

Huntsville Area Chapter – Update

The year-end holidays, here they come

Herb

Co-Leader

Do you remember your “year of firsts?” That year never seemed to end and our list of first’s went on and on; birthday, anniversary, Mother’s day, Father’s day, school, family vacation, ballgame, dance class, and oh yes, the first holiday season. Unfortunately, it is not just the “day” we must conquer anymore, it is an entire season.

Courtesy of our profit driven economy, the Halloween costumes and candy are on the same shelf with back to school clothes. Thanksgiving turkeys are in the supermarket before the first trick-or-treaters ring the bell and retail stores and mail catalogs stock up for holiday gift purchases before the jack-o-lanterns are carved. These holiday icons are vivid and painful memories that our children are not here to participate anymore. Can we survive this onslaught? Is there an answer?

For TCF of the Huntsville Area, it is the first holiday season for our group and we will be trying to help with this seasonal dilemma as we discuss Handling the

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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



Holidays at our monthly meeting, November 13th. Please bring your questions as well as your suggestions so we can help each other. Tell us what works and what doesn't work for you.

Of note, is our planned program for December. Instead of a monthly meeting on Tuesday, December 11th, we will have a candle light ceremony with Hospice Family Care of Huntsville on Sunday, December 9th at 6:45 pm at the Hospice building on Westmill Dr. in Huntsville. Plan to bring a candle for our remembrance table with a picture and/or memento of your child. Most of us stay and visit afterwards so please bring a finger food dessert or snack to share.

The evening will include a music / picture slide show that Ray and I will put together. If you would like to include your child's picture, please either bring it to the November 13th TCF meeting or call us. Weather permitting; we will finish the service outside under the stars.

As always, we continually search for newsletter material. We invite you to submit an original work expressing some aspect of your grief experience.

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.

Pam R.

Treasurer TCF Huntsville Area

Since my 29 year old son, Evan, died in an auto accident on November 17, 2000 I have had several unexpected "messages" that I know in my heart are from him. These messages bring me both comfort and some pain. Sometimes the message comes in the form of a soft feather like touch on my right cheek and sometimes it is in the form of a coin or coins (usually a penny) found in unexpected places. The most recent "find" was after my birthday celebration with my two other children and grandchildren.

The plan was for us all to meet at a restaurant and eat dinner together. Just as I was getting out of my car my

daughter pulled in the parking space right next to me. She got out of her car and handed me my birthday present. Since I already knew it was a book that I had hinted for, I gave her a hug, said thanks and placed it in my driver's seat instead of taking it into the restaurant.

We spent most of the evening remembering past birthdays, doing a lot of sharing about pranks Evan and his sister and brother had pulled on each other and in general just laughing and having a very nice evening. After our party, I walked to my car, reached in to move my gift so I could sit down and when I picked up the present there lay my special penny.

I felt this great big smile come on my face. I laughed, looked up toward the heavens and said "thanks son, I knew we couldn't have my birthday party without a gift from you."

When I opened my heart, paid attention to my surroundings, and didn't worry about everything I didn't understand, is when his messages got through. Welcome the unexpected signs and maybe you too will find a coin, feel a breeze, smell a fragrance, or sense a touch and "get the message" when it is most meaningful.

First Holiday

We lit a candle today,
To fill the empty place
where you should be
but aren't....
I stood with my hands cupping the flame
and felt the heat....
the energy.....
Empty space between the fire and flesh
Nothing visible
Nothing to see...
And yet I knew it was there-
the energy touched my skin.
And so it was with you today.
Nothing visible-nothing to see.
And yet I knew you were here.
Your energy touched my heart.

by Sandy Goodman, Author of Love Never Dies: A Mother's Journey from Loss to Love (Jodere Group, 2002) reprinted with permission

The Mourner's Code

Ten Self-Compassionate Principles

Though you should reach out to others as you journey through grief, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. *You have the right to experience your own unique grief.* When you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.
2. *You have the right to talk about your grief.* Talking about grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want as often as you want. You also have the right to be silent.
3. *You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.* Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, and relief are a few of the emotions you might feel. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry is wrong. Find listeners who will accept your feelings without condition.
4. *You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.* Your feeling of loss will probably leave you fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest, eat balanced meals. Don't allow others to push you into things you don't feel ready for.
5. *You have the right to experience "griefbursts".* Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This is normal and natural.
6. *You have the right to make use of ritual.* The funeral helps provide you with the support of caring people. It is a way for you to mourn. Don't listen to those that tell you rituals are unnecessary.
7. *You have the right to embrace your spirituality.* If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate for you. Be around people who understand.
8. *You have the right to search for meaning.* You may find yourself asking "Why"? Some questions may have answers others may not. Watch out for clichéd responses. Comments like "It was God's will" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.

9. *You have the right to treasure your memories.* Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of your child. Find others with whom you can share them.
10. *You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.* Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Be patient and tolerant of yourself. Avoid people who are not tolerant with you.

The Mourner's Code; from Understanding Your Grief by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D, published by Companion Press, copyright 2003, reprinted with permission.

