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

~Simon Stephens, founder of The Compassionate Friends

Balloons, Butterflies, Bubbles and Compassionate Friends

Compassionate Friends Family members gathered in Henry Park on the second Tuesday of June for an evening of fellowship, love and understanding. The tables were laden with homemade and purchased salads, baked good, desserts, pastas and even pizza. The scent of grilling burgers and hotdogs wafted through the air, on the steady breeze. There were hugs as we remembered what had brought us together, but there were smiles and laughter, too. Families brand new to Compassionate Friends sat among those who have continued to find both solace and empathy over their many years relationship. There was a common bond...a gentle understanding that needed no words, but all knew that words shared within this safe place would be accepted and not judged. It was a good night for friends to gather; even friends who have been brought together by reasons that have broken their hearts.

After a shared meal, siblings, parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles and friends trekked up the hill to the base of HENRY TOWER, where a gentle annual ceremony of remembrance awaited. Those who wished to take part in the Balloon release were given the opportunity to write a message upon a cotton stringed biodegradable latex balloon. This year in recognition of raised consciousness for the environmental impact and respect of the Connecticut law restricting amounts of balloons released at one time, bubbles and butterflies were offered. Our family elected to release butterflies in Robyn’s name. Having only been to WINGS, (Butterfly museum in Deerfield, MA) once before when Robbie

(Continued on page 4)
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.

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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
c/o Laureen Relyea
107 Milo Peck Lane
Windsor, CT 06095-1867

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

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

If you would like someone to receive a copy of this newsletter, email TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com
Or leave a message for Bettie-Jeanne @ (860) 870-7581

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I sit here alone thinking of you
And wondering why we do what we do.
Life is so fragile, like delicate glass.
It flies by in an instant, and then it is past.
I ponder and wish and hope it's not so.
Then I look up and think, why did you go?
My heart is so heavy; it's too much to bear.
I hang my head low in an effort at prayer.
I ask Him to help me be strong and to fight
That feeling that comes to me late in the night.
I live through the day with the next not yet here,
Wishing and wanting your presence be near.
Please give me a sign that you're not far away,
A whisper, a touch, a kiss while I pray.
On the wings of an angel I hope you do fly.
Remember, my son, this is not a goodbye.
You will always be with me from morning till nigh.

Michele A. Cerrigione,
Ryan’s Mom
Northeastern CT TCF Chapter

GRANDPARENTS’ REMEMBRANCE

We are the grieving grandparents,
the shepherds of our children and grandchildren’s lives.
Our grief is two-fold
and at times we feel powerless to help.
We seek to comfort our children
in the depths of their grief
and yet we need the time and space
to face our own broken hearts.
We have been robbed of the special tender touch
a grandparent shares with a grandchild
and we have lost a symbol of our immortality.
As we walk by our child’s side,
we both give and draw strength.
We reach into their hearts to comfort them,
and when they reach out to us in their distress,
we begin the journey to heal together.
We continue to be their guardians.
We allow traditions to change
to accommodate their loss.
We support the new ones
which symbolize the small steps on their journey.
It is in their healing that our hearts find comfort.

~Susan Mackey, TCF, Rutland, VT~

HAVING TROUBLE REMEMBERING THE WEB AND EMAIL ADDRESSES?

TCFNECTChapter
Stands for
THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS
NORTHEASTERN
CONNECTICUT
CHAPTER

THE WEBSITE IS TCFNECTCHAPTER.org
And THE EMAIL IS TCFNECTCHAPTER@gmail.com

AUGUST MEETING TOPIC

One of the most compelling workshops at The Compassionate Friends National Conference was the presentation by Pat Schweibert of her DVD TEAR SOUP and the discussion that followed. Our August Compassionate Friends meeting will view the video, which validates the Grief Experience, using the analogy of the making of TEAR SOUP. Discussion about our own grief journeys and the importance of not judging or being judged, will follow.

~Susan Mackey, TCF, Rutland, VT~
brought my mom and I just after my dad’s death, it seemed a fitting and particularly meaningful tribute to re-lease butterflies from there in Robyn’s memory. Donna and Scotty Maheux also chose to honor Donna’s sister, JoAnne, gone less than a week, with whispers on the wings of released butterflies.

As the temperature gently fell, and the sun began to dip, soft music provided a comforting background. SHARPIE ® MARKERS squeaked against the latex, scribbling messages of love and remembrance. Periods of somber silence were broken by easy laughter as more stories were swapped and lives remembered. Children, most siblings of those gone too soon, used straws and thickened “bubble juice” to send their bubbles skyward, both an non-impactive treatment of the environment and a reaffirming message that life does go on.

Finally, as Release Time approached families solemnly gathered in small groups; some holding hands, emotion heavy on expectant faces. The music continued to play softly as poems of hope and love were read. As always, there were giggles as balloons caught in trees, popped and sent too soon. Finally, fingers that held the strings connected to their message of love, released, and balloons, amidst the bubbles, began to fly skyward. Eyes turned toward the heavens. Hearts floated with the balloons, remembering days filled with those whom we miss so much. We watched, until they, like our remembered children, had passed from physical view.

Once the balloons were released, everyone was invited to participate in the butterfly release in Robyn and JoAnne’s honor. Gently, the sleeping butterflies were coaxied awake and nudged from their paper sleeping bags. Sweet sounds of honest laughter tinged the air as the butterflies took turns lighting on those waiting and watching! With each person they sat upon, they seemed to bring spirit and light. The mood changed from mellow and somber to bright and hopeful! Unlike the balloons quickly floating from our sight, the butterflies seemed content to linger and visit. It was as if they presented a gift of love and hope to everyone they touched.

“Since the early centuries, the butterfly has symbolized renewed life. The caterpillar signifies life here on earth; the cocoon, death; and the butterfly, the emergence of those gone into a new, beautiful and freer existence. … The Compassionate Friends embrace the butterfly a symbol - a sign of hope that our children are living in another dimension with greater beauty and freedom …” *

Somehow, it felt not only very appropriate, but immensely special, to celebrate the lives of our daughter, RobynApril, and of Donna Jean’s sister, JoAnne, and all of the children, siblings and grandchildren, by sending new life out in to the world; to help fertilize and pollinate; to assist in creating a new chain of life. Butterflies not only are poetry in flight, bringing color to landscape, but entomologists now claim that only bees outrank butterflies on the Important Pollinators List.

