



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

May-June 2017

Chapter Leader: Theresa Phillips

24-Hour Help Line: (816)229-2640

Private Facebook Page: Eastern Jackson County TCF

Website: www.easternjacksoncounty tcf.org

TCF National Headquarters

PO Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522

Website: www.compassionatefriends.org

630-990-0010

Why You Didn't Fail As A Mother

by Angela Miller *Still Standing Magazine*

I have to tell you this. You didn't fail. Not even a little.

You are *not* a horrible mother.

You didn't *choose* this. You didn't *want* this to happen. You didn't do anything *wrong*. It just happened. *To you*. Despite your begging, pleading, praying, hoping against all hope that it would not. Even though everything within you was screaming, *no no no no no*.

God didn't do this to you to punish you, smite you, or to teach you a lesson. That is not God's way. You could not have prevented this if you tried harder, prayed harder, or if you were a "better" person. Nor if you ate better, loved harder, yogaed more, did x, y, z to the nth degree— fill in the blank with any other lie your mind devises. You could not have prevented this even if you could have predicted the future like *no one can*.

No, there is nothing more you could have done. You did everything you possibly could have. And you are the best mother there is because you would have done absolutely anything to keep your child alive. To breathe your last breath instead. To choose the pain all over again just to spend one more minute together. That is the ultimate kind of love. You are the *ultimate* kind of mother.

So wash your hands of any naysayers, betrayers, or those who sprinted in the other direction when you needed them most. Wash your hands of the people who may have falsely judged you, ostracized you, or stigmatized you because of what

happened to you. Wash your hands of anyone who has made you feel *less than* by questioning everything you did or didn't do. Anyone whose words or looks have implied this was somehow your fault.

This was *not* your fault. This will *never* be your fault, no matter how many different ways someone tries to tell you it was.

Especially if that *someone* happens to be you. Sometimes it's not what others are saying that keeps us shackled in shame. Sometimes you adopt others' misguided opinions and assumptions. Sometimes it's your own inner voice that shoves you into the darkest corner of despair, like an abuser, telling you over and over and over again you failed as a mother. Convincing you *if only* this and *what if* that, it would never have happened. Saying you *coulda, shoulda* done *this or that* so your child would not have died.

That is a lie of the sickest kind. Do not believe it, not even for a second. Do not let it sink into your bones. Do not let it smother that beautiful, beautiful light of yours.

Instead, breathe in this truth with every part of yourself: *You are the best damn mother in the entire world*.

No one else could do what you do. No one else could ever mother your child as well as you can, as well as you *are*. No one else could let your child's love and light shine through the way you do. No one else could mother your dead child as well as bravely. No one else could carry this unrelenting burden as courageously. It is the heaviest, most torturous burden there is.

There is no one, no one, *no one* who

could ever, *ever* replace you. *No one*. You were *chosen* to be your child's mother. *Yes— chosen*. And no one could parent your child better in life or in death than you do. You have within you a sacred strength.

You are the mother of all mothers.

So breathe mama, keep *breathing*. Believe mama, keep *believing*. Fight mama, keep *fighting*, for this truth to uproot the lies in your heart— *you didn't fail*. Not even a little.

For whatever it's worth, I see you. I hear your guttural sobs. I feel your ache deep inside my bones. And it doesn't make me uncomfortable to put my fingers as a makeshift Band Aid over the gaping hole in your heart until the scabs come, if and when they do.

It takes invincible strength to mother a child you can no longer *hold, see, touch or hear*. You are a superhero mama. I see you fall down and get up, fall down and get up, over and over again. I notice the grit and guts it takes to pry yourself out of bed every single day and force your bloodied feet to stand up and keep walking. I see you walking this path of life you've been given where every breath and step apart from your child is a physical, emotional and spiritual battleground. A fight for your own survival. A fight to quiet the insidious lies.

But the truth is, you haven't failed at all. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

You are the mother of *all* mothers.

Truly the most *inspiring, courageous, loving* mother there is— a warrior mama through and through. For even in death, you lovingly mother your precious child still.



