



The Compassionate Friends NEWSLETTER

Manhattan Newsletter

WINTER 2015 Vol. XXVII No. 1

I've often spoken about the difficulty I have of moving from one year to the next...of feeling like I am hopping off one island on to another, leaving Peter behind. Here I was, 15 years ago, leaping from one century into another only seven years after Peter left...

BITTERSWEET

And now into the breach. It's the 21st century. We are at the beginning of a new century that will, more than any other in history, see changes in the way life progresses, cultures are managed, economies are grown. We, the terminally bereaved have crossed over into another world – and we have survived. We have made the jump in spite of our grief, our trepidation, our fears and our incredible sadness.

Oh, what would this brave new world have been like if we could have seen it through the eyes of our missing children, brothers, sisters?

Instead, we are assured of the continuum of grieving. That time does not heal as much as it teaches. It teaches endurance. It teaches compassion. It teaches us survival skills we never imagined we could learn. It teaches us an appreciation of all we had and all it is possible to lose. It teaches us that it is possible to appear to be alive even when so much is dead inside. I can only speak for myself here, for I have no surviving children. My loss was not only of my precious son, it was so much of my loss of self...my loss of motherhood, grandparenthood...the loss of all I have built in a lifetime that I always believed would matter to some future generations.

In the end, I am left at the beginning of this century, too aware of the end of myself. While my peers and distant relatives are happily marrying off their youngest children and enjoying their first grandchildren, Phil and I contemplate long term care and anonymous philanthropy.

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GETTING GRIEF RIGHT

by Patrick O'Malley

By the time Mary came to see me, six months after losing her daughter to sudden infant death syndrome, she had hired and fired two other therapists. She was trying to get her grief right.

Mary was a successful accountant, a driven person who was unaccustomed to being weighed down by sorrow. She was also well versed in the so-called stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. To her and so many others in our culture, that meant grief would be temporary and somewhat predictable, even with the enormity of her loss. She expected to be able to put it behind her and get on with her life.

To look at her, she already had done so. The mask she wore for the world was carefully constructed and effective. She seemed to epitomize what many people would call "doing really well," meaning someone who had experienced a loss but looked as if she was finished grieving. Within a few days of the death of her daughter she was back at work and seemed to function largely as before.

The truth of her life was something else. Six months after her baby's death she remained in deep despair. She was exhausted from acting better than she felt around co-workers, friends and family. As is so often the case, she had diagnosed her condition as being "stuck" in grief, believing that a stubborn depression was preventing her from achieving acceptance and closure.

(Continued on page 10)

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) 414-1780jacquienytcf@verizon.net .

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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.

WINTER 2015 - TCF Manhattan

THE BEREAVED PARENTS' GUIDE TO THE UNIVERSE

by Nora Yood

Bereaved fathers and mothers have a different way of marking time than other parents. Our calendars are filled with signs and symbols identifying upcoming events, crucial dates, and important occasions that reflect our unique and unwanted status. The month of May is illustrative. May 19th is my son's birthday, which since his death, has morphed into and especially painful, weird and holy day for me, his father, and his two sisters. On the closest Sunday to that memorial, we gather at the cemetery, huddled at his grave, together as the family we used to be in a sad, fleeting solidarity that can only be expressed through silence. Then there is Mother's Day that manages to trigger both fist clenching anger and body numbing paralysis, leaving me incapable of behaving in a way that remotely resembles a rational being. So dysfunctional does the Hallmark holiday render me, for the past few years, on that fateful weekend, I leave town and seclude myself in an upstate New York Ashram. May heralds the debut of spring, inviting nature to show off its flowering crown, vibrant colors, scented breezes, bright sun, blue skies, and green grass. This unabashed display of renewal and abundance, frankly, depresses me. I vote for May as the cruelest month.

But wait! What about July, the month in which I buried my son? That surely makes July a contender. December earns its cringe creds with my birthday and the winter holidays. The visits from relatives, the annual catch-up cards and e-mails, the parties, the gift giving magnify the void left by the empty chair at the festive table. October, too, sends me into a downward spiral, as it signals the arrival of fall, my son's favorite season.

