



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

February 2023

Volume XXXVI, Number 2

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Recently I had a procedure at the hospital where our son is a surgeon. As I chatted with a staff member about my son, she asked me, “Do you have other children?” A slight internal pause, a stutter in my head, a quick assessment of where I was. “Another son,” I said. “We have two boys.” The conversation moved on with her unaware of the quick choice I had made to not share my daughter with her. I will probably never see this person again. It has been over 38 years since I held my baby daughter in my arms. I do not want to get into the messy explanation of, “One son is here in Michigan; the other in Ohio. But I have a daughter in heaven.” This does not deny Anna’s reality in my mind and heart, but I still feel a small stab of disloyalty when I choose to not share her when I’m asked that question.

I spent some time googling, “What do bereaved parents say when asked, ‘How many children do you have?’” I discovered a variety of personal, thoughtful, individual responses. We have included some of them in this newsletter. Anna O’Neil summarizes it well, “...there’s no right way to answer so personal a question. If you want to honor your child by reminding the world that he’s in heaven, still your child, still loved, then yes — speak his name. Don’t be afraid to include him in your family’s number.”

But if it’s too much to bring it up again and again, if it’s not something you feel comfortable sharing yet, please don’t worry about not witnessing to the life your child had. Nobody has a right to hear your story, not unless you choose to tell it. A child is no less honored, no less remembered and loved when his parents keep his memory private in the secret of their hearts.

Sincerely,
Jerry and Carol Webb



There is something new to be chronicled every day. Grief is like a long valley – a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape.

C.S. Lewis

A whole and happy person has to fight battles, suffer from exhaustion, overcome bad memories, possibly do some forgiving, accept responsibility for his words and actions, and endure life's trials and challenges. After being wounded so cruelly by the deaths of our children, it seems easier to draw in and let the world go by, and maybe this is a necessary state to some extent during that year of firsts. But it is non-productive health-wise to allow it to become a lifestyle. Some people have actively grieved for the rest of their lives. In effect, two deaths occurred: their child's and their own. It's important to consider that we have a choice concerning the paths our lives will follow. Also, we need not feel guilty about feeling improved and happier down the road from our children's death. Our children would not want us to be unhappy.

Helen Armstrong, TCF, Pikes Peak, CO

NOT YET

I can't write of healing as yet. I see sparks and flickers which may someday leap to flames. But for now I'm still spiraling, in death's unspeakable grip.

I try to write of love and hope, but what comes out is desolate pain, deepest longing, and darkest despair.

I can write of faith, it seems my only solace now, that day by day, inch by inch, God carries me, shelters me beneath His wings, and nurtures me for the day when I can finally write of healing.

For Derek

Rachel Block, TCF Northwest Suburban Chapter
Arlington Heights, IL

You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly – that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.

Anne Lamott

We talk about them because we're proud. We talk about them because they deserve to be remembered. We talk about them because even though they are not physically with us, they are never far from our mind. We talk about them because they are part of us, a part that we could never ignore or disown. We talk about them because we love them still and always will - forever. Nothing will ever change that.

Even Presidents Have Lost

Among the men who have led our nation since its inception, there is a strong bond. And for more than half of our First Families, there is another, silent connection. This thread is woven not only through the families of our commanders in chief; it unites parents of newborns with those of seasoned war veterans, Chicago's homicides to our fallen policemen in Dallas, devout Christians to observant Jews to pious Muslims: it is the unequivocal, life-changing loss of a child.

According to Doug Wead, a historian and author of *All the Presidents' Children: Triumph and Tragedy in the Lives of America's First Families*, 26 children of presidents died before the age of five, and many more before the age of 30.

Grover Cleveland found the death of his 12-year old daughter, Ruth, "almost unbearable," whereas James Garfield, who neglected to kiss his daughter Trot before leaving the house for a trip, described his loss by saying it was "as if the fabric of my life were torn to atoms and scattered in the winds." It is said that John Adams could not speak of his young daughter Susanna's death for years, while Thomas Jefferson, who lost five of his six children [with his wife Martha], carried a lock of hair from his first Lucy Elizabeth for the rest of his life.

Before entering the White House, Abraham Lincoln would lose Eddie to tuberculosis at age three. It was during the Civil War that his second and favorite son, Willie, an adolescent, would die from typhoid fever. Some historians suggest Willie's death propelled Lincoln to empathize with families during the war.



