important to acknowledge your grief and feelings. If you need to escape to the bathroom or a quiet area to regroup, that's okay. Grief doesn't take a day off.

Don't feel as though talking about your loved one will bring others down. Often, they may not mention him or her out of fear that it will upset you. Encourage them to share their favorite memories and good times together. Grieving doesn't always look like tears, heartache, and sadness. Sometimes it's belly laughs and feel-good stories, recalling fond times with a loved one.

I is for Indomitable

It's almost the end of the year. What better time to pat yourself on the back and celebrate all you've accomplished. There were days you probably couldn't see getting through the next 24 hours, let alone making it to the holidays. Every

MONTHLY MEETING

November 10th 7 pm

December 8th 7 pm

*World Wide Candle Lighting
December 13 7 pm*

*Social Distancing & Masks are
required.*

**If Oscoda Area Schools is closed
due to weather our meeting is
canceled—per Sacred Heart
Policy**

CHAPTER LEADERSHIP

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The Compassionate Friends Oscoda



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morning, you get up to face each day, unsure of what's ahead. And, like a badass, you continue to get through all the things that life throws at you. That's an indomitable spirit.

Regardless of what arises during the holiday season, know that you will be okay. You'll survive the tears, the pain, and frustrations about why your person isn't here to celebrate it. Keep in mind there is no shame in reaching out for help to get through the final months of the year. Seeking out help when needed is yet another sign of your resiliency and determination to get through the darkest parts of your grief. Give yourself the credit you so rightly deserve!

F is for Forgiveness

The truth is, unless you've lost a child, grandchild or sibling you won't "get it." Even when well-intentioned loved ones offer words of comfort and sympathy, we may feel it comes across as trite and ingenuous. Remember that it's unfair to expect them to have learned from battles they've never fought.

The reality is that we were once in their shoes. We might have said the person who came before us was "strong," not realizing it was their only choice. We tried to offer hope and encouragement with sayings like, "She's looking down at you" or "Everything happens for a reason." Unless you've loved and lost a child, grandchild or sibling you don't realize the impact those words may have on the receiver.

Your family and friends mean well. Assume positive intent. Educate them on more acceptable ways to shower those who are grieving with love. Forgive their ignorance. We wouldn't wish this on anyone.

T is for Thankful

Death takes so much from us. Over time, it steals memories of our past and robs us of the future we mapped out.

Regardless of what we've been through and who we've lost, there is always, always a reason to be thankful. By training our brain to see the good in each day, we're able to live beyond our grief. We can spend the rest of our lives focused on our loss, or we can pay tribute to a loved one by living our best life. Your "grieving card" won't be revoked for living post-loss. It's okay to have an attitude of gratitude despite the crappy hand you were dealt. It's okay to move forward, love, and laugh. It's okay to be more than your grief. It's okay to define yourself as more than a grieving parent, grandparent or sibling. None of this means that you didn't love....that you don't still love. It doesn't mean forgetting. It doesn't mean you're "over it."

The loss will impact our lives for years and decades to come, especially if there are children involved. Yet, that life still has space to let in contentment, friendship, joy, dreams, goals, and more.

Always choose gratitude.

~Kerry Phillips

Posted 10/31/2019 *Open to Hope*



*I cannot hold your hands today,
I cannot see your smile,
My children, who are gone.*

*But I recall your faces still,
The songs, the talks, the sighs,
And story times, and winter walks,
And sharing secret things.*

*I know you helped my mind to live
Beyond your time with me.
You gave me clearer eyes to see—
You gave me finer ears to hear—
What living means, what dying means,
My children, who are gone.*

*So here it is Thanksgiving Day,
And you are not with me.
And while I weep a mother's tears,
I thank you for the gift you were,
And all the gifts you gave to me,
My children, who are gone.*

~Sascha Wagner
Wintersun



Thanksgiving serves as an entry point to the holiday season which can be so hard during times of grief. Although there is much to be thankful for, it is hard to express thanks when our worlds are not as they should be and when we are missing a part of our heart.