I could feel Robyn smiling and nodding her head in approval.

As the small groups shared final hugs and began to dis-perse, the balloons gone from sight and the butterflies now searching for a nighttime resting place. Donna and Scotty Mahuex took out their kite, a final flight, in a dance of remembrance for not only JoAnne, but for all of our children and siblings, we hope, soaring above the clouds.

It was a Good Night. ♥

Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby, RobynApril’s mom

* Compassionate Friends National Quote

SHARING RELEASE DAY STORIES

The balloon release means a lot to me. I’m a dyed in the wool conservationist so I never thought of releasing a balloon until my son died. When I wrote my first message to heaven on the balloon I felt for the first time I could actually write a message to him. It was a way to tell him I love him and miss him so very much. I “talk” to my son every day but writing the message took on new meaning. It eased the pain and felt like a positive thing to do.

Laureen Reyela, Christopher’s mom

At our balloon release, I attached a picture of Mark with his date of birth and last earth day along with a personal note from me. Evidently, it was found by someone and she posted this on Mark’s “Tributes.com” page:

“I did not know Mark but I was blessed with his presence when I was walking along my yard with my 4 year old and happen along a balloon with a wonderful photo of Mark. This balloon made me cry and hug my child very tightly, he did not understand what was wrong but from a mother to a mother, I am very sorry for your loss! Thank you for reminding me what life is truly about and what my priority need to be. From my heart to yours, with love, Kathleen

Posted by: Kathleen Preston, CT  Jun 22, 2010 “

Amazing don’t you think!

Sue Roarabaugh, Mark’s mom

(Continued on page 14)
The balloon release is my way of saying hi back to Derek for all the times he says hi to me. I try to get the other members of my family to come to the release, but it's not always possible. When they do come, I feel like it's a way to try to connect them to Derek the same way I feel connected. I hope Derek is smiling back & saying "Thanks Mom." I still miss him so much—even after 4 years, there is so much pain.

~ Carol Sullivan, Derek's mom
YOU WERE ON MY MIND . . .

When I woke up this morning... You were on my mind. You were on my mind. You with that genuine enthusiasm, like a kid with his first bicycle. You with the curiosity and excitement that dads love to be there for. There's so much of you still with me. Still with us! It's not fair that we feel cheated or that we won't share your ways anymore. But in reality, after all the tears and inner feelings of pain and sadness pass we will have joy and great happiness because we shared your days. Your laughter. You. And when I wake up each morning It will be OK that you were on my mind...

You are on my mind. That's a special place for you to be, because it will be forever.

Michael Tyler
TCF Lighthouse Chapter
Lewes, Delaware

ON NOT SAYING IT

I never got around to saying it. There was always tomorrow, When the time would be more appropriate. Besides, you hated “embarrassment,” Or was the embarrassed one really me? Now I say it a lot, To the sky, to your photo, to a gravestone. Knowing facts say you cannot hear it, But believing, inside me, you can. When a child, a youth, then a young man, I remember how you watched my face. First as your god, then as your monitor, Finally, I hope, as a friend. But “I love you,” as years went by, Were words we kept bottled inside. Now that you've left, the bottle overflows. Until I, too, cross the Divide, I have to believe you knew. And forgave me for not saying it.

Leonard Ruppert
TCF, Atlanta, GA

Life's unfairness is not irrevocable; we can help balance the scales for others, if not always for ourselves. Hubert H. Humphrey
Alan Pedersen had known his way around Nashville, as an award winning songwriter, successful recording artist, stand-up comedian, and network radio news reporter. But on August 15, 2001 life as he knew it changed forever when Alan's 18 year old daughter, Ashley Marie Pedersen, was killed in an automobile accident in rural Colorado.

Alan began to find healing as he attended meetings, and then became actively involved with the Littleton, Colorado Chapter of The Compassionate Friends, finding that he did not have to walk his grief journey alone.

In 2003, Alan started giving back as he began traveling and sharing his music and story with other TCF Chapters. What started out as a "daddy taking a road trip to honor and remember his daughter" has now blossomed into a full time ministry as Alan has turned his journey through grief and pain into a collection of powerful and moving songs. To date, Alan has played concerts and spoken at over 500 events during this "road trip" including nearly 150 TCF Chapters.

Alan and his wife, Denise, have founded GRIEF AND BEYOND: a multimedia ministry offering support to organizations, families, and individuals going through the grief process. Currently they are on the road as part of the ANGELS ACROSS THE USA TOUR which is sponsored in part by bereaved families in honor of their children, grandchildren and siblings. They will travel to 120+ cities and feature at least one concert event in each of the 48 states. The goal of this 2010 tour is to raise community awareness and draw media attention toward local grief organizations that provide resources for the bereaved.

Alan was this year's PROFESSIONAL AWARD RECIPIENT at the National Conference of Compassionate Friends. The recipient of this award has contributed greatly in the area of supporting, assisting, and educating others in accordance with the mission and goals of TCF.

(Above Reprinted from The Compassionate Friends 33rd National Conference Program Booklet)

Who is Alan Pedersen?

Alan has been a keynote speaker and workshop presenter at many prestigious conferences including: The World Gathering on Bereavement, The Compassionate Friends National Conference, and The National Gathering of Bereaved Parents of the USA. Alan has written many articles on grief that have been featured in national magazines, newsletters and other publications. He has been a recurring guest on Healing the Grieving Heart on the Health and Wellness Radio Network. Stories about Alan’s music, message and travels have been featured on television and radio stations around the country, and have been the subject of countless newspaper articles. Alan’s music is popular with bereaved people around the world and has been used at thousands of candle lighting services, balloon and butterfly releases, as well as by hundreds of professionals and organizations as a healing tool for the bereaved. His music has been played at Ground Zero in New York City, the memorial at Virginia Tech University, the memorial at Columbine High School and is featured on many memorial and tribute websites.¹

Why Alan Pedersen?

