



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.

AUGUST 2016

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

Cypress Creek Christian Church Community Center
6823 Cypresswood Drive, Room 20
Spring, Texas 77379

**We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.
(Our next meeting is Tuesday, August 9th)**

We are located between Stuebner-Airline and Kuykendahl, about 2 miles North of FM 1960 West. The Community Center is located behind the church, between the courthouse and Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the church/community center parking lot. Follow the posted signs to our 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.





Lighting a candle, cherishing a birth.....

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

2003-Makaylin Angel, Daughter of Jennifer Edwards
1999-Devin Wood, Son of Natalie Wood
1970-Lisa Renee Sanders, Daughter of Jim & Peggy Holland
1988-Shaun N. Finley, Son of Barbara Finley
2002-Samantha Short, Daughter of Linda Short
1988-Trace Thornton, Son of Nina Thornton
1988-Honey Khan, Son of Amra Khan
1963-Lloyd Ross (Rossi) Moore, Jr., Son of Carolyn Moore
1988-Matthew Peterson, Son of Sharon Peterson
1983-Fallon Ginther, Daughter of Lisa Ginther
1983-Travis Walden, Son of Janet Walden
1961-Terry Shannon Pauling, Son of Howard & Jean Pauling, Brother of Vicki Hyde
1995-Cheyenne Crocker, Daughter of Beth & Nick Crocker
1983-Christine Marie Frazier, Daughter of Steven R. Frazier
1980-Molly Long, Daughter of Carolyn Long
1955-Tony King, Brother of Carolyn Moore
1968-Dillon R. Howland, Jr., Son of Rachel Howland
2001-Emily Crocker, Daughter of Beth & Nick Crocker
1980-Ryan David Dodson, Son of Diane & David Dodson
1985-Derek Johns, Son of Shauna & Jeff Crook
1990-David Morgan, Son of Brent & Martina Morgan
1998-Katelyn Holmes, Daughter of Melinda Holmes
1989-Danielle Basford, Daughter of Jerry & Laurie Basford
1988-Samual Johnson, Son of Tim Johnson
1970-James Loveless, Son of Bob & Frances Loveless
1960-Kimberly Grubbs, Daughter of Patsy Grubbs
2013-Elias Reyes, Son of Crystal Reyes
2013-Jasmins Potter Jr, Son of Jasmins & Erika Potter
1984-Justin McHan, Son of Ronnie & Linda McHan
1978- Sarah Beltran, Daughter of Hila Beltran
1993-Forrest Gadler, Son of Tanya Gadler
1998-Tremaine Robinson, Son of Toya Robinson
1993-Cathrine Breeding, Daughter of Barbara Breeding
1997-Wesley Hundl, Son of Sharon Mondrik
1987-Marc Pournier, Son of Jolena Pournier
Ariel & Athena Suniga, Daughters of Selena Suniga



Lighting a candle, remembering a life

AUGUST ANGEL DATES

2008- Dillon & Alex Gussie, Sons of Debbie Benavides
2009- Nicholas (Nick) Skala, Son of Judy Skala
2007- Alan Jerome Austin, Son of Rhonda Austin
2003- Brian D. Klaus, Son of Johnny & Ginger Klaus
2011- Cherelle Luter, Daughter of Sylvia Green
2012-Landyn Elizabeth Tickle, Daughter of Matthew & Shelby Tickle
2013-James Loveless, Son of Bob & Frances Loveless
2013-Colton Alderson, Son of Jimmy Alderson
2013-Elias Reyes, Son of Crystal Reyes
2013-David Kerpchar, Son of Sally Kerpchar
2012-Misty Smith, Daughter of Terri DeMontrond
2008-Adam Brown, Son of Greg & Debbie Brown
2014-Gene Ware, Son of Roberta Ware
2014-Ginger Ware, Daughter of Roberta Ware
2014-Giavanna Calista, Daughter of Nicole Kelley
2015-Luke Curry, Son of Lynsy Curry
1983-Justin Ross Heino, Son of Darryl Heino
2015-Kellie Martin, Daughter of Denise Martin
2014-Hunter Smith, Son of Lee Smith



YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

You are not forgotten, loved one
Nor will you ever be,
As long as life and memory last
We will remember thee.
We miss you now.
As time goes by
We'll miss you more.
Your loving smile, your gentle face
No one can fill your vacant place.

Written by the family of Odessa Anne Box

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, August 9th at 7pm. Please bring a picture/photo of your child or sibling to share with the group.

