



MAY - JUNE 2026

VOLUME XXIX, NUMBER 1

WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE



The “She Is Football” 5K took place on March 6, in and around the Tampa Bay Buccaneers training center. We got to walk through the stadium itself, which was such a neat experience. We all carry our children, siblings, and grandchildren’s names in our hearts. And yet, walking behind Peggy (bottom right in the photo above), there was something so moving about seeing the back of her shirt, reading her son RJ’s name: a visual reminder that we carry them in our heart and ‘sole’ with every step.



From left to right: Sylvia, KK’s mom; Peggy, RJ’s mom; Molly, Jackson’s mom; Tracy, Bailey’s mom; and Tim, Bailey’s dad.

Monthly Meetings

First Thursday of the month

NEW Location starting Nov 6
Brandon Christian Church
910 Bryan Rd
Brandon, FL 33511

Parking on Lumsden Rd side,
enter through doors under
covered walkway: Room 1

Time: 7 - 9pm

Third Thursday of the month

Virtually on Zoom:

[Click HERE to join](#)

Time: 7 - 9pm

Upcoming Events



TCF's 49th
National Conference

July 3 - 5, 2026
Baltimore, MD

for more information visit
compassionatefriends.org

Craft time

Florida summer is right around the corner, which means we will be taking a break from physical activity outdoors. We'll work on planing more 5Ks later in the year, when the temperatures get cooler once more.

In the meantime we have resumed our craft days. We eased into it with a Paint by Numbers painting of our own choosing, and continued our project in the second gathering. No pressure to finish, no need to feel you have to be creative.



Clockwise from left: Marcolina, Brandon's mom; Tracy, Bailey's mom; Kelly, Evan and Levi's mom; Peggy, RJ's mom; and Sylvia, KK's mom

"It's really nice to see people and feel comfortable taking your mask off in a lighter setting. It is proof that there is life after this tremendous loss."

Molly, Jackson's mom



Clockwise from left: Sylvia, KK's mom; Misty, Will's mom; Noah, Will's brother; Kelly, Evan and Levi's mom; Tracy, Bailey's mom; Lynn, Anthony's mom; and Peggy, RJ's mom

"I only got brave enough to come to the last 2 craft days. Somehow since the boys' death I often feel like I don't belong. I don't know why and I know it makes no sense. I am definitely challenged when it comes to anything artistic, but I have absolutely enjoyed getting together with everyone the last 2 times. You get to know each other on a whole different personal level. The laughter we share is so good for the soul and yet I know you all understand what I am walking through because we share that."

Kelly, Levi and Evan's mom



From left to right: Misty, Will's mom; Noah, Will's brother; and Kelly, Evan and Levi's mom



Lynn, Anthony's mom; and Peggy, RJ's mom

"Craft day for me early in my grief was another way to be around people that understood what I was feeling. There was laughing, and some tears, along with the simple crafts that we were working on. I was not sure about participating at first because my craft level is not expert, but I quickly found out that it wasn't really about the craft, it was about the companionship. Now I look forward to crafting with the group."

Tracy, Bailey's mom

Our next craft time is scheduled for May 16th. We will be painting rocks and bricks, no experience needed. We hope you will join us. Let Debbie or me (Sylvia) know so we can get you the details. Can't make it in May, but perhaps interested in joining in the future? Let me know and I can add you to our group text.



Speaking of painting rocks: this rock was given to my husband, Jim, because of the name "Kate" painted on it. Someone at his work who knew his story thought he would appreciate it. He very much did. "Kate" was one of KK's many names that people knew her by, and he was touched by his coworker's gesture. I loved the message on the back. I immediately went to the Facebook page listed. It turns out that, shortly after Kate Biedron's death, her sister started painting rocks and leaving them for others to find, asking them to post a photo. She was thrilled to hear from me and, after learning my story, asked me to keep the rock.

Adrian Grief Support's Substack

Three Therapists and a Dead Son

Kym Hinchey

Feb 28, 2026



I used to believe therapy after trauma would be safe, a quiet space with an 'expert' who could explain to you what was going on and how long it would last and how to get through it. I certainly thought it would be someone who understood that when your child dies, the rules of the world collapse.

That version of me had not yet met the Bottle of Wine and Doritos Era of grief.

My friend Marla told me, "You should write about that." She meant the Doritos. She meant the wine. She meant the therapists. She meant that strange stretch of time where nothing about me was normal, and yet every person I encountered kept approaching me from their normal.