Jim and I had the privilege of hearing Alan sing at the National Conference. It wasn’t a workshop that I meant to take, but “accidentally” found myself in (there are no coincidences!) From the first gentle note of his songs, I felt as if I was being wrapped in a warm, gentle blanket. The more Alan sang, the more I was certain that he had seen into my soul, my pain, my journey since Robyn’s death, and put to music everything that I have been feeling. Before I left the conference, I had purchased Alan’s 3 highly acclaimed (and I know why they are!) CDs. (Watch for a review in upcoming newsletters). To hear him sing in person melted my heart. At times I felt as if Robyn were whispering in his ear exactly what

¹ Source: www.angelsacrosstheusa.com

(Continued on page 8)
DADDY SMILE

Words and Music by Alan Pedersen
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She stayed until the morning sun came up
There’s so much she had to say.
So I just listened.
She said,
“Daddy, how I long to hear you laugh again ~
It’s O.K. with me!
So, Daddy, Laugh Again!
The best thing you can do for me
Is Do The Best For YOU!
I left you all my memories to help you make it through.
Daddy, you’ve got so much to give.
Start givin’!
You will always be my sunshine,
even when it rains!
And, Daddy, I want you to start livin’.
Let go! Daddy, Let go of The Pain!
I’ve go to go now.
I’ll see you in a while.
But, until then,
Daddy, SMILE! “

Chorus

I sit here in my easy chair this mornin’
starin’ at her picture.
She’s so beautiful!
She makes me smile!
Yeah, she makes her Daddy Smile!
Yeah, she makes me smile!
Yes, she does! She makes her Daddy smile!
Yes, she does! She still makes her Daddy Smile!
Yes, she does! Oh! She makes me smile!

(Continued from page 7)
she wanted me to hear; exactly what I needed to hear.

In between songs, Alan shared his experiences as a bereaved dad and how his journey led him not only to his wife, Denise, who lost her son, but to the musical ministry the two of them have created: ANGELS ACROSS THE USA. I strongly related to him when he retold the story of how he left music after his daughter’s death, because it felt too painful to go on without her. He talked about nearly destroying his guitars, certain that he would never sing again. But, then, something changed for him, as Ashley became even more of a part of his music then she had been before. In her memory, Alan began to reach out to others through his songs.

Displayed in the workshop were photos that will become beautiful butterfly decals, with each child’s name and hometown draw on it, which will adorn the ANGEL TRAILER and will be prominently displayed at every event. (information about how you can add your child to The Tour to become a sponsor are available on Alan’s ANGELS ACROSS THE USA TOUR website – address at the end of this article). The pictures will also be featured on the ANGELS ACROSS THE USA Facebook Page, the tour website and at each concert.

Even though Alan is inspired by his Ashley, we could tell that he was singing for each one of those children in the photos; for every parent who has ever lost a child. When Alan sang it wasn’t just pretty words and melody. He painted a picture of our grief journeys and yet, somehow, managed to fill the room and our hearts with peace, gentleness and hope.

~Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby, newsletter editor
and Robyn’s mom
**What is the ANGELS ACROSS THE USA Tour?**

The Angels Across the USA Tour is a yearlong series of concert events featuring the music and message of Alan Pedersen. His gentle mix of humor and straight-from-the-heart talk wrapped around powerful songs about love, loss and healing make for a unique experience. The purpose of this tour is to bring community awareness and draw media attention toward grief organizations, large and small, who reach out to bereaved families. The Tour is truly Alan and Denise’s ministry. It is a non-profit event for which Alan and Denise don’t charge performance fees, and is made possible by the sponsorship of by hundreds of families who have lost a child and want to have their Angel travel across the USA…. The Tour will cover the 48 contiguous states, stopping in at least 120 + cities.

You can register your child to become a part of this very special journey as Alan carries our beautiful Angels Across the USA at Alan’s website:


Listen to samplings of Alan’s music on youtube.com

---

**A Little Farther Down the Road**  
Words and Music by Alan Pedersen  
Copyright EverAshley Music  
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I know those tears you’re cryin’  
I’ve been in your shoes  
You feel like there’s no use in tryin’  
Like there’s nothing left to lose  
You take one step forward and move two steps back  
You may not see it now but it won’t always be like that

Chorus:

A Little Farther Down the Road  
You’ll see the sun again  
A Little Farther Down the Road  
You’ll look back at where you’ve been  
You’ll see how far you’ve come  
And you’ll find the strength to go  
A Little Farther Down the Road

This journey is not easy  
it’s a windin’ road filled with twists and turns  
But you can make it believe me  
In time you’ll learn  
A greater love comes from your deepest pain  
There’s power in that love to help you rise again

Repeat chorus

Chorus:

I Know You By Heart (I Chase Butterflies)  
Words and Music by Alan Pedersen  
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This road gets lonely  
Since you’ve been gone  
There’s one thing to console me  
I’m sure our love lives on  
It’s deeper than flesh and bone  
It’s stronger than time  
It keeps you close to me  
If I open up my mind  
So I chase butterflies  
I reach for falling stars  
I look for any sign  
From where you are  
I call your name out to the wind  
So I can feel you here again  
Death can’t keep us apart  
Cause I know you by heart  
You’re my heart  
People think I’m crazy  
Cause I talk to you this way  
They don’t know how much I hear  
In the words I feel you say  
You’re the inspiration  
That keeps me strong  
Though you’re just beyond my touch  
You are never really gone
My Jackie
My little one

Did you know how much I loved you?
How you made my heart always sing?
When I ever thought about you
What a memory of your smile would bring.

