



July/August 2019

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS-CHAPTER 2358

CO-LEADERS: Susan Fletcher, Scott Higgins
& Lesa Hartranft
Sibling Coordinator - Courtney Langdon

NEWSLETTER: Donna Goodrich

PHONE: 704-882-4503

E-MAIL: tcf.clt@gmail.com

WEBSITE: WWW.CHARLOTTETCF.ORG

Facebook Page: *Compassionate Friends of
Charlotte, NC*

MONTHLY MEETING

Meeting place: St. Matthew Catholic Church, 8015 Ballantyne
Commons Parkway, Charlotte, NC - Room 234-235

Meeting Time: 3rd Tuesday of Each Month at 7:00 pm

UPCOMING EVENTS:

*Card making session usually on the first Monday of each
month at Donna Goodrich's home. E-mails will be sent out.

*42nd TCF Annual National Conference, July 19-21, 2019,
Philadelphia, PA

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

WELCOME & CHAPTER INFO.....	2
THANK YOU NOTES.....	3-4
CLOSED ONLINE PRIVATE PAGES.....	5
WE REMEMBER OUR CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN AND SIBLINGS.....	6-9
SIBLING CORNER.....	10
BUTTERFLY RELEASE PICTURES.....	11
WHAT IS NORMAL AFTER YOUR CHILD DIES.....	12-13
THE FAR SIDE OF THE RAINBOW.....	14
INFO ON TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE.....	15
BEREAVEMENT BY DRUGS.....	16-17
CONFESSIONS OF A LONG TERM GRIEVER... 	18-20

REGIONAL COORDINATOR

Regional Coordinators for NC: Donna & Ralph Goodrich

Phone Number: 704-882-4503

E-mail: iluvu2lauren@gmail.com

NATIONAL OFFICE

The Compassionate Friends
PO Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
(877-969-0010)

nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Website:

www.compassionatefriends.org

online private closed facebook pages:

*[https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communi-
ties/](https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/)*

TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS!!

We congratulate you on having the courage to walk through our door for the first time. Please give our meetings at least 3 tries before deciding if they are right for you. We hope, with the resources available through TCF, you will find the right person or the right words to help you. You Need Not Walk Alone, We Are The Compassionate Friends.

TO OUR SEASONED MEMBERS:

We need your encouragement and support. TCF continues because of YOU. You give hope to the newly bereaved - hope that they too can eventually find joy in life again. Please attend when you feel you are able to reach out to another bereaved parent, grandparent or sibling.

Did you know that TCF Charlotte has its own Facebook page? Just search in facebook for - Compassionate Friends of Charlotte, NC

LIKE our page and please post any article, quote or personal musings that you feel may help another member. All information for meetings and special events will be listed on our facebook page.

WE HAVE A NEW WEBPAGE!!

PLEASE VISIT US!!

WWW.CHARLOTTETCF.ORG

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE PART OF TCF CHARLOTTE STEERING COMMITTEE???

We need your help. Volunteering to be on our Steering Committee is a wonderful way to give back to the organization that helped you when you were starting your grief journey, and what better way to keep your child, grandchild or sibling's memory alive?? Contact any of the leaders at our meetings if you would like more information. We need YOUR help to ensure our Chapter is as successful as possible in helping others. This is YOUR Chapter - help us make it a welcoming and caring place for bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings to come to for help.

Our Chapter survives by donations only. Please consider donating to your Chapter in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling on their special days. What better thing to do in their memory than to pay it forward for the help you have received from TCF. Thank you to the following people for recent donations to our Charlotte Chapter:

Please Mail All Donations to Our TCF Charlotte Treasurer
At The Following Address:
Carolyn Patton
5902 Rimerton Drive
Charlotte, NC 28226-8227

Corrections to the following donation shown in italics and quotes. So Sorry!!