Lincoln was assassinated before the death of his last son, Tad, who died from tuberculosis as a teen. Only Robert, the Lincoln's first child, would survive to become an adult.

Franklin Pierce lost all three of his children, a sentence his wife believed was inflicted upon them by God for her husband's political ambitions. When he

inadvertently and unexpectedly won the democratic nomination for President, she fainted at the news and feared the loss of their last son, Benjamin. Following an electoral landslide carrying all but four states, the Pierces lost their 11-year old son, "Benny,"

who was the sole fatality in a train accident 11 days before inauguration.

Childhood maladies and accidents are not the sole causes of loss. Alcoholism, suicide and childbirth played prominent roles in the deaths of many presidential adult children. While John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Martin Van Buren, Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Theodore Roosevelt, Warren Harding and Ronald Reagan all lost one adult child, some families lost many more. John Quincy Adams and Andrew Johnson lost two, John Tyler lost three, while William Henry Harrison lost five adult children.

While on military duty in the Mississippi delta, General Zachary Taylor lost two young children, Octavia and Margaret, to what historians speculate as malaria. Another one of Taylor's daughters, Sarah, survived the bout that had taken the lives of her two sisters, but lost her life to a second fight with the disease at age 21.

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TCF's Facebook Page is a proven support area for bereaved family members to come and talk about their grief. Stop by and visit with some of our more than 120,000 Facebook members. **Please join our TCF/USA Facebook family.** Tell us about your child, sibling, grandchild, or other loved one and find support in the words and concern of others. **Check out the Discussion Boards!** Every day we also provide thought provoking questions, grief quotes, and links to grief stories, as well as TCF news such as updates on the National Conference, Worldwide Candle Lighting, and other TCF programs.

Closed Facebook Groups: The Compassionate Friends offers several closed Facebook groups to connect with other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. The groups supply support, encouragement, and friendship. Recently added groups include Men in Grief; Loss to Long Term Illness; Loss of a Step Child; Loss of a Child with Special Needs.

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 Website:

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.

Dealing with Others

After we lost our son, my wife needed time to heal physically from the emergency C-section, and we both needed time to heal emotionally. We were living in a small town at the time where everybody knew everyone else. On our very first venture out, a family next to us thought that for some reason it was a good idea to start having a theological discussion on if our son was burning in hell or not because he wasn't baptized before he died.

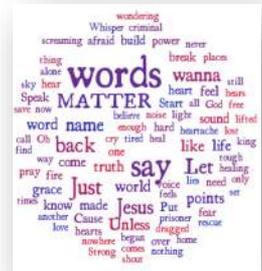
Hopefully, nobody has said anything nearly as hurtful to you, but chances are you've heard, or will hear, some things from people that won't be super helpful in your grieving process.

An acquaintance of ours, after hearing the bad news about our son said, "Well, think of all the fun you'll have trying again." This is a guy who genuinely cared for us, but I'm not going to lie, I did I want to punch him in the face at the time.

You might hear stuff like, "Heaven needed another angel" that may make you want to lose your mind. Though it can be hard, try to remember that these are people who likely love and care for you greatly, but truthfully, just don't know what to say when someone is hurting so badly. It's tempting to give into that anger you feel because chances are, you may be angry that your loved one is gone and having someone to take that anger out on might be appealing to your subconscious.

The other thing nobody prepared me for was how quickly I would waver between "I want a community here with me" and "I need to be alone right now, please just go away." In the early days of grief, it's perfectly normal for you to switch back and forth between these extremes multiple times a day.

Even though you may be oscillating between extremes so many times that you feel genuinely horrible for the people around you, remember that you are never too much for Christ to handle. God will never abandon you.



From *Sitting in Grief: A Devotional Journey Towards Standing Again* - YouVersion

The Heartbreak of the Question, “How Many Children Do You Have?”

When we were driving home from the hospital after I had delivered our fourth baby, our son, Beau, I asked my husband, “What will we say when



people ask how many kids we have?”

He answered thoughtfully, “We only have three. We only have three here with us.”

It was true. And it is still true over two years later. We only have three children with us here on Earth. In our home, singing along in the minivan, sitting around our dinner table. Beau was alive inside of me one day and no longer had a heartbeat the next. He was a beautiful 3 pounds and 1 ounce when he was delivered into our arms. We held him for four hours before his body was wheeled away. We no longer have him.

I know for many parents who have lost a child, a common and seemingly innocent question from people you have just met is, “How many children do you have?” It’s such an everyday sort of question you might ask a new

neighbor, a mom at your kids’ school, or even a complete stranger at the grocery store.