There will be a meeting on Thursday, August 11th. at 7pm. for parents that have lost an infant, toddler, or have had a miscarriage or stillbirth. Contact Julie Joiner at 832-724-4299 if you are interested in attending this meeting.

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

To our newest members—we offer our warmest welcome to **Lee Smith, lost his son Hunter in August of last year.** 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.

As our TCF Credo says, *"We come from different walks of life..."*, but the common bond we now share is the death of a beloved child, grandchild, or sibling. Others cannot understand the terrifying and debilitating emotional issues that occur in our daily lives once this event happens; a TCF member can and does!

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 hope that through this trauma, we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

Love Messages to Your Child

Please share with the group an article, poem or love message about your child. You can bring them to the next meeting or email them to me at llbrewer67@hotmail.com. With your permission I will include them in the next newsletter.

LIBRARY

Our chapter offers a lending library with a variety of books on grief and bereavement. We encourage you to browse our library and feel free to check out a book or CD to take home with you.

We only ask that you sign out the books and return them in a timely manner so others can have the benefit of the information as well. If you have borrowed a book from our library please remember to return it. You can drop it by anytime.

If you have read a book that was helpful to you and would like to share it with others, donating that book in your child's name is a wonderful way to honor them.

*You never know how **strong** you are until **strong** is the only choice you have.*

SPECIAL REMEMBRANCE

Joel Christopher Sloan
7/14/71 – 1/31/2014

The Dash
By Linda Ellis

*I read of a man who stood to speak at a funeral of a friend
He referred to the dates on the tombstone from the beginning . . . to the end.*

*He noted that first came the date of birth and spoke the following date with tears,
But he said **what mattered most of all was the dash between those years***

Joel lived his dash as well, or better than anyone we've ever known. People, very kindly, would compliment us, "You must have been wonderful parents to have raised such a fine man." We weren't. We tried. But he took what love we were able to give, mixed in his own goodness and right choices and blew right past us. He was born with a ball in his hands and by nine months old he was clearly a southpaw. Childhood was spent playing baseball, basketball and a smattering of football and soccer. In Kentucky, his allergies were bad enough that we finally moved to Fort Worth -- which cured him! He always had buds -- neighbors, camp, ball teams, school -- and kept those friends to the end. He knew his neighbors. Everyone he came in contact with seemed to become his friend. His wife was his soulmate, his boys were his life. He coached their basketball and baseball teams, was summer camp counselor where he taught the kids new songs, mentored them, and participated in the typical goofy skits that counselors do. One camp now has a Joel Sloan Camper of the Year. There is also a camp scholarship fund in his name. The family went camping and he taught the boys to fish. They would watch Harry Potter movie marathons. He was loved and respected at work. I have a video of him doing the "chicken dance" with a co-worker. His New York boss flew in to be at his memorial. He played banjo and guitar. He led singing at church, always teaching new songs to the congregation. He always memorized the songs because he wanted to engage with the congregation. Over and over we heard from people that "he listened". On a cold, rainy evening over 800 people packed an auditorium meant to hold half that. Standing room only to honor a well-lived dash. What keeps us going is honoring him by living our dashes well.

Jamie and Glenna Sloan
Joel's Dad and Mom
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter

Thanks Jamie and Glenna for sharing with us what a wonderful person Joel was.

Reflections from the 39th TCF National Conference

By Daniel Driscoll
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter

I think someone forgot to turn the heat down, it's 115 degrees and I think I will punch the next person who tells me that it is a dry heat. It's hot regardless of the type of heat. That was our introduction to Scottsdale, Arizona upon arriving at the sprawling Fairmont resort for our second Compassionate Friends National Conference.

We arrived on Wednesday to allow time to acclimate to the resort and do a hike on Thursday morning before registration package pickup later that day. Since this was our second conference we didn't have the apprehension that accompanied us last year and were better prepared for this conference. The Fairmont is a large resort spread over numerous acres that provided us with plenty of exercising getting to and from our room and the conference center as well as finding our breakout sessions.

Thursday morning we woke early to go on our hike. The hotel had recommend this hike because they said it was easy to moderate. Unfortunately it was more moderate with a quarter of it being more strenuous than easy. Cindy was only able to make it about a quarter of the way. I decided to press on without her.

The trail was an out and back hike of a total of 4 miles. I hiked all the way to the end including the last quarter which was marked strenuous from here. It was definitely strenuous and I could tell it was taking me longer than I originally anticipated. I voice mailed and texted Cindy to return to the starting point where there was plenty of shade and water because it would take me longer to return to her.

