



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.

DECEMBER 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, Dec. 13th)

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.....

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 1989 - Alex Flood, Son of John & Alice Flood**
- 1985 - Jerry Dwight Tanksley, Jr., Son of Virginia Tanksley**
- 1980- Garrett Conrad Ford, Son of Leigh Heard**
- 1986- Lance Anderson, Son of John & Dianna Brumley**
- 2006- Logan Xavier Venegas, Son of Rochelle Snyder**
- 1990- Kevin Thrift, Son of Stephanie & Tim Thrift**
- 1985- Danny Ewing, Son of Steffani L. Ewing**
- 1975- Tiffany Gower, Daughter of Brenda Whitworth**
- 1985- Lauren Ovelgonne Tenney, Daughter of Steve & Carol Ovelgonne**
- 1992- Grant Goodwin, Son of Linda Foraker**
- 1990- Ryan Bennett, Son of Dan & Cindy Bennett**
- 1990- Zack "Moose" Triplett, Son of Trina Cash**
- 1984- Cameron Clark, Son of Rhonda & Ellie Holden**
- 2003- Milana Ramirez, Daughter of Dean & Hannah Ramirez**
- 1983- Peter Ly, Brother of Kimberly Ly**
- 1963- Ginger Ware, Daughter of Roberta Ware**
- 1995 - David Arthur, Son of Cathy Arthur**
- 2008 - Angel Joseph Vasquez, Son of Mary Vasquez and Jose Herrera**
- 2013 - Athena Suniga, Daughter of Selena Suniga**



The Birth and Death of our loved ones are always very difficult. Especially during this holiday season. Please remember to include these families in your thoughts and prayers on their very difficult days.



Lighting a candle, remembering a life

DECEMBER ANGEL DATES

- 2008- Alexander Gene Davis, Son of Janice Davis**
2007 -Tara Michelle Rose, Daughter of Angie Rose
2009 -Kayla Lower, Daughter of Lori Morris
2009 -Van Holland, Son of James & Olivia Holland
2009- Liam Young, Son of Jill Young
1999 -Kevin Donat, Son of Diane Donat
2002- Grant Koval, Son of Linda Koval
2007-Kyle Black, Son of Lisa Black
2011- Travis George, Son of Kathy George
2011- Michael Vincent Ledwig, Son of Jim & Mary Ann Ledwig
2011- Rikki Ashley Brown, Daughter of Mike & Gwen Williams
2013- Jenny Ryan, Daughter of John & Debbie Ryan
2013- Cameron Clark, Son of Rhonda & Ellie Holden
1999- Christopher Gibler, Son of Susan Gibler
2012- Katrina Martinez, Daughter of Amy Kohl
2013 - James (Jimi) Nicholas, Son of Linda Nicholas
2012 - Amelia Tayloe, Daughter of Matthew & Misty Tayloe
2015 - Steven Jackman, Son of Deborah Jackman

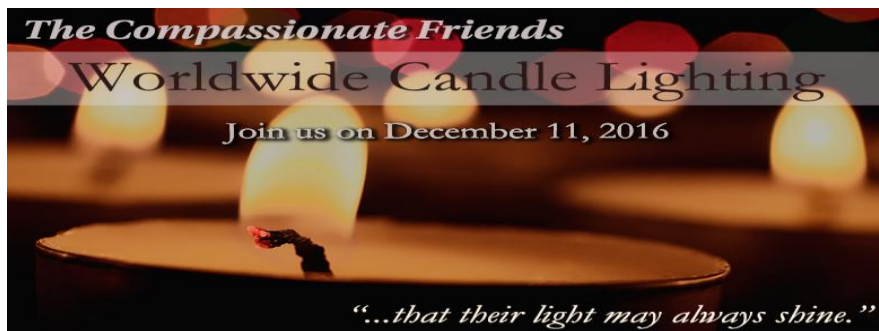
YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

**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, December 13th at 7pm. Please join us. Don't forget to attend our chapter's Candle Lighting Services, Sunday, December 11th at 6:45pm at the Jersey Village High School. The candle lighting will take place before our regular meeting. Also, the small group for parents that have lost an infant, toddler, or have had miscarriage or stillbirth will meet Thursday, December 8th. at 7pm. This meeting is before the Candle Lighting Service.



Our Chapter Candle Lighting Service will be held:

WHEN: Sunday, December 11, 2016
7:00 pm (please arrive at 6:45)

WHERE: Jersey Village High School
7600 Solomon
Houston, TX 77040
(The high school is at Beltway 8 and Hwy 290)

Food, sodas, coffee will be provided. There will be readings, performances and the candle lighting. A message board for you to leave your child a message will also be available and there will also be a balloon release. If you wish to bring a picture of your child to display, please feel free to do so (you can take the picture home when the program is finished).





