



The Compassionate Friends

Manhattan Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

MANHATTAN NEWSLETTER

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Things that happen for a reason...

By Marie Levine

We've all heard it before. All our lives, the phrase has been in the ether. "Everything happens for a reason". It is one phrase that really rankles me. Those of us traveling this road often complain to each other about the dumb things people say. It used to make me angry. But time has softened my attitude and I've become strangely forgiving. I've concluded that most of these clichés are offered in the spirit of helping...of wanting to offer solace...even though it is pretty dumb to think a cliché can offer anything to anyone who has suffered a loss as catastrophic as ours. One thing I'm sure of...not everything happens for a reason.

Belief systems are another syndrome that used to bother me. Those who lean heavily on their belief in God and the afterlife used to annoy me. Time has also altered that view. It seems wonderful to me that some people are so invested in their belief systems that it carries them along on the journey. I sometimes wish I could toss off all my pain and rejoice in the sense that my son has "gone home". Home? Isn't that here with me and his father. Isn't that here with his friends and family, living out the life he spent all of his earthly years growing through and learning about...always working toward living into adulthood and old age...finally experiencing everything he ultimately missed? Having gotten through his childhood and adolescence didn't he deserve an adult life and some reward for his efforts? (con't page3)

Grief is a Constant Companion for the Mother Who's Lost a Child

By Tiffany Wicks

I'm sorry for your loss. Loss is something that is never easy, but especially excruciating when it was the life you created, carried, birthed, and held. It is so important to remember your child, but also important to remember you.

Grief is one of the most uncomfortable topics in the world. When you grieve, you often struggle to capture the wide range of emotions felt day-to-day, or you struggle to grasp what kind of support you need when asked. But for others watching you grieve, it's awkward and sometimes silent. People say the words "take as long as you need" and yet they expect you to come back to work in a week or at least get out of bed. There's this unspoken expectation that eventually you will stop talking about it or it won't be at the forefront of your daily life anymore. But the truth is, you have gone through a great loss, one like no other. Although that grief will look different over time, it IS a part of you.

I say this because it is OK to feel it. It's OK to take as long as you need, because you will need forever. It's OK to feel the range of emotions, to talk about it, to cry, to not be OK sometimes. The norm (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.
Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church
Enter at 7 West 55th Street **WE START PROMPTLY AT 7pm**

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 or a sister or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

The Cycle of Grief by Nora Yood

This summer will mark the 12th anniversary of my son David's death. Every year, on his birthday, I write him a note usually saying how much I miss him. Not exactly a Hallmark greeting, and yet it pleases me to do that. On the anniversary of his death, I compose a sort of journal entry about how our relationship has progressed over the year. I admit, it may appear to be a one-sided exercise, in that the flesh and blood child that I gave birth to, the son who grew into adulthood, the young man who died a few short weeks after his thirtieth birthday, no longer is contained in a human form. There is no address to reach him in the land of the living, and no opportunity for him to respond through the usual avenues of communication. This fact has little relevance for my annual ritual which is qualitatively different than an interaction between a parent and a living offspring. The reality is that my son's absence has propelled him onto center stage of my consciousness, an ongoing presence in every aspect of my thought and behavior. And like all paradoxes that first appear to be confusing, even contradictory, this one, too, upon further, thoughtful examination, reveals a deeper, more complex understanding beyond the superficial, common sense, surface meaning. While always absent from wherever space I inhabit, my missing child never leaves my interior landscape.

When your child dies, the person you were before that trauma dies too. While intellectually you are aware that often, and for many reasons--none of them valid--parents bury their children, it is an abstract tragedy. Of course, you're disturbed and sympathetic and sad for those mothers and fathers. You can't fathom what they are feeling. You wonder if they will ever be able ever process their loss and *move on*. How will they be able to continue with their everyday life? And then you find yourself one of those alien, pitiable victims of fate, and you wonder the same thing about yourself.

