

Huntsville Area Chapter – Update

Spring is Here

Herb

Co-Leader

“March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb.” “April showers bring May flowers”. Ah... spring time when thoughts of new life, gentle rains, and warmer sunshine are supposed to rejuvenate our winter-depressed minds and get us thinking about flowers, spring planting, gardens, and lush lawns. All kinds of “new life” ideas flood the advertisements and suggest that we embrace the oncoming spring season as happy, healing, and healthy.

To some of us, spring also means rejuvenating memories of loss; loss of our child and loss of the future. It can be hard to embrace spring celebrations. Easter, Mother’s Day, and Father’s Day can be very painful to a bereaved parent.

In this edition of the TCF Huntsville Newsletter we are going to focus on mothers, not specifically Mother’s Day, but mothers. Our highlight article is an essay titled “The Unfinished Mother”, our sibling section was written by a mother of five children, and this edition’s quotes will be about mothers.

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Personal Contacts

We have all experienced the pain of losing a child. We understand and would like to hear from you. If you can't reach a particular person, please call another and make contact.

We Need Not Walk Alone

Illness..... Sharon & Jerry
(256) 882-0642
illness@tcfhuntsville.org

AccidentPam
(256) 534-1873
accident@tcfhuntsville.org

Substance Abuse..... Jane & Herb
(256) 883-0997
substance_abuse@tcfhuntsville.org

Suicide Ray
(256) 650-0381
suicide@tcfhuntsville.org

Website..... <http://www.tcfhuntsville.org>
Email tcf@tcfhuntsville.org

Additional Area Resources:

Hospice HOPE Huntsville
(256) 650-1212

TCF National Office
(877) 969-0010



Locally, this spring has already brought some highlights such as our own Ray getting his heart-felt essay about his brother Bill published in the national magazine, *We Need Not Walk Alone*. His article, *Remembering Bill*, was first published in our local newsletter dated November 2007 and can still be found on our local website (but buy the national magazine and get the glossy pages). Additionally, Alan Pedersen, a bereaved father, song writer, guitarist, and entertainer, is on tour singing about his daughter Ashley who died in a traffic accident. Alan is coming to Huntsville on April 2nd. I have heard him sing twice in concert, have purchased his CD's, and have played his music for three of our past candle light ceremonies. Mark this date now and plan on attending this free concert (details on our web site).

At TCF, we are anxiously awaiting July for the National Conference to begin in Nashville; that is the closest it will be to Huntsville for many years as the conference travels yearly across the country. Conference registration is open both on-line and by paper application; reserve your hotel now too. Locally, we solicit your help. Send in your ideas, suggestions, topics, material, likes and dislikes. Help us help you.

May your memories never fade - **Herb**

...From the Heart

...a compassionate friend speaks

"...*From the Heart*", is a regular feature that will give a local member the opportunity to share a tip, suggestion, or experience of what has helped or hurt in his personal grief journey. As always, remember that we all grieve differently and it's OK to accept what makes sense and reject the rest.

Bambi R.

Member TCF Huntsville Area

When a child enters your life, you don't think about loving them unconditionally, you just do. My son was my constant companion and the center of my world.

I remember his smile most of all. He had a kind heart, enjoyed helping others and was always happy. My son could not stand to see anyone mistreated and enjoyed school because of his friends. He was very active in sports and loved to run, rollerblade and fish. At home he was always busy with his activities or projects as he called them. He finally learned to manage an exacto knife many stitches later. My son was twelve and at an age where he was fearless and loved zooming down steep hills on rollerblades or in homemade vehicles.

When he visited friends I would ask him to please come home with all his skin intact.

He was very mechanically and electrically inclined building RC kits from scratch by himself. Sometimes he would combine his love of fireworks by adding some "propulsion" to one of his remote control vehicles to get an extra boost of speed trying to beat his father in a race.

He loved to tease me most of all and could always make me smile. If I was having a horrible day, he would just smile and my world was right again. Because of him, his existence, his life, I learned what true love is really all about.

