

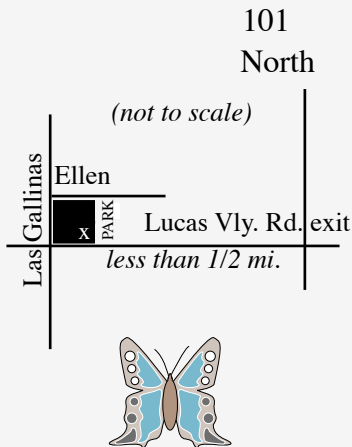
A non-profit self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the loss of a child

New Meeting Site

**Lucas Valley Community
Church Conference Room
2000 Las Gallinas at Lucas
Valley Rd. in San Rafael
3rd Tuesdays of the month
at 7:30 P.M.**

Directions Exit 101 at **Lucas Valley Rd.** and go west. Turn right onto **Las Gallinas** and make an immediate right onto **Ellen**, then a right turn into the parking lot at the signage. The Conference Room is located in the first building next to the parking lot. For more info, call Genesse Gentry at 415/457-3123. Please call prior to your first meeting, so that you might meet with the facilitator before the meeting begins.

MAP



Alternate site in San Francisco: Parents: Community Meeting Room/Taravel Police Station at 2345-24th Ave. (near Taravel) in S.F. on the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm. For information: alhallum@comcast.net.

New Year's Goals

The holidays are over and I bet you're glad about that. You did make it through, and by now maybe some of the stress of that powerful time has left you. Next year you will find you learned from this year, no matter how many years it has been, and I hope it will be easier for you, too, in the years ahead. If you made New Year's resolutions, I hope they included:

- to try and take it one day at a time;
- to forgive yourselves for whatever it is you feel you did wrong;
- to figure out ways to resolve your anger so you can let go of it;
- to concentrate on and value what you have left as much as what you have lost;
- to risk reinvestment in life;
- to let those you value know how important they are to you.

These are important steps forward. Try to be good to yourself in the new year.

TCF Long Beach Member, CA CH NL '94

This Can Be a Constructive, If Not a Happy New Year

Happy New Year??? How can it ever be happy again? How will I ever make it through another year of this torment?

When we are hurting and so terribly depressed it is hard to see any good in our new year, but we must try. First of all, we must hold on tightly to the idea that we will someday feel good again. This is almost impossible to believe, but even if we don't believe it we must tell ourselves over and over, that it is true — because it is. Many parents whose children have died some years in the past will attest to this. Remember also, no one can suffer indefinitely as you are suffering now.

Secondly, we must face the New Year with the knowledge that this year offers us a choice as to whether we will be on our way to healing this time NEXT year or still be in the pit of intensive grief. We must remind ourselves that if we choose to be on our way to healing the following year, we must work to get there and that work entails allowing ourselves to go THROUGH our grief, to cry, to be angry, to talk out our guilt, to do whatever is necessary to move towards healing.

Thirdly, we must look for good in our lives and find reasons to go on, and accept the fact that our continuous suffering will not bring our child back. Many of us have other children or a spouse for whom we must go on. Most importantly we have our own lives that must be lived. Most of us know that our deceased children would want us to go on.

Through our grief, we can grow and become more understanding, loving and compassionate and aware of the real values in life. Let us not waste this New Year.

Margaret Gerner, TCT, St. Louis MO

reprinted from TCF Santa Clara Chapter newsletter

The Grief of Mental Illness

I know now that my daughter Laurie was mentally ill. I did not understand the meaning of this 20 years ago when her depression and “strange” behavior preceded a suicide attempt while in college. Despite all the help we could get her, she succeeded in completing suicide five years later, at the age of 25, in 1980. Her psychiatrist then agreed to talk to me — he said, with tears in his eyes, she had been a serious schizophrenic patient. For reasons of patient confidentiality, I was not privy to this information earlier. WHY couldn’t I have learned about

this before it was too late? The grief I felt as a bereaved parent was compounded by the truth of her illness. There is a stigma with mental illness.

Society has been slow to understand and to accept mental illness. There is grief with mental illness — for the loss of the child that we wanted to be normal. Why did this have to happen to my child? Was it my fault? Guilt rears its ugly head. Why didn’t I see the early signs that she needed help? I felt anger — wanting to blame others for what happened. I was frustrated — with the professionals who could not/did not “fix it.” I was disillusioned with the public and private mental health system and its limited resources for the mentally ill and their families. Laurie fell between the cracks and is gone.

