



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 2026

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

Our next meeting is Tuesday, January 13th.

at

**Trinity Lutheran Church
Family Life Center, Room #116
5201 Spring Cypress Rd.
Spring, Texas 77379**

The Church is located on the corner of Spring Cypress Rd. 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.



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

Matthew Coers, Son of Michelle Guerrero

Mark Cook, Son of Bill and Joanne Cook

Sean Anthony May, Son of David & Ann May

Joshua Bell, Son of Steve and Donna Bell

Reagan Ottnat, Daughter of Stacy Raines

Elijah James Knight, Son of Stephen and Courtney Knight

Chantal Warfield, Daughter of Jacqueline Smith

Matthew Hanzi, son of Nelda Hanzi

Galencia Symone, Daughter of Titlayo Traylor



**If we choose to move forward
Acknowledging the sorrow and sadness
But also the love and laughter
Then hope travels with us**

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
Sean Anthony May, Son of David and Ann May
Jared Mayfield, Son of Robbie Lampkins
Stephen Verdell Jr., Son of Stephen Verdell and Melinda Nagle
Jessica Nicole Driskell, Daughter of Patricia Ann Tull
Bryan Selby, Son of Dennis Selby
Chad Moyer, Son of Valli Moyer
Nicole Speir, Daughter of Sue Speir
John Taylor Hill, Son of Debbie Stasney
Lucy Schaefer, Daughter of Amy Croston
David Brace, Son of Julia Hine
Matthew Lopez, Son of Rick Lopez
Morgan Ascencios, Son of Lisa Ascencios
Amber Faith Dawson, Daughter of Michael Dawson



*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

Our next meeting is Tuesday, January 13th. 7pm. at Trinity Lutheran Church, Family Life Center #116.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members, **Linda Mallet lost her son Austin in May 2024; Lisa Marie Starcher lost her sister Linda in October 2025.** If you have walked through the door to a TCF meeting, we understand how traumatic and difficult that is to do...we have all taken that step and reach out to you in friendship and support.

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

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

Private Facebook Groups

The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private Facebook Groups. These pages are moderated by bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, and may not be accessed unless a request to join is approved by a moderator. Please click on the link next to the group you wish to join and answer the screening questions so we can confirm your request. If you are waiting approval, please message one of the administrators. Join requests to our Facebook groups must be requested personally, therefore when you wish to share the group with someone please pass along the link to the group.

[View Groups](#)

SAVE THE DATE

**49th TCF National Conference
Will be held in Baltimore, MD
July 3-5, 2026**

*Thanks to everyone that attended the Candle Lighting Service in December. A special thanks to Trinity Lutheran Church for setting everything up. I'd also like to thank Darryl Heino for the slide show of our children. Thank you Beth Crocker for emceeing the program.
David*



BITTERSWEET MEMORIES

By: Vickie Van Antwerp
TCF Brevard, NC

One of the most precious things to a parent who has lost a child is the memories. Without them, it would be as if their child never was. With them, it is so bittersweet that it can make a parent laugh and cry, rejoice and anguish, touch the sweetness to the lips and taste the salt from the tears.

Memories keep the heart from crushing under the weight of sorrow. They give a parent the chance to be with their child again. They can walk through their memories like they were a movie. When the memories are so vivid, you can almost feel them, touch them, hug them, and kiss them. It is so bittersweet when the reality comes and you realize it is just a memory, a thought, and you are reminded of what you have lost.

If you asked a parent if they would give up the memories so they didn't have to feel the pain of knowing their child is gone, they would tell you no. As painful as it may be, not having the memories or feeling their presence, is just as unbearable as losing them.

There is no happy place to go to, but there is a place to be with your child. You know before you step into that realm that it will be painful, but you know that it will be joyful too.

So as we let the memories take us to a time that our child was safe with us, just rest a while until it is time to go and the next time try not to think of what is gone but what is still in your heart and will always be.



Faded Memories

I remember the first time I realized that my sense of my son, Jeremy, was beginning to fade.

I was losing his smell, the exact color of his hair, the tone of his voice when he said, "Oh, Mom," the feel of his arms around me when I got a too-seldom sixteen year-old hug.

Until my son's death, it had never occurred to me that I knew him through all of my senses. I believe the profound sense of loss I've experienced results in part from this total cut-off from his being. It's not just that I can't physically see him, but the essence of who he was is gone.

Perhaps that explains why I would often go to his room when I wanted to recapture a connection with him. Some nights I would sleep in his bed. I would wear his tee shirts. I would make a cocoon of an afghan that wrapped around him many times. Somehow, I felt his energy about me. I smelled his smell.

