



The COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Northern Lake County Illinois Chapter #1511

January 2026 Newsletter

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



A Note from Susan

Take Your Time

A new year provides a point in time that we as individuals can take some time to reflect on the past and contemplate the future. When you are a person in grief, this is not always a welcome opportunity. Another year can mean just one more year further from the last time you saw or spoke to your loved one. We grieve the new year.

Maybe this is a year for you to work on your grief by being conscious of it and talking about it as well as sharing the personality and gifts of the loved one who has gone too soon. Remembering and sharing our loved one can be a helpful method in surviving the new year and bringing some comfort to all of us. What did you share with your loved one; things may include a shared sense of humor, a love of fishing, love of music or art, cooking together, fun shopping trips, favorite meals, crazy vacations or simple everyday rituals that you both enjoyed. It is hoped that remembering these things will make you smile and not hurt. Of course, it will make a difference as to how far along you are on your grief journey.

The one phrase we hear more than any other is, "it will take time for you to get over your child's death." I don't believe we get over our loved one's death, but our grief can soften over time with support and healing. We know that this is spoken with care and love. But little do we know at the beginning of our grief just what time means: the first time, the daytime, the nighttime, the last time, all of these times. The

one thing we can say is "take it." Take all the time you need. Grief is hard work, and we need to take the time for all of the aspects we talk so much about and really work through it.

Take time to feel, it is hard but worth it. We can't just push those feelings aside because they are part of who we are, how we have managed, and the life we have had. All of our life experiences combine to affect our feelings.

Take time to talk. Talk to anyone who seems to care about you. Ask your friends and family if they will take the time to listen. Be with others who understand.

Take the time to read. When you read the experience of others, you will realize that you are not alone. Maybe a special book will help you understand what is happening to you during this time we call bereavement. Take the time to read and re-read the paragraphs or chapters that help.

Take the time to physically care for yourself. If you like to exercise; walking outside, going to the gym, swimming or biking. Go out and use that time to help you feel better. Get enough rest, take the time to sleep late some days, or go to bed earlier if you need to. Sleeping may be an escape, but if it helps you, take the time for an extra few hours. It is rest for your body and mind. Take time to eat meals that you enjoy and nourish your body.

Remember that someday you will take the time to help someone else and that time will be the most satisfying time of all.

Wishing you a new year of happy moments and gentleness.

Your Friend, Susan ~ Westley's mom

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.

January 1, 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

January 15, 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.

*A special thank you to a dear friend of
Rose, our chapter treasure; Michele made
a donation to our chapter.*

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.*



Gifts During the Year

In this season of giving and thanksgiving we give our thanks to those who lovingly give of their time for our Compassionate Friends

Chapter:

Leia Betar

Kris Frisby

Donna Brown

Toni Nesheim

Denny Salomonson

Shannon Seay

Mirtha Vidal

Raphael Vidal

Cindy Leden

Brian Leden

Michael Banks

Pastor Miranda Moeller

~~~~~  
Thank you, Nicky Seay, Landan & Marllys Banks, for reading the Siblings Walking Together poem.  
~~~~~

Our grateful appreciation to those who gave financial donations, to those who brought refreshments, to those who attended, planned and helped with the Candle-lighting ceremony; the Milburn Congregational Church, and to all those who faithfully attend our monthly meetings.

What is New about the New Year?

There is a lot of silliness about ringing in the New Year, and I have never been able to enter into the spirit with noisemakers, funny hats and loud hurrahs. Since the death of my son, I especially find myself wondering what this is all about. I think

some of the partying and celebrating are motivated by a deep desire for a new start in our lives; a desire to leave behind some of the problems, sorrows, worries and pain of the year just ending. The short, sunless days and long dark nights make us want something to cheer us. So, we give the New Year's Eve party a try. But it really doesn't work for most of us; we see now that we are just the same and the heaviness in our hearts, as we continue with the struggle to cope with the loss of our child, remains with us. Can we find new ways to live our lives in the New Year?

I'd like to suggest a few things to try; Let's find new friends. A good place to start this is at Compassionate Friends meetings. Here you are with a group of people who care about each other in special ways. We understand the pain and anger, the confusion and the inertia suffered by bereaved parents. In the New Year, let's also find new ways to be close to the family that we have left. We feel regrets about hugs not given, letters not written, "I love you" not said often enough. We can do all these things now. We can establish new memories with the family we have right now. Another way to move into this New Year with a better feeling is to think about what we can do for others, because that is truly a way to help ourselves. If we can reach out to other sorrowing families, give a gift of our time, a note of love, a listening ear, or a shoulder to lean on, we'll grow stronger ourselves.