Mother's Day... For all Bereaved Moms

A day of joy and celebration for all mothers on this earth who love their children unconditionally from adoption or from birth

This love lasts a lifetime but if your child should die the day is marked with sadness stained with tears that you will cry

God bless you special mothers who children have donned wings our thoughts are with you this bittersweet day and the melancholy that it brings

No matter how many years will pass your heart will ache with yearning for a hug from those special arms to ease the pain that you are enduring

Remember you were the lucky one who knew your child the best and though they are not physically here today their love still lays within and without your breast

I will not wish you a Happy Mother's Day Nor will I ignore your silent pain But I will say: Your love lives on dear mother Just as your child's love too remains.

-Mitch Carmody

Our Special World

Sometimes the need to see your face Becomes so incredibly strong, A panic seems to overtake me And I know that something is wrong.

The heart beats faster and the stress increases. There is only one thing I can do. Closing my eyes, I take a breath And bring your sweet face into view.

Slowly exhaling, my muscles relax As I enter our own special place Where I can look at you and you are safe In a world with a much slower pace.

There is comfort in our special world Where there is just quiet, and you, and me. It lifts my spirits and calms me down. It is filled with serenity.

So, if people should see me lean back And suddenly close my eyes, They might think I was sleepy and taking a nap, But they would be in for a surprise.

For I am just going to visit my baby In a special world they cannot see. A secret place to which I can escape Where there is just quiet, and you, and me...

PAULA GROSSMAN

Daddy, Fix It

A broken toy? Daddy, fix it.
Wagon broken? Daddy, fix it.
Dolly needs a new eye? Daddy, fix it.
Faucet leaking? Daddy, fix it.
Need new wall paneling? Daddy, fix it.
Anything need rebuilding or repair?
Daddy, fix it.

And why not?
Daddy has hundreds of different sized screws, nails, bolts, nuts & washers; he has all sizes of screwdrivers; he has all sizes of hammers from a 12-lb. sledge to a 3-oz. brad hammer; he has a brace and bit set, a hand drill, electric drills, all sizes of bits to go with the drills; he has several sets of wrenches, even some metric ones; he has cheap tools, and some very expensive tools, and he has books to tell him how to fix it.

If Daddy doesn't have the tool or the specialized knowledge, why the Ace Hardware Man or True Value Hardware or the Sears Roebuck Store... will have what he needs to fix it.

Except the last time. Oh, he still had all of his plain and fancy tools, all of the screws, nails, bolts and nuts, and all of his books. But even Ace, True Value and Sears couldn't help him—not this time.

Daddy, fix it.
Except the last time.
Death.
Daddy couldn't fix it.

--Tom Crouthamel, TCF, Englewood, FL

*Real grief is not healed by time.
If time does anything,
it deepens our grief.
The longer we live,
the more fully we become aware
of who he/she was for us,
and the more intimately we
experience
what their love meant to us.*
—Henri Nouwen

Some Thoughts on Rebuilt Engines

Most of us reading this newsletter have experienced the shattering of our human machinery upon impact with a child's death. Whatever helped us keep moving before, nothing works now. Our lives ground to a halt.

In the stillness of grief's long night, I despaired over trying to repair something that would always lack a vital part. How could I ever rebuild the machinery of my life without that precious part? Any repair work would require my permission and participation. Looking at the tangled, damaged parts of myself, I questioned how to salvage anything workable from the wreckage.

Eventually, blessedly, the desire to move again, to get back into life's traffic, got me doing something. At first it was tinkering, experimenting with the broken parts, imagining them whole again. Then I tried to learn by watching others who were rebuilding. It helped to read repair manuals, painfully written by people like me. The process was tedious and exhausting; there were setbacks, hidden costs, and false starts.

One surprising day my engine actually turned over—I moved a little. Before long, the motor sounded stronger. It almost seemed to hum, as I remembered it could. With persistence, I worked up to a decent speed, regained my sense of direction, and even began appreciating some sights along the way. I discovered that a rebuilt engine could carry me, despite the missing part. Occasionally it sputters, misfires, or floods, being sensitive to road hazards other drivers don't see. Some hills always seem too steep, certain roads have too many memories, or the fog is too thick to drive through. When necessary I slow down, make adjustments, or pull off the road temporarily.