*"Forever In Our Hearts"
Our Children/Siblings Remembered*



Birthdays



November
Michel Wright



November
Steve Valentine



Remembrances



November
Aaron Dean



November
Ronald Lewis



Ronald Lewis



*By love they are remembered,
and in memory they live.*

~unknown

*When Cardinals appear
Your loved one is near*



Hanging Up the Holiday Blues

By-Scott Mastley

posted November 24, 2009 *Open to Hope*

I believe, maybe because it helps me heal, that my brother would want me to enjoy the holidays. His car accident was in December almost 15 years ago, and that December date catches up with me each year. I start to hide from the world around mid-November. I want to sleep more. I blink back tears watching sappy commercials. I don't feel like working or working out at the gym.

It happens right on cue every year, but it took me several years to realize it. I just thought it was holiday stress. Now I recognize it right away and know that I'm subconsciously dreading the December 5th angel date. The depression rolls in as if on cue.

When I didn't realize the cause of the depression, I let it roll over me and tried to keep it to myself. I didn't want to be a complainer. I thought about Chris every day, so I didn't see how this time of year was different.

Now I know it's going to happen, know why it's happening, and I've told my family about it. My wife knows that December can be a little crazy. It took me years to get excited about Christmas again after Chris's accident, but now I love it like I did before. It's the only time of year that I actually enjoy going to the mall.

Believing that Chris would want me to enjoy the holidays helped tremendously. I'm still going to cry when I see a sappy commercial, because the emotions are running high this time of year, but I'm also going to appreciate the holiday atmosphere.

In the early years I tried distraction (go to the movies), escape (travel to another town), and denial (pretend everything is OK). Distraction and escape were helpful at the time, but denial never worked.

Now I focus on my family. When I see the hole that is Chris's absence, I look at other families. That's why I enjoy the mall at Christmas. It's packed with families, panicked parents and excited kids. I love to think that they are not burdened by anything as heavy as a lost sibling or child. They're just getting ready for another great Christmas. It helps me get ready for my own.



Ghosts of Christmas Past

By Joanneta Hendel

Reprinted with permission of the author.

In anticipation of my first Christmas morning, Mamma posed me, freshly scrubbed and curled, before the Christmas tree for my annual holiday photograph. This was the beginning of a lifetime of Christmas celebrations—each one steeped in rituals and traditions built upon those which had gone before. As a child, I delighted in the magical world created in the minds of the very young. We woke to sparkle and glitter, presents stacked high, and bulging stockings. As I grew, the magic of childhood gave way to a different reality and a different joy, but the rituals remained largely un-changed.

Marriage brought family and babies of my own. The photo albums grew and expanded as I made a career of the holidays and the memories they held. Year after year, I lined up the little ones in front of the tree—just as my mother had done before me. Each holiday celebration was an extension of former joys, other times, different places. Importance was placed on building bridges from the past into the present.

Constancy equals comfort and security. Psychologists agree that tradition is important to the development of society and to family structure. Family traditions are healthy and normal. There's only one thing wrong with traditions—it's filled with shoulds. "We should have the tree up before the 15th. We entertain. We should shop...decorate...send cards. We

should be happy...” Tradition creates purpose and connection. Tradition provides roots. But tradition magnifies the pain of our loss.

At our house, we trim the tree the first weekend in December. It’s tradition. But the year Alexander died, I didn’t feel like trimming the tree at all. When we did do it, as many changes as possible were made in the ritual to help me tolerate the empty space left in his absence. The children receive a new Christmas ornament each year to add to their collections. Someday these ornaments will adorn their own Christmas trees in their own homes. But what about Alex’s set? Those three ornaments will never bloom into twenty and will never follow him into adulthood. That first year after Alex’s death I bought him one anyway—an angel in flight. Four stockings hang from the mantel. Do I hang Alexander’s stocking, or do I put it away forever? The first year, I hung his apart from the others. But every year since, his stocking has hung with the other four. I have five children with five Christmas stockings—and I always will.

