



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.

JANUARY 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, Jan. 12th)

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.



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Eric Reiland, Son of Kimberly Crawford and Grandson of Janet Heilman
Anthony Boras, Son of Walter Boras
Ava Helena Wallheimer, Daughter of Angela Wallheimer
Patrick Williams, Son of Poppy & Steve Williams
Syrina Snow Salazar, Daughter of April R. Torres
Ronald Lee, Son of Ana Castellanos
Samantha Dawn Quesada, Daughter of Albert & Dawn Quesada
Amber Eileen Schulze, Daughter of Lisa Schulze
Patrick Noel Jernigan, Son of Juanice Jernigan
Amanda Jane Franklin, Daughter of Jane Draycott
Christy Wempe, Daughter of Ann & Lance Parks
Karen Crawford, Daughter of Kim Crawford
Shane Woodson, Son of Theresa Woodson
Lucy Gale, Daughter of Steve & Jackie Sanders
Braiden Mainor, Grandson of Barbara Herring
Christina, Granddaughter of Barbara Thomas
Kailey Massey, Daughter of Terry & Wendy Massey

JANUARY ANGEL DATES

Ryan David Dodson, Son of Diane & David Dodson
Alex John Piniewski, Son of Bob & Christi Piniewski
Hugo Alberto DeLeon, Son of Lupita DeLeon
Kenneth Ray Roberts, III, Son of Brenda Johnson
Darrell Wayne McSpadden, Son of Janet & Robert McSpadden
Brandon Miller Estes, Son of Holly Olive
Derek Johns, Son of Shauna & Jeff Cook
Devin Giblin, Son of Tanya Giblin
Tiffany Gower, Daughter of Brenda Whitworth
Patrick Burns, Son of Ray & Amanda Burns
Adam Kujawa, Son of Larry & Sara Kujawa
Kailey Massey, Daughter of Terry & Wendy Massey
Jasmins Potter Jr., Son of Jasmins & Erika Potter
Joel Sloan, Son of Jim & Glenna Sloan
Kathy Degen, Sister of Clare Watkins
Joshua Pham, Son of Tony & Peach Pham
Catherine Breeding, Daughter of Barbara Breeding

*A new year brings time to reflect on the children we love,
those who remain with us and those for whom we grieve ~
Wayne Loder*

CHAPTER NEWS

I hope you'll join us at our next meeting Tuesday, January 12th at 7pm. Our guest speaker will be Dr. B. Glenn Wilkerson. Glenn is the bereaved parent, retired minister of Cypress Creek Christian Church and president of The ARK Group.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members, **Bo and Allison Neelley, lost their son Baron in November of last year.** If you have walked through the door to a TCF meeting, we understand how traumatic and difficult that is to do...we have all taken that step and reach out to you in friendship and support.

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

We hope you will find our meetings and newsletters to be a source of comfort, a place where tears are allowed, no judgments are made and the hope that through this trauma, we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

"A Special Remembrance"

If you would like to submit an article about your child for our newsletter please send them to me, Linda Brewer at llbrewer67@hotmail.com. It's a wonderful tribute to your child to shared a writing about him or her so that everyone may get to know them. Tell us what he or she liked. Did they have siblings? What were their hobbies? Where did they go to school or worked? Please let us hear from you.

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.

Volunteers

We are always in need of volunteers for our group 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 or see David Hendricks after the meeting.

"A Special Thank You"

Our Chapter's Candle Lighting Ceremony on December 13, 2015

Hosted by:

Beth Crocker and the Jersey Village Players

Our chapter held its annual candle lighting on December 13th as part of the World Wide Candle Lighting services. Once again we would like to thank Beth Crocker and her theater students of Jersey Village High School for a wonderful program. There was music, songs and poetry performances by the students. Food was provided by the students and their parents. We had an excellent turnout with approximately 100 in attendance. Thank you to everyone who made this a very special night.







Hello, Did I Hear a Big Sigh?

The holidays are finally over, and we can put our hurt and pain back in the boxes along with the Christmas decorations. Oh, how easy that would be, if that were so.

Dealing with the anticipation of the holidays without our loved ones early on in our grief is devastating. We find ourselves not wanting to cope and wishing away the oncoming celebration. This is a natural reaction, of course, and one we must fight to overcome. Memories and the thought of celebrations without our children are fraught with tears and heartache.

