



The Compassionate Friends

Quad City Area Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

December 2021

Volume XXXIV, Number 10

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Letter writing was an honored practice in my family of origin. I remember my mom sitting at her desk writing letters to family members, and I remember letters arriving from Arkansas with my grandmother's distinctive handwriting.

When I left home to go to college, I was expected to write my parents a letter every week. For 25 years, I did. For the past two years I have written a weekly letter to an aunt after she moved far away from her friends.

In *The Christmas Box*, by Richard Paul Evans, a grieving mother helps process her grief by writing a letter each year at Christmas to her child who died. As we grieve over the loss of our child there may be things we wish to say and express. Writing a letter can help grief by releasing feelings and expressing emotions that are hard to share out loud. You can also write what you wish you could tell your child if he/she was here. Some of these prompts might help you get started. My best memory of you is ... Now that you are gone I feel ... I really wish that... What I miss the most is ... I wish I could tell you... I'm so angry that ... Sometimes I think about... What I learned from you is ...I hope that...

What do you do with the letters once you have written them? You could save them to read later when you are further along in your grief. You could share them with close family members, but make sure it is someone you judge can gently handle your honest feelings. You could read them out loud as though you are reading to your child. You can tear them up burn them.

The process of writing may be more meaningful than what you do with your letters when you are done, but that will be different for each of us. Writing letters can be a vehicle to label your feelings, voice them without judgment, and be genuine about our thoughts and feelings. The process could be one more useful tool to help you process your grief.



Sincerely,

Jerry and Carol Webb



Reflections

How can you help me this holiday season?

Remember:

The greatest gift is sharing memories.

Let me know when you are hurting or missing them too.

The worst is thinking I am alone in my grief.

Help me to honor them in some meaningful way.

Allow me to cry, laugh or leave when I need to.

Allow traditions to change to accommodate the missing space.

Allow me to say no to invitations

Allow me to change my mind often.

Remember that much of what I do is a reflection of my grief not my feelings about the holiday or my friends and families.

Though I am hurting I still love and care.

Tanya Lord thegrieftoolbox.com

Some of the most comforting words in the universe are 'me too.' That moment when you find out that your struggle is also someone else's struggle. That you're not alone and that others have been down the same road.

Rita Ghatourey

Grief is never linear. We all learn that hard lesson. I remember thinking that if I could just be "good" and take steps 1, 2, and 3, then I would end up at step 4. And then 5 and 6 and bingo! I'd be there. I would be in the place where it didn't hurt to take a deep breath or cook a Christmas turkey or see a child who looked like mine walking down the street. That didn't happen, of course. Step 4 led back to step 2 and then leapt to 5 and circled back to step 1 again. Unlike the fox trot, the dance of grief makes up the steps as it goes along, never mind who its partner is.

Carolyn Pogue - TCF/Canada

Happy, Merry, and Oh So Sad - It's that time of the year, the holiday: Thanksgiving, Hanukah, Christmas, and New Years. For many these holidays brought so much joy prior to the loss of a child (children), now they bring confusion. The first year can be the hardest along with the other "firsts," but even for long-time grievers the pain the holiday season brings can be brutal. As the holiday season begins, the memories of holidays past rush to the forefront of our hearts and thoughts. This time can be difficult for our family and friends. They want to help, but don't know what to do, so it's up to you to convey your needs. Do you keep old traditions, or do you change and start new? The most important message I can give you is do what you think is right for you and your family. There is no wrong or right way to get through the holidays. Do what you can and say no to what you can't.

Sheila - TCF Providence RI

*Grievors use a very simple calendar.
Before and After.*

www.griefdiaries.com

If you know someone who has lost a child ...and you're afraid to mention them because you think you might make them sad by reminding them that they died, they didn't forget they died. You're not reminding them. What you're reminding them of is that you remember that they lived, and

Love Gifts



As parents and other family members find healing and hope within the group or from this newsletter, they often wish to make a **Love Gift** to help with the work of our chapter. This is a way to remember a beloved child, and to help other parents who mourn the loss of their child.

