On April 17, 2018, Barbara Bush, wife of former President George H.W. Bush, died at the age of 92. In 1953, when Barbara was 28 years old (over 65 years ago), her second child, Robin, died from leukemia. Like all bereaved families, the death of their child had a tremendous impact on each of them. The following are some of Barbara Bush’s own words.

“I remember asking the doctor why this was happening to our little girl, this perfectly beautiful creature. And the doctor said, 'You have to realize that every well person is a miracle. It takes billions of cells to make up a person. And all it takes is one cell to be bad to destroy a whole person.' So I came to see that the people who are sitting around alive are the miracles.”

“Both George and I felt this enormous physical pain for months afterward. I think you get that when anyone you love dies. Just this enormous physical pain. It felt like our hearts were breaking. We had both been around the hospital for so long that around eight months after her death, we decided to have checkups because we both thought we'd caught something. And of course we didn't have anything, thank heavens. But when you've been around sick people for so long and this pain is there, you begin to think you might be physically ill.”

“I hadn't cried at all when Robin was alive, but after she died, I felt I could cry forever. George had a much harder time when she was sick. He was just killing himself, while I was very strong. That's the way a good marriage works. Had I cried a lot, he wouldn't have. But then things reversed after she died. George seemed to accept it better.”

“Each time the other children got sick, you can believe me, I was hanging over that crib more than any other mother. I was sure we would lose another child. You just don't know how valuable a child is until you lose one, and you don't know what a miracle it is when a child is born well.”

“We were lucky to have her for as long as we did. Robin's death strengthened our belief in God. 'Thy will be done.' And our belief in God strengthened us. So I’ve always felt that Robin Continued on page 2
Thoughts on Mother’s Day

I saw my friend standing, staring at a picture of my son and daughter, and I joined her. Instinctively we put our arms around each other as we stood together. “Loving him was worth the pain of losing him, wasn’t it,” she said. It wasn’t a question. It was a statement of fact, and we both knew the answer was “Yes, yes, a thousand times, yes.” My friend is childless, but not by choice. I know how hard Mother’s Day is for me, but I can only imagine how difficult and empty it must be for her. For me there are memories of the months I nurtured that child beneath my heart. Will I ever forget the time he actually kicked a purse off that bump I called my lap? And the times he hiccupped? Even if he had died at birth, I would still have those memories to treasure. Then, there were those wonderful toddler days when he told the world all our family secrets and amused a whole airplane full of people when he said in his loudest 3-year-old voice, “Tell the maid I want a cake!” School brought a mixed bag of memories. Some good, some bad, but all a part of a boy growing up. How we loved him as a teenager. We lost him during those years, but sometimes I’ve consoled myself with the thought that 16 would be a magical age to be forever. “Yes, dear friend, loving him was worth all the pain of losing him, and more. Much, much more.”

Judy Osgood,
TCF/Central Oregon
When Mother’s Day Hurts

I vividly recall the first Mother’s Day after my son died. It was a very sad, painful day. The beauty of spring itself seemed to exist solely to mock my childless arms. On that day, my husband and I planted a tree in our backyard. I had originally planned to plant a tree for our son so that he could watch the tree grow as he grew. Instead, we planted the tree in his memory.

The choosing of the tree, bringing it home, digging the hole, and the placement of the tree itself, were all acts that meant more than the simple planting of a tree. The act was elevated to ritual status and was very healing and comforting. I placed special stones around the tree, hung wind chimes and placed special ornaments in and around the tree.

Caring for the tree has become a way of demonstrating our on-going love for him. Weeding, decorating the area, watering and fertilizing the tree have allowed for that loving memorial to continue. The tree is visible in our backyard from every window that looks out of the back of our house: kitchen, living room, bathroom, hallway, office. While nothing takes away the pain of missing my child, the ritual we created together to honor his memory made that first Mother’s Day more bearable and is a constant reminder of our love for him. Seeing the tree bloom each spring and watching it grow a little taller and stronger with each passing year underscores the tree’s symbolic representation of our ever-present love for him and his presence in our family.

Karla Helbert
The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child. Founded in England in 1969, the first U.S. chapter was organized in 1972. Since then, 635 chapters have been established. The current Quad City Chapter was formed in 1987.

TCF National Office
P.O. Box 3696
Oak Brook, Illinois 60522-3696
Toll Free (877)969-0010
TCF National Web site — www.compassionatefriends.org
http://www.quadcitytcf.org

Mission Statement
The mission of The Compassionate Friends Quad City Area Chapter is when a child dies at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

Vision Statement
The vision statement of The Compassionate Friends is that everyone who needs us will find us, and everyone who finds us will be helped.

