



The Compassionate Friends *of Northwest Houston* Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Welcome to The Compassionate Friends. We are sorry for the reason you are here, but are glad that you found us. You Need Not Walk Alone, we are The Compassionate Friends.

JANUARY 2018

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

Cypress Creek Christian Church Community Center
6823 Cypresswood Drive, Room 20
Spring, Texas 77379

We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.

(Our next meeting is Tuesday, Jan. 9th)

Because of the ongoing renovations at Cypress Creek Christian Church our meeting this month will be held once again at the home of Mark and Debbie Rambis. Their address is: 3607 Bainbridge Estates Dr. Spring, TX 77388

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

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

To the Newly Bereaved

As the years pass, we see new members come into the chapter, and we try to help them with their grief as we progress in our own. Over and over again, I have seen newly bereaved parents come to their first meeting totally devastated and convinced that their lives are over. Through the months (and years) I have seen them struggle and suffer and try to find meaning in their lives again. And they do! Through all the anger, pain and tears, somehow the human spirit is able to survive and flower again in a new life – perhaps a changed life and possibly a sadder one, but a stronger one nevertheless.

We feel so weak and crushed when our beloved children die, but I know because I have seen it countless times in the years I've been involved with The Compassionate Friends that we can make it together. When you walked through the door for the first meeting, you were frightened and nervous; but with that step you made a statement about your life. With that first step through the door, you said you wanted to try, you wanted to find a reason for living again, that you weren't willing to be swallowed by your grief. You wanted to go forward, and those first steps into The Compassionate Friends began your journey.

The journey will be a long one, for you loved your child with all your heart and soul. When that child died, a part of you was ripped away. It takes a long time to repair that large hole. The journey will not always be steady or constant; there will be many setbacks. Those of us who have taken the journey before you can assure you that, while there may be no rainbow at the other end, there is indeed "light at the end of the tunnel."

We want to help you as we were helped, but in the beginning and in the long run, you must help yourself. You have to want to get better, to talk about your loss, to struggle through the grief. We will listen, suggest, share and laugh and cry with you; and we hope, at this time next year, you'll be several steps along in your personal journey through grief. Then you can begin to help others.



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Eric Reiland, Son of Kimberly Crawford and Grandson of Janet Heilman
Anthony Boras, Son of Walter Boras
Ava Helena Wallheimer, Daughter of Angela Wallheimer
Patrick Williams, Son of Poppy & Steve Williams
Syrina Snow Salazar, Daughter of April R. Torres
Ronald Lee, Son of Ana Castellanos
Samantha Dawn Quesada, Daughter of Albert & Dawn Quesada
Amber Eileen Schulze, Daughter of Lisa Schulze
Patrick Noel Jernigan, Son of Juanice Jernigan
Amanda Jane Franklin, Daughter of Jane Draycott
Christy Wempe, Daughter of Ann & Lance Parks
Karen Crawford, Daughter of Kim Crawford
Shane Woodson, Son of Theresa Woodson
Lucy Gale, Daughter of Steve & Jackie Sanders
Braiden Mainor, Grandson of Barbara Herring
Christina, Granddaughter of Barbara Thomas
Kailey Massey, Daughter of Terry & Wendy Massey
Matthew Coers, Son of Michelle Guerrero
Mark Cook, Son of Bill and Joanne Cook
Sean Anthony May, Son of David & Ann May
Joshua Bell, Son of Steve and Donna Bell
Reagan Ottnat, Daughter of Stacy Ottnat

JANUARY ANGEL DATES

Ryan David Dodson, Son of Diane & David Dodson
Alex John Piniewski, Son of Bob & Christi Piniewski
Hugo Alberto DeLeon, Son of Lupita DeLeon
Kenneth Ray Roberts, III, Son of Brenda Johnson
Darrell Wayne McSpadden, Son of Janet & Robert McSpadden
Brandon Miller Estes, Son of Holly Olive
Derek Johns, Son of Shauna & Jeff Cook
Devin Giblin, Son of Tanya Giblin
Tiffany Gower, Daughter of Brenda Whitworth
Patrick Burns, Son of Ray & Amanda Burns
Adam Kujawa, Son of Larry & Sara Kujawa
Kailey Massey, Daughter of Terry & Wendy Massey
Jasmins Potter Jr., Son of Jasmins & Erika Potter
Joel Sloan, Son of Jim & Glenna Sloan
Kathy Degen, Sister of Clare Watkins
Joshua Pham, Son of Tony & Peach Pham
Catherine Breeding, Daughter of Barbara Breeding
Sean Anthony May, Son of David and Ann May
Jared Mayfield, Son of Robbie Lampkins

