If this is your first Newsletter

If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, it is because someone has told us it might be helpful for you. We hope it is. We also invite you to our monthly meetings at Hayes Barton Baptist Church. At these meetings you may talk or choose not to say a word. There are no fees or dues. We are sorry you have had to experience the death of a child (or children) but we are here for you. We, too, are on this journey of grief and extend our hearts and arms to you.

January Meetings

The Wake County Chapter meets every second and fourth Tuesday of the month at Hayes Barton Baptist Church, 1800 Glenwood Avenue, at the corner of Glenwood Avenue and Whitaker Mill Road at Five Points in Raleigh. Enter from Whitaker Mill Road into Main Entrance of the Family Life Center which is attached to and behind the church. Ask directions to TCF meeting room at desk just inside the entrance door.

Tuesday, January 14th — The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Tuesday, January 28th — The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Our Credo...

We need not walk alone.
We are The Compassionate Friends.
We reach out to each other with love,
with understanding and with 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,
just as your hope becomes my hope.
We come together from all walks of life,
from many different circumstances.
We need not walk alone.
We are The Compassionate Friends.

We are a unique family because we represent many races,
creeds and relationships. We are young, and 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,
while 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 the children who have died.
We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for
ourselves, but we are committed to building a 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 to grieve as well as to grow.
We need not walk alone.
We are The Compassionate Friends.

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If you would like to give a Love Gift in remembrance of your child, or if you would like to make a donation to our Wake County Compassionate Friends group, please mail your gift to:

Love Gifts — Wake County Chapter
The Compassionate Friends, Inc.
P. O. Box 6602
Raleigh, NC 27628-6602

In order for these gifts to be acknowledged in the following month’s newsletter, they need to be received no later than the 15th of each month.

We are grateful for the gifts given in memory of children. This is the only source of income for our newsletter and other chapter expenses and they are tax deductible. Thanks to each and everyone who sends a love gift.

Creating Memorials

The families in our chapter are a great resource to each other in finding ways to memorialize our children. If you have done something in memory of your child, please send your story to us. Include contact information, vendors, or anything that helped you achieve your memorial….quilts, jewelry, candles, books, websites, garden stones, adopting a roadway, signs, foundations, homemade gift items….everything. We would like to include your stories and your memorials in our newsletters. Send to Pattie Griffin, Wake TCF Newsletter Editor, 30 Shepherd Street, Raleigh, NC 27607 or e-mail your memorials to pattie.grif@gmail.com.

Wake TCF Love Gift Section:

We would like to change our Love Gift section of our Wake TCF Newsletter this year to include pictures of the children remembered in this section. If you would like to have your child’s picture included in this section, please send a copy of his/her picture to Pattie Griffin, Wake TCF Newsletter Editor, 30 Shepherd St, Raleigh NC 27607 or e-mail it to pattie.grif@gmail.com.

We the bereaved are not alone. When it seems that our sorrow is too great to be borne, let us think of the great family of the heavy-hearted into which our grief has given us entrance, and inevitably, we will feel about us their arms, their sympathy, their understanding.

Believe, when you are most unhappy, that there is something for you to do in the world. So long as you can sweeten another’s pain, life is not in vain.

Helen Keller, 1880-1968
National Executive Director of TCF position update

As was announced a few weeks ago, Alan Pedersen is now serving as TCF’s Interim Executive Director from December 1, 2013 through July 31, 2014. TCF Board of Directors is currently developing a formal application process for the permanent Executive Director position, which will be announced in January, 2014. Please direct all questions or comments to Pat O'Donnell at billyodee@yahoo.com.

37th National Conference in Chicago, IL

SAVE THE DATE: The Compassionate Friends is pleased to announce that Chicago, IL will be the site of the 37th TCF National Conference July 11-13, 2014. "Miles of Compassion through The Winds of Hope" is the theme of next year's event which promises more of this year's great national conference experience. The 2014 conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare right near the airport. We'll keep you updated with details on the national website as well as on our TCF/USA Facebook Page and elsewhere as they become available. Plan to come and be a part of this heartwarming experience.

The 17th TCF Worldwide Candle Lighting

More than 620 Worldwide Candle Lighting events were held around the world on Sunday, December 8th. Although areas across the country were experiencing weather challenges, people braved the rain and snow to honor the lives of all children who left us much too soon. Our thanks to all who held or helped with services so others might attend.

To allow as many families as possible to post their memories, experiences and thoughts, TCF extended the posting time frame for the Remembrance Book an extra 24 hours. By that night, more than 4400 had visited to share their heartfelt messages.

...that their light may always shine.
Twenty-one years ago, my husband, Rich, and I joined the club with the highest dues, and the one to which no one wants to belong. We became bereaved parents. Our eighteen-year-old son, Mark, died in a fall while away at college, a freshman at UCLA.

That began our journey, the demarcation for the rest of our lives: the "before and after" by which we mark time ... before Mark’s death and after Mark’s death.

