Northeastern Connecticut / Rockville Chapter
TCFNECTChapter.org
TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com
860-656-0260

“Forever in my Heart” wristbands are available. They are $3.50 each or two for $5.00. If you are unable to come to meetings and would like to order some, send a check, plus $2.25 shipping, to:
The Compassionate Friends
c/o Laureen Relyea
107 Milo Peck Lane
Windsor, CT 06095

NORTH EAST CHAPTER ANNUAL PICNIC AND BALLOON RELEASE
JUNE 8TH—RAINDATE JUNE 15TH
Henry Park, Vernon, CT
Picnic 6:00  Balloon Release 7:00

It is tradition for the balloon Release to take place after the picnic, up by the Fox Hill Tower. It is an emotional moment as we all write messages on the balloons and release them skyward with whispers to our missing child, grandchild, sibling.

We will never forget our children who are gone too soon.

Please leave a voice message on the Chapter Phone 860-656-0260 or email subject line: Picnic TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com
with your name, phone number, email address and the amount of people who will be accompanying you, so that we can have adequate numbers of supplies.

The Balloons used will be a bio-degradable latex, said to degrade in about the same time frame as a leaf. Those who prefer to privately order and release butterflies are welcomed to do so. Information about various butterfly release companies can be found online through your favorite search engine.

More photos on page 12
Welcome

All bereaved parents, grandparents, and adult siblings are welcome at our support group meetings. You will find a place of comfort, caring people, and most of all - HOPE. Coming to the first meeting is the hardest, but you have nothing to lose and much to gain. We urge you to give it a try. For many it is the first real step toward healing. Although it may seem overwhelming, we encourage you to come to several meetings to give yourself a chance to become comfortable. We are not professional counselors. We are bereaved families who want to help each other. Please join us as we heal together.

TELEPHONE FRIENDS

Feel free to call 860-656-0260. A member will contact you. We can put you in contact with members who have experienced similar losses: auto accidents, suicide, homicide, illness, sudden, infant death, unknown causes...

Compassionate Friends is made up of others who understand through experience and CARE.

If you would like to volunteer to just talk and visit with another TCF member, please call or email TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com

Chapter Steering Committee

Chapter Leader:
Mary Fitzgerald

Co-Leader / Facilitator: Michele Cerrigione
Co-Leader / Facilitator: Peter Hany
Co-Leader / Facilitator: Lois O’Callaghan
Newsletter Editor: Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby
Treasurer: Laureen Relyea

Chapter Voice Mail: 860-656-0260
TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com

www.TCFNECTChapter.org

Love Gifts

are a way of remembering your child, sibling or grandchild by supporting your local The Compassionate Friends Chapter.

Donations of any size are accepted and appreciated at every meeting.

Thank you to all who contribute and support. Checks should be made payable to The Compassionate Friends and can be mailed to

The Compassionate Friends

107 Milo Peck Lane
Windsor, CT 06095

Check with your employer how you can donate to The Compassionate Friends through non-profit payroll deduction.

REFLECTIONS OF LOVE, VISIONS OF HOPE

“The Reflections of Love, Visions of Hope” is the theme for this year’s TCF National Conference — an event unlike any other! Bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents are able to share with others walking the same grief journey — with well-known speakers, entertainment, and more than 100 workshops on most topics of grief following the death of a child. Hyatt Regency in Crystal City is hosting the conference (request TCF conference rates). Full details and scheduling are available on The Compassionate Friends website and newsletter. www.compassionatefriends.org

TAG SALE POTENTIAL

The Steering Committee is considering the potential of holding a TAG SALE for the purpose of both fostering community and the raising of funds. If you have items to donate, a storage facility to house accumulating donations, and / or are willing to help in any way, please leave a message on the phone line or drop an email TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com

EDITOR’S MESSAGE:

This newsletter is for all of us who hurt and know that even if we feel as if we don’t want to, we will go on living. I wish it to speak to your needs and to let you know that you ARE NOT ALONE — that you are in the company of those who “Get It”.

Please share your own musings, journal entries, poems, stories and thoughts. I welcome and thank you for all submissions. ~Bettie-Jeanne, Robyn’s mom

Forever In Our Hearts  Northeastern CT.  Page 2

MAY 2010
Editor's note:
Over the next several issues, we'll be sharing the various ways in which we are remembering, memorializing and paying tribute to our children, grandchildren and siblings no longer with us. If you have something that you would like to share, not only to keep your child visible and “alive”, but to help inspire others, please send it to Bettie-Jeanne at TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com or 4 Darby DreamView Ellington, CT 06029-2733 or bring it to a meeting

Sharing Memories of Christopher

I was asked to write about the ways that my family has memorialized our Son Christopher. To do this I would have to talk a little about Chris. Chris was born with a birth defect, but he never let it slow him down or used it to his advantage. He and his father joined Scouts when he was in second grade. They enjoyed doing Cub Scouts together, camping and making pinewood derby cars. When Chris crossed over to Boy Scouts I got involved to help out the troop and my husband eventually became Scoutmaster. But this story isn’t about my husband Alan or me, it is about Chris.

Chris worked hard and didn’t take any shortcuts to become an Eagle at 16. He became an adult leader in the troop when he turned 18 and enrolled in “Woodbadge”, the adult leader training course. In this course they talk a lot about leaving a legacy and that is what Chris did. He worked hard to raise consciousness for people with disabilities, in Scouts, his church and his schools. When Chris passed away at 22 we wanted more than anything not to let Chris be forgotten. We asked everyone to give money to his church instead of flowers, that money has been used to purchase bibles in his memory for the confirmation class each year.

