



The Compassionate Friends

Manhattan Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

MANHATTAN NEWSLETTER

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Half a Life....

By Marie Levine

My fears are catching up with my reality. I'm reading a blog by a young widow who complains about the life she is missing having lost her partner before they could live the life they planned. I read a lot about widowhood now – just as I read a lot about child loss then.

When Peter died 25 years ago at the age of 22, Phil and I had lived half our lives. Peter had barely lived a quarter of his and we felt we had all been robbed – Peter of his entire adulthood and we of everything we were sure life had to offer.

My grief back then was distinctly colored by anger and fear. I was angry for Peter. He had worked so hard to achieve young adulthood and the promise of a successful life. There were no guarantees, but back then we all believed that hard work and perseverance would prove to be a ticket to success. We didn't really understand how little control we had and that no matter what we do, life happens. I was angry for me and Phil – for all we had invested in life and had been lead to expect - the reasonable rewards that would no doubt follow all our efforts – a growing family, grandchildren and a comfortable old age.

When Peter died, ripped suddenly from our lives, fear rode in and added fire to the anger. Suddenly, the impossible became possible. If this could happen, anything could. My world became totally unstable, incomprehensible and treacherous. If Peter could die, anything could happen; waiting for a light to cross the street, every car seemed about to lose control and come careening into me; the scaffold I walked under might suddenly collapse; if my husband didn't arrive home within the expected

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Why I Don't Say My Son Committed Suicide

By Desiree Woodland

The news spread quickly. Two youth from the local high school had died over the weekend. "They committed suicide" were the words I heard to explain the tragic loss of two young people, who had their entire lives ahead of them.

It is common to hear those two words together — commit and suicide. I cringe when I hear it. **They didn't commit a crime. They died by suicide.**

I am a survivor of suicide loss. After my son's death, I was helpless to respond to the painful words that were spoken in hushed tones around me. "It was a selfish act." "Didn't you see the signs?" "Are they in heaven?" "I wonder what went wrong in the family?" I was unable to formulate responses to these false beliefs. I didn't even know they were false. I just knew they held me hostage under a grief so powerful I could hardly breathe.

In short bursts of time when I could focus, I read. Books like "I'm Not Sick, I Don't Need Help," "The Burden of Sympathy – how families cope with mental illness," or "Man's Search for Meaning," helped me understand the suffering my son endured was so deep that he would take his own life.

"Schizophrenia with delusional behaviors," the doctor had said. Ryan was diagnosed with mental illness nine months before he died. In hindsight, I had seen signs, but I didn't know they were signs of mental illness. I never even considered mental illness was real. I just hoped he'd outgrow the anxiety, fear and worry that had insinuated themselves into his psyche. Sleeping too much, not wanting to go to school, avoiding social situations, becoming more isolated and failing grades were what I had dismissed as "normal" adolescence.

I am not alone. Sadly, I hear stories of other parents who thought their child would outgrow these behaviors, too. When behaviors such as these change someone's personality, it could signal a growing mental illness.

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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 Next Decade by Nora Yood

This July will begin the second year of the second decade since my son died. His death also marked the death of the person I was before this reversal of the natural order of events initiated the unnatural order of events that has become the compelling narrative of my identity. Physically, I may present the same flesh and bones structure, but my current belief system and outlook is completely turned upside down. My son's death thrust me into uncharted territory and demanded that I discover a road map which could illustrate how I might navigate a survival strategy in a strange, scary, threatening mental landscape. It has been a challenging and rocky road to travel, replete with many detours and dead end destinations. With over a decade's worth of pages marked off on my calendar, I wanted to share reflections about the evolution of my grieving odyssey.

Acknowledging and respecting these constraints, I have devised an experimental instructional manual to help guide me in the coming decade in arranging the pieces of this ongoing, ever changing puzzle of how to affirm life without denying the ever present filter of sadness that permanently complicates and distorts all my activities and ambitions. Whatever the occasion: routine or exceptional, boring or thrilling, solitary or in company, part of me is always aware that David is no more. That is how it was at the beginning of this journey, and I assume that that is how it will always

remain. My son is no longer available to participate, comment, or react to a suggestion with a laugh, cry, yawn, or scowl. And yet, time passed, and I have managed to live with this sobering truth.

The early years following David's death seemed an exercise in hide-and-seek with reality. For a long while, I could not properly process that the living, breathing son that occupied so much of my energy and oversight for three decades was gone. I thought I saw him in the tall, slim handsome young men that floated by me on the city streets, scarf loosely hanging over his collar, coffee cup in hand, exuding an air of insouciance and preoccupation. I had nightmares that he was in danger, and I could not save him, despite my desperate and frenetic efforts. I avoided people that might have not heard of his death, escaping the excruciating task of having to cough out the devastating update of family history. I never mentioned that I had a son that died to people I casually knew or recently met. I could not trust my composure, fearing a waterfall of tears would cascade unbidden and unstoppable. Guilt, resentment, depression, self-pity were constant emotional staples. I could not change the past.