Thirteen years later I have come to terms with her suicide. I know now there are many reasons for mental illness, most of which are beyond my control. Mental illness is a disease. It can be the result of genetics, a chemical imbalance in the brain, or a nutritional deficiency/allergy — NOT bad parenting. I have learned that in grief and in loss, most people want to/need to “talk about it.” The magic of sharing feelings and experiences with others who understand (because they’ve been there), is a healing process. For me, The Compassionate Friends, a national peer support organization for bereaved parents and siblings, has provided this outlet on a local and national level. I have also participated in a local chapter of The Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and have learned so much more about mental illness through sharing with others who are coping with this stigma and grief. Their slogan in 1991 was “the most shocking thing about mental illness is how little people understand it.” How true! How sad!

After Laurie’s suicide, initially the most therapeutic healing for me was to publish a book of her writings, material I found expressing her thoughts, visions and frustrations from the ages of 15 to 25. This actual documentation of a mentally ill young person is poetic, loving, humorous, depressing and spiritual. Perhaps her words will help others to see and understand this disease. Her words express intuitive insights in a most articulate way, despite the message of helplessness and hopelessness. As a bereaved parent I felt a strong motivation to perpetuate the memory of Laurie in a positive way.

Public education and acceptance of mental illness as a disease is helping to change attitudes. We are learning to be more open and honest about it. We are learning to cope and go on with our lives. Maybe it was the mother in me, but I thought I never would lose her. Now through the grief, and later the understanding of this disease, I have found a new purpose in my life. Reaching out to help others caught in the quagmire of grief — from mental illness, from suicide, from the death of a child, through support groups and writings, in turn has been a healing process for me too. I know that Laurie’s 25 years on this earth have made a difference.

*Carol Katz, TCF Regional Coordinator, MA
reprinted from TCF Southern Humboldt, CA newsletter*

“Mental illness is a disease. It can be the result of genetics, a chemical imbalance in the brain, or a nutritional deficiency/allergy — NOT bad parenting”.

“Death leaves a heart-ache no one can heal,
Love leaves a memory no one can steal.”

*Copied from the Sacramento Chpt. of Friends for Survival Newsletter
(Found on a headstone in Ireland)*

Please Ask

Someone asked me about you today.
It's been a long time since anyone has done that.
It felt so good to talk about you,
To share my memories of you,
To simply say your name out loud.
She asked me if I minded talking about
What happened to you...
Or would it be too painful to speak of it.
I told her I think of it every day
And speaking about it helps me to release
the tormented thoughts whirling around in my head.
She said she never realized the pain would last this long...
She apologized for not asking sooner.
I told her, "Thanks for asking."
I don't know if it was curiosity or concern that made her ask, but told
her, "Please do it again sometime soon."

Barbara Taylor Hudson
Kansas City TCF Chpt.
reprinted from the Saint Paul, MN Chapter newsletter

FEBRUARY

When February comes, there is finally an end in sight to the long winter. Sometimes melting snow reveals the green tips of an early crocus or even an exquisite blossom itself, a soft flower of hope invading a harsh landscape of graying snow, biting wind and an ominous sky - a small promise of new life to come.

My heart, grieving for my son who died, was like that image of winter. For somehow, even during the darkest, coldest moments, an unexpected sign of hope would intrude. And as the hours and the days and months dragged on, my heart finally learned once again to be open to the promise of new life. Painful memories melted into loving ones. Life that seemed forever dormant once again sprang forth from my heart. In living hopefully and lovingly, the seasons of the heart can change. The living memories of your special child, like the flower in the snow, can be the beginning of the end of winter.

*Maryann Kramer, TCF Arlington Heights, IL
from TCF Portland, OR Chpt. Newsletter*

Our Valentine Cookies

This Valentine's Day cookies won't taste so good this year.
I stirred in the sugar, but you were not here.
Frosting - pink on the tip of your nose.
Days spun too swiftly - my biggest woe.
Did the time have to come so very soon?
My heart would dance and I would sing
To feel you tug at my apron strings.
But instead I'll toil with the rolling pin,
And rely on my mind's eye for your silly grin.
When the heart shapes are baked, mine will still ache.
But I'll always love you-, for goodness sake!