For a very long time, I struggled with how to answer this question. Other loss moms encouraged me to speak Beau’s name and to tell people I have four children, in order to properly honor him. I have read many comments and posts from loss moms that are almost imploring fellow loss moms to include the children they have lost in their “kid count.”

Often it seems as though many are insinuating, or are flat out stating, that if you do not include your lost child in your kid count, you are not honoring their memory. It matters not if the asker feels uncomfortable afterward because all that matters is that your lost child is mentioned.

I disagree. One year after we lost our son, we moved from Colorado back to our home state of Montana. We were in a new neighborhood full of new people. Our oldest daughter was starting kindergarten in a new school. We had daily encounters meeting new people at the playground, the school, and virtually everywhere we went — kind, smiling people. Perhaps these new people would one day become a friend. Perhaps they would just be a person I’d wave to as I passed them on the street. It was impossible to know where these relationships would go.

I had thought hard about what I would say when the inevitable question was asked, “How many kids do you have?” I wanted to be the kind

of mother who would stand up for my lost son and say, "I have three daughters and one son, but our son passed away." I wanted to believe that I didn't care if I made the asker uncomfortable because I needed to honor Beau's existence. And if I didn't count him, then I was forgetting him.

I tried it out a few times. I cried every time I said his name aloud, and this was no different. So, there I was, standing in front of a person I had just met, crying, grieving, and pouring out in order to provide them with an answer I had been pushed into giving. It wasn't working for me.

Answering the question with "four" turned an otherwise pleasant moment into a moment that was purely painful for me. These people who did not know me at all were witness to my precious grief moments after learning my name. Yes, they now knew I've delivered four babies, but they were also left feeling sad and perhaps feeling guilty for asking such a simple question.

I could picture them telling their significant others later, "I met this lady at the park and asked her how many kids she had. She burst into tears and babbled something about her son who had died. I felt terrible for asking! Poor girl!"

I decided that Beau's name and his role in our family is so precious and sacred to us that I didn't want his name to be associated with feelings of guilt or feelings of pity. When it comes to brand new people in my life, I have

to feel that they are safe, that they are a person I will call "friend," and that they are going to love Beau even without ever knowing him.

Once I have established a solid relationship with a new person and have come to know them in deeper ways, then I do share about him and his place in our family order. When I've chosen to wait, the moments I finally share about him have proven to be moments surrounded with love and care, by people I now know and trust, people I will continue to know and who will continue to know me and know me fully.

Sadly, we do not have him here with us. We have three daughters here with us right now. Answering a stranger's question with "three" when asked is a perfectly accurate answer. In time, I may tell them about Beau. Or I may not. It all depends on the moment, my feelings, and where I am with my grief at that time. It depends greatly on the relationship unfolding between us and the role they are going to have in my life.

In turn, I take care when asking people I have just met how many children they have. I feel they too can tell me about their children as they see fit and don't necessarily need to be asked outright by me, a perfect stranger. I know now this simple question is actually deeply personal and may have a very complex answer.

Tara Rigg – Scary Mommy

Support Groups for Grieving Parents & Siblings

**The Compassionate Friends, Quad City Chapter Meeting
February 23, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. at
Bethany for Children & Families
1830 6th Avenue, Moline, Illinois 61265
*The next monthly meeting of the chapter is
Thursday, March 23, 2023, at 6:30 p.m.***

<p>The Compassionate Friends of Muscatine</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Rick's House of Hope</p>	<p>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. 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@verafrenchmhc.org or go to www.rhoh.org.</p>
<p>SHARE</p>	<p>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 p.m. 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.</p>
<p>Phone Support</p>	<p>If you need someone who understands and will listen, feel free to call or email (if address is given):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Doug Scott 563.370.1041, dns0826@gmail.com ♥ Kay Miller, 309.738.4915 ♥ Rosemary Shoemaker 309.945.6738, shoeartb4@gmail.com ♥ Judy Delvecchio 563.349.8895, delvecchiojudy@hotmail.com <p>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.</p>

Last Moments

Last moments

Snatches of conversation that echo across all decades...

Priceless words indelibly etched on the heart.

Sometimes thoughts were never spoken, but unexpected sentiment—

A quick embrace, a silly smirk, or joyous laughter—

Reaches through the pain and warms the heart.

We came too soon to understand the folly of harsh words

Or neglected touch,

For who can know which taken-for-granted event

Will become a last moment?

