



The Compassionate Friends

Manhattan Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

MANHATTAN NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2019 Vol. XLI No. 1

A VERY, VERY, BAD DREAM

I was very busy, engaged in some now unknown activity surrounded by others similarly engaged. Through the crowd a stranger approached and announced my son had died. In my dream I ran from person to person begging them to tell me it wasn't true. Each continued on with their tasks, brushing me off and telling me I was over-reacting and that it was no big deal, I should get over it. As my hysteria grew in my restless sleep, I tossed, turned, wept and finally cried out which wakened me. And for a brief nonosecond I felt an indescribable relief that it was only a dream – until the next nanosecond when my consciousness kicked in and I was reminded that the nightmare continues. It always continues. Peter is still dead. I still struggle to survive.

I think most will agree that there is no greater love on this earth than the love of a parent for a child. It is a new and different love from anything we've ever felt in our lives and it is born and grows from the moment we know we are to become a parent. This love continues to grow and expand and enlarge even as our children morph from little pods to living, breathing, emotion filled, and intelligent, multi-faceted human beings filled with all the potential we know life will offer them.

So it is a simple statement of fact. There is simply no love like the indescribable sensation – and it is a sensation – we feel for our child. No matter the love we feel for a parent, a relative, a spouse, a friend, a pet – ask anyone who has experienced all of the above – and I bet the universal response will be that the love we have for our children defies comparison with any of the greatest, most passionate loves of our lives. It's just different.

(Continued on page 7)

I AM A MOTHER

I am a mother. I am a bereaved mother. My child died, and this is my reluctant path. It is not a path of my choice, but it is a path I must walk mindfully and with intention. It is a journey through the darkest night of my soul and it will take time to wind through the places that scare me.

Every cell in my body aches and longs to be with my beloved child. On days when grief is loud, I may be impatient, distracted, frustrated, and unfocused. I may get angry more easily, or I may seem hopeless. I will shed many, many, many tears. I won't smile as often as my old self. Smiling hurts now. Most everything hurts some days, even breathing.

But please, just sit beside me.

Say nothing.

Do not offer a cure.

Or a pill, or a word, or a potion.

Witness my suffering and don't turn away from me.

Please be gentle with me.

And I will try to be gentle with me too.

I will not ever "get over" my child's death so please don't urge me down that path. Even on days when grief is quiescent, when it isn't standing loudly in the foreground, even on days when I am even able to smile again, the pain is just beneath the surface.

There are days when I still feel paralyzed. My chest feels the sinking weight of my child's absence and, sometimes,

(Continued on page 7)

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. However, if you need to speak with someone please call one of the following volunteers: Jacquie Mitchell (eves) (347) 414-1780 jacquienytcf@gmail.com.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MEETINGS are always the second and fourth Tuesday of each month.
Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church,
 55th and 5th Avenue. Enter at 7 West 55th street.
We start PROMPTLY at 7:00PM.

The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. We are a group of bereaved parents who are seeking support in our grief or are able to give it. Among us, your religion, your race, your politics, your job or social standing are not important. We care about your grief – the tragedy that each of us has shared – and how we can grow through it, not back to the person we were but to the person we can become.

THE GRIEF GAUZE By Nora Yood

When your child dies, you lose not only his/her present physical presence. You also forfeit your hopes and fantasies for the future. When we look back at our pre-bereaved self, we are astonished by what seems to us, now, like naive optimism or sheer hubris. We foolishly assumed we would be protected from the kind of tragedies that we know other people experience, but never imagine for ourselves. Our faith in the natural order of life is replaced by a sense of things just not being right with us and the world. This dystopian attitude, I believe, generates a physical mutation that develops at a molecular level and radically changes our consciousness. What we generate, in order to cope with our crisis, is what I call a grief gauze which becomes incorporated into our neurological makeup and alters how we process our thoughts and experiences.

A recently published story "When We Were Happy, We Had Other Names,"* written by the Chinese American writer Yiyun Li explores the ways grief morphs into many manifestations after the death of a child and parents must face a world which has become unmoored and unimaginable.

The story opens with Jiayu sitting in the reception room of the funeral parlor waiting to finalize burial arrangements for her fifteen year old son who recently committed suicide. The days following Evan's death initiate a routine where she careened between near paralysis, barely able to carry out the simplest task, and frenetic marathons of obsessive scrubbing counters and chopping vegetables. "Any action, and feeling, erratic or not, fell under the umbrella of grief." She starts a spreadsheet on her computer listing all the people she ever met that had since died, noting whatever facts or anecdotes she could recall about them. Stories kept coming, adding details and nuance. Connections emerged between the circumstances of the various dead people on the list. The spreadsheet was a distraction, but offered neither a reprieve for her despair nor providing a resolution to address her complete inability to comprehend what happened. "Perhaps grief was nothing but disbelief," she muses. Seasons pass. The New Year came and went. The spreadsheet grows, and she returns to it often. The ache of Evan's absence does not lessen. "Perhaps grief was the recognition of having run out of illusions," she considers with a sense of resignation.