I wanted to write about my experience out of gratitude. Each of us has our own long night of grief

and our own reawakening from it. The mystery of healing defies simple explanation. Do invisible hands help us in the healing process? I don't have an answer, just astonishment at the process which moved me from the tangled wreckage of myself to a sturdy rebuilt that appears whole, even though it isn't.

--Joan Page, TCF, Miami, FL

From Lament for a Son

It's the neverness that is so painful. Never to be here with us, never to sit with us at table, never to travel with us, never to laugh with us, never to cry with us, never to embrace us as he leaves for school, never to see his brothers and sister marry.

All the rest of our lives we must live without him. Only our death can stop the pain of his death. A month, a year, five years—with that I could live. But not this forever.

I step outdoors into the moist, moldy fragrance of an early summer morning, and in arm with my enjoyment comes the realization that never again will he smell this.

*As a cloud vanishes and is gone,
so he who goes down to the grave
does not return, He will never come
to his house again; his place will
know him no more*
(Job 7:9-10)

One small misstep and now this endless neverness.

--Nicholas Wolterstoff

I Would if I Could

I would if I could, sing my song of love for you with the voice of a golden throated song bird, each perfect note made soulful by haunting harmony.

I would if I could, build a monument of love so magnificent that it would dwarf the Grand Canyon and outlive the tombs of Tut and Cheops. It would glisten white in a midday's sun and shimmer in the pale light of a May full moon.

I would if I could, paint a picture of love with bold strokes...with paints that hint of pride and happiness and admiration. The hues

would stain the canvas as the brush adds the texture...guided by my love for you ...a masterpiece.

I would if I could...but I can't. But what I can and will do, is live my life in such a way as to reflect the love I have for you. I appreciate life and love so much more because of you, and I will be tender and attentive, supportive and loving, grateful and joyous...all because you have touched my life in just this way, my son.

And I hope that people will be able to see you through me, and that I may touch them as you have touched me. I love you, my son. I miss you, my son, and you will live forever...in me.

--Quinino J. Galvez, TCF Central Coast, CA

No Vacation

There is no vacation from your absence. Every morning I awake, I am a bereaved parent.

Every noon I feel the hole in my heart.

Every evening my arms are empty.

My life is busy now, but not quite full. My heart is mended, but not quite healed.

For the rest of my life every moment will be lived without you. There is no vacation from your absence.

--Kathy Boyette, MS Gulf Coast Chptr
TCF

You're Here, Now You're Gone

You're here.

Now you're gone.

It went just that fast.

Where'd it begin? Where'd it end?

Like a flash of lightning in the sky.

So bright and full of life.

Now gone and full of emptiness.

How'd it start? Why didn't it stop?

No one knows, but everyone cares.

Your spirit is flowing in the air.

You're not here, but you'll never be gone.

You will always rise with the morning dawn

You hold my heart

It will never be torn apart.

... by Catherine Ludlow, in memory of her sister,
Cynthia, who died by suicide on June 24,
1993.

Reprinted from *Obelisk*, Vol. 15, No. 45, a publication of Catholic Charities LOSS Program,
Chicago, Illinois.

The Sandpiper

by Robert Peterson

She was six years old when I first met her on the beach near where I live. I drive to this beach, a distance of three or four miles, whenever the world begins to close in on me. She was building a sand castle or something and looked up, her eyes as blue as the sea.

"Hello," she said.

I answered with a nod, not really in the mood to bother with a small child.

"I'm building," she said.

"I see that. What is it?" I asked, not really caring.

"Oh, I don't know, I just like the feel of sand."

That sounds good, I thought, and slipped off my shoes.

A sandpiper glided by.

"That's a joy," the child said.

"It's a what?"

"It's a joy. My mama says sandpipers come to bring us joy."

The bird went gliding down the beach. Good bye joy, I muttered to myself, hello pain, and turned to walk on. I was depressed, my life seemed completely out of balance.

