



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Bluegrass Chapter Newsletter

“We need not walk alone.”

www.tcfbluegrass.org

P.O. Box 647, Nicholasville, Kentucky 40340

May/June 2013

Chapter Co-Leaders

Suzie McDonald

catholic20@windstream.net

Janie Fields

butterflymom@windstream.net

Treasurer

David Fields

Newsletter Editor

Lisa Fields

Bluegrass Chapter

The Compassionate Friends

Regional Coordinators

Suzie McDonald

(859) 576-7680

Telephone Friends

Sometimes it helps to be able to talk to someone who understands. The following bereaved parents are willing to provide support and comfort.

Jim Sims

(859) 858-8288

(859) 797-2168

Mary Camp

(859) 737-0180

Suzie McDonald

(859) 576-7680

Janie Fields

(859) 881-1991

*The Compassionate Friends
National Office*

P.O. Box 3696

Oak Brook, IL 60522

(877) 969-0010

www.compassionatefriends.org

We welcome you with Compassion, Love and Hope

It is always difficult to say, “Welcome” to people coming to our meetings for the first time because we are so very sorry for the reason they came. For some, the first meeting or two can be rather overwhelming, especially if they are newly bereaved. We hope that anyone feeling that way will return to at least a couple more of our meetings. Everyone is welcome to attend our meetings, regardless of the age at which their child died or the length of time that has passed since that day.

Newcomers Lexington TCF

Larry Barnes and Linda Horvay, parents of Liam Barnes

Michael Barnes, brother of Liam Barnes

Susie Templeton, mother of Robert Woods Templeton

Bill and Pat Gruber, parents of Daniel Wyatt Gruber

Newcomers Winchester TCF

Stephen and Susan Patrick, parents of Shawn Douglas Patrick

Yvonne Butler, mother of Amanda “Mandy” Lynn Tapp Lowe

Love Gifts

A Thoughtful Way to Remember

Love Gifts are a beautiful and loving way to remember a loved one. Through Love Gifts, we are able to reach out to others with our brochures and newsletters as well as obtain books and other information for our library. We truly appreciate every Love Gift, donation and sponsorship. Our Chapter work is done by volunteers and these donations help us reach out in many ways, including the preparation and mailing of the newsletter.

Refreshments

Some of us like to remember our child’s birthday or the anniversary of his or her death by bringing a cake or cookies to the meeting that month. We would appreciate having you bring a special treat to any meeting. You may also want to bring and share a picture of your child.

Thank you!
Janie and Suzie

May the wings of a butterfly kiss the sun.

And find your shoulder to light on.

To fill your heart with warm thoughts and precious memories.



Our Children Forever Loved and Remembered

MAY BIRTH DATES

- 5/1 **Emily Ann Preston** Granddaughter of Bud and Gwen Preston
 5/6 **Mitchell Allen Jaquish** Son of Ellie and Thomas Jaquish
 5/7 **Mark Robert Bartella** Son of John and Brenda Peterson
 5/8 **Michael Patrick Randall Morgeson** Grandson of Carl & Phyllis Hardin
 5/9 **Riley London Clark** Son of Jordan and Sherrie Clark
 5/10 **Lori Em Kotzbauer** Daughter of Bob and Connie Kotzbauer
 5/10 **Steven Roberts** Son of Elizabeth Roberts
 5/10 **Kim Varney** Daughter of Judy Varney
 5/10 **Sarah Elizabeth Brittain** Daughter of Vanna Britain
 5/12 **Mitch Baber** Son of Steve and Kim Baber
 5/12 **Margaret Angela Hunt** Daughter of Linda & James Litzinger
 5/14 **Jayne Ann Smith** Daughter of Jeanette McGee
 5/14 **Michael Bransford Burns** Son of Emily and Mike Burns
 5/14 **Robin Lee Webb** Daughter of Ricky and Sharon Blakeman
 5/15 **Olivia Faith Higgs** Daughter of Wesley and Beverly Higgs
 5/15 **Parker Blair** Son of Bill and Jennifer Blair
 5/15 **Samantha Blair** Daughter of Bill and Jennifer Blair
 5/15 **Robert Riley** Son of Robert & Linda Riley
 5/16 **Lisa Jean Johnson** Daughter of Sam and Doris Strader
 5/18 **Christopher Frederick Lenz** Son of Mark and Karen Lenz
 5/19 **Denise Brantigan Engdahl** Daughter of Maureen & Richard Brantigan
 5/19 **Terry Hayes** Son of Patricia Morgan
 5/19 **Dillon Andrew Scott Waldrige** Son of Meredith Waldrige
 5/21 **Colby Giles** Son of Debbie and Robert Giles
 5/23 **Michael Patrick Randall Morgeson** Son of Stacy & Michael Morgeson
 5/23 **John Martin Robinson** Son of Pat and Jim Robinson
 5/23 **Howard "Jay" Joseph Crim** Son of Becky & Keith LaVey & Howard Crim
 5/23 **Stephen Booher** Son of Mary McCormick
 5/24 **Tracey Lynn VanHoose** Daughter of Karolyn and Sam Guy
 5/25 **Nathan Charles Stamper** Son of Charlie and Missy Stamper
 5/27 **P. J. Phillip Duncan** Son of Donna Breeze
 5/27 **Keich Allen Newby** Son of Sharon Newby
 5/27 **Adam Harold Cave** Son of Mark Cave and Krystal Landers
 5/29 **Liz Ragle** Daughter of Mitch and Sandy Ragle
 5/31 **Scarlett Lynn Miller** Daughter of Ronald and Ruby Miller
 5/31 **Matthew "Beau" Salsman** Son of Ray and Vicki Salsman
 5/31 **David Scott Fine** Son of Aida and David Fine

