



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 2023

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

Our next meeting is Tuesday, December 12th.

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.

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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 - Ariel Suniga, Daughter of Selena Suniga
2016 - Harmony Faith Hamilton, Daughter of Roslen Smith Hamilton
1984- Zach Doss, Son of Susan Doss
2001- Stephen Verdell Jr., Son of Stephen Verdell and Melinda Nagle
1983- Ruby Abrol, Daughter of Bina Abrol
1961- Mary, Daughter of Brian and Milly McDonald
1988- Jonathan Boyd Chapa, Son of Jessica Chapa



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
2016 - Harmony Faith Hamilton, Daughter of Roslen Smith Hamilton
2017- Victor Alberto Renteria Jr., Son of Carla Renteria
2011 - Kelsey Jackowski, Daughter of Camille Jackowski
2003 - Aaron Kirby O'Neal, Son of Sylvia Ann Roushion
2019 - Bryan Pfluger, Son of Penny McElhaney
2020 - Rachel Livingston, Daughter of Beth Rosler
2020 - Kaylee Welch, Daughter of Joel Welch & Brandy Brandt
2021 - Michael Anthony Jansen, Son of Mike and Linda Jansen
2021 - Dylan Fojtasek, Son of Marie Fojtasek
2021 - Wes McGhee , Son of Darlene McGhee
2022 - CW-Carl Mercer, Son of Kathy Calhoun



CHAPTER NEWS

Our regular meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 12th, at 7pm.

Thanks to everyone that attended the Candle Lighting Service Sunday night. This is difficult time of year for all of us grieving the loss of our children.

Thanks to Trinity Lutheran Church for setting everything up. I'd also like to thank Darryl Heino for the slide show of our children and helping to coordinate with the Church. Thank you to Beth Crocker and the Klein Collins drama students for their great performance that made the evening so very special. Thank you everyone! David

Online Support Community

The Compassionate Friends offers virtual grief support through an Online Support Community (live typed 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. [View Schedule](#)

Private Facebook Groups

The Compassionate Friends offers over 40 private Facebook groups. These pages were established to encourage connection and sharing among parents, stepparents, grandparents, and siblings grieving the death of a child, grandchild or sibling.

[View Groups](#)

**47th TCF National Conference will be held
July 12 - July 14, 2024
in
New Orleans, LA**

Reduce Holiday Anxiety

The holidays are upon us. Office parties, church parties, club parties, party-parties. Pressures to buy, to bake, and to bask in the season are applied from within and without. As the holidays approach, most bereaved parents feel anxiety, apprehension and some little bit of fear. The past is gone along with our beautiful children. We live in the now, the new reality, of holidays without our children.

Newly bereaved parents are especially vulnerable; even seasoned parents can't avoid the momentary tearfulness, the anxiety and the pain of this season completely. But there are ways to cope.

Avoid loud, noisy parties. If you plan to do any shopping, do not go into stores during peak traffic times. Take a friend with you who can help you to focus on what you must buy and then leave.

Avoid depressing and maudlin movies and shows. Do as much or as little as you feel is appropriate. Take "holiday breaks." Do some gardening: this is an ideal time to plant trees and shrubs. Clean out the garage. Stay busy with tasks that are unrelated to the holiday rush. Send cards if you decide you're up to the task. If you're not ready to do this, don't do it. Don't put pressure on yourself to live up to the expectations of others.

Find what is right for you. Pressures from others mean nothing. You choose whether a celebration is in order. You choose how to celebrate. You choose the old traditions or you choose some new ones . . . maybe you choose nothing and decide to go with the flow of the moment. As bereaved parents, you will always remember your child at Christmas, but as the years add up and grief starts to release its grip on your soul, you may find that you can keep your child in your heart and have room for the spirit of Christmas, as well.

Each of us learns to deal with Christmas in our own way. Each year I am a different person with a new perspective on the holidays. This year I may decide to skip it all or immerse myself in the season. My truth is ever changing.

The holidays do get better. Life does get better. The days will gradually become softer and sweeter. The nights will ease into gentleness. Friendships will again have luster, and relationships will become deeper and more meaningful. That is the future for each of us. The present is driven by where we are in our grief. So for this and every Christmas holiday season, be who you are and mark the day as you choose.

May we all have serenity throughout the holiday season and in the years ahead.

