



**THE  
COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS**  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

# Bluegrass Chapter Newsletter

**"We need not walk alone."**  
[www.tcfbluegrass.org](http://www.tcfbluegrass.org)

P.O. Box 647, Nicholasville, Kentucky 40340

May/June 2012

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## *Telephone Friends*

Sometimes it helps to be able to talk to someone who understands. The following bereaved parents are willing to provide support and comfort.

**Jim Sims**

(859) 858-8288

(859) 797-2168

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## *The Compassionate Friends National Office*

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(877) 969-0010

[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

## We welcome you with Compassion, Love and Hope

It is always difficult to say, "Welcome" to people coming to our meetings for the first time because we are so very sorry for the reason they came. For some, the first meeting or two can be rather overwhelming, especially if they are newly bereaved. We hope that anyone feeling that way will return to at least a couple more of our meetings. Everyone is welcome to attend our meetings, regardless of the age at which their child died or the length of time that has passed since that day.

## Newcomers Welcome

We know it's hard to take that first step to attend your first meeting. Bringing someone along can help you take that first step. There are misconceptions about what our meetings are like. Are we sitting around having a pity party? NO! We learn healthy ways to deal with our grief. Does crying mean we are out of control? No! It means we hurt. Do others understand why we continue way past the time they think we shouldn't need it anymore? Some of us have stayed so others will have a place to come to heal. Aren't we glad others don't understand!

## A Solitary Journey By Helen Steiner Rice

Grief is a solitary journey. No one but you knows how great the hurt is. No one but you can know the gaping hole left in your life when someone you loved has died. And no one but you can mourn the silence that was once filled with laughter and song. It is the nature of love and of death to touch every person in a totally unique way. Comfort comes from knowing that many people have made the same journey. And solace comes from understanding how others have learned to sing again.

Mother's Day may be painful for parents whose children are no longer with them, but it can also be a time for taking steps toward healing broken hearts. I wish you all a peaceful Mother's Day, whether you celebrate with your children here with you or remember the ones who you wish were here this year.

*Our Children Forever Loved and Remembered***May Birthdates**

- 5/1 **Emily Ann Preston** Granddaughter of Bud and Gwen Preston  
 5/2 **Charles Planchage** Son of Peggy Campbell  
 5/6 **Mitchell Allen Jaquish** Son of Ellie and Thomas Jaquish  
 5/7 **Mark Robert Bartella** Son of John and Brenda Peterson  
 5/8 **Michael Patrick Randall Morgeson** Grandson of Carl & Phyllis Hardin  
 5/9 **Riley London Clark** Son of Jordan and Sherrie Clark  
 5/10 **Lori Em Kotzbauer** Daughter of Bob and Connie Kotzbauer  
 5/10 **Steven Roberts** Son of Elizabeth Roberts  
 5/10 **Kim Varney** Daughter of Judy Varney  
 5/12 **Mitch Baber** Son of Steve and Kim Baber  
 5/12 **Margaret Angela Hunt** Daughter of Linda & James Litzinger  
 5/14 **Jayne Ann Smith** Daughter of Jeanette McGee  
 5/14 **Michael Bransford Burns** Son of Emily and Mike Burns  
 5/14 **Robin Lee Webb** Daughter of Ricky and Sharon Blakeman  
 5/15 **Olivia Faith Higgs** Daughter of Wesley and Beverly Higgs  
 5/15 **Parker Blair** Son of Bill and Jennifer Blair  
 5/15 **Samantha Blair** Daughter of Bill and Jennifer Blair  
 5/15 **Robert Riley** Son of Robert & Linda Riley  
 5/16 **Lisa Jean Johnson** Daughter of Sam and Doris Strader  
 5/18 **Christopher Frederick Lenz** Son of Mark and Karen Lenz  
 5/19 **Denise Brantigan Engdahl** Daughter of Maureen & Richard Brantigan  
 5/19 **Terry Hayes** Son of Patricia Morgan  
 5/19 **Dillon Andrew Scott Waldridge** Son of Meredith Waldridge  
 5/21 **Colby Giles** Son of Debbie and Robert Giles  
 5/23 **Michael Patrick Randall Morgeson** Son of Stacy & Michael Morgeson  
 5/23 **John Martin Robinson** Son of Pat and Jim Robinson  
 5/23 **Howard "Jay" Joseph Crim** Son of Becky & Keith LaVey & Howard Crim  
 5/23 **Stephen Booher** Son of Mary McCormick  
 5/24 **Tracey Lynn VanHoose** Daughter of Karolyn and Sam Guy  
 5/24 **Nathan Charles Stamper** Son of Charlie and Missy Stamper  
 5/27 **P. J. Phillip Duncan** Son of Donna Breeze  
 5/27 **Keich Allen Newby** Son of Sharon Newby  
 5/27 **Adam Harold Cave** Son of Mark Cave and Krystal Landers  
 5/31 **Scarlett Lynn Miller** Daughter of Ronald and Ruby Miller  
 5/31 **Matthew "Beau" Salsman** Son of Ray and Vicki Salsman  
 5/31 **David Scott Fine** Son of Aida and David Fine