A few weeks later, a close friend from Connecticut, also a bereaved parent, introduced us to The Compassionate Friends. A few months later, she encouraged us to attend The Compassionate Friends National Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina.

From that moment on, The Compassionate Friends became a major part of our lives. A year later we began the South Bay Los Angeles Chapter of TCF with two other bereaved couples. We found support and gained hope by helping other bereaved families.

Later we volunteered at the regional and then the national Long Beach conferences. My husband became a National Board member. TCF became a very important part of our lives. Rich wrote a book about his experiences as a bereaved father, Into the Valley and Out Again, dedicating it to our son, and donating all the proceeds to TCF. TCF had become our lifeline through the valley.

Over the years, TCF friends were the ones who truly understood. When our surviving son got married and a candle was lit in memory of his brother, they understood. When our son’s cat died, our last link to our son, we cried, and our TCF friends understood. When our son’s friends graduated from college, got married, had children, more links, our TCF friends understood. And when my husband suddenly died, my TCF friends understood.

Many of you, like me, feel that TCF holds a special place in our hearts. It is OUR organization. If you volunteer to be a chapter leader, participate in the chapter steering committee, work on the website, help with the website, greet at meetings, serve as a regional coordinator, help a committee and volunteer for National Conferences, help with Regional Chapter Leadership Training, serve on the National Board of Directors or on the Foundation Board, donate time and/or money, you are actually helping yourself. And we do this in our children's, grandchildren's, siblings', nieces', nephews', or friends' names. We all want to be sure that this organization is available for all who need it.

Please do what you can. Spread the word. Help where you can. So that those who need us in the future will find us and those who find us will be helped.

FROM THE NATIONAL OFFICE OF TCF

By Kitty Edler, Acting Executive Director

BEREAVED SIBLINGS

Smile

~ By Chelsey McHale

By definition, grief is deep sorrow especially caused by someone’s death
To me, grief is a lifelong suffering that can slowly deplete but never goes away, a pain that is so strong, yet so beautiful, as our love for them shines through the broken parts
It's every emotion you can think of, felt for the rest of your days on this earth
It hurts and it hurts
But remember, it could be worse
You ask how this is when you feel such remorse
Well, you could look back and not feel grateful about one memory
They say when you grieve so much for someone, it means you had true happiness in your life
So grief is bittersweet
And nothing I say will make it all okay
I know it’s easier to wallow in the pain than keep it small and contained,
But we talk with others who share our pain and are in that club we never wanted to join
I know sometimes it’s easier to destroy ourselves than it is to heal ourselves
But when you start to feel the guilt
And when your world starts to tilt
As hard as it may be, think of a good memory
It may make you cry, it may make you ask why, it may make that heaviness on your chest feel heavier
But remember to breathe and remember to smile
Your loved one watches you from above, feeling your pain and your unconditional love
But we owe it to them to not always be so sad
We owe it to them to look back on positive memories we had
But every so often, subside the tears, and once in a while, look up, and give them a smile

Chelsey lives in Phoenix, Arizona, and works at a mortgage company. She recently went back to school to get her master's degree in counseling with an emphasis in bereavement. She created and facilitates a sibling loss group in Arizona for the Eastside Chapter of The Compassionate Friends.
Relationships Do Change

Does it seem to you as if relationships with your family and friends have changed since the death of your child or sibling? You are not alone. In her book When the Bough Breaks, Judith Bernstein selects these expressive quotations from other writers’ works to introduce the chapters on “Family Relationships” and “Social Relationships,” respectively:

Death of a child member becomes an important identifying piece of information about the family. It is woven into its history and into the everyday operation of members' lives. The child who has died continues to be a family member after death. Parents are forever parents of a dead child as well as of the surviving children. The dead child lives in memory. The family grieves for him and remembers him with little comfort and support from the society around them.

— Joan H. Arnold & Penelope B. Gemma
A Child Dies: A Portrait of Family Grief

When people outside the immediate family are encountered who do not allow expressions of emotions and thoughts about deceased children, it creates a resentment that is difficult to control. Subsequently, the time comes when parents begin to separate themselves from insensitive and uncaring people in their environments who insist on keeping channels of communication closed.

Many times a wedge is driven between those suffering the loss and very dear and close friends. We can refer to this as a “wedge of ignorance”—ignorance about the great importance of open communication.

— Ronald J. Knapp
Beyond Endurance

Letting Go of the Pain

A few weeks or a few months after your child has died, you'll probably find yourself in a situation where you find yourself laughing or having a good time, then you say STOP laughing or having a good time and think to yourself, "How can I dare laugh or have any fun, now that my child has died and I hurt so bad?" We've all had this feeling in the early stages of our grief.