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, January 9th at 7pm. We will meet at the home of Mark & Debbie Rambis, 3607 Bainbridge Estates Dr., Spring 77388.

Correction! Glenn Wilkerson will be our guest speaker in February not this month as earlier mentioned.

A Warm Welcome to Our New Members - We're Glad You Found Us.

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members. If you have walked through the door to a TCF meeting, we understand how traumatic and difficult that is to do...we have all taken that step and reach out to you in friendship and support.

As our TCF Credo says, *"We come from different walks of life..."*, but the common bond we now share is the death of a beloved child, grandchild, or sibling. Others cannot understand the terrifying and debilitating emotional issues that occur in our daily lives once this event happens; a TCF member can and does!

We hope you will find our meetings and newsletters to be a source of comfort, a place where tears are allowed, no judgments are made and the hope that through this trauma, we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

"A Special Remembrance"

If you would like to submit an article about your child for our newsletter please send them to me, Linda Brewer at llbrewer67@hotmail.com. It's a wonderful tribute to your child to shared a writing about him or her so that everyone may get to know them. Tell us what he or she liked. Did they have siblings? What were their hobbies? Where did they go to school or worked? Please let us hear from you.

Love Gifts – A Way to Remember

There are no dues to belong to Compassionate Friends, because we have already paid the ultimate price; the loss of our loved one(s). A Love Gift is a gift of money given in honor of a child, who has died, or a gift of thanksgiving that their own children are alive and well, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help support our Chapter. Your gifts are tax deductible and are used to reach out to other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. Your gifts support this newsletter, our TCF Library, and other Chapter expenses.

***A new year brings time to reflect on the children we love,
those who remain with us and those for whom we grieve ~
Wayne Loder***

"A Special Thank You"

Our 2017 TCF Northwest Houston Candle Lighting Service was held at Jersey Village High School and presented by the JV Players. It has been 18 years that our Candle Lighting Service has been held at Jersey Village High under the direction of Beth Crocker. A BIG thanks to Beth for her dedication and support of The Compassionate Friends and also to her students for hosting the Candle Lighting these past 18 years. Thanks Beth and JV Players, we appreciate all your hard work for putting together a beautiful candle lighting service each year!





Losing a child is "the worst thing anyone can ever imagine".