I see David in the all, lankly, handsome young men who pass me on the street with a carefree, insouciant gait, scarf hanging loosely, jacket unzipped, clutching a cup of designer coffee in his hand. Sometimes, I recognize a crooked smile or virtual high-five, as if my beloved child is greeting me from the great beyond. My chronic despair is lifted. I feel calm and light, released from the heavy burden of loss and loneliness until grim reality weighs me down once again. No calendar page is turned without tears.

Still the pages flip forward in an inevitable march toward the future. I have grown older. My son has not. His life was truncated in his prime; he remains forever thirty. After his death, I became unhinged, adrift, and clueless about how to proceed with my life. My most basic assumptions and logical explanations of how the universe operated were shattered. Nothing made sense, not even the constructs of time and space.

In order to survive, I needed to discover my own Theory of Relativity. Time became bifurcated into the period before David's death and the period after. Space divided into two distinct entities. The first was a solid, physical manifestation, accessible to the senses—organic substance that completes a life cycle, dies, disintegrates. The second, a magical, mystical, mysterious field of subatomic particles: quarks, muons, neutrinos positrons. Invisible and inextinguishable points of energy, like gravity, hidden from our perception but exerting powerful force that is basic to the structure and viability of matter. This is where David now resides, part of an eternal, elemental galactic dance that is as crucial to my stability as gravity.

YESTERDAY

Yesterday I heard your voice
today, that voice is still.

I yearn to hear it once again,
I guess I always will.

Yesterday I touched your face
as you lay safe in bed.

If I could kiss you just once more
and stroke your precious head.

You touched my life so briefly,
and the magic lingers on.

It blesses me at twilight,
and it wakes me with the dawn.

If I live until forever,
'til my eyes no longer see,
my mind will 'ere remember
what you were, and are, to me.

~**Marcia Dyke**, *TCF Ocala, FL*

A LOVE GIFT is a donation given in memory of a child who has died, or sometimes as 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 and siblings through books, programs, meetings and this newsletter. In this issue we want to thank and acknowledge the following for their generous support of our chapter and especially, our newsletter. Note, on advice from our National office, because of concerns about identity theft we have changed our format and eliminated years from birth dates and anniversary dates.

Evelyn Rabi In memory of her daughter **Yvonne Laurice Ajakie**, 1/21 - 7/20, forever 23

Gloria & Arthur Goldberg In memory of their son **Brian Goldberg**, 8/9 - 6/16, forever 19

Claudette Hannibal In memory of her son, **Troy O. Myers**, 5/30 - 12/20, forever 33

Ervine Kimerling In memory of her son **Sean Kimerling**, 4/17 - 9/9 forever 37

Leslie Kandell In memory of her daughter **Elinor Friedberg Blume**, forever 41

Lynn & Mitch Baumeister In memory of their son **Matthew Baumeister**, 4/5 - 5/11, forever 19

Siblings - We are the surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends. We are brought together by the deaths of our brothers and sisters. Open your hearts to us, but have patience with us. Sometimes we will need the support of our friends. At other times we need our families to be there. Sometimes we must walk alone, taking our memories with us, continuing to become the individuals we want to be. We cannot be our dead brother or sister, however a special part of them lives on with us. When our brothers and sisters died, our lives changed. We are living a life very different from what we envisioned, and we feel the responsibility to be strong even when we feel weak. Yet we can go on because we understand better than many others the value of family and the precious gift of life. Our goal is not to be the forgotten mourners that we sometimes are, but to walk together to face our tomorrows as surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends®

THE LOSS OF A SIBLING...

No matter how old, no matter how close or not, and no matter how often death has occurred to others we know, is like losing part of our own lives and part of ourselves. Who will be left now to remember us as the children we once were? Who will be able to remember our parents the way we do and as only children can? Who will there be who lived in the same house, tasted the same foods, heard the same stories, were taught the same lessons as we were? We still

have our own memories of course, but without someone who shared them and relive them with us, they become mere ghosts...