Jiayu's grandfather became the most compelling entry on her spreadsheet. He enjoyed a long and productive life, and in his old age rotated visits among his grandchildren. Jiayu cherished the many summers spent with him. She thought it would be comforting, even fun, to consider the memory of a man who lived a very long, productive, and happy life, reflecting the ordained progression, one generation making room for the next. She was already in college when her grandfather died and she learned that he had a wife and child before he

married her grandmother. That first wife had committed suicide after the death of her son. Decades later, Evan's suicide causes Jiayu to mourn her grandfather again, but differently, as a young father who buried his wife and child. Though many years had passed since she had even thought about her grandfather, she felt the need to do so. Jiayu comes to the understanding that "true grief, beginning with disbelief and often ending elsewhere, was never too late."

Grief is the unseen force that pushes us toward us the detour that allows us to pass around the wall of despair and hopelessness that rises high and solid after we first learn our child is no longer with us. Grief, mystifying and consuming, is the overwhelming, underlying reflex that dominates the dazed nightmare of reentry into daily activities. Grief provides us with armor to fight the phantom demons of denial and disbelief that a catastrophe of such epic proportion could have befallen such an ordinary person as we conceive ourselves to be. As time passes, grief becomes the balm that enables us to reach beyond our personal pain and feel compassion for others who also have suffered loss.

Ultimately, grief develops into a flexible, expanding, internal, microscopic gauze defying the boundary between the material and spiritual realms, offering a path to keeping our children close to us until we too cross over the path and enter that other sphere.

** The New Yorker October 1, 2018*

NATURE'S RAINBOWS

We held them in our parent arms
for days or weeks or years.
Now we hold them in our hearts
and cry the darkest tears.

The cord attached to children
eternally fine and strong.
We never leave the missing;
It holds us all lifelong.

Our children now inside us –
our souls tattooed with gold.
Their love, their words, caresses,
are hugs that we still hold.

If we open to the knowledge
that they aren't completely gone,
we will sometimes feel their touching,
sometimes soft, and sometimes strong.

When they show us nature's rainbows,
we can feel their proud delight,
sending signs to show they're living,
only far beyond our sight.

Genesse Gentry

From her book, "Stars in the Deepest Night"

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.



Shauna Denkensohn	In memory of Peter Levine , forever 22, and all the children gone too soon.
Lillian Haas	In loving memory of her daughters, Michele Siegel , 7/15 – 2/18, forever 29, and Diane Haas , 3/3 – 8/24, forever 5 months old.
Valerie Preston	In loving memory of her son Marcus Preston , 2/18 – 4/1, forever 17
Leslie Kandell	In loving memory of her daughter, Elinor Friedberg Blume , 3/10 – 7/7, forever 41
Evelyn Rabi	In loving memory of her daughter Yvonne Laurice Ajakie , 1/21 – 7/20, forever 23
Peggy Lang	In loving memory of her son David Lang Barek , 3/28 – 12/25, forever 19
Barbara Russell	In loving memory of her daughter Blakely Russell Kaye , 2/20 – 6/7, forever 25
Judith Koppersmith	In loving memory of her daughter Anya Gabriela Koppersmith , 7/23 – 1/11, forever 21
Marie Jones	In loving memory of her daughter Laurie Nichols , 8/7 – 2/17, forever 49
Marie Levine	In loving memory of Grace Cozine , forever 19, beloved daughter of Patti & Danny Cozine

SIBLINGS

GRIEVING THE DEATH OF A BROTHER OR SISTER

Somehow we take for granted that our brothers and sisters will always be there as companions and friends. When a sibling dies, it feels wrong, out of sync, confusing. This may help you begin to explore and resolve some of the unique aspects of your grief:

Honor your own grief. Grief is different for each person, depending on past experiences with loss, coping skills, age and sex, mental and physical health, the circumstances of the death, and perhaps, most significantly, the nature of the relationship with the deceased person. Only you know how deeply you feel the loss of this person who shared your history and knew you so well.

Respect your feelings. You might have to resume your normal daily routine soon after the funeral. But inside you may be feeling anything but normal, with many of the mixed up emotions that grief can bring. Talk about such feelings to a grief support group or write a letter to the deceased person or to God so that you can express your grief safely.