It has been almost eight years since he left my world. The pain and separation was unbearable. I realized that I loved him unconditionally with no barriers around my heart. I think that is why the pain has been so intense. Now I only look forward to seeing him again. He is still the center of my world and is always with me, holding my heart in his hands. I will miss him until the day I die. I know when I see him again, he will be smiling and this pain I feel now will not seem important anymore.

Daniel's Mom - Bambi

Mother's Day

How is the weather now, on mother's day?
Shining with spring, promising early roses?

But hides there, in secret, a moment of grief?
Frost in the sunlight, pale heartache of sorrow?

The children are gone.-
Are you reminded twice over:
the children are gone?

And will you be ready perhaps to remember
without tears
The sunlight, the laughter, the roses you shared
with the children on next mother's day?

Sascha Wagner



Unfinished Mothers

by Clara Hinton

Ed Note: The following article is from the website silentgrief.com, copyright 2004 © and reprinted here with permission from the author, Clara Hinton, bereaved mother and author.

When child loss occurs, a mother goes through a difficult time of emotional turmoil and questioning. "Am I still a mother?" "Does my child still have a birthday each year, or does time stand still?" "Can the mother/child relationship continue to grow, or am I now an 'unfinished mother'?"

Losing a child places a mother on a road that begins a lonelier journey than ever expected—one that can never really be explained. There was a beginning, but with the death of the child, there is no middle and no end. Everything seems so unfinished. Hopes and dreams were stopped far too soon. Joy was snatched away so suddenly. A mother is left with empty arms and an empty heart. Nothing can ever be complete when a child's life ends.

When the death of a child occurs, a mother is stopped in her tracks, and she suddenly feels inadequate and incomplete. She wears a new name. She is an "unfinished mother", never being able to see the rest of the picture. She will never be able to watch her child mature into a young adult. She will never be able to see all the pieces fit together. The picture will always have part of the scenery missing. It is so painful to be an unfinished mother! Child loss makes everything seem so empty and incomplete. Killing the torch of hope one more time...

The reality of child loss is devastating to a mother. There are overwhelming feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and most often feelings of failure. These feelings can overwhelm a mother for several months following the death of a child, and it can be quite difficult to build a support system to carry a mother through this roller coaster of emotions. Very few people will understand a mother's explanation of feeling like she is an unfinished mother.

There will come a critical point in this journey of grief when a mother must reach deep inside her inner resources and make a conscious decision to accept herself just as she is—a mother whose heart has been touched by the pain and grief of child loss. Only then can she start to put together some of the broken pieces and begin to feel like there will be a day when she will feel more like a complete mother than an unfinished mother.

When a child dies, life is suddenly thrown completely off balance. A mother is left feeling like her identity

has been taken away. It is often a long difficult journey to find that place of identity as a mother again. It's hard to understand that there is unfinished living that will never be completed. Peace can finally come to a mother's heart when she realizes that there is a big difference between having unfinished business and being left feeling like an unfinished mother.

A mother is never "unfinished." No matter how brief her time was with her child, the bond of love between mother and child was complete. A mother's love for her child is unending. Dreams may shatter and circumstances may change, but a mother's love remains strong. As a mother travels the path to healing, it is important for her to remind herself often that she is a mother forever. Her motherhood did not stop when her child died. This understanding of motherhood releases the feelings of guilt and failure and allows a mother to begin to see herself as a whole person again—a complete mother.

A mother is never an "unfinished mother." A mother's love runs far too deep to ever be called unfinished!

A Sibling Perspective

Brothers and sisters speak

SIBLINGS

Ed Note: Michelle Bertucco is a mother of five and shares her reflections 20 years after the death of her brother Cory. Michelle is the daughter of our local member, Ray.

by Michelle Bertucco

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This is not a raw outpouring of latent tears, nor some systematic denial of unbearable pain. This is me - 20 years after my step-brother hanged himself in his mother's garage. I don't think about it every day anymore, or even every week, yet honestly believe that this "event" had more impact on my life than any before or since.

Cory, I don't know what you would have been to me if you had lived to have a family, a career, or even that island amusement park you dreamed up, but, by choosing to end your life, you changed me more than anyone else on the planet.