When we lose a sibling, we lose not just the particular person or relationship, but perhaps our last remaining link with our past. Our siblings are special people in our lives, i.e. sometimes they are supports and sometimes they are even stresses or even strangers to us. But it does not really matter because regardless of

whether we like each other, we have intimately shared and shaped each others' past and been shaped by them. So when our siblings age and fail, our own lives are changed too.

And when our siblings die, we know there is no one else - no matter how close to us they may be - who can bring back the particular part of our life we have lost.

~**Lillian Hawthorne**,
Senior World Magazine

SOMETIMES

Sometimes something clicks
and with a tear
remembrance of the pain
and the loneliness
flood the heart.

Sometimes something clicks
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 Kenfield, CA

I KNOW YOU

I know who you are...I see your face reflected in mine..
Ravaged by tears, distorted by the pain of a lifetime.
You are a parent of a child who now lives on in your heart
Joined in spirit though physically torn apart.

To live between two worlds is now our task
To be recognized by others, we all have a mask.
But in the abyss, in the darkness of the in between
We often fall to our knees,
Tearing away the pretense and silently scream.

I know who you are, your voice sounds familiar as mine.
It calls out, vibrating throughout all of eternity, searching
trying to find.

"Where are you my child? I hear you in my mind,
but I cannot find the way.
Somehow I have gotten lost,
where are all of my yesterdays?"

In the void, a child's voice has fallen silent
deafening silence, echoing cries..
We are left to follow each other in the darkness,
always asking Why?

Into the unknown, we stumble along,
The sun will rise and another day will begin.
But the only light I can see is in the outstretched hand
of a kindred soul, another grieving friend.

I know who you are, your heart is shattered,
Your soul is broken, just like mine..
And though the pieces may fit back together.
one tiny fragment at a time,
we will never again be while,
for there is a gap in our lives where our child should be
The child that lives in our hearts,
dances deep in our souls, laughs in our memories.

I know who you are...I can feel
your pain.
We will never be the same.

I cry the same tears.
We have the same fears.
Alone in a crowd,
we both cried aloud
As our dreams came to an end.
I know you my grieving friend.

You are not alone, look in the mirror and you will see
Standing next to you...is a reflection of me.

~Lisa Comstock, TCF Florence, KY
~reprinted from TCF Atlanta newsletter Jan/Feb 2001

THE REALITY OF GRIEF

It's easy to give in to pain
when grief is ever by your side.
But there is nothing one can gain
by dying as our loved one's died.

The sadness surely will remain -
one cannot run away and hide;
but you can come in from the rain
and stem the many tears you've cried.

You'll find your efforts not in vain
if you are patient and abide;
it takes great effort to maintain
your balance in a raging tide.

So don't give up - you must sustain
your strength through this traumatic ride;
life can be happy, in the main -
you'll never know if you haven't tried.

~Carole Babush, TCF, N. Atlanta, GA



**If you are planning to attend our National
Conference in Dallas this summer, be sure to
go online to www.compassionatefriends.org
for complete registration and hotel information.
The hotel fills up fast so don't delay!**

ON LOSING AN ONLY CHILD

I would like to put into perspective the subject of losing a child as compared to losing an only child. It is said that comparisons are odious, but sometimes a different perspective can be helpful. The pain of losing a child is excruciating, whether that child has siblings or not. That is incontrovertible. However, it has to be admitted that the particular relationship with the lost child, the involvement, the constancy and the intimacy are all factors that affect the degree of pain.

For those who have remaining children, there is resentment when they are told that they are fortunate to have other children. Someone said that when a person loses a leg, they don't say how lucky he is to have another leg. He is distraught that he has lost a leg, his whole focus is on that leg. The observer, however, can see that to lose both legs is more difficult.

We look to our children for a variety of reasons. They provide us with companionship of a unique sort. They lend continuity to our lives – a form of immortality. They create the role of parent for us with the immeasurable possibilities inherent therein. They provide that comfort that comes from knowing someone very close will be concerned with us.

Though the pain suffered by any bereaved parent is just as great, it must be admitted that those who have other children can have the benefit of all of the above, whereas the person who has lost an only child (or all their children) has had all of the above wiped out.

