



The Compassionate Friends

Minneapolis Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

8701 36th Ave N

New Hope, MN 55427

Meeting Schedule

We meet 7:00–8:30 pm on the third
Monday of each month.

St. Joseph Parish Community

8701 36th Ave N

New Hope, MN 55427

Corner of 36th Ave N & Boone Ave N

Bereaved Sibling Group Meeting

A bereaved sibling facilitates the group.
Siblings meet separately, but at the same
location and time as our Chapter meeting.

Monday, February 19

"Collage—the Art of Healing"

Sue Reed Crouse, bereaved mom, artist
and poet demonstrates how she honors
her daughter's legacy through collage.
By combining broken things in new ways,
collage becomes the perfect metaphor
for how one must live with the death of
a child. See Sue's article on Page 7.

Monday, March 19

"Author's Hour"

Bring your favorite quote, poem, song,
article, or book...something you created,
or discovered along your grief path. We'll
share with the group.

Monday, April 16

"Living With Loss and Love"

Family grief is a lifelong journey. We'll
explore ways to focus on how our loved
one lived, rather than reliving the story
of their death.

We Need Not Walk Alone

The Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved families. Anyone who has experienced the death of a child at any age, from any cause, is welcome. Our meetings give parents the opportunity to talk about their child and feelings as they go through the grieving process. Our meetings are also open to grandparents, older siblings, and extended family. There are no membership dues. There is no religious affiliation.

When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. **The Mission** of The Compassionate Friends is to provide highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or daughter, a brother or sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

The Secret of TCF's Success is Simple: As seasoned grievers reach out to the newly bereaved, energy that has been directed inward begins to flow outward, and both are helped to heal.

To Our New Members: Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But, you have nothing to lose, and much to gain. Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. The second, third, or fourth meeting might be the time you find the right person...or just the right words spoken that will help you in your grief work.

To Our Members Further Down the 'Grief Road': We need your encouragement and your support. Each meeting, we have new parents. Think back, what would it have been like for you at your first meeting if there had not been any TCF "veterans" to welcome you and share your grief?



About Our Meetings:

Please don't stay away from a meeting because the scheduled topic does not

interest you. At each meeting there will be time to discuss and share whatever is on your mind. We welcome your participation, but it is not required.

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Resources

HELP WANTED — Our Chapter Website is Temporarily Unavailable

Are you, or someone you know, willing to consult, help research, or design a new website for our Chapter?

Our Local Chapter Is On Facebook.



Join our Minneapolis
Chapter's private Facebook
community online: [TCF Mpls](#)
Or log onto Facebook and
search: TCF Mpls

www.facebook.com/groups/TCFMpls

National Organization Resources

may be found by visiting:

www.compassionatefriends.org

Click "Find Support" tab.

• **National Magazine, We Need Not Walk Alone®**

• **Monthly E-Newsletter**

• **Online Grief-Related Webinar Series**

• **Online Support Community**

• **Facebook Closed (Private) Groups**

[TCF/USA National Facebook Page](#)

www.facebook.com/TCFUSA

MINNEAPOLIS CHAPTER INFO

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Treasurer

John Jordan

Newsletter Editor & Co-Leader

Gloria Jordan

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Mary Jo Peterson

Webmaster*Position Open***Facebook Page Administrator**

Lisa Gross Crees

Hospitality Coordinator

Gail Hokemeir

Donor Appreciation

Pat Reller

Co-LibrariansTasha Feigh & *(Position Open)***Special Events Coordinator**

Carol Hawk

Sibling Facilitator

Maggie Bauer

Steering Committee Meetings

Held quarterly to plan events and Chapter direction. Next meeting: Friday, April 13.