# Our Children Forever Loved and Remembered

## May Remembrance Dates

- 5/1 **Jason Davis** Son of Curt Davis  
5/1 **Bridget Elizabeth Kolles** Daughter of Greg and Mary Kolles  
5/1 **Christina Leigh Kolles** Daughter of Greg and Mary Kolles  
5/4 **William Elliott Sommer** Son of Tim and Rita Sommer  
5/4 **Stan Caudill** Son of Tom and Patricia Tschop  
5/5 **Dusty Riggs**, Son of Sharon Bellows  
5/6 **Hannah Meagan Landers** Son of Michelle and Richard Landers  
5/7 **Jayne Ann Smith** Daughter of Jeanette McGee  
5/7 **Kassey Lund** Daughter of Robin Jenerou  
5/9 **Missy Fields** Daughter of David and Janie Fields  
5/10 **John Harold Putman** Son of John and Harriet Putman  
5/11 **Janene Carpenter** Daughter of Linda Carpenter  
5/11 **Bill Mahan III** Son of Bill and the late Susie Mahan  
5/11 **Jacob Scott Harrod** Son of Mike and Cindy Harrod  
5/12 **Colby Giles** Son of Debbie and Robert Giles  
5/14 **Brian Paul Staats** Son of Juanita and Paul Staats  
5/14 **Eugenia L. Morton** Daughter of Eugene & Joyce Morton  
5/18 **Heidi Allen Hunt** Daughter of Judy B. Horne  
5/19 **Robert Patrick Dehner** Son of Tim and Connie Dehner  
5/20 **Tyler Benjamin Johnston** Son of Joe and Andi Johnston  
5/20 **Jim Taylor, II** Son of Dinah and Jim Taylor  
5/22 **Mark Romond** Son of Jan and Ed Romond  
5/23 **Kimberly Ann Holder** Daughter of David and Sondra Holder  
5/25 **Adeline McReynolds** Daughter of Jackson and Theresa McReynolds  
5/26 **Erin Renee Glass** Daughter of Martha and Wesley Glass  
5/28 **Garrett Witt** Son of David and Linda Witt  
5/28 **Timothy Ray Elkin** Son of Betty and the late Billy Elkin  
5/29 **Denise Brantigan Engdahl** Daughter of Maureen & Richard Brantigan  
5/29 **Jonathan Brewer** Son of Teresa and Don Bush

*If we have omitted your child, misspelled your child's name, or listed incorrect dates, please accept our apologies and call Janie Fields at (859) 881-1991 to correct the information. Call any of our telephone friends if you are having a hard time on these days. We truly understand your pain; for we, too, remember our own children.*