We now have a new TCF Charlotte Webpage designed and constructed by Colleen Higgins, daughter of Scott Higgins and "Lois" Clark and Sister of Christopher "Diehl." Thank you so much Colleen for our beautiful webpage and thanks to Scott for all his contributions in designing our great page in loving memory of Christopher "Diehl". We appreciate it so much. All information pertaining to our Chapter can be found at our new webpage:

<https://www.charlottetcf.org>

At our regularly scheduled meeting on June 18th, our chapter held its first butterfly release and pot luck dinner, including raffling off of 15 various gift baskets donated by the following members: Carol Patton, Connie Tobey, Marie Roberts, Lesa Hartranft, Lois Diehl, Donna Goodrich, Kay Thomas, Valerie Samuels, Loreen Ringersen, Barbara Litschert, and Susan Fletcher. We would like to thank everyone who donated a basket and all who helped make the evening a success. A special thanks to Scott Higgins and Lois Clark for getting our butterflies for us and keeping them “sleeping” until we were ready for the to “WAKE UP”. Everything went beautifully and we hope to make this an annual event. Thanks also to all who helped set up and clean up for this event. Pictures are shown below and on our facebook page (search for - Compassionate Friends of Charlotte, NC)

We would also like to thank Beckie Johnstone at the Chick-Fil-A at Stonecrest for again supporting our Chapter by providing sandwiches and tea. This establishment has been supporting the TCF of Charlotte since May of 2007. PLEASE show your appreciation by visiting them anytime you are in this area. Thank you Chick-Fil-A for again making our event a success.

“

With all that I
have been through;
all the hurt, all the pain,
all the struggles that
have come as a result of
losing you; I'm still
forever grateful I had you.

JONI GRIEFTOLIFE.COM



“

Your mind will sometimes
take you back to that place.
It will take you back to that
time when you lost them.
As hard as it is to feel
that pain again, let it come.
Scream, cry, do whatever you feel.
Then, once you dry your eyes...
Stop, if only for a moment,
and reflect on how far you've come.
Be proud of yourself.
You are surviving what
could have very well ended you.

JONI GRIEFTOLIFE.COM



Do you ever wake up at night and just need someone to talk to that “knows” what you are feeling, what you are thinking, that will just “let you talk about your child”? TCF has over 20 closed facebook pages for bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings. Go to this link and look over the different pages. They really are good:

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/private-facebook-groups/>

Members - this is YOUR newsletter. If you have something you have written or found that you feel relates to you, please send it to me.

TO OUR MEMBERS

If there are any errors in dates or names in our listing of our children's, grandchildren's, or siblings's, please let me know. We are trying to get our database as accurate as possible. Many of our loved ones names do not have a last name listed. In these cases, we assume it is the same as the parent, grandparent or sibling who is listed as a member in our database. If this is incorrect, please let me know. There are many names that do not have a birth date or a death date listed. We know this can be very difficult to list, especially in the early days of grief. If you feel like adding those dates, just email them to me at: iluvu2lauren@gmail.com. We are only human so we do make mistakes but I have tried to be as accurate as I possibly can. Thank you for your understanding.