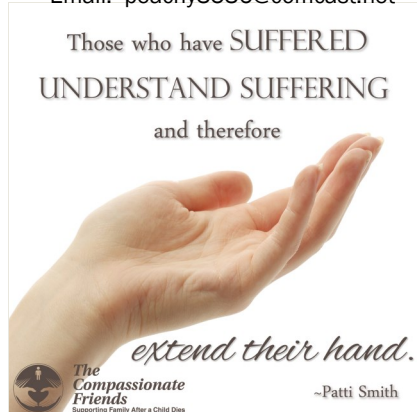
TCF NATIONAL OFFICE

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REGIONAL COORDINATOR

Cathy Seehuetter: 651-459-9341

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Articles printed in this newsletter reflect the author's personal views, and not necessarily the opinion of the newsletter editor or The Compassionate Friends.

SURROUNDING AREA ADDITIONAL CHAPTERS

The St. Paul Chapter

Meets at Beaver Lake Lutheran Church at 2280 Stillwater Ave. in Maplewood.

Second Thursday each month, 7 pm.

Sandy, (651) 528-6073

Cathy, (651) 459-9341

The Rockford Chapter

Meets at Our Father's Lutheran Church at 3900 Gilbert Ave SE.

Fourth Tuesday of each month, 7 pm.

Sandy, (763) 843-8685

The Monticello Chapter

Meets at St. Henry's Catholic Church at 1001 7th St. E in Monticello.

Second Monday of the month, 7 pm.

Beth Hill, (763) 295-3610.

The South of the River Chapter

Meets at Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church at 12650 Johnny Cake Ridge Rd., Apple Valley.

Third Tuesday each month, 7 pm.

Sue, (952) 797-6346

**TCF National Conference July 27-29, 2018**

Save the date, and make plans to attend the 41st TCF National Conference in St. Louis, MO.

A national conference of The Compassionate Friends is unlike any other conference you may ever attend. It is a place where you can go and know that you truly are not alone as you travel your grief journey. Every person comes for the same reason: a child has died. It is a place where "friendship, understanding, and hope" are more than just words.

You'll find a friendly, warm, safe atmosphere surrounded by compassionate people. It's a weekend of hopeful and healing activities. At each conference there are many activities for parents, grandparents, and siblings, but you decide what is right for you. There are almost 100 workshops and sharing sessions—a time for learning and sharing. Many areas of grief are covered by the workshops. Interesting and well-known speakers address the Opening and Closing Sessions, and the banquets. A special candle lighting ceremony concludes the Saturday evening banquet. A Walk to Remember closes the conference on Sunday.

Registration for the Conference and hotel rooms will open in early February. A block of hotel rooms has been set aside at the conference site, Marriott St. Louis Grand Hotel. Watch for updates with details on TCF national website, www.compassionatefriends.org, as well as on TCF/USA Facebook Page, and our Chapter's FB page as they become available.

Don't miss the opportunity to participate in a great conference with lots of activities and workshops for bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents, just like you.



NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Our Chapter is seeking a volunteer Editor for our quarterly newsletter. This opportunity provides a valuable and rewarding service to our Chapter by being a lifeline to members who can't make it to a meeting, but need the reassurance they are not walking alone. There is a database of articles and poems to draw from. We currently use Microsoft Publisher. If needed, I will tutor, be a reference tool, and walk alongside you until you feel comfortable, for as little or long as it takes. For more info, please email our current Newsletter Editor, Gloria Jordan, tcf.mpls.editor@gmail.com.

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT: We need help in researching a new web host as well as designing a new website. Do you have the expertise, or know someone who would be a good resource for helping us in research and/or development? If you have any input, please email Gloria Jordan, tcf.mpls@gmail.com THANKS!!



and



*On a cold winter day the sun went out
Grief walked in to stay
I turned away from the unwanted guest
And bid him be on his way.*

*Grief was merciless, he brought his friends...
Loneliness, Fear and Despair.
They walk these rooms unceasingly
In the somber cloaks they wear.*

*Every so often now,
Love pays a call
She always has Hope by her side
I welcome Love as well as Hope
For I thought surely they had died.*

*Love counsels Grief in a most gentle way
Bids him be still for a while
Then Love walks with me through memory's hall
And for a time...I can smile.*

- Kerry Marston TCF Grand Junction, CO

In Gratitude

We appreciate and thank Pat and Charlie Brown for their loving service in honor of their daughter Molly. They are stepping away from our TCF Chapter Leadership to pursue other passions and devote more time to expressions of creativity.

