



The Compassionate Friends

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

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Eugene Oregon Chapter

DEEP GRIEF: CREATING MEANING FROM MOURNING

When your child dies, the immensity of still being alive strikes at your core. Your focus shifts back and forth between the grief you have and the gift you had.

You are overwhelmed by sorrow and loss and a sense of what might have been.

At the same time, you are thunderstruck by the joy and beauty and richness your child brought into the world.

You are awash with the deepest-aching pain. And yet you long to celebrate your child's brief, brilliant time on this planet.

That moment-to-moment tension, the never-ending whiplash to-and-fro between these two powerful instincts — the grief and the gift — drives you mad.

Some parents in deep grief have found a way to tamp down the madness a little, to go on living within this gut-wrenching dichotomy. They have discovered ways to redirect some of the grief toward the gift — by creating a memorial that celebrates the memory of the child, and, at the same time, sustains and propels the child's spirit and hopes and dreams into the future.

It is a paradox, says Kenneth J. Doka, a professor of gerontology at the graduate school of

The College of New Rochelle. By creating memorial funds or foundations, says Doka, the author of a shelf-full of grief books, including *Living with Grief: At Work, At School, At Worship*, parents "are creating a bond with their children that goes beyond death."

Turning Grief Into Education

Joseph and Lorenza Colletti created that kind of bond. They were devastated when they lost their 26-year-old son in 1995. "It's like a nightmare," Lorenza Colletti says more than 14 years later, choking back tears. "You go to sleep at nighttime — if you can even catch some sleep — and then you wake up in the morning and the nightmare begins all over again. And it's all over again, day after day. "I mean, when your child is alive, you don't think of him 24 hours a day. But when he's gone, that's the only thing that's on your mind. And then you walk around and you see maybe someone wearing a cap that reminds you of your son, and you quickly turn — maybe that's him. Your mind plays so many tricks because it's so hard to really understand the depth of what has happened to you."

The accident was flukish. Lorenza's son, Marc Colletti — a marine biologist with the New York Department of Environ-

mental Conservation — was surf casting in Long Island Sound. "The water was not even waist deep," Lorenza says. "And as he was walking from one area to the other within the water, trying to go fishing, there was sort of a depth that he wasn't aware of, or an undertow." Marc's chest waders filled with water.

Though he knew how to swim, he was sucked under by the force and drowned.

"To this day it haunts me," Lorenza says. "It was just such a freaky accident, that's all I can say. If I dwell on it, it bothers me because he wasn't taking any chances. He wasn't being foolish. He wasn't out there when there was stormy weather. I don't know. I don't know."

The Collettis turned their parental energy to creating a memorial for Marc. "Joe and I immediately knew that we had to keep his dream alive," Lorenza says. "We did some research and spoke to a number of people. What we wanted at first was to have a room dedicated to Marc in an aquarium — a hands-on for children to educate them about marine life. That was too expensive." Then the Collettis learned of a marine education program at the Science Museum of Long Island in Manhasset. Using family funds, they arranged to fund an annual field trip for

MONTHLY MEETING

Location

Lane County Mental Health Bldg.
2411 MLK Jr Boulevard
Eugene, OR 97401

When

1st Wednesday of every month at 7pm
No religious affiliation
18 and over

UPCOMING EVENTS

- *Mid Month Coffee*
Wed, 2/17
Starbucks 7th & Washington
5:15 p.m.
- *Steering Committee Mtg*
Wed, 2/24
5th Avenue Food Court
5:15 p.m.



NATIONAL OFFICE

The Compassionate Friends
PO Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
(877) 969-0010
nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org
www.compassionatefriends.org

middle-schoolers. Every September, six members of the inner-city Boys & Girls Club of Oyster Bay-East Norwich are treated to a daylong boat trip to learn about marine life and the environmental impact of humans on the ocean and the planet. The Collettis hope the students will be inspired to carry on the work their son began.

"I've been a few times onboard," Lorenza says, "and it's so touching because then in the middle, in the center of the water, they stop the boat and they ring the bell for a minute of silence for Marc. And I know he's watching. And when he's watching I know that all these kids, they are loving the water. And loving what he loves. And his spirit is around in that moment. I just love it."

Finding Consolation In Community Action

You never, ever get over losing a child. The grief becomes part of your emotional DNA. You carry it with you like cancer. Ella Thompson understood that heartache.