Remembering these Children and Their Families on Their Birthdays - July 2019

Debbie Ferrell

7/14 - 10/16

Mike & Kay Arden
Michelle Arden**Leokoshia Baldwin**

7/29 - 7/27

Lynette Battle

Peter Fowler

7/5 - 4/5

Lisa Bellucci

Baby Chambers

7/18 - 7/18

Bryan & Andrea Chambers

Drew Wright

7/31 - 5/29

Bernadette & Bill Christi

Blair M. Crane

7/15 - 10/16

Matthew Crane

Brendan Cullen

7/29 - 2/24

Sue Cullen

Kathlyn Joy Davis

7/30 - 7/30

Beth & John Davis

Adam Dixon

7/22 - 1/30

Pam & Joe Dixon

Nathan Epley

7/28 - 3/1

Vicki Epley

Yasmine Anderson

7/11 - 12/16

Kim Glazier

Garrett Howison

7/16 - 11/21

Angie & Jason Howison

Steven Hulsey

7/1 - 7/24

Candice Hulsey

Daniel James Johnson

7/4 - 5/21

Jim & Jane Johnson

Jacquetta Johnson

7/8 - 6/10

Valerie Johnson

Chase Austin McCowie

7/8 - 3/23

Angela & Robert McCowie
Beth Jordan**Jason Pike**

7/13 - 8/21

Vicki Keppel

Cole Kolker-Hicks

7/23 - 10/26

Jenny Kolker & Paul Hicks

Abigail LaLone

7/2 - 7/2

Laura LaLone

Christina Michailidis

7/26 - 6/8

Mary & Paul Michailidis

Jack Pahle

7/17 - 7/8

Jann & Dick Pahle

Kevin Roddey

7/7 - 10/21

Shelby & Jack Roddey

Alan Bloom

7/8 - 10/9

Sandi Schlager

Jeremy Sprague

7/4 - 11/30

Max Sprague

Christopher John Thorne

7/26 - 1/25

Jackie Thorne

Max Ugarte

7/5 - 9/10

Belinda Ugarte

Jake Ziegler

7/22 - 10/13

Jackie Ziegler

Remembering these Children and Their Families on Their Anniversaries - July 2019

Felix Barraclough

6/6 - 7/16

John & Eva Barraclough

Leokoshia Baldwin

7/29 - 7/27

Lynette Battle

Nolan Brantley

11/18 - 7/22

Holly Brantley

Jack Morgan

5/26 - 7/2

Karen Geisler

Kathlyn Joy Davis

7/30 - 7/30

Beth & John Davis

Michael Wm. Fletcher, Jr.

9/11 - 7/30

Susan & Michael Fletcher, Sr.

Christian Buell

4/12 - 7/8

Jennifer Buell

Charlie Mullis

9/26 - 7/14

Kathy Holder

Steven Hulse

7/1 - 7/24

Candice Hulse

Justin Luckhardt

8/22 - 7/13

Laura LaLone

Abigail LaLone

7/2 - 7/2

Laura LaLone

Erica Lubeznik

5/4 - 7/24

Maricely Lubeznik

Hannah E. Strickland

12/6 - 7/2

Charlotte Manis

Hudson Lee

9/14 - 7/24

Francesca Marie

Jack Pahle

7/17 - 7/8

Jann & Dick Pahle

Emily Parker

4/28 - 7/9

Jeff & Leslie Parker

Ezra Santiago Perez

10/15 - 7/22

Julia Perez

Jermode Darnell Pharr

10/30 - 7/4

Jacqueline & Roger Pharr

Logan R. Barnhouse

8/5 - 7/24

Marsha Roberts

Liliana Patricia Solano Mevdosa

10/23 - 7/24

Henry Solano

Zachary Michael Tobey

2/4 - 7/2

Connie & John Tobey

Seth Henderson

9/27 - 7/2

Daphney Torres

William "Britton" Twitty

11/21 - 7/14

Kathy Twitty

Sarah Vincent

10/3 - 7/21

Elaine & Bill Vincent

Greg Vitiello

12/5 - 7/6

Pat & Ciro Vitiello

Remembering these Children and Their Families on Their Birthdays - August 2019

Dan Biffi
8/25 - 3/11
Mary Beth Biffi

Nicholas Cherry
8/16 - 3/26
Wayne & Jane Cherry

Andrew (Drew) Michael Chester
8/27 - 5/14
Mark & Kathi Chester

Caden Pidwerbesky Davies
8/3 - 8/3
Rodney & Jill Davies

Aidan Donan Guilfoyle
8/1 - 8/1
Susan & Tim Guilfoyle

Kristopher Hartung
8/28 - 6/15
Ryan Hartung

June Keiper
8/21 - 9/14
Roy & Sue Keiper

Justin Luckhardt
8/22 - 7/13
Laura LaLone

Andy Yeager
8/3 - 4/20
Sharon Macaluso

Jamie McKinley
8/14 - 4/9
Janet McKinley

Stephanie Midkiff
8/17 - 2/3
Teresa Moore

Cullen Reiland
8/9 - 10/1
Steve Reiland

Logan R. Barnhouse
8/5 - 7/24
Marsha Roberts

Gregg Moore
8/16 - 11/8
Linda & Arnold Shaw

Shamar Sheats
8/27 - 11/15
Ken Sheats

Jeremy Barber
8/2 - 8/30
Donna Sides

Chris Turner
8/24 - 9/11
Elise Turner

Nicole C. Willis
8/13 - 5/3
Jeanna Willis

Derik Brown
8/1 - 3/23
Lori Young

Remembering these Children and Their Families on Their Anniversaries - August 2019

