



The COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS Northern Lake County Illinois Chapter #1511 February 2026 Newsletter

A self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents.



A Note from Susan

"FEBRUARY: AN ARROW THROUGH THE HEART"

by Susan Arlen, M.D.

Dr. Arlen is the medical director of the Hospice at Somerset Medical Center. She is board certified in rehabilitation medicine, and she is a psychotherapist specializing in the losses associated with death, disability and life-changing illness.

In the month of February, we are still in the firm grip of winter. Bone-chilling winds whip around bleak, bare trees, gray days alternate with bright, blue skies, but give little warmth. Having survived January, we have learned to conserve our energy, and we have grown accustomed to the weather.

Though we may still intensely dislike the wintertime, we have learned to take pleasure in the bright sun and the clear, blue sky. The stark landscape may even be appreciated for its unique beauty. Why does this happen? Why do we accept the bundling up and the shivering of winter? How is it that we can find pleasure and beauty in our misery? The answer is a paradox; We have a choice, and we have no choice. We can continue to wish for balmy air, laden with the scent of flowers, or we can mumble about the cold and grumble about the necessity for bundling up to face the chill days. If we focus only on what we don't have, or long for the past warmth of summer or the future rebirth of spring, we tend to lose any ability to notice the aspects of this month that might engender some pleasure. Try as we might, it is impossible to change the course of nature. We cannot bring back the summer any more than we can fast-forward the seasons.

By focusing on what no longer is, we lose the capacity to find beauty, happiness, or pleasure. If we continue to bang our heads against unchangeable situations, it only increases our feelings of helplessness and futility.

Our alternative is acceptance. By February, we recognize that hoping, wishing and dreaming will not bring back the summer's warmth, so we accept what is. We learn to live with reality of the situation. It's not that we don't remember the various beautiful times of the summer, it's not that we don't yearn at times for them again; but now, we recognize that has passed. Though our souls may be warmed by the memories of summer, summer is gone. Now, we are free to live in the reality that is today. We enable ourselves to find beauty and joy in February. The mid-winter landscape has a quieter and more tranquil beauty. Rarely flamboyant, it does not overwhelm the senses; and the ability to recognize and appreciate this soft beauty can give us a sense of peace.

The month of February is similar to the completion of that long, middle phase of bereavement that results in acceptance of what has occurred. The memories of precious times will always be there to warm our hearts, and they will continue to bring tears and pangs of yearning, but realization of the finality of the loss had also occurred.

It takes a long time to accept situations that we do not want as permanent. It takes much time and heartache to recognize that we cannot change situations. It is a long process during which evolves a changed concept of ourselves, the world, and our place in it. It is not that the world has really changed, but with the death of a loved one, OUR world has changed. Again, we have a choice. That long and painful middle portion of the bereavement process may remain with us for a very long time as we struggle to maintain our old ways of being in spite of the agonizing loss. Continued page 2.

(Continued from page 1)

If we become fixed or stuck at this time, there is a double tragedy. Life is lived in the past, and the present is filled with yearning for what should have been and what has been stolen from the survivor. Certainly, we are not "happy" about the situation, but slowly we realize that things will never again be the same and that as survivors, we must go on. After a time, which varies from situation to situation, we accept the finality of the loss. With this acceptance, the ability occurs to perceive beauty without feelings of disloyalty.

Though Valentine's Day does not have the same tradition and resultant dread of Christmas and other holidays, it can still bring a great deal of pain. The very symbol of this day, Cupid's arrow piercing the heart, can feel quite literal for the bereaved whose hearts feel as if they have been broken. Old, tattered, cherished cards will be wept over, as well as bits of lace, red satin ribbon, and the poetry of a spouse, parent or sibling that is especially precious.

Red roses and red valentine hearts are symbolic of the invisible blood that the bereaved have shed over their loss. When we feel despondent, isolated or cheated on Valentine's Day (or any other day), the pain we are feeling is because of the great love we had. The experience of that love will never die, the memory of that love, of that loved one, will live on in our hearts. We must now live on—for the sake of ourselves and our loved one.