I search now to get through each day
Though my tears have an endless flow
My heart in a constant ache
For your presence of you to know

I know you are no longer suffering
You’re with God and no longer have your fear
But my heart is still so heavy
I still struggle with you not here

You always made me proud
I thought you always knew
Though you questioned why I felt this
And I realized you didn’t have a clue

Your heart was always open
You never could see what I could see
Your heart always looking further
To a better person you could be

You never bragged or boasted
Of the achievements you had made
My daughter who looked always further
To never let any of her dreams fade

You always fought your hardest
When life put you to the test
Your strength came through as always
When your disease would not let you rest

I watched you struggle daily
And heard you cry no more
Somehow you continued always
And rise for your feet to touch the floor

You always would amaze me
The courage you always had
For everything you had to endure
Pain I knew was sometimes so bad

I miss the times I laid with you
And held you close to me
In hope you would feel some peace
For as long as it could be

I prayed to God beside you
To help you sleep quiet through the night
And hold you ever gently
Until you woke to dawns day light

Then things happened so very quickly
You were slipping away from me
My heart was starting to panic
I didn’t want this to be

The Lord was taking you with him
There was nothing I could do
I prayed to find the strength
For me to let you go with him too

You went so very peacefully
My heart was breaking apart
Your family all surrounded you
With tears hoping to heal their heart

I do know you are happy
That you can finally smile
I call to you to talk to me
To sit with me for awhile

Your sister is holding on well
As tough as she can be
I know she longs for her little sister
Though she knows her heart you can see

Your friends they love and miss you so
They remember you in every way
They keep your memory alive
And they know what you would say

Your family how they long for you
And remember you all the time
They can’t image life without you
Days ahead to follow will be an upward climb

My Jackie, my little one
I hold in my heart
Until the day God sends for me
For in heaven we will never part.

Until then I will long to hear
The two words I miss each day
When you would call to say “Hi mom”.
With my hope and faith I pray.

Love Mom…

Laurie Meyer,
Jackie’s Mom
Northeastern CT TCF Chapter
addressing the grief of those newly bereaved

Editors note:
There is no singular moment when one passes from “newly bereaved” to “Bereaved”. There will be no earth shattering clasp of thunder or movement from the ground. Chances are that you won’t even recognize that you are sliding toward something a “little bit softer”; something that includes a balance of a bit more Trees than Bark (see April 2010 issue “THE BARK AND THE TREES”)

I remember the Compassionate Friends meeting, about 8 months “after”, in which those who had been there longer said that for some of them that the second and third years were “even worse than the first”. I remember my sharp intake of breath and loud moan as I folded over, banging my head on the table. How could anything BE WORSE?

For me, entering into the second year has been a conglomeration of worse and of “softer”...of intense and sudden waves of pain and loneliness, accompanied by some smiles, laughter and gentle visions of “trees and forest”. I am still not enjoying this journey at all, but words like “glad”, “enjoy”, “like”, “love” are seeping their way back into my vocabulary.

At the recent National Compassionate Friends Conference (which Jim and I recommend that every Bereaved Parent, Grandparent and Sibling attend - it was more than worth the financial strain from our still not returned to work budget and we are already planning to attend in July 2011) I was often surprised that those “further removed” from the first few years ‘after’, thought of us, 19 months ‘after’, as “Fresh”, “Right at the Beginning”, “Still Very New”. From this peer group, we learned that most bereaved family members think of “NEWLY Bereaved” as, at least, the first 3 to 5 years....

But remember, there will be no sudden switch that indicates that you are “no longer new”. There is no stick to measure the depth of your pain and grief. EVERY GRIEF JOURNEY IS VERY INDIVIDUAL. There is no comparison to anyone else’s grief; nor has anyone the right to judge whether you are “not making healthy progress” in your own Grief Journey. (I sadly heard that comment from another bereaved parent who seemed to feel that their grief knowledge was best!)

What I do KNOW as a “Still Newly Bereaved Parent” (but not as newly bereaved or numb as I was a year ago), is that there ARE CHANGES...in YOU, in your address book, in your Grief, in Levels of Pain, in How The Memories Affect you......And that I am thankful for My Compassionate Friends who are holding my hand along this journey.
~Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby, RobynApril’s mommie

ARE WE EVER GOING TO BE OK????

You know that feeling, when you are sitting in your couch, maybe by the fire place, hot cocoa in hand, watching the snow fall, or maybe listening to the waves, and you look around at your children or grandchildren playing with the dog, “hubby” comfortably laying back in his lazy boy reading the paper, and you think
“ Ahhhh, It’s all good. This is what I thought life should be like. It feels right...”

You know? That feeling like you are exactly where you should be.
What is it called?
“Well-being”? “Warm and fuzzy inside”?

I have little hope I will ever feel that way again. I don’t think I will look around and feel like my life was complete again. Actually, it feels like my life should be approaching the end. I can tell some of you are ready to yell at me to remember my other sons, to remind me that Julian would want me to smile, or that God has some amazing plan in which I am supposed to take part. I am aware of all those and more.

We often compare grief to a roller coaster with its ups and downs. I think it is a bit more complicated myself and way more dangerous with little or big traps here and there. I guess it would be more like a crazy GHOST TRAIN of some kind , where fear, numbness, nausea, periods of rest and quiet, excitement of new things happening, ups and downs, sudden turns, no way to go back, and when you finally think you are getting to the end of the ride and out of the darkest tunnel, a hand grabs you tight reminding you that it just will never be over, and you get to start it all back from the beginning and not necessarily in the same order. Sometimes you have a chance to get off though, but if you make the wrong choices it could just mean the end and is that what we really want, the end? Sometimes I think so, but I know better...

So, anyway, lets get back to the CRAZY TRAIN.
Imagine trying to get through all those curves, ups and downs, scary tunnels, ... all that without throwing up and still having to think about making meals, getting children ready, laundry done, (Continued on page 12)
(Continued from page 11) **GOING TO BE OK????**

house cleaned and fitting some actually good quality loving time with everyone living under your roof!... And then, finding a reason good enough to get up and do it all over again the next day. Well, after a while, it is easy to want to give up; it is easy to stop caring about what the house might look like, or if the kids eat McDonald’s for the 3rd time in a week, as long as you don’t have to cook. It is easy to just not even talk, and eventually shut down. I know, because I have been there. I still go there from time to time. And I realized that I have to pull the emergency brake and get off the CRAZY TRAIN, but somehow that seems like the hardest thing to do. So I found something else to do that will keep my mind busy and not just temporarily. I chose to keep fighting for the kids and their families. In doing that I honor Julian's memory because he loved his "tumor buddies". I also I started going to school. I chose things that I am passionate about so I can stay focused enough. I might not be who I was before cancer *(probably not that bad of a thing)*. I might not be the mom I should anymore, nor the spouse or the friend-I-used-to-be, but believe me, I have tried. And when nothing makes sense anymore, it is useless to try to live like the person you aren’t anymore.