Zachery Anderson

3/5 - 8/22

Tracy & Jeff Anderson

Robert Ankrah

5/30 - 8/1

Philip Ankrah

Tim Boyer

11/22 - 8/26

Darlene & Melvin Boyer

Colleen Louise Brooks

11/15 - 8/19

Sandra Brokaw

Chet DeMilio

2/10 - 8/25

Kathy Cahill

Kevin Carosa

4/1 - 8/31

Lou Carosa

Caden Pidwerbesky Davies

8/3 - 8/3

Rodney & Jill Davies

Thaddeus Cash

12/10 - 8/17

Jerrica Gaves

Ryan Hortis

10/29 - 8/14

Heidi & Jimmy Goodwin

Aidan Donan Guilfoyle

8/1 - 8/1

Susan & Tim Guilfoyle

Michael Howard

5/15 - 8/25

Karen & Kevin Howard

Jacob Preston Penrow

2/24 - 8/2

Beth Jordan

Jeremiah Karriker

2/17 - 8/4

Jamie Karriker

Amanda Kendall Barbee

6/15 - 8/17

Charlie Kendall

Jason Pike

7/13 - 8/21

Vicki Keppel

Brittney Lambert

6/22 - 8/22

Leslie & Jerry Lambert

Sky Lee

10/25 - 8/14

Francesca Marie

Benjamin Elliot Owens

6/1 - 8/29

Lori & Dallas Owens

Steven Vaughn Ray

1/27 - 8/21

Jimmy Ray

Jennifer Hokanson

10/6 - 8/31

Louis & Jodi Reed

Christopher Ross

6/25 - 8/5

Cindy & Mike Ross

Jeremy Barber

8/2 - 8/30

Donna Sides

Billy Trahey

12/25 - 8/12

Pat Varipapa

Jason Walters

12/10 - 8/26

Alan & Ellen Walters

Angela Harper

12/15 - 8/13

Sherri West

Jeremiah Karriker

2/17 - 8/4

Angie Wolf

SIBLING CORNER

This Can't Be

This is still such a shock to me This really can't be!

I don't want to believe this is real This is not something that I want to feel!

You just came back, you can't leave for good

If I could change this all...I would.

You were the one that was always there.

You were the one to always care. Now a picture is the only way to see you.

I really don't know what to do.

You'll always be my big sister, But life's not the same.

Life without you seems so lame. No more car rides, no more late nights. No more singing and no more play fights.

Where are you? You should still be here.

Where are you? I can't find you anywhere.

I need you still you just can't go away. I need you here, please come back and stay!

Useless to pray you'll come back, you're gone.

God took you with Him to call his own.

But you'll always be present here in our hearts.

You always have been, right from the start.

This is still such a shock to me, This really can't be!

Lilli Pugh TCF Houston Northwest, TX In Memory of my sister, Mand

People think that I have survived your leaving. What they don't understand is that I have to relearn how to survive each day. Because each day you're still gone.

Playing in the Shadows

We grew up together,
Big sister, little brother.

I took care of you

Until you were old enough to care for yourself.

Though you didn't say it,
I knew you loved me.

We played in the sunlight, you and I; Remember the games of "Mother-May-I" and "Hide-and-Seek"?

Sure we had our fights

As all siblings do,

But through it all we never lost Our love for each other.

Now you're gone.

I'll never see you again except in the memories of those sunny days.

You will forever be sixteen--
Far too young to die.

You had your whole life to live.

I'll always grieve, but I must go on. Still, without you,

I play alone in the shadows.

Charlotte TCF Chapter Butterfly Release June 18, 2019

We would like to thank all of the parents, step-parents, siblings, grandparents, and friends that attended our Butterfly Release on June 18th. While listening to the music and verse sung on tape by Alan Pederson "Chasing Butterflies" we celebrated life with the release of butterflies in memory of our children, grandchildren, and siblings. The butterflies, a symbol of life, and freedom, represented our loved ones. The butterflies emerged from their envelopes and rested on our hands for a few brief moments before flying off. We hope that you found some comfort in knowing that you do not have to walk this grief journey alone. We celebrated our children, grandchildren and sibling's lives and honored them that day. We have done what all parents want-we have kept their memory alive.



Grieving-Mothers.org

WHAT IS NORMAL AFTER YOUR CHILD DIES?

Normal is having tears waiting behind every smile when you realize someone important is missing from all the important events in your family's life.

Normal is trying to decide what to take to the cemetery for Birthdays, Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Years, Valentine's Day, etc.

Normal is feeling like you can't sit another minute without getting up and screaming, because you just don't like to sit through anything anymore.

Normal is not sleeping very well because a thousand what if's & why didn't I's go through your head constantly.

