



# *The Compassionate Friends*

## *Manhattan Chapter*

### **Supporting Family After a Child Dies**

MANHATTAN NEWSLETTER

VOLUME XII NUMBER 4

HOLIDAY 2019

#### **Futurity**

I was just reading a survey in Vanity Fair. What caught my eye and imagination was the question “In the obituary of your dreams, which one of the following phrases would you most like to see? a) Survived by eight grandchildren, b) at the age of 99, c) well-known philanthropist, d) flags will be flown at half mast, e) after a brief illness”. At an astounding 3 to one ratio everyone surveyed, both parents and non-parents all agreed that *a) survived by eight grandchildren* was the one phrase they all aspired to.

I thought back to my mom, who never hesitated to tell me, “you think you love your children? Just wait until you have grandchildren!” When Peter left this world, I grieved not only for the loss of him, but for the loss of all my never-to-be grandchildren. To this day, it is still an open wound.

We live our lives like immortals. When we are very young, the concept of dying is not one we can apply to ourselves or those we love. As we live and experience loss, it becomes a concept that we try to understand but it still doesn’t apply to us. Then, we have children and futurity becomes something we begin to recognize. Finally, we see in them the beginning of ourselves and all our efforts go into teaching them our values so that they will grow into adults like us. As we age, it becomes a comfort to know that though we may not be physically here, we will continue in a future world we will never know but that our children – and more important (con’t page 3)

#### **Choice Points in Your Grief**

By Darcie Sims

We have always had choices in our lives:

- *Should I smile or cry now?*
- *Which thumb to suck?*
- *Who will be my best friend?*
- *Which to eat first ..dessert or vegetable?*
- *Which one to fall in love with?*
- *Whom to marry?*
- *How many children to have?*
- *What will we name them?*

And then one day we run out of choices, or so we thought. Our world came to pieces, and the sky grew dark, and the sun went out. But even then, in the darkest moments we have ever known, there were choices to be made... even if we did not recognize them. From the moment we learned of the death, there were choices to be made:

- *Should I continue breathing?*
- *Who needs to be notified?*
- *Which funeral home to use?*
- *Burial or cremation?*
- *Which clothes, music, readings?*
- *Who will do what?*
- *Should I continue breathing?*

*(con’t page 6)*

**Telephone friends:** When you’re having the kind of day that you feel only another bereaved parent or sibling can understand, we are willing to listen and share with you. Don’t hesitate to call our Manhattan Chapter phone for meeting information (212) 217-9647 and someone will get back to you. Siblings may call Jordon Ferber at (917) 837-7752.

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#### **THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MANHATTAN CHAPTER MEETINGS**

Are always the **SECOND** and **FOURTH** Tuesday of the month at the Fifth Ave Presbyterian Church. Enter at 7 West 55<sup>th</sup> St. **Meetings start promptly at 7 PM**

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

## A Tough Question

By Nora Yood

We've all been subjected to inappropriate questions from people who are nosy, socially clueless, or just plain rude. No one likes to be quizzed about matters that are just too personal or embarrassing to merit a glib and effortless answer. Is that a designer purse or a knock-off? Can you afford a vacation this year? How much do you weigh, earn, give to charity, pay in rent, recycle? Have you ever considered Botox? We feel righteous indignation at the lack of manners of these loathsome boors and perfectly justified in responding with hot-tempered sarcasm or icy silence.

For most people, the question *How many children do you have?* does not belong in the category described. The query falls more into the class of speech rituals employed by those who don't really know each other and have not yet determined whether they have anything of substance to share, part of the repertoire of small talk, bland and unthreatening, designed to grease the verbal engine and get the dialogue up and running. A conversation starter.

For most people, that is. Not for me. I am a parent whose son has died. I find the question emotionally wrought and unsettling, with the power to derail any budding discussion or even bring it to an awkward and abrupt halt. What do I say? I had three children, but I don't have one of them any longer. At least not in the flesh and blood, to touch and feed and argue and celebrate with. Yes, I have a son in my heart and in my thoughts, always and forever, often obsessively. But I do not have a son in the land of the living, where I want him to be. That would be the most truthful answer.