Because when Adrian died, I did what many grieving parents do. I tried to find help. I tried to find someone who could sit across from me and understand that my son was dead and that my life had split into before and after. What I found instead were three very different versions of "normal."

The first therapist asked me about volunteer work.

I remember sitting there stunned, in that numb way that early grief produces. It felt as if she had asked me to consider training for a marathon while I was lying there on the ground with two broken legs. Volunteer work implied energy, ability- a version of me that could give something to someone else. But at that time, I was not even capable of answering text messages from people who loved me. Messages sat unopened because responding required language, language required coherence, and coherence required a functioning self.

I did not have a functioning self. I had a dead son.

I remember thinking, "Oh, you do not understand where I am." And she did not. Not because she was a bad therapist or lacked empathy, but because she was meeting me from her normal. In her world, grief could be eased by purpose. In my world, grief had demolished purpose entirely.

So I never went back.

CONTINUED

The second therapist spent over thirty minutes talking to me about addiction. This one was more complicated because addiction had been part of, a huge part of, my life for years. Adrian's addiction. I had read the books, attended the meetings, learned the language, navigated the chaos, sat with the fear, held hope, lost hope, found it again, and lost it again. Addiction was not foreign territory to me. This conversation felt like studying weather patterns after the hurricane has already destroyed your damn house.

The discussion of addiction was educational, perhaps helpful for someone trying to understand the concept. But I was not there for a lecture or to learn about addiction. I was there because my son had died from it. I remember thinking during that session that everything she was telling me was technically true and totally irrelevant, now. Again, she was meeting me from her normal. In her world, education could empower. In my world, education could not resurrect.

So I never went back.

The third therapist asked me about my diet and exercise.

I remember just staring at her for a second, trying to decide if this was real. My diet? At that point, my diet was a bottle of wine and Doritos. Not occasionally. Daily. That was the level of functioning we were working with. Wine took the edge off the scream trapped in my throat, always ready to burst out. Doritos did not ask anything of me. Cooking depended on energy and energy required a reason to care. But caring assumed a future I was not convinced I wanted. Doritos? Just open the bag ...and exist a bit longer.

The idea of discussing balanced meals and movement goals was so incredibly disconnected from where I was that it bordered on parody. In her world, diet and exercise supported mental health. In my world, just breathing was a huge win.

So... I never went back.

What I see now, years later, is not a series of failed therapists but a powerful illustration of what grief does to reality. Grief relocates you, not geographically but existentially. You are still standing in the same rooms, driving the same streets, seeing the same people, but your internal coordinates have shifted so drastically that conversations become mismatched radio frequencies. People speak from one station. You are receiving another. And please understand, neither side is wrong.

Those therapists were not careless or unkind. They were not grief-informed, as most people are not. They were operating from frameworks that help many people, frameworks rooted in functioning, healing, improvement, and forward movement. But acute grief does not operate inside those frameworks. Acute grief is not a problem to solve, not a behavior to correct, and not a lifestyle adjustment.

It is devastation.

This is something many griever's encounter, not just in therapy but everywhere. Friends offering advice. Family suggesting routines. Coworkers encouraging distraction. Well-meaning people attempting to pull you back into the world using tools that worked for them during ordinary hardship.

But grief is not ordinary hardship. It is waking up in a life that no longer matches the one you were living just yesterday. It is discovering that the Before Time is so far out of reach, it might as well be in a museum behind glass.

It is discovering that survival can look like wine and Doritos.

The phrase might sound flippant, but it is true. Survival in early grief looks nothing like the version of survival celebrated in self-help books. It is messy, confusing, ugly...and nutritionally questionable.

Yet, it is survival.

The bottle of wine and Doritos represented a moment in time where functioning was reduced to its most basic form for me. And in that place, I discovered one of the most painful aspects of grief- not just the loss itself, but the constant sense of being misunderstood within it. The feeling that others are standing on the shore shouting instructions while you are struggling to stay afloat in open water, in a hurricane, with weighted shoes. They are speaking from stability and “normalcy”- their normal. You are living inside absolute abnormality. And it is not because people do not care, but because their normal no longer aligns with yours. And here is the part I wish someone had told me then...

There is nothing wrong with being not normal after an abnormal loss.

Grief is not meant to be clean. It is not meant to be productive. It is not meant to look like functioning. The wine and Doritos were a season where my identity shattered, my ways disassembled, and my ability to do anything was drastically reduced. A season where survival looked different.

