



# *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.*

## **FEBRUARY 2016**

### **HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

[www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org](http://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, Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>)**

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**

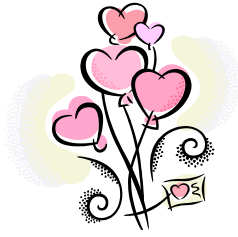
As the years pass, we see new members come into the chapter, and we try to help them with their grief as we progress in our own. Over and over again, I have seen newly bereaved parents come to their first meeting totally devastated and convinced that their lives are over. Through the months (and years) 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.





## ***Our Children, Siblings, and Grandchildren Remembered***

### **FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS**

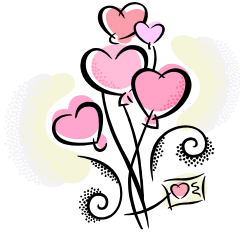
Natalia Lopez - Daughter of Melissa Lopez  
Devin Giblin - Son of Tanya Giblin  
Ryan Mitchell Smith - Son of Anne-Marie Smith  
Jonathon Kuta - Son of Larry & Terri Kuta  
Jeff Shinsky - Son of Margaret Butler  
Jason Allen Denbo - Son of Donna J. Denbo  
Jason Lucher - Brother of Kerri Lucher  
Ryder & Levi Wagner - Sons of Susan & R.J. Wagner  
Jason Robert Kramberger, Son of Nancy & Ken Thornton  
Charlotte Caldwell, Daughter of Jason & Rebecca Caldwell  
Colton Alderson, Son of Jimmy Alderson and Julia Ware  
Patrick Bull, Son of Tom & Gayle Bull  
Christopher Gibler, Son of Susan Gibler  
William Michael Shaw, Son of Mary Kay Martin  
Katherine Collins, Daughter of Kevin & Paula Collins  
Miller LaCour Wade, Son of Burton & Julie Wade  
Moriah Clay, Daughter of Kim Clay  
Amelia Tayloe, Daughter of Matthew & Misty Tayloe  
Race Killen, Son of Wendy Killen  
Sean Weinstein, Son of Steve & Sherry Weinstein



#### **A Solitary Journey**

**By: Helen Steiner Rice**

***Grief is a solitary journey. No one but you knows the gaping hole left in your life when someone you know has died. And no one but you can mourn the silence that was once filled with laughter and song. It is the nature of love and of death to touch every person in a totally unique way. Comfort comes from knowing that people have made the same journey. And solace comes from understanding how others have learned to sing again.***



## FEBRUARY ANGEL DATES

Lisa Renee Sanders - Daughter of Jim & Peggy Holland  
Gregory Whitney Vinson, Son of Lance & Marilyn Vinson  
Travis Walden, Son of Janet Walden  
Jeff Walker - Brother of Stephanie Thrift  
Matthew Brown - Son of Cathy Brown  
Ryan Mitchell Smith - Son of Anne-Marie Smith  
Michael Shrum, Son of Mike & Melva Shrum  
Jerry Dwight Tanksley, Jr., Son of Virginia Tanksley  
Christy Wempe, Daughter of Ann & Lance Parks  
David Morgan - Son of Brent & Martina Morgan  
Emily Crocker, Daughter of Nick & Beth Crocker  
David Hendricks II, Son of David Hendricks  
Ryder & Levi Wagner - Sons of Susan & R.J. Wagner  
Leah Elizabeth Davis - Daughter of Ron & Laura Davis  
Logan Xavier Venegas, Son of Rochelle Snyder  
Ryder & Levi Wagner, Sons of R.J. & Susan Wagner  
Amber Eileen Schulze, Daughter of Lisa Schulze  
Joshua Hucklebridge, Son of Elaine White  
Sloan Nagy, Son of Tammy Johnson  
Tiffany Driscoll, Daughter of Dan & Cindy Driscoll  
Ryan Moody, Son of Gloria Moody  
William Michael Shaw, Son of Mary Kay Martin  
Katherine Collins, Daughter of Kevin & Paula Collins  
Miller LaCour Wade, Son of Burton & Julie Wade



*Seeking to forget makes exile all the longer. The secret to redemption lies in remembrance. - Richard von Weizsaecker*

## CHAPTER NEWS

**Our next regular meeting is Tuesday, February, 9th at 7pm. I hope you will join us. I would like to extend a special invitation to our old members. Please join us and share your grief journey with our newly bereaved members. Come and share your wisdom and give back to those in need of your support.**

