

Arlington Chapter

Springtime Thoughts

Our daughter, Erika died on April 10, 2011. It was a beautiful spring day, full of promise - a day starting with going to church, or so we planned. We were getting dressed for 8:30AM church. Oddly, a pastor I didn't know knocked on our door, saying he needed to talk with us. I told him we didn't have time to talk with him. He started to insist, and then I saw the policeman and paramedic behind him. He didn't need to say anything. Our daughter had been deep into her substance use disorder (SUD) for some time and we had feared it would kill her. So we knew what the pastor wanted to talk about. Our beautiful daughter had died. The worst day of our lives had started. There was no church for us that day, though much praying was done. We were pretty numb - I guess that is a self defense mechanism. The police offered to fetch our daughter's dogs - life goes on. That day we received a call from a doctor at the National Institute of Mental Health, asking us for permission to donate Erika's brain for research into SUD. We complied. Knowing how hard she had fought her disease, it was only right that we should allow her to help others through that research.

The next day we went to our daughter's house to begin the cleanup. The house was nearby. It had a large mortgage, so we were motivated to sell it ASAP. We had an estate sale that necessitated going through all her things and organizing them for the sale. So painful and odious! Erika's house had lots of belongings, but one item caught my eye, and I will never forget it. On her deck was a small tomato plant in a plastic container she had bought to plant outside. She always had a tomato garden in her yard, and she shared her tomatoes. She was planning for the future. That symbolizes the lost potential caused by her death. She was the best Auntie Mame style aunt to our granddaughters. They were very young when she died and will not see or know her now. She used her legal talents to help those who needed, but could not afford, legal help. She wrote grant applications for a charity that helped women coming out of prison to adjust to the free world. She had so much more to offer. Our pain is terrible. We miss her so.

Those of us left behind must figure out what to do now that our child has died. For me, I had to find a way to honor the heroic struggle Erika endured. Among other things,

I volunteer for a charity that supports those recovering from SUD that need rehab and can't afford it. We also have sponsored and participated in a workshop on Communication After Stigmatized Losses at the National TCF Conferences for several years (This also helps me heal.). Something good has to come from so much suffering and loss. To do otherwise is unacceptable to me.

Ron Byrd
Arlington, VA Chapter TCF

I Am Spring

I am the beginning.
I am budding promise.
I spill cleansing tears of life
from cloudy vessels
creating muddy puddles
where single cell creatures abide
and splashing children play.

I am new green growth.
I softly flow from winter's barren hand.
On gentle breeze I fly - embracing sorrow.
With compassion, we feather nests
where winged voices sing winter-spring duets.
As frozen ice transforms to playful stream
I whisper truth - life is change.

I am spring.
I bless long, dark wintry days.
I crown mankind's pain
with starry skies
in deepest night
lighting solitary paths from sorrow to joy
as the wheel of life turns 'round and 'round.

(written after attending a workshop presented by John Fox, author of 'Finding What You Didn't Lose' and 'Poetic Medicine'.)

Carol Clum

New Members

Mark & Barbara Bertolini, parents of Briana
Ricardo Calete, father of Rhys Ayrton and Rhae
Anissa
Carla, mother of Alejandra
Monika Platkoviska, mother of Aiden
Bob Thompson, father of Robert Rhys
Kelly Garrity, mother of Connor

Grief Work

Grief work is finding a way to put your loss into perspective and to weave your loss into the fabric of your life. It is allowing feelings, working through them, asking for and receiving comfort. It is remembering the good times and the bad and getting them in perspective. It is memorializing your loved one in your heart and/or in many other ways. It is honoring your loved one by going forward a better person for the gift of that person's life in your life no matter how brief. Simply, grief work is letting you go through the emotions and process of grief. Through is the only way out.

No two people ever grieve in the same way or on the same schedule. This is very hard for couples to fully grasp. Neither parent may have the energy to support the other. It takes a while to understand that our partner can't be there for us.

There is no right or wrong way to experience grief, but some ways are healthier and lead to more resolution. Many fight the emotions of grief, doing whatever it takes to "just be fine again". Others distract ourselves from our feelings by keeping busy, some simply ignore their feelings. It is crucial to grieve.

Tasks involved in grief work include the following:

1. To accept the reality of the loss: takes time, telling your story, think, talk about what has happened. Repeat this over and over.
2. To experience the pain of grief is not easy (an understatement). Grief requires us to turn inward.
3. Requires us to adjust to an environment in which your loved one is missing.
4. Requires us to withdraw our emotional energy and to reinvest it in another relationship with our child. Our "new normal"

These words sound very academic and, to me, unfeeling. But this is what we're doing on our grief journey. Takes a long time and lots of energy and dealing with emotions we thought we would never have to deal with.

Lois Copeland, TCF, Arlington, VA

Observing the Day

How do you observe the day your child, sibling, or grandchild died? We each find our own way to observe our child's Remembrance day. Many go to the cemetery, attend church, refrain from working, plan a special meal, light candles, set up an altar, special family time, or a time of seclusion.

Our family rented a house secluded in the mountains of West Virginia for several days. No television, radio, or telephone. We talk, reminisce, cook. Listen to music, read, hike, play games and just be. Since we go the end of January we always have a roaring fire going. This adds warmth, spirituality and serenity. On the day of David's passing we light candles and spend the day quietly. Some of us go to the cemetery.

The time together is not always peaceful: there may be tension or frayed nerves. We try to remember we are not in the same place in the grief process. This is especially important.

Our children (who are young adults) learned that winning at Scrabble is not always the longest words, but placement and strategy (taught by their father after many late night games). They also learned to play Bridge and Pinochle and increase their skill at Hearts.