About The Compassionate Friends

The Compassionate Friends is a proven support area for bereaved family members to come and talk about their grief. Stop by and visit with some of our more than 120,000 Facebook members. Please join our TCF/USA Facebook family. Tell us about your child, sibling, grandchild, or other loved one and find support in the words and concern of others. Check out the Discussion Boards! Every day we also provide thought provoking questions, grief quotes, and links to grief stories, as well as TCF news such as updates on the National Conference, Worldwide Candle Lighting, and other TCF programs.

Closed Facebook Groups: The Compassionate Friends offers several closed Facebook groups to connect with other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. The groups supply support, encouragement, and friendship. Recently added groups include Men in Grief; Loss to Long Term Illness; Loss of a Step Child; Loss of a Child with Special Needs.

The Compassionate Friends National Newsletter
One complimentary copy is sent to bereaved families who contact the national office: The Compassionate Friends, Inc., P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696 (877)969-0010.
email: NationalOffice@compassionatefriends.org
Website: www.compassionatefriends.org

Visit the sibling resource page at www.compassionatefriends.org. It is also available to read online without charge.

e-Newsletter Now Available! An e-Newsletter is now available from the National Office! The monthly e-Newsletter contains notes and happenings of interest to all TCFers. To subscribe to the e-Newsletter, visit the TCF National Website home page and click on the Register for TCF e-Newsletter Link. This newsletter is available to everyone.
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I don’t feel much like celebrating Mother’s Day this year. My 15-year-old daughter died 51 days ago, after being plagued by a rare, relentless form of cancer for five years. I’m not sure what the celebration is supposed to look like when I failed at my main task as a mother: Seeing my child safely to adulthood.

I realize that attributing the death of my child to my own failure is irrational. I understand that guilt and blame won’t bring her back, that we tried valiantly to cure her with treatments that ranged from a liver transplant to chemotherapy to radiation. I know cancer kills children every day. But she wasn’t a statistic. She was my child, and I couldn’t save her. I couldn’t save her.

I know other mothers who’ve lost children, and they’ve tried to prepare me for how unbearable this Hallmark holiday can be, how your very identity as a mother is shaken and upended when your child dies. We’re a dismal, heartbroken club of kindred spirits. We share the pain of empty, quiet rooms that hold the remnants of our children’s lives—keepsakes that remain long after our dear ones have gone.

How can I celebrate this day? How can I celebrate myself? Every day I open the door to my daughter’s room, sit on her tidy bed and wonder how any of this is real. How is it possible that all I have left is her collection of albums, stones and crystals, and her closet full of untouched clothes? How long will they serve as proof that she was here on this Earth, that she was real?

As the days go by, my daughter’s proximity to me fades; the reality of her absence becomes more concrete. This would be okay if it were because she had graduated high school, gone off to college and started her life, but that’s not what happened. She stopped existing at 15. She stopped.

I don’t know how to celebrate Mother’s Day without the consolation prize given all mothers — that our babies are gone, but we have laughing toddlers in exchange, that our toddlers are gone, but we have curious, bright-eyed preschoolers in their place, that the messy, carefree days of preschool meld into the primary years, when interests and personalities emerge and blossom, giving us teenagers who are whole, unique people. The fact that our kids grow up into actual people distracts us from the pain of their fading childhood. Except, of course, if they don’t grow up.

I am two mothers now — the mother you see walking beside my remaining daughter in the all-too-real world of chores and homework and trivial things, and the mother you don’t see — the mother bereft, imagining that my daughter is two steps behind me, just out of sight. I look whole and normal, but deep inside there’s an emptiness where my heart used to be. I can’t walk with my surviving daughter without imagining the shadow of her sister right beside us, rolling her eyes, glancing at her phone.

There are too many mothers like me, rushing here and there, pretending we’re fully in one world when, really, we’re in two.

I wish I could go back to when my kids were 9 and 6, when Mother’s Day was about hand-drawn cards and breakfast in bed. I can almost smell the burned toast, taste the mint tea. Dwelling on the past is the only thing that allows me to feel Continued, next page
Continued from previous page

something other than numbness and despair. The others who walk this path of intense grief tell me it gets better. Eventually, I’ll start feeling what I’m supposed to feel. I’ll move more fully into the world of living children. Until then, I’m as much a part of my dead daughter’s world as I am my living daughter’s.

But what if I don’t want that to happen? What if time erases the only thing I have left of my daughter, dulling the edges of her face in my mind’s eye like a faded photograph? Living this quiet pain is how I feel closest to her right now.