"It has been said, 'time heals all wounds.' I do not agree. The wounds remain. In time, the mind, protecting its sanity, covers them with scar tissue and the pain lessens. But it is never gone."

~Rose Kennedy

Our Children Forever Loved and Remembered

MAY REMBERANCE DATES

- 5/1 **Jason Davis** Son of Curt Davis
5/1 **Bridget Elizabeth Kolles** Daughter of Greg and Mary Kolles
5/1 **Christina Leigh Kolles** Daughter of Greg and Mary Kolles
5/2 **Robert Woods Templeton** Son of Susie Templeton
5/4 **William Elliott Sommer** Son of Tim and Rita Sommer
5/4 **Stan Caudill** Son of Tom and Patricia Tschop
5/5 **Dusty Riggs** Son of Sharon Bellows
5/6 **Hannah Meagan Landers** Daughter of Michelle and Richard Landers
5/7 **Jayne Ann Smith** Daughter of Jeanette McGee
5/9 **Missy Fields** Daughter of David and Janie Fields
5/10 **John Harold Putman** Son of John and Harriet Putman
5/11 **Janene Carpenter** Daughter of Linda Carpenter
5/11 **Bill Mahan III** Son of Bill and the late Susie Mahan
5/11 **Jacob Scott Harrod** Son of Mike and Cindy Harrod
5/12 **Colby Giles** Son of Debbie and Robert Giles
5/14 **Brian Paul Staats** Son of Juanita and Paul Staats
5/14 **Eugenia L. Morton** Daughter of Eugene & Joyce Morton
5/18 **Heidi Allen Hunt** Daughter of Judy B. Horne
5/19 **Robert Patrick Dehner** Son of Tim and Connie Dehner
5/20 **Tyler Benjamin Johnston** Son of Joe and Andi Johnston
5/20 **Jim Taylor, II** Son of Dinah and Jim Taylor
5/22 **Mark Romond** Son of Jan and Ed Romond
5/23 **Kimberly Ann Holder** Daughter of David and Sondra Holder
5/25 **Adeline McReynolds** Daughter of Jackson and Theresa McReynolds
5/26 **Erin Renee Glass** Daughter of Martha and Wesley Glass
5/28 **Garrett Witt** Son of David and Linda Witt
5/28 **Timothy Ray Elkin** Son of Betty and the late Billy Elkin
5/29 **Denise Brantigan Engdahl** Daughter of Maureen & Richard Brantigan
5/29 **Jonathan Brewer** Son of Teresa and Don Bush

A Safe Place

“The Compassionate Friends is about transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope. It takes people out of the isolation society imposes on the bereaved and lets them express their grief naturally. With the shedding of tears, healing comes. And the newly bereaved get to see people who have survived and are learning to live and love again.” —Simon Stephens, founder of The Compassionate Friends

If we have omitted your child, misspelled your child's name, or listed incorrect dates, please accept our apologies and call Janie Fields at (859) 881-1991 to correct the information. Call any of our telephone friends if you are having a hard time on these days. We truly understand your pain; for we, too, remember our own children.