I urge you newly bereaved, PLEASE don't feel guilty about enjoying the happiness that comes from "LIFE". When you find yourself laughing and enjoying something in life, it doesn't mean that you have forgotten your dead child ... it just means that you are "letting go" of some of the pain. All of our lives there will be tears and all of our lives there should be laughter.

When people used to say to me, "You must put it behind you and let go of your child and start living again," I wondered what they meant by "IT". I would get very angry. How dare those people think that I could ever "let go" of my child, or even want to ... but after a while I realized that I don't have to "let go" of my child in order to live again. I just have to "let go of the pain" that his death caused. His LIFE will always be part of me, and so will his death; I'll never forget him. But I don't have to keep the grief and pain with me always ... So if you see me cry ... I'm "letting go" of some pain. And when you see me laughing or having a good time, I'm living life again.

Verna Smith, TCF, Fort Worth, TX

A Candle Lighting at 30,000 Feet

We received this e-mail at the National Office yesterday, and wanted to share it with all of you. This special communication has shown us that even in the midst of people's busy travel schedules, they found a way to participate in the Worldwide Candle Lighting and honor the memories of children everywhere who have left us too soon.

If you're wondering what they used in lieu of candles, they all pressed their call buttons simultaneously, as shown in the photo above.

Dear Compassionate Friends,

On Sunday, December 8th, one of our flight attendants asked passengers at 7pm to participate in the 17th Annual Worldwide Candle Lighting (as she has for the past 10 years, if I heard her correctly) started by The Compassionate Friends, an organization that supports families and friends of children who have passed away. As a medical student on my pediatrics rotation right now, I all too frequently see the reason for these types of organizations and am thankful for the work that they do to support those who have lost loved ones. Also, I know that Southwest is a company that cares a lot about not only its customers but their families as well. I think it might be a meaningful moment for other crews on Southwest flights to invite people to participate in if they choose to, both to help those for whom the holiday season is particularly tough and to raise awareness about this organization.

(E-mailer’s Name Withheld)
What is the most difficult age to "lose" a child? What is the right age for ANYONE to die?

**Stillborn, a few weeks or months old?**
"Perhaps. For then the parents haven't learned to really know them yet." I wonder — How about all the dreams, anxiety and care taken during those pregnant months, in order to assure a healthy child? The pain of delivery, yet only empty arms to show for it. The nursery, ready and waiting. What a tragic end to a dream!

**One to Five Years Old?**
"They were so young. Maybe the real closeness hadn't formed yet. They weren't people yet." Think again! Remember their first steps — their funny run (often with wet diapers drooping) — their first words, then sentences — their letting you know how important you are to them. Beautiful years — gone!

**Six to Twelve Years Old?**
"They, at least, had some time to have fun." Just think, though. They were on the threshold of real learning — some getting ready to enter Jr. High. Just starting into that pre-adult world. Frightening, but exciting to them. They cannot wait to be older, more independent.

**Twelve to Twenty Years Old?**
Not then, certainly. They are just upon the threshold — starting to date, learning to drive, real responsibilities. Graduation — the beginning of their future. Their dreams starting to form.

**Twenty to Thirty Years Old? Thirty to Forty Years Old?**
That certainly would not be the time. They are just upon the threshold of their letting you know how important you are to them. Their dreams starting to form.

**Fifty to Sixty Years Old?**
"Certainly they have lived a full life." But then, when is a full life reached? Now there are probably children in college — house almost paid off. Dreaming of seeing their children settled and happy. Seeing grandchildren — an extension of their love. So, not quite yet.

**Sixty to Seventy Years Old?**
"That's it." BUT — what if there is a spouse sharing that life? What happens after so many years — now suddenly alone! College tuitions behind them. House, maybe, paid off. Perhaps their planned trips that go along with newfound freedom — and of retirement dreams. Their children, now grown, will grieve and the grandchildren will be robbed of an important force in their lives.

**Eighty and Up?**
At least, then, we can say they lived a long life. We hope a full life. Even then, however, the chances are someone will grieve.

It all comes down to whatever the age of the loved one who died — there is grief. Granted, the grief is different when you are dealing with a child's (any age) death, a spouse's death or a parent's death, or the death of a sibling. We, bereaved parents, feel the grief of losing a child is the worst. However, a person who is close to his or her parents, having that umbilical cord finally severed is extremely painful. The loss of a spouse, a brother or sister, when there was a close bond, can be devastating. What I am trying to say, is that we could all be kinder to one another by not being judgmental as to whether it is harder to lose someone at a young age or an older age — suddenly or through long illness. It really is not relevant. The bottom line is, we are all in pain! Understanding another's pain and sharing ours is all part of the process of healing. "Never judge another man, until you have walked ten paces in his footsteps." That is what being a compassionate friend is all about.