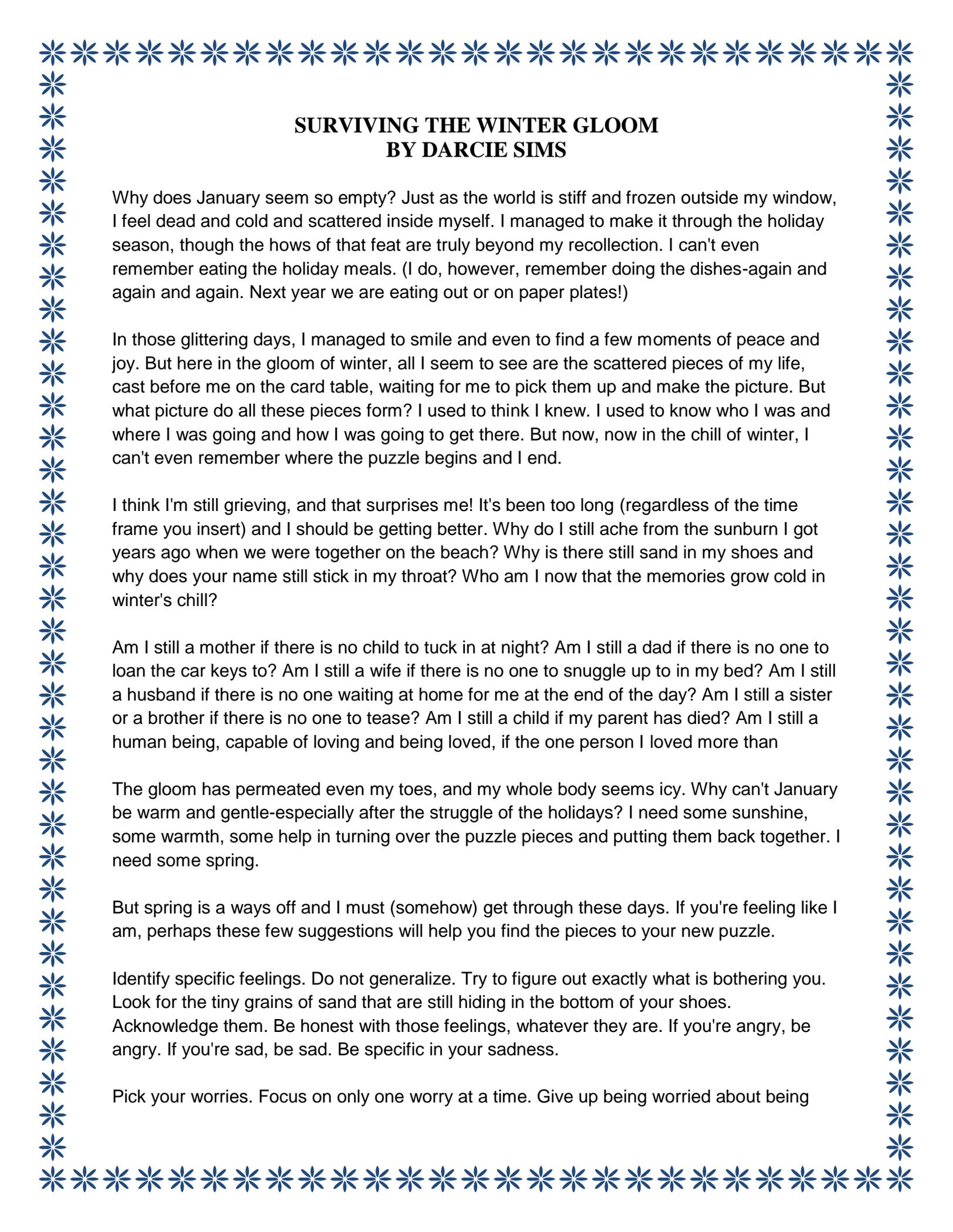
That's what everyone says. I wonder if they REALLY try to imagine it. As an actor and an acting coach, I have spent the majority of my life perfecting the skill of empathy. As a twice bereaved mom, I have directed actors through something of which they have no real experience: the role of child loss. I have spent the years since first becoming a bereaved mom trying to make the unimaginable into something that people can understand. I have observed professional actors creating scenes in movies and on TV in which they mourn the loss of their child. I have read author descriptions of child loss in fictional stories, & I struggle. I feel I can't reach them. I can't get them to truly understand what it's like. With one tragic event, the loss of the beloved Debbie Reynolds as a result of the loss of her sweet daughter, Carrie, the world has suddenly awoken and realized the severity of the pain we feel.

No longer will the medical industry be able to get away with giving us responses like "Oh no, I mean physical stress" when we explain what stress we are under... yes, that happened to me in an ER when I was having an appendicitis attack 5 weeks after the loss of my oldest daughter. It was the 20th century. The idea that our physical bodies are not influenced by our state of mind was rampant. Denial that mental health is directly linked to physical health, & vice-versa, has become an openly ignorant statement over night. Literally. Shows like Good Morning America spent their airtime discussing the tragic loss of the mother-daughter acting team, news stories on the loss described Debbie's death saying she died of a broken heart, and that is progress in our struggle to be understood, but the medical and psychological worlds have been merged in a sonic boom from that same explosive tragedy, and the world will never be the same. The world has finally realized what we already knew. We can now say with valid proof, that GRIEF KILLS.