**This year on Mother's Day, I'll shed my tears, but let them be as a soft summer's rain.  
A rain that nourishes the earth, tears that heal and cleanse my hurting heart.**

*Our Children Forever Loved and Remembered***June Birthdates**

- 6/1 **McKenna Brooke Hatchett** Daughter of Tim and Melissa Hatchett  
 6/1 **Mark Davis** Son of Harold and Jeannie Davis  
 6/1 **DeAnna Marie Friend** Daughter of Barbara Friend  
 6/2 **Robby Matthew Oesch** Son of Candy Oesch  
 6/3 **Victor M. Martina** Mar Son of Don and Judy Martina  
 6/4 **Chasity Marie Green Leach** Daughter of Larry Leach  
 6/6 **Julie Ann Kilpatrick** Sister of Roy Stewart  
 6/7 **Nicholas Alan Norris** Son of Greg and Joanne Norris  
 6/8 **Rylee Jorja McFarland** Daughter of Joy and Chris McFarland  
 6/9 **Brenda Nicole Smith** Daughter of Carla and Kenneth Smith  
 6/9 **Brian Jason Hardin** Son of Richard and Sue Hardin  
 6/10 **Tressa Parsons Adams** Daughter of Linda and Bobby Parsons  
 6/11 **Donald Ray Bingham** Daughter of Barbara Bingham  
 6/12 **Cynthia "Cyndy" Ellen Crim** Daughter of Becky & Keith LaVey and Howard Crim  
 6/12 **Gary James Travis Burke** Nephew of Addie Waugh  
 6/13 **Thomas Allan Woodrum "Tommy"** Son of Mimi & Thomas Woodrum  
 6/14 **Becky Fister** Daughter of David and Mariam Fister  
 6/14 **Erin Renee Glass** Daughter of Martha and Wesley Glass  
 6/14 **Tim Sizemore** Son of T. C. Sizemore  
 6/14 **Jonathan Walker Mayberry** Son of Jonathan & Stephanie Mayberry  
 6/16 **Steve Elliot** Son of Nancy and Carroll Elliot  
 6/20 **John Martin Laswell** Dec Son of Frances Shaver  
 6/21 **Juan Pirir Cux** Son of Donna and Dave Uckotter  
 6/22 **Timothy Ray Elkin** Son of Betty and the late Billy Elkin  
 6/24 **Thomas E. Masters II** Son of Bess Masters  
 6/25 **Sharon Davidson** Daughter of Melvin and Sonia Davidson  
 6/25 **Jacob Daniel Akin** Son of Becky Akin  
 6/26 **Julie Dawn Hall** Daughter of Sharon and Don Hall  
 6/28 **Darius Xavier Jerome Young** Son of Deborah  
 6/29 **Phillip Old Jul** Son of Priscilla Old  
 6/30 **Christopher Everett** Grandson of Tawana Everett

**A Mother's Love Is like a Circle It Has No Beginning and No Ending.  
 It Keeps Going Around and Around Ever Expanding,  
 Touching Everyone Who Comes In Contact With It.**