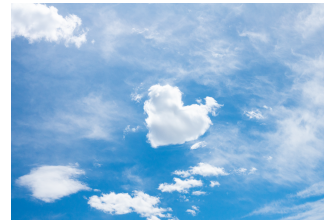
We must give ourselves permission to enjoy again, even through tears. Let's remind ourselves of the blessings that we have had, despite the deprivation, and let's not deny others their blessings.

We should seek things that will bring us peace. A snow-covered landscape can be beautiful, glistening, and pure. Any view of a situation takes on the

meaning that we assign to it. If we choose to believe that a scene or a situation is bleak, it will be bleak. If we focus on one aspect of beauty, we see beauty.

Borrowed from TCF Atlanta Newsletter Jan/Feb 2000

May you find kindness and love this February
Your Friend, Susan ~ Westley's mom



A Valentine Sent to Heaven

Angels come swiftly, hurry to our side
Carry our hearts back with you, to our children
in heaven now reside.

Carry them gently, handle them with care
And take them to their sides and gently lay
them there.

Whisper to them of our love, and our longing
hearts

All our lonely aching while we are apart.

Hold them gently to you, and let them see our
love

Let them see this, our valentine to them above.

Reassure them of our love, that it is still the
same

And gently hold us when we cry, when we hear
them whisper our names.

Let this exchange of love be our valentine

And whisper to them that our love will stand
the test of time.

Show them the memories are safely held inside
And with us they will always abide.

Let them see this day, a day filled with our love
As we shed our tears, and whisper their names,
to our Valentines above.

by Sheila Simmons
Dallas, GA

Chapter Meetings

Northern Illinois Chapter TCF #1511

<http://www.iltcf.org/index.html>

Zoom meeting

First Thursday of the month

7p.m. to 8:30pm

Susan Banks will email the
link to the meeting.

February 5, 2026

Third Thursday of the month meets at

Millburn Congregational Church

19073 West Old Town Court

Lake Villa, IL 60046.

Park in the lot behind the church, enter through the
double glass doors.

Park in the parking lot behind the church,
enter through the double glass doors.

It's also ok to sit and listen and when you feel com-
fortable sharing, please share with us.

Open discussion

February 19, 2026

Chapter News

Upcoming events for our Chapter

Thursday February 5 & 19, 2026

"Meet my loved one..."

***For the meetings in the month of
February, we will celebrate our
loved one who has gone to soon
by sharing a picture, a memorable
story or a favorite item that holds
a special memory of your loved
one.***

If you have any questions please call, email, or text
Susan at 847.366.9375 or Lanwesmar@comcast.net



GIFTS OF LOVE

*A donation to our
chapter in honor of or
in loving memory of
your child.*

A love gift is a gift of money or of time
given to the Northern Lake County Illinois
Chapter of the Compassionate Friends. It
is usually in memory of a child who has
died, but donations can also be from indi-
viduals who want to honor a relative or
friend who has died, a gift of thanksgiving
that their own children are alive and well,
or simply a gift from someone who wants to
help in the work of our chapter.

Love gifts are acknowledged each month in
the newsletter.

Please remember that our chapter will
never solicit for donations. You will never
receive an email, text message or phone
call soliciting for a donation or a need of
money or payment from any steering com-
mittee member. I, as the chapter leader
will never ask for money for assistance with
any chapter finances. We provide the op-
portunity for Gifts of Love as a place to give
a donation in honor or memory of a loved
one. *Susan Banks Chapter Leader and our
Chapter Steering Committee members.*

And

**Your attention Please; The month of
June 2026 will not have any meetings.
We are taking time the month of June
to be with family and friends.*



***OUR CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN, AND SIBLINGS LOVED,
MISSED AND REMEMBERED IN FEBRUARY***

Each month we remember the children who are sadly missed. Please take a few moments, place them in your thoughts, and remember them on their day together with their parents.

None of us ever forget our special days and messages that say "I care" help us to get through them. Our children's lives will go on, if we remember them and celebrate their lives.