Find healthy ways to keep your sibling's memory alive. Coping with the death of a beloved sibling startles

us with a reminder of our own mortality and often stirs up unfinished spiritual business. You may feel a need to assess what your life has been about, evaluate your life goals, and prioritize your commitments and relationships in a new way.

Saying good-bye to a loved one is never easy. But these thoughts from playwright Robert Anderson may help:
"Death ends a life, not a relationship. Let go of the pain and allow the memories to remain."

Care notes by **Kathlyn Miller**, lovingly lifted from Carrollton, OH TCF newsletter

NATIVE AMERICAN PRAYER

Hold on to what is good
Even if it is a handful of earth.
Hold onto what you believe
Even if it is a tree which stands by
itself.
Hold on to what you must do
Even if it is a long way from here.
Hold on to life
Even when it is easier letting go.
Hold on to my hand

SOMETIMES

Sometimes something clicks
And with a tear
Remembrance of the pain
And the loneliness
Flood the heart

Sometimes something clicks,
And with a smile
Remembrance of the love
And the laughter
Flood the senses

And there are times
When nothing clicks at all,
And a voice echoes
Through the emptiness
And numbness
Never finding the person
Who used to fill that space.

And sometimes
The most special time of all,
A feeling ripples through your
Body, heart and soul
That tells you
That person never left you
And he's right there with you
Through it all.

Kirsten Hansen,
TCF Kentfield, CA

...from *Healing after loss* by Martha Whitmore Hickman

Pain is the most individualizing thing on earth. It is true that it is the great common bond as well, but that realization comes only when it is over. To suffer is to be alone. To watch another suffer is to know the barrier that shuts each of us away by himself. Only individuals can suffer.

~Edith Hamilton

It is all very well to talk about the universality of grief. But at the time of our loss we feel as though we are the only person in the world who has the feelings we have and we are right. If well-meaning friends say to us "I know just how you feel," we inwardly bristle with denial – no, no. You couldn't know what this is like.

Even our closest family members have a different experience than we, and sometimes we stumble all over one another, hurt one another, and feel hurt ourselves because we assume that since we are grieving for the same person our grief is the same.

And yet...and yet...at no time do we need other people more. There is a fine balance called for between our need to honor the sanctity of our own inner space and our need for others to be present... for love, for company, for understanding support.

I would say to my friends – when I cannot come out from my house of grief, put your hand to the open window and I will hold on for dear life.

PROGRESS

On better days, I fill my life with laughter
Enjoy the charm of other people's children
And think about new flowers for my garden.
On better days I start the morning proudly.
I disregard the forecast of bad weather,
and look ahead to possible adventures.
On better days I look at faded pictures,
recall vacations in the rainy season,
remember kissing baby powdered feet.
On better days I hardly cry at all.

~ Sasha Wagner

A TIME TO MOURN

by Jill Englar

I am lost in grief, numb with shock,
filled with disbelief and at times, rage,
besieged by an army of rebellious emotions,
my instinct is to retreat.

I want to hide under a blanket and sleep,
awakening only to your smiling face.
But the nightmare is real,
and you are not coming back.

I am a worry to my family
and a stranger to our friends,
adrift in a sea of despair
and marooned in an unwelcome reality.

Please don't rush my grief
or tell me to move on with my life.
I need time.
My loss must be processed;
my pain must be healed.

Please be gentle and kind.
Offer a hot meal - not advice!
Share a cup of tea.

Understand my silence may be from fatigue
and emptiness within.
Please don't shy away
when I vent anger and frustration.
I may even seem bitter
and envious of those around me.

Have patience as I reminisce
and gaze fondly at old photographs.
Speak my beloved's name and smile
as we reflect shared memories.
I am not afraid of tears,
only the loneliness each day brings.

Grieving takes time, grieving requires support.
Embrace me with love; companion me with hope.
My faith gets me out of bed,
your support keeps me going.

Thank you for being my friend.

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A VERY VERY BAD DREAM... (continued from page 1)

So it follows that when we lose the focus of that love – our child – the grief is as deep and abiding as the love. And just as we never lose the love, it follows that we never lose the grief.

Carrying these two overwhelming emotions around with us while we try valiantly to re-engage in life is what makes heroes of us all.