The first year that I lost my son, whenever a new acquaintance asked the dreaded question, I answered, *two daughters*. The reality of my son's death was too unimaginable and surreal to articulate. I could not say the words without falling apart. I was angry and numb, and could not expose the raw and seething pain I was constantly experiencing. It took all my energy to carry out the motions of living through each day and pretending to be coping. Even now, three and a half years later, for random schmoozes with nameless strangers who I most probably will never see again, *two daughters* is enough of an answer. The stitches that keep me intact are still very fragile and disintegrate easily.

Eventually, it became evident that I would have to find a way to express my loss to people I interacted with since my son's death. Life, somehow, goes on. New relationships are formed. If I didn't find the words to speak about my son's death early on in an encounter, the revelation became exponentially more difficult as time passed. And I understood that anyone who would be part of my world had to know about David, no less than my about my other children. *How many children do you have? Two daughters, and a son who died.*

Having made that decision doesn't make giving my answer easier. Each time I repeat it, the unfairness and finality the response conveys is reinforced. And the acceptance. Acceptance of its reality and acceptance that the sadness and pain surrounding that reality will never leave me. For a parent who lost a son or daughter, *How many children do you have?* is a tough question

### NOTICE

This issue of our Manhattan Chapter newsletter will be the last sent by US mail.

Due to continued increases in printing and postage costs, in 2020 we will continue to publish our newsletter quarterly but will distribute it via email to all for whom we have an email address. If you have *not* already received your emailed copy of this newsletter when you read this, please email to [danzweigtcf@gmail.com](mailto:danzweigtcf@gmail.com) to let us know. Our quarterly newsletter will also continue to be posted on our website - [compassionatefriends.nyc](http://compassionatefriends.nyc)

**A Love Gift** is a donation given in memory of a child, grandchild, sister or brother. It can also be a memorial to a relative or friend. It can be in honor of a happy event that you would like to acknowledge. Your contributions can be in any amount, are tax deductible and are a source of income for our chapter that helps us to reach out to bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings through books, programs and this newsletter. We want to thank the following for their generous support of our chapter.

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>James Fraser</b>              | In memory of his son, <b>Glen Fraser</b> , 12/1 – 9/18, forever 28                           |
| <b>Tom &amp; Eleanor Ashton</b>  | In memory of their daughter <b>Amber Ashton</b> , 10/1 – 12/13, forever 34                   |
| <b>Renee &amp; Hervey Sande</b>  | In memory of their grandson <b>Caleb Sande</b> , 12/29 – 9/3, forever 6                      |
| <b>Carol Lee Stermer</b>         | In memory of her brother <b>Harvey Stermer</b> , 5/31 – 6/9, forever 59                      |
| <b>Jack &amp; Phyllis Fisher</b> | In memory of their daughter <b>Cybele Elizabeth Fisher Koppel</b> , 3/10 – 10/15, Forever 42 |

## **Futurity** (con't from page 1)

our grandchildren will inhabit along with the memory of us and hopefully with all the life lessons and family sagas we have instilled and implanted in them.

I wonder sometimes why futurity seems so important. Even after losing our children and learning the survival skills it takes to live each day to the fullest, aside from missing our children, we all miss the children they didn't get a chance to have. Is it a conceit to think that our values will matter in the world if they are carried forward by our progeny? Do we always harbor a wish that one of our heirs will make a difference in the world – therefore making us matter.

I am at a difficult stage once more. All my friends are becoming grandparents. They delight in these mini-versions of themselves as I'm sure I would too. But I'm not sure they even know why they are so delighted by these children. But I know. If I did have grandchildren, I'm sure, like all my friends, I too would be oblivious to what now eats at my soul. I would simply delight in their existence. I would marvel at their growth. I would be so proud of their accomplishments. I would take such comfort in their unconscious mission -

carry my history and that of my family into their future. But the loss of them - the impossibility of their existence and my being condemned to another kind of "neverness", is every bit as painful and ongoing as the loss of Peter.

Those of us with surviving children continue to hope. And though many may not ever have the pleasure of grandchildren, they at least have the distraction of a continuing family while hope lives deep inside. As the holiday season creeps upon us once more, I am brought back again to all I'm missing. I put these thoughts aside again and prepare to share in the delight of my friends.