And yet, time passed, and I have managed to recognize slow brewing insights and long time com-

ing epiphanies, that have enabled me to cope with this sobering truth; after all these years, there is still not a day that I do not think of my son, regret that he is no longer part of the drama of daily life, wish he could be standing right next to me as I write this. That truth is constant and will be mourned for as long as I remain on this earth. But I have come to realize that he is still very much part of my existence. His presence is never outside my consciousness. That is a constant truth as strong and powerful as the undeniable fact of his physical absence. Today, I am able to talk about him without dissolving into a puddle of tears. I feel joy when I see or hear or taste the things that brought joy to him. I connect to others who have suffered loss, and I am filled with compassion for myself and my fellow travelers along the narrow path of pain and despair that is our common fate.

These many challenging years have refined and matured my understanding of the complexity and conflicting truths of what it means to be human. I seek the courage to embrace an expansive, transcendent spiritual realm unfettered by the limits of time and space and a transformative perception of the full range of my experiences that can accommodate both grief and gratitude. I have learned love outlasts death. My son will always be in my life, and that constant truth I hope will sustain me in the decade to come.

- Nora

With the death of a child we as parents experience the ultimate failure—we are supposed to be invincible where our children are concerned and now we have failed to keep our child alive! Suddenly our belief system is shattered. The suddenness of the death has robbed us of our confidence in ourselves. We have low self esteem; we suffer from lack of motivation due to our severe fatigue.

We have nothing left to believe in, not even God, for some. We are totally insecure. We are placed in the position of continuing to deteriorate, or to begin to rebuild our lives by rebuilding our beliefs, our confidence and our self esteem. The choice is ours. Choose to live. Our children would want us not only to just live, but continue to grow and love.

~ Faith Harden, TCF, Tuscaloosa, AL

Reprinted from We Need Not Walk Alone 1990

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
- Laurie Sanders Smith** In loving memory of her daughter **Shana Dowdeswell**, 4/1 – 12/12, forever 23
- 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
- Claudette Hannibal** In loving memory of her son **Troy O. Myers**, 5/30 – 12/20, forever 33
- Marilyn & Al Feldstein** In loving memory of their daughter **Laura Feldstein**, 4/20 – 8/26, forever 31
- Ron & Ronnie Moore** In loving memory of their son Jonathan Moore, 1/12—1/22, forever 30
- Carol Gertz** In loving memory of her daughter Alison Gertz, 2/27—8/8, forever 27
- Dan Zweig & Sally Petrick** In memory and commemoration of the one year anniversary of **Phil Levine**

DO NOT DISCOUNT SIBLING GRIEF

I have come to think of sibling grief as “Discount Grief”. Why? Because siblings appear to be an emotional bargain in most people’s eyes. People worry so much about the bereaved parents that they invest very little attention on the grieving sibling.

My personal “favorite” comforting line said to siblings is “*you be sure and take care of your parents*”. I wanted to know who was supposed to take care of me – I know I couldn’t.

The grief of a sibling may differ from that of a parent, but it ought not to be discounted. People need to realize that while it is obviously painful for parents to have lost a child, it is also painful for the sibling who has not only lost a brother or sister, but an irreplaceable friend.

While dealing with this double loss, he or she must confront another factor; the loss of a brother or sister is frequently the surviving sibling’s first experience with death of any young person. Young people feel they will live forever. A strong

dose of mortality in the form of sibling death is very hard to take. The feelings of the siblings are often discounted when decisions are made – on things ranging from funeral plans to flower selections. Parent need to listen to surviving siblings who usually know a lot about the tastes and preferences of the deceased.

Drawing on the knowledge that surviving siblings have about supposedly trivial things – such as favorite clothes or music – can serve two purposes when planning a funeral or memorial service. First, their input helps insure that the deceased receives the type of service he or she would have liked. Second, their inclusion in the planning lets them know they are still an important part of the family.

I realize that people are unaware that they are discounting sibling grief. But then – that’s why I’m writing this – so people will know.