The key to surviving Christmas as a bereaved individual is flexibility and foresight. It’s important to plan ahead, and it’s important to anticipate the changes you will need to make. Habit is easy, and it does take a little more effort to implement creative change in holiday planning. But change and adjustment are essential for the newly bereaved.

Families can spend so many years following the same patterns and routines that they forget these choices were made because they were right for their moment. But choices made under different circumstances may not be the right choices for the newly bereaved. The early moments of grief demand new rules. Even customs “set in stone” can be bent. Festivities that expend more energy than we have to give can be skipped. Entertaining and socializing can be altered or curtailed altogether. Decisions can be delayed and new plans designed and implemented at the last minute. The bereaved can learn to be creative and flexible in customizing their holiday plans. Traditions bind families and societies tightly to one another. But altering our traditions to suit our current needs makes sense. Each moment, each stage of life, demands its own customs and its own rituals. By building our bridges moment to moment, we link the past and present to the future.



Gifts of the New Year

Faith that, in spite of the pain of today, I can and will learn to go on, one step at a time, one day at a time, learning to once again truly enjoy the little (and bigger) things that come my way.

Patience when I’m having a bad day, when I seem to take two steps backward and only one forward in learning to cope with the death of my child.

Laughter, which someone said is the best medicine. I believe laughter is a positive source of healing. When I feel good laughing at some silly little thing that comes along, I know another little part of me has healed.

Time: If nothing else, the new year offers the gift of time—time to heal, to learn to cope, to put some wholeness back into lives that seem hopelessly broken.

Won’t you join me opening these gifts? You see, they aren’t just mine to receive; they are gifts to be shared by all. You need only reach out and accept them. Each of these gifts can help us go on with our lives.

May the new year bring you all these gifts and many blessings, but most especially, may you receive the gift of peace.

~Audry Cain
TCF, Western New York



Grief is LAUGHTER
Grief is TEARS
Grief is MEMORIES
Grief is SILENCE
Grief is TIMELESS
Grief is SHARING STORIES
Grief is HELPING OTHERS
Grief is LIVING WITH LOSS
Grief is LOVE THAT NEVER DIES

~Alan Pedersen
angelsacrosstheusa.org

One Day at a Time.

Easy for you to say when you are greeted by the beauty of the sun each morning.

For me, the sun is a seething reminder of the missing pieces of my life and it forces my eyes to open though I'd prefer they stay closed.

For some, one day at a time is a simplified way of getting through life making it easier as you look forward to tucking all your children in safely at night. For me, one day at a time is endless days of watching each grain of sand descend in slow motion through the hourglass. One day at a time is a rehearsed soliloquy.

A pre-programmed mantra meant to keep me focused on the present.

For you, the present is a gift. For me, the present is filled with the unfathomable absence of my child.

Take it one step at a time? Easy for you to say when your path is paved. For me, every step I take is rocky and painful- as I take steps on rocks that are pointy and piercing my skin. I'm weighed down by the weight of grief. And some days it's just too heavy to carry. I'm following this path, trying not to look back even though everything I wanted was in my past and now my future holds uncertainty.

One breath at a time. It sounds nice and positive like I'm making progress but I look up and can't believe I'm still repeating this dismal phrase. This lie! It is not one day at a time – it is one step at a time...

One moment at a time... One breath at a time...and I can't breathe. My heart hurts and I just wish it would stop. Some days my heart hurts so much that I think it will stop, but it never does.

When COVID-19 first hit, I thought to myself maybe this was my time and God would have mercy on me and let me go be with my son. Then I got sick and got better and was still stuck here. Really?! 56,000 deaths from COVID-19 and I'm still here? I wish I could just wake up from this nightmare I have been forced to live. Yesterday one day at a time was a liberating phrase...today it is torture.