We can only hope that the next time we must encounter a specific holiday, we will find it less painful to cope with because we have put one more year behind us. Time does have a way of helping to soften our grief, but the road can be very bumpy along the way to recovery.

Our children were our reason for life, and their memories are our reason to go on living.

Because of my sons, my affiliation with TCF has given me many treasured friends whom I can sympathize with and have empathy for.

Let's all start the New Year with the promise of mending our bodies; holding the memories of our children, so love, in our hearts, and helping each newly bereaved parent and sibling to better cope with the difficult task of their loss. By supporting one another in our grief, we find the comfort and understanding we so sorely need.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Mary Senbertrand
TCF Cape May, NJ



*The journey of grief can seem bleak and lonely
Look in front of you...
there are others encouraging and guiding you
Look beside you...
there are others on the same journey
Look behind you...
there are others encouraged by you
We are not alone on this journey.*

“Butterfly in the Snow”

I knew that the further away we got from Minnesota I should have felt the weight of the world lift off of my shoulders. Normally someone who was going on an 18-day vacation, away from the stresses and strains of work and everyday life, on their way to the beautiful West Coast should feel that way. But the events of the past few years made it difficult to relax and I felt the muscles in my neck and back become tenser as we journeyed on. I could sense that my son Dan picked up on my anxieties, as I was sure he had his own. He was seated next to me and I tried to flash a smile of reassurance to him that really belied my fears and the growing knot that I felt in the pit of my stomach.

Our uneasiness was justified. This was the first time we were on vacation in a little over four years. That family vacation had ended in unspeakable tragedy. Having spent the day of my 45th birthday at Daytona Beach, my husband, daughter Kristina (her nickname was Nina), son Dan and myself were on our way to my celebratory birthday supper. Only three-quarters of a mile from our destination, a drunk driver fell asleep at the wheel, crossed the median, hit the side of the car where my precious and beloved 15 ½ year old daughter, Nina, was sitting and she was killed instantly. From that moment, life as we knew it was irrevocably changed. It was the initiation into unfamiliar territory and the beginning of the roller coaster ride of emotions we were to experience. We were about to be educated in the school of grief; a place we never wanted to enter. From that day forward I swore that I would never, ever attempt to go on another family vacation. The memory of that one was painfully and eternally burned into my mind. I was fearful that if it could happen once, it could happen again. In my experiences along the grief pathway and those I had become acquainted with while on that journey, I came to learn that no one was immune to tragedy repeating itself.

Shortly after Nina died, I became involved in “The Club” that no one wants to be a member of. I became a part of The Compassionate Friends, a self-help support group for bereaved parents. Membership is a parent’s worst nightmare to someone who has never lost a child, but to those of us who have it is a lifesaver. With their support and friendship, I could uncurl myself from the fetal position and begin to think, feel and cope with life again. There I met people that I know will be my lifelong friends; people who had somehow even survived the loss of more than one child, and some that had lost their only child. Each of their stories were incredibly heartbreaking: children “gone too soon” from cancer, congenital defects, accidents, house fires, suicide, AIDS, homicide – a never-ending list of sorrow. But somehow they carried on and gave back what they had received tenfold to the newly bereaved. They were such an inspiration and I knew that in time I would want to give back as well.

A few years after my precious daughter’s death, I became co-leader and newsletter editor to our TCF Chapter in St. Paul, Minnesota. The Compassionate Friend’s National Conference was being held in Portland, Oregon in June of 1999. I had always heard how lovely Oregon was and for the first time considered even attempting another family vacation. Though I was apprehensive, I wondered how I could allow my feelings to dictate that my son Dan would never experience with his family the beauty that this bountiful country of ours has to offer. I also justified it by rationalizing that it was more a “business trip”, to receive ideas to help my other Compassionate Friends, than a pleasure trip.

My parents generously offered to take Dan and me through some of the most gorgeous country in America. We traveled to Glacier, Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons National Parks, with their “purple mountains majesty.” We saw the rugged and rocky, lighthouse studded

spectacular Oregon coastline and the breathtakingly gargantuan redwood trees in Jedidiah Smith Redwood Forest in California. Though I was awestruck and taken in by all the beauty, inwardly I still harbored doubts. In my prayers at night I would speak to Nina and ask for her approval. "Is this all right with you, Nina, after what happened on our last family vacation? Please somehow let me know that I am doing the right thing."

