



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 2023

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

at

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

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

Chapter Leader:

David Hendricks

936-441-3840

dbhendricks@hotmail.com

South Texas Regional Coordinator:

Gene Caligari

gcaligari7@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor:

Linda Brewer 936-441-3840

llbrewer67@hotmail.com

National Headquarters, TCF

P.O. Box 3696

Oakbrook, IL 60522-3696

1-876-969-0010

www.compassionatefriends.org

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

You Are Not Alone

When your child has died, suddenly it seems like all meaning has been drained from your life. When you wake in the morning, it's difficult to get out of bed, much less live a "normal" life. All that was right with the world now seems wrong and you're wondering when, or if, you'll ever feel better.

We've been there ourselves and understand some of the pain you are feeling right now. We are truly glad that you have found us but profoundly saddened by the reason. We know that you are trying to find your way in a bewildering experience for which no one can truly be prepared.

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
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
1980- Jessica Nicole Driskell, Daughter of Patricia Ann Tull
1984 - Justin Moyer, Son of Valli Moyer
1986 - Chad Moyer, Son of Valli Moyer
1991 - Eric Garcia, Son of John & Louise Garcia
1991 - Dylan Fojtasek, Son of Marie Fojtasek
1979 - Shawna Merchant, Daughter of Bitsy Hatch
2006 - Kay Lee Welch, Daughter of Joel Welch and Brandy Brandt



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
2017- Kahlid "Kal" Albaba, Son of Ramsey Albaba
2018 - Ethan Tyler Brown, Son of Erica Poorbaugh
2017 - Nelly Rosa, son of Mariano Jonell Rosa
2017 - Jacquelynn Borel, Daughter of Rebecca Borel
2020 - Roxane Rucker, Daughter of Deborah Maly
2021 - Mark Kramer, Son of Carol Kramer
2022 - Gabriella Grace Pena, Daughter of Servando & Jeanne Pena
2021 - Ryan Wyckoff, Son of Marlena Wyckoff

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 8th. at 7pm. We will be in room #213 for this meeting.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our newest 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.

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.

PRIVATE FACEBOOK GROUPS

The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private Facebook Groups. These pages are moderated by bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, and may not be accessed unless a request to join is approved by a moderator. A private message will be sent prior to approval, please be sure to check your mailbox marked "Other" if you do not receive one in your main mailbox. These pages were established to encourage connection and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings grieving the death of a child, grandchild or sibling.

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/private-facebook-groups/>

Online Support

The Compassionate Friends 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.

[Get Online Support](#)



Wesley on his Birthday
August 23, 1997– February 13, 2016

Thoughts of my Son Wesley on his Birthday

He gave the best hugs..... That's one of my favorite memories of my sweet son, Wesley.

He had the sweetest smile, the kindest eyes. So very true, and what others said to me.

Wesley was musically talented at trumpet, drums, and was learning the guitar. He had the best voice – although he'd never admit it. But his teacher and others agreed with me, even at the young age of 10 when he sang at the 5th grade Talent Show.

Even more important than these, was Wesley's sweet and compassionate spirit, and the kindness he showed others. Many stories that were told to me later after he passed. It's unfortunate I didn't know the stories sooner. I would have told him how incredibly proud I was of him. How he made such a difference in others' lives. I think he knew; I hope so.

I wonder sometimes, how a boy who was struggling so much trying to fight off the negative thoughts, that dark relentless voice of depression. How could he reach out and help others? Where did that strength come from?

All I can think is that he loved his family and friends. It made Wesley feel better to help someone else. To take the focus off himself. How did my son know that at age 18 – when I'm still learning this?

I think Wesley was trying to teach me, his family and friends – by his example.

We are his legacy, and I will keep trying to make him proud. The way he always made me.

I know Wesley is in Heaven looking down on me....and smiling.

This is the day I miss you the most, but it's also the day I was happiest because YOU came into my life. You were born on a stormy night on August 23rd, 1997, with bright red hair and eyes so blue. You were always a joy - YOU changed my life. Although this day will be met with sadness because you are not here, I am still grateful and blessed by you. These thoughts of you are what I choose to remember. Today we celebrate YOU, Forever 18. I know Jesus and the angels in Heaven and our dear family are showing you the love today.

I love you Wesley so very much. I miss you every hour of every day. Until I see you again.....I will always say your name.

Forever Wesley's Mom,
Sharon Mondrik Cash
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter
8/2023



In Loving Memory of my Son Wesley
By: Sharon Cash

The Stages of Grief.

In 1969, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, MD wrote a book, "On Death and Dying". She did research by interviewing dying patients. She came up with her 5 Stages of Grief after extensive interviews with those patients. The Stages are: 1) Denial, 2) Anger, 3) Bargaining, 4) Depression and 5) Acceptance. These stages make sense when one thinks that the grieving person is the dying person.

Notice that these Stages were developed through interviewing living people who were dying. They were not developed to refer to third parties grieving over someone else. As Kubler-Ross noted, "I have worked with dying patients for the past 2 ½ years.