BIRTHDAYS

<i>Jeff Stirnichuk</i>	<i>February 4</i>	Son of Mary Wagner
<i>Aaron Barrera</i>	<i>February 6</i>	Son of Tammie & Ernie Barrera
<i>Daniel A. Middaugh</i>	<i>February 8</i>	Son of Jim & Julie Middaugh
<i>Micah Gerald Musich</i>	<i>February 10</i>	Son of Heather Musich
<i>Scott Levin</i>	<i>February 11</i>	Son of Lynda Levin
<i>Kal-El O. Sexton</i>	<i>February 13</i>	Son of Derry Sexton
<i>Roderick Young</i>	<i>February 13</i>	Son of Scarlet Austin Grandson of "Charlie" Johnson
<i>Megan Candice Grace</i>	<i>February 24</i>	Daughter of Tim & Marilyn Grace
<i>Anne Thomson</i>	<i>February 25</i>	Daughter of Nancy & Tom Thomson
<i>Felicity Patrick</i>	<i>February 26</i>	Daughter of Nicole Patrick

ANNIVERSARIES

<i>Daniel A Middaugh</i>	<i>February 3</i>	Son of Jim & Julie Middaugh
<i>Susan Nesheim Allbee</i>	<i>February 5</i>	Sister of Toni Nesheim
<i>Micah Gerald Musich</i>	<i>February 10</i>	Son of Heather Musich
<i>Darien Wilson</i>	<i>February 11</i>	Son of Tammy & Tim Olvera
<i>Delilah Vivian Butler</i>	<i>February 13</i>	Daughter of Aileen & Chris Butler
<i>Kelly Klawonn</i>	<i>February 14</i>	Son of Raymond & Dorthy Klawonn
<i>Tommy Howe III</i>	<i>February 15</i>	<i>Son of Tom & Margaret Howe</i>
<i>Ashley Seay</i>	<i>February 18</i>	Daughter of Mike and Shannon Seay Granddaughter of Dennis & Georgene Manley
<i>Zachary Taylor</i>	<i>February 24</i>	Son of Mike Taylor & Karen Adams-Taylor
<i>Brayden Szymczak</i>	<i>February 28</i>	Son of Sarah & Matt Szymczak

Please let me know if I have omitted a child, misspelled a name or have published an incorrect date. I know how important it is to bereaved families to have their children remembered. Susan Banks Lanwesmar@comcast.net



Precious Valentine Memories

—by Darcle Sims

The lace has grown yellow with age. The edges are tattered and the glue that held the pieces together has long dried up, leaving only a slight stain on the faded red paper. It is much smaller than I remembered. Perhaps time has caused it to shrink. It seems so fragile, resting here in my palm. The words have nearly faded and even the heavy crayon marks have lost their luster over the years. There's a smudge of unknown origin on the back, near where the paper was rubbed dangerously thin by the uncounted erasure marks. The name is barely legible, the pencil lines so weak that only the mind can read the letters. .

I found it the other day, while doing one of those winter chores: cleaning closets. It's nearly 25 degrees below zero outside and it seemed like a good idea to clear away some of the trappings of a thousand years.

February is a middle-of-winter month and most of us have fewer choices in this month than in any other. For those of us here in the Great North, it is either shovel the walk or clean the closets, and it's warmer in the closet (although not by much!) So, armed with a dust rag, trash bag and the radio, I opened the door and slipped in...not really about what I might find. I thought I was just going to clean the closet.

But, that first box sent me spinning. I found things I hadn't even remembered I'd lost! I finally found the holiday gift bought for my sister last year and then so carefully had hidden away. I found snow boots and sand pails, a beach towel, three old paperbacks, a pile of magazines (all saved because I wanted to clip something "important").

I found shoelaces for shoes no longer "alive" and several other things that had once been alive. I found a half a chocolate-covered cherry and part of a deck of cards. It was quite a treasure box, filled with junk that once had had some meaning to someone, maybe even me.

I sorted through the coats and clothes, painfully aware that "someday" would probably not arrive in my

lifetime. The too short hemline and the too-small waist would not be mine again. I packed those things away, mindless of the hours and the drifting snow outside the windows.