Our Children Forever Loved and Remembered

JUNE BIRTH DATES

- 6/1 **McKenna Brooke Hatchett** Daughter of Tim and Melissa Hatchett
 6/1 **Mark Davis** Son of Harold and Jeannie Davis
 6/1 **DeAnna Marie Friend** Daughter of Barbara Friend
 6/2 **Robby Matthew Oesch** Son of Candy Oesch
 6/3 **Victor M. Martina** Mar Son of Don and Judy Martina
 6/4 **Chasity Marie Green Leach** Daughter of Larry Leach
 6/6 **Julie Ann Kilpatrick** Sister of Roy Stewart
 6/7 **Nicholas Alan Norris** Son of Greg and Joanne Norris
 6/8 **Rylee Jorja McFarland** Daughter of Joy and Chris McFarland
 6/9 **Brenda Nicole Smith** Daughter of Carla and Kenneth Smith
 6/9 **Brian Jason Hardin** Son of Richard and Sue Hardin
 6/10 **Tressa Parsons Adams** Daughter of Linda and Bobby Parsons
 6/11 **Donald Ray Bingham** Daughter of Barbara Bingham
 6/12 **Cynthia "Cyndy" Ellen Crim** Daughter of Becky & Keith LaVey and Howard Crim
 6/12 **Gary James Travis Burke** Nephew of Addie Waugh
 6/13 **Thomas Allan Woodrum "Tommy"** Son of Mimi & Thomas Woodrum
 6/14 **Becky Fister** Daughter of David and Mariam Fister
 6/14 **Erin Renee Glass** Daughter of Martha and Wesley Glass
 6/14 **Tim Sizemore** Son of T. C. Sizemore
 6/14 **Jonathan Walker Mayberry** Son of Jonathan & Stephanie Mayberry
 6/16 **Steve Elliot** Son of Nancy and Carroll Elliot
 6/20 **John Martin Laswell** Dec Son of Frances Shaver
 6/21 **Juan Pirir Cux** Son of Donna and Dave Uckotter
 6/22 **Timothy Ray Elkin** Son of Betty and the late Billy Elkin
 6/24 **Thomas E. Masters II** Son of Bess Masters
 6/25 **Sharon Davidson** Daughter of Melvin and Sonia Davidson
 6/25 **Jacob Daniel Akin** Son of Becky Akin
 6/26 **Julie Dawn Hall** Daughter of Sharon and Don Hall
 6/28 **Darius Xavier Jerome Young** Son of Deborah Young
 6/29 **Phillip Old** Jul Son of Priscilla Old
 6/30 **Christopher Everett** Grandson of Tawana Everett

Just a Breath Away

Look for me in springtime as raindrops fill the air. In the splendor of the rainbow you'll find my presence there. You will find me in the fragrance of April's sweet perfume drifting through the clover on a sultry day in June. An August day will find me upon the summer breeze on the distant sound of the thunder in the gently swaying trees. In the golden fields of harvest is where I can be found as autumn time approaches and leaves comes tumbling down. In the wintertime when days are short and chill is in the air just look into a moonlit night you'll find me lingering there. When the setting sun has gone away and shadows fill the night, when the cloak of darkness lifts its veil I'll be your morning light. So when you feel discouraged get on your knees and pray. You'll feel me there beside you I'm just a breath away.

Our Children Forever Loved and Remembered

JUNE REMEMBRANCE DATES

- 6/2 **Spencer David Turner** Son of Kathy and Danny Turner
6/4 **Missy Ann Tomblin** Daughter of Gail Tomblin
6/5 **Luke Bellue**, Son of Andrea Mills
6/7 **Kimberly Sue Toye** Daughter of Gail Toye
6/7 **Ashley Riggs** Son of Sharon Bellows
6/7 **Colin Spencer** Son of Stephanie Spencer
6/7 **Carrie Elizabeth Griffin** Daughter of David and Debbie Griffin
6/8 **Robby Matthew Oesch** Son of Candy Oesch
6/8 **Rylee Jorja McFarland** Daughter of Joy and Chris McFarland
6/9 **Jonathan Hepburn** Jul Son of Jo Hepburn
6/9 **Jan Cecile Richardson** Daughter of Jim and Jean Richardson
6/14 **Dawn Chrystine Beckett** Daughter of Mike and Lynn Lindsey
6/15 **David Scott Fine** Son of Aida and David Fine
6/15 **Justin Branham** Son of Ruthie and James Willoughby
6/16 **Gary Ryan Delanhoussaye** Son of Glynn and Catherine Delanhoussaye
6/17 **Brandon Holbrook** Son of Linda M. Holbrook
6/18 **Richard (Rick) Allen** Son of Richard and Linda Allen
6/19 **Paul R. Criswell, Jr.** Son of Georgia and Paul Criswell
6/20 **Mark Grimes** Son of Betty and Steve Grimes
6/22 **Jacob Issac Gibson** Son of Veronica and Darrell Gibson
6/22 **Spencer David Turner** Son of Kathy and Danny Turner
6/23 **Fred “Lance” L. Murphy III** Son of Patty Murphy, Brother of Stacy Hoskins
6/27 **Edward Charles Cambell** Son of Martha E. Stone
6/28 **Davey Allison Dunavant** Son of Anita and J. C. Harris
6/30 **Katherine “Kate” Tudor** Daughter of Suzanne Tudor & Lewis Perry