For those parents who are suffering the deep pain of the newly bereaved, none of the things I've mentioned may be possible yet. For you, I hold out the hope that soon your days will be just a bit better, your sorrow a little lighter, your tears healing, your friends strengthening and your memories filled more with the good times and less with the unhappiness of your grief.

Dory Rooker
TCF, Upper Valley, VT



OUR CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN, AND SIBLINGS LOVED, MISSED AND REMEMBERED IN JANUARY

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

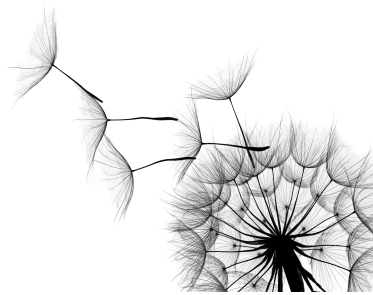
<i>Michael Curtis</i>	<i>January 4</i>	<i>Son of Sonya Curtis</i>
<i>Eric Wiatr</i>	<i>January 5</i>	<i>Son of Debbie Eposito</i>
<i>Maggie Curley Shackett</i>	<i>January 7</i>	<i>Daughter of Yvonne Curley</i>
<i>Nathan Enright</i>	<i>January 7</i>	<i>Son of Martin Boyle</i>
<i>Casperin Hernandez</i>	<i>January 10</i>	<i>Son of Colleen Sinsun Ramos</i>
<i>Gabriel Murphy, Jr.</i>	<i>January 16</i>	<i>Son of Arvine Murphy</i>
<i>Angel Reyes Soto</i>	<i>January 18</i>	<i>Son of Ricardo Reyes & Alma Soto</i>
<i>Justin Cody Ortega</i>	<i>January 20</i>	<i>Son of Susie Meggs</i>
<i>Michael Coleman</i>	<i>January 21</i>	<i>Son of Karen Dvorak Coleman</i>
<i>Hiezer Castillo</i>	<i>January 22</i>	<i>Son of Somara & Antonio Castillo</i>

ANNIVERSARIES

<i>Casperin Amory Hernandez</i>	<i>January 1</i>	<i>Son of Colleen Sinsun Ramos</i>
<i>Noel Wendell Hernandez</i>	<i>January 1</i>	<i>Son of Colleen Sinsun Ramos</i>
<i>Rachel Elizabeth Szech</i>	<i>January 2</i>	<i>Daughter Vicki Szech</i>
		<i>Sister of Andrew Szech</i>
<i>Chris Houchin</i>	<i>January 5</i>	<i>Son of Scott Houchin & Heather McDonald</i>
<i>Joey Frase</i>	<i>January 20</i>	<i>Son of Cathy Frase</i>
<i>Charlie Schmit</i>	<i>January 20</i>	<i>Son of Jean Schmit-Gill</i>
<i>Eric Wiatr</i>	<i>January 21</i>	<i>Son of Debbie Esposito</i>
<i>Alyssa Carranza</i>	<i>January 22</i>	<i>Daughter of Luz Barrera,</i> <i>Granddaughter of Angel & Raquel Gasco</i>
<i>Dan Furlan Jr</i>	<i>January 29</i>	<i>Son of Dan & Pat Furlan</i>

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



Life Has a Different Meaning Now

"Life has a different meaning now" is how Cindy Bullens starts off her song *Scarlett Wings*. Never been truer words written. Melinda Simpson, a counselor with Hospice coined the phrase for us, "bereaved parents look at things through the lens of grief." Those words have been repeated by the families that sat in the small back room of an old house that hospice uses for their office. I remember the first time I walked into the old house with wooden floors. The floors creaked and reminded me of an old store in the town I grew up in. Funny, how sounds and sights can take you back in time to another place and bring out emotions. The old store I'm speaking of was in Enid, Oklahoma. It was an upscale clothing store called Newman's Premier. It always felt awkward going in this upscale store since our family couldn't really afford to shop there. We weren't really poor, if we were, us kids never knew it. We would visit this store only when there was a particular sale on something mother needed. Mom did a lot of sewing back in those days, but she must have liked to look in this store. It always made me feel a little awkward when we would go in this store, the wooden floors creaked and we didn't usually buy anything, we just looked around.