At other times, I'd get out the Ziplock bag; the one with snippets of his hair that was cut when they had to screw the "halo" in his head to secure his neck and severed spinal cord. I'd study the color of his hair, memorizing the shades of light brown.

And the sounds? Only one. I found a cassette tape that he had recorded himself accompanying a favorite band. I listened to that for hours, eyes closed, trying to capture the vision of those moments.

Although my behaviors might seem odd to some, the fear of fading memories eased.

Tom Robbins, in his book *Jitterbug Perfume*, says "Death is impatient and thoughtless. It barges into your room when you are right in the middle of some- thing. It doesn't even bother to wipe its boots." True. I was in the middle of parenting my only child. Death not only left the dirty mess of grieving for me to clean-up, but I had no warning.

Had I had warning that a three-quarter ton pick-up truck was going to run head-on into my son's Toyota Celica, I would have long before bought a camcorder and taken hours of audio and video. Lights. Camera. Action. The opening scene is me yelling, "Can you quiet down a little? You're sounding great, but those drums are going to drive the neighbors crazy." No answer.

Next scene. In his room, head-set on, eyes closed, tongue showing, intensity high, drumsticks alive with action.

Next scene: At the soccer field. I'm feeling the pride of watching my half-back move the ball down the field, demonstrating his years of experience.

Next scene: Middle of the night. I wake up to go to the bathroom; pass by his room. I see the light from the computer screen. "Jeremy, you've got to go to school in the morning. Turn that thing off." Fade out. Regrets. I didn't have a camcorder.

Often, just when I'm struggling with trying to remember the details, the minute details, I'll have one of those experiences. It's something that I'm hesitant to tell anyone about, partly because it feels so private and partly because I fear I won't be understood.

I'll be sleeping, and he'll come to me. Instantaneously my senses take in his presence; all of who he is. I feel the weight of his body against me as we hug. I see his eyebrows that almost, but not quite, meet. I smell that smell that is his alone. I hear his voice, oh so familiar. I find myself surprised that he is so real.

I used to awaken disappointed that it was "only" a dream. Today, nine years after his death, I treasure these infrequent experiences. While I don't understand it, and I have no explanations, each time it happens I believe I have spent a brief time in the presence of my son.

I thank God I don't have to rely only on faded memories.

Judi Simmons Estes
Prairie Village, Kansas
In Memory of my son Jeremy



Healing and Hope

For a long time after the death of a child, bereaved parents are convinced that healing will never occur, and that the loneliness, anger, guilt and despair, which control life so completely, will never change. This feeling is so strong that when others try to reassure the grieving one, the response is usually, "It's different with me! You don't understand!" This is the "normal" response to what is probably the most severe stress a human will ever face.

Fortunately, there are compassionate friends who once felt this same way who have learned that, out of this morass of loneliness, anger, guilt and despair, there finally arises a ray of hope. Though small and fleeting at first, this hope becomes the light which leads the wounded parents through the dark valley and into acceptance of their child's death. And this healing will occur even though there is still no understanding of "Why?"

It is by working through our guilt (both real and imagined), facing our anger including anger at God and even at the dead child, crying our way through our despair (with carefully chosen professional help if necessary), that the loneliness will lessen, and hope will be seen as surviving when it was thought gone forever. Each one must use one's spiritual beliefs in his or her own way to assist in this process.

Full recovery—in the sense that the effects of grief will finally disappear never to return—return not occur, although the term "recovery" is used. I prefer the term "healing," a process whereby our lives come to a new "normal." Healing implies (a) our accepting the unacceptable (the death of our child), and (b) our slowly learning to resume productive relationships with others. This is done all while we continue to love and miss the dead child.

Since we still love the children who have died, we will still experience grief, but it will no longer control our lives. Just as we cannot stop the flashbacks which occur so suddenly and unexpectedly during grief, neither can we prevent healing from occurring. We may slow the process by failing to do our grief work, but we cannot stop it!! One of the greatest hindrances to our healing is the fear that our dead children will be forgotten. We will not forget them, nor will they be forgotten by others, even though we may not realize it at the time! Perhaps the greatest obstacle to healing is the failure to forgive—ourselves, the dead child, others involved with the child's death, even God if we hold Him responsible. For only through forgiveness and forgiving are we truly able to handle our guilt and the anger that comes from the guilt we presume in others.

We enhance the healing process when we do our grief work, when we have gratitude for the time we had with our child, when we recall the happy times we experienced with our child (or during pregnancy, if that's all we had), and when we pick up the shattered pieces of our existence (as our child would want us to do), slowly resuming productive living.

