



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 2024

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

at

**Trinity Lutheran Church
Family Life Center #204
5201 Spring Cypress Rd.
Spring, TX 77379**

The Church is located on the corner of Spring Cypress Road and Klein Church Road. Please enter off Spring Cypress Road. The meetings are held in the Family Life Center, Room #204

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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
- 1991 - Bonnie, Daughter of Eve Baszkiewicz
- 1992 - Brittany, Daughter of Kimberly Swan
- 1989 - Christopher, Son of Margie Caswell
- 1982 - Stephen Offenburger, Son of Mary Raub
- 2004 - Morgan Ascencios, Son of Lisa Ascencios

**Your life was a blessing
Your memory a treasure
You are loved beyond words
And missed beyond measure.**

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
2021 - Dylan Guy, Son of Gavin & Rachel Wheeler
2021 - Parker , Son of Tim & Amy Coogan
2022 - Jonathan Boyd Chapa, Son of Jessica Chapa
2021 - Jacob Hamburg, Son of Faith Hamburg

Don't try to destroy a beautiful part of your life because remembering it hurts. As children of today and tomorrow, we are also children of yesterday. The past still travels with us and what it has been makes us what we are.

Rabbi Earl Grollman

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, April 9th. at 7pm.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members .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.

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.



Hotel Reservations

This year's conference will be held at the New Orleans Marriott. Reservations can now be made online at TCF's dedicated [reservation link](#). Our discounted room rate with the Marriott is \$144 per night plus applicable taxes and fees. Please note that each attendee can reserve a maximum of two rooms. Many attendees arrive on Thursday since the conference begins early on Friday morning. We also have pre-conference activities that are offered on Thursday evening, that attendees find beneficial. We look forward to seeing you in New Orleans!

I Almost Went Home

by Diane Cassidy

(a member of the Troy, Michigan TCF Chapter)

(taken from 2014 We Need Not Walk Alone Magazine)

When my Katie Kates went to Heaven on May 18, 2005, she was 19 1/2 yrs. old, and the world as I knew it was destroyed.

I did not know anyone who had lost their child. I felt like I had suddenly been dropped into a foreign country with no friends, cell phone, map or money and I did not even know the language. I was completely alone in an unfamiliar world. Family, friends and my church tried to help, however I no longer lived in their world and they most certainly had no idea what to do or say to me.

I didn't want to be in my own home, my daughter died in the middle of the night peacefully, when she was sleeping in her own bed, with me in the next room. I did still believe in God, however, I felt God must be very angry with me to take my baby! I had tried to live a good life, I wondered what could I have possibly done to deserve this?

It was hard to imagine how life went on. I became a robot, automatically doing what I needed to do and most of what I was expected to do. However, no one was home. I no longer was present, I was still in this foreign country all alone, lost, hopeless for the first year, I just wanted to die.

In May of 2006, my oldest daughter Christina found The Compassionate Friends. She wanted me to attend the National Conference in Dearborn, Michigan which was only a half hour from my house. I told her "NO!" I wanted nothing to do with TCF, I couldn't even take care of my own grief, how in the heck was I supposed to deal with thousands of others who also had had their lives destroyed? She asked me to do it for her; I told her I would try.

It was difficult to say no to my daughter, and therefore I decided to give the TCF Conference a try. Christina lives in another state and so I arrived at the Conference a day before her. I was trying to keep an open mind but I did not want to be there. When I pulled up to the hotel valet, I did not unpack my car, I decided to register and look around first.

There were so many bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings, it was much more crowded than I expected. I lasted less than an hour; I did not speak to anyone and kept to myself. I decided to leave and asked the valet to get my car. Two bereaved dads came up to me wearing TCF badges and said "You're leaving, aren't you?" I acted like I did not hear them, but they would not go away. To make a long story short, they talked me into staying just for the night, and offered some advice. "Don't think about the Conference, go to your room, order room service, take a long hot bath, watch a funny show or movie, sleep, wake up in the morning, go to the Opening Ceremony, then make your decision. Please stay, you will be happy you came."

For some reason, what these two caring bereaved dads said to me made sense, and that is exactly what I did. I showed up to the Opening Ceremony, I found hope and new friends and my new normal world to live in that is no longer foreign to me. I'm thrilled I went!!

In the past nine years, I've been to seven Conferences; this year will be my eighth. I am the person who is outside whenever possible and watches for those alone, getting ready to leave. I try to give them a plan to hopefully find hope, just like the two dads gave to me.

So, if you're afraid to come to a TCF's National Conference, I understand, because I have been there. I am now the woman standing just outside the front doors at every TCF Conference looking for someone like me who is thinking about leaving. If you see me, stop by and say hello to Katie Cassidy's Mom and we'll chat.

TCF is HOPE.



Self Help

For many of us, the monthly meeting of our Compassionate Friends Group is the only real healing time we give to ourselves. Helping ourselves on a daily basis is critical to our journey in the grieving process.

Many of us find solace in books. Others find it in movies, music, time with friends, meditation or intense spiritual conviction. Each day we should take some time to center ourselves, to find a place of peace.

If you haven't already done so, start with a quiet time of reflection and search your soul for the key to your own solace. There will still be bad, even terrible, days. The effort to help ourselves begins with knowing ourselves and finding the unique activity that soothes our broken hearts for just a little while.