Thank you to:

Doug & Connie Brock — in memory of our son Jon and grandson Elijah.

Donations are used to provide postage for the newsletter and mailings to newly bereaved families. Some of the love gifts are used for materials to share with first time attendees at our meetings or to purchase books for our library. Our thanks to the many families who provide love gifts so that the work of reaching out to bereaved parents and families can continue. **If you would like to send a donation or love gift, please send it or to our Chapter Treasurer, Doug Scott, 6550 Madison Street, Davenport, Iowa 52806.** Checks should be made out to *The Compassionate Friends*. **Your gifts are tax deductible. (This chapter of The Compassionate Friends would be a suitable charity for receiving your Required Minimum Distribution from your IRA account.)**

Contact the Editors

If you read or write an article or poem which might be helpful to other bereaved parents and would like to share it...

If you move and would like to continue receiving the newsletter, please send us your new address. Because we send the newsletter bulk rate, the post office will not forward it...

If you know someone you think would benefit from receiving the newsletter,

send his/her/their name and address...

If you prefer to no longer receive the newsletter or if you prefer to receive this newsletter via email...

Please contact:

Jerry and Carol Webb

390 Arbor Ridge,
Benton Harbor, MI
49022 or email

CarolynPWebb@gmail.com.



The Compassionate Friends Worldwide

Candle Lighting on the second 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 12th, 2021, 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.



The Compassionate Friends National Newsletter

A complimentary issue of the National Newsletter is sent to bereaved families who contact the office at The Compassionate Friends, Inc., 48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808, Wixom, MI 48393, (877)969-0010.

email:

NationalOffice@compassionatefriends.org

Website: www.compassionatefriends.org

Visit the **sibling resource** page at www.compassionatefriends.org. It is also available to read online without charge.



e-Newsletter Now

Available! An e-Newsletter is now available from the National Office! The monthly e-Newsletter contains notes and happenings of interest to all TCFers. To subscribe to the e-Newsletter, visit the TCF National Website home page and click on the Register for TCF e-Newsletter Link. This newsletter is available to everyone.

About The Compassionate Friends

The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child. Founded in England in 1969, the first U.S. chapter was organized in 1972. Since then, 635 chapters have been established. The current Quad City Chapter was formed in 1987 (<http://www.quadcitytcf.org>).

TCF National Office

48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808

Wixom, MI 48393

Toll Free (877)969-0010

TCF National Web site:

www.compassionatefriends.org

Mission Statement

The mission of The Compassionate Friends Quad City Area Chapter is that when a child dies at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

Vision Statement

The vision statement of The Compassionate Friends is that everyone who needs us will find us, and everyone who finds us will be helped.

Printed Resources for Grieving Parents & Siblings

TCF Online Support Community	TCF's 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 sessions last an hour and have trained moderators present. For more information, visit www.compassionatefriends.org and click "Online Support" in the "Resources" column.
TCF's Grief Related Resources	There are resources on elements of grief with well-known experts in the field. To view the resources, go to https://www.opentohope.com/tv/ .
TCF National Magazine	<i>We Need Not Walk Alone</i> is available to read online without charge. Go to www.compassionatefriends.org and review the options at the top of the page. TCF e-Newsletter is also available from the National Office to subscribe to the e-Newsletter, visit the TCF National Website home page and click on the Register for TCF e-Newsletter link.
Grief Materials	Looking for a particular grief book? Look no further than the Centering Corporation, the official recommended grief resource center of The Compassionate Friends. With the largest selection of grief-related resources in the United States, Centering Corporation will probably have just about anything you're looking for — or they'll be able to tell you where to find it. Call Centering Corporation for a catalog at 402.553.1200 or visit their website at www.centering.org . When ordering, be sure to mention you are with The Compassionate Friends and all shipping charges will be waived.
Amazon.com	When making a purchase from Amazon.com, enter through the link on the home page of TCF national website and a portion of the purchase price is donated to further the mission of TCF. This donation applies to all purchases made at Amazon.com.
Previous Newsletter Editions	Looking for more articles or previous copies of this newsletter? Go to www.bethany-qc.org for copies of the last several years of The Quad City Chapter of TCF-QC Chapter Newsletter in Adobe Acrobat format.
Alive Alone	A newsletter for bereaved parents whose only or all children are deceased. A self-help network and publication to promote healing and communication can be reached at www.alivealone.org or alivealone@bright.net .
Bereaved Parents' Magazine	Online articles and poems. Reminder emails are sent notifying readers when new issues are available. https://bereavedparentsusa.org .
Our Newsletter	Published one to three times per year, when there is content to make a balanced issue. It usually contains 30 pages of personal stories and updates, poetry, subsequent birth announcements, and any new topical articles and information. Currently it is being distributed electronically (PDF), but a printout is available to anyone without email access. To request a sample copy, please email Jean Kollantai at climb@climb-support.org . Include your full name, your location, and your reason