Of course, unknown to me, she didn't bring her cell phone with her so she never received my instructions. So when people that had left after me, returned and saw her sitting there, they asked if she needed help. She told them she was waiting for me. However, when the second group passed and asked about her, she told them she was a little concerned because I hadn't returned yet. So when that group reached the start they informed the ranger station that I was missing. Of course I was fine just taking longer to return.

They notified the Tom's Thumb ranger rescue station to aid in rescuing me but thankfully they were unavailable at the time rescuing someone else. They had an employee at the station start to hike the trail but by the time he reached me I was less than 100 meters from Cindy. I informed him I was fine and I didn't need any assistance.

You fall once hiking in 58 years and injure yourself and suddenly you are incapable of hiking on a well maintained trail with numerous people on it unlike hiking in a jungle. Needless to say I successfully hiked the entire 4 miles of trail but was thankful to return to A/C. Boy that was hot hiking!

Rested up some before heading over to pick up our registration packages and began planning our work sessions.

Overall the conference facility was good and the staff was very friendly but I clearly preferred last year's conference venue with its vertically organized conference center and plenty of area and casual seating nearby to allow for meeting and talking to other attendees.

Opening session started with jokes about the heat which were most appropriate but the highlight was Barry Kluger, who lost his daughter to an automobile accident. After losing his daughter he started an

initiative that has led to the Farley-Kluger Act currently under consideration in congress to amend the FMLA to cover Parental Bereavement.

Last year we focused on newly bereaved workshops but this year we explored understanding our grief and trying to find our new selves. As with last year we found many helpful workshops covering a variety of different issues and perspectives. One that I particularly liked was how to keep memories alive of your child. This covered beyond collecting photographs and videos from family and friends but how to use things of your child to build new useful or decorative items.

This was one of those sessions that was scheduled for an hour and a half but could have gone for several hours. They showed how to take a favorite old sweater of your child and create new items such as mittens and scarves, taking old t-shirts and creating quilts, creating jewelry from other items and many other things to create living memories of your child. They also showed a company that will take your child's finger print and place it onto a ring or cufflinks. There were so many ideas she covered including creating games and things for those with small children. She had her book in the bookstore but it sold out after her first session ended. I had to order it because someone grabbed the last copy before me, and Cindy said I couldn't tackle her and take it.

Last year we didn't attend the Friday lunch but since Olivia Newton John was singing we attended. Just prior to the lunch we purchased the new autographed CD from the bookstore with her new songs healing from loss and grief. We enjoyed the concert and were thankful we purchased the CD because that enabled us to get ahead of the line for our picture with her.

She was as genuine and kind as you would have hoped and Cindy told her that she has seen Grease at least 50 times which Olivia seemed amazed at. Cindy wants me to crop the picture and take me and the other two women out so she has just a picture of her and Olivia.

One other session we both found timely was "The loss of a Deceased Loved One's Pet" an issue we are facing now. One of our dogs was originally Tiffany's dog although she has lived with us since Tiffany became ill. Tiffany rescued Spike the day before she was scheduled to be euthanized. Spike is now 16.5 years old and was recently diagnosed with spleen cancer.

The presenter was a vet who lost a son and had to deal with the loss of his cat. He was very helpful and stayed after to talk to us and discuss our situation. During his presentation he said, he had never had a pet cremated but had his sons cat cremated and possibly the ashes might have been buried at his sons grave.

He discussed how the loss of his sons pet brought all the memories of his sons loss full back into focus and how difficult the entire period was because it was losing another piece of his son. That is how Cindy and I felt even before the cancer diagnosis.

During last year's opening session we sat by a woman from Austin who had lost her son. We had exchanged email addresses but never established a connection. This year I thought I saw her during the opening session again, so after it ended I went over to her table and asked her if she attended last year's conference and mentioned a few things and she then remembered us. The funny thing was we saw her more than anyone else during the conference and told her that she was stalking us. We have since friended her on FB so we can cyber stalk each other.

The Saturday candle light dinner was enjoyable and a young couple we met last year sat at our table. They didn't remember us but I started talking to them and asking them a few questions which lead them to remember us. It is funny how some of this worked out. Also at dinner I talked about a couple we met

last year that was our age and from New York, near where I lived. He felt similar to me that work was no longer enjoyable and he was thinking of retiring and moving to Florida. You can see where this is leading to.