# Our Children Forever Loved and Remembered

## June Remembrance Dates

- 6/2 **Spencer David Turner** Son of Kathy and Danny Turner  
6/4 **Missy Ann Tomblin** Daughter of Gail Tomblin  
6/5 **Luke Bellue** Son of Andrea Mills  
6/7 **Kimberly Sue Toye** Daughter of Gail Toye  
6/7 Ashley Riggs ?? of Sharon Bellows  
6/7 **Colin Spencer** Son of Stephanie Spencer  
6/7 **Carrie Elizabeth Griffin** Daughter of David and Debbie Griffin  
6/8 **Robby Matthew Oesch** Son of Candy Oesch  
6/8 **Rylee Jorja McFarland** Daughter of Joy and Chris McFarland  
6/9 **Jonathan Hepburn** Jul Son of Jo Hepburn  
6/9 **Jan Cecile Richardson** Daughter of Jim and Jean Richardson  
6/14 **Dawn Chrystine Beckett** Daughter of Mike and Lynn Lindsey  
6/15 **David Scott Fine** Son of Aida and David Fine  
6/15 **Justin Branham** Son of Ruthie and James Willoughby  
6/16 **Gary Ryan Delanhoussaye** Son of Glynn and Catherine Delanhoussaye  
6/17 **Brandon Holbrook** Son of Linda M. Holbrook  
6/18 **Richard (Rick) Allen** Son of Richard and Linda Allen  
6/19 **Paul R. Criswell, Jr.** Son of Georgia and Paul Criswell  
6/20 **Mark Grimes** Son of Betty and Steve Grimes  
6/22 **Jacob Issac Gibson** Son of Veronica and Darrell Gibson  
6/22 **Spencer David Turner** Son of Kathy and Danny Turner  
6/23 **Fred "Lance" L. Murphy III** Son of Patty Murphy, Brother of Stacy Hoskins  
6/27 **Edward Charles Cambell** Son of Martha E. Stone  
6/28 **Davey Allison Dunavant** Son of Anita and J. C. Harris  
6/30 **Katherine "Kate" Tudor** Daughter of Suzanne Tudor & Lewis Perry

### A FATHER MEANS...

A Father means so many things...

A understanding heart,

A source of strength and of support

Right from the very start.

A constant readiness to help

In a kind and thoughtful way.

With encouragement and forgiveness

No matter what comes your way.

A special generosity and always affection, too

A Father means so many things

When he's a man like you...

### Love Gifts

Given in memory of Eugenia Morton

by her parents, Eugene and Joyce Morton

You have memories. Don't crowd them out.

Think about them.

Treasure them.

And let them bring you solace and a measure of joy.

## Mother's Day with Surviving Children

### By Janie Fields

I became a mother for the first time to a son in 1974. Three years later I became a mother to another son. I was so blessed! Five years later I was blessed once again with the birth of my daughter. I was so happy with my family, life was wonderful!

Becoming a mother was such an honor for me. I always felt that this was the greatest accomplishment I could ever achieve. Just like every other mother I watched over my children and tried to protect them and keep them safe. But that is not possible all the time as I learned on Mother's Day, May 9, 2004 when my daughter was in a fatal car accident.

Mother's Day is so different now for the entire family. The first couple of years I didn't want to even acknowledge this previously wonderful day. I felt cheated not only of the loss of my daughter, but the loss of this day with my sons. Mother's Day is not just about mothers, but their children as well. I saw the look in their eyes that first Mother's Day; they didn't know what to do either. They too were in pain and felt the loss of their sister and this day of family celebration. Before the accident, the day consisted of lots of love, laughter and of course reliving their youth! I cherished every moment seeing my children together becoming even closer due to these special days.

After the first couple years of trying to avoid Mother's Day, I realized that I was not being fair to my surviving children. I was taking away the one day a year that was set aside for us to show our love for one another. I wanted to reassure them that I was still their mother and I that my love for them was even more precious than ever.

Mother's Day is still a very difficult day, because I continue to grieve for my daughter; that will never change. Without a doubt this special day will never be what it once was but, I will honor my daughter my Mother's Day by showing my love for her brothers. I want Missy and her brothers to be proud of me not only this day, but every day.

Written with love and memories of Missy Fields, my precious daughter.

## Quick Fix

### By Lanford, TCF, Atlanta

I believe that losing a beloved child or children is the hardest and most traumatic experience of our lives, because we can't fix it. There are lots of things in life we can change, but death is not one of them – to our sorrow.

From the time a baby is born, we try to fix everything as soon as possible. When the child cries, we are right there to see what is wrong. We like to solve and fix problems in our lives quickly.

When you encounter the death of a child, there is no quick fix, for death is permanent. We can't fix it, but we can carry their love and our love with us until the end of time.