The truth is, you don't. You become someone else. A person who has to reinvent themselves. You must develop a new identity and a more sober and realistic acknowledgment of what life owes you. There is guilt about the past, hindsight seeming to point an accusatory finger at you. Why did you say or not say *this*, do or not do *that*? All the things you wish you had handled differently that can't be undone. The present seems like a prison with no escape. The future holds no rosy prom-

ises. The dreams you looked forward to turned into a sham, and became an invitation to nihilism. After much introspection and agony and, finally, acceptance, you ultimately surrender your parental hubris and acknowledge that did not have the power-- despite your very best efforts-- to keep your child safe.

But, you survive, and so does your relationship with your child. Not the way you would have wished it, but in a way that transforms you and allows to keep your child with the (new) you. You discover how you can honor that precious life that was theirs by the way you have learned to conduct your own life in the aftermath of your enormity of your loss. You continue to grieve but are sustained by the memory of your child, and find ways to honor that memory in way you live.

As I think about this anniversary of my son's death, I realize that there is a cycle of grieving that has its own rhythm. In the early days and months, even years following the death, we are consumed by our mourning, nursing our hurt and resentment like a nursing infant. But then our grief matures, as we begin to understand that only the body of our child is over, but our role in their life is not. Our children left us too early, but they bequeathed us many lessons. Losing a child has taught me about how fragile, and holy life is. I was forced to confront my unexamined and prejudicial assumptions, the limits of rational explanation, the randomness of much that befalls us. I learned how to live life on life's terms, not the Hollywood sitcom or happily-ever-after fairy tale version. I persevered, helped by sharing my story with others and sharing theirs. I can never understand, or make peace with the tragedy of my son's death, but I now feel I can be grateful for the gift of his life. In so many ways, he has become a spiritual guide and guru to me, growing my compassion, encouraging me to resist despair and pessimism despite the inevitability of loss, sorrow, suffering and ultimately death.

Without death there is no life. As genetic material lives on after the body dies, so does the spiritual legacy outlasts physical death. While we live, those we love remain within us, until that time we, too shed our bodies.

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- Nora

Please note my new email is nbmjdy@gmail.com

A LOVE GIFT is a donation given in memory of a child who has died, or sometimes 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. In this issue we want to thank the following for their generous support of our chapter and especially, our newsletter

Linda & Ed Wagner	In loving memory of their son Christopher Wagner , 9/30 – 6/12, forever 35
Ervine Kimerling	In loving memory of her son Sean Kimerling , 4/17 – 9/3, forever 37
Juanita Gibbs	In loving memory of her daughter Josette Gibbs , 6/7 – 10/10, forever 38
Leslie Kandell	In loving memory of her daughter Elinor Friedberg Blume , 3/10 – 7/7, forever 41
Irma E. Schubert	In loving memory of her son, William Edward Schubert , 6/21 – 5/2, forever 34
Jacque & John Mitchell	In loving memory of their sons Kareem , 6/29—6/30 forever 15, and Kevin 11/4— 7/2, forever 12
Marie Levine	In loving memory of her only child, Peter Adam Levine , 7/14—8/7, forever 22
Dan Zweig & Sally Petrick	In loving memory of their son Benjamin Zweig 11/6—8/31, forever 16 , and in memory of Phil Levine , Peter’s Dad.

Things that happen for a reason ... (con’t from page 1)

I do harbor a belief that in some matter or form, life is a continuum. I never really believed that before, but when Peter died it was impossible to believe that so large a personality could have simply evaporated. There has to be more. I’ve been searching for the ‘more’ for 15 years now.

No, in spite of the company I keep, for me this has been and continues to be a mostly solitary journey. Surrounded by compassionate friends who share many of my views, I continue to wonder about many of these things. For instance, I know that most people who have known me throughout these past 15 years think I’m “over it”. Surely those I’ve met during these years have no idea that Peter is even now, such a major part of my life. Had he lived I suspect I wouldn’t think of him as much. But his absence has become even bigger than his presence. That could be because he was our only child. But maybe not. It just seems that I must deal every day with the ongoing lives of all my contemporaries... and the fact is I have nothing similar to share with them.