Kay Bevington, Editor, ALIVE ALONE

DOUBLE GRIEF

The death of my grandchild
and the grief of my son
pull on my heartstrings
and I am undone.
in secret I mourn beyond relief
for I have been given a double grief.
God help me deal with the pain and sorrow
of living without the hope of tomorrow.

Andy Cipriano, TCF Tallahassee, FL

A NEW YEAR BEGINS

Living life with a heart badly broken by loss
is a difficult life to be sure.

When the broken heart's caused by the death of one's child,
grief's an agony hard to endure.

I began this new year without promise or hope,
bewildered, bereft and bereaved.
missing you; you anchored my world in its place,
now I struggle through pain, unrelieved.

I know life is in constant renewal,
death takes to make room for the new.
mankind's not exempt from this process,
we expect death will come when it's due.

But I find myself needing to question
if a maker has planned out this scheme...
for the parting of parent and child by death
has no rational part of this theme.

What's the point? What's the plan? Are there rules?
It might help if I knew where I stood.
Did I cherish, and love, and nurture my child
just to suffer the trauma of losing for good?

I know there aren't answers to questions I pose,
I must search for my solace within.
Making peace with the pain and the anger and grief
through tears that seem never to end.

Living life with a heart badly broken by loss
is a life that is empty and sad...
And I mourn for the years that are lost to us now,
for the future my child never had.

As I face this new year without her sweet smile
I yearn for what now cannot be...
But her memory lives on through the words that I share
of the beauty and joy that was she.

~ **Sally Migliaccio**, in memory of **Tracey**, always

MY WORLD CHANGED

Prior to becoming a bereaved parent, I thought I had at least a glimpse of what parents whose children have died go through. I was an emergency room nurse, and the saddest part of my job was to inform parents that their children had died. After delivering that most devastating news, I would sit and cry with them. When I went home at night, I would think about the parents, pray for them and thank God my two little boys were safe and that my family was intact.

Then, on September 11, 1997, I became a bereaved parent! The police informed me that my son Andrew had died in an auto accident. My life seemed to stop. I wasn't sure if I was able to breathe again without my son, let alone survive his death. In the days that followed one thing was for sure; I hadn't had even a glimpse about what happens to a person when their child dies.

As I walk this journey of a bereaved parent, I notice that my whole world changed. My beliefs aren't the same. And my future is changed forever. My whole life had been shattered, and I didn't know where to begin to pick up the pieces or if I even had the will to pick up the pieces. Everyone around me, even though very attentive to me, continued functioning in their lives. I didn't know where I fit in anymore. I was alone...trying to figure out what happened in that split second when they told me Andrew was dead.

I noticed that the silence of people who did not mention Andrew's name was deafening to me. There were no stories about him anymore. It felt like "out of sight, out of mind." My son had lived; he had been a part of my life. I had dreams for him. He was my future. I was frightened that everyone would forget him, and I need to hear other people say his name. I could not stand the thought of going through the rest of my life not ever hearing or saying his name again. I knew then that part of my survival was going to involve keeping the memory of my son alive.

I noticed that people would shy away from me, run

down the other aisle of the grocery store rather than chance running into me. I needed more than ever for people to come up to me and give me a big hug. Depending on how I felt that day, I would hunt down those people and show them that talking with me was not going to be a painful experience for them and that being a bereaved parent was not contagious.

I noticed that I struggled with something so simple as not being able to sign a birthday or anniversary card from our family, because to do that, I would have to leave Andrew's name off the card. I had signed his name for 23 years and there was no way his name could be left off the card now. I also knew I needed to sign his name or people might forget him. I now sign all cards

"With Love and memories of Andrew." It's funny, I rarely sent Christmas cards before Andrew died; now I make sure that I send everyone I know a Christmas cards so I can write his name and keep his memory alive. I also notice that people send cards back to me with the same message. It's great!

I noticed that people were uncomfortable about what to

say to me, so they would avoid mentioning Andrew's life or death for fear they would remind me of him. They thought they would feel badly if they made me cry, and then, "what would they do with me?" It was easier for them not to say anything. What these people didn't know is that they didn't have to remind me of Andrew; I think about Andrew every minute of every day. I will never forget his life or his death. Mentioning Andrew's name only made me feel better. After experiencing a few of these encounters, I knew I had to make people understand that it was okay to talk about Andrew, and if there were tears, that was okay too. I always thanked people for bringing up Andrew's name and remembering him. If tears came, I would explain that they had not made me cry, and I really appreciated them talking with me about Andrew.