Eventually, life expanded again. My appetite returned. Wine lost its nightly appeal. Conversations started to become coherent. Slowly, painfully, the world became recognizable, even if forever changed. I found a wonderful therapist, and my sessions became helpful in ways they had not, could not have been, initially. But those early attempts taught me something very important about grief.

People meet you from where they are.

Therapists, friends, family, strangers, everyone approaches grief carrying their own experiences, beliefs, and coping strategies. They are not intentionally minimizing your reality. They are interpreting it through their own. This understanding does not erase the loneliness of those moments, but it softens the edges of perceived betrayal. It can let us reframe the experience- from abandonment to misalignment. And we should try to, because grief is already heavy enough without carrying resentment for every misunderstanding encountered.

Looking back now, I can see those three therapists as snapshots of normal colliding with devastation. Volunteer work represented purpose. Addiction education represented understanding. Diet and exercise represented functioning. All valid. All helpful in certain contexts. All profoundly out of sync with where I was. And that is the heart of this story.

Grief places you in a reality that others cannot fully enter unless they have lived there themselves. It is simply the nature of loss. Some experiences cannot be explained into understanding. They must be lived. And grief cannot be surmounted. It must simply be survived.

Sometimes survival looks quiet.

Sometimes it looks messy.

Sometimes it looks like wine and Doritos.

If you find yourself in your own version of the Wine and Doritos Era, I want you to know this. Your not normal is not wrong. Your reduced capacity is not failure. Your survival strategies are not moral reflections. They are all evidence that you are doing the impossible work of living in the aftermath of unfathomable loss. And that work rarely looks impressive from the outside.

But it is extraordinary.

Because continuing to exist in a life reshaped by death is one of the bravest things a human being can do.

Wine and Doritos and all.

ALWAYS WITH LOVE, WE REMEMBER THEM IN MAY

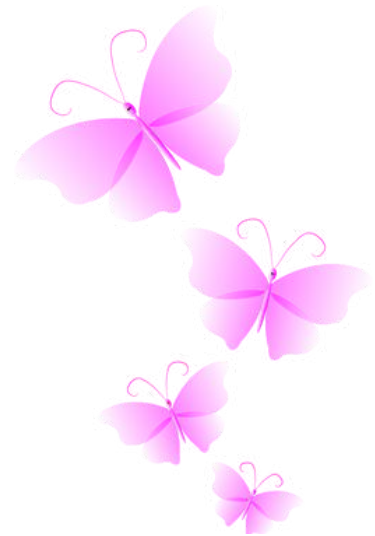
LIGHTING A CANDLE, CHERISHING A BIRTH...



Remembering them:

2 - Patrick Jernigan
 2 - Melanie Jenkins
 3 - Steven Messina
 4 - Meaghan
 4 - Tori Foody
 4 - Lois Kathleen
 4 - Nicholas A. Rodriguez
 8 - Wyatt Jax Mitchell
 8 - Kallie Robin Pierpoint
 9 - Nick
 9 - Lucy Skye Sobkowiak
 10 - Gabriel Hassan
 12 - Steven Cozzi
 15 - Michael
 16 - Maria
 18 - Zachery Willis
 19 - Nash Cole Baker
 20 - Lexi Ringo
 21 - Wesley Fields
 26 - Melissa Leigh Trotter
 26 - Joshua Emmanuel Williams
 27 - Alisha Gsell
 28 - Debbie
 29 - Ashton
 31 - Jessica Lynne Gravette

Debbie and David Rivera
 Krista and Milton Jenkins
 Debra and Steven Messina
 Russell and Shari Casady
 Mary Kay and EJ Foody
 Cindy R. Sampson
 Lauri and Artie Rodriguez
 Nyesha Mond
 Kristie and Karl Pierpoint
 Elaine Molyneux-Lehman
 Elizabeth and Jeremy Sobkowiak
 Mac and Carolyn Hassan
 Lois and George Cozzi
 Mary Ellen Holmberg
 Paulette and Michael Vroblefski
 Rhonda Willis
 Dylan Cole Baker (Brooke Case)
 Chrissy and Tim Ringo
 Kim Fields
 Robin Trotter
 Bridget and Jason Williams
 Christine and Tim Redfearn
 Marilyn Yarbrough
 Madeleine Tellekamp
 Pamela Gravette



Birthdays & Remembrances

Birthday and anniversary dates can be difficult times for families as they remember a loved one gone too soon. The days leading up to the date can often be harder than the actual day itself, while for some the days following can also be difficult.