"What's your name?" She wouldn't give up.

"Robert," I answered. "I'm Robert Peterson."

"Mine's Wendy... I'm six."

"Hi, Wendy."

She giggled. "You're funny," she said. In spite of my gloom, I laughed too and walked on. Her musical giggle followed me.

"Come again, Mr. P," she called. "We'll have another happy day."

The next few days consisted of a group of unruly Boy Scouts, PTA meetings, and an ailing mother. The sun was shining one morning as I took my hands out of the dishwasher. I need a sandpiper, I said to myself, gathering up my coat.

The ever changing balm of the seashore awaited me. The breeze was chilly but I strode along, trying to recapture the serenity I needed.

"Hello, Mr. P," she said. "Do you want to play?"

"What did you have in mind?" I asked, with a twinge of annoyance.

"I don't know. You say."

"How about charades?" I asked sarcastically.

The tinkling laughter burst forth again. "I don't know what that is."

"Then let's just walk."

Looking at her, I noticed the delicate fairness of her face. "Where do you live?" I asked.

"Over there." She pointed toward a row of summer cottages.

Strange, I thought, in winter.

"Where do you go to school?"

"I don't go to school. Mommy says we're on vacation."

She chattered little girl talk as we strolled up the beach, but my mind was on other things. When I left for home, Wendy said it had been a happy day. Feeling surprisingly better, I smiled at her and agreed.

Three weeks later, I rushed to my beach in a state of near panic. I was in no mood to even greet Wendy. I thought I saw her mother on the porch and felt like demanding she keep her child at home.

"Look, if you don't mind," I said crossly when Wendy caught up with me, "I'd rather be alone today." She seemed unusually pale and out of breath.

"Why?" she asked.

I shouted, "Because my mother just died!," and thought, My God, why was I saying this to a little child?

"Oh," she said quietly, "then this is a bad day."

"Yes," I said, "and yesterday and the day before and—oh, go away!"

"Did it hurt?" she inquired.

"Did what hurt?" I was exasperated with her, with myself.

"When she died?"

"Of course it hurt!" I snapped, misunderstanding, wrapped up in myself. I strode off.

A month or so after that, when I next went to the beach, she wasn't there. Feeling guilty, ashamed, and admitting to myself I missed her, I went up to the cottage after my walk and knocked. A drawn looking young woman with honey colored hair opened the door.

"Hello," I said, "I'm Robert Peterson. I missed your little girl today and wondered where she was."

"Oh yes, Mr. Peterson, please come in. Wendy spoke of you so much. I'm

afraid I allowed her to bother you. If she was a nuisance, please, accept my apology."

"Not at all --she's a delightful child." I said, suddenly realizing that I meant what I had just said.

"Wendy died last week, Mr. Peterson. She had leukemia. Maybe she didn't tell you."

Struck dumb, I groped for a chair. I had to catch my breath.

"She loved this beach, so when she asked to come, we couldn't say no. She seemed so much better here and had a lot of what she called happy days. But the last few weeks, she declined rapidly..." Her voice faltered, "She left something for you, if only I can find it. Could you wait a moment while I look?"

I nodded stupidly, my mind racing for something to say to this lovely young woman. She handed me a smeared envelope with "MR. P" printed in bold childish letters. Inside was a drawing in bright crayon hues, a yellow beach, a blue sea, and a brown bird. Underneath was carefully printed:

"A SANDPIPER TO BRING YOU JOY."

Tears welled up in my eyes, and a heart that had almost forgotten to love opened wide. I took Wendy's mother in my arms. "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry," I uttered over and over, and we wept together. The precious little picture is framed now and hangs in my study. Six words—one for each year of her life—that speak to me of harmony, courage, and undemanding love.

A gift from a child with sea blue eyes and hair the color of sand—who taught me the gift of love.

NOTE: This is a true story. It happened over 20 years ago, and changed Robert Peterson's life forever... This week, be sure to give your loved ones an extra hug, and by all means, take a moment...even if it is only ten seconds, to stop and smell the roses. Never brush aside anyone as insignificant. Who knows what they can teach us?

