



# *The Compassionate Friends* *of Northwest Houston* Supporting Family After a Child Dies

*Welcome to The Compassionate Friends. We are sorry for the reason you are here, but are glad that you found us. You Need Not Walk Alone, we are The Compassionate Friends.*

## **APRIL 2018**

**HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

[www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org](http://www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org)

**We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.  
(Our next meeting is Tuesday, April 10th)**

**Because of the ongoing renovations at Cypress Creek Christian Church our meeting this month will be held once again at the home of Mark and Debbie Rambis. Their address is: 3607 Bainbridge Estates Dr. Spring, TX 77388.**

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## THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

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.

### **To the Newly Bereaved**

As the years pass, we see new members come into the chapter, and we try to help them with their grief as we progress in our own. Over and over again, I have seen newly bereaved parents come to their first meeting totally devastated and convinced that their lives are over. Through the months (and years) I have seen them struggle and suffer and try to find meaning in their lives again. And they do! Through all the anger, pain and tears, somehow the human spirit is able to survive and flower again in a new life – perhaps a changed life and possibly a sadder one, but a stronger one nevertheless.

We feel so weak and crushed when our beloved children die, but I know because I have seen it countless times in the years I've been involved with The Compassionate Friends that we can make it together. When you walked through the door for the first meeting, you were frightened and nervous; but with that step you made a statement about your life. With that first step through the door, you said you wanted to try, you wanted to find a reason for living again, that you weren't willing to be swallowed by your grief. You wanted to go forward, and those first steps into The Compassionate Friends began your journey.

The journey will be a long one, for you loved your child with all your heart and soul. When that child died, a part of you was ripped away. It takes a long time to repair that large hole. The journey will not always be steady or constant; there will be many setbacks. Those of us who have taken the journey before you can assure you that, while there may be no rainbow at the other end, there is indeed "light at the end of the tunnel."

We want to help you as we were helped, but in the beginning and in the long run, you must help yourself. You have to want to get better, to talk about your loss, to struggle through the grief. We will listen, suggest, share and laugh and cry with you; and we hope, at this time next year, you'll be several steps along in your personal journey through grief. Then you can begin to help others.



*Our Children, Siblings, and Grandchildren Remembered*

**APRIL BIRTHDAYS**

- 1980-Gregory Lynn Meier, Son of Gary Meier
- 1983- Justin Fletcher, Son of Karen Fletcher
- 1985- Chance Williams Son of Lynn Williams
- 1987- Ryan Matthews, Son of Frances Matthews
- 1990- Derek Ford, Son of Jackie Ford
- 1988- Stephen Cage, Son of Melanie Cage
- 2005- Sanai Caden Johnson, Daughter of Octavia Johnson
- 2012- Hamzah Zubair, Son of Farah Zubair
- 1979- Tracey, Daughter of Anita Sutphin
- 1988- Travis George, Son of Kathy George
- 1990- Kayanna, Daughter of Shari Lancaster
- 1991- Iman Had, Daughter of Naila Qureshi
- 1982- Joshua Hucklebridge, Son of Elaine White
- 2010- Zy'Air Stovall, Son of Jerome & Dora Stovall
- 1983- Crystal Garza, Daughter of Marta Garza
- 1982- Tiffany Driscoll, Daughter of Dan & Cindy Driscoll
- 2014 - Giavanna Calista, Daughter of Nicole Kelley
- 2014 - Korie Joiner, Daughter of Julie Joiner
- 1989 - Lindie, Daughter of Beth Shelton
- 1994 - Hunter Smith, Son of Lee Smith
- 1995 - Brandon LaFavre, Son of Teresa Kobs

**APRIL ANGEL DATES**

- 2005 - Chance Williams, Son of Lynn Williams
- 2008- Samantha Dawn Quesada, Daughter of Albert & Dawn Quesada
- 2009- Sandra ReNae Southerland, Daughter of Vivian Southerland
- 1993- Karen Crawford, Daughter of Kim Crawford
- 2010- Keegan Dade Coggon, Son of Kellie & Gavin Coggon
- 2007- Andrew Rininger, Son of Philip & Ellen Rininger
- 2009- Nicole Berrow, Daughter of Rosie Berrow
- 2009- Anthony R. Boras, Son of Walter A. Boras
- 2005- Dillon R. Howland, Jr., Son of Rachel Howland
- 2010- Alex Flood, Son of John & Alice Flood
- 2009- Matthew Peterson, Son of Sharon Peterson
- 2009- Bryan Belveal, Son of Linda Belveal
- 2006- Michael Beshara, Son of Mike & Elaine Beshara
- 2006- Shannon Stovall, Daughter of Charlie & Liz Stovall
- 2008- Eric Reiland, Son of Kimberly Crawford
- 2010- Staci Kendall, Daughter of Larry & Tami Kendall
- 2011- Iman Had, Daughter of Naila Qureshi
- 2012- Samual Johnson, Son of Tim Johnson
- 2012- Lauren Ovelgonne Tenney, Daughter of Steve & Carol Ovelgonne
- 2012- Tracey, Daughter of Anita Sutphin
- 2011 - Justin McHan, Son of Ronnie & Linda McHan
- 2014 - Angel Joseph Vasquez, Son of Mary Vasquez
- 2014 - Kyla, Daughter of Ron O'Farrell and Monica Reynolds
- 2013 - Wolfgang Jones, Son of Phillip Jones
- 2016 - Radley Moon, Son of Melissa and Daniel