Annette Mennen Baldwin  
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen  
TCF, Katy, TX

As a child I enjoyed the thrill of the roller coaster: gliding up the giant track, reaching the top with a momentary anticipation and the thrill of the quick dropping roll to the bottom of the track. The deep turns, first to the right and then to the left were designed to heighten the anticipation of the next climb and drop. In my childhood mind, these curves, climbs and drops were an isolated experience, temporary and fun. The ride would end.

A few months after my son's death, I dreamed of the roller coaster. But this time it wasn't fun. It was a nightmare of fear, anxiety and pain; I was so paralyzed that I couldn't breathe. That dream was the simple symbolism of life since my son died.

Now I ride a different sort of roller coaster. The climb to the top is a slow, difficult rise to normalcy. The rapid descent to the bottom is yet another terrible setback. I hang onto the bar of sanity on the curves, first one way, then another. I really want to stop this ride, but it is forever. This ride won't end.

Today I recalled that roller coaster dream, in all its vivid detail, and I compare it to the roller coaster that is my life now. Are the highs lower and the lows higher? Are the curves softening? Yes, I believe they are. It's been two years and two months since Todd died. I still weep. Tiny tears still fall unexpectedly. I still have anxiety. I still feel as if the earth has dropped from under me. I still miss talking with my son. I miss seeing him. I ache for that special hug that only my child can give. Yes, I miss my only child very much. My heart has been shattered, my definition of myself has been altered and my loneliness is incomprehensible. But something has changed on the roller coaster of this life. That something is, of course, me. I work through my grief in many, many ways. I have consciously shifted the paradigms of my life. I have learned to evaluate people from a different perspective. I have become so sensitive to the pain of other parents that I feel it as if it were my own. I have stopped anticipating how I will handle stressful events, anniversaries, birthdays, holidays. I have learned to live without being a part of my grandchildren's lives. I have learned to keep negative energy and negative people at a far distance. I have learned that a routine provides necessary structure. I have learned to live in the moment, to take joy in simple things, to talk openly about my child's life and to acknowledge the things I cannot change.

As time moves forward, I will continue to accept what is given and give what I can. I know the roller coaster will level out eventually. For as long as I live, I will keep my child with me, in my heart. That's all I can do as I ride this changing roller coaster that is now my life.



By Clara Hinton

When a 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?"

Loving 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 a 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 a part of the scenery missing. It is so painful to be an unfinished mother. Child loss makes everything seem so empty and incomplete.

The reality of child loss is devastating to a mother. There are overwhelming feelings of guilt, inadequacy and most often feeling 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." Not 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. Dramas 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!



## **Not Guilt, Regret**

**Kitty Sanders, Nashville, TN (Survivor of Suicide Group)**

One of our basic responsibilities as parents is to keep our children from harm. So, when anything happens to them, we feel guilty whether we could have realistically have done anything or not. When the ultimate tragedy occurs, we are devastated. How could we let this happen? Why didn't we stop it? If we have compounded our guilt with any degree of human error of commission or omission, we are beyond devastation. Even words, either of anger or left unspoken, haunt us. Guilt implies intent. If we intended to harm our child, we can feel guilty of that. If we never intended harm to ever, ever come to our child, the correct name for our emotion is regret. The crushing pain is still there, but regret is softer, gentler, less judgmental, and easier to forgive and to heal. It is also more accurate. If that name doesn't feel strong enough for our feelings, it will in time. Let it float there and try it now and then. Not guilt; we feel regret.

## **A Mother's Day/Father's Day**

Mother's Day and Father's Day can be both heart-wrenching and heart-warming for bereaved parents. Surviving children recognize their parents' loss and their own losses; and in their effort to regain a kind of normalcy, they often try to make these special days as festive and full of love as they possibly can. Most parents recognize the efforts of their surviving children and try to respond with enthusiasm, however difficult it may be at the time. As much as bereaved parents love and appreciate their living children, no bereaved parent can forget the child (or children) now missing from the family circle. Fractured families are never quite the same as they once were. Parents whose only child has died, or whose children have all died, can be especially saddened when Mother's Day and Father's Day are touted in every department store and gift shop. Yet even these parents (for parenthood does not die with children) may find that memories ease the working through of the grieving process.