At 15, there was no option for me but to let my broken heart drag me through every stage of "the grieving process." I was old enough to understand everything that was happening, and especially

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sensitive to the reactions of others. I have forgiven, but never forgotten my Catholic neighbor's offer to pray you out of purgatory for me. I can still see and hear one of your close friends hitting the top of the coffin with his fists and shouting through clenched teeth and tears "Damn you, Cory!" over and over. I remember not feeling angry with the guy for saying it. It was honest. It was real.

Most importantly, by dying at 22, before you got a chance to see if things could ever get better, Cory, you taught me to live. To live no matter what. To go when it hurts too much to stay. To search out happiness and not count the cost. While my life choices have not brought me success or fame, I can say, with some confidence that I have lived more than most.

By not understanding how many people suffer from one tiny little suicide, you forced me to witness it firsthand. I couldn't pretend not to know. No one could write a suicide note long enough to cover the holes they will blow in so many people's lives. All this in exchange for relief, for one ticket out. As much as you thought nobody cared, and that the world would be better off without you, you left dozens of people shattered for years. End your life, and you've murdered somebody's mother/father/daughter/son/brother/sister/aunt/uncle/cousin/lover/friend.

I was just sitting on my back porch looking up and, seeing Orion, remembered the Christmas two months after you died Cory. I assigned you a star and wished hard - I don't remember for what. Maybe to stop hurting, or to hear something from you, from God, who knows. But, just then, a meteor streaked across Orion from hand to foot, cutting a path directly across the star I had picked. It was the brightest, longest I had ever seen. I could hear it sizzle through the atmosphere. I don't even know what meaning I attached to the "sign" at the time - just remember being stunned out of my sobbing, and feeling like the world was expanding around me. So much yet to be found out.

Looking up tonight, I had the thought that I am glad it all happened when it did. I immediately censored myself, because it sounds like I am somehow glad that you died. I'm not. I would love nothing more than to bring all my kids to Uncle Cory's Island Amusement Park for vacations. I wish that they could hear your laugh. It was the greatest.

But really, if it had happened when I was very young, like 4 or something, I might still be attempting to deal with it. When kids lose someone close, it is too big to process, so they just put it away. A lost parent or sibling becomes idealized. Memories blur with fantasies. Plus, the situation isn't always explained to them fully until they are much older... and often they are lied to right out. What a mess to have to wade through 20 years later.

On the other hand, if I had been in my 30s or 40s when I experienced my first significant loss, it may have been even harder. Kind of like not getting chickenpox until you are 35. Instead of 2 weeks of itchy spots, you get two months of shingles. I would be sitting here trying to grieve, and take care of five children. I would have to put on a face for everyone. Adults who experience loss are allowed to be sad for a few weeks or months, and then somehow expected to just go on with their normal lives. Go to work, church, the grocery store, pay the bills, be polite, and all of the things that become practically impossible to do when you are suffering so intensely.

Being 15, with no real-life responsibilities, I was completely free to lose my fool mind. For years. To just be sad. To be wickedly mad. To be totally, disgustingly selfish. To act out in crazy irresponsible ways. Nobody expected anything less. It scared Mom and Dad, because it looked a lot to them like I was trying everything I could to just die too...and I am sorry for putting them through that. However, I think it was more about trying everything I could to find a way to make peace with just being me and being alive. That much I have found.

Thanks, Cory, for sharing your dad with me. I needed one, for sure. He really is a great guy. I know it was a pretty rough time for you, living with Dad's new family, but you were a great big brother to me. I needed one, for sure. And, as far as my neighbor's prayers, we didn't need those after all. I know you're up there waiting for us. In a way, whether you knew it or not, you laid down your life for me. In my God's eyes, that counts for everything.

Michelle

Note: Our Huntsville newsletters are available online at <http://www.tcfhuntsville.org/Newsletters.html>

We Remember Them

...on their Birth Dates, on their Death Dates, and always...

Ben S.