When I found the box of scrapbooks, I sat down, now that the closet had some actual floor space. I touched the bindings; not quite sure I possessed the courage required to open the pages. The phone rang and forced me away from that decision. I left the closet and did not return until now.

That's when I found the old paper Valentine, tucked away between the pages of a life lived long ago. As I held that once sticky, but now only stained, piece of construction paper, I felt a connection with other valentines, in other lifetimes. I heard a whisper of another voice: my own mother's exclamation over my offered gift. It blended with my voice, speaking across the generations of children bringing home paper messages of love. OH! I had forgotten THAT - it had become lost in the pain of losing you.

It was a peaceful hour in that closet, listening to the sounds of my life, lived long ago and now remembered through the pages of the scrapbooks. I found my own laughter and that of my friend, joining the laughter of my own children, seeking the laughter of tomorrow's bearers of paper hearts. Time does pass on. Generations of hearts have been delivered and received. Generations of love have been shared just as generations of hurt have been endured. It felt timeless in the closet ...as if when I opened the door, the giver of this Valentine would still be waiting!

Perhaps that is exactly what is happening, perhaps the engineers of all of our hurts and happiness are still waiting - waiting for us to claim that love and bring their light back into being. There were so many years when I could not bear this exchanging of paper hearts! There were so many years when I counted FIRST what was missing, never realizing that in the measuring of my losses, I was truly losing what I did have.

The snow had drifted deep across the yard: only the tips of my flamingos' knit-capped, covered heads are visible in the white. But my vision has been cleared somewhat this afternoon by a visit in the closet where I found a memory that no length of time could fade. (Continued on page 6)

Continued from page 5

The lace is faded, the edges tattered, but the heart always remembers and through the tears, the sounds of love given and received echo back to me.

So now, this little paper message from both my past and my future sit on my dresser, reminding me each morning to make room for the happy memories as well as the hard ones.

I had "lost" that Valentine form so long ago, but the bearer of that most precious gift of love has

NOT been lost to me. Our loved ones die, but the love we share between us can NEVER BE DESTROYED. Love continues past all change and becomes the memory trace that guides the human spirit. Love isn't enough, but without it, the world grows cold and frozen, and the sidewalks never get shoveled and the closets never get cleaned, and the memories get lost in the confusion of pain not healing.

Go find a Valentine, clean a closet, rummage through a drawer, search for some tangible evidence that, indeed, your love DID LIVE - and what a sweet treat that will be!

~lovingly lifted from Sunflower Chapter, Wichita, KS Feb Newsletter & TCF Atlanta Online E-Newsletter

"Where there is love, there is life"



SYMBOLS

By Marilyn Heavilin TCF Redlands

We are fast approaching Valentine's Day, filled with symbols of love ... hearts and roses. As a young schoolgirl, I can remember wishing I would get a valentine from someone special. My friends and I would count how many valentines we had received, feeling certain that the more you received, the more it indicated your popularity.

As I grew older, I was thrilled when I received flowers from that special someone. Surely this was, true love. As a married woman, Valentine's Day was always special. Glen and I usually went out to dinner, and I often

received flowers or a special gift that said, I love you! While those gifts were much appreciated, I would be hard pressed now to tell you what we did or what I received. However, one Valentine's Day will stay frozen in my memory forever, February 14, 1983. Glen took my arm and steadied me as I walked into a mortuary to view the body of our 17 year old son Nathan, who had been killed by a drunken driver on February 10. We had ordered a spray of seventeen red roses to be placed on his casket. When I ordered those flowers, I was stunned to discover how high priced roses are on Valentine's Day! At first, I had decided I would be content with carnations. Then the florist saw in my eyes how much I wanted my last gift to my son to be the very best...red, long stemmed roses. The florist promised she would provide us with roses, regardless of how little we could afford to pay.