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 quite birds in circle flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not think of me as gone.
I am still with you - in each new dawn.

Meeting Information

Lexington

First Tuesday of Every Month
6:30 p.m.—8:30 p.m.
Hospice of the Bluegrass
2321 Alexandria Drive
Lexington, Kentucky

Meeting Format

Doors open one-half hour before meeting times to provide the opportunity to visit with old friends and acknowledge new ones. Please plan to arrive early so the meeting can begin on time.

Winchester

Third Tuesday of Every Month
7:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.
Hospice East
417 Shoppers Drive
Winchester, Kentucky

When you run out of strength
and you want to give up
because it's just too much to bear...
I want to remind you, my precious friend,
that you have what it takes inside...
extraordinary courage that may not ROAR
but it doesn't cower and hide.

It's the quiet voice inside you that says,
"Tomorrow I'll try again."
It's the courage to keep on going...
to see things through to the end.

You are not defined by this moment in time.
You are not what has happened to you
It's the way you choose to respond that matters
and what you decide to do.
Courage is not the absence of fear,
but a powerful choice we make...
the choice to move forward with PURPOSE
. . . regardless of what it takes

It's the courage that's found in ordinary women
who are HEROES in their own way,
exhibiting strength and fortitude

Your Compassionate Friend

By: Steven L. Channing, The Compassionate Friends, Winnipeg, Canada

I can tell by that look friend, that you need to talk,
So come take my hand and let's go for a walk.
See, I'm not like the others - I won't shy away,
Because I want to hear what you've got to say.
Your child has died and you need to be heard,
But they don't want to hear a single word.
They tell you your child's "with God", so be strong.
They say all the "right" things that somehow seem
wrong.
They're just hurting for you and trying to say,
They'd give anything to help take your pain away.
But they're struggling with feelings they can't un-
derstand
So forgive them for not offering a helping hand.
I'll walk in your shoes for more than a mile.
I'll wait while you cry and be glad if you smile.
I won't criticize you or judge you or scorn,

in life's challenges every day...
Valiant woman of exceptional courage
with enduring power to cope...
taking each problem one day at a time
and never giving up HOPE.

We're encouraged by the faith of others
to survive and overcome,
with the courage to say, "I may be down...
but the battle is not done!"

For the WOMAN of COURAGE is a winner...
regardless of what she loses
She displays amazing beauty and strength
with the attitude she chooses.

She gives herself the permission she needs...
to feel disappointed or sad.
But then she empowers herself with faith...
to focus on good things...not bad

Her story is one of gentle strength
reminding us all once more...
Steel is sometimes covered in velvet
and...
COURAGE doesn't always roar.



I'll just stay and listen 'til your night turns to
morn.
Yes, the journey is hard and unbearably long,
And I know that you think that you're not quite
that strong.
So just take my hand 'cause I've got time to spare,
And I know how it hurts, friend, for I have been
there.
See, I owe a debt you can help me repay
For not long ago, I was helped the same way.
As I stumbled and fell thru a world so unreal,
So believe when I say that I know how you feel.
I don't look for praise or financial gain
And I'm sure not the kind who gets joy out of pain.
I'm just a strong shoulder who'll be here 'til the
end-
I'll be your Compassionate Friend.

Letter to A Friend

Grief is hard on friendships, but it doesn't have to be. Sometimes, all it takes is a little honesty between friends. If we gently and lovingly explain what we need from the relationship during our time of grief, and what we are willing to do in return, we can turn even a lukewarm friendship into something special. Share the following letter with a friend over lunch.