Lights of Love

Can you see our candles
Burning in the night?
Lights of love we send you
Rays of purest white

Children we remember
Though missing from our sight.
In honor and remembrance
We light candles in the night

All across the big blue marble
Spinning out in space
Can you see the candles burning
From this human place?

Oh, angels gone before us
Who taught us perfect love
This night the world lights candles
That you may see them from above

Tonight the globe is lit by love
Of those who know great sorrow,
But as we remember our yesterdays Let's
light one candle for tomorrow

We will not forget,
And every year in deep December
On Earth we will light candles
As.....we remember
By: Jacqueline Brown~Peace Valley TCF

To Start a New Year

If I can concentrate on the moral and spiritual side of the holidays I can make it through.

If I can absorb the love and warmth that was the beginning I can give love back.

If I can share the grief and love that is in me through these holidays I can start a New Year. - Tom Spray, TCF Ventura, CA -

HOLIDAY HOPE

I have now survived over a decade of Thanksgivings and Christmases since my daughter Nina's death in 1995. It feels surreal that it has been that long since my dark-haired angel has not been present to share her infectious enthusiasm for the holidays. Admittedly, if not for my journaling, I have little recollection of the first two. Writing allows me to see how far I have come since the bleakness of my soul those first early holidays. In the midst of a "grief storm", when I feel that I have taken one step forward and two steps back, I only need to read what I have written to see that I have made much progress, something that in early grief I did not believe was possible. When in such a dark abyss, it is almost impossible to imagine that there is even a glimmer of hope and light.

The first Thanksgiving is a blur. Whether we went out for dinner or spent it with family or nuked a frozen dinner, I haven't a clue. As no one else seems to remember, I would surmise that it was the same for everyone else as well. The first Christmas without Nina was spent trying desperately to make sure that nothing was going to change. The trees would be decorated, cards would be sent, gifts bought—I believed that my daughter would not want us to be sad and that the holiday should and would play out as usual. It almost worked. But the effort of trying to achieve such an impossible task took its toll; coming home from my parents' home Christmas Day evening, the sight from the rearview mirror of the empty spot in the back seat next to my son where Nina should have been playfully sparring with her brother, was too much to bear. I spent weeks recovering from such an exhausting charade.

I learned a lesson that first Christmas because the second Christmas "after" I gave into the emptiness and pain that I felt. The artificial tree sat forlornly unadorned right where it was assembled in the middle of the living room; it seemed to symbolize the somber mood of that second holiday season. I vocalized to my family and friends that year about what I could and could not do, would and would not do, I used what I called the "five-minute rule", which meant however I felt five minutes before a holiday happening would be the deciding factor whether I attended or not. The respect for my feelings they showed me that year was the best gift they could ever have given me.

However, Christmas #3 seemed to mark a turning point. The visible evidence involved my Christmas Village. Though an inexpensive Department 59 wannabe, it was loved by my children, especially Nina. From the time she was very young, she imaginatively played with the ceramic people for hours at a time. Even as a teenager, she wanted to know when I would be putting up the Village, as it was her favorite part of our holiday décor.

The first two Christmases, I made a decision to never put up our Christmas Village again. The memory of Nina's interactions with the Village was too painful to comprehend. However, that third Christmas, as I was unpacking the few holiday items that I would display, I came upon the boxes holding the Village. I slowly opened the containers of precious memories and one by one removed and unwrapped each piece. Visions of Christmases past raced through my mind. This year, the images of Nina's wide-eyed childlike wonder and excitement each time the Village came out of its yearlong resting place brought a genuine smile to my face.

I brought the Village upstairs and arranged it on the ledge of the bay window, where it always had been. I sat in the dark next to the lit village houses and watched the mechanical

skaters on the make-believe pond twirl and glide on the mirrored “ice”. Even through my tears, I felt the warm glow of beautiful one-of-a-kind memories resurface. I realized at that moment that a corner had been turned. Whereas the first two Christmases I was unable to setup the Christmas Village because of the memories, I was now setting it up for the same reason—the memories! But with a twist this year—what I had once perceived as a painful memory, with time had become a precious memory as I remembered the delight and joy the Village brought to Nina each Christmas of her life.

Each holiday season following the third one has been gentler. We have gradually brought back some of our old traditions intermingled with the new. Though we are sadly aware that someone so loved is missing from our family gatherings, the beauty of the season can now overshadow some of the sorrow. We will never forget Nina and she will forever be included in our holiday celebrations. I put up a special little tree to exclusively hold the ornaments I bought each of the 15 years of her life; mixed in with the angel and butterfly ornaments I have since bought symbolizing her “eternal life”. We light a candle and set her picture beside it, and we speak freely of our memories of her. The TCF Worldwide Candle Lighting program our chapter has each year is an especially important time for us to step away from the hubbub of the season, to reflect, remember, and bring Nina’s spirit with us into the holidays.