- Mary Ehmann, TCF/Valley Forge, PA

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**Friends Supporting Friends**
**Telephone and E-Mail Contact List**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Betsy Allen</td>
<td>18 yr old</td>
<td>daughter, fire suffocation</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kiddiekottage@gmail.com">kiddiekottage@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-981-0767</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kati Bourque</td>
<td>2 yr old</td>
<td>daughter, diaphragmatic hernia</td>
<td><a href="mailto:frogsducksanddoc@hotmail.com">frogsducksanddoc@hotmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-637-9544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and 38 yr old brother, heart attack</td>
<td><a href="mailto:frogsducksanddoc@hotmail.com">frogsducksanddoc@hotmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-637-9544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie Brauer</td>
<td>18 yr old</td>
<td>daughter, hit and run</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jamie081363@yahoo.com">jamie081363@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>919-771-7339</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathleen Breland</td>
<td>17 yr old</td>
<td>suicide</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ksabreland@gmail.com">ksabreland@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-463-9409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Lou Clarkson</td>
<td>21 yr old</td>
<td>son, leukemia</td>
<td></td>
<td>919-501-7769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elise Cope</td>
<td>15 yr old</td>
<td>son, auto accident</td>
<td><a href="mailto:surrid@aol.com">surrid@aol.com</a></td>
<td>919-656-5005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Creech</td>
<td>14 yr old</td>
<td>daughter, heart defect</td>
<td><a href="mailto:leonaselena0105@aol.com">leonaselena0105@aol.com</a></td>
<td>919-803-5889</td>
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<tr>
<td>LaTanya Ellis</td>
<td>18 yr old</td>
<td>daughter, sickle cell anemia</td>
<td><a href="mailto:latomya.s.elli@gmail.com">latomya.s.elli@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-706-2284</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Gray</td>
<td>27 yr old</td>
<td>son, auto accident</td>
<td><a href="mailto:scmusiec62@gmail.com">scmusiec62@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-757-1664</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Chris Griffin</td>
<td>44 yr old</td>
<td>son, heart disease</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mcgriffin48@gmail.com">mcgriffin48@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-552-4440</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diane Haddon</td>
<td>26 yr old</td>
<td>daughter, metastatic melanoma</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dkhaddon@ncrr.com">dkhaddon@ncrr.com</a></td>
<td>919-363-9721</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nan Hamilton</td>
<td>5 yr old</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becky Hart</td>
<td>16 yr old</td>
<td>son, auto accident</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bhart@nlaw.com">bhart@nlaw.com</a></td>
<td>919-815-5501</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denise Johnson</td>
<td>18 yr old</td>
<td>daughter, suicide</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kimswhispers78@yahoo.com">kimswhispers78@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>919-556-8386</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cathy Joostema</td>
<td>28 yr old</td>
<td>son, stroke</td>
<td><a href="mailto:joostema2@hotmail.com">joostema2@hotmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-880-8135</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:christi@workplaceoptions.com">christi@workplaceoptions.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mara Lewis</td>
<td>15 yr old</td>
<td>son, osteosarcoma</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mlewiscnc@gmail.com">mlewiscnc@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-655-5659</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cindy McLeod</td>
<td>23 yr old</td>
<td>son, blunt force trauma</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cindyemcleod1954@att.net">cindyemcleod1954@att.net</a></td>
<td>330-926-7771</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sue Melott</td>
<td>21 yr old</td>
<td>son, suicide</td>
<td><a href="mailto:suemelott@yahoo.com">suemelott@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>919-427-7169</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faira Pearce</td>
<td>3.5 mo old</td>
<td>son, pneumonia</td>
<td><a href="mailto:fairaharris@yahoo.com">fairaharris@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>919-274-2769</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ora Riggs</td>
<td>30 yr old</td>
<td>son, primary brain tumor</td>
<td><a href="mailto:orasriggs@gmail.com">orasriggs@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-866-7542</td>
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<td>Ron &amp; Cindy Salyer</td>
<td>21 yr old</td>
<td>son, motorcycle accident</td>
<td><a href="mailto:salyer86@hotmail.com">salyer86@hotmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-400-3077</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amber Silvers</td>
<td>stillborn</td>
<td>daughter</td>
<td><a href="mailto:silvers0226@gmail.com">silvers0226@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-294-6842</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linda Strother</td>
<td>15 yr old</td>
<td>son, colon cancer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ljstrother@yahoo.com">ljstrother@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>919-938-9651</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa Tucker</td>
<td>26 yr old</td>
<td>daughter, suicide</td>
<td><a href="mailto:phototucker@gmail.com">phototucker@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-553-4995</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nancy Turlington</td>
<td>19 yr old</td>
<td>son, car accident</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dhtntt@embarqmail.com">dhtntt@embarqmail.com</a></td>
<td>919-330-3271</td>
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A Ride That Changed Our Lives
By Jenny Pontow

My uncle’s car was sitting in our driveway when I came home from a night out, and I got a sick feeling in my stomach. I walked up the driveway, and my uncle asked me to get in the car; my dad was with him. There had been a car crash, they said. As we drove away, I asked what happened, and learned my sister Meggan was in it.