You'll both be glad you did.

“Dear Friend,

Please be patient with me; I need to grieve in my own way and in my own time. Please don't take away my grief or try to fix my pain. The best thing you can do is listen to me and let me cry on your shoulder. Don't be afraid to cry with me. Your tears will tell me how much you care.

“Please forgive me if I seem insensitive to your problems. I feel depleted and drained, like an empty vessel, with nothing left to give. Please let me express my feelings and talk about my memories. Feel free to share your own stories of my loved one with me. I need to hear them.

“Please understand why I must turn a deaf ear to criticism or tired clichés. I can't handle another person telling me that time heals all wounds. Please don't try to find the 'right' words to say to me; there's nothing you can say to take away the hurt. What I need are hugs, not words.

“Please don't push me to do things I'm not ready to do, or feel hurt if I seem withdrawn. This is a necessary part of my recovery. Please don't stop calling me. You might think you're respecting my privacy, but to me it feels like abandonment.

“Please don't expect me to be the same as I was before. I've been through a traumatic experience and I'm a different person. Please accept me for who I am today.

“In return for your loving support I promise that, after I've worked through my grief, I will be a more loving, caring, sensitive and compassionate friend - because I have learned from the best.

Love,

“(your name)”

Grief Nights By Doug Parrish

Four o'clock in the morning “AGAIN” and this disease called Grief has awakened me once more. You never know when it's going to turn on – that movie picture show in your mind.

There are a lot of symptoms of grief including depression, despair, confusion, anger and loneliness. Then there's the why's. Why me? Why did this happen? Why did GOD let this happen? Why now? And, of course, Why my child?

Grief has no known cure; only God and time will make it easier to live with. For me, I think any loss of a loved one is devastating, but the loss of a child takes so much more out of you. The years, hours or moments you had to nurture that child are lost in an instant. Your dreams and aspirations for your child gone in a moment of time. It is so senseless for a young life to be taken from you before what we as parents would say “before their time.”

Now all that's left are the loving memories, the pitter-patter of little feet running around the house carefree and so enjoyable. Graduation Day and the pride billowing up inside you like a cloud in the sky. Memories of hugs and kisses and “I love you, Mom and Dad!” And, of course, “We love you too!” So, I say to all bereaved persons, hold on to those precious memories and keep them in your heart. Talk about the good ones and the love shared between you and your child.

Take time to live, thank God and pray for each other. It's not easy but we will survive.

Mother Love Author Unknown

Long. Long ago so I have been told two angels once met on the streets paved with gold, “By the stars in your crown,” said the one to the other, “I see that on earth you, too were a mother.” “And by the blue-tinted halo you wear—You too have known sorrow and deepest despair.”

“Ah, yes” the first replied, “I once had a son, A sweet little lad, full of laughter and fun. But tell of your child,” “Oh, I know I was blest From the moment I first held him close to my breast. And my heart almost burst with the joy of that day.”

“Ah, yes,” sighed the other, “I felt the same way.” The first one continued, “The first steps he took So eager and breathless—the sweet startled look Which came over his face—he trusted me so.”

“Ah, yes,” said the other, “How well do I know.” But soon he had grown to a tall handsome boy So stalwart and kind — and it gave me such joy To have him just walk down the street by my side.”

“Ah, yes,” said the other, “I felt the same pride.”

PANACHÉ by Keith Swett

Joy is public but pain is always private. We do not comprehend the pain of another. Good friends commented that they wished that woman would get over her dead baby. They’re not bad people. They certainly didn’t realize they were offending my wife and me. After all, we had lost an adult son; and my wife rarely speaks Matt’s name. I, on the other hand, tell humorous stories about Matt to reinforce Shakespeare’s message almost daily. Because I laugh, people don’t see the void in my life. You see I realize that there will never, never be any new stories. Never is beyond my comprehension; I realize that I won’t tell new stories today, not tomorrow, not the day after. Then my comprehension stops.

So how much does it hurt? It hurts as much as the first day but not as often. It hurts so much that I forget whom I am talking to at a wrestling tournament. People think I’m senile, but Matt wrestled here and I’m seeing matches that are ten years old.