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

Choice

How many stomachs churn when you see store shelves already stocked with the colors of the upcoming holidays? How high does your blood pressure rise when relatives throw hints around about “Your house or mine?” How many turn away with leaded feet and ask the question, “How am I gonna do this?”

Like every day you have lived since your child’s death you will do this holiday season, “one moment at a time.” You will search for what is important, what you want to save, what you want to throw out, what others can do for you, what you want to do for yourself. You may stay in town or leave; you may cook or go out. Whatever you do, it is your choice. But before you take the first step you have to give yourself permission to have that choice.

The first holiday season, after our son Chad died, I didn’t know I had a choice. I was numb, in a powerful lot of pain, and feeling abjectly distracted. Therefore, when asked about Thanksgiving, I just went right along with the old traditions and said yes to the familiar family dinner.

Thanksgiving Day arrived and our family drove to my Aunt’s for dinner. When we walked in there was an invisible hush that descended upon the room. Then the noise level immediately resumed with an intensity I don’t ever recall hearing before. People laughed really loud. Their movements were rushed and jerky. They wanted to know where I got my earrings. They asked Roger how his favorite football team was doing. Everyone spoke to us but it wasn’t about what we needed to talk about! And then, they went about their routines. Mom cooked in the kitchen, Aunt made the gravy, Uncle mashed the potatoes, Cousin carved the turkey, and Dad played the guitar for the little kids.

I hadn’t been asked to bring anything. They said I wasn’t needed in the kitchen. So Roger and I sat huddled on the couch alone. Finally dinner was ready and we were all called together to be “thankful.” The prayer before the meal was familiar, something we had all learned in grade school, and then we sat down to eat. No one mentioned Chad’s name, no one asked us how we were doing, and nothing was done to mark the saddest holiday of my life. We managed to eat something, keep our broken hearts and tears in check, until we could get our coats on and leave. We both cried all the way home, angry, sad, frustrated, and mad. Never again, we agreed, would we go to a gathering where Chad was not welcome.

The days passed, as they somehow do when we are grieving, and soon the orange and brown colors of the stores changed to red, green, silver, and gold. We were looking another holiday square in the face. But this time we had a choice. We had a plan! We were going to buy a special candle, Chad’s candle, and we were going to let the family know that we wanted to talk about him, that we wanted to honor him. Melinda, my daughter, and I went shopping and we went in and out of stores trying to find the perfect candle to no avail. My heart was beginning to wonder if it could continue this search when I reached down and saw the “perfect candle.” It was a light rose color with a simple raised cross. I smiled, picked it up and turned to show Melinda who by now was at the other end of the store. Much to my glee, she was holding the exact same candle!

That Christmas Day, we waited until most everyone arrived and then showed them the candle. We told them the story of finding it and then we lit it and put it in the middle of the floor where we were sitting. We then asked everyone to write a note about Chad and we passed around his Christmas stocking and asked that they put their notes in it. As the family was doing this my “always late” Aunt arrived. As she threw open the door the candle flickered and went out, the family as a unit looked up at her with such shock that when I picture it today, I still laugh. We filled her in about what we were doing and re-lit the candle, gave her a chance to write her note, and then moved it to a table and went about the rest of the day with the candle burning. I know there were some uncomfortable people that Christmas, but they all went along and I am forever thankful.

Those notes and that candle lighting were a comfort to my family and me. We still read the messages that were put in his stocking and light his candle.

You may choose to do what we did, or you may think of something else. The most important message is that you have a choice to make the holiday for your family and yourself something that will be helpful and healing. There will be time in the future to “go back” to tradition. *Right now* is what is important and you have a choice. Take care of you.

With love,
Sue Anderson, Chapter Leader
In memory of Chad
Eastside TCF, Kirkland, WA



Tradition, Tradition, Tradition

Even in normal times, tradition isn't what it is always cracked up to be, and sometimes “tradition” gets in the way of sanity. Often we cling to tradition because it's easier, we don't want to offend others, we don't want to be embarrassed, or we don't know what else to do. When you are a grieving parent, giving in to tradition can drive you over the edge.

I found myself in the “tradition predicament” regarding putting up a tree the first Christmas holiday after my son, Chad died. I didn't want, need, or have the energy to put up a tree. Yet other family members wanted a tree and they wanted it as it always had been, big, bright, and decorated with ornaments they had purchased or made through the years. What eventually took place, with regard to a tree, changed our holiday forever and it has been a good thing for everyone involved.