As we drove, it was very quiet. I could tell by how they were acting that something bad had happened. When we arrived at the hospital, my uncle took us to where my mom and aunt were sitting. My mom was crying, and I lost it as soon as I saw her. As we were waiting for Meggan’s first surgery, they wheeled her past us, and I couldn’t believe what I saw in front of me. She looked like a monster. Nearly every bone in her face had been broken. My poor, helpless sister just lay there, unresponsive. I remember screaming as they wheeled her away.

What we learned later was that while my sister had been at her friend Kate’s house, Kate’s brother had friends over in the basement. While the party was going on, one of the boys, a 15-year-old who attended the same school, came up to where the girls were and asked if they wanted to go for a ride in his friend’s Camaro. Innocently, they agreed. The driver and the girl who owned the car sat in the front while Meg, Kate, and Emily sat in the back. They drove around just a couple of blocks, but on the way back they hit a patch of wet leaves while driving too fast. The car left the road, bounced off a fire hydrant, and hit a tree broadsided, splitting the car in half. Kate and Emily died instantly. Meggan was seen at the accident walking around prior to collapsing. The driver and front passenger survived with minor injuries.

My sister had a large amount of swelling on her brain and needed multiple surgeries to relieve the pressure. The outpouring of support we received from family and friends was incredible. However, our community was torn by what had happened. That first week after the crash our hope for Meggan’s recovery remained strong, but the swelling was not going down. I remember the moment we were told that Meggan was not going to recover. After several attempts to relieve pressure on her brain, she was declared brain-dead. A higher authority had decided that her life was not hers to decide. She could no longer survive without the machines that kept her alive. And so the hardest decision my parents have ever faced was made: her life support was turned off, and she was gone. November 17, 1991, is the day she died. It’s the day my family became part of a community of families that have lost someone who was far too young to die. Meggan’s service was attended by over 1,000 people. We stood at the front of our church from 3:00 to 10:00 p.m. The compassion that we saw from our friends and family was amazing. I tried to distract myself to avoid dealing with the grief that was building inside me by working on photo collages for the wake and a tape of Meg’s favorite music. The heartbeat of watching my parents bury their youngest child was devastating to me.

Everyone in my family dealt with the grief in a different way. I internalized mine more, and I think this was because I was living with my parents at home. I don’t think anyone should ever have to watch their parents bury their child. I saw them at their weakest point in life as they continued to live and love their family and friends. However, it took some time for the living and loving to happen. My brother Jim returned to Harvard to finish his master’s degree, and has since been ordained a Jesuit priest. My brother Scott went back to Northern Illinois University and is now the associate principal at the high school we all attended. My mom had a very hard time after Meggan died, but she had just had her child murdered in a way that could have been prevented. My dad redirected his angst by participating in a committee that was formed to create tougher laws for parents who let their kids have underage drinking parties.

And now to the part of how this all happened. The boy driving the car came to our house a couple of weeks after Meggan died to apologize for what he had done. He admitted he had been drinking, and said he had not told the girls he had been drinking. He reassured us that the girls had nothing to do with the party. The meeting was very awkward; I had never met him until that day. Here sat the killer of my sister, wanting our forgiveness so he could ease his conscience. He wanted forgiveness, and my dad attempted to give it to him. He went on living his life after our encounter, but our lives were frozen by that tragedy on November 9. In the end, he was charged with three counts of reckless homicide, given five years’ probation, and was supposed to do 2,000 hours of community service. He never completed the community service hours because he said it was too difficult so it was dismissed. He also couldn’t get his license for five years since he was a minor at the time of the accident and never even had his license. He was upset about the verdict, even though he avoided any kind of incarceration. Three innocent children were killed as a result of his partying and his choice to drive a car recklessly, even though he was not legally old enough to drive.

I grew up in the Chicago area, but five years ago we moved to Wisconsin, where my husband grew up. Many people I’ve come in contact with look at drinking and driving as if it is no big deal. Yet I have also met some amazing people whose lives have been impacted by drinking and driving. I learned that many others who live here share my concern with drinking and driving. People need to think before they get into a car and drive while intoxicated.

We will never stop talking about Meggan. We have brought her to life for our children. She loved butterflies, so whenever my kids see a butterfly they will say there is Auntie Meggan. She wasn’t alive to be my maid of honor when I got married. She never got the chance to go to Notre Dame College as she had dreamed of doing. I don’t have her to call when I am having a bad day and just need my sister. We are fond of the phrase “carpe diem” because we want to seize every day, since that is how Meggan lived her life. I believe she continues to live her life through my speaking and the sharing of her story.