The Browns found TCF after the death of their daughter Molly, approximately 10 years ago. Within a couple years, they began attending Steering Meetings and were a valuable resource for our Chapter. Charlie built our new website after the previous one became unavailable. His creative endeavors polished our Chapter's outreach. As an avid reader, Pat served as co-librarian and contributed to our Book Reviews. Both were frequent facilitators in large and small group. Their compassionate service is an expression of TCF's mission to provide comfort and hope to bereaved families.

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Book Review

by a compassionate friend

The Body Remembers:
The Psychophysiology of Trauma
by Babette Rothschild

I've been reading a book and it's clarifying and articulating things for me. It's called The Body Remembers. Might be an Interesting read for some. It's a good book about how trauma affects the body, especially for bereaved parents still experiencing illnesses years after their child has died. If you're not working on your grief, your body will...ulcers, colitis, arthritis...anything inflammatory. As one mentor says, "If you don't weep, your body will."

Another book on the subject: **The Body Keeps the Score:**
Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma
by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.

Editor's Note: We welcome member's reviews of any book that you have found interesting, helpful, or inspiring. Submit reviews to tcf.mpls.editor@gmail.com

Leader's Corner

Last autumn I covered phone calls from our chapter's dedicated phone line. As a result I contacted people within our fold to respond to some of the newly bereaved families. What IS this energy vein of willingness that is so predominant in seasoned grieverers?

In the chaotic pain of child or sibling loss, how is it that one can step forward again? I see it in the monthly meetings and in the connections between meetings.

Brand new members are welcomed by seasoned grieverers. Grief journeys shared expose huge holes of the heart. In that opening a balm of empathy is applied. The newly bereaved and the older bereaved each take in a deeper breath calming the other.

To those of us who are new, and to those of us who are renewing, just begin. Anywhere will work. A purposeful step forward is in each of us.

Monica Colberg
Art's Mom and Chapter Leader



Our Minneapolis Chapter depends solely on donations to fund our activities; room rental, meeting supplies, speakers, lending library, printing/mailling the newsletter, outreach materials, and more.

LOVE GIFTS are tax-deductible donations given in memory of our children or other loved ones by family or friends who wish to support the work of The Compassionate Friends. There are no membership dues or fees. All contributions are voluntary.

The chapter leadership is grateful for your contributions of any amount. In addition, thank you for the anonymous cash offerings received at recent events.

Donation In Memory of:

Christopher
Chris
Matthew
Lauren
Mark
Carissa
Jory Day-Monroe
Andrea
Vincent
Michelle Marie Franta
Kendra Rae Lindfors
Ann Longton
Daniel
Antonio Demeules
Shayde Erin Rudenick
David
Danny

by TCF Member/Family:

Bruce and Mary Bauer
Maggie Bauer
Robert and Barbara Demsky
Dawn and Peter Duwenhoegger
Donna Frain
Linda Hayen
Mary Klingelhoets
Joan and Martin Leeper
Jeff Lewis
Lynn and Stan Lideman
Tom and Terri Lindfors
Barabara & Richard McNamara
Audrey Nelson
Sheila Potocnik
Steve Rudenick
Selma Twigg
Georgie Waulk

TCF's Vision

*That everyone who
needs us will find us
and everyone who
finds us will be helped.*