That afternoon, I drank in every detail of my boy, his hair, the bruise on his face, the National Honor Society pin on his lapel, those wonderful, strong hands. Then I pulled myself together for a very special appointment. I was the Academic Counselor at Nathan's high school, and we had arranged a special viewing for the students prior to the general visitation. I watched as young girls brought beautiful bouquets of red roses they had received from their boyfriends, but now they were placing them below our son's casket. Their final act of love for a very dear friend. It has taken me a long time to be able to actually celebrate Valentine's Day in a normal fashion. In fact, I guess I never will be able to do that. Valentine's Day is no longer a superficial type of holiday where I just send cards or give candy or flowers without much deliberation beforehand. The symbols are still there; I just see them differently now:

The ROSE: A symbol of love that cannot be separated by death. The HEART: Broken, bruised, and bandaged, but not defeated. And now, there's one more symbol: The HAND: As we offer our hands to each other in friendship, in understanding, in strength, we are saying:

WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE; WE ARE THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS!

May your Valentine's Day be filled with roses that will encourage your broken heart and give you strength to offer a helping hand to others who are grieving.

My Daughter, Marllys, was 19 when we lost her brother, Westley. She was in her freshman year at the University of Dayton. Westley's older brother, Landan, rode the train from Chicago to Gurnee that very sad morning. We then drove to Champaign IL to meet with the police. This is where Westley died. And from there we drove to Dayton to pick up Marllys and then drive home to Gurnee. Now it has been a little more than 8½ years for our family and we dearly miss Westley in so many ways.

Marllys shared this poem with me, "Dear Grievors" and she thought it was a good message to share with the Compassionate Friends Group. It's ok to Nurture yourself. Give yourself time to grieve, rest, heal, reflect, and work toward enjoying life again – celebrating the life that you have – be it an altered life.

We all deserve peace and healing. May this winter be your time to find peace with your memories.

Wishing you a gentle, winter season. Susan



*Dear Grievors,
There are those who do not know
And who cannot know
This deep pain.
They are afraid of it.
They may tell you to "move on".
They may tell you it's not "normal" to
grieve this long.
They may tell you it's part of "God's plan".
Your shattering makes them uneasy.
Vulnerable.
Some may avoid you,
Others may pity you.
But this is your grief.
No one else's. Yours.
You have earned every single tear you shed.
Your emotions are yours,
Even on days
You'd wish them gone.
Don't let anyone take grief from you.
Through the grief – and the love –
Hold your head high,
Even when you are suffering most.
Perhaps, especially, when you are suffering
most.
Surround yourself with loving others.
Give yourself time to feel.
Because grief work is not for the faint of
heart.
And one day, suffering endured,
Will become compassion expressed.*

Dr. Joanne Cacciatore – founder of the MISS
Foundation. Originally posted in January of
2015

Can there ever be closure after losing a child?

No.

I wholeheartedly 100 %, do not believe there can ever be closure. To me, closure to losing my son would mean the love ends and there's no way I can ever stop loving my son. I could never stop loving my child.

Does it change? Yes, is their acceptance? Hmm...I am not sure there can be acceptance either. Maybe that is kind of a fluid thing. I just don't know on that yet, and maybe I haven't been grieving long enough to answer that question.

Of course, every single person that loses a child is to have a different experience. But I would have to think there is just no way you could have closure and let go of something or someone whose love is simply a part of you. I do feel like you start to learn with grief and "them" in a different way.

My experience is a little bit different. I have developed a connection with David across the veil. I'm hopeful that by sharing David's story, more and more people grieving their child realize they too can create this connection. Whether it be through signs, through journaling, through just talking to them in a safe quiet place, through spiritual means... I have no doubt your child is always with you. They are hearing you, are talking back to you, and you just have to find a peaceful spot to trust and listen.

I find as the years pass you learn to carry your grief in a different way. The blank, empty spot that is left in your life does fill in with other things, but you find things to soften the void. Although this too waxes and wanes depending on the seasons, holidays, special times or just that something out of the blue make you think of them. The painful parts

become a little less of a dagger and more of an ache.

After all that being said, the short answer is NO there is never closure after losing a child, it only softens.