The parents of Chris’ Cub Scout den (The Mighty Five) got together and started a scholarship in his memory at the high school that the five boys had attended. Our Scout Troop does shelter meals at a local shelter and the weekend closest to Chris’ Birthday our family pays for the food, helps cook the meal and the Scouts serve. We are having a bench made for the Scout camp that he had attended while a youth, to be placed someplace that would be a good resting place.

And every summer we plant sunflowers, Chris’ favorite flower and give away the seedlings to friends and family. I think as parents we fear that some how our child will be forgotten. I’m not sure they will be forgotten but by giving it some thought we can ease our hearts just a little.

Laureen Reyela,
Christopher’s Mom

Sharing Memories of Penny

Penny was a physical therapist at Gaylord Hospital in Wallingford, CT and was also the athletic trainer at Bolton High School. She worked at many places as an athletic trainer including donating her time to the Special Olympics. She taught CPR for the American Heart Association and the American Red Cross. She was an athletic trainer on the high school and college levels. We are currently working on an endowed scholarship fund in Penny's name. It will be for a CT Junior Student attending college for Athletic Training. We are planning to hold fund raisers to raise at least $25,000 and have so far totaled about $7,000. the plan is for a $1,000 a year scholarship, in Penny's Memory.

Others who loved Penny have made their own “memorials” of her. One of the hospice nurses made teddy bears from some of her clothes for the 3 most special men in Penny's life; her dad, husband and brother. They are very cute (the bears are very cute, not the guys)

Co-workers at Gaylord Hospital made “Penny Pins” with a blue ribbon (for colon cancer) with a penny glued on to it. Also very cute.

Co-workers at Gaylord had a special memorial service; they painted Christmas scenes on the windows and had a special package painted with Penny’s name on it; they made a bird feeder with pennies for the roof and raffled it off and raised money for her scholarship fund and another charity that Penny loved.

We purchased a beautiful urn for Penny's ashes. It is a lighthouse up on a rock and it is in our living room. People can't believe that it is an urn, it's so nice. Lighthouses have always been special to us and, like us, Penny loved the ocean and beach. It makes for a very special memory.

Nancy and Jim Dunker,
Penny’s Mom and Dad

Please Share, for Future Issues, How you Remember your Child, Grandchild or Sibling...
EMDR
ONE FATHER’S PERSPECTIVE OF A NEW THERAPY

After Ryan passed and people asked me “How are you doing? I would usually respond with something like, “Some days are better than others”. I know that every member of The Compassionate Friends can relate and understands what those days - the really hard “Others”- are like. In the hope that it may lead to easing the level of pain that we’ve all known, I’d like to share my personal experience with EMDR ~ EYE MOVEMENT DESENSITIZATION REPROCESSING ~ THERAPY.

I first heard of EMDR THERAPY in an article by Forever Family Foundation. Piquing my interest, I researched the subject and learned that EMDR therapy is a fairly new psychotherapy technique, which is reported to be very safe and highly effective in helping people who suffer from a variety of conditions, including grief and trauma. I learned that it has the reputation of being very beneficial to those that have been making slow or little progress with more traditional therapies; in a fraction of the time that those traditional therapies generally take. Many turning to EMDR report it to be very positive and effective, and that they have “finally found something that works”. All research pointed to EMDR as being amazingly simple, effective, and fast, regardless of an individual’s belief system. In addition, there are no drugs or hypnosis involved, and it is normally performed in only two or three sessions, with long lasting, if not permanent results.

And so I decided to experience it for myself.

The first in my family to attempt the EMDR therapy, I researched therapists and chose one in Newton, Mass., who seemed to be more in tune with people dealing with grief and loss than some of the others I had found. His typical approach was to schedule two, one and a half hour sessions, over the course of two days. I scheduled my visits and went to them without a lot of expectation. My attitude was that, simply, if the EMDR sessions did nothing more than just take the ‘edge off’ of my pain, it would be well worth the time, effort and fee. The total cost was $600, before the 50% insurance payment, though I’ve been told that some insurance plans may cover more, if not 100%.

The sessions themselves were very simple. It consisted of first determining the core issues, then a combination of psychotherapy technique and hand / eye movements addressing and diminishing the emotion connected with them. My sense was that, for me, it seemed to bypass a lot of the ‘normal grieving process, and go right to the releasing and healing stages.

It’s only been a few weeks but I haven’t noticed any signs of it ‘wearing off’; in fact, quite the opposite. The most noticeable difference was an immediate and definite reduction in my overall sadness level. Before the therapy, on some of the “Other” days I was just overwhelmed with emotion, sadness, and basically needed to be alone to spend the day in tears. I was usually too emotionally drained to do anything else and it was a struggle just making it through the day. I haven’t had one of “Those Other” days since the therapy, which considering what this year means to me, is pretty good. This is a particularly memory-evoking and challenging time. This would have been Ryan’s high school graduation this June. We should be planning his graduation party. Instead, we’re planning a scholarship in Ryan’s memory. Naturally, I miss my son as much as I ever did, but there seems to be less pain and more acceptance around the memories and thoughts about what should have been, and what will never be....

My memories are all there, completely in tact. There has been no loss, no changing or fading. The therapy doesn’t alter at all what was, but rather the body and mind’s reaction to it. There is less “heaviness” around the memories of Ryan, particularly the extremely vivid ones from the last time I saw my son, as well as both the night at the hospital when Ryan passed, and those of his funeral. Those were very strong triggers, which would typically have me in tears. Yet as I write those words, I feel it and know it’s there, but I haven’t been overwhelmed by it. The waves of grief that would normally consume me in writing or talking about those events, are now manageable. Because of the EMDR Therapy I haven’t had to stop writing and wipe away tears to continue. It is much easier to call upon some of the happier thoughts and memories; the ones that I would really like to have when I think of my son.