The Things I Have Learned About Grief Since the Death of My Child

- Grief is not an event, it is a process. It does not have a distinct finish line. It takes each person a different amount of time to do their grief work – each person's journey is as unique as their fingerprints.
- Grief is unique for each person because of the relationship they had with the child who has died. That relationship was also unique. It is different for a father, different for a mother, different for a surviving sibling. Your grief journey will be guided by many things besides the relationship you had with the child who died. It will be influenced by your past life experiences (including previous losses); your religious beliefs, your socio-economic status, your physical health, the availability of a support network, and, in many cases, the cause of the death itself.
- People want you to be “over it” way sooner than you can ever imagine that as a remote possibility. They don't seem to understand that this is not the flu and we don't get “over it”, we learn to integrate it into the fabric of our lives. People want us to be back to our “old selves again” but what they don't realize is that we will never be the same people we were before our child died. One of our tasks as we make our grief journey is to redefine who we are in this new reality that we did not choose.
- Grief is not a predictable journey and sometimes feels as though we are on a roller coaster. One day we may feel somewhat stronger and feel we are making progress, the next day we may crash and burn. Grief is sometimes like winding a ball of yarn – you wind and wind on it and sometimes drop it and it unravels before you – then it is time to start winding it up again. Grief can be like that. It is unrealistic to think that things will be “normal” again because they won't be the “normal” we have always known. It will be part of our job to define our “new normal” – an existence without that child's physical presence.
- It is important to remember that as we grieve, we must also mourn the death of our child. The two words are usually used interchangeably, but they mean different things. Grief is on the inside – what we are feeling inside. Mourning is “grief gone public” – in other words how we are allowed to express our grief outside of ourselves.
- We have a great need to tell and retell our story far longer than many people are willing to listen to us. We need to find safe places to tell our story and continue to talk about our child. This is probably one of the greatest values of a TCF Chapter. Being part of a TCF Chapter also helps to validate what we are feeling and helps to make us feel less alone.
- Pain is part of the grief process and cannot be ignored or “gotten around” if we are to heal. You must integrate and process the pain to get to the other side of it – to the place where healing can start taking place. There is a Buddhist saying... “In order to heal, you have to lean into the pain.” While grief and pain are inevitable in most people's lives, misery is optional. I am sure you have heard the expression “we cannot change the wind, only the direction of our sails.”
- Remember that letting go of the pain does not mean letting go of the love you had for your child. That love will remain with you always.
- I think at some point each of us must make a conscious decision to heal. We must decide whether or not we want to become bitter or better. I believe each of us has the tools within us to heal, but we must listen to our inner voice to tell us how to proceed.
- Everyone seems to have an explanation for why this happened to you. It is a characteristic of our society that we want to be problem solvers, so people often feel they have to provide us with some kind of explanation. I haven't met a bereaved parent yet who felt there was a reasonable and acceptable explanation for why their child had to die.
- I also think we need to be selfish as we grieve. By this I mean we must be good to ourselves, be patient with ourselves, look to what we need to do to move forward. Sometimes we get so busy caring for and nurturing others, we neglect to nurture ourselves. Remember, the word grief means “to carry a heavy burden”.
- We need to be open to the help others can provide. This is not a journey we need to make alone. Let people help you. Ask for help when you need it. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but an acknowledgement that you want to heal.

~Susan Chan, Rachael's Mom, TCF Topeka, KS



Your Pup and I

Your old pup sleeps before the fire,
Muzzle resting on outstretched paws.
He twitches with a little yelp,

Reaching to a dream gone bad that he can't help.
A sound from outside jerks his head alert,
Ears listening intently,
Radar in search of your special step.
Not hearing the sound that he wants, he looks hurt.
His head goes down with a sigh.
He looks to me with mournful eyes.
I declare I think that dog sometimes cries...
He, like I, never dreamed you'd be the first to die.
He misses you as badly as I.
Even old pups want to know why...
And they grieve, like us, for one last good-bye,
And tonight I joined him as he cried.

Fay Harden, TCF Tuscaloosa, AL

When a Child Dies by Drug Addiction

Ben was an addict. That declaration is enormously painful and takes even more courage to write, than Ben died at age nineteen. He was an honor student, football captain, neighborhood skateboard star, altar server, little league all-star, and lead singer in a punk rock band; he was handsome, popular, kind, and gentle. He was my first born, my only boy. He was an addict and heroin killed him.