Normal is continuously reliving that horrible day of learning of your child's death through your eyes and mind, holding your head to make it go away.

Normal is having the TV on the minute you walk into the house to have noise, because the silence is deafening.

Normal is every happy event in your life always being backed up with sadness lurking close behind, because of the hole in your heart.

Normal is telling the story of your child's death as if it were an everyday, commonplace activity, and then seeing the horror in someone's eyes at

how awful it sounds. And yet realizing it has become a part of your "normal."

Normal is coming up with the difficult task of how to honor your child's memory on their birthday and holidays, and survive these days. And trying to find the balloon or flag that fit's the occasion. "Happy Birthday"? Not really.

Normal is my heart warming and yet sinking at the sight of something special my child loved. Thinking how she would love it, but how she is not here to enjoy it.

Normal is having some people afraid to mention my child.

Normal is making sure that others do remember her.

Normal is after the funeral is over everyone else goes on with their lives, but we continue to grieve our loss forever.

Normal is seeing other families who are "whole" and thinking of how lucky they are. And thinking back on memories of when we were a whole family and knowing that it will never be that way again because our family chain was broken.

Normal is weeks, months, and years after the initial shock, the grieving gets worse, not better because with every passing day, you miss them more.

Normal is not listening to people compare anything in their life to this loss, unless they too have lost a child. Nothing compares. Nothing.

Losing a parent is horrible, but having to bury your own child is unnatural... a complete nightmare that you never wake up from.

Normal is taking pills, and trying not to cry all day, because you know your mental health depends on it.

Normal is realizing that you do cry every day.

Normal is being impatient with everything and everyone but someone stricken with grief over the loss of their own child.

Normal is sitting at the computer crying, sharing how you feel with chat buddies who have also lost a child.

Normal is not wanting to hear that my child is in a better place because although I know she is in heaven, I will never understand why my beautiful child was taken from this earth. It makes absolutely no sense to this grieving mother.

Normal is being too tired to care if you paid the bills, cleaned the house, did the laundry or if there is any food... too tired to even get ready to go to the doctor to find out why you're so tired.

Normal is asking God why he took your child's life instead of yours.

Normal is knowing you will never get over this loss, not in a day nor a million years.

Normal is having therapists agree with you that you will never "really" get over the pain and that there is nothing they can do to help you because they know that only bringing your child back from the dead could possibly make it "better".

Normal is learning to lie to everyone you meet and telling them you are fine. You lie because it makes others uncomfortable if you cry. You've learned it's easier to lie to them than to tell them the truth that you still feel empty and it's probably never going to get any better -- ever.

And last of all...

Normal is hiding all the things that have become "normal" for you to feel, so that everyone around you will think that you are "normal" — with [Tina Kaio](#), [Ruth Mezza](#), [Norma Perez](#) and [Liz Roberson](#).

One day it dawned on me that my children were going to have more memories of me crying and unhappy than they'd ever have of me smiling. And it hurt. It cut me in half that I was leaving that burden for the loves of my life, to carry.
So I got up. I left my bed of despair. I shelved my heart and I smiled. But it was ok...I was letting my soul run the show now. And I knew what I had to do. I had to break the cycle.

Alfa

What a different place this world would be

if people remembered that *grief is born of love*

and all acts of grief are

**NORMAL,
HEALTHY,
and EXPECTED.**

~RaeAnne Fredrickson



**The
Compassionate
Friends**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Taken from "The Far Side of the Rainbow"

The best way I can describe grieving over a child as the years go by is to say it's similar to carrying a stone in your pocket.

When you walk, the stone brushes against your skin. You feel it. You always feel it. But depending on the way you stand or the way your body moves, the smooth edges might barely graze your body.

Sometimes you lean the wrong way or you turn too quickly and a sharp edge pokes you. Your eyes water and you rub your wound but you have to keep going because not everyone knows about your stone or if they do, they don't realize it can still bring this much pain.

There are days you are simply happy now, smiling comes easy and you laugh without thinking. You slap your leg during that laughter and you feel your stone and aren't sure whether you should be laughing still. The stone still hurts.

Once in a while you can't take your hand off that stone. You run it over your fingers and roll it in your palm and are so preoccupied by it's weight, you forget things like your car keys and home address. You try to leave it alone but you just can't. You want to take a nap but it's been so many years since you've called in "sad" you're not sure anyone would understand anymore or if they ever did.