[Again this week], I collapsed in pain on my bathroom floor, tortured by the thought that I won't get to see my son again: that life doesn’t make sense anymore, that I can’t ever feel like Everything Is How It Should Be Again, that my children are growing up with a half mom.

I felt like the only way off that STUPID GHOST TRAIN was to give up on life period. I know some of you feel that way ...

But then I heard a soothing voice saying to me, :

"And what if you aren't the same anymore? What if you are hurting? What if sometimes you fall to the ground and can't get up for a while? What if you get scared? What if people decide they can't be your friends because of all this? Get up when you are ready Mimi! Find it in yourself to do what you can each day, and each day it might be a little more. Some day it might be a little less. Get up! Choose one thing to focus on; one thing you like to do. When you are ready, get up and look around. Just as Julian's life and death changed you, so did your circle of friends. Some stayed, some left and some joined in. It is ok to be a different person. It's ok to cry; to hurt and grieve. But then it is ok to get up and stand a little taller each time. You just need to accept the fact that you won't be the same again and that it is ok to not be ok sometimes..."

I hate how I feel. I hate not having my lil' guy and be able to watch him grow. I have never felt such pain emotional, nor physical. I hate watching my friends go through the same horror.

But now I know there is a way off THE TRAIN that doesn't have to end in yet another tragedy. I know I can choose to slow down, take time to grieve and then focus on life again. I accept the fact that some days it is going to be bad and I won't want to get back up. I accept the fact that I am not the same person anymore. But I also accept the fact that all of that is ok and I don't have to feel bad about it.

Grieving is personal and no one can tell you which rules YOU should follow. Just remember, **IT'S OK TO NOT BE OK** and if you start by accepting that, it will be easier to accept **THAT BEING OK, well, is alright too** ...

Mimi Avery
Julian's mom
2 years 1 day later

---

**The passage of time alone does not cause our grief to end,**
**but its softening touch helps us to survive ~**

Wayne Loder
BRING THE MEMORY OF YOUR LOVED ONE TO A MEETING

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

Michele Cerrigione
TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com

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 ♥

JULY’S CHILD

Fireworks race toward heaven
Brilliant colors in the sky,
Their splendor ends in seconds
On this evening in July.
"Her birthday is this Saturday,"
I whisper with a sigh,
She was born this month,
She loved this month
And she chose this month to die.
Like the bright and beautiful fireworks
Glowing briefly in the dark
They are gone too soon, and so was she
Having been, and left her mark.
A glorious incandescent life,
A catalyst, a spark...
Her being gently lit my path
And softened all things stark.
The July birth, the July death of
my happy summer child
Marked a life too brief that ended
Without rancor, without guile.
Like the fireworks that leave images
On unprotected eyes...
Her lustrous life engraved my heart...
With love that never dies♥

Sally Migliaccio,
TCF Babylon, Long Island, NY

In this universe
nothing is ever wholly lost,
That which is excellent
remains forever a part
of this universe.
Human hearts are dust,
But the love which moves
the human heart,
abides to bless the last generation.
Ralph Waldo Emerson
GOOD-BYE

Good-bye is too hard to say
Good-bye, good-bye,
never got to say good-bye.
Always thought I’d never need to say
good-bye to you.
You were always there.
Why, why, why,
you can ask that over and over
but never any answer.
You only say good-bye when you’re
not coming back.

Until that day we meet again — good-bye!

Shannon Kennedy, age 10

(Continued from page 4) BALLOONS ~ BUTTERFLIES

Our first time at a Compassionate Friends gathering, Scott & I attended the event and it was very healing. We met other people who honor and miss those loved ones that have moved to a better place. To cry was OK, to talk was OK, to smile was OK. After the death of my sister only days before, sharing dinner with everyone was the first “meal” I had in days…. the nourishment was a good thing for me.

When the balloons were released, for me it was in watching them rise to a point when they were just specks in the sky. I told Scott it was like my sister, JoAnne. She was there one moment and slowly seemed to float away. I think of that and it helps me understand.

When I released the butterfly it quivered a little then flew to the cover and nourishment of a tall strong tree.

I was glad for 2 years to be the strong tree for JoAnne and send her the strength she needed all that time.

At the end of the release Scotty and I attempted to fly a kite in the evening breeze. It didn’t sail as high as I had hoped that night. But one day the kite will take off, and that is when I know JoAnne has grabbed it and helped sail it into the sky! We shared an afternoon of trying to fly it... up then down.....almost like her recovery. First she flew, then she tumbled. The wind gave out...

It was an evening of deep meaning for us. Mostly it was the hugs, words of kindness and people who listened and were compassionate. I am glad that we were invited to be part of it.

Donna Jean Maheux,
JoAnne’s sister

Reminder!
Mature Siblings
(not young children, please)
are welcomed to all
Northeastern CT Chapter meetings

Please share your thoughts, poems, articles,
as a sibling, with us. Send your contributions to
Subject line: SIBLING PAGE
TCFNECTChapter@gmail.com
Or to editor at 4 Darby DreamView Ellington, CT
06029-2733

IF TOMORROW

If tomorrow starts without me
And I’m not there to see,
If the sun should rise and find
Your eyes all filled with tears for me.
I wish so much that you wouldn’t cry
The way you did
While thinking of the many things
We didn’t get to say.
I know how much you love me,
As much as I love you.
Each time you think of me
I know you’ll miss me too.
But when tomorrow starts without me
Please try to understand,
And angel came and called my name
And took me by the hand.
When tomorrow starts with out me
Don’t think we’re far apart,
Every time you think of me
I’m right there in your heart.
I miss and love you,
But I know that God loves you best.
Your loving sister, Charlene

In loving memory of my brother, Donald L. Slater
Sunrise June 14, 1947

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06029-2733
I have always been a voracious reader. In this first year and one half following Robyn’s leaving of the earth plane, I spied through over 200 books. Many, read for pure distraction and escape from reality, had captivating plots during the reading, but quickly escaped, too, from my memory. Only a scant few were SELF-HELP / GRIEF BOOKS, as the reality felt too much like salt poured on a deep and open wound. Non-fiction has rarely been a first choice, not providing nearly enough diversion. Non-fiction that involves the death of a child hadn’t had the strong pull of a bee to nectar, but on occasion edged its way on to my reading list.