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members, **Denise Martin, lost her daughter Kellie; Ken and Jan Knight lost their son Christopher; Steve and Sherry Weinstein lost their son Sean; and Julie Joiner lost two daughters Korie and Kacie.** 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 Gifts – A Way to Remember**

There are no dues to belong to Compassionate Friends, because we have already paid the ultimate price; the loss of our loved one(s). A Love Gift is a gift of money given in honor of a child, who has died, or a gift of thanksgiving that their own children are alive and well, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help support our Chapter. Your gifts are tax deductible and are used to reach out to other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. Your gifts support this newsletter, our TCF Library, and other Chapter expenses.

*We thank Steve and Sherry Weinstein for their Love Gift in memory of their son Sean, and Janet McSpadden for her Love Gift in memory of her son Darryl. Thank you, we appreciate your generous support*

### **Volunteers**

**We are always in need of volunteers that can help set up before the meeting, greet people at the door, make coffee, bring light refreshments, etc. If you are interested and would like to help please email me, Linda Brewer at [llbrewer67@hotmail.com](mailto:llbrewer67@hotmail.com) or see David Hendricks after the meeting.**

### **SAVE THE DATE**

**The Compassionate Friends' 39th Annual National Conference is coming to Scottsdale, Arizona on July 8-10, 2016.**

# A Pair Of Shoes



all-greatquotes.com

I am wearing a pair of shoes.  
They are ugly shoes.  
Uncomfortable shoes.  
I hate my shoes.  
Each day I wear them,  
and each day I wish  
I had another pair.  
Some days my shoes hurt so bad that  
I do not think I can take another step.  
Yet, I continue to wear them.  
I get funny looks wearing these shoes.  
They are looks of sympathy.  
I can tell in others eyes that they are  
glad they are my shoes and not theirs.  
They never talk about my shoes.  
To learn how awful my shoes are  
might make them uncomfortable.  
To truly understand these shoes  
you must walk in them.  
But, once you put them on,  
you can never take them off.  
I now realize that I am not the only  
one who wears these shoes.  
There are many pairs in this world.  
Some women are like me and ache daily  
as they try and walk in them.  
Some have learned how to walk in  
them so they don't hurt quite as much  
Some have worn the shoes so long that  
days will go by before they  
think about how much they hurt.  
No woman deserves to wear these  
shoes. Yet, because of these shoes  
I am a stronger woman.  
These shoes have given me  
the strength to face anything.  
They have made me who I am.  
I will forever walk in the shoes  
of a woman who has lost a child.

## Please Don't Discount Sibling Grief

I have come to think of sibling grief as "discounted grief." Why? Because siblings appear to be an emotional bargain in most people's eyes. People worry so much about the bereaved parents that they invest very little attention in the grieving sibling.

My personal "favorite" line said to siblings is, "You be sure and take care of your parents." I wanted to know who was supposed to take care of me, I knew I couldn't.

The grief of siblings may differ from that of a parent, but it ought not to be discounted. People need to realize that while it is obviously painful for parents to have lost a child, it is also painful for the sibling, who has not only lost a sister or brother, but an irreplaceable friend.

While dealing with this double loss, he or she must confront yet another factor: The loss of a brother or sister is frequently the surviving sibling's first experience with the death of any young person. Young people feel they will live forever. A strong dose of mortality in the form of a sibling death is very hard to take.

The feelings of sibling are also often discounted when decisions are being made on things ranging from a funeral plan to flower selections. Parents need to listen to surviving siblings who usually know a lot about the tastes and preferences of the deceased.

Drawing on the knowledge that surviving siblings have about supposedly trivial things, such as favorite clothes or music, can serve two purposes when planning funeral or memorial services. First, their input helps ensure that the deceased receives the type of service he or she would have liked. Second, their inclusion in the planning lets them know they are still an important part of the family.

I realize that people are unaware that they are discounting sibling grief. But then, that's why I'm writing this, so people will know.

Jane Machado  
TCF Tulare, CA



### 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



**IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER**

We can't see you here,  
We can't talk to you here,  
But we can see and talk to you  
In our hearts forever.

We can't touch you here,  
We can't kiss you here,  
But we can touch and kiss you  
In our hearts forever.

We will have aching hearts forever and ever.  
We will have pain and grief for all tomorrows,  
But we will always love you  
In our hearts forever.