Grief is crazy like that- the moment to moment emotional embodiment of polar opposites. I am so tired of giving myself pep talks just to get out of bed. I tell myself "be intentional" and "work on healing." I am so tired of how much effort and intention I must put into making it through a single day! One day should not be this hard! One day should not be so long! I go one day without intentional effort and I'm paralyzed. In the world of grieving, one day can be gentle or one day can feel like you're experiencing death all over again. It's been 411 days of living one day at a time and I honestly don't know how many more days I can make it one step at a time.

Last night I couldn't sleep. I was up well after the birds started to sing. Sleep is the only thing that I look forward to because when I'm asleep my brain finally takes a break from the haunting thoughts that invade my head. It allows me to forget all the things I could have done to possibly change the outcome. But ever since the quarantine sleep evades me. I was sleeping ok before the pandemic but isolation and anxiety are a dangerous combination. Some nights are restful and others are relentless. Either way, I usually wake up with intense pain in my soul. The missing part starts aching and the longing never stops.

I worked so hard yesterday to get to feeling ok at night and now here I am sinking into the darkness again. I hate the darkness because I never know exactly how deep the hole will go when I lean in. But I learned that fighting it only pulls me under more violently so I just let myself go and float on the waves until they take me ashore.

I am tired. Tired of healing but never being healed. Tired of taking 2 steps forward just to stay in the same place. One day at a time is exhausting and some days I just don't want to do it. I just can't get out of bed. I lay there real still hoping to just disappear. Waiting for it to be night again so I can go to sleep with the hope of seeing you in my dream. All the while, wishing this was a dream that I could wake up from. Why won't God let me wake up? People always say have faith. My faith is not the problem. I have faith that you are with our Creator – but is it so wrong for me to want you here with me? Or for me to want to be there with you? If to be with the Lord is to be at peace, why is it so wrong for me to want peace? I'm trying to faithfully fulfill my purpose. But I just want to be reunited with you.

I want to be who I was. I want to hold you once again. I want to smile and really mean it... I want to smile without it hurting. I want to forget that this ever happened but still remember that you lived. I'm doing time. Time is the only thing that separates me from you. One day at a time is also one day closer to being with you again. Soon all the days that I must serve without you will have passed and the last sand keeping me from you will have descended. Until then, I will do my best, one day at a time. Though it's not comforting, it is the only way I can maneuver through this. One day at a time. The thought of a week or a month or a year is just too overwhelming. I don't know if I can get through another year without you.

But I know I can get through the day. I can make it through today. So as cliché as it is... one day at a time, one step at a time, one breath at a time is all I can handle and that's ok.

I move forward with you in my heart, in my soul, in every crevice of my being. I carry you with me with every breath, every step, every day.

~Ruqaaayya Gibson lost her 17 year old son in March 2019. She is learning to live again after the unexpected tragedy.

The Compassionate Friends Newsletter October 2020

Open to Hope



The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting on the 2nd Sunday in December unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit on December 13th, 2020 at 7:00 pm local time, hundreds of thousands of people commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the annual Worldwide Candle Lighting (WCL), a gift to the bereavement community from The Compassionate Friends, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. TCF's WCL started in the United States in 1997 as a small internet observance and has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world of the remembrance. Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held, and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes, as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died and will never be forgotten.

Details related to The Compassionate Friends of Oscoda 6th Annual Worldwide Candle Lighting, December 13th, are listed in the attached flier.



The Compassionate Friends
Supporting Family After a Child Dies
Oscoda Area Chapter

The Compassionate Friends of Oscoda Area 6th Annual Worldwide Candle Lighting



Sunday December 13, 2020
6:45-7:15 pm

Outside at Mark's Park on River Road
(1/2 block west of US 23)
Oscoda, MI

This event is an opportunity for families, as well as extended family and friends to come together to honor the memories of children, siblings and grandchildren who left too soon.

There will be no formal program. However, we invite you to join us to light a candle (yours or one provided), drive by to see the lit candles or light a candle at home.

For more information email us at tcfoscod@gmail.com, or check out our Facebook page.