I shall look forward to our candle lighting on December 8<sup>th</sup> and the social time that follows with all my compassionate friends later that evening. Knowing I am part of such a compassionate and understanding community is what really helps me get through the impending season of joy. Though I wish Peter was there for me to brag about, I will content myself with the knowledge that you, my friends, really know how palpable an absence each of our losses creates, especially at this time of year. Thank you for being such an important part of my life.

**Marie Levine**

## Choices in our Grief (con't from page 1)

In a world where there are no choices to be made, we are faced with countless choices that are required. Yet there is simply no energy, no brainpower, no motivation to make any of them. We would prefer to lay down and die ... and some of us tried, but it didn't work, and so we got up, dusted ourselves off, got busy, made coffee, tossed in a load of laundry, and began to move forward into grief ... a world filled with choices we did not want to make! In the early hours, days, weeks and even months of grief, our choices are pretty basic and limited. We plod through the fog, frozen as icicles or Popsicles, functioning, but not feeling. It is early grief, and fortunately, the choices are pretty basic:

- *Should I eat?*
- *Should I go to work?*
- *Should I pay the bills?*
- *Should I keep breathing?*

But as grief progresses, our choices begin to become more complex:

- *What should we do with the stuff?*
- *What do we do with the room?*
- *Should I keep breathing?*
- *Should we move, stay married, hide?*
- *What do we tell everyone when they ask how we are?*
- *Why are we still breathing?*
- 

Eventually grief settles down into a routine of sorts... a new normal for us; and still there are choices to be made:

- *Should we go to a support group?*
- *Should I make him/her go with me?*
- *How should we memorialize our child/grandchild?*
- *How long should we be grieving?*
- *Can we move on, get over it, or stay in sadness forever?*
- 

And finally, what should we bring with us into our new life? You will wrestle long and hard, and finally discover the awful truth of grief; your child, your grandchild, your sibling *has died*. You have *not*. You are left among the living, to carve out an existence that has to endure not only the pains of life, but the joys as well. And suddenly, survival isn't enough. If you are to be stuck in life, then you can *choose* to live again.

We can choose how we wish grief to influence us. We can carry bitterness and anger, or we can choose to remember the light and love. We rearrange the furniture, change rooms, and sometimes we move. "The Room" becomes a den, a sewing room, a guest room, or perhaps, someone else's room. We slowly begin to understand that putting our child's things away does not mean putting him or her out of our life.

The 'now' becomes a fork in the road... a choice between grieving forever and learning to live with what you've got instead of what you wanted. You don't have to remember only the awfulness of *the death*. You can choose to recall the joys, the light your loved one brought, the music of his or her presence in your life.

These are the Choice Points in Grief:

- √ You can choose what you remember.
- √ You can choose what you carry with you.
- √ You can choose what you let go.
- √ You can choose to carry hurt, pain, bitterness and anger.
- √ You can choose to carry joy, love, laughter and life.
- √ How long are you going to let *the death* overshadow *the life*?
- √ Didn't say good-bye? Then say it now or choose to say "I love you", now, tonight and forever.
- √ You don't stop loving someone just because they died.
- √ You can choose whether you remember the death or the life *first*.

You can look for joy and carry rose-colored glasses, or you can carry the pain and sorrow of the death. Risk it all; don't wait for anything anymore ... just start dancing. Even if there is no light, our memory can light the way. No one can take our memories away. You can toss them away or give them away, but no one can destroy those precious moments of light. They will last forever.

*Love is the size of a sigh  
Light as a kiss  
Gentle as a whisper  
Small as a moment in time*

I am glad I bought the ticket. I'm glad I paid the price. I'm glad I shared the journey, and I have a memento or two from the ride. Let go of the hurt so there is room for love to grow. Remember the *life*, not just the death.

I think the truly bereaved are those who have never known love at all. You and I are rich beyond measure because someone loved us and we loved them ... we still do. And for this I am thankful.

*Grief isn't a seasonal song.  
It's a lifetime song,  
but it doesn't have to be a sad song forever.  
Our loved ones lived. We loved them.  
We still do.  
I choose joy and thanks for the little while.*

~ Darcie Sims

## Worldwide Candle Lighting

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting®, held annually the second Sunday in December, this year December 8th, unites family and friends around the globe as they light candles for one hour to honor and remember children who have died at any age from any cause. As candles are lit at 7 p.m. local time, creating a virtual wave of light, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memories of children in a way that transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious, and political boundaries.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, a gift from TCF to the bereavement community, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten.