## CHAPTER NEWS

**Our next meeting is Tuesday, April, 10th at 7pm. I had hoped to be back at the Church in April, however, as of this week the Church is still not ready. We will once again meet at Mark & Debbie Rambis home, 3607 Bainbridge Estates Dr., Spring 77388. Hope you will join us.**

### Balloon Release

On Tuesday May 8<sup>th</sup> we will hold our annual Balloon Release. This is when we honor our children in a lovely ceremony. We'll write a note to our child and tie the note to our balloons to be released into the sky. At this time, weather permitting, we plan to have the balloon release at the children's fountain located on the eastside of the Church. If you would like to volunteer to bring balloons please let me know.

### A Warm Welcome to Our New Members - We're Glad You Found Us.

We offer our warmest welcome to our new member, **Laurie Martin**. Laurie lost her son, **Patrick in July 2005, and her daughter Kristina in July 2017**. If you have walked through the door to a TCF meeting, we understand how traumatic and difficult that is to do...we have all taken that step and reach out to you in friendship and support.

If you have recently attended your first meeting, you may have left feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you may feel that you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared in meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return.

These feeling are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least three tries before you decide if these meetings are for you.

We hope you will find our meetings and newsletters to be a source of comfort, a place where tears are allowed, no judgments are made and the support which will help you travel this journey of grief, and we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

### *"A Special Remembrance"*

Chapter members please consider submitting a short story about your child for our newsletter. Tell us about the happy times of your child's life, their hobbies, the school they went to or where they worked. Did they have siblings. Or you may consider sharing your grief journey with others so they will come know there is hope after the darkness. Send your articles to me, Linda Brewer at [llbrewer67@hotmail.com](mailto:llbrewer67@hotmail.com).

### To Our Old Members

We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick. THINK BACK...what would it have been like for you if there had not been any "oldies" to welcome you, share your grief, and encourage you? It was from them you heard, "your pain will not always be this bad; it really does soften." Come join us and support our new families.



## National Conference News

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 year's event, which promises more of last year's great National Conference experience. The 2018 Conference will be held at the Marriott St. Louis Grand Hotel. We'll keep you updated with details here, on the national website as well as on our [TCF/USA Facebook Page](#) and elsewhere as they become available. Plan to come and be a part of this heartwarming experience.

### Register Now

Adult Registration: \$115  
Child Registration (9-17) \$55  
Full-time College Student Registration \$55  
Active Military Registration \$55

## 19TH ANNUAL WALK TO REMEMBER

JULY 29 @ 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

The Compassionate Friends Walk to Remember is a highlight of every TCF National Conference. Even if you are not able to attend, you can be a part of this heartfelt event by sending us the names of the children, grandchildren and siblings whose memory you wish to honor. Your generosity will help us support all bereaved families who have reached out to TCF, as well as those who today don't know they'll need our help tomorrow.

We invite you to send us a child's, grandchild's or sibling's name so that it can lovingly be carried by volunteers in our 18th Walk to Remember, a time set aside to honor and remember the children gone much too soon. We also are offering the opportunity to sponsor a personalized walk sign that includes your child's/grandchild's/sibling's photo and name. These walk signs will be featured along the walk route. For those who are unable to attend the National Conference, photos will be taken of the at the Walk to Remember and a link will be posted on our website, [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org).

Register at:

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/walk-remember-registration/>

## Peace

Today is the one year anniversary of the day my son realized he could no longer live. I know this because he told us so in the writings he left behind. It is not the anniversary of his death.

What I remember of the day is that it was not unlike any other. There were no family fights or friend drama. There were no failed tests or poor academic projects.

It was just a day like today.