But most days you can take your hand in and out of your pocket, feel your stone and even smile at its unwavering presence. You've accepted this stone as your own, crossing your hands over it, saying "mine" as children do.

You rest more peacefully than you once did, you've learned to move forward the best you can. Some days you want to show the world what a beautiful memory you're holding. But most days you twirl it through your fingers, smile and look to the sky. You squeeze your hands together and hope you are living in a way that honors the missing piece you carry, until your arms are full again.

- Jessica Watson - <https://fourplusanangel.com/>

(with special thanks to Valerie Jones)

42ND TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Still trying to decide about attending our TCF National Conference?? You can still attend!! Even though early registration has ended, you can register on-site!!

Just a few of the many things found at the conference to help a grieving parent, grandparent or sibling.

- Choose to attend from over a hundred different workshops and sharing sessions, given by professionals and also individuals just like you.
- Take advantage of “Healing Haven” to receive free personal services such as a massage.
- Craft items to commemorate the love for your family member in the “Crafty Corner”.
- Step away for a quiet moment of pause in the “Reflection Room”.
- Attend the Walk to Remember on Sunday morning before closing ceremony.

Please join us. As many have said - on Sunday you do not want to leave because you have finally found a place where you are completely understood - you have a new family - your TCF Family.

HOTEL RESERVATIONS

Philadelphia 201 Hotel

201 N. 17th St.

Philadelphia, PA 19103

[MAKE A RESERVATION](#)

Would you like to see the different workshops offered at this year’s conference? Just go to this website:

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/national-conference-workshops/>

BEREAVEMENT BY DRUGS

Posted on January 28th, 2019

Our son Jim died five years ago of a heroin overdose at the age of 21. It was a total body blow for us. Although he had messed around with cannabis when he was 16 or 17, we believed he had moved on, and we didn't know he was involved with drugs of any kind at the time of his death, let alone a drug like heroin.

There is a whole lot I'd like to tell you about Jim; what he was like, what he enjoyed, and there's so much I could write about the pain of losing him and the years of sorrow that followed. Here, though, I want to discipline myself to think about one particular result of losing him in the way we did; the struggle with feelings of shame, stigma, and subsequent isolation.

William Feigelman wrote about his research into the specific needs of families bereaved by drugs. He highlighted both the social stigma faced by such families and also the paucity of resources available to them to help them through their grief. As I read his article, I found it rang true to my own experience.

When Jim died, though I was surrounded by much kindness, I was unable to find specific support to help me in my loss. Sadly, at that difficult time, I felt unable to contact groups such as The Compassionate Friends UK or Cruse Bereavement because I had a dread that I would not be met with sympathy, and that Jim would be judged. My gut fear was that no one would care about him because he had died of a drug overdose. I was afraid he and his family would be labeled and stereotyped. In my worst imaginings, I could hear voices saying things like, "The world's better off without people like him," or "Well, it was his own choice to take drugs." In other words, I feared the judgment of myself and our family and of Jim.

At that time, it was very hard to walk into social gatherings of any kind, as my bereaved mind and soul struggled with the anxiety that behind the kind and concerned faces were hidden harsh and unloving words and thoughts. I loved Jim so much and knew what a lovely young man he was and how much potential he had, and I couldn't bear the thought that on top of the wrenching pain of losing him, other people might be thinking badly about him.

Such tangled and painful emotions caused me to feel very alone in those early months. Who could I speak to about such awful feelings; who could possibly understand? I wanted everyone to know how utterly wrong it was that Jim had died, how special and loved he was, and that he mattered just as much as any other young person who had died of any other cause, natural or accidental.

Battling with such pain and not knowing where to turn, I found myself at the end of two years still deep in grief. It's true that I was getting on with other parts of my life, caring for my family and pursuing a counseling course, but everything I was doing was coming from this deep pot of grief and desperation, and it was exhausting me. They were truly wearying months.

Bereavement by Drugs (continued)

Eventually, in November, two years after Jim died, I was guided to a charity in the UK called DrugFam, set up not long before by another mum who had also lost her son to heroin. DrugFam was different from many other support groups in that they aimed not only to help families facing the nightmare of looking after loved ones with addiction issues in life but also in death. Now, at last, I was able to meet and talk with other people who were experiencing many of the same emotions I was facing. We were able to support one another and talk about our children or siblings in a safe place where we knew no one would judge either them or us. There were lots of tears, of course, but now I was not alone. What a relief it was to know that all these terrible, confused feelings were not unique to me.