Diane Fields TCF Westmoreland, PA



Continued from page 3

The death of a child is not relegated to those of the past.

Five modern-day presidents have suffered this great tragedy: Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan - both of whom lost two children, and George H.W. Bush.* In Jon Meacham's Pulitzer Prize winning biography, *Power and Destiny*, President George H.W. Bush speaks of how Robin, who died of cancer at age four, remains with him even 60 years later.

Dwight Eisenhower would lose more than his son, who fell to scarlet fever at age three. On the day they would have celebrated his son's 38th birthday, Eisenhower suffered his first heart attack. Fourteen years later and a day after the anniversary of Ikky's birthday, Mamie would collapse from a stroke and die within two weeks. She admitted losing Ikky was one of the most difficult hardships that the couple had faced.

The impact on parents, then and today, remains a matter of life and death. First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln would outlive three of her four sons and on the first anniversary of Tad's death, she fell ill and died the following day. The same is true of First Lady Grace Coolidge who died one

year and a day following the death of her 16-year-old son, Calvin, Jr. Theodore Roosevelt would die within six months of his son Quentin who died during a World War I dogfight with German airmen.

As we reflect on the contributions of our nation's leaders throughout the centuries, let us not forget the losses they had in common with families who live and work in our neighborhoods and communities today. We, as a nation, have an opportunity — and a responsibility — to honor those who have passed and help those left behind, presidential or not.

Joyal Mulheron

To My Husband

Your tears flow within your heart.

Mine flow down my cheeks.

Your anger lies with thoughts and movement.

Mine gallops forward for all to see.

Your despair shows in your now dull eyes.

Mine shows in line after written line.

You grieve over the death of your son.

I grieve over the death of my baby.

But we're still the same, still one,

Only we grieve at different times

Over different memories and at different lengths.

Yet we both realize

The death of our child.

**Pam Burden, TCF
Augusta, GA**

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.

Thanks to:

Bill and Laurie Steinhauser, in memory of Maggie's 18th anniversary.

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.**

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.



1...2...3...4...I Have Four Children

Excerpted from “When People Ask How Many Children I Have, This Is My Answer”

When asked, I can’t answer and not include him. To say I have three children would be a lie. It would be the greatest lie I ever told. While he’s not here physically, he’s present in every action I take. His creation created who I am. Whether he is here or not, he is still my child.

This solution is not an easy one. It is not one that will fit everyone. My father lost his only son when I was a child. Years later when I was older, I noticed, when asked, he gave an open-ended answer. “I still got these two at home.” I can understand this type of answer. I really, truly can. Having to highlight the biggest pain you’ve ever felt at another person’s whim leaves you open and vulnerable. There are people who can not allow themselves to feel that way. And that’s okay. There is no right way to grieve. There are no rules set as to how to be a parent with a dead child. My way is the only way I know how.

He will always be a part of our family. So no matter the intent of the question, no matter the place or the person, I will forever include him in a count of my children.

I answer this differently based on the situation. I have two living children, born after a miscarriage and the death of my son, Max, just after his birth. If it’s a really short, passing scenario, I sometimes just say I have a one- and two-year-old. I like that answering that way doesn’t tie me to a number that I know isn’t accurate. But a lot of the time I’ll make the space to say I have a one-year-old and two-year-old and also have a son who died almost four years ago. In the right setting, that answer frequently opens a sweet space for people to acknowledge a loss of their own or just to know me and my family a little more fully. It took me a little while to not feel guilty that I don’t mention our first baby when enumerating my kids or when I don’t bring Max up. But I know that my babies were and are fully loved even if I don’t tell the random stranger at Target about them.

Sam (From Hope Mommies)

The grief after a death is sharp and strong. It pops up at unexpected moments, even years later.

—Kenneth Sutton, *UU World*





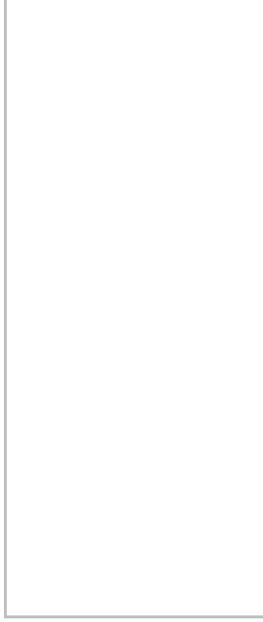
The Compassionate Friends
Quad City Area Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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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.