Jen Pontow lives in Combined Locks, Wisconsin with her husband, Chad, and their children, Jack, Meggan, and Ally. She works in IT at Zurich North America full-time and has a photography business, butterflyframes.net, as well as volunteering her time speaking to DUI offenders and teenagers about the consequences of drinking and driving. She is affiliated with the Northwest Suburban Illinois chapter of TCF in Northbrook.
Resolutions for a Bereaved Parent:

- I will grieve as much and for as long as I feel like grieving, and I will not let others put a timetable on my grief.
- I will grieve in whatever way I feel like grieving, and I will ignore those who try to tell me what I should or should not be feeling and how I should or should not be behaving.
- I will cry whenever and wherever I feel like crying, and I will not hold back my tears just because someone else feels I should be "brave" or "getting better" or "healing by now".
- I will talk about my child as often as I want to, and I will not let others turn me off just because they can't deal with their own feelings.
- I will not expect family and friends to know how I feel, understanding that one who has not lost a child cannot possibly know how it feels.
- I will not blame myself for my child's death, and I will constantly remind myself that I did the best job of parenting I could possibly have done. But when feelings of guilt are overwhelming, I will remind myself that this is a normal part of the grief process and it will pass.
- I will not be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help if I feel it is necessary.
- I will commune with my child at least once a day in whatever way feels comfortable and natural to me, and I won't feel compelled to explain this communication to others or to justify or even discuss it with them.
- I will try to eat, sleep and exercise every day in order to give my body strength it will need to help me cope with my grief.
- I will know that I am not losing my mind and I will remind myself that loss of memory, feelings of disorientation, lack of energy and a sense of vulnerability are all normal parts of the grief process.
- I know that I will heal, even though it will take a long time.
- I will let myself heal and not feel guilty about feeling better.
- I will remind myself that the grief process is circuitous—that is, I will not make steady upward progress. And when I find myself slipping back into the old moods of despair and depression, I will tell myself that "slipping backward" is also a normal part of the grief process and these moods, too, will pass.
- I will try to be happy about something for some part of every day, knowing that at first I may have to force myself to think cheerful thoughts so eventually they can become a habit. I will reach out at times and try to help someone else, knowing that helping others will help me to get over my depression.

Reflections: BRIGHTER TEETH AND LIGHTER GRIEF

If we can only find the right brand of stuff, we can solve our problems in just one washing, brushing, scrubbing, spoonful or easy application, according to the television commercials. Life is full of trouble, the television tells us. We have ring around our collars; our whites are not white and our colors are not bright. Prince Charming won't kiss Sleeping Beauty because she has bad breath; we have headaches; our nasal passages are clogged and, after a hard day branding cattle all we get is light beer. But that’s okay because when we think our trouble is going to get us down, we learn that it's possible to get a good night's sleep, kill Johnson grass with no carryover, fight germs while still having bright teeth and spell relief. And all of our troubles go away before the next program.

Wouldn't it be nice if there were a bereaved person spray? Just spray it on and everyone will know what to say to make us feel good. We will pass places and days that used to hurt as if nothing were ever wrong. We will remember the cheery times and blot out the ugly rings around the collars of our minds.

Some people think that going through grief should be an easy, one-step miracle process. Send back the label and proof of purchase if not completely satisfied. If I can buy a pill that absorbs 47 times more stomach acid, I should be able to find a way to grieve that will absorb 50% more of the acid in my heart.

I sincerely wish that losing a dear one were in the league with getting light beer after a hard day on the range. But it is not something we can get over or make go away. Losing a loved one is a change in our lives that we must go through. We cannot cure our grief, go around it or wish it away. New life, hope and a profound and deeply satisfying way of living is on the other side of grief. But, first, we must go through grief. We must walk that lonesome valley.

by Dennis Klass
Adviser to BP/USA Board and
St. Louis Chapter of BP/USA

by Nancy Mower, TCF Hawaii
FOR THE NEW YEAR:

Instead of the old kind of New Year’s resolutions we used to make and break, let’s make some this year and really try to keep them:

- Let us not try to imagine the future — take one day at a time.
- Allow yourself time to cry, both alone and with your loved ones.
- Don’t shut out other family members from your thoughts and feelings. Share these difficult times. You may all become closer for it.
- Try to be realistic about your expectations; of yourself, your spouse, other family members and friends. Each of us is an entity, therefore different. So how can there be perfect understanding?
- When a good day comes, relish it; don’t feel guilty and don’t be discouraged because it doesn’t last. IT WILL come again and multiply.
- Take care of your health. Even though the mind might not care, a sick body will only compound your troubles. Help your body heal as well as your mind.
- Share your feelings with other Compassionate Friends and let them share with you. As you find you are caring about the pain of others, you are starting to come out of your shell — a very healthy sign.

I know following these won’t be easy but what has been? It’s worth a try, don’t you think? Nothing to lose and perhaps much to gain.

— Mary Ehmann, TCF Valley Forge, PA

When Someone Takes His Own Life
by Norman Vincent Peale

In many ways, this seems the most tragic form of death. Certainly it can entail more shock and grief for those who are left behind than any other. And often the stigma of suicide is what rests most heavily on those left behind.