This is different from The Compassionate Friends where the parent is the grieving person, but not the dying person. That's the main reason why the 5 Stages don't necessarily apply to a parent of a deceased child. For us in TCF, the Stages can occur randomly, can be skipped, may repeat themselves and are not necessarily in the Kubler-Ross order. As an example, the sudden unexpected death of a child may eliminate any prolonged denial stage since we know the child has died.

When there is a health issue with a child, the parent may go through the 5 Stages of Grief, sometimes along with the child, depending on the age of the child.

As an aside, the 5 Stages of Grief are sometimes referred to in divorce counseling because the individual directly involved in the divorce is also the person going through those Stages.

The important thing to remember is that the Kubler-Ross 5 Stages of Grief don't necessarily apply to a grieving parent, but any Stage at any time may be applicable to that parent.

David Hendricks
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter Leader



Sibling Loss

One whose sister or brother has died has a special view of this loss. There is the loss itself, hard enough to bear, and often no one inquires how a bereaved sibling is doing with the grief. And as I've heard one sibling put it, *'I lost my brother, and my parents are so changed that I feel as if I lost them too.'* Much is changed within our surviving family.

Many of us have found the company of other bereaved siblings to be very valuable, a group of listeners who truly and fully understands.

Charley Kopp
TCF Contra Costa, CA

Shards of Grief Linger after Murder

On a dreary night in December, a knock came at our door with news that would forever alter our lives. The news was that Anne, our only daughter, had been kidnapped and brutally murdered by persons or a person unknown. The shock, disbelief, anguish and anxieties over the next several months, a small piece of the grieving process, were extraordinary, and I have often wondered how we survived.

There was the extreme rage at the person who was responsible for taking Anne's life for no reason except for the pure pleasure of destroying good. But we survived.

There was the awful anger against the legal system for being so callous and insensitive to the needs of the family and friends. The wounds from Anne's death were already deep and unhealing, but listening to and reading about the insinuations and innuendoes by the lawyers made the wounds grow deeper and deeper. The impression was given the family must endure punishment for allowing our daughter to be in the wrong place. This caused a feeling of guilt. But we survived.

There was the fear that Anne would become just another statistic, and the person responsible would go unpunished. Now the fear exists that the person will be released from prison to repeat his acts of violence. I am afraid that fears are addictive and one replaces another. Perhaps the worst fear is, when your faith in God is at its lowest ebb, that you will never be able to respond to normal stimuli again and regain all that faith. All the fears are real; but so far we have survived.

These, I suppose, are normal reactions as the result of a violent act. I believe these anxieties delay a normal (so-called) grieving period until after the culprit has been found, tried and sentenced. After these three things happened, I do know a terrible burden was lifted from our shoulders and we could restart living our lives. Somehow we survived.

How did we survive? After much reflecting, I firmly believe we survived by recalling the positive aspects of Anne's life and character. Each individual is endowed with certain instruments, and we hear the music of their lives long after they are gone.

Anne's instrument of love of life was a blessing, and we still can hear the melodies of her song in the night. These melodies cannot be taken away, and they are more valuable than diamonds to us.

Anne's instrument of hope for a future in which to achieve her goals and have some effect on society was the backbone of her dream. The songs of hope in work, in life and the goodness of heart cannot be destroyed by evil or circumstances. Today is gone, but we still hear the songs of hope for tomorrow. These songs of hope, heard in the night, sustain us.

Anne's instrument of faith that she would lead a productive life and achieve both her spiritual and material goals was music in her heart. The faith she had in herself, her family and her friends transmits to us, urging us to proceed with our lives. The music of her faith is still a beacon in the night.

We will not believe Anne's dreams have ended, but we believe they will find their place in the world to come. The music that was set in motion by her love, hope and faith will move, everlasting, in sweet memories forever. The wounds from the loss of a loved one cannot be healed by words or deeds. These terrible burdens are borne by each of us in our own way and, hopefully, we survive.

Bill Boggs
In memory of Anne
TCF, Atlanta, GA



No You Don't Need "Closure"

By: Stephen J. Forman

There are few among us who have not experienced the loss of a friend or loved one. Often it comes without warning, in an accident or, as we've seen all too often recently, an act of terrorism. The experience of loss after a lingering illness like cancer, though more expected, is just as deeply felt. As time passes, we often hear how important it is to gain closure—a way of tidying up to help us move on with our own lives.

The reality is that closure is a myth. My personal and professional experience with those who have lost friends and family, including children, has taught me that going on with life is not the same as gaining closure. The wound of loss is a part of each person's life forever. We continue to think about those dear to us, though perhaps not every day or with the same intensity. Recollection is sometimes provoked by a date on a calendar or, less predictably, by a sight, sound, aroma, melody or place that evokes the missing person.

These personal moments, seemingly forever paused in time, can cause us to feel alone, especially during sentiment-filled holidays. The danger of the idea closure is that it heightens this aloneness, by giving us a false expectation that these experiences should and will at some point end. They won't.