In 1988, Ella's 12-year-old daughter, Andrea Perry, was raped, then shot to death in West Baltimore.

Whereas the Collettis channeled part of their sorrow into education, Ella turned hers toward community action. Her response to deep grief was to help other at-risk children avoid her daughter's terrible fate.

First she volunteered at the Martin Luther King Jr. Recreation Center — less than two blocks from where Andrea was murdered — in her Franklin Square neighborhood known for drugs and danger. Then, for seven years, she served as the recreation center's director. Her work among the bullet-riddled, drug-flooded streets of Baltimore became her living memorial to Andrea.

Ella was interviewed many times by Baltimore writer David Simon for his 1997 book *The Corner*. Simon, creator of hyper-realistic TV dramas such as *Homicide* and *The Wire*, recalls that Ella "talked at length about how she was at the rec center because that would honor Andrea and connected her with Andrea's memory. And at one point when I asked her if she thought she could, through what she was doing, ever heal completely, or something to that effect, she was overcome, and had to get up and walk to a corner of the rec. She faced the far wall so I wouldn't see her crying. But she was crying."

For Ella, Simon says, "her grief was profound and all-encompassing, it was forever."

In 1996, the Parks & People Foundation, a Baltimore nonprofit group, hired Ella to run KidsGrow, an environmental education program in West Baltimore recreation centers. "Ella loved the children that showed up at KidsGrow after school," says Jean DuBose of the Parks & People Foundation. "She made it her job to know them, where they lived, who their parents or guardians were, and what they were good at. Ella knew that this personal interest in their lives is what kept them coming back, and she knew that when they were in KidsGrow they were safe." In 1998, Ella herself died of a heart attack — while driving a car filled with donated computer equipment. She was 47. But her work, and Andrea's dream for a better life, continues. Simon and others established the [Ella Thompson Fund](#). Administered by the Parks & People Foundation, the fund supports inner-city initiatives such as KidsGrow. DuBose says that even though Andrea and Ella are gone, "the fundamental elements that were Ella's passion remain the same."

Stomping Grief Into Energy

These are some of the daunting challenges for bereaved parents: to actually care about the needs of the world at large and to attempt to carry on in the spirit of their lost child.

Deep grief is debilitating.

And yet in Kathmandu, Nepal, Krishna Gurung is trying somehow to find energy — literally — in his grief. Krishna takes cow dung and shredded wastepaper and creates briquettes for local people to use as inexpensive fuel.

He does this in the name of his late son, Kevin.

Krishna tells the story of how Kevin died, by accident, when he was 7 years old. "He was very active," Krishna says. "And he was playing with a cord that was hanging from the door. And he strangled himself to death. That was within a few minutes."

Krishna dreamed that someday Kevin would join him, side by side, working for the poor and disenfranchised. "I was hoping that he would be following the way that we are going," Krishna says. "And it didn't happen ... physically. So I took all of the responsibilities to establish an organization in his name."

Like parents who need to take physical care of their newborns, some bereaved parents take on the life's work that their dead children cannot do.

In Kevin's memory, Krishna has created an eco-friendly village that provides education, health care and jobs to people with leprosy and physical handicaps. In honor of Kevin, Krishna says, "we have got more inspiration, more family and other members being so cooperative. And we get now more energy to work in this field, which the entire world is needing now."

As one source of income, Krishna and other workers in the village gather up the wastepaper from the embassies and offices in Kathmandu. "We just collect papers and shred them by hand by the people, and that is soaked over the night," Krishna says.

The wet shredded paper is mixed with sawdust and cow dung, Krishna says. "Then next morning we just compress it in a handmade device, and the water is squeezed out and the briquette becomes harder. And we take it out for drying and it is ready to burn. ... It burns very well."

Every Day The Nightmare Returns

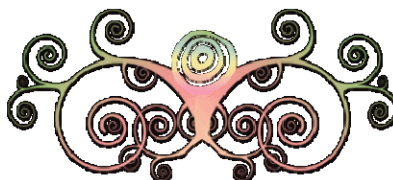
As Krishna Gurung, Lorenza Colletti and other parents who have lost children know, you do not stop being parents when your children die. Living memorials — a marine science program, community action, a sustainable eco-village — enable parents to continue the meaningful work they know their children would have done had they lived on.