Please take the time to reach out to those chapter members that have their child's birthday and/or anniversary in this newsletter and let them know they need not walk alone!

ALWAYS WITH LOVE, WE REMEMBER THEM IN MAY

LIGHTING A CANDLE, REMEMBERING A LIFE...



1 - Rebecca (Becca) Mitchell
3 - Joshua Ashley Weicheld
4 - Katelyn
4 - Ryan Casey
4 - Claudio
6 - Jeff Grace
7 - Curtis
8 - Kallie Robin Pierpoint
9 - Lucy Skye Sobkowiak
10 - Robert (RJ)
13 - Joseph Rodriguez
19 - Nash Cole Baker
21 - Alexandria (Allie) Trottman
24 - Zach Morris
24 - Brandon Dawson
24 - Evangeline Nellie Nolan
25 - Dayla
25 - Lauren Bailey Egleston
26 - J. Aaron Wolf
27 - Rachel
30 - Levi Godwin
31 - Bubba (James)

Remembering them:

John Mitchell
Gail Dudley
Diane King
Mike Casey
Carlos Sarmiento
Michael Grace
Laura Shepherd
Kristie and Karl Pierpoint
Elizabeth and Jeremy Sobkowiak
Maria and Bruce McGregor
Carmen Rodriguez
Dylan Baker (Brooke Case)
Deborah and Jerome Fulton
Kevin and Laura Morris
Leigh and Bill Dawson
Samantha Garcia and Cody Nolan
Dale Dintelmann
Tracy and Tim Egleston
Idaleah Rubin
Patricia O'Steen
Kelly Godwin
Janet Kist



Your first meeting

Attending your first TCF meeting can be difficult. Feelings can be overwhelming. We have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Please attend two or three meetings before deciding if TCF is right for you. There are no dues or fees. If you choose, you need not speak a word at a meeting. We are an international, non-denominational group, offering support and information to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents. We need not walk alone.



I want to take a moment to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Tracy Egleston, Bailey's mom. Tracy works behind the scenes for every single newsletter, meticulously gathering all the names of our children, siblings, and grandchildren, to be added to each newsletter, their birthdays and memorial dates for all of us to see and to remember.

The work that Tracy does is by far the most emotionally laden task of the entire newsletter. It is hard reading the names of those gone too soon, and the names of the ones left behind. It can bring along all kinds of deep feelings.

The months of May and June are especially fraught with emotions for her, as these two months hold both Bailey's sunset date as well as her birthday. And then of course there's Mother's Day.

So thank you, Tracy.

Thank you for pouring your heart into it time and again.

In memory of your daughter Lauren Bailey.

For all of us.

thank you

International Bereaved Mother's Day: A day to acknowledge loss moms

Click [HERE](#) for the full article

International Bereaved Mother's Day is a day of remembrance and support for mothers who have lost a child, and it is observed on the first Sunday of May each year. This day acknowledges the profound grief of losing a child, no matter the circumstances.

This year, International Bereaved Mother's Day will be observed on Sunday, May 3, 2026.

History of International Bereaved Mother's Day

Loss mom Carly Marie Dudley created International Bereaved Mother's Day. Carly Marie's son, Christian, was born still in 2007. After Christian's death, she began documenting her journey through grief through her blog, artwork, and grief projects and found a community of parents who experienced similar losses.

In 2010, CarlyMarie organized the first International Bereaved Mother's Day as a way to honor and validate the motherhood of those who have also experienced pregnancy and child loss. The day is now recognized around the world as a time to remember and support these beautiful mothers.

Importance of International Bereaved Mother's Day

Losing a child is one of the most devastating experiences a mother can go through. It can be a lonely and isolating experience, as many people do not know how to support someone who is grieving the loss of a child. International Bereaved Mother's Day allows mothers to connect with others who have gone through similar experiences, share stories, and offer comfort and support.

Carly Marie wrote about the importance of International Bereaved Mother's Day: "The traditional Mother's Day has proven to be an emotionally exhausting day for so many mothers around the world. Just because your child died does not mean that you are not a mother anymore. You are your child's mother forever, and people need to start recognizing this fact. On Bereaved Mother's Day each year, we come together to celebrate our connection, our babies and children, and our hope for the future."