Jane Machado, TCF Atlanta, GA

IT’S THE MUSIC THAT BONDS THE SOUL

The room you once lived in
doesn’t look the same
The people who used to call you
never mention your name
The car you used to drive
they may not make anymore;
and all the things you treasured
are boxed behind closed doors.
The clothes you set the trends by
are surely out of date.
The people you owed money to
have wiped away the slate.
Things have changed and changed
since you went away,
but some things remain the same
each and every day.
Like the aching in my heart -
ascar that just won’t heal.
Or the way a special song
can change the way I feel.
Brother, you must know that the music
bonds us and will keep us close;
because secretly I know in my heart
It’s the music you miss the most.
So let the world keep turning
Time can take its toll.
As long as the music is playing
you’ll be dancing in my soul.

STACIE GILLIAM
N. OklahomaCity, OK

Half a Life... (con't. from 1)

hour, surely some tragedy had befallen him; every ache or pain was surely a terminal condition. I was doomed and I didn't much care – without our child to watch over and advocate for us, old age was too terrifying to even contemplate.

Despite the fear, we managed during these past 25 years, to reconstruct our lives, including Peter in everything. As the years passed, as the unremitting pain subsided and a general sadness and longing took hold, we survived the changing of the seasons, the many grandchildren born to friends and family, the holiday seasons, the special days. We took advantage of opportunities to travel, entertained and were enter-

tained by friends, and continued to grieve privately while associates took comfort in our apparent “return to normalcy”. Alone together, we became one unit devoted to keeping Peter's memory alive, comforted by knowing we each had a partner carrying half of the same load. We had both crawled out of the same trench in the same war. We both recognized in each other the identical effort it had taken to survive.

And now, Phil is gone – reunited with our beloved son while I am left here to continue the task of keeping memory alive. As Peter lost the future that might have been, I've lost the history that was. Like the tree that falls alone in the forest, with no

one to hear, my grief, though understood by my compassionate friends, no longer has a receiver – it brings on a solitary-ness I have never known and am hard pressed to describe.

As Phil used to say, “nobody gets out of here alive.” Except for those who leave early, everyone will confront old age and ultimately inhabit it. Life has more than enough effortless, built in unavoidable unpleasant memories. Making good memories, “the roses in December”, should be our most conscious effort and our highest priority. The season of hope and renewal is upon us. Don't waste a minute.

Marie, January 2019

Why I Don't Say My Son Committed Suicide... (con't. from 1)

I stopped really seeing my son because I thought I knew him by heart. I dismissed his complaints and his tears. I didn't reach out to help him find his way because I was lost too.

Parents cannot look inside a child's head to see what dark thoughts may be present, thoughts of worthlessness, of being a burden or thoughts of death. These are thoughts they can't shake. Too ashamed to speak them aloud, our children suffer. To share these with another person they fear judgment, advice giving and not being taken seriously, or worse, feeling weak and powerless.

Without knowledge of mental illness as an actual brain illness, they languish. Without treatment, the illness can worsen over time and become a full blown chronic illness that is more difficult to treat or results in suicide. 90 percent of people who die by suicide had a diagnosable mental illness.

All too often the “s-word” strikes fear in our hearts — fear of the act itself, fear of the unknown or fear of getting too close because suicide might be contagious.

We must remove the shame and stigma from mental illness and suicide, as well as the judgment youth often fear from talking about their feelings and seeking help. We must do a better job to help them share the darkness in their emotions

so that parents, teachers and others can support the 1 in 5 who will be diagnosed with mental illness at some point in their lives. We must listen with our hearts even if we quake with inadequacy when we hear the pain of our child or student. We need to know of their suffering in order to move toward evaluation and treatment, if need be. Talking is only the first step.

We have to remove the shame if we want to reduce and eventually prevent suicide in our time. We need to practice using the words *suicide* and *mental illness* so they roll off our tongues as easily as *bubble gum* and *dish soap*. We need to face our fear that asking questions about suicide will give our loved ones the idea this could be an option.

With understanding comes a responsibility to educate others to effect change in the words we use when referring to someone with depression, anxiety or any other mental illness. We can increase our understanding of mental illness, suicide and open the dialogue. We can stop blaming the families or blaming the ones who took their lives. There is no blame in suicide.

Those students did not commit a crime. My son did not commit a crime. They believed the only way to end the pain was to end their lives. They died because they didn't have the words to

express the deep psychological/biological pain, which was not a sign of weakness but of brain illness.

I didn't understand then, but I do now.

These truths eluded me for a long time. Sometimes truth has to hold the darkness before it can shine the light.

Desiree Woodland

Desiree Woodland lives with her husband in Albuquerque, New Mexico. After Ryan's suicide, Desiree wrote a book called I Still Believe. She retired after 19 years of teaching to promote the use of a curriculum in NM schools called Breaking the Silence NM, which teaches youth mental illness and suicide awareness. She serves on the board of Survivors of Suicide ABQ and co-facilitates the suicide survivor group, as well as a mother's group for suicide loss. She works at the Grief Resource Center in Albuquerque, NM.