### **Meeting Information**

#### **Lexington**

First Tuesday of Every Month  
6:30 p.m.—8:30 p.m.  
Hospice of the Bluegrass  
2321 Alexandria Drive  
Lexington, Kentucky

#### **Winchester**

Third Tuesday of Every Month  
7:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.  
Hospice East  
417 Shoppers Drive  
Winchester, Kentucky

### **Meeting Format**

Doors open one-half hour before meeting times to provide the opportunity to visit with old friends and acknowledge new ones.  
Please plan to arrive early so the meeting can begin on time.

**A Father is always a  
father...  
nothing, not even death,  
can take that away from  
you**

**A father is someone who  
carries pictures....where  
his money used to be!**

## Making Mother's Day and Father's Day Special

By —Elaine Stillwell

Pamper yourself – this is a special day in your life and always will be. You are a parent forever and your child is your child forever. Rest and be kind to yourself.

Do what you need to do – whatever helps you. Grieve your way.

Surround yourself with those loving people – the ones who make you feel comfortable, make no demands or give advice and do not try "to fix" your grief.

Plan ahead – do things that make you feel good or give you a moment's peace. Build structure into these days. It's being caught off guard that does you in.

Start new rituals – to make new memories. Remember to honor and hold your love in special ways on these days. Take a special quality of your loved one and make it part of you.

Make decisions together – share your thoughts with family members; decide what the day should include. If you are alone, find a good friend.

Include your child in the day – through prayer, lighting a candle, telling stories about them, looking through pictures, planting flowers, doing a good deed, writing about them or making their favorite recipe.

Join with another bereaved family – to honor this day and have mutual support. Be with people who understand your pain.

Start a garden – or add to a special garden in memory of your child. Plant the flowers or shrubs with special names, bleeding hearts, butterfly bush and forget me-nots.

Visit the cemetery – if that helps your heart on this day. Make that a part of your day for your dead child and then set aside time to be with your remaining child/children.

Plant a special flower or shrub – that will come to bloom this time of year, making a special appearance for Mother's Day or Father's Day.

Perform an act of kindness – do something special for someone else or something special in your child's name.

Listen to music – that makes your heart feel good or favorites of your child. Learn to play an instrument or write your own songs.

Cook some favorite recipes – that your child enjoyed or cooked for you.

Buy a present for yourself – from your child and enjoy the comfort it brings you, whether it's a bouquet, perfume, earrings or a sweatshirt. Feel its symbolism.

Write a poem or article – in memory of your child sharing memories or what has helped you.

Attend a family gathering of relatives – if their love and support can give you a life on this day. Don't go if it is too stressful.

Make a booklet of favorite poems – that help your heart and give copies to dear friends and relatives in memory of your child.

Set aside some special time to grieve – unloading all the frustration and sadness that can envelop you on such a day. Allow time to mediate alone. Fill that empty spot with positive thoughts.

Cry – allow yourself time to cry, let the tears flow. Feel the healing as you release these emotions. It's a day when you want your child here. Let the feelings surface instead of stuffing them down inside to erupt later. There is no need to apologize for crying, it is a natural response to your loss.

## Anticipating Mother's Day By Annette Mennen Baldwin

Before we lost our children to death, Mother's Day was a happy time. We each reflect back on Mother's Days past.....gifts, cards, special memories and one day set aside to acknowledge the best in our relationship with our treasured children.

With the death of our child, this dynamic was forever transfigured. Now, instead of looking forward to this day, we grasp at anything that will keep our minds away from it. Yet the anxiety still creeps into our minds and hearts; our stomachs churn and tears fill our eyes at the most inopportune moments. The dreadful countdown begins in late April and lasts for nearly three weeks.