When Ben was in the throes of his disease, I would jolt awake, stare at the blank ceiling, feeling my blood turn to ice. With my hands slipped under my lower back and my fingers spread so my body heat could radiate through my arms, hands, and fingers, I'd say the Lord's Prayer, trying to obliterate the swarming fears.

Obsessed with this prayer, I studied Emmet Fox's *Around the Year with Emmet Fox* before bed each night. Reading and dissecting the prayer by phrase, I studied each word on every page, searching for an answer to my never-ending question. “How can I save Ben?”

I also wrote in journals, pouring out my heart to empty space. Addiction is lonely and isolating, and it leaves a trail of “Whys?” and “Could haves?” I'm still haunted by the idea that some kind of trauma or horrible encounter unleashed a beast within my son. Why didn't I see it? Why didn't Ben feel safe enough to tell me? Was the disease so embedded in his DNA, that there was nothing anyone could do? Did I fail him? That is the hardest question of all: Did I fail him?

I sometimes wish Ben had died of cancer. People understand the disease. Addiction carries an insidious stigma, casting out its victims and relegating them—and their families—to society's margins. There is no respect attached to such conditions. Police officers don't touch the brim of their hats in homage, and no other fanfare takes place to mark the grievous occasion of loss. There is only mourning...and those damn unanswerable questions.

Joni Norby, Quakertown, PA

Our Children Remembered...on Their Birthdays

Loved...Missed...Forever in Our Hearts



February

CHILD	MEMBER
Kimberly	Donna
J. D.	Cathy Bailly
Zachary	Lauren & Michael O'Neil
Ian Stevens	Kristine & Dale DeWitt
Steven Eric Hanson	Meg Hanson
Elyse Mary Stern	Robin Stern
Corey Fetzer-Londer	Cheryl Fetzer
Charlotte	Jon & Angie Downing
Jonathan Jeffrey	Glenn & Linda Jeffrey
Kapra Merideth Quain	Mary Quain
Brianna Hager	Valerie & Rob Hager
Brianna Hager (Granddaughter)	Marge & Paul Modell
Alice	Suzanna Bess & Carrie Johnson
Christopher Bormann	Susan Bormann
Claire Richards	Gail Manning & David Richards
Malia	Alisa Matteson
Mark Blaska	Karen Blaska-Morrow
Troy Perron	Gin Johnson
Michael Gebhard	Allan & Evelyn Gebhard
Noah Tweed	Dennis & Sandee Tweed
David brother	Gabrielle Robbins
Kevin Williams	Shirley Williams
Kevin Williams (Sibling)	Kim and Ken Williams
Amanda	Dave & Deb Nordgaard
Lori Jensen	Christine Jensen
Harriet	Stephen & Fiona Burgdorf
Chris (Sibling)	Maggie Bauer
Christopher	Mary & Bruce Bauer
Aiden	Mary Sullivan
Paul Just	Kelly Barrett

March

CHILD	MEMBER
Henry Persson	Emily Persson
Zachary	Darcie Rummel
Renee	Pat & Roy Schulz
Adam	Kathryn & Waters
Cassie Nicole Turner	Gail Turner
Danielle (Granddaughter)	Irene Guckeen
Danielle	Jeannie & Darin Guckeen
John Michael Morgan (Sibling)	Jane Morgan
Jehangir (J.J.) Merchant	Pheroza Merchant
Christopher	Lynnette Orkin
Jesse Meyers	Sandra Bouressa
Bridgette	Tom Twining
Roan	Sang, Zoe & Jude Tran
Ashley Cochran	Lisa Cochran
Alexander	Susan & Ed Herrmann