So I am often left wondering when I hear that ‘everything happens for a reason’. I think of all I’ve learned since Peter died. All the children I’ve ‘met’ posthumously. All the different ways they were taken from us. Was there a reason for all the mayhem, the pain, the suffering, the loss...? If there is a god, and he really needed our children, couldn’t he have made the

leaving less violent in some cases, less painful in others. Was there a reason for all the pain and torment?

Julian Barnes, the author, said recently that he doesn’t believe in God, but he misses him. I love that. I miss him too. I miss having something to hang on to that would make this life more comprehensible. I miss finding the why in all this. I’m comforted to know that some of my friends with their very committed, strong belief systems are themselves comforted by those beliefs. I hang on to them and hope that they know something I don’t know.

Meanwhile, I move ahead. I continue to share my experience as each year I learn more about it. I stay in the entry to this path to greet those who stagger in so that I can catch them and try to assure them they will survive. I live as full a life as I can manage and offer myself as an example on how it is possible to recover, reinvent and renew yourself after such a calamity. Time, in its inexorable moving forward, has worked for me. I know that it can work for others and offer that hope. That’s my belief system.

Marie Levine

February 2009

Grief is a Constant Companion for the Mother Who's Lost a Child

by Tiffany Wicks (con't from pg 1)

SHOULD be that we expect each other to grieve for a lifetime, and that we unconditionally accept that your loss will shape you in a different way forever. While grief may take a lifetime, healing allows your pain to feel like that boulder on your chest each and every day is a little lighter. It is anger and acceptance, pain and comfort.

But healing is possible.

Your journey in this matters. You matter. The child you lost matters. As you and your family adjusts to a new normal, the idea that things are different and you might not always be able to put your finger on what's best for you at each moment, it is important to surround yourself with others who allow you to grieve in your own time and your own way. Phrases like, "Yeah I know that was tough but . . ." or "Well it's been so long isn't it time to move on? Or try again?" are damaging and can be toxic.

Generally, people mean well. But because our society still treats grief as an awkward pause in life, it is vital to set boundaries. In your grief, use your voice. It's OK to tell others in your life that what they said was hurtful or that it wasn't what you needed. It's OK to set boundaries with others that you may not want in your life anymore but they might still exist in your space such as work, church, or family. It's OK to give yourself the power to remember that your grieving process is yours and no one else's. Don't compare. The woman who spoke at your support group who lost her child last year might have seemed to "get through it" faster, but that comparison minimizes what you need. Comparison is the thief of joy, and to compare your grief is to prevent future possibilities of joy as you heal.

It's important to remember that you can reach out to those who have embraced your grief with you. Creating networks of friends and family for you as an individual and you as a family is crucial to healing. Allowing yourself to ask for what you need—maybe a meal, maybe time alone, maybe a friend for comfort and company—gives you the new ability to get in tune with your feelings and needs daily in order to take care of yourself.

Self-care is similar to healing, but not the same. Self care leads to healing. It is an active practice of understanding who you are as you undergo major transitions in life. Losing a child is the worst, major transition that no one would ask for. But in your grief and your process to heal, you only benefit you and your family when you begin to assess what you can and will need from yourself and from others. If you don't know right now or tomorrow? It's OK. It takes time. If it feels selfish at first, that's OK, too. It's not selfish, but it can be uncomfortable to put your needs first when so many of you are feeling the weight of such a heavy loss. However, when each of you allow yourselves to prioritize what you need that will benefit your life and health and reach out to the people who help you accomplish that, it WILL lead to healing. You transform the process in which you understand the importance of your grieving and the importance of healthy coping. You begin to understand how to set boundaries with those who do not honor your loss as an ongoing process and you unapologetically move on from toxic environments toward true community. Through self-care you recognize that when your mental health improves, others around you benefit and want to improve too. You remember that your journey matters and that you matter. And the child you lost matters.