Elizabeth Crocker
Theatre Director, Acting Coach, twice bereaved mom



*The journey of grief can seem bleak and lonely
Look in front of you...
there are others encouraging and guiding you
Look beside you...
there are others on the same journey
Look behind you...
there are others encouraged by you
we are not alone on this journey.*



SURVIVING THE WINTER GLOOM

BY DARCIÉ SIMS

Why does January seem so empty? Just as the world is stiff and frozen outside my window, I feel dead and cold and scattered inside myself. I managed to make it through the holiday season, though the hows of that feat are truly beyond my recollection. I can't even remember eating the holiday meals. (I do, however, remember doing the dishes-again and again and again. Next year we are eating out or on paper plates!)

In those glittering days, I managed to smile and even to find a few moments of peace and joy. But here in the gloom of winter, all I seem to see are the scattered pieces of my life, cast before me on the card table, waiting for me to pick them up and make the picture. But what picture do all these pieces form? I used to think I knew. I used to know who I was and where I was going and how I was going to get there. But now, now in the chill of winter, I can't even remember where the puzzle begins and I end.

I think I'm still grieving, and that surprises me! It's been too long (regardless of the time frame you insert) and I should be getting better. Why do I still ache from the sunburn I got years ago when we were together on the beach? Why is there still sand in my shoes and why does your name still stick in my throat? Who am I now that the memories grow cold in winter's chill?

Am I still a mother if there is no child to tuck in at night? Am I still a dad if there is no one to loan the car keys to? Am I still a wife if there is no one to snuggle up to in my bed? Am I still a husband if there is no one waiting at home for me at the end of the day? Am I still a sister or a brother if there is no one to tease? Am I still a child if my parent has died? Am I still a human being, capable of loving and being loved, if the one person I loved more than

The gloom has permeated even my toes, and my whole body seems icy. Why can't January be warm and gentle-especially after the struggle of the holidays? I need some sunshine, some warmth, some help in turning over the puzzle pieces and putting them back together. I need some spring.

But spring is a ways off and I must (somehow) get through these days. If you're feeling like I am, perhaps these few suggestions will help you find the pieces to your new puzzle.

Identify specific feelings. Do not generalize. Try to figure out exactly what is bothering you. Look for the tiny grains of sand that are still hiding in the bottom of your shoes. Acknowledge them. Be honest with those feelings, whatever they are. If you're angry, be angry. If you're sad, be sad. Be specific in your sadness.

Pick your worries. Focus on only one worry at a time. Give up being worried about being

worried. Prioritize your worries. This helps combat feelings of being overwhelmed and you can decide which worries to keep and which to send to your:

1) mother; 2) children; 3) family; 4) neighbor; 5) enemy.

Keep a picture or two of the sand castle where you can enjoy it every day. You may decide not to make a shrine out of your memories, but don't lose the joy that you had in making that marvelous moat! Keep the sand you found in the shoe-you just don't have to keep it there! That's what memories are for-a place to stash the important stuff that we need.

Become as informed and as knowledgeable as possible about this new world in which you live. We fear what we don't know, what we can't see, what we can't touch. Read, listen and learn all you can about grief. It's not where you planned on being this winter, but it is where you are. Look around.

Listen to everyone. You will receive enough advice about how to do it (grief) to sink a fleet of battleships. Be grateful. At least someone is talking with you! But, follow your own music.

Be kind to yourself. You survived the holiday season, and now it is the beginning of another season, another way of living. Learn to forgive yourself for living.

Set small goals first; accomplish them. Then, set bigger goals. Try starting with getting the garbage out on the right day. Then, open the closet, the drawers and the heart. Try going out. The next time you might be able to get farther than the driveway. Take your time. It's a long way to the beach. You'll get there again-someday.

Remember that life requires effort on your part. Make friends with the vacuum, the checkbook and the car. Become determined to learn to remove the box before microwaving the dinner. Don't wait for happiness to find you again. Make it happen. Build another sand castle, maybe on a different beach this time. Don't lose the memories just because they hurt. Look at the pictures, listen to the song and remember the love- you haven't lost that. How could you possibly lose the love you shared?

Keep turning the puzzle pieces over. But don't keep trying to put them back into the same picture. That picture is gone. There is a new picture to be made of those scattered pieces. Search for that scene. Search for the new you. Search for the new person you are becoming.