I might not have purposely gone looking to read HANNAH’S GIFT, but when it presented itself in my life, I felt compelled to read it in 2 sittings, interrupted only by things that could not be rescheduled.

HANNAH’S GIFT is a Light Filled True Story of the darkness of cancer in a beautiful preschooler named HANNA. As I began to read this book, authored by her mom, my brain and emotions split. I was deeply aware of Maria’s truly amazing relationship with language; her chosen words a paintbrush for vivid pictures colored with tears, laughter and naked honesty. And I was intensely aware that this was not a moving piece of Fiction meant simply to entertain, but was Real Life, authored by a mommy about her precious daughter and her journey through cancer. Hannah’s gift of living and how she approached her dying became a gift, not only to her family, but those who knew her and those now privileged to read the personal and heartwarming recollections.

Above the tile on the cover is a quote by Anne Lamott, “Hannah’s Gift broke my heart and filled me with joy.”

I could not think of a more apt sentiment. Though as deep and sad the subject matter of the death of a child is, I did not find HANNAH’S GIFT to be a sad book….nor is it hokey and filled with frivolous platitudes or clichés. It is a deeply moving sharing of a family’s concentric journey, through the eyes of a mommy, focusing on the nucleus of Hannah’s own personal journey.

This book will long hold a special place in my library.

HANNAH’S GIFT is available on kindle, as well as in both hard and soft cover. There is a FACEBOOK Group, Friends of HANNAH’S GIFT: Lessons From A Life Fully Lived, as well as a second Facebook Page: HANNAH’S GIFT - LESSONS FROM A LIFE FULLY LIVED. HANNAH’S GIFT is being made into a full-length feature film.

Post Script
At The Compassionate Friends National Conference, I noticed a beautiful woman descending on an escalator. I was struck by the way she carried herself. She was impeccably dressed for her long, lean frame and though a perfect fashion statement, it was something else that drew me to speak to her. Among so many parents visibly weighed down by the storms of new grief, this beautiful woman exuded an aura of strength, calm and peace that drew me to speak to her. At that time I had no idea that she was either presenting at the conference, nor an author of a very important book. I met Maria as a bereaved mom, who, too, said good bye to a very loved daughter. Something in her presence felt light and serene, and though I have no doubt that she has known (and perhaps still knows) her own share of personal turmoil and pain, she has not allowed her journey to destroy her, but instead has allowed Hannah’s gift to her to become a gift to others. What better legacy could there be for Hannah, from her mommy?

Perspective by Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby, RobynApril’s mom
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.

Special thanks to the generosity of those who contributed to the Walk To Remember (continued on the following page)

with love from his mom, Michele Cerrigione
John & Heidi Cerrigione
Jan & Mark Falade
Judy & Tim O'Brien
Laurette Carpenter
Michelle & Ross Rossomangno
Debra & Richard Mongeau
Sue-Ann & Gary Quirion
Debra Fournier
Dennis DeBonee
Doug and Beth Mecteau
Gayle & Tim Anderson
Ken & Arlene Jacobsen
Shirley and John Cerrigione

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:
In Loving Memory and Honor of Jennifer Barnett

Michele Herring, In memory of her daughter and Best Friend, Jennifer Barnett
Nancy & Bob Merriman
S & M Welch
Terry & Cliff Jakobsen
Aloma Clark
Ann & Lorin DaRos
Debra & Richard Mongeau
Diane McGowan
Diane Young
Eileen Vibberts
Irv & Chris Smith
Jerry & Mom Zuk
Ken & Arlene Jacobsen
Laurel LaFlamme

Always Remembering “My Dream Come True, RobynApril” ~ from your mommie
In Loving Memory of our daughter~ RobynApril, Jim Darby and Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby
From Robyn’s Brother ~ in memory of Robyn
In Memory of our god-daughter and always favorite niece ~ Janet and Ted Flanagin
Remembering Robyn and JoAnne, ~ Donna and Scott Maheux
In Memory of Robyn and Fellow Angel Jean Daigle ~ Stacey Daigle Glinski
In Memory of Robyn, Chris and Jen ~ Michael and Brenda Cunningham
William Wong ~ remembering my first West Coast Swing Teacher
Barbara Jay and Saul Haffner, in support of Bettie and Jim and Memory of RobynApril
Shelley Schulman ~ In Memory of Robyn and support of BJ and Jim
Trista Smith, Remembering a very best friend
Diana McLean
Joline Daudelin
Joseph Kenney
Kathleen Guilmette
Kathy and Michelle
Mushiba
Peruse Khachoya
Angela Tjonahen
Ben Jerome
Heather Marshall ~ I love you, Robyn!
In loving memory of my son, Larry ~ Janice Provost
In loving memory of our son, Arthur Leon Gagne III ~ Millie Gagne

In Loving Memory and Honor of RobynApril Rivard-Darby Maguire

In Loving Memory and Honor of Christopher
From his Mom, Laureen Reylea

In Loving Memory and Honor of Ryan Evans
From his Dad, Dave Evans
When Ryan died 8 years ago, The Compassionate Friends was a lifeline for me. It was a godsend to me to be able to speak with others that knew what I was feeling. We have a saying that we all belong to the one group no one wants to belong to. Unfortunately we are growing everyday and new members arrive at our meetings every month. I continue to be an active member of the group now so that I can give back some of the support that was given to me by this group of grieving parents and grandparents.