*Marlene Kimmel Leff  
Villanova, PA*



**February**

In February we celebrate the birth of George Washington and Abe Lincoln. Lent begins. We wonder if the groundhog will see his shadow, and we have Valentine's Day. Candy, flowers and cards are often exchanged. Many cards are given and received between parents and children as a way of showing love for one another. Valentine's Day is another holiday on which bereaved parents remember the drawings, cards and gifts received from their deceased children.

Take time out to be good to yourself. Perhaps you could remember your child with a special flower, or could do something kind in your child's memory for someone in need. Most of all, take time to tell your living children and your spouse or someone special how fortunate you are to have them and how much they mean to you.

Lorraine Bauman  
TCF Fairmont, MN



## Two Viewpoints

The following letter, signed "Sibling," appeared in the Louisville, KY newsletter. It is a poignant expression of love and pain that is typical of siblings' reactions. It is hoped that, for those of you with teenagers, it will offer clues leading to freer communications and sharing of feelings.

Dear Parents of "Compassionate Friends":

I am writing to let you know how I feel and maybe how some of the other siblings feel. There have been times when my parents start really getting extra down about my brother. I usually leave the room. I feel that no matter how hard I try, I will say or do something that will hurt them more, or that they won't understand what I'm really trying to say. They already feel enough pain. I really love them and I understand enough about how they hurt, but I'm just not good at saying what I feel. It seems like it never sounds right. I also hold my emotions back from them. I always hear it is best to let it out, and I do, but not in front of my parents. I'm afraid they might try to hold their emotions back in front of me, so I won't get upset. I've had rough times for the past couple of years, and I'm still having hard times, so I'm always afraid they will hold back if they see me getting upset. I know that would just hurt them more when they try to hold it back. I love to talk about the good times my brother and I had, but I'd just rather be alone when I cry for him. Just once in a while my sister and I can talk about him, but that's the only person I can really talk to. I hope and pray with all my heart that my parents will understand, but I just can't talk to them. I miss my brother a lot, more than I think they really realize. I love and care for them too much to go and upset them even more. Maybe I'm wrong, but please parents, understand how I feel. May we always be close.

Love,  
Sibling



*Grief is not a disease,*

*it is not an illness,*

*it is not depression.*

*It is, in fact an expression of love.*

*Grief can only be a disease if love is.*

- Dr. Joanne Cacciatore

## The Surviving Children

Being a parent is never easy. When one's child dies, it is even more difficult being parents to the children who survive. In those first days and weeks, shock may cause us to make decisions (or allow others to make them) that we will later regret. We may wish later that we had included the children more, that we had not permitted ourselves to be isolated from them, that we had explained things differently. Most of us never expect to face this situation, so we have never thought through in advance what the best course would be.

At some point in our grief, we do become more sensitive to these "forgotten grievers" who have lost a brother or sister. They are having struggles of their own. The first thing to remember is that everything going on with our other children is not caused by the death. They are still, through it all, growing up, going through the various developmental stages that have always concerned parents. Any special problems they had before will not have magically disappeared. Just as we proclaim repeatedly that there is no one way for a parent to grieve, so each child has his own style and timetable for everything, and we cannot control these. We can only try to understand and help when we can. We cannot make it "go away" any more than we can make any of the other harsh realities of life go away.

The very foundations of life has been shaken. The home, so sheltering and safe, has been invaded by forces our surviving children do not understand and parents, who seemed all-powerful and all-wise, may have been reduced to quivering, uncertain robots. Probably for the first time, death-whatever that is-has claimed someone who is not old. Worse, if there has been the usual quota of sibling rivalry and squabbling, the child may be afraid that he has caused the death by being "bad," or by wishing there were no such bothersome person to have to share with or "take a back seat to."

Just as every child is different, every relationship is different. Feelings toward an older brother or sister who was protector, teacher, idol, and those toward a younger one who may have been a sometime responsibility, hanger-on, biggest fan, are not the same. They may have been best friends or rivals who didn't get along very well. Their responses to the death will be as varied as our own.

A child's place in the family system is changed. The second oldest finds himself suddenly the big brother. The buffer between the others may be gone. Most difficult of all, a child may have become an "only child." Any child younger than the one who died has to go through the scary years of being the same age. Similar symptoms and situations are so frightening. Brothers and sisters often do look and behave very much alike, and these resemblances can be a source of discomfort or of pride. There may be efforts to exaggerate these, to replace the missing child, to make things the way they used to be.