Though the holidays can never be as they were, we who are further along in our grief journey can offer the gift of hope with the knowledge that with time, patience, support and compassionate friendship, you will find new ways (when you are ready) to bring a measure of joy and light back into the holiday season again. Wishing you peace, hope, solace and understanding...

With gentle thoughts,

Cathy L. Seehuetter
TCF St. Paul, MN
In Memory of my daughter, Nina



Spirit Gifts

Grief is such an individual journey. We are cast on its path without our consent, enveloped by a depth of pain we never dreamed existed. We all have times when despair and loneliness threaten to engulf us.

But we do have one companion on this lonely, unsought road: our child who died. I think there is never a moment in the day when a part of me is not connected to Philip, to our years together—and to our present relationship. Our journey through grief is a good-bye to the physical presence of our children, but it is never good-bye to their spirits and to the essence of their beings. Philip lives inside me now, and the same gifts he gave me when he was physically alive are still available to me through his spirit. In some ways, those "spirit gifts" are stronger, because they are contained and undiluted within me.

When the days get unbearably hard, when I think of all this wonderful young man missed by not getting to live out his life, I try to remember to focus on the present Philip, the one inside me. I try to integrate his gifts into my life, sometimes seeing through his eyes, thinking from his heart and mind. Often when I walk in the hills, I'll hear his voice: "Pay attention, Mom." (He noticed the details in nature so much more than I.)

No matter how old your child who died, the essence of this unique being remains within you forever. It is through us and others who knew them that our children continue to live and affect our present world. Though not in the way we hoped and expected, our beloved children are still alive.

...May the spirit of the child who lives so deep within your heart help you through this month and through every moment of the re-establishing of your life.

Catharine (Kitty) Reeve
Newsletter Editor, TCF Marin and San Francisco Chapters, CA
Reprint permission granted by author to TCF
In Memory of my son, Philip



A Christmas Gift from Heaven

The first snow of the season is gently falling outside my office window. On the one hand, it is beautiful to look at; on the other hand, for me, as I know it is for those whose loved one's chair will sit empty at the holiday table this year, it signals the advent of the remaining three of the "Big Four" holidays. This time of year is perhaps one of the ultimate tests of endurance for the bereaved, and it is particularly difficult for those who will undergo Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's for the first time since their child, sibling or grandchild died.

It has been eight holiday seasons since my Nina died. Though I remember little to nothing about the first Thanksgiving, I still quite clearly remember that painful first Christmas. Even with the blessed numbness of early grief to anesthetize me from some of the sting, I still recall the emptiness. That only an 8 x 10 photo of her smiling face with a lit votive candle placed next to it marked Nina's presence that Christmas of 1995, along with the knowledge she would never physically be present at another holiday family celebration, was beyond comprehension. Although everyone tried desperately to bring some normalcy to an anything-but-normal holiday, by the end of the day we were exhausted from the effort. As we drove quietly from my parent's house that evening, I will never forget the car ride home and watching my son in the rearview mirror. Where in other years past there would have been the back-seat horseplay of brother and sister after a fun holiday spent with extended family, instead he sat alone with tears streaming down his face with the conspicuously unoccupied seat next to him. The silence was deafening and spoke volumes of our intense sorrow.

I can truthfully say that each holiday since the first two have become a little more tolerable—I would never say "easier" because there is nothing "easy" about any of this. I think the word "gentler" fits better. Though obviously never the same as before, it has become bearable, even with moments of joy and laughter sprinkled in. The fact that it gets gentler with time may or may not help any of the newly bereaved reading right now because, honestly, that first and second year I couldn't imagine another holiday season, much less life, without Nina. Moreover, on my early grief voyage when someone who had been down the road before me

gave the old “it will get better with time” routine, it fell on deaf ears. I could see no hope, no light at the end of the tunnel. My reality was that my daughter was dead and she was never coming back. Whether it would get better down the road mattered little at that time; it just plain hurt. Though you may not wish to embrace stories of hope just yet, please let me share with you something that happened to me the week before that first Christmas. For 15+ years, a group of my friends get together right before Christmas. We only see each other once a year but always seem to be able to catch up right where we left off the year before. I decided to go to that gathering of friends that first Christmas after Nina’s death. I felt she would want me to surround myself, if I felt able (an important point—please don’t feel you have to do anything you don’t feel up to—you are the best judge of what you can and cannot handle), with comforting and caring people and perhaps give me a small reprieve from some of the “awfulness” of the holidays.