I don't know the exact circumstances of how our “new tradition” came into being that first year. But I do remember frustration, tears, and upset people. I also remember my daughter saying to me it was her Christmas too and she needed a tree. It was her older brother, the one she remembered getting up with every Christmas morning when

she was little that was dead, and she had to have something so she could deal with the emptiness. So she came up with a plan. She and her father would go find a tree and she would take care of the decorations all by herself.

That was ten Christmases ago and this year, once again, my husband and my daughter will leave early in the morning, a week before Christmas, and hunt for a tree, just the two of them. When they come home, I will prepare breakfast, while they get the tree in the holder, and move the furniture. We will sit down together and enjoy our meal and then my husband and I will leave for several hours. During that time we will do whatever we feel like doing. We have gone to the cemetery, gone for walks, gone to the bookstore, visited friends, etc. When we return, my daughter will have decorated our Christmas tree, and the whole house!

Every year the tree has been different, limited only to my daughter's imagination and the budget we keep her on. She didn't use our regular ornaments for a while and when she did, she told me ahead of time and said how meaningful it was for her to be the one who put Chad's ornaments back on the tree. We have continued this "new tradition" to this day. Now, I find angel ornaments to put on the tree to honor our missing angel, and enjoy with my husband, sons, and family, my daughter's traditional tribute to her brother. This "changing tradition" has been so healing. Our family has had the brightness and beauty that a lighted tree can provide, and I have been able to save my energy for other things I wanted to do.

During the next few weeks, I hope you will make the activities of the season as stress free as you can. I hope that you will feel free to experiment with new traditions, knowing there is no "right way" to go through this season, only "your way." I hope that you will remember Christmas is only one day and that the time leading up to that "one day" will probably be more difficult than the actual day. And finally, I hope for peace in your hearts, if not today then tomorrow, or the tomorrow after, or the tomorrow after that.

Sue Anderson
TCF, South Bend, IN
In Memory of my son, Chad
October 30, 2012



Holiday Lights

During the holiday season, both Christian and Jew light candles in celebration of their respective faiths, and as they do so even the darkest of rooms become warm and bright from the glow of the candle. Then,

we can ask ourselves how powerful and sinister can the darkness be if it can be overcome by the light of one little candle.

There is then a message in this for all of us. When the darkness seems to overwhelm us, and it can be a mental and spiritual darkness as well as the darkness of winter night, we need to be reminded that it is powerless to withstand the smallest bit of illumination.

So as the world grows colder and darker during these winter months, we as Compassionate Friends must do what people of many faiths have been taught to do at this season. Light a candle in someone's life to make the darkness and fears flee. A little bit of light is all that most of us need, but, oh, we need that little bit so badly.

So, let us all in The Compassionate Friends extend a candle of light and hope not only to each other, but to the unfortunate people who, for whatever reason, become one of us this winter and will be in need of that light. It's the least we can do and it accomplishes so much. Together we can make it.

Bettye and Sam Rosenberg
TCF Louisville, KY



Resolutions

Every time the holiday season comes to a close, I feel as if I can hear a collective sigh of relief. This year was no different except that the sigh seemed louder and longer than in past years. Some years are like that for us. This one was certainly like that for me. No matter how difficult I thought the holidays would be to get through I was wrong. In some ways they were more difficult and in other ways, surprisingly, they were less difficult. The reality is that you and I, no matter how we anticipated the holidays, did get through them. We did survive the holidays and though it may be difficult for you to believe this now, there is no reason that this new year shouldn't be better.

Which brings me to a favorite topic for this time of year, New Year's resolutions. Resolutions that I think are most helpful are those that concern our well-being. Above all else, resolve to take better care of yourself. Try to eat right and exercise. Find ways to nurture yourself—both your body and your mind. Remember all things in moderation. Seek advice from others when you need it and above all, ask for help when you need it. You won't always get the help when you ask for it, but remember, if you don't ask for it, you surely won't get it.

Another thing you can do to have a happier new year is to become more involved in our chapter of The Compassionate Friends. If you've not come to any meetings, or if it's been a while, give it a try. Commit to attending at least three meetings. If you were to attend only one, you would not necessarily get a very good idea of what our meetings are like. Join us and make your needs known to us.

This newsletter is another way you can become more involved in our chapter. Let us

know what works for you and what doesn't. Consider becoming a contributor. Tell us how we might be able to better serve your needs.

Have a happier New Year!

Pat Akery
TCF, Medford, OR



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 ourselves up for a letdown 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



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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