I noticed that when I entered the room at my first bereaved parent meeting, I was surprised to find other



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parents in that room, some smiling, some laughing, and some making small talk. I thought I was really in the wrong place. It was inconceivable to me that I would ever smile or laugh again, and I assumed they must not have loved their child as much as I did. But once the meeting began, I learned these parents did love their children as much as I loved Andrew and that someday maybe I would smile and laugh again too. There was a glimmer of hope that I might survive, and they would lead the way.

I noticed that at those meetings, I learned a lot about my new world from parents who had walked the path before me. They brought to my attention the situations I might encounter, and offered suggestions as to how they had dealt with those issues. They didn't theorize their grief; they lived it every day and shared their coping skills with the group. They gave me strength and confidence and validated that I was on the right path in keeping the memory of Andrew alive. They were patient with me. I knew I was in a safe place where people understood me. They knew something I didn't know at the time - that I was going to survive.

I noticed that some people thought that because my son was 23 years old, somehow he wasn't a child anymore. Even though I was his parent, they assumed the grief would not be as intense as if he were a baby or younger child. I'll never forget a 70 year old man coming in to the emergency room, dead on arrival after a heart attack. I was told his mom was on her way to the ER. When his frail, 90 year old mother entered the room, she screamed out "my baby, my baby!" She sobbed, she hugged him; she held and rocked him. She kissed him all the while saying "my baby, my baby." I learned that night that it doesn't matter how old your child was, because the parent-child relationship never ends. That night her baby died. The night Andrew died was the night my baby died. Our children are our children forever.

I noticed that I didn't know what to say when people asked me "How many children do you have?" This causes me great anxiety when it comes up in conversation. I answer that I have two boys and most of the time that is sufficient. If the conversation requires more information, I tell them that my eldest son Andrew, was a mechanical engineer and that he died

in an auto accident. My younger son Elliot, is alive and well and is a graphic designer. I tell them about Andrew, not so that they can feel sorry for me, but because I will always be his mom; he will always be my child, and I cannot deny he lived.

I noticed that people compared my loss to their own losses; father dying, grandmother dying and I even had one person compare my loss to their dog dying. I know these people didn't have any intention of hurting me. They were just trying to relate to the worst experience they had ever had with death, but I needed to let them know that my father had died, my grandmother had died, some friends, my aunt and uncles and even my dogs have died. My Andrew's death was like no other experience I have had with death. My life didn't stop with all the other deaths as it did when Andrew died. Even though I grieved the other deaths, they didn't hit the core of my existence the way Andrew's death did. My heart didn't ache every minute of every day of every year, as it has since Andrew died. I would have given my life to let Andrew live, but I wasn't given that choice.

I noticed that after a year or two, people were expecting the "old" Sharon back. They wanted me to move on, to go on with my life, to be happy and try to forget my son's death. I guess they read one of those psychology or medical books that give bereaved parents one year to recover. I know now that the writer's of those books never consulted a bereaved parent. Society doesn't understand or seem to want to give us the time it takes to get better. I let people know that I was working very hard on my recovery. I didn't want pity; I was not attention seeking or a martyr. I wanted more than they did to feel like my old self again. I wanted the intense pain to stop. I hated where I was in my life and I hated feeling that bad. I let them know that I had heard that as the years pass, the pain gets softer and the tears flow less, but I will never fully recover. I will always miss Andrew. I will always grieve his death. He will always be part of my life and I will never forget him.

My wish for all parents and families whose children have died is that they will find peace and know that their child is with them and will never be forgotten.