April

CHILD	MEMBER
Samantha	Julie Bangsund
Chad Goodspeed (Sibling)	Brenna Goodspeed
Chad Goodspeed	Betty Udseth
Wyatt Mitchell Olig	Katherine Olig
Ashley	Michon Jenkin
Haylie	Alyssa Bjorklund
Michael	Jean Shilinski
Matthew (Matt)	Stephen & Carol Hawk
Andy	Debbie Stifter
Alex Fischer	Becky Reese
Dale Redning Jr.	Kim & Wayne Baier
Sofia Buxton Anderson	Molly Remington
Owen	Sarah & Tim Stuewe
Mark Frain	Donna Frain
Mark Frain (Sibling)	Michael & Terri Frain

Birthday Table

Birthdays are given special recognition at our monthly meetings. During your child's birthday month, you are invited to bring photos and memorabilia to share and display on our Birthday Table. Some like to sign up to bring a favorite snack or treat (even birthday cake) to celebrate the birthday of their child.

The Promise

*Cold winds blow across the frozen pond.
Snow lies deep upon the fields.
But the change has begun.
Daylight hours increase slowly.
With each passing day later sunsets are more apparent.
Winter is ending.
For bereaved parents
The change is awfully slow.
The progress is not always apparent
But the promise is the same.
Winter will end.
Spring will return.*

Betty Stevens, TCF Baltimore, MD



Our Beloved Children...in Our Hearts Always especially during the Remembrance Month of their death.



February

CHILD	MEMBER
Chad	Gayle Brus
Kelly Ann	Theresa Nichols
Tommy	Sheryl Hutton
Krista Anne	Mae & Bob Malmquist
Sarah Tilman	Cathie Tilman
Zachariah Paul Benjamin Muonio	Michael & Anita Muonio
Mitch (Sibling)	Rachel Shapiro
Aaron	Deb & Darryl Christensen
Ben Freidson (Sibling)	Debe Fefferman
Benjamin Freidson	Judy Freidson
Michael Gebhard	Allan & Evelyn Gebhard
Alice	Suzanna Bess and Carrie Johnson
Jeremy Klein	Chris Klein and Jeanne Klein
Elsey	Mary Jo & Winston Peterson
Ben	Karen & Gary Hansen
Sadie Hanson	Dani Hanson
Alex	Chuck & Trudi Campbell
Zachary	Lauren & Michael O'Neil
Persephonee	Chris & Ameer Banks
Christopher	Lynnette Orkin

March

CHILD	MEMBER
Henry Persson	Emily Persson
Abigail Grace	Tom & Christina Monroe
Missy	Mary Feigh
Missy sister	Tasha Feigh
Juli Elisabeth	Lisa & Steve Crees
Juli Elisabeth (Siblings)	Melissa Crees and Michael Crees
Juliette	Nancy Kilhan
Jory Day-Monroe (Sibling)	Seaira Garcia
Jory Day-Monroe (Grandson)	Mary Klingelhoets
John Alden	Mary & John Alden
Keith Rosenwinkel	Wanda VonHoltum
Daniel Weyrauch	Lori & Rick Weyrauch
Jaden Dallas Dalton	Karren Gray
Michelle Franta Sibling	Jeff & Melia Liedman
Michelle Marie Franta	Lynn & Stan Liedman
Ben Alden	Mary & John Alden
Kendra	Tom & Terri and Cole Lindfors
Jonathan Jeffrey	Glenn & Linda Jeffrey
Kyle	Lynda Kubousek
Brenden	Tammy Sperr
Shayde Erin Rudenick	Steve Rudenick
Melissa Roeser	Marilyn & Steve Dahlmeier
Nicole Jean Gallery	Janna Gallery
Lauren	Nancy Riesgraf
Kimberly	Donn
Grayson Jett	Brian & Jennifer Jett
Lauren	Dawn & Peter Duwenhoegger
Ross Stenerson	Barbara Stenerson
Barrett Ugland	Renee Forst
Haylie	Alyssa Bjorklund
Alex Fischer	Becky Reese
Brianna Hager	Valerie & Rob Hager
Brianna Hager (Granddaughter)	Marge & Paul Modell

March (continued)