With generous support we will be able to help these parents who have lost children understand that they are not alone and to work toward a brighter future through understanding and compassion.

In this spirit, I chose to walk for our chapter.

Michele Cerrigione, Ryan’s Mom
THE NATIONAL WALK TO REMEMBER  July 4th ~ Arlington, Virginia.  8:00 a.m.

While “civilians” ‘back home’ loaded their cars with potato salads, lawn chairs and fireworks before heading out for their Independence Day picnics, a reverent, yet upbeat magnitude of Compassionate Friends Walkers began to gather. There are no words to adequately describe the emotion of seeing groups numbering nearly 1,500 Compassionate Friends, walking together in Remembrance of their children, siblings grandchildren. Nearly all wore white tee shirts, the WALK TO REMEMBER LOGO and their child or sibling’s photo button adorning the front, and many added pictures of their child on the back. Individuals and representative from various Chapters carried signs and banners, loving listing names of those gone too soon. Over 10,000 names were carried...an absolutely awesome number. Jim and I added names of children from our Chapter to our Walk to Remember “signs”.

The 2 mile walk took place as the heat began to pour from the pavement and the air was heavy with humidity….but no one seemed to care. We were all there for a purpose ~ to collectively honor our loved ones, and to give each other strength, fellowship and love. IT wasn’t a SAD Walk; it was a STRONG Walk.

At the midway point there was a mini-park where walkers took breaks, enjoyed the mist of the waterfall, and shared memories of their loved ones. It was there that I had a very personal and touching experience. Needing a break from my emotions, I took a short walk off of the path and began to cry. “Are you with me, Robyn?” I sobbed, thinking of all of the fund-raising walks we had done together. “Are you there?”, I whispered. No sooner had the words left my mouth, then a baby robin hopped directly into the path in front of me! Camera in hand, I laughed and cried, as I began to snap photos with shaking hands. Suddenly, the mother robin appeared, chasing after the baby and then stopping to feed it. For several minutes I was alone in the world, watching as a mom nourished and then protected her baby robin. Then the baby hopped off and the mom first began to go after it and then hopped away in another direction, I presume to focus my attention on her, to leave her baby safe. Our trip to the National Compassionate Friends Conference has already been worth every cent and every mile, but in that one moment, I felt in the Absolute Glory of not only Nature, but in All Possibilities.

Bettie-Jeanne, Robyn’s mom

NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT CHAPTER WALK TO REMEMBER

Our First Chapter Walk on Saturday July 10th walk turned out great!. About 30 people participated, including Michele Cerrigione. and her husband, in honor of their son, Ryan Lincoln, and wearing a photo button to honor Laureen Reylea’s son, Christopher; Sue Roarabaugh and her husband, in honor of their son, Mark; David Evans, his sister and her husband in honor of Dave’s son, Ryan. My husband, friends and relatives of my daughter, Jennifer Barnett, walked alongside us. Though, at the time of printing, we fell $55.00 short of our team goal of $1,500.00, we collected a good amount of money to be able to be of additional service to reaching out to bereaved families in our community. (an additional 15% is deducted by National Compassionate Friends for expenses and contribution)

It was a hot day as we walked for about an hour around the water at Mansfield Hollow State Park. I did bring some drinking water, but the shade sure felt good when we got to the picnic area for pictures. My husband got one of all of us together and then a couple others as we started and when we came back. We had to use up the FILM on our regular camera and I made prints from the negatives to share in this newsletter edition. All in all, it was a Good Day. I was very pleased to be part of it.

Michele Herring, Jennifer Barnett’s mom

DONATIONS ARE STILL BEING ACCEPTED IN PERSON, BY MAIL AND ON LINE

www.tcfwalktoremember.org - Search for the TEAM name - HEARTS ♥♥♥♥
Editors note:
Jim and I both wore T-shirts, not only with our Robyn’s photo, but carrying the names of some of our Friends’ and our Chapter’s Children:
♥ Christopher ♥ Penny ♥
♥ Russ ♥ Christina ♥
Daniel ♥ AJ ♥
♥ Ashleigh ♥ Derek ♥

♥ Eric ♥ Mark ♥ Jennifer ♥
♥ Tim ♥ TJ ♥ Ralphie ♥
♥ Jayden ♥ Vahnnsana ♥
♥ Liz ♥ Rae ♥ Michael ♥
♥ Jerod ♥
♥ Henry ♥ Julian ♥

so many names... so many children....
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!

GRIEF WATCH / PERINATAL LOSS
Resources for pregnancy loss & support for general loss
www.griefwatch.com

NATURAL SHARE OFFICE
This is a national group offering support for parents who have experienced a pregnancy loss, including a national directory of support groups
www.nationalshareoffice.com

GRIEF NET
An internet community of persons dealing with grief, death and major loss.
Www.griefnet.org

ALSO ON FACEBOOK! NATIONAL COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
The Compassionate Friends / USA
www.CompassionateFriends.org

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 to those without email.

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 add them to our free email list.

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

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!
This was a really different month for Jim and I.

July began with our attendance at our first (but certainly not our last!) The Compassionate Friends National Conference in Arlington, VA. In the nineteen months since Robbie left the earth plane, this was the singular most important thing that we have done for ourselves and for the memory of our beloved daughter.

Our first night there we attended a sharing session, attended by Facebook Friends. By the time we left the session we had not only put names to faces, heard stories that touched our hearts, but made many, many new friends. Most of those in the session were first time conference attendees, noted by the butterflies on our badges. Any time someone further on in their bereavement noticed a butterfly badge, a hug and gentle words of compassion were offered. There were many hugs shared that evening (and... many more throughout the entire conference). And even though this was only the first session of the conference, we realized 15 minutes into it that we would be back for next year’s event. I knew it as soon as one of the Dads shared one of the reasons why he, his wife, and remaining children attend the conference every year. He said that it was the closest he could ever come again to taking a vacation with his child...that this was a place where his son was with them all the time; that they not only could talk about him, but others wanted to hear about him, others wanted to share his life; it was where he could always be present and was part of everything they did over the weekend...LIKE BEING ON VACATION WITH HIS CHILD. Jim and I squeezed hands and shared a wistful look. We knew that we wanted this for us. We look forward to next year’s National Conference as “Our Time With Robyn”.