For grieving parents, the loss of a child is an around-the-clock, unrelenting, inescapable horror show. Every new day's dawn is just another sorrow-filled reminder. As Colletti says, "the nightmare begins all over again."

By creating a living memorial, some parents find the strength to get out of bed every morning. And a reason to stay tethered to the everyday world.

They take the waste that is their deep grief, and they reshape some of it into fuel, into energy, into meaning. And maybe, even, into endurance.

Editor's note: NPR national correspondent Linton Weeks and his wife, Jan, lost their two sons, Stone and Holt, who were killed by a highway trucking crash in July 2009. In memoriam, Linton and Jan created [The Stone and Holt Weeks Foundation](#).



WELCOME

Especially to those newly bereaved who have joined us for the first time. The Compassionate Friends is a voluntary self help Organization offering support, understanding and hope for the future. All bereaved parents are welcome. We are sorry we had to meet under such circumstances, but we are glad you found us. We would like to do all we can to help you through these times. We cannot hurry you through it or take away the pain, but we can help you understand more about what you are going through. Sometimes just knowing that what you are feeling is normal can be helpful. We are parents who have experienced the death of a child and offer understanding and support through our monthly meetings, a lending library, support material and a listening ear. We have learned a key to survival for bereaved families is communication. We ask that you attend three meetings before deciding if The Compassionate Friends is for you. It takes courage to attend your first meeting, but those who do come will find an atmosphere of understanding from parents and siblings who are having, or have experienced, the feelings of grief that you are now feeling.



"My sister will die over and over again for the rest of my life. Grief is forever. It doesn't go away; it becomes a part of you, step for step, breath for breath. I will never stop grieving Bailey because I will never stop loving her. That's just how it is. Grief and love are conjoined, you don't get one without the other. All I can do is love her, and love the world, emulate her by living with daring and spirit and joy."

— [Jandy Nelson, *The Sky is Everywhere*](#)

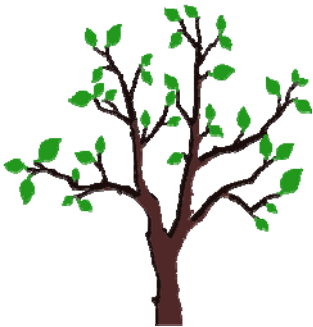


REMEMBERING ALLISON

When Allison died and we started receiving condolence messages from everyone, one stood out. One of my closest friends in Ohio said that when she told her father that Allison had lost her battle with brain cancer, he said, "I believe that the day you are born, the date of your death is already written in the stars." At the time, I didn't really feel or believe that, but after thinking about it, I found that it was one of the most comforting thoughts that I had received. Because, even with cancer, there are still feelings of guilt that overcome you- 'what could I have done differently?', 'I should have fought harder' etc.. When I was finally strong enough to start going through her papers, I came across several poems she had written in middle school and early high school that astonished me. This was years before her brain tumor diagnosis and all was well in her world. She was a straight A student, had many friends, a sweet boyfriend, played up in soccer to the varsity level and was voted homecoming attendant by her class - none of the angst associated with the teen years. So I was amazed by these poems and here is one of them:

"DEEP GRIEF SOMETIMES IS ALMOST LIKE A SPECIFIC LOCATION, A COORDINATE ON A MAP OF TIME. WHEN YOU ARE STANDING IN THAT FOREST OF SORROW, YOU CANNOT IMAGINE THAT YOU COULD EVER FIND YOUR WAY TO A BETTER PLACE. BUT IF SOMEONE CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THEY THEMSELVES HAVE STOOD IN THAT SAME PLACE, AND NOW HAVE MOVED ON, SOMETIMES THIS WILL BRING HOPE"

ELIZABETH GILBERT, *EAT, PRAY, LOVE*



"My little bird has flown away. Fly high and strong sweet one. Remember me as I remember you in each moment of every day."

- Sarah Garcia

Success

When I was just a child
And I imagined my life,
It was an open road,
With options left and right.

I thought I could do anything
My life was up to me
I planned on doing everything,
Being all that I could be.

I didn't know what I would do,
Or what I would become.
I knew that I would have success,
That I would be someone.

I didn't know what road to choose,
Each green light was a chance,
To try and fulfill my dreams,
To try to complete my plans

But now my time is running out,
The road is straight ahead,
Instead of blazing brand new paths,
I feel I'm being lead.