Remember Our Children and Make Them a Part of this Difficult Time of Year

Christmas has always been one of my favorite holidays. The songs, the twinkly lights, the spirit of kindness that seemed to flow so easily – I loved it all. And when my first child, my daughter Hudson, was born just a few weeks before Christmas, it only added more enchantment to an already magical time. But we enjoyed the magic of that holiday with her only twice.

In the spring of 2010, when she was just 17 months old, Hudson died of a sudden, severe infection. Our first Christmas without her was one of the darkest times of my life. For the first time in my life, I did not spend it with my family. I could not bear the thought of sitting through our family's

ritual of opening gifts one at a time, in order from oldest to youngest, only to face a glaring absence each time it would have been Hudson's turn

as the youngest of all her cousins. My husband and I fled to Paris on Christmas Eve, hoping to outrun our terrible grief, even if only for a few days.

It didn't work. Grief followed us to Paris, just as it follows us today, five and a half years later.



We could fly to the moon, and still we'd never outrun our grief.

For parents who have lost a child, the holidays are one of the hardest times of every year. Beginning with Halloween and continuing through New Years, we face an onslaught of family togetherness and joy, much of it centered around children. From the merchandising in stores and the advertising in magazines and online to the photos on friends' Facebook pages and holiday cards, we constantly see images of that most precious thing we will never have again: a family that is complete and whole.

In the beginning, I found that dreading the special days during the year – the holidays, Hudson's birthday, the anniversary of her death – was much worse than the actual days. Her looming absence filled every day, so the special days

were no different than any other day. They might have even been a little easier because friends and family would often remember her with us on those days.

But now, as our lives and family have continued to grow around the hole that Hudson's death left, I find that these special days are often far worse than I expect them to be.

Each year, when I design our holiday cards, I stare at the photos from the past year, longing to find her face in them. And then I resign

myself to placing the same photo of her on the back of the card that I did the year before – the one of her at a year old, giggling and pointing at the camera and wearing a red Christmas dress with black Scotties embroidered on it.

When we decorate the tree together, we must settle for hanging small, framed photos of her on several branches, instead of enjoying a living, breathing little girl fighting with her younger siblings over who will get to hang which ornaments where.

We take those younger siblings to sit on Santa's lap, and I try hard to enjoy the moment, holding in my grief until I am alone and can allow myself to imagine a gangly young girl just turned seven, trying hard to get her little sister to smile for the camera. And of course, when opening gifts on Christmas morning, we face that vast gulf each time we reach the spot where she should take her turn unwrapping a gift, after me and before her younger brother.

But what I have also come to understand is that if I cannot have her back – and even now, in some moments, it is hard to believe that I can't – I'm grateful for these holiday moments when my rawest grief is exposed again. As the years pass, my grief is my most powerful link to her because it is also a reflection of my bottomless love. I welcome the pain because it is an echo of the joy I

experienced as her mother for seventeen months and twelve days.

What I want others to understand is that no matter how many years pass, that beautiful face will always be missing from the family photo on our Christmas card. No matter how many children we have, I will never

stop looking for her when it's time to decorate the tree or open gifts. And as grateful as I am that my love of Christmas is still inside me, there are



moments (sometimes whole days) during the holidays when I am just going through the motions for the sake of my younger kids.