You are not alone. Many others who have endured the tragedy of losing a child. However, your journey through this difficult loss is different, and as important than any other mother's. You deserve unlimited time to grieve and unlimited time to heal. How you do that is up to you. But remind yourself of the power you have to take care of yourself, to reach out, to set boundaries and to take time. Your grief and healing matter. So take your time because you matter, too.

Tiffany Wicks is a therapist, specializing in maternal mental health at [Push Counseling & Coaching](#). She survives off coffee, friendship, and daily cuddles. Tiffany lives in Dallas, Texas with her husband, daughter, and two dogs.

A Thousand Ways to Grieve

I'm an active griever. By active, I mean that during those first few months following my loss, I devoured every book on grief I could get my hands on. I poured out my agony in my writing, attended grief seminars, went through photo albums and I searched the internet for helpful sites. I cried and fumed and spent long hours talking to anyone who would listen.

My husband simply withdrew and grieved in silence. Though we lived in the same house, grieved the same loss, and shared a life together, we were apart in our grief. We all have our own ideas on how to grieve and we're quick to judge those who don't conform to our way of thinking. When Prince Charles wore a blue suit to Princess Diana's funeral, he was condemned by the press until it was learned it was his former wife's favorite.

A friend of mine was criticized for wearing a pair of red strap, high heeled shoes to her husband's funeral, the same shoes she wore on the day they met.

If we are to grieve in harmony with those around us, we must give up the notion that grief can be expressed in limited ways. I once thought that grief manifested itself only in tears and depression. But I've seen what others whose vision is greater than mine have accomplished in the name of grief. Candy Lightner, the founder of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, is a good example.

Resolve to make peace with someone who grieves in ways that seem odd to you. Try expressing your grief in a new way: write a poem or song, start a journal, buy your loved one a gift and send it to someone you know who would love and appreciate the gesture. Wear something outlandish. Buy a bouquet of balloons in your loved ones favorite color. Laugh at something that would make your loved one laugh.

Tears, depression and sadness are all acceptable ways to show grief. So are blue suits and red shoes.

Margaret Brownley, *Bereavement Magazine*, March/April 2000

No greater pain

I know you mean well, but you don't understand.
There are no words to explain.

Although on the surface, I may appear fine,
remember, I buried a child of mine,
and there is no greater pain.

Grief is taboo in our civilized world,
I despise this hideous game.

I must smile, while going insane.
For God's sake, a part of me died—you can't imagine how often I've cried,
And there is no greater pain.

If I look well, or laugh when you joke,
you think I'm my old self again.

I'm raw inside, a shell of me—the woman you know can no longer be.
And there is no greater pain.

Look deep in my eyes, acknowledge my loss,
as my heart beats its hollow refrain.
I'm caught in a web of infinite whys,
I'll mourn for my son 'til the rest of me dies,
and there is no greater pain.

~**Madelaine Perri Kasden**

In loving memory of her son **Neill Perri**

"I know your sorrow and I know that for the likes of us there is no ease for the heart to be had from words of reason and that in the very assurance of sorrow's fading, there is more sorrow.

So I offer you my deeply affectionate and compassionate thoughts and wish for you that the strange thing may never fail you—whatever it is—that gives us the strength to live on with our wounds." ~ *Samuel Beckett*

Submitted by Lynn Rosenthal in loving memory of her son,, Alan Rosenthal

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CHAT SCHEDULE.
Go to www.compassionatefriends.org. Click on CHAT. Times are ET

The Compassionate Friends National Office
P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
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www.compassionatefriends.org
email: nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

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

WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE
TCF National Magazine
1 yr. subscription \$20

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!
Our next Chapter meetings are Tuesdays:
SEPT 10 OCT 8 NOV 12 DEC 10 JAN 14
SEPT 24 OCT 22 NOV 26 x JAN 28

Deadline for Newsletter article submissions:
Fall: August 1st **Spring/Summer:** April 1st
Winter: February 2nd **Holiday:** October 1st

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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