Graduation Time

Sylvia Bosma, KK's mom

Here we are once again, the dreaded Graduation Time. And yet, this year feels different from the past four. Since 2021, the year in which KK would have graduated, I have avoided social media like the plague from about March until June. I simply could not handle the endless barrage of awfully happy posts, the constant expressions of pride and joy, celebrating the children that were still alive. Oh how I envied the parents that stood there, their arms around their child, beaming at the camera, a painful reminder of what would not be..

Now my youngest is a Senior and I am caught up in the excitement of celebrating his accomplishments, even though - because he happens to have Down syndrome - this looks different from a typical High school graduate. I find that I am enjoying this time, preparing all the things for a party that's unique to him, designing his invitation, taking my own photos of him. I find myself growing increasingly excited for him. And I am also kind of holding my breath, waiting for the other shoe to drop. Or will it?

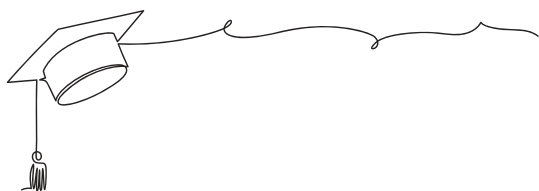
I have been conscious of my emotional state, evaluating my feelings regularly, scanning my emotions carefully. Eight years into life without my daughter have given me tools to help me get through 'grieffy' moments, and through the full out snotty-tears grief bursts. Time has not healed the pain of losing my child, but it has helped lessen the blows somewhat. Scheduling dedicated 'time with my daughter' in nature has allowed for my grief to take the wheel and drive my emotions during those moments, giving me a little more control over when and how grief shows up in everyday life.

Having said that, I am well aware of how grief can show up out of nowhere, particularly when I am in such a vulnerable place as I am now. So the answer is yes. the other shoe will drop. The one thing I can do is let grief in when she comes knocking, acknowledge her presence and give her the time she needs. I have learned that this approach is the best way to ride out those waves. Snotty tears and all.

In the meantime I am truly enjoying every minute of my son's journey, celebrating each tiny little moment as it comes my way. And I am thinking of ways to incorporate his sister into the celebrations, keeping her memory alive, having her present at her little brother's milestone.

Kaitlyn graduated Middle School in May of 2017, and her school went all out with a graduation ceremony. At the time I rolled my eyes at the whole thing. Of course their graduation is a cause for celebration, but did they really have to wear a cap and gown? It was too 'over the top' for me.

Now, of course, these memories are priceless. Her dad took this particular photo as she walked by, diploma in hand. He didn't mean to take a blurry photo, yet it is the perfect shot. I find it quite fitting, actually. It's as if she is looking at me from another dimension somehow. Oh, and that smile just melts my heart.



ALWAYS WITH LOVE, WE REMEMBER THEM IN JUNE

LIGHTING A CANDLE, CHERISHING A BIRTH...



Remembering them:



2 - Logan Scherer
5 - Brian Wilson
7 - William Johnston
8 - Catherine
9 - Alexandria (Allie) Trottman
9 - Veronica Greca
11 - Lukas
13 - Bryana Jael Michota
19 - Eve Hunter
22 - Marvin D. Lancaster III
24 - Lauren Bailey Egleston
27 - Ian Carlyse
28 - Dustin Snyder
28 - Claudio

Brooke and Jordan Scherer
Mary Wilson
Tammy and Brit Johnston
Christina Daws
Deborah and Jerome Fulton
Jessica Sanford
Katie and Dennis Squires
Dawn Michota
Melissa Hunter
Nina and Marvin Lancaster
Tracy and Tim Egleston
Tom and Lisa Carlyse
Cassandra Fondahn
Carlos Sarmiento

We sincerely apologize for any errors or omissions in our Special Days section.

To have your child, grandchild, or sibling remembered on these pages, or with any corrections, please call Debbie at 813 690-4448 or email her at TampaCompassionateFriends@gmail.com.

ALWAYS WITH LOVE, WE REMEMBER THEM IN JUNE

LIGHTING A CANDLE, REMEMBERING A LIFE...