Obviously, each individual; even the parents, grandparents or siblings of the same child, experiences and handles their

(Continued on page 5)
grief differently. I can only speak to my own personal experience, but EMDR seems to be ‘short cutting’ the grief process, cutting the pain, and reducing it from the levels that overwhelm to allow a lighter mindset to surface. I don’t expect that there will be any negative repercussions, but obviously have no way to be certain except with the passing of time. All the research I’ve done validates that anticipated results are long lasting, and haven’t come across any cases that resulted in any resurgence, let alone one in which the emotional state deteriorated instead of improved.

I found EMDR ~ EYE MOVEMENT DESENSITIZATION REPROCESSING ~ THERAPY to be very effective for me. Anyone interested in learning more about EMDR can read about it at EMDR.com, a site by the founder of EMDR therapy, Francine Shapiro, Ph.D., or just “Google” or your favorite search engine to reference EMDR. I’d also be happy to pass along the contact information for the therapist I used, or try to answer any questions privately about my experience. Just send a note to Dave Evans, care of the Chapter email address TCFNEC-TChapter@gmail.com •

THINGS TO DO WHEN DESPERATE

1. Breathe.
2. Get my teddy bear.
3. Call other bereaved people (keep their phone numbers easily available)
4. Call close friends (keep their phone numbers easily available, too.)
5. Call a counselor.
6. Call a hot-line.
7. Get in my rocking chair.
   Get in any chair and let it support me.
8. Take a hot bath.
9. Run around the block three times.
10. Listen to soothing music.
11. Put on a relaxation tape.
12. Ask someone to hold me.
13. Cry.
14. Yell into my pillow
15. Join a support group.
16. Say to myself, “Others love me,” or “I have the right to survive,” or, “Others have gotten through this, I can too.”
17. Stroke the dog or cat.
18. Watch an old movie on TV or read a book.
20. Stand or lie on the floor and feel the floor support me.
21. Pray
22. Start again at the top.

A FATHER MOURNS TOO

I just watched another TV commercial for cologne, which is the first sign of the approach of Father’s Day. Like other fathers, I know the gift I’d like to get this Father’s Day, just as I know there is no way that it will happen—my son’s life, an opportunity not to hurt when I see boys who are his age, a chance to dream those dreams for that little boy again. But that’s not going to happen. Instead I will get up on that day, having called my own father the night before to wish him a happy Father’s Day, and I will go to the cemetery to place flowers on my son’s grave. I will stand alone and cry for a time and then return home to my wife and new infant son. This year we will have a greater measure of peace because of the birth of our son, but I shall always have a hole in my soul, a longing that I know I will have until I die.

Like many bereaved fathers, I have felt misunderstood about how a father should mourn and for how long. I do not understand how a society can have such a belief in the strength of maternal love and do such a good job ignoring the intensity of paternal love. From the people whose only question at my son’s memorial service was how was my wife dealing with this tragedy, to the longtime friend who didn’t understand my choking up after watching a Hallmark commercial, it seems that many around us have difficulty understanding a father’s grief.

So, support and love is needed and needed badly. Of course, we have Compassionate Friends, but something more personal and closer to home is needed. I hope that bereaved fathers will not be forgotten on Father’s Day. It is often said that we don’t often talk of our emotional needs and are reluctant to show our pain, but we too need love when we hurt. Please remember us on Father’s Day and remember that the cute little commercials that hurt mothers in May take their toll on fathers in June. •

Doug Hughes
TCF Las Vegas, NV

A butterfly came floating by,
I thought I knew it’s face.
It landed on my shoulder,
and spread its wings of lace.
I looked and saw it smiling,
as it winked and flew away.
I’m sure I heard it whisper,
“We’ll meet again one day”

HELP US TO HELP OTHERS

In addition to LOVE GIFTS (p. 9), we truly appreciate the cash donations left in the donation jar at every meeting. As a non-profit, non-salaried peer-to-peer group, we rely on your generosity to fund the materials used to help us help others. Thank You for your kindness. •
I Can See You

I can see you when a friend visits your grave,
I can see you when I hear your favorite music,
I can see you when your dog howls as you taught him,
I can see you when the stars shine brightly,
I see you in my mind's image
when the summer rain cools
the desert brush,
When spring buds emerge with new growth,
When winter chills the air,
When I see young lovers look into each other's eyes
and make promises, have goals and dreams.

In my intense pain, I hear you whisper, "I'm O.K.".
I cannot see you when others are
uncomfortable with me,
When I can't even mention the
anniversary of your death,
When someone unwittingly said
I have two children and I
wanted to scream that I have three, now and always.

Please be kind and allow me to see him in my own way
because he exists in my world and
I see him when you let me. ♥

Cindy Nevins
TCF, Tucson Chapter

Remembering

Go ahead and mention our child,
The one that died you know.
Don't worry about hurting us further.
The depth of our pain doesn't show.
Don't worry about making us cry
We're already crying inside.
Help us to heal by releasing
The tears that we try to hide.
We're hurt when you just keep silent,
Pretending she didn't exist.
We'd rather you mention our child,
Knowing that she has been missed.
You ask us how we are doing.
We say "pretty good" or "fine".
But healing is something ongoing
We feel it will take a lifetime.
by Elizabeth Dent

PHOTOFRAME AND BUTTONS

Every minute of every day our child, our grandchild, our sibling is with us. If you would like to include the presence of your loved one on our digital photo frame displayed at every regular meeting please email a digital photo to our webmaster

Michele Cerrigione webmaster@tcfnectchapter.org

Buttons are also available to all of our Chapter Members. Each member can receive one free for the asking. Copies are available for $2.00 each.