I want my friends and family to remember Hudson. It's the wish of all parents who have lost children. To bring them into the present the only way we can – in our memory and in our actions. So I ask friends that no matter how many Christmases pass, please acknowledge our loss each year. Say her name on Christmas Day. Write on your holiday card that you are still so sorry that she's gone. Let me know that even though it's been so long, and even though it's the most wonderful time of the year, you understand that she is still missing and that we are still hurting.

Mandy Hitchcock

Support Groups for Grieving Parents & Siblings

The Compassionate Friends, Quad City Chapter Meeting Upcoming meeting on

December 6, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.

Masks and social distancing are required.

Annual Candle Light Ceremony

(See insert on page 11.)

The Chapter's next meeting is on January 27, 2021, at 6:30 pm

The Compassionate Friends of Muscatine	Meets the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 at the George M. Wittch-Lewis Funeral Home, 2907 Mulberry, Muscatine, Iowa. Chapter Leaders are Linda and Bill McCracken. You can call them at 563.260.3626 for directions or information, or contact them at linmac67@machlink.com.
Rick's House of Hope	Rick's House of Hope serves children, ages 3-18, and family members from the Quad Cities and nearby counties. We serve those with grief, loss, or trauma issues. Death of a loved one and divorce are common; however, any sort of traumatic event or family change would fit our criteria, such as: bullying, teen dating victimization/harassment, crime victims, and other needs. At this time, Rick's has a Holiday Healing group for children experiencing loss on Tuesday nights 5:30-7:00 until the Christmas holiday. The continuous groups are Family Together for all members of the family on Wednesday nights 5:00-7:00 pm and a Teen Night on Thursdays 5:00-7:30 pm. All meetings are held at 5022 Northwest Boulevard, Davenport, Iowa 52806 and are free. Rick's House of Hope also does individual counseling/therapy. For more information, contact Lynne Miller, Program Manager, at millerl@veraafrenchmhc.org or go to www.rhoh.org .
SHARE	A support group for parents who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death. SHARE meets the third Tuesday at 6:30 pm via ZOOM MEETING during the pandemic and in "normal time" in the Adler Room #1 in the lower level of Genesis Heart Institute, 1236 East Rusholme Street, Davenport, Iowa. Questions? Contact Chalyn Fornero-Green at 309.373.2568, or chalyn@shareqc.com or www.shareqc.com .
Phone Support	If you need someone who understands and will listen, feel free to call or email (if address is given): ♥ Doug Scott 563.370.1041, dns0826@gmail.com ♥ Kay Miller, 309.738.4915 ♥ Rosemary Shoemaker 309.945.6738, shoearthb4@gmail.com ♥ Judy Delvecchio 563.349.8895, delvecchiojudy@hotmail.com Doug, Kay, Rosemary, and Judy are willing to take calls from bereaved parents, grandparents, or siblings who want to talk to someone who cares that they don't feel alone.

Candles in the Night

A heart broken by the death of a child can never be healed. As parents we try every way that can be thought of to cope with the loss, but the void will always be there. At first that emptiness seems to take your breath away and most times we wish it would. This becomes different with the passage of time. It never goes away, but at some point, we learn to live with it, and in fact this horrible feeling becomes a lifeline of sorts.

One of our biggest fears is to forget our children. Forget how they looked or how their voices sounded. The smiles and tears that blur together to make a child. This emptiness in effect becomes a constant yearning to remember our children.

Our hearts force us to find ways to fill that void to maintain our role as parents. Some are as simple as visiting the cemetery and some are as complex as changing our entire lives, dedicated to the memory of our child. In between are the many rituals we create or borrow from others to honor the memories and to keep our child's name alive.

Lighting a candle and saying a child's name keeps their memory burning bright. It means we are struggling to cope with this unwanted role of bereaved parent in the only positive manner we can. We will most certainly shed tears every time, and we will still miss our child, but we are



doing something that allows the world to hear our child's name and for that one moment the candle means so much more than anyone else could ever understand. For a fleeting second that is our universe and every memory we have comes flooding back to us as we see the flame through tears, distorting it into something magical. It's the only gift we can give our children. This is as close as we can get to our child now. A tiny, flickering flame that can warm the heart and it's nice to think that perhaps they can see it also. It's a beacon, our light in the window, our shining star in the darkness. It's an opening of our hearts and a way to share our grief.