No matter how much time has passed, memories remain. To deny them is to deny precious moments of love, fellowship, gratitude and inspiration. Grieving changes the experience of loss, but does not eliminate it, and is not intended to do so. To close the memory does not sustain the healing or help in proceeding with life. Such echoes from the past are voices in the present and are sometimes warmly felt.

As humans we all yearn to remember. Nearly every culture has its way of preserving the past. We build memorials to perpetuate collective memory, whether it is the Vietnam Memorial or Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., the field of empty chairs in Oklahoma City, or the 9/11 Memorial in New York.

Cemeteries offer a communal "safe space" where grief is openly welcomed and expected, forever. Visitation rights to a plot do not suddenly expire six months after a burial, a time that some in the medical community suggest is the "normal" grieving period. In the Jewish tradition, the acknowledgement of the annual *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of the death of a family member, is always done in the presence of others, provoking a collective memory of the person.

These occasions sometimes formal, but more often spontaneous are not about closure. Rather they are about the fullness in each of our lives that came from our family, loved ones, and friends, as well as others who were touched by that person's presence.

In my work as a cancer physician, I often write to the family of a loved one who was under my care, months after the death. It is a time when most of the people who helped support them through the days and weeks immediately after have gone back to the busyness of their own lives. The bereaved are left alone with their own feelings and thoughts. The letters are a chance to remain connected, but also

a way to convey that their loved one is an important memory for us, too. These words of acknowledgement are always welcome, reassuring those whose lives have become interwoven with ours that their loved ones are alive within us, as they are in their own families.

A few months ago, I ran into a woman who many years ago had, at a very young age and early in her marriage, lost her husband to cancer. Since then she had moved away, met another man whom she adored, married him and had a family. Together they raised their children. She had built a successful career. Seemingly she had found closure from the tragedy of her early life. As we finished talking and she began to walk away, she turned around, and with eyes full, and said: "I think of him almost every day."

*Taken from the Wall Street Journal
Dr. Forman leads the Hematologic Malignancies
and Stem Cell Transplantation Institute at City of Hope*



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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5125 N. Union Blvd. Suite 4, Colorado Springs, CO 80918



*"Memories of love abound
In my heart and in my mind
They give me comfort, keep me sane
And lift my spirits up again."*

-Anonymous

Choosing Life

“It will never be the same. Never.” As a bereaved parent, you have often heard or said these words to express grief’s profound feelings of sorrow and disorientation. Your life has suddenly taken an unexpected course that appears both uncharted and endless. Bewildered, you vainly search for pathways back to your former life, until you confront the reality that there is no way back. Your child is dead forever. It is then that you may say, “...never the same.”

This is the aspect of grief that Simon Stephens calls “The Valley of the Shadow.” It is that very long time between the death of your child and your reinvestment in life. *Between*. It is not supposed to be a permanent resting place. Although some people do take up residence in the valley, it is a transition from the death of your child to life with renewed purpose.

The key to this transition is yourself. You must choose between life and the valley. You and only you can decide. And you must make that decision again and again, each day.

Giving in to the hopelessness of the valley is tempting. Choosing to move on toward life requires a great deal of work. You must struggle with the pain of grief in order to resolve it. It is a daily struggle full of tears, anger, guilt and self-doubt, but it is the only alternative to surrendering yourself to the valley.

Little by little you choose to move on. Little by little you progress toward the other side of the valley. It takes a very long time, far longer than your friends or relatives suspected. Far longer than you had believed – even prayed – that it would be. When one day you find yourself able to do more than choose merely to live but also how to live, you will know you are leaving the valley of the shadow. There will still be more work to do, more struggle and choosing. The valley, however, stretches behind rather than in front of you.

When you have resolved your grief by reinvesting in life, you will be able to realize that nothing is ever “the same.” Life is change. We would not have it be otherwise, for that is the valley of the shadow. Change has the promise of beginning and the excitement of discovery.

Life is never the same. Life is change. Choose life!

Marcia F. Alig
TCF, Mercer Area Chapter, New Jersey



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.

Laura Hengel
281-908-5197
linnemanl@aol.com
Auto Accident

Pat Morgan
713-462-7405
angeltrack@aol.com
Adult Child

Connie Brandt
281-320-9973
clynncooper@hotmail.com
Auto Accident

Beth Crocker
281-923-5196
thecrockers3@comcast.net
Multiple Loss
Heart Disease

Julie Joiner
832-724-4299
dtjb19@gmail.com
Multiple Loss
Infant Child

Loretta Stephens
281-782-8182
andersonloretta@sbcglobal.net
Auto Accident

Lisa Thompson
281-257-6837
lisalou862@yahoo.com
Fire

Pat Gallien
281-732-6399
agmom03@aol.com
Organ Donor

Leigh Heard-Boyer
281-785-6170
boyerbetterhalf@yahoo.com
Substance Abuse

FOR FATHERS:

Nick Crocker
832-458-9224
thecrockers3@comcast.net
Multiple Loss
Heart Disease

David Hendricks
936-441-3840
dbhhendricks@hotmail.com
Auto Accident

Glenn Wilkerson
832-878-7113
glennwilkerson@thearkgroup.org
Infant Child