I wish for you, a sandpiper.

There are many tears in the heart
that *never reach the eyes.*

-author unknown



Summer Time, Vacation Time, Family Time

I'll bet you never dreamed that there would ever be a time in your life when you would not welcome vacation from work...and the day-to-day hassles of routine living. It's probably a shocker to you that the slow pace of summer, cookouts, softball games, etc., are now a nightmare. Everywhere we go, there are kids out of school enjoying their leisure time, and our bodies jolt as we search for our own absent child who enjoyed this time of the year with a passion!

Surrounded by summer fun, a bereaved parent needs only look around and there are painful memories at every corner. When we are faced with all the living, loving, happy families with their children, the anger boils within and we feel very cheated. And this year we are afraid to go back to the beach cottage we've visited every year, or to the favorite mountain retreat where we laid around for a week and relaxed, or the amusement park where the kids had to ride every ride and see every attraction, no matter what the temperature was. Yes, fear of our memories, fear of too much time to think, fear of too many kids, fear of bursting inside from our pain...all of these feelings are part of the first few years of summer vacations for bereaved parents.

It's been nine years now for me, and I need to tell you that it will get easier, but I found that for the first few years I needed to consciously change some of my routines in order to deal with my fears. I could not visit the same

places we had visited when Todd was with us. We tried new experiences in new places with new people. That isn't to say there weren't some down times; however, the faster paced vacations worked better for us. I could not allow myself too much time to think. I enjoy those weekends away now, but for the first few summers I had to dig in the yard, repaint lawn furniture, rearrange the garage, and the multitude of busy projects we'd been putting off for the lack of time. That was a better vacation for me than forcing myself to go somewhere and feel miserable.

You've read it a hundred different times, you have to find your own way and your own peace—leave yourself room to escape if it becomes necessary. If you can find any enjoyment and relaxation, relish it...you deserve it, and it does not mean you don't care. It simply means you are healing. Now I walk down the beach and enjoy the solitude, or laugh when I see a toddler, or listen to the joy of kids laughing, and it warms my heart. Yes, I miss him, but I know he enjoyed every minute of this season, and I know that's what he'd want for me... and thank God, I can do it once more!

--Brenda Holand, TCF, Concord, NC

Guilty as Sin

A father's supposed to shield and protect his children from harm. Because of this I've tortured myself facing up to the fact that my child is dead and I'm still alive. Was it punishment for some long past sin? Why didn't I warn him? I should have known.

I might have prevented it if I had been there.

At least he wouldn't have died alone.

At rare times when I laugh,

I'm full of shame for having fun.

I can easily see that logically I am not to blame,

but I can't convince my psyche and me.

In times of reflection I wonder why, if God can forgive me, then why can't I?

--Dr. Richard A. Drew,

in "Rachel's Cry—A Journey Through Grief"

Memories of Our Children Are Like a Rose

When a child dies, our memories are held tightly with lots of pain.

Just like the tightly folded petals of the rose bud with the many thorns to stick and prick causing pain.

As we talk about our child and share memories with others, we begin to open ourselves to healing as the rose petals start too open ever so gradually.

Just as a rose becomes more beautiful as it blooms, so do the memories of our child.

Yes, the thorns are still there and will hurt when touched.

But oh, how beautiful the rose and oh, how beautiful the memory of our children!

Share the memory of your child so that memory can start to bloom to become as beautiful as the rose.

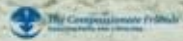
--Julie Timmerman, TCF, Tulsa, OK

The Class Ring

Next to the door he paused to stand, as he removed the class ring from her hand. Those who watched could not speak, as they saw the tears flow down his cheek. They watched in awe and awkward fear, when he whispered "I love you" in her ear. With the ring on his finger, he kissed her goodbye, then turned away and began to cry. The doorway swung open to let the wind blow, as they carried the casket into the snow.