Two years ago each of my girls bought me a tree for Mother’s Day — a magnolia and a dogwood. It’s the only Mother’s Day gift I remember clearly. The trees are small but thriving. Each year they grow a little bigger, acting as living reminders that I had two daughters, not one.

I guess Mother’s Day is just a day, not unlike the day that came before it or the day that follows. Realizing this somehow makes it okay that I can’t celebrate this year. The holidays we cherish are as real as we make them, just like our lives, just like the titles we give ourselves. My daughter isn’t here anymore, but that doesn’t make me any less her mother. Since she’s died, I’ve been afraid of losing that, losing the last little bit of her that I’ve been clinging to. There will be more painful days to come — her birthday, Father’s Day, Christmas, a first day of school she won’t get to attend and on and on. I’ll need to reconcile her absence on these days so I can be present for my remaining child. Somehow, I must figure out how to forge a new connection with my daughter now that she’s no longer here.

The mothers that walk with me in grief tell me it’s hard to face all of these milestones in the first year, but it’s even harder in the second. That’s when the reality of my child’s absence will finally feel real. I believe them because I can sense it’s coming. I dread the full weight of time and distance that will inevitably make her absence a solid thing, final and irreversible. Even so, I hope I can find my joy on Mother’s Day again, if not this year, then next.

Jacqueline Dooley
healingana.com

Men may grieve differently than women, and it is important to realize that there is no set pattern under which this process happens. There’s no formula. There’s no cookbook recipe that you can follow to make someone better. You deal with it as best as you can. You can’t say “I wish I was over this,” or “I wish I could function better.” Everybody’s going to grieve differently and move at a different pace.

Joe – HAND (Helping After Neonatal Death)
The Compassionate Friends, Quad City Chapter

Thursday, May 23, 2018, at 6:30 pm at Bethany for Children & Families,
1830 6th Avenue, Moline, Illinois 61265

The next regular monthly meeting is Thursday, June 28, 2018,
Please call Doug Scott (563.370.1041) for information and directions.

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<th>The Compassionate Friends of Muscatine</th>
<th>Meets the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 at the George M. Wittich-Lewis Funeral Home, 2907 Mulberry, Muscatine, Iowa. Chapter Leaders are Linda and Bill McCracken. You can call them at 563.260.3626 for directions or information, or contact them at <a href="mailto:linmac67@machlink.com">linmac67@machlink.com</a>.</th>
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<td>Rick’s House of Hope</td>
<td>Rick’s House of Hope serves children ages 3-18, and family members from the Quad Cities and nearby counties. We serve those with grief, loss, or trauma issues. Death of a loved one and divorce are common; however, any sort of traumatic event or family change would fit our criteria, such as: bullying, teen dating victimization/harassment, crime victims, and other needs. At this time, Rick’s has a Holiday Healing group for children experiencing loss on Tuesday nights 5:30-7:00 until the Christmas holiday. The continuous groups are Family Together for all members of the family on Wednesday nights 5:00-7:00 pm and a Teen Night on Thursdays 5:00-7:30 pm. All meetings are held at 5022 Northwest Boulevard, Davenport, Iowa 52806 and are free. Rick’s House of Hope also does individual counseling/therapy. For more information, contact Lynne Miller, Program Manager, at <a href="mailto:millerl@verafrenchmhc.org">millerl@verafrenchmhc.org</a> or go to <a href="http://www.rhoh.org">www.rhoh.org</a>.</td>
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<td>SHARE</td>
<td>A support group for parents who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death. SHARE meets the third Thursday at 6:30 pm in the Adler Room #1 in the lower level of Genesis Heart Institute, 1236 East Rusholme Street, Davenport, Iowa. Questions? Contact Chalyn Fornero-Green at 309.373.2568, or <a href="mailto:chalyn@shareqc.com">chalyn@shareqc.com</a> or <a href="http://www.shareqc.com">www.shareqc.com</a>.</td>
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| Loving Listeners | If you need someone who understands and will listen, feel free to call or email (if address is given):
- Doug Scott 563.370.1041 doug.scott@mchsi.com
- Rosemary Shoemaker 309.945.6738 shoartb3@mchsi.com
- Judy Delvecchio 563.349.8895 delveciojudy@hotmail.com
Doug, Rosemary, and Judy are willing to take calls from bereaved parents, grandparents, or siblings who want to talk to someone who cares that they don’t feel alone. |
41st TCF National Conference July 27 - 29, 2018
The Compassionate Friends is pleased to announce that St. Louis, Missouri, will be the site of the 41st TCF National Conference on July 27-29, 2018. “Gateway to Hope and Healing” is the theme of this event, which promises more of this year’s great National Conference experience. The 2018 Conference will be held at the Marriott St. Louis Grand Hotel. Details will be posted on the national website as well as on the TCF/USA Facebook Page as they become available. Plan to come and be a part of this heartwarming experience.