Don't forget how to dream, how to laugh, how to dance. The music is different but so is the season. The room may be empty, but the heart is not. The spirit may be filled with sand, but the shoes remember the steps. One day at a time is okay if you can manage it, but know that some days all you can manage is one minute at a time. But minutes add up to years, eventually, and each grain of sand adds to the strength of the castle. Build the sand castle again, if only in your memory. Just because it's January, doesn't mean the beach is closed

forever. Build your new castle in the middle of winter. Find the new occupant-the new you.

Be gentle this winter season. Turn the pieces over slowly, experiencing each piece as a newly found treasure. We can fill our days with bitterness and anger that the picture will never be the same. Or, we can hope for the spring that will surely come if we let it.

I know there are good things on the horizon. Winter can't last forever. If those things turn out to be less than we hoped, we will simply have to make whatever we get into something livable. Perhaps that is the secret to melting winter into spring. The challenge is to always carve out something beautiful from the icicle. There is joy in living, if we allow time in the winter to reassemble the thousand-piece puzzle.



Possibilities

The New Year is upon us and with its arrival are the usual concerns surrounding New Year's Resolutions. It has become popular over the years to take inventory, and consequently make a list of those things that we are going to finally try to accomplish during the new year. The list invariably includes all those intentions we have never been successful in keeping in the past before but somehow feel we might have more resolve this time around. Resolutions are tough and often too harsh. When we look at the list of "never done" and try to muster up a me list of "to do", the attempts seem discouraging and downright overwhelming. Should we really try again? The loss of our child has surrounded us with a grief that is encompassing, and draining. Do we really care about well-intentioned resolutions?

This year I decided to try a new approach. Instead of resolutions, I am going to take a serious look at possibilities. The more I thought about it the more attractive a list of possibilities became. Possibilities are neither harsh nor burdensome, but rather they have an air of lightheartedness about them. On some level they present an invitation to open a door to wishful, even wistful thinking while at the same time weaving a thread of reality. Possibilities captivate the spirit. They could be a real winner.

With possibilities there are no deadlines-no voice of doom to shout our lack of effort and accomplishment. Possibilities can be very simple with few demands but with amazing results and satisfaction. Defy normal convention and allow your imagination to wander. You might even want to be a little daring. Take a walk in the rain, soak up sunshine, take up painting, cook up a storm, renew a forgotten friendship, lie in bed till noon, stay awake until midnight and laugh with the late-night talk show hosts, to name but a few. The list is as long or as short as you wish it to be. Most important of all, possibilities are not threatening. They invite us to consider and then explore. This is only a beginning. Be childlike. Jump right in. In this New Year I wish you Happy Possibilities.

Rosemari Clogher
TCF Shoreline Chapter, Northford, CT.



Learning How to Smile Again

When my daughter died, the pain was so overwhelming, the thought that I could ever feel any ounce of happiness again seemed ridiculous. In those early days of grief, the mere idea of being happy didn't just feel impossible, it felt *wrong*.

During the first year after her death, I recall an evening when my husband insisted I sit down with him and our three boys and watch a funny show on TV that we had watched regularly as a family for years. My husband was able to recognize that in the wake of their sister's death, our boys needed life to return to as "normal" as possible in order for them to cope and feel safe, and that didn't just mean regular daily routines – it meant a return to the personal interactions with us that they had been used to. Begrudgingly, I sat down to watch the show. During the show, something was so funny that for the first time since her death, I actually felt the urge to laugh. Instead of laughing, I actually bit the inside of my cheeks to force myself NOT to smile. At that time, the idea that I could ever be happy again felt like a betrayal of my daughter.

The logic (or lack thereof) went something like this: if I allowed myself to be happy, it would mean that I was okay with the fact that she had died. Looking back, I think the self-imposed state of misery served several purposes.

First, it was a matter of basic survival. The pain of losing a child is so overwhelming and so intolerable; many people say they feel numb early on. I think it is similar to the body's natural defense mechanism of passing out while experiencing physical pain that is completely overwhelming. When the initial numbness started to wear off after about three months after her death, I tried to maintain it by suppressing my emotions. Since I couldn't pick and choose, that meant trying to suppress ALL emotions, not just the pain and guilt. In reality, this misguided effort only suppressed everything BUT the pain and guilt.