It is January, a couple of days after Matt’s death or maybe four years and a couple of days. But time is suspended and I’m lost. Theo has no idea how much he reminds me of Matt. Most days I could watch him forever. The way he runs, and works, and laughs take me back to ’97. Both Theo and Matt refuse to grow up. They’ll be 12 forever. I usually ignore physical pain, refusing to be sensible and therefore limited. Sometimes the shoulder or hip wins and for several days nothing moves. I crawl down inside myself and wait for it to be better. Most days I laugh at life and taunt the pain that would be my master. Some days pain wins. If I don’t seem to be myself maybe I’m not with you at all. I’m sledding at the lake park, climbing trees, singing at the library, watching Grease.

I’ll be back soon. I just need to visit Matt awhile.

“How often I shielded and spared him from pain
And

when he for others was so cruelly slain,
When they crucified him — and they spat in his face, how gladly would I have hung in his place.”
A moment of silence — “Oh, then you are she
The Mother of Christ,” and she fell on one knee.
But the blessed one raised her up, drawing her near,
And kissed from the cheek of the woman, a tear.

“Tell me the name of the son you loved so,
That I may share with you your grief and your woe.”

She lifted her eyes, looking straight at the other.
“He was Judas Iscariot. I am his mother.”



Hope

Hope shows up at the door of our heart in so many wonderful and different ways, and it always seems to know when we need it most. A caring, tender smile. A shared word of encouragement. A butterfly landing on the windowsill. The soft rain whispering a song. The bright moon lighting up the dark evening sky. The rainbow following a storm.

Hope. We have to be open to it being there in order to see it more clearly. When we are feeling lonely, hope reminds us that we are never alone. When our tears won't stop falling, hope sends us a sunbeam to dry our tears. When we are so tired of struggling, hope gives our weary minds a rest by allowing us to fall asleep.

Hope. It is our gift. It is our miracle. It is our reason for holding on when we want to quit! -- Clara Hinton

"Hope isn't always being cheerful and filled with laughter. Hope is a still assuredness that all will be well." —C. Hinton

When loss takes place in our lives, we feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders as well as on our hearts. It feels like if we

move one step the wrong way, our world is going to completely come tumbling down. Life hurts so bad when we lose someone we love!

Trust in the fact that there will be pockets of time when you can find some relief and peace from all of the pain and heaviness of heart. Be sure to look to the heavens each day and be reminded of Who created the great expanse.

Listen to the song of the birds, and be reminded that there will be a day when a song will return to your heart. Look at the evening stars twinkling in the sky, and remember that there is light to lead you down the path of the unknown.

Hope. Continue to hope and believe. You are much stronger than you think. When you remind yourself that your Shepherd is always near, that will give peace and strength when you grow weary along the way. Comfort and new strength will come to you when you anchor to hope! -C. Hinton

"Never give up - ever! Reach out your hand and there will be help to pull you across the chasm of despair. That help is called hope, and it will never abandon you!"

A Mother's Day Wish from Heaven

By Jody Seilheimer From "Heartfelt Words" In memory of her son Cody

Dear Mr. Hallmark,

I am writing to you from heaven and though it must appear a rather strange idea, I see everything from here. I just popped in to visit your stores to find a card, a card of love for my mother as this day for her is hard. There must be some mistake, I thought. I saw every card you could imagine except I could not find a card from a child who lives in heaven.

She is still a mother too, no matter where I reside. I had to leave, she understands, but oh the tears she's cried. I thought that, if I wrote you, you would come to know that, though I live in heaven now, I still love my mother so. She talks with me and dreams with me; we still share laughter too; memories are our way of speaking now. Would you see what you could do?

My mother carries me in her heart; her tears she hides from sight. She writes poems to honor me, sometimes far into the night. She plants flowers in my garden; there my living memory dwells. She writes to other grieving parents, trying to ease their pain as well.

So, you see, Mr. Hallmark, though I no longer live on earth, I must find a way to remind her of her wondrous worth. She needs to be honored and remembered too, just as the children on earth will do.

Thank you, Mr. Hallmark. I know you'll do your best. I have done all I can do; to you I'll leave the rest. Find a way to tell her how much she means to me until I can do it for myself when she joins me in eternity.

Fathers in Grief, A Paradox for Today's Male

The loss of your child can be crippling and leaves deep scars. It changes who we are and how we look at life and how we relate with the world. Five or six years out is still early in the spectrum of child loss but close to the point where positive rebuilding can begin. One thing that I have discovered that helps pull you out of the canyon of despair is compassion for others. It is in giving that we receive and in healing that we are healed. In the first few years, it is hard to even help yourself much less others and we mechanically maintain, weep a lot and lick our wounds while clinging desperately to everything of our child and, in secret, wish to join them. We rejoin the real world at our own time and it happens when it is right for us. Everyone's journey is different but what remains the same is the huge void that is left in our lives. How we fill it is up to us. I believe we need to fill it with something positive for others that creates a legacy of good in our child's name. We now become their legacy and we substantiate our child's life by the way we live ours.