Son of Herb & Jane

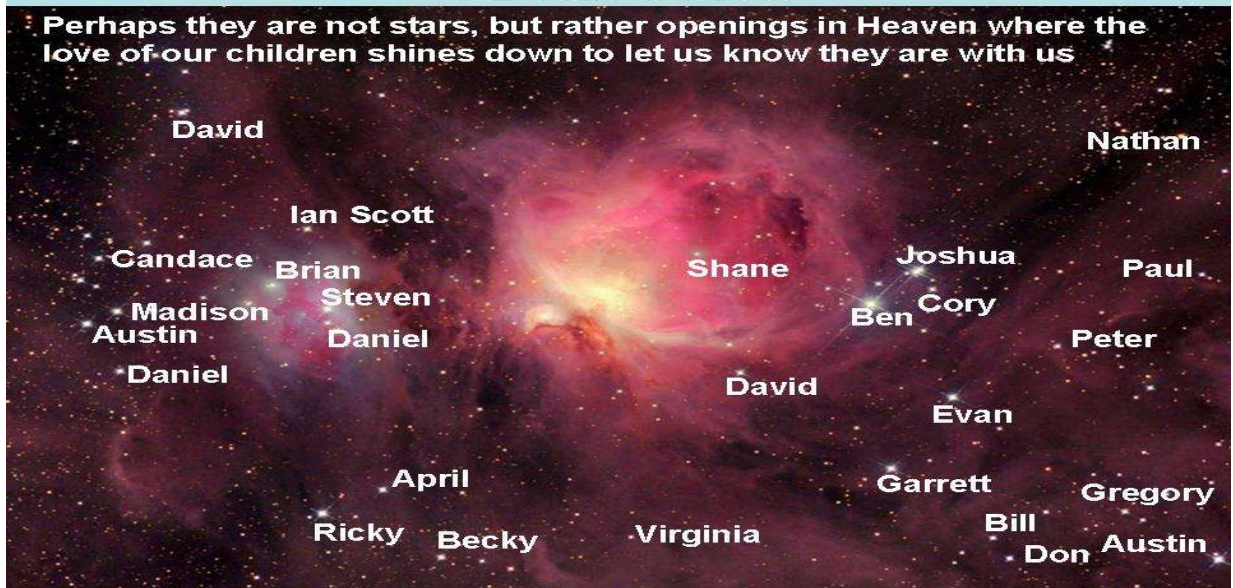
Mar. 24 – Apr. 10

Peter T.

Son of Jerry & Shari

May 20 – Jan. 26

Our Stars of HOPE



Gifts of Love and Remembrance

The following donations will help The Compassionate Friends to be here for the families who do not know today that they will need us tomorrow.

In loving memory of

Daniel

Lawrence & Bambi - Parents

In loving memory of

Ricky

Virginia --Parent

In loving memory of

Paul

Tom & Sandra - Parents

In loving memory of

Ben

Herb & Jane – Parents
Mary, Nancy, Robert - Grandparents

In loving memory of

Candace

Mark & Sheila - Parents

In loving memory of

Ian

Jerry & Sharon - Parents

Donations and Remembrance Gifts are tax deductible and may be sent to:
TCF Huntsville Area – See page 6 for mailing address

Calendar of Events

2008

April	April 2 Angels are Forever Concert April 16 Hospice Teleconference "Living with Grief, Children & Adolescents" April 18-20 National Leadership Training – Oak Brook, IL April 20 – Monthly meeting: Getting to Know Your Child
May	May 18 – Monthly meeting: Balloon Release
June	June 15 – Monthly meeting: Fathers
July	July 18-20 National Conference Nashville, TN July 20 – Monthly Meeting:

TCF Huntsville meetings are held at 4:30PM on the third Sunday of each month at:

Jordan Crossing
Multicultural Center - UMC
604 Jordan Lane (Homes & Jordan)
Huntsville, AL 35816

Official TCF Huntsville Mailing Address

TCF Huntsville Area
C/O H. Larnerd
7801 Chadwell Dr. SW
Huntsville, AL 35802

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Mailing Address
Street Number and Name
City, State 98765-4321

"A mother is never "unfinished." No matter how brief her time was with her child, the bond of love between mother and child was complete."

Mother Quotes:

Making the decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.
-Elizabeth Stone

The moment a child is born, the mother is also born. She never existed before. The woman existed, but the mother, never. A mother is something absolutely new.
-Rajneesh



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This Newsletter is published by the Huntsville Area Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. Your comments and suggestions are welcome and may be sent to newsletter@tcfhuntsville.org.