A Sibling Perspective

Brothers and sisters speak

REMEMBERING BILL

by Ray

Newsletter Editor

I didn't grow up close to my brother Bill. He is 4 years older than I and the fifth of ten siblings. I am closer in age to my next younger brother and there are two others younger still. But it is Bill that I grew closer to as I became older. Bill wasn't much on being philosophical or analytical about relationships. He just loved you or he didn't. I am fortunate to be among those he did. He never judged where I was in my life nor did he try to 'fix' things. He just opened his door whenever I'd show up. We'd sit over coffee and reminisce about the 'good old days' and laugh. Yes, we laughed a lot. I can still hear him laughing as we talked about some of the ridiculous things we did as we grew up. Some were borderline stupid. There's a book in here somewhere.

As I reflect on what to write, I think about how to keep this from becoming a novel. Bill tried it all... We worked together at the grocery store right after he got out of the Navy. He was a butcher and I was a lowly stock clerk. Later we both worked at the roofing company together... something we learned from our Dad. He became a Sheriff and later a Policeman then a Detective, but he landed on what he seemed happiest with when he became an over the road truck driver.

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Adventurous? That's an understatement. Bill was all that and more. I remember riding with him as he patrolled the streets of Kansas City. His partner would just shake his head as Bill and I talked about growing up. I guess I assumed our times together like this would last forever. And somehow they do as I remember them. I can still hear his laughter.

What I remember most about Bill is that we made a point of getting together when we could. I lived a couple hundred miles away, but on any given weekend, I might impulsively drive to KC and show up at his house. As always, he'd open the door and we'd take up where we left off like it was yesterday. As a matter of fact, none of the rest of my siblings would even know I was in town. On more than one occasion, they would say something to him like, "Was Ray in town last weekend? I thought I saw him." It wasn't that I avoided them, but Bill and I had stuff to talk about. On more than one occasion, he would stop in Wichita on his way back from a haul on the road and we'd spend still more time laughing and remembering.

It's been 14 years since Bill died and I'm now 10 years older than he was then. We were supposed to grow old together and continue this legacy of family stories and belly rolling laughter. Even our last visit as he was succumbing to the devastation associated with cancer was one filled with family legends and a lot of laughter. We didn't waste any time doing anything different that we always did.

I think about Bill often AND I talk to him about the stuff we talked about when we sat across the table over coffee. It's a little different, but not a lot. I even laugh as I remember all the things we did together. I tell our stories to anybody who'll listen and think about writing them ALL down for preservation... Book to Follow.

Grief Quotes

From past TCF National Conferences:

The best way to honor the dead is to love the living,...for if our lives stop when their life stops, death has killed twice.

Reverend William A. Ritter, Bereaved father, Key Note Speaker, TCF 2006 Conference, Michigan

It is never normal to act normal in an abnormal situation (during grief)

Joyce Francis Smith, Bereaved mother, Good Grief/Bad Grief Workshop; TCF 2007 Conference Oklahoma

If death was the last tabu, then the conspiracy of silence surrounding the death of a child, has been blown apart, not by forced measure, but by the healing love of TCF - by that most costly gift, by the priceless gift of tears, yours and mine.

Reverend Simon Stephens, Key Note Speaker, Founder of TCF, TCF 2007 Conference, Oklahoma, paraphrasing Elizabeth Kubler Ross

Moving on does not mean leaving them (our children) behind, it means figuring out how to take them with you.

Ann Hood, Bereaved mother, The Courage to Move On Workshop; TCF 2007 Conference Oklahoma

We can delay grief, but we cannot deny it.

Elizabeth Edwards, Bereaved mother, Key Note Speaker, TCF 2007 Conference, Oklahoma, (paraphrasing Edna St Vincent Millay).

Others quotes:

Let go of the mistaken idea that time heals. It isn't time that heals, it's the grief work you do while the clock ticks away that heals.

Margaret Gerner, TCF Payson, AZ newsletter, Aug 2007

Thanksgiving Prayer (-TCF Madison WI Chapter)

Today, we give thanks for our friends,
those that time has taken far from us,
those we cherish now and those we have yet to meet.

We give thanks for our family,
those members who are with us in spirit
and those who are a distance away.

We give thanks for our expanding family,
for relatives need not always be family
and family need not always be relatives,
love creates families.

We give thanks for our children,
for the ones who are here
and the ones that live on only in our memory.
We thank you. AMEN.

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...

Evan

6/4 - 11/17

Son of Pam

Brian

11/25 – 03/12

Son of Steve and Dorothy

Austin

03/03 – 11/25

Son of Bob and Candi

April

08/08 – 11/07

Daughter of Murray and Iris

Cory

08/24 – 11/13

Son of Ray and Diane



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

Larry & Bambi – parents

In loving memory of
David

Chris & Jeanne – parents

Donations are tax deductible and may be sent to :
TCF Huntsville Area
c/o Riddle
2010 East Arbor Drive
Huntsville, AL 35811

Calendar of Events

2007

November	November 13 – Monthly meeting: "Handling the Holidays"
December	December 9 (Sunday 6:30 p.m.) – National candle light ceremony at <u>Hospice, Westmill Dr., Huntsville.</u> [NOTE: No regular monthly meeting on Tuesday]

2008

January	January 8 – Monthly meeting:
February	February 12 – Monthly meeting: TBD - Chapter Leadership Training

The meetings of the Huntsville Area Chapter are held at 6:30PM on the second Tuesday of each month at:

Hope Presbyterian Church
10001 Bailey Cove Rd. (Bailey Cove & Weatherly)
Huntsville, AL 35803

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

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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



"You have the right to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of your child. Find others with whom you can share them"

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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.