In our “modern day” society, it is especially difficult for fathers to grieve openly, caught in a catch 22 of how to express the deep pain we are experiencing. Men don't cry, men do not emote, men do not hug (maybe at the funerals), men don't go to support groups, men don't call in sick because they are screaming inside; we are the man of the family. Fathers are the fix it guys, the protector, the strength and the rock the family needs for support. More times than not people will ask a father “How is your wife doing? This must be extremely hard for her.”

The modern male is now given (by women and therapists) license to show emotions, to cry, scream, hug and express their deepest emotions and fears; to let it out. The irony of this is that if he does emote and the family has never seen this behavior, it is taken as a sign of weakness and the spouse and other family members feel they have lost their safety net, their rock of support, and feel even more helpless and rudderless on this journey of pain. If this happens, he may again “clam up” to help with his family and deal with his own pain later. He finds that “letting it out” is an axiom of sophistry and, in doing so, he feels he is letting his family down. Indeed a paradox for the wanna-be sensitive Dad. Most men cry alone in their cars on the way to work and they explain that the red eyes are due to allergies or a late night. When my father died when I was age 14, my Mom told me I was the man of the family now. I did not cry. I did not grieve. It was not until years later when my losses became overwhelming that I did finally let it out and express my emotions for the loss of my father. It has been 16 years now since Kelly died and I still cry with my wife when we feel our loss together or even when I hear a special song like “Wind Beneath My Wings” and I do not care who is present. You love hard, you grieve hard and it is supposed to hurt. When you recognize your own pain and express it, you automatically become more empathetic to others in similar pain and can help relieve theirs. Heck, now I cry at hallmark card commercials. I can't help it.

When people tell us to find closure, or move on and don't dwell on it, we can but not how they think we should. We find closure in what will never be, let go of the what ifs, the shoulda-woulda-couldas and move on with the knowledge that our children are forever by our side, only in a new relationship. We live in one sphere of existence, our loved one who has died in another, but with faith, undying love and the desire that we can connect at the seam where our two worlds meet. Love never dies. In America we are allowed a few weeks to “get over it” and get back on track. The dead are wrapped up neatly, so to speak, and put away and their names unspoken. I find this totally unacceptable. It has been almost 16 years and I still talk about Kelly every day and always will. We will always be bereaved parents but we will not always be experiencing the pangs of grief. Like arthritis, we learn to live with it the rest of our lives and also realize that we shall still have flare ups of pain and discomfort as we move on through the years.



Memorial and Veteran's Days

By Betty Ewart, Editor

Perhaps this year, more than some past years, we will be aware of Memorial Day and Veterans Day. Not a day goes by that we don't hear about the death of one of our courageous men and women in the armed forces in Iraq or Afghanistan. Are you old enough to remember the Gold Star Mothers? Or to remember the Blue Stars in windows during the Second World War. If a family had a son or daughter in the service, they hung a flag with a blue star in the window. If the person died, the flag was exchanged for one with a Gold Star and the mother was called a Gold Star Mother. Over 250,000 died so that means that many mothers were mourning! A staggering thought, isn't it? Some families even had more than one die—one family even had 5 sons killed. There are many mothers and fathers and grandparents and siblings too today who bear the same burden and travel the same grief journey. Although we did not have any star to put in our window or special emblem to wear, our children are remembered in many ways, gardens, memorials, scholarships, research projects etc. We certainly remember our children on Memorial Day too. Just as the loved ones of those killed in wars go to their graves and to monuments in their honor and trace their names and remember them, we go to our cemeteries and leave flowers and remember, with love, our child, grandchild or sibling. Their example to us is a source of comfort and their memory stays with us forever.

Humor and Survival

By Mary Cleckley

Recently, my daughter paid me one of the highest compliments a bereaved parent can hope to receive. Having made a change in her primary care physician, her new doctor was taking her history and he reached the place where he inquired about her parents' health. He started with me, and my daughter just started laughing and said, “You're not going to believe her history.” With that she ran off my litany of woes, both past and present. Her doctor asked if I had gone out looking for things to happen to me. She said she assured him that wasn't the case and she added, “In spite of all of it, she has never lost her sense of humor.”