Remembering them:

1 - Tristen Tae Yang Irvin

2 - Chastity Short

4 - Jackson

5 - Jenny Leigh

5 - Sean Puckett

5 - Jeffrey Harrison

5 - Kiara Brito

6 - Jeremi Brito

6 - RJ Bronson

7 - Justin

7 - Logan Uemura

9 - John

11 - Danny

15 - Brando

17 - Lillian

17 - Paula

19 - Natalia Iris Rivera

22 - Wesley Fields

23 - Maria Alvarado

23 - Legend Alfonso Johnson

23 - Johnathon Mitchell

26 - Cody

28 - Tim

29 - Jeff

30 - Jillian

Alexandria Medehue

Candice Stoutamire

Molly Liff and Erick Hayden

Vickie Skinner

Angela Puckett

Karol Harrison

Judy Caminero

Judy Caminero

Peggy Pruitt

Marilyn and Don Andreatta

Jamie Gou

Victoria and John Mitchell

Valerie Morris Rodriguez

Yolanda Lucena and Oswald Patino

Katie Reggi

Linda Dyer

Cynthia and Gabriel Rivera

Kim Fields

Becky Pratt

Wendy Davis

Sharon Ghebali

Bonnie Warfel

Sue Bensman

Sandy Kocab

Tom and Sylvia Johnson



Love Gifts



Consider making a Love Gift to support The Compassionate Friends. Your gift will help defray the cost of chapter expenses and allow us to provide outreach in our community related to the unique needs of those who are grieving the death of a child or grandchild. The Compassionate Friends is a 501c(3) non-profit organization and your donations are fully tax deductible. To make a love gift to the chapter, make the check payable to:

Tampa Bay Area Chapter of TCF
Debbie Rivera, Chapter Leader
310 Bryan Oak Ave
Brandon, FL 33511

To the dads grieving on Father's Day: We see you!

amemorygrows.org

Nothing can be said that can fix this pain or mend the hole in your heart that is the exact shape of your child. There is nothing that can be done to fill that void. But, what those of us who grieve our children who died want to tell you is this.

To the dads who grieve on Father's Day:

A day like today is bittersweet. It is a day of celebration and honor, a day set aside to say thank you, to you. But the one (or ones) who should be thanking you, giving you cards, presenting you with yet another tie, are not here. It is a day filled with what should be, but what is not. Of what could have been, but instead is so different.

What can we say on this day, where words fall short and no Hallmark card can express the depth of what this day holds? Nothing can be said that can fix this pain or mend the hole in your heart that is the exact shape of your child. There is nothing that can be done to fill that void. But, what those of us who grieve our children who died want to tell you is this.

We see you. We know you. We are here for you. We love you.

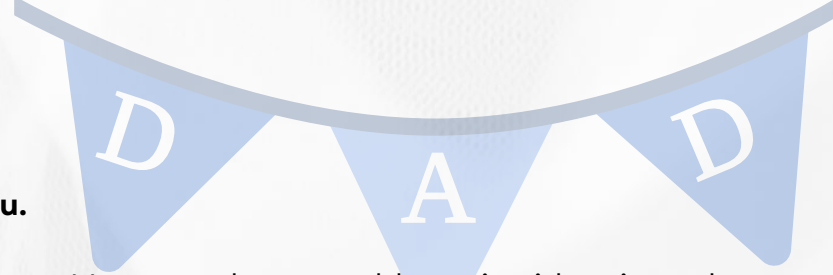
We see you.

The one with the brave face. The one who carries on about his days in the same way that he did before. The one who can compartmentalize and stay in the routine because that is what is comfortable. We also see you turn away and sometimes step aside. We see you take a deep breath and put your arm around your partner or go to lift the spirits of your other children because the way you see it, you need to be there for them; they are your priority. We see you putting others before yourself. We see you doing the best that you can, day after day. We see your passion. We see your hurt. We see your love.

We know you.

We know that behind that stoic smile and the way you go about your day, there is a heart that yearns for the child that you can not wrap your arms around. We know you feel like you must be the strong one, the one who thinks that you cannot break down because if you break down, who will be there for everyone else? We know you are the fixer, but now there is nothing about this that can be fixed.

We know you hurt; we also know our culture does not give you permission to know that it is OK to grieve and to show your feelings and speak how you truly feel. We know that when someone asks, "How are you?" you lie, because you know that the other person would likely be uncomfortable with your truth. We know you, and we know your heart is breaking but that your heart is also bursting with the joy of being your child's father. We know you, and we know this grief journey is anything but comfortable or easy.



We are here for you.

This is a lonely journey. Most people are unable to sit with pain, sadness, anger and uncertainty. But there are many who can and many who will. We want you to grieve in a way that is meaningful and helpful and in a way that allows for expression of all of your feelings, because they are real. It is OK to not be OK. You are living the unimaginable and yet it is your reality. You do not have to walk this road alone. We want to walk the journey with you. We want to remember with you. We want to listen, cry, sit with you and celebrate you because you are an incredible father.