When I got there one of my friends, Anne, walked over to me, gave me a hug and handed me a box. To the best of my recollection she said something like, “I know this is going to seem odd and I don’t know what to make of it, but as I was baking these cookies, something told me to bring some to you. I have no idea why, but the feeling was very powerful to do this, so here they are.” I opened the box and I couldn’t believe what I saw: Spritz cookies—unbeknownst to Anne, Nina’s very favorite Christmas cookie! I had bought a cookie press the previous year so that Nina and I could make them together and I very much regretted that we never had gotten a chance to do that. I agonized about that so often that first season after her death. Through my tears, I explained this to Anne.

I know, without a doubt, that those delicious little butter cookies were Nina’s Christmas gift from heaven to me. It was her way to tell me to let go of the guilt of never making Spritz cookies together, and to let me know that even though she was gone from my sight, that she was still very much with me and holding me close during that excruciatingly difficult season. I share this hopeful message of love, which I believe is sent through Nina from **ALL** our children, siblings and grandchildren; that though we can’t “see” them yet in the way that we wish, they do most definitely live on.

I hold each of you and your precious children close to my heart this holiday season. Please be gentle with yourself,

Cathy L. Seehuetter
TCF St. Paul, MN
In Memory of my daughter, Nina
October 24, 2004



Looking for Your Gift

Bereaved families often face the holidays with fear and trepidation. Just the fact, holidays continue to go on, can cause outrage. Our sadness is monumental, and causes our bodies to resist moving on. We need to be gentle with ourselves; we are going through an emotional rehabilitation. Holidays often renew our grief, even if we are a distance from fresh grief.

We need to selectively choose what traditions are important to our family. If we over commit, we set our selves up for a let down when we cannot meet our goals. If you have some traditions that are very important and you are not physically up to doing them, you will find friends and extended family will feel honored if you ask for their help. Most people want to help you get through the holidays, but don't know what to do. Give them the opportunity to feel they are helpful in your healing.

Grieving cannot be put on the shelf until the holidays are over. We need to take time to feel our grief, and express our sadness. We also need to take time to try and put a bit of normality in our lives. We must remember it is not disrespectful to laugh. I'm sure our loved one would want us to surround ourselves with caring people who can help us through the holidays. A caring supportive person is one who encourages us to be the best we can be, not one who expects us to be as we used to be.

Our healing will eventually cause our pain to move out and make room for our loved ones memories. We learn to make a new life for ourselves. Holidays get better and we learn how to live again.

We tend to think of life's richest moments as being the joyous, fun filled, carefree days prior to losing our children and siblings. But, as I search for the most meaningful things that have given me strength and a real appreciation for life, they certainly do include the pain, overcoming my despair, losing my son, grandson, and six siblings. We cherish the friendships that doesn't always demand a smiling face, and those with the warm touch that says, "share your pain, let me be a part of your grief, don't worry about making us uneasy with tears, we have all been there." Much healing can take place through sharing as we learn to be very honest and courageous with our feelings, which helps us to find hope. Hope helps to restore our love for life, and gives us the strength to survive.

This holiday we will all miss our loved ones, who are no longer with us. Though it has been through much pain, you probably have never been so close to your child or sibling, or shared such a large part of your life with them. We hope the memories that ache with pain, can also bring you thoughts of love. For those of us who are further removed from our early grief, who can look back and appreciate the strength for our struggle, the compassion from seeing other's pain, wanting to become functional human beings again so we can contribute to making a better world, are gifts our children and siblings have given to us for our survival. These gifts are greater than any fancy bow tied box can contain. Look for your gifts and cherish them.

Marie Hofmockel
TCF Valley Forge, PA

A Holiday Memorial

A holiday wreath is a traditional part of Christmas in most homes. It is a simple wreath usually of fresh greens in which you can place four candles. The wreath may be placed on any table or fireplace mantel. As you light each candle this year, you may create a new ritual which will become a lasting tradition for Christmas. We hope this memorial will help you include your loved one in celebration.

As we light these four candles in honor of our loved ones,
we light one for our grief,
one for our courage,
one for our memories and
one for our love.

The first candle represents our grief.
The pain of losing you is intense.
It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.

The second candle represents our courage.
To confront our sorrow,
To confront each other,
To change our lives.

The third candle we light in your memory.
For the times we laughed,
The times we cried,
The times we were angry with each other,
The silly things you did,
The caring and joy you gave us.

The fourth candle we light for our love.
We light this candle that your light will always shine.
As we enter this holiday season and share this night of remembrance
with our family and friends,

We cherish the special place in our hearts
that will always be reserved for you.
We thank you for the gift
your living brought to each of us.
We love you.
We remember you.



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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