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

What Is Left?

When a child dies, you ask, among other questions, what is left? A beautiful, sensitive, intelligent son has chosen to end his life. What can be left after such a crushing blow?

Others will point out that you have a spouse, other children or grandchildren, perhaps relatives and friends. They are all left. Perhaps you have a career that is left. And yet how meaningless all of those are to a bereaved parent, to one who is suffering the most devastating loss of all. So you continue to search for what it is that is left.

You read books on bereavement scarcely remembering what you have read; you attend meetings, talk with others who have suffered a loss like yours. If you are

fortunate you have one or two good friends who, while they cannot fully understand, are there to love and listen. Perhaps there is a therapist who guides you in your search for an answer. But for a long while everything you read or hear has little meaning and certainly cannot provide the answer to your question. Or can it? Does all that you have read and heard and experienced finally come together and answer the questions of what is left?

For me it does. The answer was 13 months in coming, but how clear it seems now. I am left. That's it! I *am* left and I have been left with the love of Scott. It is a new love, it is different, more intense, it is undemanding, it need not be reciprocated, there are no strings attached. I love this love of Scott's. It warms me and comforts me. It is a wonderful love, but I cannot keep it. It would be wrong to do so; this love is too precious to keep to myself.

I am left with love to spare and love to share. It will never run out. He will always be with me to replenish it. I have found my answer! I am left to share Scott's love with you.

Betty Stevens
TCF Baltimore, MD
In Memory of my son, Scott



Filling In Holes

Today, my husband and I went to the plant nursery and bought some flowers and bedding plants to go in our gardens. Spring is here, and the weather is beautiful. Not cold at all... but also not so hot that the thought of puttering in the garden brings a groan of dismay.

I remember my first spring in this house. We were so excited. Our family was nearly complete. Our third son was on his way, and we had just had a house built. We were at the plant nursery at least once a week. Our life was busy, bright, untainted by grief.

I remember our second spring in this house. How winter hung on, tenacious, unyielding, both outside, and in our hearts. I remember the first warm spring day. I came home from work early, determined to make SOMETHING grow in my life. Maybe I couldn't get my son to live, but I was going to make something live.

Grief was a raw, open wound then, and my anger was deep. I was angry at the world, at God...at everything. And so I approached my yard, shovel in hand. I decided I had to have a garden in the middle of my yard. I began furiously digging out the grass, making an oval in the center. It took me hours digging out that oval. But I wasn't through. I then decided I wanted a garden right by my doorway, so I dug out that area too. And then I made big holes, and tore out all the roots and stones and other junk.

I made big holes in my yard that day. And in the weeks to come I DID fill them with things. Funny thing, as I dug those holes and pulled on the grass, my anger drained away. My salty tears mixed with the sweat of exertion and the dirt, and ran off my arms undetected to the outside world. Digging those holes provided an outlet for my anger and my hurt.

Today I dug some more holes. But this time, my holes were smaller. And I filled them. With small, delicate flowers, purple and white. I put bulbs in the ground too, filling other small holes. And I reflected back on another hole. The hole in my heart. No, I can't ever fill it with what "should" be there... my son "should" be almost seven now, full of energy, and wanting to plant flowers with Mom. But I have filled that hole with other things. With love and healing and memories. And with the lessons and the gifts my son gave me. I never saw those gifts that spring, as I was digging out holes in my yard. And though I would rather have that hole filled with my son's presence, I am grateful for the gifts he gave. And so I will go on, filling holes.

Lisa Sculley, March, 1999
TCF Jacksonville, FL



Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Yesterday

You were here and I took it for granted that you would always be here. Telling you I loved you and was proud of you seemed unimportant. There would be time for that when we were older – when we fought less and talked more.

Today

I know that time will never come, and I will never have the chance to say things face-to-face. So I write them and think them and hope you know I mean them now and have always felt them.

Tomorrow

Each day the pain and regrets of things left unsaid get easier to deal with. I have begun to realize that you knew how I felt because you felt the same way. And as more tomorrows turn into yesterdays, I will find peace in that knowledge. Someday, somewhere, we will meet again and I will have my chance then.

Shannon Odessa Stiener
TCF, Lowell, IN

On Gratitude

My feet were cold from the icy pavement as I waited for the morning bus. The bitter winter was receding and I was working hard on gratitude. I bent my head deeper into my scarf and saw a penny in the street.

I had just returned from a regional meeting of The Compassionate Friends in Green Bay, Wisconsin. A presenter held up his 'Pennies from Heaven' and declared that signs from our loved ones are everywhere. I wonder...

I picked up that penny and found my reading glasses.

I work on gratitude with some skepticism. Was this a treasure or just a muddy little coin? The date imprinted in the copper became clear—1983—the year my son was born.

Surprise and tears triggered by that date immediately washed across my face. I no longer felt cold. I meandered through memories of a day in July some 20+ years ago when I delivered that child.

“Collect yourself,” I said to myself under my breath. I might scare my mass transit bus mates. In the cold air I turned my face away from the others and watched my breath puff into icy clouds.

The bus appeared and I boarded with everyone else. I was a penny richer that day and grateful beyond measure for the treasure trove of memories that lay in my hand.

Monica Colberg
TCF Minneapolis, MN
In Memory of my son Art



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.



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

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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