Suicide is often judged to be essentially a selfish act. Perhaps it is. But the Bible warns us not to judge, if we ourselves hope to escape judgment. And I believe this is one area where that Biblical command especially should be heeded. For how do we know how many valiant battles such a person may have fought and won before he lost that one particular battle? And is it fair that all the good acts and impulses of such a person should be forgotten or blotted out by his final tragic act?

I think our reaction should be one of love and pity, not of condemnation. Perhaps the person was not thinking clearly in his final moments: perhaps he was too driven by emotional whirlwinds that he was incapable of thinking at all. This is terribly sad. But surely it is understandable. All of us have moments when we lose control of ourselves, flashes of temper, of irritation, of selfishness that we later regret. Each one of us, probably, has a final breaking point or would have if our faith did not sustain us. Life puts far more pressure on some of us than it does on others. Some people have more stamina than others. When I see in the paper, as I do all too often, that dark despair has rolled over some lonely soul, so much so that for him life seemed unendurable, my reaction is not one of condemnation. It is rather "There but for the grace of God..."

And my heart goes out to those who are left behind, because I know that they suffer terribly. Children in particular are left under a cloud of difference all the more terrifying because it can never be fully explained or lifted. The immediate family of the victim is left wide open to tidal waves of guilt: “What did I fail to do that I should have done? What did I do that was wrong?” To such grieving persons I can only say, "Lift up your heads and your hearts.

Surely you did your best. And surely the loved one who is gone did his best, for as long as he could. Remember, that his battles and torments are over. Do not judge him, and do not presume to fathom the mind of God where one of his children is concerned.”

A few years ago, when a young man died by his own hand, a service for him was conducted by his pastor, the Reverend Weston Stevens. What he said that day expresses, far more eloquently than I can, the message that I’m trying to convey. Here are some of his words:

Our friend died on his own battlefield. He was killed in action fighting a civil war. He fought against adversaries that were as real to him as his casket is real to us. They were powerful adversaries. They took toll of his energies and endurance. They exhausted the last vestiges of his courage and his strength. At last these adversaries overwhelmed him. And it appeared that he had lost the war. But did he? I see a host of victories that he has won!

For one thing—he has won our admiration—because even if he lost the war, we give him credit for his bravery on the battlefield. And we give him credit for the courage and pride and hope that he used as his weapons as long as he could. We shall remember not his death, but his daily victories gained through his kindness and thoughtfulness, through his love for family and friends, for animals and books and music, for all things beautiful, lovely and honorable. We shall remember not his last day of defeat, but we shall remember the many days that he was victorious over overwhelming odds. We shall remember not the years we thought he had left, but the intensity with which he lived the years that he had. Only God knows what this child of His suffered in the silent skirmishes that took place in his soul. But our consolation is that God does know, and understands.
I have included a couple of poems I have written over the past few months or so. Poems and words that come to my head, strangely enough, while I am at work gazing out of the window, about my son. My greatly missed, immensely loved eldest son, Kai.

I have lived in two different worlds, two dimensions—one before the date of October 6th when he died and one after that date. Eighteen months, and in this world the pain is still immense, the anger still bubbling and simmering under the surface, covered over with antidepressants, but not dissipated.

Many of the articles and poems I read are sad—but also full of hope and understanding, and even show some form of acceptance. They are wonderful. But perhaps there are parents like me, who have words they wish to express that describe the pain, the anger, the despair and the confusion. And deep pervading sorrow, so much sorrow. I'm sorry if my words don't finish with hope and enlightenment—sometimes I cannot feel hope, sometimes I wish I could just wallow in my sorrow.

I have two beautiful children, Bronwyn, sixteen years and Jack, three years. Of course my life is made up of hope, laughter even, planning for the future, their future. But that is not what these poems are about, they are full of hope and understanding, and even show some form of acceptance. They are wonderful. But perhaps there are parents like me, who have words they wish to express that describe the pain, the anger, the despair and the confusion. And deep pervading sorrow, so much sorrow. I'm sorry if my words don't finish with hope and enlightenment—sometimes I cannot feel hope, sometimes I wish I could just wallow in my sorrow.

September 12th, 1996
Where you once were
You are not
Where your laughter rang
And such wit from your lips sprang
There is not even an echo left
Where your eyes were so alive
Even your photos are void of life
The very essence of you
That was my son
Is now gone completely
That I cannot reconcile the past with the present
And the present is now more real
Than the past ever was
And the present is the saddest place I have ever been.