What can we as parents do to help? Most of all, our children need reassurance and honesty. They need to know they are loved and that the family and the home will continue. They need all the facts they can understand. Part of this honesty requires that they know of your grief. By your actions, you can teach them it is okay to cry (even fathers!), it is okay to admit you are angry at "life" for being this way, that you too are confused about "why." Maintaining a "stiff upper lip" in front of the children only encourages them to suppress their feelings.

Try to be available when they want to talk, but be prepared for the possibility that they may not want to talk with you about their feelings. Many children hold back because they are afraid they

might make you cry. You can try explaining that you are not worried about that, but they may still prefer to talk to someone else. They may be ashamed of some common reactions such as feelings of anger, guilt, jealousy, even relief. Perhaps you can help them find someone they can talk to comfortably. They may have already found such a person without you realizing it.

Be honest in the way you remember the child who has died. It is tempting to reminisce about only the good and wonderful qualities, but was this really a saint? Surely not. Recall, and talk about, the not-so-good and wonderful things too. Be sure you are remembering a real child, for everyone's sake. A saint is hard to live up to. Talking with other parents at a meeting of The Compassionate Friends can give you practical suggestions about things that have worked for other families. You will hear ideas you may not have thought of. Some will have received help from caring professionals and you may decide to consult someone too. When you recognize your family in what others are saying, you may decide that you and your children are really doing pretty well, hurting and healing together and that it just takes longer than you thought it would.

Ronnie Peterson  
TCF Star Lake, NY



### **(This is a Sibling Story) It's a Family Affair**

When a child dies, grief is a family affair. It hits mom, dad, and siblings with equal despair. Mom cries and cannot get out of bed. Dad holds in emotions and leaves much unsaid. Sister and brother simply cannot understand why death came and dealt this kind of hand. No one acts as they should and nothing is the same. The family wants to draw together but seems to only share pain. Someone must be responsible when a child dies. Each family member thinks in some way it's them, and cries.

But no one is responsible for things we cannot control. So reach out to each other and keep the family whole.

Don't let the differences in how each grieve change the love in your family or its belief. Be strong when you can and weak when you must, and love each other with kindness and trust. So treat the family with love and you will survive. For we who have been there and made it through together can say that holding on to each other makes love last forever.

Jackie Roxen  
TCF, Broward, FL



## Wounded Heart

"Your broken heart requires at least as much care as a broken bone. With proper care you can be confident that you will heal. The same powerful forces that mend a broken bone will heal your emotional pain, but a wounded heart needs time and proper care to heal."

~Harold Bloomfield, MD~

If someone fell and broke a leg, people would rush to their aid. They wouldn't stop to even think about it. Yet, when it's our hearts that are broken, few rush to our aid and even fewer understand. At first, we receive the cards and phone calls wishing us well and telling us "if there's anything I can do"...but they soon taper off to a trickle. Then we begin to hear that we must 'get on with our life,' 'we can't let it get us down,' and we're told just how soon we should be 'back to normal'... we're given a deadline of sorts. When we don't follow the acceptable standards for healing, we are thought to 'need help'...the professional kind... and we're told that we are 'in denial'. These same people, who seem to have all of the answers, not only have never experienced the loss of a child but also tend to not want to get too involved...too close to our pain. They would rather stand off to the side until we're back to our old selves...whatever that is! They're uncomfortable when we speak of why our hearts are broken and they don't mention it for fear of reminding us of how our hearts broke in the first place... as if we could ever forget. When they ask us, "How are you"...it's more a greeting than a question. They don't want to hear how we ache inside, how lonely and empty we feel, how desolate we feel. Why...because they can't fix it. They can't make us whole again. And unlike a broken bone that's healed, we will never be as good as new. We will forever be missing a part of what made us the person that we once were. When our child died, so did a part of our heart and where that piece was, now there is nothing...only a gaping hole that nothing and no one can ever fill. Unlike a broken bone, we will not mend in a few weeks...in fact, we will never fully mend. We learn to live without that piece of our hearts...to live with our loss, to survive...one day at a time!

Jacquelyn M. Comeaux

In Loving Memory of My Angels...

Michelle, Jerry & Danny

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*Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.*

-Mother Teresa

## Phone Friends

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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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