by Kathy Slief, TCF Tulsa, OK Chpt.
reprinted from Sacramento Chpt. of Friends for Survival newsletter



• • • • • CHAPTER ANNOUNCEMENTS • • • • •

**Chapter Leader/No. CA
Regional Coordinator:**

Genesse Gentry
21 Shemran Ct.
Fairfax, CA 94930
415/457-3123

Marin TCF website:
www.tcfmarin.org

Talk with a Friend

When you want someone to talk with, the following people will welcome your call:
Judith Billings 707/452-1116 (afternoons)
Ed Garvey 650/756/8010 (suicide loss)
Sallee Kiilerich.... 415/897-6849
Natalie Meyring .. 415/383-4084 (sibling loss)
Diana deRegnier.. 415/383-1703 (suicide loss/call 9am-8pm)

TCF National Website
www.compassionatefriends.org

TCF National Office
P.O. Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60533-3696
Phone: 630/990/0010
Toll Free: 877/969/0010
Fax: 630/990/0246
Email: nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Additional Support Sites
Inlovingmemoryonline.org
Healingafterloss.org
Bereavedparents.com
childloss.com
survivorsofsuicide.com

Men's Chat Room
TCF website on Mondays from 9-10 central time.

Other Bereaved Parent Resources
The Center for Attitudinal Healing in Sausalito (415) 331-6161, ext. 106.

Hospice of Napa has a weekly bereavement group for adults, and a monthly bereavement group for survivors of suicide loss. Call Max Boveri at (707) 258-9080 for more information. what about marin???

Note Change in Chapter Meeting Site on Front Page

Marin TCF Meeting Calendar

We were very fortunate to have had Alan Pedersen entertain and nurture members at November's meeting. He has dedicated his music and work in loving memory to his beautiful and precious daughter, Ashley Marie Pedersen, who now soars with the angels. If you were not present, you may want to check out his beautiful, poignant music at everashleymusic.com.

Tues., Jan. 15th - In the New Year we will talk about the concept of *old* normal and *new* normal. Also, some folks find New Year's Eve/Day very painful at the close of their first year. We just don't want to let go of that year our children were with us physically. We'll explore "should" myths that can come with a new year, yet share with each other the hope of what baby steps forward look like for each of us.

Tues., Feb. 19th - There is no love like that of a parent! Let's share with each other the ways each of our children brought unique lessons of love into our homes. How do we celebrate their special gifts while letting go of their physical presence?

Coming to a TCF meeting for the first time???

We recognize all too well that it takes courage to come to the first meeting, whether you are a bereaved parent of one month or 5 years. You are welcome to bring a friend or relative for moral support if you wish. You will find that it is all right to cry or to laugh, to share how you feel or just listen. You are welcome to come late and leave early. We recommend that you attend 2-3 meetings before deciding if TCF is not for you. Each meeting is as varied as the attendees and the topic.

You will meet parents in both early and late stages of the grief process. Longtime members are present at meetings to help new members process their tremendous losses in their lives, and to show that some time down the road of grief, they too will be able to function and grow and learn how to live with these losses. It is best if you contact TCF prior to your first meeting at 415-457-3123 so we can meet with you before the meeting begins.

Walking Group Schedule

It's good to have our members walking together again. All walks begin at 10am on the 1st Saturday of the month (rain or shine). Bring water, appropriate clothing, and snacks/lunch if so desired; sometimes we "dine-out". Please RSVP to Marcie so she will be on the lookout for you: marcieleach@aol.com.



Note: some walks will indicate different leaders.

Sat., Jan. 5th Phoenix Lake: Meet at the end of Lagunitas Rd. in Ross. Lagunitas is the road opposite the entrance to the Marin Art and Garden Center. Contact Marcie at marcieleach@aol.com.

Sat., Feb. 2nd Tennessee Valley: Meet at the Trail Head sign at the end of Tennessee Valley Rd. At this point, the walk is leaderless, so just gather and enjoy!

Sat., Mar. 1st Lucas Valley Marsh Area: Meet in the parking lot near the McGinnis Club restaurant/golf course. We will walk out on the marsh area which is flat but unpaved. We should be enjoying wild flowers and water fowl. We will have the opportunity to eat lunch at the picnic tables or treat ourselves to lunch in the restaurant. Directions: Take Lucas Valley/ Smith Ranch exit east all the way to the end into the parking lot. This walk will be led by Cecile Noland in memory of her daughter Amanda's birth month.