For both the Photo Frame and the button, if you don't have a digital photo that you can email, you may bring a hardcopy to a meeting, and we will scan it in and give it back to you at the following meeting. Compassionate Friends wristbands are available at all meetings for a $3.50 minimum donation ♥
Remembering My Sibling

I guess I am a member of the "ugly club" because something ugly happened to me...both of my sisters were taken from me in one year. My oldest sister was suffering with Alzheimer's, so I expected her to leave us soon. But it was cruel the way she died: not knowing anyone. I wish I could have been there because she was always there for me, since she was 19 yrs older than me. She was a second mother to me.

My other sister was 12 yrs older than me. Being the youngest in the family, it is hard to watch your siblings get sick and die. I lived with her for 10 yrs after we both lost our husbands. So we became very close. We were both so different but enjoyed living together. After she was diagnosed with cancer, she only lasted a year. I really thought she would beat it like I had done 3 yrs before her.

Loosing a sister takes a part of you, but they leave so many memories behind to soothe one. Therefore we have to overcome the ugliness of unnatural death and go on with our lives.

I know they would have wanted me to live life in the fullest like they did.

Charlene Williams,
Barbara and Annette’s sister
Cromwell, CT

\[\heartsuit\ \ \heartsuit\ \ \heartsuit\]

"Looking back, I've often thought the doctors should have written a death certificate for me as well as my sister, for when she died, a part of me died, too."

KALEIDOSCOPE

He shattered his life into a thousand pieces, casting a kaleidoscope of light and shadows.

To you he may have seemed broken, but to me he was beautiful.

I remember...

The brightest blue, the laughing eyes of a child at play. Charcoal gray, the suit of a young boy, handsome and full of dreams. Ivory white, smooth keys beneath the talented hands of a youth, searching for a song. Muddled orange, the bouncing ball passed fleetingly from hand to hand in a teenager's game. Olive drab, the uniform of a young man seeking meaning, seeking himself.

Yellow, the speeding car that symbolized the beginning, the end, freedom and capture. Dull red, day in and day out, the shirt of a man paying a price of wasted days. Shadow black, a place deep within. A man too young to die was lost where no loved one could reach to shine the light.

Empty, the world without him in it. For a while it seemed that life had lost all color.

Now, though, when it seems my world is filled with shadow black, I will think of a clear and bright blue, And I will try to remember a child's laughter.

Stephanie Rice,
Robert's sister
TCF NE CT Chapter

ONLINE SIBLING SUPPORT

The Compassionate Friends National Office offers “virtual chapters” through an Online Support Community (live chats). The Sibling rooms supply support, encouragement, and friendship. The friendly atmosphere encourages conversation among friends who understand the emotions you’re experiencing. Please check the national website schedule for dates and times of the sessions. Registration is required by obtaining a password. Visit www.CompassionateFriends.org
Click on RESOURCES—GRIEF SUPPORT FOR SIBLINGS

Reminder!
Adult Siblings are welcomed to all Northeast / Rockville CT Chapter meetings
Editor’s note:
This month's book reviews are going to be a little bit different. Both are novels. Both have been made into motion pictures. Both were recommended to me by grieving mothers.

LETTERS TO GOD  A NOVEL
Patrick Doughtie and John Perrys
Copyright 2010
Zondervan / Zondervan.com

This book came highly recommended by several moms who had lost their young children to cancer and, impressively, by several children living with cancer. Both the book and movie have been used as fund raisers for several childhood cancer research and support groups, as it chronicles the life of a little boy with terminal brain cancer who copes with the disease by writing letters to God. It is a story that is both profoundly sad and yet amazingly uplifting. LETTERS TO GOD is a relationships story — a sweet and charming family and their relationships with each other and with their community, as well as with their faith and with dying. Right from the beginning I found myself swept up in caring about all of them.

As a book that delves into shaken faith, both those who have a strong faith in God, as well as those who are angry or questioning, may find themselves among the pages. There are readers who might find themselves shaking their heads in disbelief at the sometimes satcharney reactions of some of the characters, despite their many hardships and pain endured. Others may find the read greatly inspirational.

Though it is an “easy read” book, it is not necessarily an easy book to read. A reader might find themselves examining and re-examining their own anger, questions, and faith. The subject matter of terminal brain cancer may be an open wound for some. I found it to be a powerfully religious book, with a story that can reach out to anyone dealing with the crises of loss and anger.

Even if you don’t share the belief system, it can still make for a good and important read.

THE LOVELY BONES
Alice Sebold
Copyright 2002
Little, Brown and Company

It was only 10 months past the death of my daughter when a respected friend recommended THE LOVELY BONES. She didn’t tell me much about it, except that it described the experience of a young murdered girl, watching her family left on earth. The book, written in first person by the murdered child, had affected her deeply and she felt that I might have an appreciation for it. She knew how deeply I was grieving and, I think, wanted to show me the possible affects it might have on my beloved daughter. I read it in one very long afternoon.

Though, for many, the subject matter may be very upsetting and difficult to read, I found myself intrigued by the concept of the emotions and experiences of Suzie within her own heaven and her ability to keep an eye on her family. I related to the overwhelming pain of the father and the changes that this tragic event made on Suzie’s family and friends. Suzie’s murderer has a large role in the story, as she watches him from her heaven, trying to aid her emotionally deteriorating dad in his capture. The book shows how the death of a child can take a toll on not only the individuals, but on a marriage.