So here I am entering an old house occupied by Hospice in March of 2003 and the floors are creaking and I am feeling quite awkward. Life is awkward, our 16-year-old son has died, and we don't know what to do with ourselves. We don't know if we are doing this grieving right. Grief was not even a word used in our vocabulary up until Jacob's death. I do know I felt very alone in a busy world that continued to speed along. I felt like I was on one of

those merry go-rounds and the world was continuing to spin; I'm trying to hold on and not fall off but feeling sick too.

I enter the old house and am directed towards this back room with tables and comfy chairs. I am relieved I have a table in front of me to hide my awkward hands under. If I could have crawled under it, I would have felt better. Everything is awkward. How do you sit when you just lost your son? I don't even want to hold my head up, let alone speak to people. Here I am in a room that is filling with strangers. They all have that same look on their faces. The counselor introduces herself and tries to make us feel comfortable. We are encouraged to go around the table and introduce ourselves and why we are there. I don't know why I am here. I don't know why I thought this would help. Why did I drive myself there not knowing anybody? I guess my inner most self is moving me on autopilot. Maybe my innermost self is directing my body to do what it needs to do, and I am not in control. I listened to a mother describe how her daughter died alone in her apartment. The torture of making life and death decisions about organ donating at a hospital in Cincinnati. I couldn't fathom having to make such decisions. The tears came for me with the first introduction and didn't stop as each parent told their horrid story of losing their child.

We received a phone call from our panicked daughter who had police knocking on our door at 9:30pm at night looking for us. We didn't make life and death decisions. There is another family whose son was killed in a single car accident less than a mile from their home. The father got to the accident sight just moments after it happened only to find their son dead. He had just left the house. How could it be? Jacob had just left home hours before. How could it be we were all going about everyday activities and then bam our world is changed in a matter of seconds. Our precious children are dead. I want off the merry ground; I am getting sick.
Continued on page 6.

Continued from page 5.

It's my turn, lump in my throat, tears in my eyes, my hands are wringing in my lap, and I barely utter my name. I have practiced what I'm going to say but the words don't come out easily. I have to start and stop, I can't breathe, I am here around this table in this old house where the floors creak and all these people are telling how their child died. I don't want to be here; I don't want my son to be dead. I am so scared to utter the words my "son died". If I say it, then it will be true. I hear myself say those words; it must have been my inner most self because I don't want to say it. I am not in control. There I did it, I uttered the words my son was accidentally shot. I didn't want others to get a visual of a gangster type teen boy. Jake was so far from it. Jacob wanted to be liked and tended to be more of a follower than a leader. He followed into the path with some other boys that were troubled and not happy at home. Jake was happy at home. We had the best evening before he left the night he died, laughing and joking. I wanted others to know how loving and kind he is. He was always for the underdog. None of those things came out of my mouth. I look at the person beside me; I can't talk anymore. I just want off the merry go round, I am getting sick.

Two hours passed of more stories of parents whose children died, some in car accidents, all were sudden deaths. No time to say goodbye. Just going about daily life and tragic accidents happened. I learned something at that first meeting that was powerful and would help me down the road. It didn't matter how careful you were and how much you tried to protect your child; the awful enemy death snuck in when you weren't looking and robbed our child of their life. We had all done what we thought was right. Didn't we teach them to be safe drivers, seatbelts save lives don't they? We taught them to handle firearms safely. Two hunter safety courses and many trips to a gun range. We taught them healthy lifestyles and the importance of taking

care of themselves. But those things didn't matter. Time and unforeseen occurrence befell them all. I was Jake's protector, his mother. For God's sake, I gave birth to this child, he was in my care and keeping and I had failed. That is how I felt. Somewhere along the line I failed. He shouldn't have been the one to die. None of these children should have. We are supposed to go first. Here it was 20 minutes until eight o'clock. This meeting was supposed to be over with 10 minutes ago. None of us wanted to be there two hours ago but now none of us wanted to leave. We keep talking. We keep crying. We leave on shaky legs and return the next week.

We do it all again, and again, and again. Every time, we are dreading the introduction. It makes it real; our child has died. Others join us as time goes on. They meander in through the creaking floors to join us in the back room. We however are feeling like the merry go round is slowing down, we are gaining some balance. These new parents are spinning; they are getting sick and want off. Over time we are able to put our legs down on the ground and start digging our heels in the dirt. We are getting some control of the merry go round.