--Bereaved Sibling, Author Unknown

Whether you are experiencing your first family vacation without your child, grandchild or sibling or your 41st, it can be a very difficult time. Do we return to the familiar places where we have memories or new places making new traditions. It is a hard decision for most. Some families decide it is too difficult to do either. We are changed forever after the death of a child. Those that are non-bereaved may not understand how the death penetrates to your very core and the simplest things become mountains. --Karen Cantrell, TCF-Frankfort, KY



Butterfly Dream

Last night I dreamed of butterflies;
It was a most glorious sight.
Like beautiful feathers in the wind,
they left no footprints on the night.

Against my wishes, I awoke
To a morning filled with sadness,
Remembering the time had passed
When they sipped my blooms with gladness.

But they didn't leave me empty handed;
I had sweet memories to treasure
Of the too few days they spent with me,
Giving me joy too great to measure.

They landed softly on each flower,
And sipped sweet nectar from each one,
Knowing each was filled with goodness
They would not sleep 'til day was done.

A butterfly's wise in butterfly ways,
He can sense the coming of winter's
night.

Nature has told him the time has come
For sweet goodbyes and his final flight.

--Bernice Maddux, Weatherford,
TX, in loving memory of
good friend and butterfly expert,
Tom Allen.

© Birds and Blooms. Reprinted with
permission.

Memorial Day

My first Memorial Day after my son died in December was one I look back on with deep sadness but also with hope. Anticipating the arrival of Memorial Day nearly put me over the edge. The thought of decorating

Shannon's grave was incomprehensible. For days I couldn't sleep, and I couldn't think of any ceremony that could help me get through this holiday.

I woke up very early on Memorial Day and decided I wanted some time alone at the cemetery before other family members arrived. As I pulled up beside Shannon's grave, I felt so empty & alone. I managed to get out of the car and walk over to his grave. I had not gotten a headstone yet; I couldn't bear the thought. It seemed so final, something I was unable to deal with at that time. Seeing the marker from the funeral home staring back at me brought the tears flowing. Reading those words, "Shannon Foster, 1972-1990," forced me to accept the reality—Shannon was gone. Never again would I hold him or see him.

My heart ached for all I would never know. I closed my eyes as I tried to find strength from within. Suddenly I felt a presence, someone's arms around me. A warmth came over me as I realized somehow Shannon was there. I kept my eyes closed as I talked aloud to the son I so desperately needed to see. I know Shannon could hear me and was helping me through this unbearable day. As I opened my eyes I felt his presence still beside me. As the sun came up that day I remained sitting by his grave, feeling once again close to my son.

--Judy Foster, TCF, Omaha, NE

The Graduation Party

You've been gone so long. I could not feel the spirit of you over my sadness. My grief was taking me further away from you.

Then you came to me. Just as I remembered you. Laughing, shining eyes. Moving so gracefully. So Alive. It made me happy just to look at you, for I hadn't seen you that clearly in years.

It would soon be your brother's graduation, and I wondered how I would get through it without crying for you. "YOU should be here... YOU should be part of this," I cried.

"HAVE A PARTY!" You bounced the words at me. "No," I said. "You were our party person." We could hardly have company over, especially without you egging us on. But as the days went by, those words continued to gnaw at me, or was it you?

Last night your brother graduated. We had a BIG party...lots of friends, lots of laughter, lots of memories and YOU. The banner, the balloons, all were touches from you. For a while you were back with us. It felt so good.

--Lynn Kulp, TCF, Sonoma County, CA

For Remembrance dates please visit our website at

www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org

Find us on Facebook at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1582699755290182>

We have several volunteers who write remembrance cards to families on birthdays and death dates. Just a reminder if you have an address change please email phillipsplace@aol.com or mail a note to TCF, P.O. Box 2204, Independence, MO 64055 so the roster can be updated.

Please remember that you can give to The Compassionate Friends through your United Way pledge at work or as a single gift, but you MUST WRITE IT IN.

TCF asks for donations in memory of our children who have died. Our activities support the grief work of many families. We also work to educate members of our community about the grief process & how they can support bereaved parents.

Please help us help others. Make a LOVE GIFT today. Tax deductible Love Gifts may be sent to: TCF, P.O. Box 2204, Independence, MO 64055