Jim and I both went to see the movie when it was released. As when reading the book, there were plenty of times that tears came streaming down my cheeks and I noticed Jim’s own misted eyes on several occasions. The movie, of course, had much less detail than the book and I think missed out on capturing many of the reasons why the book spoke to both my friend and to me. But it had beautifully constructed and highly visual scenes to compensate for pieces of the puzzle left untold.

As like LETTERS TO GOD, the subject matter is certainly not an easy one. Unlike LETTERS TO GOD, I wouldn’t characterize THE LOVELY BOOKS as uplifting. Both of these books, for me, were an in-between place between self-help and fiction, using the stories surrounding the loss of children as additional steps in the process of finding the “New Me” I will eventually become.

LIBRARY VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
One of the emails received from a parent pointed out the obvious that we just haven’t seen — a published comprehensive list of books available in our library would be a great benefit to our families. We could use some help in compiling a list with descriptions. If you are willing to donate some time to the Library Cause please email: TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com or phone Bettie at (860) 870-7581 and we’ll set up a time to meet together.
Love Gifts

are a way of remembering your child, sibling or grandchild by supporting our local The Compassionate Friends Chapter.

Love Gifts

can be a donation of time, a contribution to our library, the sharing of cookies or snacks at a meeting, your contribution of time and outreach, a monthly contribution towards our meeting beverage and food hospitality, a financial memorial contribution to help us keep helping others. Donations of all sizes are accepted, and appreciated, at any meeting.

Our Chapter is completely dependent on funds from our families and friends. Your Love Gifts help pay for our lending libraries, candle lighting ceremonies, telephone, meeting facilities, outreach programs, mailings, web site and all supplies. We, very much, appreciate your financial support. To make a donation please print and use the form below.

To make a Tax Deductible Love Gift in memory of your child, grandchild, sibling, or special loved one, complete the form and mail to

The Compassionate Friends NE CT Chapter  
c/o Laureen Relyea  
107 Milo Peck Lane  
Windsor, CT  
06095

LOVE GIFT RECEIVED FROM ________________________________________________________________

IN MEMORY OF  _______________________________________________________________________

RELATIONSHIP  _______________________________________________________________________

BIRTHDATE _________________________    LAST EARTH DAY _________________________

LOVE GIFT IN OCCASION OF  [ ] BIRTHDAY  [ ] ANNIVERSARY OF LAST EARTH DAY  [ ] OTHER ________

[ ] PLEASE PRINT OCCasion    [ ] PLEASE DO NOT PRINT OCCASION

AMOUNT OF LOVE GIFT DONATION: $_________  [ ] PRIVACY, PLEASE. Do not share in the newsletter.

That a Love Gift was made will be listed in a future newsletter, unless you have requested privacy. Amounts will not be revealed, but unless otherwise requested the donor’s name and whom it honors will be shared. Please include any special tribute or memory that you wish to have printed.

Thank You

Please print this tribute:

WALK TO REMEMBER

The Compassionate Friends Walk to Remember® is a highlight of every TCF National Conference. It was created as a symbolic way to show the love we carry for the children we mourn. Held at 8 a.m. Sunday on the final day of the national conference it starts at the host hotel of the conference. As many as 1400 participate. Some go the full distance while others only walk a short way knowing that in participating, they are remembering. Special Walk to Remember T-shirts are given to all who register, as well as walk bibs where the names of the children being remembered can be written. In conjunction with the main walk, TFC encourages people across the country to send in the names of the children for whom they grieve to be carried in the walk. These are printed on sheets of paper and carried by volunteers. More than 10,000 names are estimated to have been carried by those participating in a single Walk to Remember. (Learn more at 2010 TCF National Conference ♥

NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT CHAPTER WALK TO REMEMBER

Reserve your space NOW!

Michele Herring, Jennifer Barnett’s mom, has graciously volunteered to lead us in our own Northeastern Connecticut Chapter WALK TO REMEMBER. Tying in with the National Walk as a Chapter Team, we may look toward this event as a Chapter Fundraiser, and will be inviting family and friends. The date has not yet be determined, but Michele is looking toward around the 13th of July, in honor of Jennifer’s birthday. Watch for information to come in future newsletters, emails and on our Fan and Group Pages on Facebook. If you are interested in joining us, PLEASE SEND AN EMAIL OF INTENT ~ we are trying to determine if there is "Need" and if we would have a group to walk.♥
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DISCUSSING THE UGLY CLUB

Editor's note: My recent use of the words “THE UGLY CLUB” created some emotion...and unfortunately a tiny bit of confusion for at least one reader. In this issue I'd like to clarify the pure intention of my words and to share some of the notes received.

Just wanted you to know that after reading the newsletters you have written, I think you have done a great job of putting feelings into words, and understanding how everyone feels things differently. The Ugly Club is a different name, and I relate to it. Ugly feelings make you feel so bad. And there is nothing worse for BAD feelings than losing a child, at any age. We all grieve in our own way, but the "ugly" feelings are so hard! Even now sometimes when I look at Jen's picture, the stab in the heart is renewed fiercely. I try to have positive memories, and often I do. But when you have watched your child slip away, sometimes it is so hard to have good thoughts. Anyway, thank you for doing such a good job. Lord knows I could not handle writing alot right now. My concentration is still off!