I wonder what I could have been,
If I could have gone farther,
If I would have made that fateful choice,
And tried a little harder.

And now I must accept myself,
A fallen, burned out star.
I will blindly travel down my road,
Barren, cold and far.

Before I ever lived,
My precious life ran out.
I couldn't make the wiser choice,
I followed the wrong route.

So now what am I to do,
Knowing that I'm done?
No matter how hard I work,
I may never be someone.

Allison Collet
10th grade

Allison never stopped living and working after receiving her diagnosis a month before her 20th birthday. She graduated from college with honors and fulfilled her dream by getting into medical school despite her tumor. The tumor reared its ugly head after her first semester of med school and she lost the battle 3 weeks after her 26th birthday. Her neurosurgeon, Dr. Andrew Kokkino, wrote in a letter of recommendation to OHSU, "...I have learned much about her drive to succeed in life, given the challenges that she had to face as a student who needed to face a serious medical condition. She never winced or blinked and always moved forward through difficult times. I have never seen Allison frown or have a sad moment in remarkably stressful personal situations." That's my gal Al. It's as if she knew somehow.

-Jenny Collet, Alison's proud Mom



"We do not have control over many things in life and death but we do have control over the meaning we give it."

— *Nathalie Himmelrich*

OUR CHILDREN REMEMBERED

JANUARY ANGEL DAYS

Matthew David Bartling
 Jonathon Lee Schive
 Nickolas James Gillespie
 Marcus Adam Pelta
 Rebecca Huffman
 Maven Wallick-Williston
 Casey Michael Carroll
 Vincent Mack
 Cassandra Ann Chapman
 Jesse Daniel Nelson
 Jude Francis Benjamin
 John Henry Holleman
 Jason Eric Petchell Waterman

FEBRUARY ANGEL DAYS

Kenneth Sconawah
 Aaron Zachary Canoy
 January Suzanne Storm
 Laurel Jeanne Gieber
 Hailey Grace Cooper
 Daryl Steven Stanford
 Nathan Paul Buck
 Jack Harnsongkram
 Kristi Lee
 Starling Madigan Yannick
 Lawrence Korte
 Nathan Daniel McBryde
 Ben Sequoia
 Dominic Shaun Rusk
 Garrett Thomas Brandt

I CARRY
 YOUR
 HEART IN
 MY HEART



LOVING LISTENERS



Reach out to one of our loving listeners if your heart is hurting and you need to talk.

Tori 541-912-5322

Maureen 541-747-5148

Alison 541-554-5510

Sarah 425-289-9659

“I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.”

- John Burroughs

“YOU WILL LOSE SOMEONE YOU CAN’T LIVE WITHOUT, AND YOUR HEART WILL BE BADLY BROKEN, AND THE BAD NEWS IS THAT YOU NEVER COMPLETELY GET OVER THE LOSS OF YOUR BELOVED. BUT THIS IS ALSO THE GOOD NEWS. THEY LIVE FOREVER IN YOUR BROKEN HEART THAT DOESN’T SEAL BACK UP. AND YOU COME THROUGH. IT’S LIKE HAVING A BROKEN LEG THAT NEVER HEALS PERFECTLY—THAT STILL HURTS WHEN THE WEATHER GETS COLD, BUT YOU LEARN TO DANCE WITH THE LIMP.”

- ANNE LAMOTT



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

Chapter Mailing Address:
PO Box 40756
Eugene, OR 97401

Chapter Phone: 425-289-9659
Chapter E-mail:
eugenecompassionatefriends@gmail.com

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU

The mission of The Compassionate Friends: 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.

Eugene Compassionate Friends Volunteers

Facilitator	Sarah
Library	Sarah & Cedar
E-Mail	Sarah
Treasurer	Maureen
Member List	Sarah
Website	Leeann
Newsletter	Volunteer Needed
Proof Reader	Ruth Anne
Public Relations	Volunteer Needed

Website:

eugenecompassionatefriends.org

Steering Committee:

We are always looking for new members. Please join us at our next meeting.

Newsletter:

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome. Please e-mail us at eugenecompassionatefriends@gmail.com.



“When you are sorrowful look again
in your heart, and you shall see
that in truth you are weeping for
that which has been your delight.”

- Kahlil Gibran