Second, when my daughter died, life as I knew it ended. I was living in a world that suddenly felt alien and intolerable. Not only did I feel like I could never be happy again, I felt outright angry that people around me were happy. To smile, laugh, and have fun again felt like it would mean that there was no longer the possibility that I would wake up from this nightmare I was in. It would mean that I would have to accept that she really *did* die and life really *did* go on without her.

In a convoluted way, the pain had become the biggest connection I had to my daughter. I could no longer see her, touch her, hold her, or hear her sweet voice. Family and friends stopped talking about her because it had become too painful for them. The pain of missing her was what kept her present in my thoughts almost every minute of my waking hours. It's what I talked about at the support groups I went to. Talking about her was painful because she was no

longer here, but it meant I was still talking about her and acknowledging the continuing importance of her place in my life and in my heart.

Before my daughter died, I had heard several times the old adage that those who have died wouldn't want to see their surviving loved ones living in sorrow and misery. I don't think I fully understood or appreciated what that meant until I was faced with it myself. Sorrow and pain will come no matter what. However, we can unknowingly allow ourselves to get stuck in it because it may feel like the only connection we still have to the loved one we lost.

Over time, the notion of happiness as a betrayal of my daughter faded. At some point, I gave myself permission to smile and to be happy again. I don't think there was any specific moment I can pinpoint, but instead, it was a slow realization that life was going to go on without her physically here whether I liked it or not. It helped that I still had four other children – one born after she died – and the joy and happiness that they bring into my life is undeniable. The pain of losing her has not gone away, but it does not occupy as much room as it once did. Just like I have chosen to allow myself to smile and be happy again, I have chosen to focus less on my daughter's death and more on the happy memories of my daughter's life. I choose love and happiness, and can't think of a better way to honor her memory.

Maria Kubitz
TCF Contra Costa County, CA
In Memory of my daughter, Margareta



On Gratitude

My feet were cold from the icy pavement as I waited for the morning bus. The bitter winter was receding and I was working hard on gratitude. I bent my head deeper into my scarf and saw a penny in the street.

I had just returned from a regional meeting of The Compassionate Friends in Green Bay, Wisconsin. A presenter held up his 'Pennies from Heaven' and declared that signs from our loved ones are everywhere. I wonder...

I picked up that penny and found my reading glasses.

I work on gratitude with some skepticism. Was this a treasure or just a muddy little coin? The date imprinted in the copper became clear—1983—the year my son was born.

Surprise and tears triggered by that date immediately washed across my face. I no longer felt cold. I meandered through memories of a day in July some 20+ years ago when I delivered that child.

“Collect yourself,” I said to myself under my breath. I might scare my mass transit bus mates. In the cold air I turned my face away from the others and watched my breath puff into icy clouds.

The bus appeared and I boarded with everyone else. I was a penny richer that day and grateful beyond measure for the treasure trove of memories that lay in my hand.

Monica Colberg
TCF Minneapolis, MN
In Memory of my son Art



NOW I KNOW...

I never knew, when you lost your child,
What you were going through.
I wasn't there, I stayed away,
I just deserted you.

I didn't know the words to say,
I didn't know the things to do.
I think your pain so frightened me,
I didn't know how to comfort you.

And then one day my child died.
You were the first one there.
You quietly stayed by my side,
Listened, and held me as I cried.

You didn't leave, you didn't go.
The lesson learned is...
NOW I KNOW!

Alice Kerr
TCF Lower Bucks, PA



Phone Friends

All of the people on the following list are bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. They understand what you are going through and have all wished to be included in this list in the hope that anyone who needs to talk will reach out to them. They are willing to talk with you at any time you need their support. Some have listed the specific area in which they have personal experience but they do not intend to imply that that is the only topic they wish to talk about. We all have experienced this journey through grief and it encompasses much more than the specifics surrounding our individual loss. Having a compassionate person to listen when you are having a bad day or just need someone to reach out to when you feel overwhelmed can make the difference in getting through one more day. We have all been there and understand, please feel free to contact any one of us.

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