October 3rd, 1996
Once I found myself saying,
This time last week you were laughing
You were talking on the phone
Then that week ended.
And I found myself saying
This time last month you were happy
You were in love
Then that month ended.
And on New Year’s Eve —
I could still say,
This year you were here
This year you had plans
This year I heard your voice, and saw your smile.
And then it became the new year
Not a year of hope but a year of sorrow.
A year in which you were never alive.
And now It’s almost a year since you died.
And just today I can say
This time last year you were alive
You were almost seventeen
You were almost coming home
You were almost everything
You could have been.
Just this time last year —
I could have it back.
I could go to you on that date
And hold you in my arms
Wrap myself around you
And hold the life inside you
And never let it go.
Would I have to have held you forever
To keep you here?
And would it have worked anyway?
I don’t know, but I wish it so.
### Our January Children
Loved and Always Remembered

#### Birthday
- **Ian Kirk**
  - Son
  - Kevin & Stormie Kirk
- **Timothy Reedy**
  - Son
  - Kelly Boutwell
- **Jill Perlette**
  - Daughter
  - Maureen & Charles Perlette
- **Kyle Evan Shaw**
  - Son
  - Judy & Doug Brunk
- **Eric Metcalf**
  - Son
  - Kim Bertniaume
- **Zachary Michael Arata**
  - Son
  - Mike & Karen Arata
- **Jerry Hart**
  - Son
  - Becky Hart
- **Lynn Williams**
  - Daughter
  - Wilson & Ann Williams
- **Pam Demaree**
  - Daughter
  - Mary Demaree
- **Kristen C. Hunter**
  - Daughter
  - Cynthia Hunter
- **Jason Yasser**
  - Son
  - Donna Tyson
- **H'Katherine Rcom**
  - Daughter
  - Vien Slu & H'Phoa Rcom
- **Gregory William Smith**
  - Son
  - Ann Conlon-Smith & Shepherd Smith
- **Eric J. Silver**
  - Son
  - Sueanne Silver Myers
- **Larry E Stafford**
  - Son
  - Alvah & Rachel Ward
- **Kaitlyn Hassard**
  - Daughter
  - Richard & Korey Hassard
- **Karl "K.J." Davis II**
  - Son
  - Selina & Karl Davis
- **James (Jay) Edmund Spence IV**
  - Son
  - Ed & Becky Spence
- **Isabella Hedge**
  - Daughter
  - Amber Silvers & James Hedge
- **Kevan Hill**
  - Son
  - Beth & Mike Hill
- **Christopher (Chris) Pecoraro**
  - Son
  - Anthony & Betty Dodd Pecoraro
- **Charles "Chuck" Turlington II**
  - Son
  - David & Nancy Turlington
- **Sarah Elizabeth Fogleman**
  - Daughter
  - Jan Fogleman
- **Matthew Yurcak**
  - Son
  - Gary & Susan Yurcak
- **David Michael Kosturko**
  - Son
  - Jean & Joe Kosturko
- **Blake Lemaster**
  - Son
  - Saundra & J.B. Lemaster
- **Michael Mendy**
  - Son
  - Kathleen & Mike Mendy
- **Jacob Lee**
  - Son
  - Terri & Bill Holt
- **Scott Ryan Snyder**
  - Son
  - Cindy Snyder McLeod

#### Anniversary
- **Mike Helfant**
  - Son
  - Susan & Larry Helfant
- **Reece Michael Melton**
  - Son
  - Debbie & Chris Strickland
- **Bryan Jay Newman**
  - Son
  - Art & Lois Gelb
- **Hillarie J. Denning**
  - Daughter
  - Judy & Buddy Johnson
- **Jarrod Marc Vecchione**
  - Son
  - Elizabeth Curry
- **Pam Demaree**
  - Daughter
  - Mary Demaree
- **Gary Griffin**
  - Son
  - Mary Chris Griffin
- **Ann Myers**
  - Daughter
  - Gretchen Wrigley
- **Michael Mihalik III**
  - Son
  - Jody & Michael Mihalik, Jr
- **Carol Stamper**
  - Daughter
  - Mark & Lynn Stamper
- **Jake David Breland Jr.**
  - Son
  - Kathleen & Jake Breland
- **Jill Perlette**
  - Daughter
  - Maureen & Charles Perlette
- **Kyle Kozlowski**
  - Son
  - Kimberly & Chris Kozlowski
- **Jason Yasser**
  - Son
  - Donna Tyson
- **Heidi Lynn Bauer**
  - Daughter
  - Mimi & Merle Bauer
- **Isabella Hedge**
  - Daughter
  - Amber Silvers & James Hedge
- **Sean Ryan**
  - Son
  - Frank & Suzanne Ryan
- **Tony Thompson**
  - Son
  - Susan Thompson
- **Kaitlyn Hassard**
  - Daughter
  - Richard & Korey Hassard
- **David Michael Kosturko**
  - Son
  - Jean & Joe Kosturko
- **Jamie Lynn McLeod**
  - Daughter
  - Brenda M. Warwick
- **Kolin Robbins**
  - Grandson
  - Cynthia Kay Moore
- **Lisa Diane Gatlin**
  - Daughter
  - Jo Ann & Miller Gatlin
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