We gather to honor the memories of our children and to share this bond of lighting a candle for the children all over the world.

We miss them so much.

Jim Lowery
TCF/Sugar Land/SW
Houston Chapter

Coping with Grief at Christmas Time

Facing your first Christmas without someone you love can be a very lonely and daunting time. There may be expectations that you will put up the Christmas tree, send out greeting cards, go out Christmas shopping and join family and friends for Christmas dinner... especially because others want to see you coping and moving on.

But when you're grieving, this can be really difficult. You may have no inclination or energy to "pretend" that you are looking forward to Christmas when in truth you wish things were the way they were last year - when you were still together with your loved one.

On the other hand, some people want to handle Christmas time by doing things in the same way as always - not changing anything and keeping to the same routines and family rituals. Keeping to the familiar gives them comfort. Allow yourself to have fun. It doesn't mean you've forgotten the person or that your grief for them is over.

When you're grieving, everyone handles their emotions and reactions differently. Here are three tips if you're facing the dilemma of how to handle this Christmas:

1. Give yourself permission not to do the things that you're finding hard to do - writing Christmas cards, putting up the tree, going to Christmas parties - it's alright to let these go this year or next, until you can cope with social events again.
2. Make a point of remembering your loved one in a special way - light a candle for them on Christmas Day, place an ornament on



For some, Christmas is not the time to be jolly. For some people, this Christmas will be filled with sad memories of someone close who is no longer here.

the Christmas tree to symbolize them, buy a gift for a needy child or family in place of the gift you would have bought.

3. Allow yourself to grieve - the days leading up to Christmas (and other significant days on the calendar) can heighten your grief. Seeing other couples and families together just hurts. Seeing the empty place at the Christmas table will be hard to bear. It's alright to cry and let people know that it's hard living without someone special. Try not to bottle up your feelings. Now's the time to tell a close friend that you're struggling to put on a happy face and that you'd appreciate their company or simply their listening ear for support.

And if you know someone who is grieving this Christmas, give them a call, write them a special card, invite them over for a quiet get together, speak up and acknowledge their loss, and have the courage to mention the name of their loved one ... and let them know that you understand that it may be a hard time for them because it's Christmas... and there

are memory triggers everywhere of a missing face, an empty chair and silent thoughts of the way Christmas used to be.

Doris Zagdanski
mygriefassist.com

ANNUAL CANDLE LIGHT MEMORIAL SERVICE

Our annual Candle Light Memorial Service is for bereaved parents who would like to have their child(ren) remembered. The service will be held at the Angel of Hope Memorial in the Moline Memorial Park Cemetery on Monday, December 6. There will be music and reflection, and a procession of light to the angel.

We will gather in the chapel (just south of the memorial garden) for a short service. All participants are asked to wear masks. Following the service, we will proceed to the Angel of Hope placing a candle and a white flower at the foot of the monument.

If you cannot attend and would like a candle lit in your child's memory, please complete and return the form below to Lisa Rains at 2341 7 ½ Street, East Moline, Illinois 61244.

Child's Name: _____

Parents' Names: _____

**Monday, December 6, 2021
at 6:30 p.m.
Angel of Hope
Memorial Garden**

**The service will be held at
the Memorial Garden in the
Moline Memorial Park
Cemetery**

5001 34th Avenue,
Moline, Illinois





The Compassionate Friends
Quad City Area Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies



1830 6th Avenue
Moline, Illinois 61265

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Return Service Requested



To those who are receiving our newsletter for the first time, we wish you were not eligible to belong to this group, but we want you to know that your family and you have many friends. We who have received love and compassion from others in our time of deep sorrow now wish to offer the same support and understanding to you. Please know we understand, we care, and we want to help.

You are not alone in your grief.