This is the eighth Mother's Day I have endured since the death of my son. Each year I have the same, desperate anxiety, yet each year the day is a bit easier to handle. Each year the anticipation is far worse than the day itself.... "borrowing trouble" as my dad would say. Since my son is my only child, I do not have the comfort of other children nor do I have the need to put on a happy face. Instead, I am able to choose what I will do without feeling the burden of guilt.

While my first Mother's Day was filled with tears, subsequent Mother's Days have been more subdued.

The choice to embrace or ignore Mother's Day is yours alone. Many bereaved mothers adopt a new perspective which honors their child and still gives normalcy to their family. Mother's Day is bittersweet for us. The pain is part of the love that we will feel for our children for eternity. We wouldn't trade one treasured moment for a cosmic reduction of our pain.

Some of us plan the day carefully. Some of us just "go with the flow." Some of us weep; some of us work. Some of us read, some of us revel in this special moment set aside just for mothers. Each of us makes a choice that is based on our own truth.

The day itself is not nearly as overwhelming as the buildup of anxiety and sadness which precedes it. I have found this to be true of all holidays, birthdays, death anniversaries and special occasions. I am trying to live in the moment. When the moment of Mother's Day happens, I will decide what I should do. I refuse to let others pressure me. I refuse to become maudlin over greeting card commercials and heart-grabbing point-of-purchase marketing efforts. I will not be manipulated by the agenda of others.

But on Mother's Day, as on each day of the year, I will think of my son, remembering the child he was and the man he became. I will honor his life by doing the best I can with what is left of my life. I will remain in the moment and treasure my memories. And for this mother, that is enough.

### The Compassionate Friends 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 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.

Fathers are often referred to as the hidden grievers. When a child dies, thoughts generally go to the mothers—the agony they most certainly are suffering, their loneliness, emptiness, now that someone who was once a part of them is gone. Women tend to grieve outwardly, talking to their friends, crying, seeking out supportive groups and friends to be with and with whom to share their burden of sorrow.

Men, on the other hand, have a much more inward grieving style. Men are usually more factual than emotional. They accept more readily that nothing they say or do will reverse the situation; their child is irrecoverably gone from this earth.

They may weep at times, but that is not their primary mode of mourning. A man may throw himself into his job with fervor, perhaps to help alleviate the feeling that as the "family protector," he has failed to keep each member safe. He may begin or continue a project, or start a new activity, in memory of his loved one, to whom he dedicates his efforts.

Men are more concrete in their thinking, but that does not mean they grieve less. What it often does mean is that they get less emotional support; people see them return to work, keep busy at home, and assume "they're over it." Little do others realize that men agonize through their grief and mourning fully as much as women, and appreciate just as much the caring word, the hug, a recalled memory, a shared moment of silence.

Perhaps the best gift you could ever give a grieving father on Father's Day is the recognition of his loss, and affirming him as a father in mourning. A card recognizing that he is missing one of those who made him a father, yet he is still a father; a gift in memory of his child; or simply a hug, an arm around the shoulder, or a compassionate word will assure him that although he does not grieve outwardly much, those who truly care about him have not forgotten.



### Tips for Fathers who are Grieving Their Children

1. Be kind to yourself. Many fathers may feel anger, sadness, guilt and a host of other emotions because their child died before them. These emotions may seem foreign but are very common with grief—don't try to avoid them.
2. Reach out for support; it is not a sign of weakness but a sign of courage. Boys are taught to "shake it off" and "take it like a man." It is unrealistic and mistaken that grief can be "shaken off" or avoided.
3. Allow time to grieve and express your emotions in a healthy way. Finding balance is key to healing.
4. Be patient with yourself. Talk openly with family and friends about your child and encourage them to talk openly with you too—hearing your child's name mentioned can be helpful.
5. Create your own memorial. Whether it involves planting, writing, building or painting, be creative and put your energy into doing something in memory of your child.