Best to you,
Michele H,
Jen’s mom

On July 29th, 2007, our 21 year old grandson Greg was killed, 5 days after his Dad's birthday, that was "Ugly". He hit a tree, that was "Ugly". His body was virtually untouched, except for the head trauma, that was "Ugly". I will never forget the pain in my son's voice, when he called to tell me what had happened to Greg, that was "Ugly". Two months before we were celebrating his graduation from college, and his whole world ahead of him. That was all taken away on July 29th, how "Ugly" is that? I am sorry if some people take offense at the word "Ugly" but that is the way it feels. I hope in time the ugliness will go away, but I don't know when. Until then, don't blame me for feeling that this whole situation was "Ugly".

Lucille Rothammer,
Greg’s Grandma

I do not like the term "ugly club" when it references the Compassionate Friends. An organization is made up of it's members and the words ugly club have a direct reflection on the membership. This group reached out to me when I was at my lowest after losing Russ. The love and compassion was something that has helped tremen-

dously in the healing process. To refer to the group in the way you do says that the members are ugly because they belong to this club. That couldn't be further from the truth. Maybe you don't mean it that way but I would like to see you stop using the term in regards to the TCF. I know what you are trying to say, because I wished I never met any of the groups members. That would mean Russ would be alive. But the fact of the matter is he is gone forever from this life and this group will help you and I get thru the grief...

Pete Hany,
Russ’ Dad

Response from The Editor:
I regret any misconception of the words “THE UGLY CLUB”. Let me assure all that I was NOT using the term to reference The Compassionate Friends; Nor was there any inference that Compassionate Friends are UGLY. In fact “THE UGLY CLUB” has nothing to do with Compassionate Friends at all! “THE UGLY CLUB” is a term coined by a young mom who had lost her 5 year old to cancer. It refers to the fact that losing our child, feels ugly and horrible... ...that losing a child is an UGLY EVENT.

A compassionate friend wrote to me:
"Ugly is the reflection in the mirror that seems to have forgotten how to smile or to look carefree - ugly because it is the antithesis of all that I was and ache to be again but know that my scars will always be visible. Ugly is experience that robs beauty and joy from our lives. Ugly is the sound of inconsolable tears... Ugly is the loss of a child."

Being a member of the “THE UGLY CLUB” is different from happily joining a sewing circle, a Bible Reading Class, or a car club...the things that we WANT to be part of...the things that provide us with fun and enjoyment.

As a bereaved mom wrote
“Nobody wants to join this ugly club, there is no BEAUTY in being a member. There is love and compassion and beauty among those of us who were forced to become members against our will, but certainly not in the reason that the ugly club exists”

We are all members who did not chose to become part of “THE UGLY CLUB”.
Our families,
Our friends,
Our lives have all become different.
And it is an ugly reality that made it so.

Many of those who relate to the term "THE UGLY CLUB"
(Continued on page 14)
When Will The Pain End?

Annette Mennen Baldwin, Todd’s mom
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen, who left the plane by completing suicide
Katy, TX

When I look back over my grief journey, I marvel at how far I have come and yet at how poignant and permanent the loss of my son will always be for me. How can this dichotomy exist within one person’s mind?

The horror of the news of my son’s death, the shock that slammed my mind into numbness, the unremembered conversations, the platitudes that followed the memorial service and the first two months of living in a complete fog of disbelief are very vivid in my mind. The horror is too real to forget. The next six months of melancholy, miserable mourning are forever locked in my mind. The pure physical pain, the piercing jolts when I momentarily thought of something beyond my child’s death and was mercilessly slammed back into the finality of death’s amputation of my son’s smile, laughter and physical presence on this earth are etched for eternity in my soul. My mind simply couldn’t accept that Todd was gone from this plane.

The first anniversary of his death was a horrifying day worsened by a very bleak and foreshadowing conversation with my son’s widow. Life would be much different for my husband and me from this point forward. There were no bridges to the past. She made that clear. I was inconsolable from the impact of her wicked words. But I made it through the first and second years with help from my Compassionate Friends Chapter. I could cry and scream about the injustice of my loss and all that followed, and each parent understood. Eventually I had told my story enough times to enough people that I subconsciously accepted Todd’s death and all the changes in my life that followed.

At some point in my second year of grief I began reaching out to others. Helping others, seeing their pain, hearing their tearful words, had become cathartic for me. The more I helped, the more I was helped.

Yes, my son is still with me in my heart and in my memories. The movies of his life play in my mind almost daily. I have made new friends. I have walked away from old acquaintances. I have learned to separate the meaningful from the meaningless. And I have learned that I will always feel the pain of my son’s death, yet I must always move forward into hope. Each day brings more hope as I accomplish another piece of my lifelong grief work.

So the dichotomy exists within me. In my heart, mind and soul my child will live forever. The memories of the full measure of each day of his life are there to give me peace and solace. Yet, the brutal pain of my son’s death is there, too. Unlike any other love in life, a parent’s love is unconditional and transcends all. There is a peace in knowing that. The pain doesn’t end. It simply reshapes itself into a quiet, soft ache that gives us a gentle, often tearful, reminder that our child will always be with us. And perhaps that is as it should be.

NEWSLETTER GOES ELECTRONIC

In Order to provide additional, more in depth content on a monthly basis, the chapter newsletter Forever in Our Hearts Will now be provided in an electronic pdf. format, both on line at the website and by direct email. Hard Copies are not currently available through postal mail, unless one has provided self addressed stamped envelopes. Hard Copies will be made available at the monthly meetings.

Electronic Extras
Enjoy the extra content provided in the electronic newsletter format, that is not available in hard copy. If you know of family members, friends or others who might benefit from our electronic newsletter, just send a request and we’ll email a copy.