I'm still here mom: Conversations with My Son from Heaven by Michelle Lyn.

A memoir about a mother's journey through grief after losing her son in a tragic accident.

(This is for all moms and dads)



A letter to my Child

Dear my child,

I carry you with me in every breath I take. In the quiet moments, when the world slows down, that's where I feel you the most.

You live in my heart, in my thoughts and in every beat that still aches for you.

Some days are heavy, heavier than words can explain. But even in the pain, your love gives me strength.

It teaches me how to keep going, when I don't think I can.

I promise to carry your love forward. To live with kindness, compassion and courage.

Because loving you changed me forever.

You are my always:

Many phases and faces of a mother's grief.

Shared by a member of our chapter
Lisa Metzler, Tristan's mom

LOVE GIFTS

Enclosed in a check in the amount of _____ to be used as follows (check all that apply):

In loving memory of _____

In honor of _____

Sponsor the newsletter for _____ month) (\$25 pays ½ monthly cost)

Check here to keep receiving the newsletter _____

It is important for our children to be remembered. Please understand that in order for your child to be included in the "special days" list each month in the newsletter, you must fill out this form that gives us permission to list this information. If you are donating, please make the check payable to **The Compassionate Friends. Rosita Hernandez 3016 16th Place, North Chicago, IL 60064. rosehernandez@juno.com**

We welcome your comments and/or items submitted for use in the newsletter. Short articles, poems, or book reviews are always appreciated. Please include the author of any written works. Send your items for the newsletter to Susan Banks 1427 Clavey Lane, Gurnee, IL 60031. Lanwesmar@comcast.net

The Compassionate Friends is a non-profit, self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved families. Its' mission is to assist them in the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child and to provide information and education to help others to be supportive

TCF National Office PO Box 46 Wheaton, IL 60187. 877-969-0001. www.compassionatefriends.org

Steering Committee 2025 – 2026

CHAPTER LEADERSHIP Susan Banks 847-366-9375 lanwesmar@comcast.net – son, Westley Banks Age 21 of suicide.

TREASURER Rosita Hernandez 847-602-0698 rosehernandez@juno.com daughter, Victoria Pickett Age 26 of suicide.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

HOSPITALITY Kris Frisby 847-366-3170 Kefrisby88@comcast.net son, Camden Frisby Age 15 of suicide.

SECRETARY / LIBRARIAN

REMEMBRANCE SECRETARY Shannon Seay 224-456-2891 Seayseven1@comcast.net daughter, Ashley Seay Age 17 Auto accident.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR Susan Banks 847-366-9375 lanwesmar@comcast.net – son, Westley Banks Age 21 of suicide.

NEWSLETTER PRINTING & MAILING Toni Nesheim 847-204-7585 tnesheim@sbcglobal.net & Denny Salomonson, 847-223-7353 drdeno@sbcglobal.net - daughter, Rachel Salomonson, 19 Auto accident

WOODLAND WALK COORDINATORS Christine Pado 847-455-6642 chpado@gmail.com - daughter Lindsay Wilcynski Age 29 Pulmonary Embolism

FACILITATORS AT HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC CHURCH WAUKEGAN, IL. SPANISH AND ENGLISH. Mirtha Vidal 847-293-1658 mirthavidal1213@yahoo.com & Raphael Vidal rvidal1027@yahoo.com, son Raphael Vidal age 17 of suicide. Mirtha is available by phone call or email.

FACILITADORES EN HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC CHURCH WAUKEGAN, IL. Española e inglés. Mirtha Vidal 847-293-1658 mirthavidal1213@yahoo.com & Raphael Vidal rvidal1027@yahoo.com, hijo Raphael Vidal de 17 años de suicidio. Mirtha está disponible por teléfono o correo electrónico.

Northern Lake County IL Chapter #1511 <http://www.iltcf.org/index.html>

NORTHERN LAKE COUNTY COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS FACEBOOK page <https://www.facebook.com/cfonlci>

Facebook Pages for Siblings - The Sounds of the Siblings: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/21358475781/>

TCF SIBS: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tcfsibs/>