CHILD	MEMBER
Gregory Sather (Sibling)	Eric Sather
Gregory Sather (Sibling))	Joelle & Paul Valentini
Gregory Sather	Nancy Sather
Daniel (Sibling)	Anna & Todd Lundblad
Daniel Hinschberger	Linda Schaeffer
Jordan	Leslie Holt
John Morgan (Sibling)	Jane Morgan
Adam Iesh	Deanna Iesh
Mandy	Don & Connie Lundholm
Elyse Mary Stern	Robin Stern

April

CHILD	MEMBER
Zachary	Connie Theis
Danielle (Granddaughter)	Irene Guckeen
Danielle	Jeannie & Darin Guckeen
John Pecknik (Sibling)	Jeanne Klein
Spencer Johnson	Ann Perry
Noah Tweed	Dennis & Sandee Tweed
Michael Habte	Debra Hudson
Matthew	Michael Wolfson
Jenna Rietmulder	Jay & Holli Rietmulder
Paul Just	Kelly Barrett
Molly	Pat & Charlie, & Tyler Brown
Michael James Lewis	Joanne Lewis
Joseph Daniel Muonio	Michael & Anita Muonio
Calob	Jessica Bartram
Kevin Williams (Son, Sibling)	Shirley, & Kim and Ken Williams
Brianna Leigh	Brenda vanAsch
Vincent	Jeff Lewis
Sarah	Jane Ramerth & Marc Friedman
Amanda	Dave & Deb Nordgaard
Jelani	Alyce Hamilton
Cynthia	Liz Keller
Javi	Renee & Ricardo Moron
Andrew	Gail Archer
LisaBeth McCabe	William & Betty McCabe
Hallie	Todd & Kathy Brown
Dominic	Aaron Cepeda
Owen	Sarah & Tim Stuewe
Corey	Mary Feigh

The Survivors

The depth of your sorrow diminishes slowly and, at times, imperceptibly.

Your recovery is not an act of disloyalty to the one who has died.

Nor is it achieved by forgetting the past.

Try to strike a delicate balance between a yesterday that should be Remembered and a tomorrow that must be Created.

The French Word “*Collage*” Means to Glue

She was sitting on the curb outside the coffee shop with her friends when I arrived, balancing a 2' x 3' piece of plywood against her knees. She stood up, hoisted the board, which I suspected she'd retrieved from the construction dumpster nearby, and made her way to the car. Bolted to the front of the plywood was a metal circuit box, out of which a variety of colorful wires sprouted. A segmented conduit flopped over the top and a chipped, plastic plate framed an oily light switch. “I hope you're taking that thing to your apartment,” I snapped at my artistic 20 year old daughter. “I don't want it laying around the basement.”

“I'm going to make something very cool out of it,” Laura retorted, her chin high.

A month later, she was dead, having fallen through a damaged portion of walkway on the Arcola High Bridge. We cleaned out her apartment and there was the old board, painted blue-grey. She had bolted a black picture frame to the front, painted the light switch gold and added a surreal picture of a black rose, suspended in sooty air. The piece was clearly unfinished, propped against an end-table (also saved from a dumpster) and surrounded by coffee cans filled with bits of wire, metal washers and peculiar hardware. She obviously envisioned some marvelous industrial vibe, but I would never know.

During the ensuing year, walking felt unfamiliar and treacherous as I no longer trusted the ground beneath my feet. Nothing about my life or myself felt familiar or survivable. Each day I looked at the board, now leaning against the wall in my office. It had become a symbol of my grief and regret.

One day, as I thought about William Stafford's poem, detailing the disparate contents of his journal, I curled the wires from the board around a pencil to look like morning-glory vines, and placed paper flowers on the ends. A few days later, I glued some black stones to the board. Then, a passage from the book Laura had been reading, *The Heart of Understanding* by Tich Nhat Hanh. Then, a chunky flower she'd drawn with green crayon when she was a little girl. Before long, I had my first collage, a fusion of Steampunk and Bereaved Mom.