That week was just like any other as well. Tom attended high school and college classes, and we worked, going through our days just as we always do. But Tom found a way to spend special time with each of us before he left. He and L.J. spent Monday night playing music together. I tried to record it, but it was not perfect, so I deleted the file that night. Tuesday night he and I made his favorite meal together, pasta with hot sausage red sauce. Then, we played a complicated Wii game which consisted of me pushing random buttons to fend off the bad guys while he worked his magic on the most powerful villains. We played for a few hours, until my hands hurt and I could not see straight from all of the blurred images on the television. He played the music he loved and told me which was his favorite song. I listened to it through his ears, but cannot remember the song name. That night, he peeked his head in our room, and played with the light switch, turning it on and closing the door behind him with a mischievous grin. He spent the next few days with his father, doing the things they loved to do together, including gaming with a great bunch of folks on Friday night. He spent Saturday and Sunday at our house, doing homework, playing on the computer, and listening to music.

That Sunday, as I cooked in the kitchen and talked casually with him, he wrote his final farewell to us.

We had no idea of his pain, his plan, or our future.

In his note, he told us that past week had been the happiest he could remember because he was able to live during that time without fear and anxiety of the future. So a part of me is at peace, if that's possible, because he was able to spend his final hours free from his demons. But how I wish, in that week, he had found the strength to fight through the darkness and tell us of his inner war. How I wish I had seen past his armored wall into his soul, so I could pull him through to the light of our love. I wish we could have shown him how many people appreciated him and were impacted by him, and how many would have stood by his side as he fought his undiagnosed illness so he could win his battle with a full army. I wish...

I miss him every hour of every day. I miss his humor, his intelligence, his presence, his thoughtfulness and his soul. Someone recently responded on one of my posts that maybe Tom misses me, too. I hope he is beside me as I write, and can feel the outpouring of whatever is stronger than love, that I have for him. I pray that through his death, he found the peace he could not find in life.

Kimberly Starr  
TCF Facebook Loss to Suicide Group  
In Memory of my son Tom

## The Cord

We are connected, my child and I,  
by an invisible cord not seen by the eye.

It's not like the cord that connects us 'til birth  
This cord can't been seen by any on Earth.

This cord does it's work right from the start.  
It binds us together attached to my heart.

I know that it's there though no one can see  
The invisible cord from my child to me.

The strength of this cord is hard to describe.  
It can't be destroyed, it can't be denied.

It's stronger than any cord man could create.  
It withstands the test, can hold any weight.

And though you are gone, though you're not here with me,  
The cord is still there, but no one can see.

It pulls at my heart, I am bruised...I am sore,  
But this cord is my lifeline as never before.

I am thankful that God connects us this way  
A mother and child, death can't take it away!



*The  
Compassionate  
Friends*  
Lehigh Valley Chapter  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Author Unknown

[Facebook.com/TCFLehighValley](https://www.facebook.com/TCFLehighValley)





## The Robin's Song

It's spring once again. Our part of the world is turning back towards the sun; trees are leafing out; wildflowers are blooming. Robins are again singing to one another. And, I believe, also singing to those who are grieving.

Before my daughter Lori died in the summer of 1991, I was under the misperception that only the English robin had a glorious song. That smaller, red-breasted scalawag of a bird delights all who hear it, and I had felt that we in the United States had been short-changed when they'd misnamed its larger, boring, American cousin the same sweet name. All I'd ever heard our robins do was cheep!

Then one spring day in the year after Lori died, during one of the darkest times of my grief, my ears and heart flew open with surprise at a song I heard outside my window. I distinctly heard, in the midst of my pain, a bird singing loudly and clearly, "Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio! . . . Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio!" I went outside to see what marvelous bird might have been sent to sing to me. I could barely see the bird at the top of the neighbor's poplar tree, so, while hoping this exotic, magical bird wouldn't fly away while I was gone, I went to find our binoculars.

Rushing back, I could hear the bird from each room in the house. After adjusting the binoculars, I was truly amazed to see one of our "boring" American robins come clearly into view! As he continued singing clear as day, "Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio!" I marveled at this special message and wondered if my robin was the only one who sang these words. So I looked it up in my Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds and found that my robin was not an anomaly, but that robins are considered the true harbinger of spring, singing "Cheer-up, cheer-up, cheerily."

I stood there that day filled with wonder. I wasn't hearing things; there it was in the bird book: "Cheer-up, cheer-up, cheerily." I thought to myself, "Cheerily . . . No, that isn't what I hear." We had lived in England for a year and our family, especially Lori, who loved to put on an English accent, often said "Cheerio!" to one another when we meant, "Goodbye" or "See you later!" There was no doubt in my mind as I stood there listening. It WAS cheerio. Lori could have found no more perfect way to try to cheer me up AND say "hello"!