On Sunday morning Walk to Remember, I am finding a shady spot to wait for the walk to begin and I hear a man's voice that sounded familiar. I turn around and say to Cindy I think that is the couple from New York. She is unsure so I walked over and ask him if they attended last year's conference and if they were from New York. Yes, they were the couple we met last year and he did indeed retire and move to Sarasota, Florida. We walked the entire walk with them talking about Sarasota as Cindy has been considering moving to that area. They invited us to come and stay with them either before or after next year's conference. They even offered Cindy the name of their real estate agent.

As with last year's conference, by the end we were emotional drained. It's a place where we are comfortable talking about our child and wearing t-shirts with her picture on them and no one thinks we're strange. Well, at least for wearing the t-shirts. We have learned new things and met others struggling as we are in carrying a burden we would prefer not to carry.

Recently someone shared a quote with me that I will paraphrase here, "Some parents were chosen to bear difficult trials with their children because they were strong enough to bear it." There may be some truth to that, but what I know is I don't walk alone. We'll see you next year.

*Thanks Dan for filling us in on your experiences at the conference.
Sounds like you've made some lasting friendships.*

HOPE

I am feeling a bit different today and I wonder if I am healing. I've read about healing from those who know grief. But how many of them have lost what I have lost? How many do not sleep, eat, or play as they did before? But today I heard the birds sing, and wondered where they had been hiding for so long. Then it dawned on me that I have been hiding.

My sorrow has imprisoned me. Maybe it is time to escape, time to rediscover the laughter and replace some of the tears. Maybe it's time to say yes to life's opportunities. I'm not sure I can do this. I still feel totally alone, in the midst of family and friends. I'm still scared when I think of facing life's trails without her. She had absolutely no fear and showed me such courage. I don't know if I am up to it.

If I can enjoy the song of my backyard birds, maybe my life can return to me if I can work at it harder. I think that I might want to try. Maybe the good sleep will return and food can taste good. Maybe the days of aimlessness can be replaced with purpose!

I think that the bird's song was a sign. It is time to say hello again to who I was and who I can again be.

By: Ronald Gries



FRENCH TOAST

a poem by Fay Harden

I stand here before the stove.
All the ingredients are here,
The eggs, the milk,
Vanilla, cinnamon and sugar.
The frying pan is heating slowly,
Melting the butter,
And still I stand
In my robe and slippers.
I pick up the egg to break it in the bowl,
But I just can't do it.
I want so much to fix French Toast,
Because my husband loves it so.
Just like my son did all his life...
Right up until he died.
I've lived this scene
So many times since then,
Always with a tear and a sigh.
We'd had French Toast
At least once a week
For more years than I can remember.
How they ate! I'd laugh and complain,
Because I had to cook so much.
Once , in Florida,
When we had French Toast
For breakfast in a restaurant with friends,
He said, "This is okay,
But you ought to taste my mom's!
I can still hear him say it.
Now, I just can't do it.
I cannot cook French Toast!
My husband never asks,
And while I stand
Before the stove and weep,
He pretends not to notice.
But I know he understands.
I just can't cook French Toast.
Not yet.

Am I Down for the Count?

I abhor boxing and have not a shred of comprehension about why it is called a "sport." That abhorrence, however, did not prevent me from being a fan of the Rocky movies from long ago. So, I have a general idea of the procedures and possible outcomes of this endorsed method of brutally bashing in the head of an opponent. The terminology has seeped into my brain.

It's been four years since my son died and I wish I had the answer to this question: am I down for the count?

I don't know.

I get out of bed. I function. I guess I would be considered productive.

Is there joy? Not really.

Is there gleeful anticipation of the future? Not at all.

According to my friend Dennis Apple, this is called "slogging." So, I slog. I get through the days. I try to fulfill my obligations. I have a schedule. I have a "to-do" list and I cross off items.

And I try very, very hard to respect the advice I get from more seasoned grievers. I try to be open to the idea that this may get better (?), softer, easier. I try to have hope. I try to believe that there will come a day when I can consider a future that I actually want to imagine.

But I sometimes can't help but wonder: am I down for the count? Have the blows been too much? Can I get back to a standing position, even if wounded and bloodied? Can I stand?

Peggi Johnson
TCF Piedmont Chapter, VA
January 2014

Helping Someone Survive

A death by suicide triggers great amounts of anger and guilt. However, some of those feelings can be balanced by struggling to see that the suicide was not so much a deliberate, hostile act, but a gesture of utter hopelessness and despair. Reminders that a person was so driven by emotional whirlwinds that it was impossible to sense any ray of hope, can temper considerably the emotional impact of a death by suicide.