I shed a Good Amount of tears at the conference. Certain words spoken in workshops triggered memories and emotions...Talking about Robyn and sharing her life ~ and her death ~ is still very tender. Sometimes I found myself feeling very much at peace, and then it would hit me why I was there. Triggered by the workshop format, I would fall back into my memories of all of the dance events and workshops that Robbie and I had gone away for together and it would suddenly strike me that it would never be again. And then I would remember what the dad had said that first night about how this was the place that their child could always be with them.

I talked about Robbie a lot, especially to several of the presenters with whom I bonded....and something began to happen differently......I began to see MORE TREES and much less bark...and the bark that I saw wasn’t as much BARK. (see April 2010 issue THE BARK AND THE TREES). I was surrounded by 1,500 other people who understood my pain, my grief, my aching to have my child back ~ and that, in itself, was profoundly comforting.

At times it was beyond my comprehension as I looked around at so many, many families affected by the loss of their child, their grandchild or their sibling. The amount of names carried during THE WALK TO REMEMBER was overwhelming, as were the amount of people, nearly all wearing the logo-ed white and red tee shirts, many adorned with photos of their beloved child gone too soon. And though the walk was a time of reverence, it was not, like the entire conference had been before it, a time of depression. There were smiles and stories and laughter. Some skipped off track for a “quickie” at STARBUCKS or COLD STONE CREAMERY. I kept taking photo after photo, daunted by the site of so, so many people who had lost children, yet knew statistically that we represented only a very tiny portion of bereaved families.

One of the strangest moments during The Conference was when Jim and I were telling another parent that it had been 18 months since Robyn’s leaving of the earth plane...and then I suddenly realized that it actually was 19 months on July 4, the final day of The Conference. When had I stopped being aware of how many days it was? Was that Good? Was it Forgetting Robyn? Was it Healthier? I finally decided that I didn’t need to define it. It JUST IS. By the end of July I was very well aware that it was 19 months, 3 weeks and 6 days, but not without some aid of the calendar.

Leaving the Conference was very, very hard. For 5 days we had been surrounded with Compassionate, Understanding New Friends, where hugs and warmth flowed freely; where we didn’t have to explain to others how “hard it is”; where it was OK to cry, to grieve, to hurt, to be angry, to be sad....and TO HOPE.

One of the most surprising moments of The Conference, for me, was when one of the speakers noted that years now after the death of her sister and her two children that she was actually in a better, happier, healthier place then she was before those tragedies. Instead of being sentenced to a dismal existence of horrible grief for the rest of her life, her journey had taken her to a place of intense self growth and she had ended up a more alive, happier person that she ever had been. It was an intensely brave thing to admit. HOPE was the constant theme throughout the weekend.

Leaving the safety of that warm cocoon and heading back to Reality and to THE CIVILIAN WORLD was not an easy thing for many of us. To go from a Place of Understanding back to The Land Where People don’t “Know” and can’t relate, nor do they want to, is very, very hard.
Luckily, Jim and I had two sets of different friends in Virginia who we spent the next 10 days with. Neither set “understood”. One never had children and the other has three healthy little ones. But both sets of friends love us and cared about us and gave us safe place to begin to “de-grief”. (I’ve already been approached about possibly leading a session at next year’s conference on “De-grieving, Decompressing, and Entering Back into the Civilian World”)

I “fell apart”, sobbing, several times at their homes and one night just sat at the computer, typing “SCREAM SCREAM SCREAM SCREAM SCREAM” into my Facebook Status line because the pain of missing Robyn was so great. Other times, especially at the friend’s home who had “grown up” with Robbie during their teenaged years together, I shared Robyn stories, laughter with gentle, happy, fond memories. There is an ebb and a flow as I begin to move into the New Normal, which can’t be avoided. It Just Is.

It’s been a really different month.

I found myself helping and comforting a lot of people this month. The badges at the Conference made it easy for us to reach out to “first timers”, too, and whenever Jim and I saw someone alone, we would extend a hand of friendship and comfort and invite them to join us. We met some really amazing people and have begun new relationships that I expect to last far, far, far into our future. (That’s another difference this month...I am recognizing that there IS FUTURE...)

Sometimes I gave more to others than I needed myself. Other times I turned to others, heavily, for strength and understanding. Parts of me that I thought were going to be buried forever, if not long gone, are slowly resurfacing. And yet, I still find time where I just can’t function; where missing her is overwhelming....Sometimes, it is more ache, and less feeling totally fractured. I can honestly say that I think, besides the passing of days and the baby steps that I have been forced to take, The Conference has made a very big difference in where I am in my journey....and The Music was part of that....something very different this month.

Something clicked differently in me as I listened to one of Alan Pedersen’s songs...(see the article on Alan and THE ANGELS ACROSS THE USA TOUR). It was the song DADDY SMILE, written by Alan, through the eyes of his beloved and very greatly missed daughter, Ashley. As I listened to him sing, I was certain that Robbie had reached into his heart, using his voice, his words to send me this message....

“I sat here in my easy chair the other night like so many times before
staring at her picture
Feeling sorry for myself again thinking about how hard life’s been
And how much I miss her
All of the sudden
it was almost like a dream
She stepped out of that picture frame
and sat right next to me
She said “Mommie, I think it’s time
we had a little conversation ~
~ a heart to heart ~
~ just a you and me ~
[Mommie], every day I look at you
And what do I see?
You’re crying
when you’re looking back at me.
That was O.K. for a while, but you know, [Mommie], I miss your smile. “

I am beginning to realize that it has been a really different month, because I am becoming a very different me.

I can’t thank The National Compassionate Friends Conference enough for bringing new important people and relationships into my life and for bringing other emotions, besides pain, back into my life.

☆ Words and Music by Alan Pedersen
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