Now, I consider that a compliment because I'm sure there were times she couldn't have said that. I tell you this because, when one of our children dies, we seem to lose other things, as well. One of them seems to be our sense of humor. We are hard put to find things that tickle our funny bone. Life becomes tedious and surviving becomes a deadly serious business. After a few months, when something strikes you as humorous and you laugh, you'll find that the old devil guilt makes his presence known.

If this happened to just a few bereaved parents, you would probably think it was somehow warranted guilt but how do you account for it happening to practically every bereaved parent? Most of us were good parents who never intentionally did anything that warranted the feeling of guilt, except maybe loving our children too much.

Next time you're tempted to laugh, go ahead! Laugh long and hard. You'll feel better after you do, for, eventually, you come to realize that laughing does not mean you're “all over” your child's death. It just means you needed some relief from all that pain that comes with grieving. Those of us who allow humor to become a part of our lives again survive better. If someone nearby hears you laughing and attributes it to problems with your mental health, just tell them that that's mental health, all right, but it's no problem!

Be gentle with yourself as you grieve. You're not getting a grade on your efforts; there are no Oscars for “Best Performance as a Griever.” There is no easy, quick way out of a grief-storm.

-Lynn Eib

A Mother is Forever From THE SLENDER THREAD

This Mother's Day will trouble you—it can't be otherwise since your son and daughter, too, won't be there by your side. They won't be there to bake a cake or bring you cards and flowers, nor can they walk into your home to brighten lonely hours. The memories you have of them I know will make you smile, and you'll remember all the joys that made your lives worthwhile. And so on Mother's Day this year and in every other, remember they're connected still by love to you, their mother.



Celebrate Spring

The ancient Greeks explained the seasons through the loss of a child. Nature's daughter was forced to spend half the year in Hades. Winter reflects the mother's pain. Barren, cold, hopeless winter. Immediately after our children's death we exist rather than live, we hibernate rather than engage, we survive rather than thrive. Our world is empty and bleak, lacking even a hint of hope. We stumble blindly from task to task unable to focus, unable to plan, unable to imagine a better time. Pain and Death reign supreme. But....Nature's daughter came home in spring. The mother's joy is reflected in blossoms, buds and rebirth. What was once barren now thrives. I'm not crazy. Matt only walks through the door in my dreams. But with hard work and the support of friends Matt is a positive, joyous part of my everyday life. Others have walked this path before and found a way to celebrate their child's life. Their success can be copied. I think other Bereaved Parents are the key to my celebrating Matt's life rather than living in that endless winter of despair. Oh, winter still comes. I still slip on the ice and fall into that bottomless pit, but I know spring is coming. I know that no matter how harsh the day is, it too will pass. Children are a gift. Our lives changed with their birth. It is only natural that our lives change with their death. Now Matt can come to me (at 2 or 10 or 20), always laughing, always excited, always happy. With him comes spring and joy and hope. It is spring and I open my arms wide as I can to embrace all that is coming. If I ride a bike, pick some flowers, fish in a creek or walk through the park, I know Matt is with me and I celebrate. Invite your child to share their favorite activities this spring. Using faith, hope and love, they will rush back to your arms and the whole world will celebrate spring.



I Am A Man By J. J. Jim Brown

I hunt, fish, drive a fast car, play football, basketball and baseball. I am tough!! I went to war. I am the toughest two-legged mammal alive. I am a MAN! While our son was still in the hospital, I cried alone so my wife wouldn't see me. At home, I cried alone in the shower, in the back yard, anywhere but in front of my wife. I had to be a rock. After our son died, I helped support my wife in the best way I knew how. I was a rock for her to lean on. I was invincible. The rock caused more trouble than good. Soon we were not talking or getting along with each other and I didn't understand why. My wife became angry. She told me, "You act like you don't love JJ" (because I didn't appear to be grieving). The rock became mush. I then realized what I had done. I had played MAN instead of just being a father and a husband. You see, a mother doesn't need a rock with no emotions. She needed me to show her I did indeed love our son and that I was hurting after his death and that I did cry. My wife comforted me that night after we talked. I cried; she cried. We both needed it. I found out that it was good for me to cry and let my wife help me. I am a MAN. I am a grieving man who now does not mind crying in front of anyone. I cry for myself and for our son.