Sharing Memories of Christina

How we remember Christina….My daughters and I all share a tattoo on our left foot of a hibiscus flower which on my daughters’ feet say “daughter and sister”. Mine says “Cristina, Angela, Cassandra and Pasquale”. We have had a tree planting at Elm Hill Manor, Inc., and at Strawberry Park where she spent her summers with all of us. We have three scholarships in her memory one at our local high school Tolland, One at Rockville High School and one at Southern Conn. State University where she graduated with honors from while on chemo. We have had rocks painted with her picture and places she loved to visit. We have had candle lightings and held a family balloon release on April 18th for her 2nd year anniversary. We have made throw pillows with thoughts for Cristina written on them. Many friends also have tattoo’s for our daughter whether just the initials CMC or courage, and Hope with a purple crayon with “Beaker”, her nick name, written on someone’s back. About 11 people have a tattoo for Cristina. Our home has several places her picture is displayed and our office is all about Cristina. We have 5 shadow boxes with several items about Cristina and several items of hers out and displayed. Each of my children have some of Cristina's items in each of the bed rooms as well as several pictures up. We have had a book dedication at our local library in her memory. I have a digital picture frame in our kitchen with several hundred pictures that show all day. She is in our hearts and on our mind everyday, every moment.

Lisa Cortese, Christina’s Mom

Continued from page 3

REMEMBERING OUR CHILDREN
Last month, I covered some of the many experiences we have dealing with grieving the loss of a child—feelings, challenges and decisions that most of us face. This month, I would like to touch on some of the differences in our grieving experiences. For this I can only speak from my own personal experience.

When I lost my parents several years ago, I found family and friends very supportive with cards, food and attending services. As we gathered to share our grief, we talked freely about our loved ones—how they lived and how they died. We shared memories and tears. No one was lost for words or felt awkward. My father had died from a heart condition and my mother from lung cancer.

As I have mentioned before, my son, Rick died on April 27th, 2001. He was 31 years old and after a lifelong battle with depression and addiction, he killed himself. His first attempted suicide was when he was only 8 years old, so it was not totally unexpected. We did all we could to get him help and counseling but in the end, I believe his pain had become unbearable.

We had a Memorial Service for Rick, and though it was well attended by family and friends whom I truly believe cared, it was also a very awkward situation. Suicide is not a word that people are comfortable with but that was how Rick died and that is what we had to deal with. Unfortunately, most people didn’t know what to say or what to do—just a big hug or a few comforting words like “I’m so sorry for your loss” or “I don’t know what to do or say but I will be praying for you” goes a long way toward comfort. Though people meant well, much of what I remember was very painful—instead of caring, support and consolation some of the comments were:
* What did you do that made your son kill himself?
* Why didn’t you stop him and get him some help?
* You know your son will never go to Heaven because he killed himself.
* How did he do it?
And 3 months after his death—a co-worker said “Aren’t you and his sister over it yet?—You need to get on with your life.”

After the Memorial Service only a handful of people stayed in touch with me—even friends I had known for many years just couldn’t handle my son’s suicide so they avoided me. I looked for a support group and even that was not easy. One organization that I called asked me when and how my son died and then told me to call back in a couple months and they would try to find me a group. Another group I reached out to told me that they were a general grief support group but they hadn’t dealt with a suicide and other people might be uncomfortable with me there. At that time, I didn’t know there was a local Compassionate Friends Chapter. Finally, the director of one of the funeral homes I called gave me the number of someone to call who could probably help and as a result I was connected to a support group for those who have lost loved ones to suicide. Finally, someone understood what I was going through and reached out to help. At that point, I don’t think I could have taken another ‘rejection’. Losing my son was difficult enough without feeling so alone in dealing with his death.

Because of my experience, I got acquainted with other survivors through The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and got involved with 2 different support groups. Eventually, I was asked to participate in an Outreach Program of Colonial Point Christian Church of South Windsor and became a facilitator of The Anchor, a local support group for those who have lost loved ones to suicide. Doing so has helped bring some healing into my own life by helping others deal with their loss. I attended other groups now and then because sometimes I need to be a participant, not a facilitator.

I hope that you have not experienced feeling alone or rejected in your grief. If you are reading this article, I expect that you have found compassion and support through CF to help deal with the loss of a child.

If you would like to share your experience and how you have dealt with it, I am sure that it would be helpful to other families who have lost a child.
Balloon Release 2009
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CREDO:  
WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE  

We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, understanding and hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us. Your pain becomes my pain as your hope becomes my hope. We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races and creeds and relationships.

We are young; we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope. Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression; others radiate an inner peace.

But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share just as we share with each other our love for our children who have died. We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building that future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts and help each other grieve as well as to grow.

WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE.
WE ARE THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS!

OTHER AREA SUPPORT GROUPS

Each month we will attempt to feature a rotation of resources. If you know of any, please send us an email with the information!

NORTH CENTRAL HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE Bereavement & Grief Support Groups
Provides year-round community support
For more information, please contact our Bereavement Coordinator at 860.872.9163 x 2425
www.vnhsc.org

Youth/Young Adult Bereavement Support
Individual support is available, and groups are formed as needed. Call for information.

SIDS NETWORK, INC.
Ledyard, CT 06339
860-447-1791 ext 4541
sidsnet1@sids-network.org www.sids-network.org

FIRST CANDLE GRIEF SUPPORT FOR GRANDPARENTS
Talking with other bereaved grandparents may help. First Candle can help put you in touch with other grandparents who have experienced a similar death by calling 1-800-221-7437. www.firstcandle.org

(Continued from page 10)  
THE UGLY CLUB

are on the end of newer bereavement and still, deeply, feel the ugliness of it being forced upon us. For many of us, "THE UGLY CLUB" is a very apt description.