Nine springs have passed since then, and although I will always deeply miss Lori's physical presence in my life, those darkest of times are thankfully now mostly in the past. It is spring once again and as I hear the robin singing so hopefully in the highest branches, it takes me back to that first spring song, and I smile, remembering. And I think of all those who are now in the darkest depths of their own grief and pray they too will hear this lovely song.

**By: Genesse Bourdeau Gentry**

## River Reflections

I just got back from a river rafting trip, where I found myself thinking about my brother a lot. He died 16 months ago of an overdose of morphine. I don't know why it happened; it happened. I didn't see the beginning of his life—he was three years older, but I saw the end. I can look at it now and see it in its entirety—his 33 years of living that I so much counted on and expected to last another 70 or 80 years. I thought I would always have him to talk to—about life, about family, and about ourselves.

The river was a meditative place for me. The rhythm of the oars, the gentle motion of the raft, the shore gliding by, the gurgle of the water as it seeped into and back out of our raft—all of this provided just enough stimulation and was hypnotic enough that I didn't want to do anything but sit and think. For a few days on the river, I floated without any of my day-to-day concerns, without the usual level of tension standing behind me.

What rose to the surface, visible in the clear water of my mind after the silt of all my worries sank to the bottom, were thoughts of my brother. Nat would have liked this trip. The rough beauty of the terrain and the quiet power of the water would not have been lost on him. He would have noticed the beauty of the full moon and the light on the canyon walls as the sun rose and set.

I have felt a lot of anger at him for dying, for taking his own life, for engaging in an activity so dangerous, for playing Russian roulette, for committing suicide. He left no note, he didn't say good-bye; he left a wife and two sons whom he loved very much but who, like me, were not enough to keep him alive. It wasn't the anger, though, that I felt on the river. I just remembered him.

Grief is at its sharpest when, after a death, he all of a sudden flashes into focus so real and so present that I can hear his voice as if he has just spoken to me. I can imagine the scent of his hair, remember the texture of his face as I touch it, and I can see him walking and talking as if he were only there a moment ago. At these times, the grief flares up; the wound feels fresh and sharp with memories of the love, the charm, and the grace. I realize both with gratitude and with anguish for the wound this reality carries, that he is not someone I can let go. These memories will come to me for the rest of my life. He is truly a part of me. He is mixed up in my blood and my bones and the electrical impulses of my brain. And in whatever way all of these things go together to form a soul, he is a part of that too. There is no escaping him. This is the gift and the price of love--it doesn't end.

My brother was there in the river's sand and mud, in the full moon, the constantly flowing cold water, the clear dry air, the red canyon walls, and the blue sky. And he was there in me. And I was there, alive and more appreciative than I would have been before he died. I was more aware of my connection to my surroundings—that one day my body will be river mud, water, and bones like driftwood. What form my love will take then, I don't know. Maybe if there is a river and desert light offering delight to someone's senses, that will be enough. I don't know.

Emily Moore  
TCF Los Angeles, CA  
In Memory of my brother, Nat

## Suicide Grief

To lose someone to suicide is complex and confusing. It's unique from other ways people die because someone ended his or her own life. They made a choice and that leaves those of us left behind wondering if there is something we could have done to change that choice. Often, there were mental health issues involved that also could have included substance abuse. There is just not one factor that goes into a suicide death.

The grief journey we must travel after suicide often is treacherous because we aren't sure what to expect. Life never prepares us for the kind of grief (and the reactions that tumble after it) that suicide loss brings. We also don't realize that we don't have to travel it alone. There are many other people out there who are going through a similar journey (or are much further along on the road) and would welcome some company or a chance to help us. Ultimately, we must find our own way and our own hope and peace. The Compassionate Friends is here to help, no blame or shame, just Love.



### LIFE

*Life is something we all share,  
Just like oxygen, in the air.  
The way we live it, is up to us,  
With a negative or with a plus.*

*Life is something, we should cherish,  
We never know, when we'll perish.  
Live each and every single day,  
Smell the flowers, stop and play.*

*Life is something, we've been blessed,  
Choice is yours, choose your quest.  
Follow your passions, and you'll be fine,  
With the right attitude, you will shine.*



## My April Child

When our daughters were growing up the arrival of springtime was a favorite time of the year, filled with anticipation of the coming of special days of family fun. The freshness of the air, the brilliant colors of spring time trees and flowers, and the song of the birds returned from their winter retreat resounded the message of hope and that life was good. We had survived another cold, snowy Michigan winter and were soon to be rewarded with blue sky, sunshine and temperatures well above freezing!

