



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 2020

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.

This month's meeting is canceled do to Covid-19 Virus

at

**Cypress Creek Christian Church
6823 Cypresswood Dr., Room #3
Spring, TX 77379**

The Church is located between the Courthouse and the Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the Church area parking. We meet in Room #3 which is down six step off the main lobby of the Church on the Library side. Follow the posted signs to the meeting room.

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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
1994 - Ryan Francis, Son of Greg and Anne Francis

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- Samuel 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

Because of the Covid-19 virus our monthly meeting will be canceled. Please feel free to call any of the phone friends on the last page of the newsletter if you feel the need to talk to someone during this difficult time. I hope all of you will stay safe and healthy.

Balloon Release

We will update you in the future on the possibility of having our May Balloon Release.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members, **Jacqueline Smith, she lost her daughter Chantal Warfield in October last year; and Sue Speir, lost her daughter Nicole in January.** 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 feelings 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.

Mother's Day Special Remembrance

Mother's Day is next month, please consider submitting a short story about your child for our newsletter. Tell us about your child's life, his/her hobbies, the school they went to or where they worked, did they have siblings. Include a picture of your child. Or you may consider sharing your grief journey so newly bereaved parents will know there is hope after the darkness. Email your articles to me at llbrewer67@hotmail.com.

TCF "ONLINE SUPPORT COMMUNITY" OFFERS OPPORTUNITY FOR GRIEF SHARING

The Compassionate Friends national website offers "virtual chapters" through an Online Support Community (live chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child. The rooms supply support, encouragement, and friendship. The friendly atmosphere encourages conversation among friends; friends who understand the emotions you're experiencing. There are general bereavement sessions as well as more specific sessions.

The sessions last an hour and have trained moderators present. For more information, visit www.compassionatefriends.org and click "Online Support" listed under the Find Support menu.

I Didn't Have A Sister Until My Child Died

As a child, I often felt a deep loneliness when meeting my friends' sisters. I had no sister. There was no one with whom I could share my secrets, my successes, my dreams, my failures, my fears, my heartbreaks, my environment, my stresses, my sadness or my love. There was no sister who shared the meaningful events in my life. But time moved on.

Then my only child died.

My life turned upside down as a mother's worst fear became a reality. I was in shock. I was depressed, withdrawn, broken and lost. I began attending Compassionate Friends meetings. Initially I felt only my heartbreak and the heartbreak of the mothers whose children had died. As I continued to attend the meetings, I felt a kinship to these women. I learned the story of their children and shared the story of my child. I began to think of their children as nieces and nephews who were with my child.

We shared our anxieties, secrets, successes, dreams, failures, fears, heartbreaks, stresses and experiences. We were walking the same lonely road together. We had a common bond, a bond as thick as blood....our precious children were dead. As I meet newly bereaved parents, I look at the mothers and realize I may well have another sister. This is a big family now and, sadly, it's getting bigger. I experience the pain of many birthdays and death anniversaries throughout the year. I feel the blood-curdling scream of each mother whose child has died. She is my sister. I reach out to her, as others have reached out to me, and in so doing, I may help her and bring a tiny bit of peace to her and to myself.

Yes, it would be easier to turn my back and pretend I don't connect with these mothers. But I do connect with them. And life isn't always about the easy road, as we have sadly come to understand. Life is about finding ourselves in the midst of chaos and tragedy and moving forward to a deeper, more meaningful normalcy. A normalcy that includes the memories of our child and our sisters' children.

Happy Mother's Day to All My Sisters

Annette Mennen Baldwin
In Memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX

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 Anticipation of Spring

Spring is a time for growth and renewal. As a child, teen, and then an adult, I always looked forward to spring with anticipation. The thoughts of green grass, budding trees, and blooming flowers of all varieties and colors were a welcome change from the long cold, dreary Michigan winter.

It was a magical time of year. When I was a child, each member of my family watched anxiously to lay claim to being the first to spot the familiar hop-hop of the returning robin, the first sign that spring was actually here. We could finally take off the gloves, shed our heavy winter coats and boots, and roll down the windows on the car to hear the laughter of children playing outside and smell the fresh mown grass as we'd drive down the road.

That's the way it was for me on the first day of spring 12 years ago. I remarked how beautiful the tulips looked as they danced in the wind. The trees were budding, and there was magic in the air. My kids and I shed our heavy winter coats, flinging them in the backseat, rolled down the windows of the car, and started singing in celebration of the beautiful day we were experiencing.

And then . . . **IT** happened.

Suddenly, undeniably, horrifically—my world, my spring, my life changed.

My 5-year-old son, Stephen, died that first spring day. His 8-year-old sister, Stephanie, my firstborn, died a few hours later, enough past midnight to list the next day on the death certificate. Gone was the laughter, the magic, the beauty of my world.

The springs that followed were no longer filled with anticipation or magic. They were dark and ugly and filled with memories too painful to talk about. I wanted nothing to do with "spring." If H.G. Well's time machine had existed, I would have entered it at the end of winter and fast-forwarded through spring.

As time marched on and one spring followed another, I learned an important lesson in my journey through grief: As much as I wanted to, I couldn't fast-forward through the hard spots. I couldn't go around them. I had to go through them slowly, like a dog paddling through water, so I could get to the other side. Somehow doing this taught me to cope, to endure, to face tomorrow and all the first days of spring that followed. It's much like the transformation that takes place when a butterfly emerges from a dark, cold, seemingly lifeless chrysalis.

A few years ago, as winter was drawing to a close and the first day of spring was quickly approaching, I looked out the kitchen window toward the budding pear tree in the backyard and discovered it was full of chirping robins. I smiled and knew that spring somehow wasn't going to be so bad. It was once again time to enjoy the smells of the season, the beauty of the budding trees, and the magic that the season had to offer. And I knew Stef and Steve would have wanted that for me.

Pat Loder
TCF Lakes Area Chapter, MI
In Memory of Stephanie and Stephen Loder
Reprinted from *We Need Not Walk Alone*, 2003.

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.

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



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

Facebook.com/TCFLehighValley

Phone Friends

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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