One of the best responses to a suicide that I have ever heard came through a sermon delivered by a pastor of a young man who shot himself. With great eloquence, his pastor was able to convey tremendous hope through these words: "Our friend died on his own battlefield. He was killed in action fighting a civil war. He fought against adversaries that were as real to him as his casket is real to us. They were powerful adversaries. They took toll of his energies and endurance. They exhausted the last vestiges of his courage, and only God knows how this child of His suffered in the silent skirmishes that took place in his soul."

Victor Passchin
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THE TATTOO

“Mom, when I turn 18 I'm going to get a tattoo!” Hannah announced. “Hannah, what would you possibly want permanently inked on your body that you won't be embarrassed about when you're 80??”

It was about a year between the time Hannah made that statement and when she died. In those first years after they pass time isn't relevant anymore, blocks of time fade into oblivion when nothing matters. I do remember that very shortly after her death I “understood” why people got tattoos and I had to get one “for her”. It made sense to me at the time that it would be one of the few things I could still do for her and, in a way, for me too, one last thing we could share.

The design came easy as each property of the tattoo had to mean something. I went to the tattoo parlor with hopes the artist would bring it to life the way I saw it in my heart. I sat in the chair a bit apprehensively as he prepped my forearm, not my bicep where it could easily be hidden from the public. I chose this location so it could be seen by anyone and everyone, to show Hannah was here and she mattered, plus, in that location people would see it and ask about her, after all, it is my job to keep her memory alive. Part way into the process the artist asked me if it hurt to which I answered, “not near as much as her death”.

As I left the salon I left with Hannah permanently emblazoned on my arm for the world to see. A heart with her name inside written in a beautiful script with a rosebud through it, Rose is her middle name. A rosebud is symbolic of a young life that ended too soon. It is surrounded by a crown of thorns to show that her death will always hurt...

Kim Pietruszewski,
Hannah ZumMallen's mom,
TCF St Paul MN chapter



When we are drawn into the brotherhood or sisterhood of loss, tenderness seems to be our natural state. We are so vulnerable. Everything brushes against the raw wound of our grief, reminding us of what we have lost, triggering memories-a tilt of the head, a laugh, a way of walking, a touch, a particular conversation. These images are like beads strung together on the necklace of loss. Tenderly, we turn them again and again. We cannot let them go. Then, gradually, bit by bit, the binding thread of grief somehow transmutes, reconstitutes itself as a thread of treasured memories-a tilt of the head, a laugh, a way of walking, a touch, a particular conversation, as gifts from the life we shared with the one we lost, gifts that can never be taken away. May I honor and trust the processes of grief and healing, knowing that, in time, a new day will come.

by: Martha Whitmore Hickman



Fall and Back To School Can Be Painful

Yes, it's that time of year again as the kids all start a new year in school. For those of us who have lost school-aged children, we feel the sting. Even those of you who lost older children probably have melancholic feelings this time of year as well. September seems to represent a step forward, and our children don't get to move forward any more. Hard swallow. But, as my other daughter Hilary moves to a new grade, I can actually feel the excitement of a new year even though I also feel the sadness that Stefanie does not. This is the story of our lives, and I finally "get it". I don't like it, but at least I get.

I sigh when I think how she might look now as a junior in high school. I wonder if she'd have a boyfriend and if she'd still be swimming on the swim team. Would she still be getting good grades? We are even getting junk mail solicitations addressed to her trying to sell her special college testing courses, etc. Yep, even the marketing world assumes that my daughter is alive even though she hasn't advanced from the 4th grade and we've moved 2,000 miles away.

So I'm left just nodding my head in acknowledgement that the unthinkable has happened to us, but time still marches on. It's just a sort of resignation to the state of affairs of my life that I feel these days. There's nothing I can do about any of it, so I try to enjoy my life the way it is and focus on Hilary. It seems like I sigh a lot in September.

Nanette Jacobs, St. Louis, TCF

Memories

The certain special memories
That follow me each day,
Cast your shadow in my life
In a certain way.

Sometimes the blowing wind
Or the lyrics of a song
Make me stop and think of you
Sometimes all day long

Memories are good to have
To share and keep in my heart,
Just knowing that you're still inside
Makes sure we'll never part.

Collette Covington
TCF Lake Charles, LA

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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