Our 42nd Nation Conference will be held in Philadelphia, PA

JULY 19—21, 2019

If you have never attended one of these amazing events you should do whatever you can to get there. For three days you will be in the company of fellow travelers from all over the country.

With more than 100 workshops to choose from, with inspiring keynote speakers, banquets, a candle lighting ceremony, daily sharing sessions and the Walk To Remember on the final day, this year a spectacular parade lead by the Philadelphia Mummers, you will learn so many of the coping skills we all seek on our healing journey.

Hotel reservations go quickly. If this is your first conference, talk to your chapter leaders about your plan to attend and see how some of your conference expenses may be offset by the chapter.

go to www.compassionatefriends.org for details.

CLOSED FACEBOOK PAGES

TCF – Loss of a Stepchild

Moderators: Barbara Davies and Babe Muro

TCF – Loss of a Grandchild

Moderators: Grace Cassidy, Mary Ebert Fisk, and Debbie Fluhr

TCF – Sibs

Moderators: Luci Abrahamson, Dylan Stoskus, Katelyn Stoskus, Stephen Stott, and Cindy Tart

TCF – Bereaved LGBTQ Parents with Loss of a Child

Moderators: Arlene Istar Lev and Paula Pressley

TCF – Multiple Losses

Moderators: Lisa Jones and Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby

TCF – Men in Grief

Moderators: Gary Odle and Bradley Vinson

TCF – Daughterless Mothers

Moderators: Mary Ebert Fisk and Rhonda Bush

TCF – Sudden Death

Moderators: Chris Lourenco, Bettie-Jeanne Rivard-Darby, and Dana Young

TCF – Loss to Substance Related Causes

Moderators: Barbara Allen, Karen Coangelo, Mary Lemley and Carol Wiles

TCF – Sibling Loss to Substance Related Causes

Moderators: Barbara Allen, Kristy Flower, and Andrea Keller

TCF – Loss to Suicide

Moderators: Carla Askew, Leanna Leyes, Marcie Knase,

Barbara Reboratti, Laura Beth Stone Brimer, Deidre Taylor, and Mary Ann Ward

TCF – Loss to Homicide

Moderators: Rebecca Perkins and Dawn Wassel

TCF – Loss to a Drunk/Impaired Driver

Moderators: Michelle Arrowood and Robin Landry

TCF – Loss to Cancer

Moderator: Rita Studzinski

TCF – Loss of a Child with Special Needs

Moderator: Beverly Carter Busch, Donna Reagan, and Krissy Tempesta Brigante

TCF – Loss to Long-term Illness

Moderator: Debbie Gossen

TCF – Loss to Mental Illness

Moderators: Sherry Cox and Annette Swestyn

TCF – Loss to Miscarriage or Stillbirth

Moderators: Kelly Kittel and Ann Walsh

TCF – Miscarriage, Stillbirth, Loss of an Infant Grandchild

Moderators: Debbie Fluhr, Carole Mayer, and Michele Myers White

TCF – Infant and Toddler Loss

Moderators: Julia West and Deanna Wheeler

TCF – Loss of a Child 4 -12 Years Old

Moderators: Heike and Brian Mayle

TCF – Loss of an Adult Child

Moderators: Dennis Gravelle, Debbie Miller, and Rebecca Perkins

TCF – Loss of an Only Child/All Your Children

Moderators: Marsha Paul Anders and Crystal Webster

TCF – Grandparents Raising their Grandchildren

Moderators: Rita Studzinski

TCF – Bereaved Parents with Grandchild Visitation Issues

Moderator: Rita Studzinski

TCF – Reading Your Way Through Grief

Moderators: Ron Gallacher, Michael McLeod, and Clayton Samels

TCF – Crafty Corner

Moderators: Gail Lafferty and Kathy Rambo

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CHAT SCHEDULE.

Go to 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 Grandparents/Stepparents	General Bereavement Men's Chat
TUE			General Bereavement Issues Bereaved over 2 yrs Pregnancy & Infant Loss	General Bereavement Issues Pregnancy/Infant Loss
WED	Newly Bereaved		September 11 Families Siblings	General Bereavement Issues
THU		No Surviving Children	General Bereavement Issues Siblings	General Bereavement Issues
FRI		Suicide	Special Needs Children	General Bereavement
SAT				General Bereavement Siblings
SUN	Siblings		General Bereavement Siblings	General Bereavement Issues Siblings

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WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Our next Chapter meetings are Tuesdays:
MAY 14 JUNE 11 JULY 9 AUG 13
MAY 28 JUNE 25 JULY 23 AUG 27

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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