The day before we were to arrive in Portland, we made a stop at another National Park. I don't think I was at all prepared for my surroundings at Crater Lake National Park. To say the crystalline sapphire-blue waters of the lake skirted by rolling mountains, volcanic peaks, and evergreen forests left me breathless would have been a gross understatement. As we were not properly dressed for the cold weather and snow, my parents, Dan and I shivered as we stood above the snow line overlooking this awe-inspiring sight. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a tiny unique butterfly appeared. With the snowy backdrop, it looked out of place. It fluttered near us and circled the four of us several times, but stayed close by. I watched its flight until it disappeared as quickly as it arrived.

I felt a smile cross my lips. A warm glow overtook my entire being and the tenseness in my body diminished. I had already drawn my own conclusion as to whom this unlikely visitor was, but did not share my thoughts with anyone else. The four of us stood quietly for a few minutes until my father broke the silence. "You know who that was, don't you?" he quietly remarked. I stated that I knew who I thought it was. "Butterflies can't fly up here in the cold air at this elevation," he continued. "That little butterfly was Nina. She came to remind us that she is with us always and wherever we are... and that this is the kind of exquisite beauty and so much more that she experiences in heaven every day."

The highlight of my trip – a sign from my precious daughter, who came with the answer to my question. And to remind us all that the best is yet to come.

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

For the New Year

Where there is pain,
Let there be softening
Where there is bitterness,
Let there be acceptance
Where there is silence,
Let there be communication
Where there is loneliness,
Let there be friendships
Where there is despair,
Let there be hope.

Ruth Eiseman
TCF Louisville, KY

The Grief of a Parent Who Has Lost an Infant

To experience the loss of an infant is to grieve for what never was. After all the months of anticipation and preparation, the actual birth of a child brings the feeling of hope and fulfillment. Should the child be stillborn, or die hours, days or even months later, the unrealized dreams become a source of pain for parents. No parent ever expects to outlive his child; the death of an infant is often the loss of a child unknown even to his parents. The expected stages of grief (guilt, disbelief, anger, etc.) can have new directions for the parents who have lost an infant.

1. Shame and Guilt - Especially if the infant was stillborn or had a birth defect, the mother may feel she has failed as a woman. "Other women have live, normal babies, why can't I?" Should an infant die months after birth, parents find it hard to resolve feelings that it was their fault.

2. No Memories - Parents may only have "souvenirs of the occasion" (birth certificate, I.D. bracelet) by which to remember their child. If the infant is older, they may have pictures and a few belongings, but they still feel they hadn't really gotten to know their child.

3. Loneliness in Grief - It is hard for friends and relatives to share your grief for a child they never knew. If the child is newborn, they may give the impression you are grieving unnecessarily, they hope you can "forget this baby" and "have another one."

4. Neglected Fathers - Too often the sympathies of professionals and friends are directed mainly to the mother. It is important to remember that the father had made plans for this baby, too.

5. Mothers vs. Fathers - Since the mother has bonded with her child during the pregnancy, her grief may be much deeper than the father's, who only came to know this child after birth. It may be difficult for a father to understand why his wife's grief is so profound and so prolonged.

Claire McGaughey and Sue Shelley
TCF St. Louis, MO



A Promise

The colors of life change as we go through grief.
We begin black and white;

Then gray settles over us, seeping into our pores, surrounding us,

Smothering us for a long period of time; then slowly the colors change.
We may not even be aware of their changing 'til one day we see a rainbow,

And know it was meant for us.

Faye Harden
TCF, Tuscaloosa, AL

Learning How to Smile Again

When my daughter died, the pain was so overwhelming, the thought that I could ever feel any ounce of happiness again seemed ridiculous. In those early days of grief, the mere idea of being happy didn't just feel impossible, it felt *wrong*.

During the first year after her death, I recall an evening when my husband insisted I sit down with him and our three boys and watch a funny show on TV that we had watched regularly as a family for years. My husband was able to recognize that in the wake of their sister's death, our boys needed life to return to as "normal" as possible in order for them to cope and feel safe, and that didn't just mean regular daily routines – it meant a return to the personal interactions with us that they had been used to. Begrudgingly, I sat down to watch the show. During the show, something was so funny that for the first time since her death, I actually felt the urge to laugh. Instead of laughing, I actually bit the inside of my cheeks to force myself NOT to smile. At that time, the idea that I could ever be happy again felt like a betrayal of my daughter.

The logic (or lack thereof) went something like this: if I allowed myself to be happy, it would mean that I was okay with the fact that she had died. Looking back, I think the self-imposed state of misery served several purposes.