Each year is different. The first two years was more emotional and intense. There are few rules; respect for one another and cooks don't do dishes. We plan ahead, but our emotions and mood set the tone for our stay.

Last year (2003) we bought the house in West Virginia and named it Shalom. Shalom means peace, hello and goodbye in Hebrew. David has never been to the house, but the home is infused with his spirit and presence. And there we found peace.

Update. We sold Shalom several weeks ago. Our life has changed, our children have moved on and we were spending less and less time there. Shalom was our sanctuary, especially during the early years. We mourned the loss of Shalom in a way like we mourned the loss of David.

Lois Copeland, TCF, Arlington, VA

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Our next meeting is **Thursday, April 12** at 7:30 pm at the Trinity Presbyterian Church. Doors open at 7:15. There will be a meeting for new parents.
2. Please join us. **Alan Pederson Concert April 12 at 7 pm** at the Trinity Presbyterian Church. Our regular meeting night. Concert is free, **but donations greatly appreciated.** Alan Pederson is an award winning speaker, songwriter and recording artist. His inspirational message of hope and his music have resonated deeply with those facing loss or adversity in their lives. Since the death of his 18 year-old daughter Ashley in 2001, Alan has traveled to more than 1,300 cities speaking and playing his original music. Alan served four years as the Executive Director of the Compassionate Friends. He is currently on the road with **The Angels Across the USA Tour**, where he will join us April 12. We always play his original song, **Precious Child** at our Candle Lighting Service. I have seen Alan perform any number of times and can't say enough about how beautiful and inspiring and uplifting his concert is.
3. **Annual Family Picnic and BBQ**, Saturday, June 10 at Lake Barcroft, Lake 5, from 1 – 4 pm.
4. **National Conference Registration and Hotel Registration is now open. Conference at the Marriott St. Louis Hotel. Hotel registration 800-397-1282. For conference information go to our National Website at: www.compassionatefriends.org.** Please consider attending. It can be life changing.



41st TCF National Conference
St. Louis, MO • July 27-29, 2018

NATIONAL AND LOCAL RESOURCES

National:

Survivors of Suicide:

www.suivivorsofsuicide.com

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:

www.afsp.org

(888) 333-2377

Friends for Survival:

www.friendsforsurvival.org. A national outreach program for survivors of suicide loss.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

(800) 273-8255 (TALK)

Parents of Murdered Children:

www.natipomc@aol.com

(888) 818-7662

Crisis Link: www.crisislink.org

(703) 527-4077

SHARE (pregnancy & infant loss support):

www.nationalshareoffice.com

(800) 821-6819

M.I.S.S. Foundation: www.missfoundation.org.

Support following the death of a child. Local contact, Roberta Quick, 703-728-8446. Meets the 2nd Tuesday of the month.

SIDS/SUIDS: www.sids.org. Information on SIDS and support after a child has died from SIDS

CJ Foundation for SIDS: www.cjsids.org.

Supports grieving families following the death from SIDS.

Bereaved Parents of the USA: National organization helping families who have lost children. www.bereavedparentsusa.org

GriefNet: www.griefnet.org. Online support group of persons dealing with grief, death and major loss.

The Grief Tool Box: www.thegrieftoolbox.com
Resources to help with grief.

Good Grief: www.goodgrief.org. Educate and provide programs children, young people and adults challenge by loss and change

www.thebereavementjourney.com

www.griefwatch.com

www.journeyofhearts.org

www.healingheart.net

Alive Alone: Support for bereaved parents whose only child or children have died.

www.childrenofdome.com

www.spacebetweenbreaths.com

www.holdingontolove.com

www.griefhaven.com

Local:

Washington Regional Transplant Community:

www.beadonor.org

(703) 641-0100

Haven of Northern Virginia:

www.havenofnova.org. Email:

info@havenofnova.org.

(703) 941-7000

MIS/Share: www.misshare.org.

Contact: 703-647-0911 or

support@misshare.org.

St. Luke's United Methodist Church

7628 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA

Meets the 2nd Thursday of every month,

7:30-9:30 p.m.

MIS/Share, 301-460-6222 (24 hr. info Line) for VA also

Contact: Diane DelGrasso and Cubby LaHood

Meetings at Holy Cross Hospital, Silver Spring, MD

William Wendt Center for Loss and Healing:

www.wendtcenter.org.

4291 Connecticut Ave., Suite 300,
WDC, 20008, 202-624-0010,

E-mail: info@wendtcenter.org.

WHY I ATTEND THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Why do I go to the TCF National Conference?

Attending the National Conference is similar to spending the weekend with your child, sibling or grandchild and his or her friends. The workshops provide a place to hear about and discuss every aspect of your child's life. The Memory Board is like looking at a photo album filled with pictures of family and friends. The sharing sessions enable you to tell your child's story and listen to others.

During the course of the day you meet people from across the country, where you develop an instant bond. Conversation comes easily. You tell your story and they share their story. Incredibly you feel an instant closeness and find yourself sharing stories about your children as if they were alive--bragging about how pretty, handsome, adorable, bright, funny and mischievous they were while smiling or even laughing. In addition you also share the sorrows—troublesome behavior, drug or alcohol abuse, depression or losing the long battle following an illness.

You share the love, the loss, the bravery and difficult times of the living and the loss of a special needs child. Included are pictures and stories of a life short lived, maybe just a sonogram picture or one never living long enough for a first smile or just a brief first smile. But you see that adorable baby and parents with an everlasting love.

Yes, it sounds depressing and emotionally draining. Some have said, "How can you be around so much sadness when you're still grieving." I answer, "Yes, but at the same time I am spending the weekend with friends and family and my son David. How special is that!"

Lois Copeland, Arlington, (VA) TCF