I absolutely agree that The Compassionate Friends is a source of comfort and compassion, and there is beauty and friendship among our walls and within our pages. As it states on the National Website "We are truly glad that you have found us but profoundly saddened by the reason of your visit." ♥

Bettie-Jeanne,
RobynApril's Mom
Newsletter Editor

Comments, Questions, concerns are always welcomed by the readers. Please share your thoughts! Unless expressly stated, the views expressed in articles, poetry, letters, etc. are not necessarily reflective upon the views of The Compassionate Friends, the Chapter Steering Committee or the Editorial Team. ♥

A wife who loses a husband is called a widow.
A husband who loses a wife is called a widower.
A child who loses his parents is called an orphan.
There is no word for a parent who loses a child.
That's how awful the loss is.
Widely attributed to Ronald Reagan

IT’S THE WAY TO CONNECT

Though in its infancy we are now on Facebook. Your friends and family are invited to join. We hate that people do need our services, but we want those who do to find us easily. With each new person who becomes aware, we have a greater opportunity to reach those in need. Facebook will allow us to more easily connect to others who care, understand and offer support. We will use FB to remind members about meetings and events, to post photos of our children and siblings, to share memories and to talk with each other about whatever we need to share. Though the FB terminology isn’t appropriate for us we have both a FAN PAGE and a GROUP. Please Join both.

FAN PAGE
The Compassionate Friends of Northeastern CT (Rockville)
GROUP
The Compassionate Friends Northeastern CT Chapter (Rockville) ♥
See you on Facebook! ♥

MAY 2010
Forever In Our Hearts Northeastern CT.
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May.
Another month come and past.
I mark time by the 4th of every month now.
It was 17 months this month.
It sounds so long.

Seventeen months has been an agony of eternity since Robbie held my hand or we shared tea time or danced together.
Seventeen months since I began my day with an email to here, verifying that I was awake, followed by her start-of-the-day-phone-call to me.
Seventeen months since I could just pick up a phone to hear her words of comfort, her contagious silly laugh, or hear My Girl tell yet another really bad corny joke.

(Two Peanuts walk into a bar. One is a salted.)

Agonizing Eternity.

And yet, still early.
The Grief still “New”.
She has only been away from me 4.8% of the time that we shared her earth plane life.
Only 4.8%.

Yet in the way time juxtaposes, I feel both fresh in her loss and old in my grief. But times passes and seasons change, and sometimes against my will, I change.

I KNOW that I am not the same lighthearted, often silly, and mostly fun Me-I –Used-To-Be, but I also recognize that I am not the same Hating-Life-Aching-Mom from a year ago.
Recently, I have been noticing that I don’t walk with my shoulders slumped and head hanging, except on one of THE BARK Days, which are further and further between.
I have surprised myself to suddenly notice that I am singing along with a song on the radio.
I have been shocked, not only at the sound of my own laughter, but at realizing that I wasn’t “faking it” to make someone else feel better.

Yesterday, I sat outside with my husband at Dairy Queen. I had suddenly felt a craving for a chili cheese foot-long, something that I would consider taboo for our health, weight and ages…
…but then I think to Robyn’s last night ~ to her last week. I wonder if she knew that on December 4th her life would end on the plane, if she might have had less skinless boned chicken, plain scrod and more hot fudge sundaes, vanilla chais and more of the chocolate that she loved so much. So, yesterday, I devoured my fries and fattening dog, knowing that tomorrow’s number on the wii™ scale would be high, but not caring as much as I once did. Would Robyn have eaten the doughnut that she craved that cold bleak December morning if only she had known?

And while we sat, eating in silence, I looked over Jim’s shoulder and noticed the blue sky with puffy white clouds. The sun shone, and though it was chilly, it felt peaceful and calm
And then I realized with a start

ALMOST NORMAL

I’ve had a few of those Almost Normal moments in the past few months, but they are usually fleeting and have had a feeling of transparency to them. Yesterday, the appreciation for a bright blue sunny spring sky was brief.
But, for a moment, it was THERE. That puts me in a different place than this time one ugly year ago. Apparently that it what Time does, whether we like it or not.

Changes Things.
I know that I am in a “quieter” less emotional place that last year. Pain is “softer”, mostly, but never gone. There is still a rollercoaster of emotions, but the drops are more shallow and the scary heights, less high.

This morning I got a great email from one of my dearest friends. The ME-WHO-USED-TO-BE would have become very excited! The EMERGING-ME recognized the goodness and was pleased. The Emerging Me recognized that this year I am able to use the words GREAT, LIKE, LOVE and mean them. But as I attempted to share the news with my family, by forwarded email, I began to sob….
Robyn is the first person, after Jim, who I would always share any news with. To not be able to phone her is a glaring bottomless black hole.

YES, I KNOW that I can talk to her and she will hear, but I miss, with all of my heart, the back and forth conversation that always flowed so easily between us. So, for a while, I will cuddle with her beloved childhood stuffed SNUGGLE BUNNY, a reminder of the days when my children were small and life was filled with all of the goodness yet to come.

And as I hold that bunny close to my face, trying to fill my memories with the scent of my little girl, the tears will slow and I will know that though it will never be The Same ~ or maybe even As Good without my daughter here ~ that there may be goodness yet to come. ♥

Bettie-Jeanne,
RobynApril’s mom