First, it was a matter of basic survival. The pain of losing a child is so overwhelming and so intolerable; many people say they feel numb early on. I think it is similar to the body's natural defense mechanism of passing out while experiencing physical pain that is completely overwhelming. When the initial numbness started to wear off after about three months after her death, I tried to maintain it by suppressing my emotions. Since I couldn't pick and choose, that meant trying to suppress ALL emotions, not just the pain and guilt. In reality, this misguided effort only suppressed everything BUT the pain and guilt.

Second, when my daughter died, life as I knew it ended. I was living in a world that suddenly felt alien and intolerable. Not only did I feel like I could never be happy again, I felt outright angry that people around me were happy. To smile, laugh, and have fun again felt like it would mean that there was no longer the possibility that I would wake up from this nightmare I was in. It would mean that I would have to accept that she really *did* die and life really *did* go on without her.

In a convoluted way, the pain had become the biggest connection I had to my daughter. I could no longer see her, touch her, hold her, or hear her sweet voice. Family and friends stopped talking about her because it had become too painful for them. The pain of missing her was what kept her present in my thoughts almost every minute of my waking hours. It's what I talked about at the support groups I went to. Talking about her was painful because she was no longer here, but it meant I was still talking about her and acknowledging the continuing importance of her place in my life and in my heart.

Before my daughter died, I had heard several times the old adage that those who have died wouldn't want to see their surviving loved ones living in sorrow and misery. I don't think I fully understood or appreciated what that meant until I was faced with it myself. Sorrow and pain will come no matter what. However, we can unknowingly allow ourselves to get stuck in it because it may feel like the only connection we still have to the loved one we lost.

Over time, the notion of happiness as a betrayal of my daughter faded. At some point, I gave myself permission to smile and to be happy again. I don't think there was any specific moment I can pinpoint, but instead, it was a slow realization that life was going to go on without her physically here whether I liked it or not. It helped that I still had four other children – one born after she died – and the joy and happiness that they bring into my life is undeniable. The pain of losing her has not gone away, but it does not occupy as much room as it once did. Just like I have chosen to allow myself to smile and be happy again, I have chosen to focus less on my daughter's death and more on the happy memories of my daughter's life. I choose love and happiness, and can't think of a better way to honor her memory.

Maria Kubitz
TCF Contra Costa County, CA
In Memory of my daughter, Margareta



On Gratitude

My feet were cold from the icy pavement as I waited for the morning bus. The bitter winter was receding and I was working hard on gratitude. I bent my head deeper into my scarf and saw a penny in the street.

I had just returned from a regional meeting of The Compassionate Friends in Green Bay, Wisconsin. A presenter held up his 'Pennies from Heaven' and declared that signs from our loved ones are everywhere. I wonder...

I picked up that penny and found my reading glasses.

I work on gratitude with some skepticism. Was this a treasure or just a muddy little coin? The date imprinted in the copper became clear—1983—the year my son was born.

Surprise and tears triggered by that date immediately washed across my face. I no longer felt cold. I meandered through memories of a day in July some 20+ years ago when I delivered that child.

“Collect yourself,” I said to myself under my breath. I might scare my mass transit bus mates. In the cold air I turned my face away from the others and watched my breath puff into icy clouds.

The bus appeared and I boarded with everyone else. I was a penny richer that day and grateful beyond measure for the treasure trove of memories that lay in my hand.

Monica Colberg
TCF Minneapolis, MN
In Memory of my son Art



NOW I KNOW...

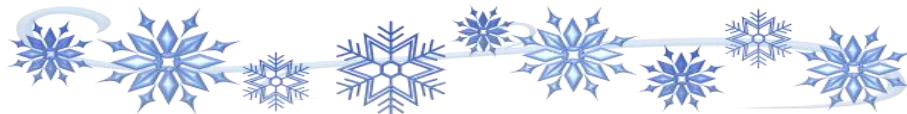
I never knew, when you lost your child,
What you were going through.
I wasn't there, I stayed away,
I just deserted you.

I didn't know the words to say,
I didn't know the things to do.
I think your pain so frightened me,
I didn't know how to comfort you.

And then one day my child died.
You were the first one there.
You quietly stayed by my side,
Listened, and held me as I cried.

You didn't leave, you didn't go.
The lesson learned is...
NOW I KNOW!

Alice Kerr
TCF Lower Bucks, 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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