Until then, I had buried myself in a frantic repertoire of activity in the desperate search for solace. I obsessively read and wrote poetry. I created an elaborate garden with flowers bearing her name. I found meaningful volunteer work. I made quilts. While all of these activities eased the agony a bit, it was work on the rescued board that gave me courage to slow down and consider what some call the “new normal.” Something about the process and the result seemed much greater than the sum of all these modest parts and the time spent selecting and attaching them. As Stafford wrote that his journal contained *mean things*, *fishhooks*, *barbs in your hand*, also, *space for Alaska*, so the collage held bouquets of 8-penny nails—nail-heads painted like daisies—and space for my Alaska-dwarfing sorrow. I found myself saving the onion bag because of its intricate, red weave. I gathered fallen hollyhock blossoms because they resembled butterflies. I pried rusted washers from the heat-softened asphalt during my walks. I began to see possibility in what seemed worthless and felt compelled to give these objects a strange, new life.

In the seven years since Laura's death, I've made hundreds of collages. I've sewn leaves and frayed rope to paper. A cache of sticky lollipop sticks I found in her apartment became flower stems. The tiniest scraps of paper upon which she'd jotted a phone number or note became clouds above mountains torn from pages of poetry. I shredded a copy of her death certificate and wove the strips with floral ribbon. Some of the collages shout with rage and agony. I've burned photographs, hacked up paper with razor blades and scribbled pencil-breaking, page-ripping profanity, all of which have been set into collage. Others are lovely and quiet, containing poetry and watercolor. Bits of her clothing. Wire. Crushed flowers encased in tulle and scribble-sewn to paper. Soil from her grave.

At some point, it occurred to me that collage was simply a metaphor for what I had to do in order to continue. I had to take the shards of my life and somehow glue them together in a new way. Collage demonstrated that I could integrate her death into my life and survive. I didn't have to *move on* or *let go* or any of the troubling platitudes that are often directed at the bereaved. I could hold on to everything and transform it into art, which offered me a new way to relate to my daughter.

Laura's collection of rusty hardware is slowly being incorporated—along with my own found objects, poetry and art—into a collection that honors and celebrates her life and my grief process. Following Laura's lead with the discarded board, I've developed, with collage, a conduit through which we both can travel, each toward the other.

Sue Reed Crouse, Laura's Mom

Collage—the Art of Healing

What do you do with your child's driver's license, teething toy, guitar pick, report card, a scrap of paper with their handwriting, or a greeting card...work it into a collage. You don't need artistic ability to find relief and a degree of healing through collage.

Join us for the February 19 meeting when bereaved mom, Sue Crouse, shares her unique, inspiring collage creations honoring her daughter, Laura.

Seasons

The change of seasons is difficult. It reminds me that I must change if I am to live again. We can become stuck in our grief, full of self-pity and overwhelmed with pain. I do not believe our children would want us to live the rest of our lives in pain and misery. It is so easy to fall into the “black pit” and never have the strength or courage to crawl out, because crawl out we must...on our bellies.

We are different now, with different priorities and goals. We must find a new purpose for going on, and we must accept the changes in our lives, including ourselves, for we are different now. We cannot go backward, though there are times we yearn to. We must go forward. If we don't, we stay stuck at the point our world changed. I used to say “ended.”

Change is difficult. To accept the loss of our child is the most difficult of all. Our comfort comes from believing that the love we share will go on for all eternity and that we will be reunited again, and each day brings us closer. We must learn to live again, love again, feel joy and peace again, or our survival will be without value to ourselves or others.

Renee Little
TCF, Fort Collins, CO



*It may take years before
green shoots of hope begin
to appear in your life.*

*Be patient and keep
looking for them.*

*They will reappear after your
long winter of grief.*

Dennis L. Apple



The Compassionate Friends

Minneapolis Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

c/o St. Joseph Parish Community
8701 36th Ave N
New Hope MN 55427

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Thank you for your consideration!

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