A Remembrance Book is available during the event at TCF's USA national website. In that short one day span, thousands of messages are received and posted each year from every U.S. state and Washington D.C., every territory, as well as dozens of other countries. Some are in foreign languages. Go to [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) to post a message.

**The Manhattan Chapter of TCF will hold its candle lighting ceremony Sunday,**

**December 8th**

**Shelbourne Affinia Hotel**

**303 Lexington Ave (bet. 37<sup>th</sup> - 38<sup>th</sup> St.)**

**Doors open at 6:00 PM**

**Remember to bring a framed photo that can be displayed during the evening.**

***There will be an ongoing slideshow of all our children...***

**To include your loved one in this beautiful memorial, please**

**email your photos by DECEMBER 3RD to:**

**[photosmtcf@gmail.com](mailto:photosmtcf@gmail.com)**

We suggest you send two photos - a young, "sunrise" photo and a "sunset" more recent photo.

Be sure to indicate your child's **full name exactly as you wish it to appear!**

**(If you had photos in last year's slideshow, just request to use the same photos for 2019)**

**THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CHAT SCHEDULE.**

Go to [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org). Click on CHAT. Times are ET

| ET  | 9:00-10AM      | 8:00 – 9:00PM         | 9:00 – 10:00PM   | 10:00 – 11:00PM                                     |
|-----|----------------|-----------------------|--|---|
| MON |                |                       | General Bereavement Issues<br>Grandparents/Stepparents                       | General Bereavement<br>Men's Chat                   |
| TUE |                |                       | General Bereavement Issues<br>Bereaved over 2 yrs<br>Pregnancy & Infant Loss | General Bereavement Issues<br>Pregnancy/Infant Loss |
| WED | Newly Bereaved |                       | September 11 Families<br>Siblings  | General Bereavement Issues                          |
| THU |                | No Surviving Children | General Bereavement Issues<br>Siblings                                       | General Bereavement Issues                          |
| FRI |                | Suicide               | Special Needs Children   | General Bereavement                                 |
| SAT |                |                       |  | General Bereavement<br>Siblings                     |
| SUN | Siblings       |                       | General Bereavement<br>Siblings  | General Bereavement Issues<br>Siblings              |

**The Compassionate Friends National Office**

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**WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE**

*TCF National Magazine*  
1 yr. subscription \$20

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

Our next Chapter meetings are Tuesdays:

**NOV 12    DEC 10            JAN 14    FEB 11**  
**NOV 26    No mtg 24th    JAN 28    FEB 25**

**Deadline for Newsletter article submissions:**

**Fall:** August 1st    **Spring/Summer:** April 1st  
**Winter:** February 2nd    **Holiday:** October 1<sup>st</sup>

**OUR COMPASSIONATE FRIENDLY NEIGHBORS**

|                    |               |                |                     |                   |                |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Babylon            | 1st Friday    | (516) 795-8644 | Rockville Centre    | 2nd Friday        | (516) 766-4682 |
| Bronx              | 2nd Tuesday   | (914) 714-4885 | Rockland County     | 3rd Tuesday       | (845) 398-9762 |
| Brookhaven         | 2nd Friday    | (631) 738-0809 | SmithPoint/Mastic   | 2nd Thursday      | (631) 281-9004 |
| Brooklyn           | 3rd Wednesday | (917) 952-9751 | Staten Island       | 2nd & 4th Thursd. | (718) 983-0377 |
| Flushing           | 3rd Friday    | (718) 746-5010 | Syosset (Plainview) | 3rd Friday        | (718) 767-0904 |
| Manhasset          | 3rd Tuesday   | (516) 466-2480 | Twin Forks/Hamptons | 3rd Friday        | (646) 894-0317 |
| Marine Park, Bklyn | 3rd Friday    | (718) 605-1545 | White Plains        | 1st Thursday      | (914) 381-3389 |
| Medford            | 2nd Friday    | (631) 738-0809 |                     |                   |                |



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