I returned a week ago to the old building with creaking floors, it didn't feel awkward anymore. The room wasn't even in the back now. The room has changed. I have changed, the counselor has changed and no one else showed up. I noticed children's art supplies in a cart behind me. Signs of life are in this room. It doesn't squeeze the breath from you anymore. You can hear the street and life passing by outside. Car doors are shutting and people riding bicycles outside. Not spinning anymore. There were books on a bookshelf that give life to those that read. Helpful books I noticed. Helpful people. The counselor looked at me and said, "I don't think anyone else is coming".

Continue on page 7.

Continued from page 6

We decided to go home. I was okay with that. 6 years later I was okay with that. I occasionally still feel sick and feel that the room is spinning but I can balance now and put my feet down and slow things down and still hold on. These parents I met in the back room with creaky floors are still holding on. We hold each other's hands and hearts.

We look for others now that are spinning and on the merry go round. Amazing, isn't it? Your child dies and you keep on living. It is extremely difficult for me to understand how we survive but we do and are better people.

Karen Cantrell, TCF Frankfort, KY
karen821285@yahoo.com

Years can pass on the calendar, but grief doesn't measure time that way. It collapses the distance between then and now, making the past feel close enough to touch. One quiet moment and the weight of their absence is immediate and raw, as if no time has passed at all. Grief carries the name forward, whispered into ordinary days, reminding us that love doesn't fade with years; it stays present, alive in the spaces where we still reach for them.



IS IT EASING?

I heard your name today and my heart did not skip a beat, nor was my mind flooded with the emotion of losing you. I heard your name today and it did not bring back the terrible hurt feelings of when you first left me.

I heard your name today with a calmness that surprised me. Many another child carries your name, and it had been torture hearing it and seeing the smiling faces on those little girls.

But today I knew—I found out—what others in my footsteps found out and tried to tell me. The hurt will ease; but the memories, the love, the good times will never go away.

Phoebe C. Redman
TCF Bradenton, FL



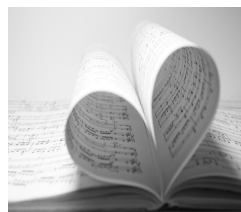
For The New Year

~reprinted from Arlington, DC, Leesburg, Prince William, and Burke-Springfield-Fairfax Virginia Chapters
January 2008 Newsletter
New Year's Wishes for Bereaved Parents
Mary Ehmann,
TCF, Valley Forge, PA

*Instead of the old kind of New Year's resolutions, we used to make and break, let's make some this year and really try to keep them.

- 1) Let's not try to imagine the future – take one day at a time.
- 2) Allow yourself time to cry, both alone, and with your loved ones.
- 3) Don't shut out other family members from your thoughts and feelings. Share these difficult times. You may all become closer for it.
- 4) Try to be realistic about your expectations of yourself, your spouse, other family members and friends. Each of us is an entity, therefore different. So how can there be perfect understanding?
- 5) When a good day comes, relish it – don't feel guilty and don't be discouraged because it doesn't last. It WILL come again and multiply.
- 6) Take care of your health. Even though the mind might not care, a sick body will only compound your troubles. Drink lots of water and take stress type multiple vitamins; rest (even if you don't sleep) and get moderate exercise. Help your body heal, as well as your mind.
- 7) Share your feelings with other Compassionate Friends (or other groups you may choose) and let them share with you. As you find you are caring about the pain of others, you are starting to come out of your shell – a very healthy sign.

I know following these suggestions won't be easy. But it's worth a try, don't you think? Nothing to lose and perhaps much to gain.



It's the Music That Bonds the Soul

The room you once lived in
Doesn't look the same.
The people who used to call you
Never mention your name

The car you used to drive
They may not make anymore;
And all the things you treasured
Are boxed behind closed doors.

The clothes you set the trends by
Are surely out of date.
The people you owed money to
Have wiped away the slate.

Things have changed and changed
Since you went away.
But some things remain the same
Each and every day.

Like the aching in my heart
A scar that just won't heal.
Or the way a special song
Can change the way I feel.

Brother, you must know that the music
Bonds us and will keep us close;
Because secretly I know in my heart
It's the music you miss the most.

So let the world keep turning,
Time can take its toll.
As long as the music is playing
You'll be dancing in my soul.

Stacey Gilliam
TCF, N. Oklahoma City, OK

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

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

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SECRETARY / LIBRARIAN

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

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

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