We love you.

No one grieves the same. No one can fully understand how you feel because no one is you. You are often the overlooked one. After a child dies, most people focus on the mom while you are left to find your own way. But you are equally as important. Your feelings matter. Your relationship with your child matters and continues to matter. We may not be perfect in the way that we care for you but hear this: We love you.

No matter how long your child lived, we know that it never could have been long enough. Father's Day is a bittersweet day. But, you, you are a father, nothing in life or in death can take that from you. You are theirs and they are yours and that is something to celebrate today and every day.

Happy Father's Day.

DeAndrea Dare is the founder and executive director of A Memory Grows, a nonprofit in Fort Worth that provides retreats and special events for parents who are grieving the deaths of their children. She wrote this column for The Dallas Morning News.



and if I must love you
at this new distance
I will love you so fiercely
It will be felt in every universe
that lies between us.

~ Sara Rian

Thoughts on Empathy

Almost 2 years ago, after the birth of my granddaughter, there was a huge shift in the way I processed grief and my life. With her birth I was able to hear things I had heard in TCF meetings and conferences before, but was not ready to actually HEAR. I started seeing cardinals, dragonflies, rainbows, double rainbows (special to our family as a sign from KK and her cousin Bailey) and other signs long thought to be from departed loved ones.

It led me to a point where I could actually feel her presence and, on one fateful day, I “heard” her. She called me to be better. She told me that mama, Zander, Aaron and Amira needed me. That day my life changed. I was able to break out of the grasp that guilt had on me. For 6 ½ years I didn’t care if I lived or died. Any joy in my life was fleeting. I felt like I didn’t deserve happiness. I felt like I failed at the most important job that I had been given, to protect my baby girl.

Once I had experienced KK calling to me, I realized I had much to live for. I decided I would live to see Amira reach all the milestones I never would see KK reach. I lost 88lbs, stopped eating and drinking junk and began meditating. Meditation has been amazing for me. It has changed the way I handle my emotions and interactions. I have been able to visit KK at her happy place, the farm, while meditating, and communicate with her. My most regular, guided meditation is the Daily Calm by Tamara Levitt. The one on empathy brought me back to that time we, as grieving parents, have all shared where people say some of the dumbest things. Often, when difficult news is shared or revealed, we don’t know what to say and try to make it better with words.

Thing is, losing a child is not something that can be made better by words or anything else, for that matter. The best thing one can do is say “I don’t have any words, but thank you for sharing. You are not alone.” Or “tell me about her/him”. Connection with compassion, through shared experience, is the only medicine I’ve found that can soothe any part of my losing Kaitlyn. At first, I found that in her mother, then through TCF. Later Syl’s grief journey and mine took very different paths. Thankfully we could always share TCF. I believe we eventually found our way back to each other emotionally, but TCF always kept us connected in some way.

I have found it is nearly impossible to offer compassionate empathy, as a regular, natural part of your daily life when you lack compassion for yourself. As bereaved parents we become very close with guilt and what-ifs. I feel that we must find a way to forgive ourselves and give ourselves compassion. Only then can we be a beacon of hope for others that are struggling worse than we.

We will always struggle and it will never be ok. Every one of us would give anything to have our children back. We can, however, realize that they don’t want us to feel guilty. They want us to forgive ourselves and to treat ourselves with the compassion we offer others. There is a sense of peace that we can come to in our grief journey. A place we can get to that makes us better humans, able to provide a judgement free space for others to receive our compassion and empathy.

Jim Cook, KK’s dad

PARENTS

*Problems, dilemmas,
flat tires, dead lights,
father, the fixer,
making things right.*

*Scraped knees, hurt feelings,
a painful ordeal,
nurturing mother,
helping things heal.*

*When Death comes calling,
what will they do,
to cope with disaster,
and get themselves through*

*the Hell of their lives
going up in smoke,
and the healer is sick
and the fixer is broke?*