It became increasingly clear to me that if the stigma of drug death was going to begin to be lifted, people who had endured it needed to speak out and tell others about their loved ones as a way of challenging commonly held preconceptions about drug users and to help a wider group to understand.

For this reason, I wrote a book telling Jim's story and my reflection on living with grief and the stigma of loss by drugs. In the UK at least, there was a gap in the market for such a book. I had longed in the earlier days to read about how others in our situation had survived but had found nothing. So this book became my contribution—a small beginning, but one that has now reached out to many others bereaved in this way, as well as those who have suffered other kinds of loss. It is also, of course, my memorial to Jim; my way of sharing him with others and letting it be known how very proud I am of him.

When I get the opportunity, I speak at meetings about Jim, the wider issue of drugs, and the shame and stigma felt by the families of users, both in life and in death. I've been privileged to address the North Staffordshire Compassionate Friends and experienced genuine warmth and acceptance there, and not the lack of understanding I had originally feared. Above all, I share a mother's love and pride in a wonderful son. And that many who hear me speak feel released to come and share their own hurts and pains that they have often held secretly for many years. This is a huge privilege for me and a powerful way of continuing Jim's contribution to the world he was part of for too short a time.

With others in DrugFam, I am writing a booklet aimed specifically at helping those who have suffered a drug- or alcohol-related loss to give them some pointers in their pain so that they might know more of what to expect and where to turn for help as the days and weeks turn to months and years. I also volunteer for the Bereaved Parent Support team at Care for the Family, another UK charity. There, I offer support and friendship to the parents who make contact who have lost loved ones through drugs. These are just small things one by one, but they are added to many other small acts being done in other places by other people I'll probably never meet. Together, we can begin to make a difference and share our message that those who die from drugs are just ordinary folk with their own stories, loved by many, and those who are left behind need the same understanding and compassion as any other bereaved person.

PHILIPPA SKINNER

Philippa Skinner works as a counsellor, and she and her husband, Graeme, have three other adult children whom they are just as proud of! Philippa's book, *See You Soon: A Mother's Story of Drugs, Grief and Hope* is recommended by The Compassionate Friends.

CONFESSIONS OF A LONG-TERM GRIEVER

They say that childbirth is a pain you forget, but nobody ever says that about child death. Losing your child is like having a piece of broken glass jammed into your heart. Permanently. Over the years, the sharp edges are often worn smooth, like sea glass, and cut less sharply. You learn to breathe through the pain. You survive. But you certainly never forget. And the younger your child was when you lost them, the longer you live with the remembering.

It has been 22 years now since the terrible day when our fifteen-month-old son, Noah, was run over in my in-law's driveway. Noah was our fourth child and my husband and I were 35 years old, still getting our marriage, family, and careers on track, when our world was shattered. It has also been 21 years since the day, nine months after Noah's death, when our fifth child, Jonah, was stillborn. We buried two babies in the space of ten months. And two decades later, we are still recovering. In many ways, we will mourn their absence for the rest of our lives.

I'm pretty sure two decades qualifies me as a long-term griever. Certainly, there was a time when I never thought I'd last this long. Whenever I attend a TCF conference and they ask for a show of hands, although I'm much younger than the oldest bereaved parents in attendance, I'm definitely among the longest. Indeed, those of us who lose our children to miscarriage or stillbirth, or as infants or toddlers, will likely live for many decades with our grief. We are the ones for whom that blessed "normal" life we once knew was shorter than the one we'll live long after we've crawled through the valley of the shadow of death. We are the bread and butter of the grief world, the stalwart attendees of support groups and conferences forever after our children's funerals are over. We will live to power wash the lichens growing on their gravestones, time and again, as the trees we planted in their memories reach ever closer to the sky.

Part of my responsibility as a long-term griever is to assure the newly bereaved that they, too, will survive and, yes, even thrive, again. Which is what we all need to hear when our worlds come crashing down around us. But there will always be work to do. As much as I hope that some day I'll wake up to find all of my rough edges worn smooth, that day has yet to dawn. Jagged shards keep breaking off, exposing sharp, shiny edges. Some are new cracks, but some are the same old worn spots I've glued back together many times. And I must confess to three that I find myself having to repair, again and again. Forgiveness. Anger. Regret. All have persisted. And along with cupboards full of things considered fragile, like wedding china and crystal, it seems I'll have a relationship with these three nouns for far longer than I ever had my sons.