Love Gifts
As parents and other family members find healing and hope within the group or from this newsletter, they often wish to make a Love Gift to help with the work of our chapter. This is a way to remember a beloved child, and to help other parents who mourn the loss of their child.

Donations are used to provide postage for the newsletter and mailings to newly bereaved families. Some of the love gifts are used for materials to share with first time attendees at our meetings or to purchase books for our library. Our thanks to the many families who provide love gifts so that the work of reaching out to bereaved parents and families can continue.

If you would like to send a donation or love gift, please send it or to our chapter leader, Doug Scott, 6550 Madison Street, Davenport, Iowa, 52806. Checks should be made out to The Compassionate Friends. Your gifts are tax deductible.

Contact the Editors
If you read or write an article or poem which might be helpful to other bereaved parents and would like to share it.
If you move and would like to continue receiving the newsletter, send us your new address.
If you know someone you think would benefit from receiving the newsletter, send his/her/their name and address.
If you prefer to no longer receive the newsletter or if you prefer to receive this newsletter via email.
Please contact:
Jerry and Carol Webb
390 Arbor Ridge, Benton Harbor, Michigan, 49022
CarolynPwebb@gmail.com
For many, the month of May can be a very traumatic time. We expect the warm days and the beauty of spring to renew us, but often our depression lingers, or deepens, for we are not ready to move on with the season. Many of us feel we are not finished mothering our child when they die. Mother’s Day magnifies the fact that we can never complete that unfinished job, and we cannot find a place for our unfinished love.

On the days we feel so sad and don’t have the energy to help ourselves, it is normal to want to stay where we are in our grief. It takes more strength than we have to move on. Our grief can become so overwhelming that we have to fight to get through the day. We feel we are not making progress, but it can be a tremendous accomplishment just to survive. Each day of survival helps us to recovery. Even reversals show progress, when we can get back to where we were before the slip. We often expect too much of ourselves. We are very fragile, confused, and vulnerable to slipping while climbing out of the pit of grief.

It takes a lot of grief before our days can have more good hours than bad. But it does come. Most of us cannot even imagine that progress in our early grief. Eventually, we can make peace with our loss and our painful memories become warm treasures. Even though we always think of our child daily, it is with thankfulness that they were a part of our lives.

The only real joy comes from having known our child or sibling. Our grief becomes so overwhelming it crowds out the joy and deteriorates us to the level of feeling we can never know joy again. It is necessary for all of us to go through stages of grief. Once we have finished our grief work (which is much more than a few months), the memories of those we love become superior to the death, or cause of death. And we accept that the real joy was having them in our lives, knowing them, and the mark they left on us.

When our child was born or adopted, we became a parent; that relationship cannot be revoked. We are still their mother and father. Often those who lose only, or all, children struggle with their parental title. We are their parents, and they will always be our children. Love is what makes this bond, and that did not diminish because they died. We still have the pride and joy of being their parent as long as the love remains, and we know that is forever.

Marie Hofmockel  
TCF/Valley Forge  
Shared Thoughts on the Love that Makes Us Parents
Hope is being able to see that there is a light despite all of the darkness.

Desmond Tutu

There is this place in me where your fingerprints still rest, your kisses still linger, and your whispers softly echo. It is the place where a part of you will forever be a part of me.

Gretchen Kemp

There is a hard truth to be told: before spring becomes beautiful, it is plug ugly, nothing but mud and muck. I have walked in the early spring through fields that will suck your boots off, a world so wet and woeful it makes you yearn for the return of ice. But in that muddy mess, the conditions for rebirth are being created.

Parker Palmer

Will there ever be a day when I will be able to go to a graduation, an engagement party, a wedding, cut a birthday cake, see a nephew, a niece, or a grandchild, toast a new year, hide an Easter egg, hang a Christmas stocking, or enjoy a lazy Sunday afternoon without remembering and wondering what might have been? And if that day ever comes, will I feel better or worse?

Ken Faulk, TCF/Scranton, PA TCF

ISLANDS
Look for the small, quiet islands of peace that arise unexpectedly from out of the greater sea of your sorrow.

Sascha Wagner
To those who are receiving our newsletter for the first time, we wish you were not eligible to belong to this group, but we want you to know that your family and you have many friends. We who have received love and compassion from others in our time of deep sorrow now wish to offer the same support and understanding to you. Please know we understand, we care, and we want to help.

You are not alone in your grief.