Another holiday season has come and gone. Another ferocious winter is upon us, allowing us to curl up within ourselves and contemplate the unbelievable circumstances of our unexpected lives. For years now I've looked forward to this season of "nothingness". No holidays or milestones to dread or survive. The winter months bring a welcome relief from the "joy" of the holiday season and gives my soul the needed rest it needs to endure the impending Spring and Summer months ahead, packed solidly as they are with rebirth, renewal, Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays, anniversaries, and the like. As time goes on I find myself painfully aware of how my life continues to empty of the family, friends and familiar symbols of my youth. Like the generations that preceded mine, I've watched as the celebrity icons of my own early years disappear. It is another "secondary" loss that Peter isn't in my life keeping me in his loop, up and current with the icons that would have been his in his old age. I look at a current People magazine and I wonder, who are these people? I probably would have known if my son was here.

I feel hopelessly outdated. Modern music is a language I don't speak. Fashion, an industry I spent most of my professional life in, eludes me. As I pass by the armory in a cab, a major industry event is taking place with a whole new population of young 'fashionistas', most Peter's contemporaries. He might have been a part of that scene, I think, regaling me with stories about his social adventures, as I did with my Mom in my day.

Winter ruminations. Private thoughts I dare not share with any of the "civilians" in my life who are blissfully unaware of my continuing struggle. The cold, dreary day as I write this, wraps itself lovingly around me, allowing me to think dreary thoughts. It is a welcome relief from my daily effort to participate in "life", upbeat and seemingly intact. Sometimes it feels good to simply wallow. I will indulge myself just for today.

Happily, the season of unmitigated joy has passed for one more year. A very brief respite now before the spring/summer season comes drifting along infusing us all with renewed hope along with its own built in emotional challenges. I for one plan to use these cold, quiet months wisely, and build up my strength for the course to come. It's harder to cry on a sunny day. Savor the winter. Spring's just around the corner.

Marie Levine, 2004

I AM A MOTHER... (continued from page 1)

I feel as if I will explode from the grief. Losing my child affects me in so many ways: as a woman, a mother, a human being. It affects every aspect of me: spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. There are days when I barely recognize myself in the mirror anymore.

Grief is as personal to me as my fingerprint. Don't tell me how I should or shouldn't be grieving or that I should or shouldn't "feel better by now." Don't tell me what's right or wrong. I'm doing it my way, in my time. If I am to survive this, I must do what is best for me.

My understanding of life will change and a different meaning of life will slowly evolve. What I knew to be true or absolute or real or fair about the world has been challenged so I'm finding my way, moment-to-moment in this new place. Things that once seemed important to me are barely thoughts any longer. I notice life's suffering more- hungry children, the homeless and the destitute, a mother's harsh voice toward her young child- or an elderly person struggling with the door. There are so many things about the world which I now struggle to understand: Why do children die? There are some questions, I've learned, which are simply unanswerable.

So please don't tell me that "God has a plan" for me. This, my friend, is between me and my God. Those platitudes slip far too easily from the mouths of those who tuck their own child into a safe, warm bed at night: Can you begin to imagine your own child, flesh of your flesh, lying lifeless in a casket, when "goodbye" means you'll never see them on this Earth again? Grieving mothers- and fathers- and grandparents- and siblings won't wake up one day with everything 'okay' and life back to normal. I have a new normal now.

As time passes, I may gain gifts, and treasures, and insights but anything gained was too high a cost when compared to what was lost. Perhaps, one day, when I am very, very old, I will say that time has truly helped to heal my broken heart. But always remember that not a second of any minute of any hour of any day passes when I am not aware of the presence of my child's absence, no matter how many years lurk over my shoulder, don't forget that I have another one, another child, whose absence, like the sky, is spread over everything as C.S. Lewis said.

My child may have died; but my love - and my motherhood - never will.

~ **Dr. Joanne Cacciatore**

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CHAT SCHEDULE

Go to: www.compassionatefriends.org, and click on CHAT. Times are Eastern Standard Time.

EDT	9:00-10:00AM	8:00-9:00PM	9:00-10:00PM	10:00-11:00PM
MON			General Bereavement Issues & Grandparents/Stepparents	General Bereavement Issues & Men's Chat
TUE			General Bereavement Issues, Bereavement over 2 years & Pregnancy Loss/Infant Death	General Bereavement Issues & Pregnancy Loss/Infant Death
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 Issues
SAT				General Bereavement & Siblings
SUN	Siblings		General Bereavement Issues & Siblings	General Bereavement Issues & Siblings

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We Need Not Walk Alone
TCF National Magazine
1 yr. subscription \$20

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

Mark Your Calendars!
Our next Chapter meetings are Tuesdays:

FEB 12	MAR 12	APR 9	MAY 14	JUN 11
FEB 26	MAR 26	APR 23	MAY 28	JUN 25

OUR COMPASSIONATE FRIENDLY NEIGHBORS

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



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