Volunteer Opportunities in the Marin Chapter

Newsletter Editor: Here's a special niche for someone interested in keeping chapter members not only informed, but supported and encouraged. It is also a great way to work through your own personal grief. The current newsletter editor will work with you to get started. Please contact the editor (Sandy Williams) at tcfed@comcast.net or Genesse at **457-3123** or gbgentry@aol.com.

Other Volunteer Opportunities available! Contact Genesse at above infor-

A New Plaque for Children's Memorial

Karen Klingel is chairing the committee for the new plaque project for children and families of Marin or Marin TCF at the Greenbrae Memorial Site. For an application form and information to have your child's name memorialized, you may contact Karen at: kklingel@sbcglobal.net. Directions for the Marin memorial are on the last page.

In Memoriam Program

TCF Marin's main source of funding the newsletters, the meetings, the Candle Lighting and other TCF expenses has always been the Love Gifts sent in by TCF members, their friends and families in memory of our children. We think it's possible that people might like to donate money in memory of friends and family members (other than our children). These will be mentioned in the newsletter under the title *In Memoriam*. (This is separate from a Love Gift donation.)

Send *In Memoriam* donation information (with check payable to TCF/Marin) to: TCF/Marin Newsletter Editor, 254 Butterfield Dr., Novato, CA 94945.

Check out our newly refurbished website at: tcfmarin.org

Candle Lighting DVDs Info

The **2007 DVD of Our Children**, is available by mailing a check for \$20 (which includes a \$5 donation to the Marin TCF) made payable to **Digital Video Dimensions** to the address below. Include your mailing address along with your payment. DVDs will be shipped via USPS First Class Mail within 5 days of receipt of payment.

Digital Video Dimensions
attn: 2007 TCF DVD
273 Crest Rd., Novato, CA 94945

In Loving Memory...

If you are interested in creating a loving website for your child, go to memory-of.com/Public/.

Chapter Leader Genesse Gentry to Be Interviewed in June 2008 on *Healing the Grieving Heart* -

We will let you know in the next newsletter when Genesse will be on this program. The series can be heard on the Web live at www.health.voiceamerica.com every Thursday at noon EST. Shows are also archived on the TCF national website and broadcast at 11 a.m. EST Sundays on a number of radio stations across the country and streamed online simultaneously at www.HealthRadioNetwork.com.

Hosts are: Dr. Gloria Horsley, bereaved parent and family therapist; and Dr. Heidi Horsley, bereaved sibling and an adjunct professor teaching graduate courses at Columbia University's School of Social Work including Intervention for Grief, Loss, and Bereavement.

Adult Siblings Loss Group No Longer Meeting

Elise Noland and Caitlin Fager, past co-facilitators, are still available by email for questions or concerns. eliseln@yahoo.com or cfager@gmail.com.

A New Year's Resolution

People all around us are making their resolutions — lose weight, give up smoking, save money — the list is endless. Three years ago my only resolution was to survive, although there were times when I wondered why. There has been gradual change in my New Year's resolution, one that I did not consciously think about, and which probably explains my involvement with TCF. That is to tell people what grief is like and how damaging it can be if there are no loving people near to help you through it. The destructive power of grief is pervasive and long-lasting.

To those who have worked through their grief, make a resolution to let others know what helped you. Give "I" messages like, "I really appreciated my neighbor's short visits before dinner," or "My boss was so understanding about my inability to concentrate that first year." This way they will know these are suggestions that may help someone else, not rules set in concrete. At least it may start them thinking of ways they might offer assistance to those burdened with fresh grief.

This year, let's come out of the closet and let people know where to find good information about healthy grieving.

reprinted from Bereaved Parents USA, Holiday 2004 issue



Directions to the Children's Memorial

Take Sir Francis Drake Boulevard to Bon Air Road in Greenbrae. Park on Bon Air Road across from Marin General Hospital. Take the path across the marsh and footbridge towards Corte Madera Creek. Turn right at the multi-use path and walk 1/8 mile or less to a bench. Just before the bench is a dirt path going off to the right. Take the path into the site. Be sure to take a moment to sit on the bench or look up at Mt. Tam and enjoy the solitude, beauty and solace of this site.



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

Marin County, California Chapter

Newsletter Editor: Sandy Williams

254 Butterfield Dr.

Novato, CA 94945

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Change in Meeting Site

January/February 2008

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