F is for Forgiveness and I feel like I've earned a PhD in this particular field of study. Noah was run over by my sixteen-year-old niece, which was an accident. But that didn't make it any easier for me to forgive her. Especially when she didn't take responsibility for her actions, nor were there any apparent consequences. Jonah's death resulted in a medical malpractice lawsuit in which we prevailed. But that didn't mean the doctor took

responsibility, either. On the contrary, she fought us in court. I teach my kids that there are three parts to an apology: “I’m sorry,” “I did this,” and “Here’s how can I try to make it up to you.” The people responsible for the deaths of our sons said none of those things, but we couldn’t move forward without figuring out some way to forgive for our own sake.

I have learned that forgiveness isn’t necessarily forever. It’s fluid. Relationships change over time, things resurface, and sometimes the people we forgive are lost to us forever. Sometimes self-preservation means excommunicating people we once loved. Sometimes the people we need to forgive are ourselves. We can talk all day about the “if only’s” because we all loved our children more than ourselves and “if only” we’d known better, we would have done better. We’ve all learned the hard way that we’re not in control. It’s not our fault. We are only human. Extending that grace to others becomes our mandate, difficult as it may be, even if we simply stand on the shore and shout it out to the sea.

One of the many disappointing things we experienced in our hour of need was that the people we expected would be present for us didn’t show up. And yet, they’re still in our lives all these years later. People don’t always behave the way we think they will. Sometimes they behave much, much worse. Conversely, others show up whom we never expected, strangers even. And so we learn to be grateful for the kindness of strangers, to embrace the gifts we do receive. And for the things we don’t, we try to relinquish our expectations and forgive. Sometimes we are still Angry. Yes. We are. Anger still exists, right in between what we’ve lost and what remains, and how the world goes on, regardless. We might be angry with people, like family and friends, or with institutions, like the medical system or insurance companies, or with the higher power seated on the throne of our particular house of worship. We might not be angry but our anger might be triggered by what people feel the need to say, even all these years later. We may still be angry about the specific circumstances of our child’s death or the fact that people’s attitudes haven’t changed or that the people responsible are still driving around or practicing medicine. Or we might be angry about people’s behavior towards us. We might feel they treat us like pariahs, like we’re the problem and it’s our fault that our child died. We’ll always be “those people”. And that’s why they can’t be our friends or let their child sleep over at our house.

But we have to remember that others are trying to find the fault line, to rationalize why this would never happen to them. Even though all of us, here, know that it could. Sometimes we have to talk ourselves off the ledge. It’s okay to throw yourself a tiny pity party. But when the party ends, sweep up the mess and move on to a happier place.

Confessions of a Long Term Griever (Continued)

Regret is really difficult to live with. It's insidious, seeping deep down inside of us and hiding in our cells, erupting as broken heart syndrome, digestive disorders, or hypertension. When Noah died I remember thinking if anything should cause cancer, it's this. And maybe it will, some day. In the meantime, live with our remorse we must. Regardless of the circumstances, we all failed, as parents, to protect our children. And we have to make our peace with that.

Regret may last forever but time creates the space to live with it and cushion the blow. So, breathe. Every time we inhale deeply, straight into the anguish we're avoiding, and then exhale with gusto, we release a little of whatever we're holding onto. And we create a tiny space within which we can replace our sorrow with joy. Then we can begin, again, to smile, laugh, and enjoy our lives.

We are all works in progress. Forgive yourself. Release your anger. Manage your regrets. Over and over, again. Rub those broken edges between your bloody fingers until they're worn smooth. Every day is a new day. Keep gluing yourself back together. As Leonard Cohen said, "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."



[KELLY KITTEL](#)

Kelly Kittel is the author of *Breathe, a Memoir of Motherhood, Grief, and Family Conflict*, and has been published in many magazines and anthologies, including *Three Minus One: Stories of Parents' Loss and Love*. She speaks about grief and loss and presents annually at TCF conferences. Her TEDx talk can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1o-A3w7JcTg> and her website is www.kellykittel.com.