Richard A Dew, M.D.
TCF, Knoxville, TN
from Rachel's Cry

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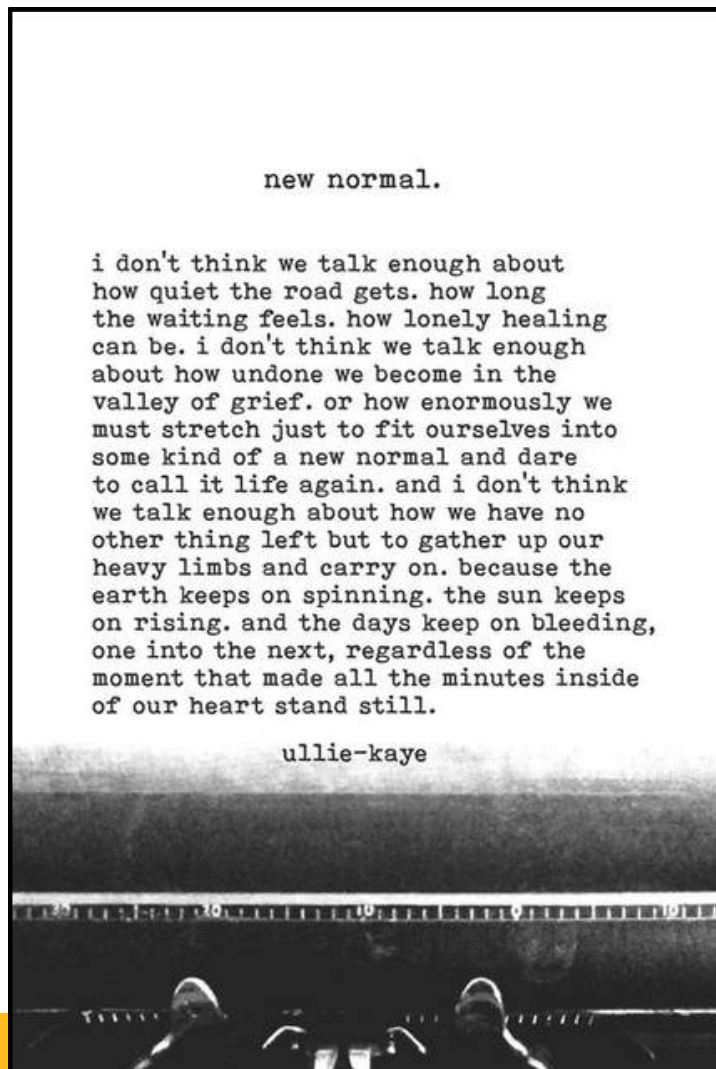
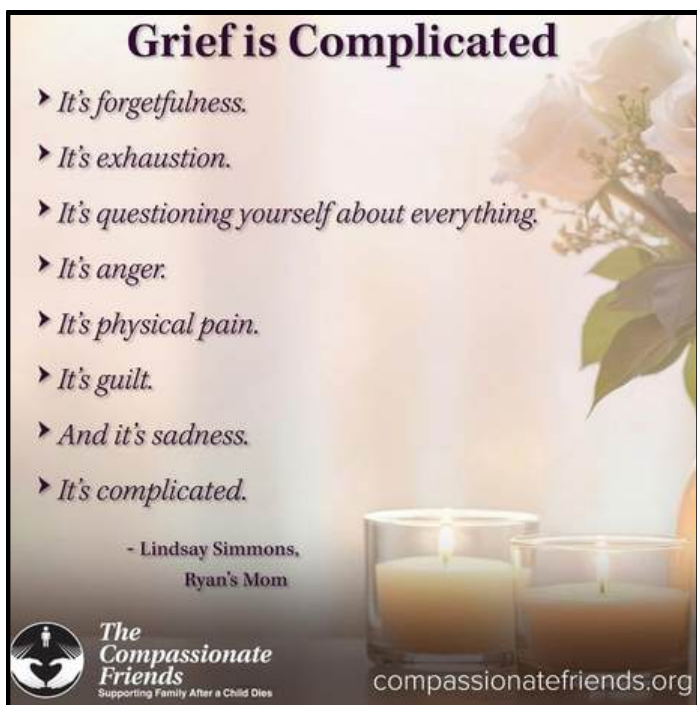
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notes from the editor

We will be back with book and podcast recommendations in the next newsletter. Until then, please take care of yourself.

Keep telling their stories.

Sylvia



Read Lindsey's article 'Grief is Complicated' along with many others in the Spring edition of our online TCF newsletter

We Need Not Walk Alone

Click on the above title for the link, or go to the Resources tab on the compassionatefriends.org website.

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Did you know that you can connect with both our local chapter and the National Organization online? Join the conversations at:

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