Birthdays in our family were a time of celebration together. Each year Larry, Anna, Debbie and I, and perhaps a friend or two, would celebrate Anna's April birthday by dining at her favorite Mexican restaurant. There would be lots of silliness and laughter. During her teenage years, Anna would always forewarn us not to have the staff come to our table to sing their crazy birthday song. Of course, since we always insisted that our role as parents was to embarrass our children, her threats and warnings could not stop our tomfoolery. I believe she secretly enjoyed the attention.

As Mother's Day approached, we looked forward again to spending the day together as a family. We would attend church, go out for my favorite brunch, have lots of conversation, fill our bellies to the max, laugh until we cried, be silly, make memories... That was before...

Then the unthinkable happened. My April child died. How could those special days of love and togetherness, laughter and fun become among the most dreaded days a mother must face? How could those days that we had once anticipated with joy and excitement bring such unbelievable heartache and confusion, loneliness and tears?

During those first few years we were simply lost. This was new, undesired, and certainly not requested, territory that we had been forced to enter. What were we supposed to do? How were we supposed to act? I just wanted to run away on her birthday. For several years we did just that. With hearts filled with the numbness of fresh grief, our restructured family of three would hop in the car and head out-of-town. We would spend the day busying ourselves with whatever it took to survive. We would laugh half-heartedly, share memories, or cry together as we struggled to discover our new identity as a family without Anna's physical presence.

As always, only a few short weeks following Anna's birthday Mother's Day would arrive right on schedule. The traditions we had come to love and enjoy became intensely painful. It became an impossible task to attend church services or go out for brunch. Seeing families enjoying their togetherness pierced my heart with an endless ache. My tear-filled eyes burned at the thought of being surrounded by "intact" families. Feelings of anger and resentment overwhelmed my heart. On the inside I wanted to lash out at all those mothers and fathers who were surrounded by all of their children and those sisters and brothers who had no clue what it would be like to lose a sibling. As the day drew to a close I felt tremendous relief that it was over. Exhausted, I would lay silently with my head on my pillow as quiet tears lulled me to sleep.

It seems impossible that it has been nine birthdays and nine Mothers' Days since Anna died. In my heart it was only yesterday. I can still see her smile and hear her laugh. I can feel the

warmth of a quick hug as she heads out the door. With each passing year comes a new reality of what it means to be a bereaved parent, of what it means to find a new normal for our lives. The pain continues to occasionally catch me off guard, but it is softer now. The tears still come, but less frequently. Warm memories bring joyful moments to the emptiness. I smile quietly to myself, reassured that Anna lives on in our hearts and lives, as well as in the hearts and lives of those around us. Once again each April we celebrate the day of her birth, for her life has been a gift of unimaginable joy. Our traditional Mother's day rituals have changed to new ones. There is more laughter now, fewer painful tears. I rejoice that I can celebrate that I am Debbie's Mom, and now Scott's mother-in-law, as well! Life is good.

The winter has been long and cold, as has been the winter of our grief. Springtime has arrived. The sunshine and blue sky, the purple crocus and yellow daffodils pushing through the warming earth bring hope of renewal and reassurance that life continues. Although there is an irreparable hole in my soul and an emptiness in my heart that will never leave, I am forever grateful that Anna lived with us for 23 years. I am eternally thankful that I am and I always will be Anna's Mom. May the warmth and brilliance of springtime fill your hearts with times of peace and hope and love.

*"In the midst of winter I found within myself an invincible summer."* Albert Camus

Paula Funk  
TCF Safe Harbor Chapter, MI  
In loving memory of my daughter, Anna



*As a butterfly graces our lives with  
a moments fragile beauty so too has  
your child's presence blessed you,  
and those around you with  
their life and unique spirit.*

*May you find peace and joy with  
each butterfly that passes by,  
knowing that your child lives on  
in the hearts of all they touched.*

*Unknown*

## Phone Friends

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All of the people on the following list are bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. They understand what you are going through and have all wished to be included in this list in the hope that anyone who needs to talk will reach out to them. They are willing to talk with you at any time you need their support. Some have listed the specific area in which they have personal experience but they do not intend to imply that that is the only topic they wish to talk about. We all have experienced this journey through grief and it encompasses much more than the specifics surrounding our individual loss. Having a compassionate person to listen when you are having a bad day or just need someone to reach out to when you feel overwhelmed can make the difference in getting through one more day. We have all been there and understand, please feel free to contact any one of us.

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