Reprinted with permission from Grief Digest, April 2006

BITTERSWEET... *(continued from page 1)*

The past seven holiday seasons magnified my loss and taught me to think of all my compassionate friends...those I know personally and those I only know through the most catastrophic news events. This past season, the millennium celebrations across each time zone, displayed a world where it seemed that everyone is young, happy, innocent and unafraid. For one, brief 24 hour period, the planet seemed to have whirled out of orbit into some wonderful place where nothing bad happens. No computer glitched. No terrorist surfaced. But grief is like an internal terrorist. We never know exactly when it will strike us down into depths of despair but we know only too well that it will. Though I watched all the activity with a smile on my face I couldn't shake the interminable sadness that rests right under my skin, waiting to get me once again.

And yet, there are all those fresh young faces, bravely

looking at a future so new, so unknown, so unsullied by personal history. Deep down I am so excited for them. I want to draw them all close to me, to try to see a future through their eyes. For Time has taught me that it does go on. As we approached the turn of the century, I felt an overwhelming sense once again, of loss... that I was leaving my life behind. That I was unwillingly being carried along by the crowd, unable to stay in a world I knew.

But something strange happened. As the countdown to 2000 grew to a fever pitch, I had a sudden sense that Peter had leaped across what had become, in my mind, a sort of "Maginot Line" of time. That he was watching me from a distant future...smiling and waving me on. So now, I march ahead, toward my waiting son. More determined than ever to live what is left of this life for both of us.

Marie Levine, January 2000

GETTING GRIEF RIGHT... *(continued from page 1)*

Was she in denial, she wondered. She also wondered if she was appropriately angry. The bottom line was that she knew she was depressed — a psychiatrist had prescribed an antidepressant — and that is what she wanted me to treat.

Earlier in my practice, I would have zeroed in on that depression. Was there a family history? Had she been depressed before? Was the medicine helping? What were her specific symptoms? Knowing the answers might suggest why she was stuck. Or I would have reviewed the stages of grief, as she had, looking for one in which the work remained incomplete.

But I had begun to operate differently by the time Mary showed up, which was 10 years after my own loss. My firstborn child had also died before he was a year old. It was why Mary had chosen me.

In our first session I put Mary's depression aside. I asked her to tell me the story of her baby rather than describe the symptoms of her grief. Though she was resistant, she eventually started to talk.

Like most other things in Mary's life, the baby, whom she named Stephanie, was planned. Mary was delighted with her pregnancy and had wonderful dreams for her daughter. After a routine delivery, Mary stayed home with Stephanie for the first three months. Returning to work had been difficult, but Mary was comfortable with the child-care arrangement, and managed to balance motherhood with her busy professional schedule.

Then Mary told me about the Saturday when she went to check on her napping daughter and found that Stephanie wasn't breathing. She began C.P.R. as her husband called 911. There were moments of surreal

focus as she and her husband tried to save their baby. Then this woman, so accustomed to being in control, had to surrender her daughter to an emergency crew. Her husband drove as they followed the ambulance to the hospital.

She described the waiting room in great detail, down to the color of the furniture. When the hospital chaplain walked in with the doctor she knew her baby was gone. She and her husband were taken into a room where they held the baby for the last time.

At this point in her story Mary finally began to weep, intensely so. She seemed surprised by the waves of emotion that washed over her. It was the first time since the death that the sadness had poured forth in that way. She said she had never told the story of her daughter from conception to death in one sitting.

"What is wrong with me?" she asked as she cried. "It has been almost seven months."

Very gently, using simple, nonclinical words, I suggested to Mary that there was nothing wrong with her. She was not depressed or stuck or wrong. She was just very sad, consumed by sorrow, but not because she was grieving incorrectly. The depth of her sadness was simply a measure of the love she had for her daughter.

A transformation occurred when she heard this. She continued to weep but the muscles in her face relaxed. I watched as months of pent-up emotions were released. She had spent most of her energy trying to figure out why she was behind in her grieving. She had buried her feelings and vowed to be strong because that's how a person was supposed to be.

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Now, in my office, stages, self-diagnoses and societal expectations didn't matter. She was free to surrender to her sorrow. As she did, the deep bond with her little girl was rekindled. Her loss was now part of her story, one to claim and cherish, not a painful event to try to put in the past.

I had gone through the same process after the loss of my son. I was in my second year of practice when he died, and I subsequently had many grieving patients referred to me. The problem in those early days was that my grief training was not helping either my patients or me. When I was trained, in the late 1970s, the stages of grief were the standard by which a grieving person's progress was assessed.

THAT model is still deeply and rigidly embedded in our cultural consciousness and psychological language. It inspires much self-diagnosis and self-criticism among the aggrieved. This is compounded by the often subtle and well-meaning judgment of the surrounding community. A person is to grieve for only so long and with so much intensity.

To be sure, some people who come to see me exhibit serious, diagnosable symptoms that require treatment. Many, however, seek help only because they and the people around them believe that time is up on their grief. The truth is that grief is as unique as a fingerprint, conforms to no timetable or societal expectation.

Based on my own and my patients' experiences, I now like to say that the story of loss has three "chapters." Chapter 1 has to do with attachment: the strength of the bond with the person who has been lost. Understanding the relationship between degree of attachment and intensity of grief brings great relief for most patients. I often tell them that the size of their grief corresponds to the depth of their love.

Chapter 2 is the death event itself. This is often the moment when the person experiencing the loss begins to question his sanity, particularly when the death is premature and traumatic. Mary had prided herself on her ability to stay in control in difficult times. The profound emotional chaos of her baby's death made her feel crazy. As soon as she was able, she resisted the craziness and shut down the natural pain and suffering.

Chapter 3 is the long road that begins after the last casserole dish is picked up — when the outside world stops grieving with you. Mary wanted to reassure her family, friends and herself that she was on the fast track to closure. This was exhausting. What she really needed was to let herself sink into her sadness, accept it.

When I suggested a support group, Mary rejected the idea. But I insisted. She later described the relief she felt in the presence of other bereaved parents, in a place where no acting was required. It was a place where people understood that they didn't really want to achieve closure after all. To do so would be to lose a piece of a sacred bond.

"All sorrows can be borne if you put them in a story or tell a story about them," said the writer Isak Dinesen. When loss is a story, there is no right or wrong way to grieve. There is no pressure to move on. There is no shame in intensity or duration. Sadness, regret, confusion, yearning and all the experiences of grief become part of the narrative of love for the one who died.

Patrick O'Malley is a psychotherapist in Fort Worth.

This is an essay from Couch, a series about psychotherapy at nytimes.com/opinionator. Some details have been altered to protect patient privacy.

NOTES IN THE NEW YEAR...

Few people who come to our meetings realize what is involved in running a 'volunteer' chapter. Setting up the meetings, serving refreshments, making up information packets for newly bereaved arrivals, producing a newsletter, maintaining a website, maintaining financial records and paying the bills, training facilitators and perpetuating leadership, setting up and maintaining a telephone information line and tending to the needs of the bereaved, by the bereaved, all volunteers who are also grieving and sustaining their

own personal and professional lives... needless to say it is a daunting challenge. At our Manhattan chapter, we do an extraordinary job with very few volunteers. It is especially difficult when a member complains that some detail falls short of their expectations. Those who work so hard to make the chapter the source of help and healing it is intended to be, **Jacque Mitchell, John Mitchell, Desiree Brown, Rosina Mensah, Marie Levine, Dick Auletta, Jordon Ferber and Dan Zweig** and all those who

reach out when there is a job to be done, **THANK YOU.** And to those for whom we have missed the mark a few times, we would ask that you be patient with us. After all, we are ALL Compassionate Friends. **And if you feel you are ready to step up and help, we welcome your participation. Just let any of the above mentioned steering committee members know you see helping as part of your healing. There's plenty to do.**

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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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:
MAR 3 APR 14 MAY 12 JUN 9
MAR 24 APR 28 MAY 26 JUN 23

OUR COMPASSIONATE FRIENDLY NEIGHBORS

Brookhaven	2nd Friday	(631) 738-0809	Staten Island	2nd and 4th Thursday	(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	(631) 653-9444
Marine Park, Bklyn	3rd Friday	(718) 605-1545	White Plains	1st Thursday	(914) 381-3389
Rockville Centre	2nd Friday	(516) 766-4682	HOT LINE		(516) 781-4173
Rockland County	3rd Tuesday	(845) 398-9762			



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