No matter where you are in your journey toward healing, bolster the hope that arises within you. Your healing is probably the best memorial you may erect to your dead child!

Robert Gloor
TCF Tuscaloosa, AL

Shared Thoughts Resolving to Care For Ourselves

We all approach the New Year very differently. Many cannot wait for the year our child or sibling died to pass, while others feel it separates them further from that person. But, the one thing most newly bereaved agree on, is that they are glad the holidays are over. For some the anticipation was far greater than the holiday itself. When pain and stress control our lives it is very difficult to be optimistic.

We must try to face the New Year with the thought that we will not always be in this much pain. As difficult as it is for us to believe, the pain does soften. One day you will find a tolerable life again. It will not be the same as it was, but in many ways our lives can be richer, for we don't fret over the trivial things we used to. We have learned the real values in life. January is the time of year we struggle to put all our trying events behind us, and begin the year with new expectations. Unfortunately, that does not apply to our grief. We cannot "get on with our life" until we have spent sufficient time resolving our grief. All too often, we choose to repress the most painful emotions. They are too difficult to share with others, and we feel too fragile to deal with them. Once unresolved issues become delayed grief, it can be very damaging, and much harder to resolve.

Perhaps, one of our New Year resolutions should be allowing ourselves freedom to grieve. We need to take time to read,, attend meetings, phone a friend, cry, walk, eat healthier, and in general remove our name from the bottom of the list of people to care for, we need to place ourselves at the top of the list, making ourselves number one. We cannot always be a reservoir of strength; this may be the time to let others care for us.

We can't expect this to be a good year if our grief is fresh. But, we should expect good things as well as bad. We have survived the impossible ordeal of the death and funeral. We have learned to take one day at a time, and not to set our expectations too high. If a good day comes, cherish it. Many times we have problems with the most important ingredient of recovery, and that is to learn to laugh and be happy again. We feel guilty for that moment of pleasure, and sometimes even feel it disrespectful. This is not a sign of forgetting, or a lack of love, it is a very healthy sign of hope. I would like to share the last stanza of one of *Sascha Wagner's* poems, "The New Year," with you.

But let us not forget
that this may be the year
when love and hope and courage
find each other somewhere
in the darkness
to lift their voice and speak
Let there be light.

Marie Hofmockel
TCF Valley Forge, PA





New Year a Time to Search for 'Ray of Hope'

*Be my ray of hope, be my ray of laughter.
Be my song to sing that guides me on my way.
Be the arms that hold me.
Be the love that enfolds me, be my light,
Be my ray of hope today.
...Paul Alexander, songwriter*

Snowflakes drift silently to earth.

A new year has dawned. The revelry of the old year has quieted and the holiday hustle and bustle has ended

As bereaved parents, for many of us, this will be our first full year without our children. For others, the upcoming year will be another thread in the garment of life. A thread connecting the memories of our old life with the hope for "recovery" in our new life.

How often our thoughts wander back to another day and time when we were happy and full of the vitality that makes up life—a time when our child made our life complete and worth living.

Though three years have passed since becoming a bereaved parent, I still think about my children every day of my life. As I sat watching the ball atop Time Square descend, my thoughts jumped back to a time when my children lay safely in their beds as we brought a new year into existence.

Does *this* new year bring with it a time when we will hurt less—when there will be a new ray of hope? Or does it bring even more heartache because of the sadness and loneliness we find difficult to leave behind?

The answers lie deep within each of us. How we approach this new year will make the difference.

Can we be kind to ourselves? Just because others place demands on us to do whatever they feel will help us does not mean they are right. They have not walked in our shoes. We can say 'NO!'

Can we enjoy life again? Though we cannot be physically with our children, they would want us to enjoy living . . . and yes, they would want us to love again!

Can we help parents who are more newly bereaved to clear the same hurdles that seemed so insurmountable to us such a short while ago? By reaching out to others and making their burdens a little lighter, we are helping our own open wounds to heal.

*Inside of me are all the answers.
Everything I need to know
Lives inside of me.
Come behold my miracle,
Come and hear my story.
Come and paint a memory with me.
. . . P. Alexander*

Wayne Loder
TCF Lakes Area, MI

"Ray of Hope" by Paul Alexander on the CD "The Best of Paul" at www.griefsong.com (Paul wrote LIGHT A CANDLE which has been used at many TCF candle lighting programs). Permission to use excerpts from "Ray of Hope" granted by Paul Alexander.



Possibilities

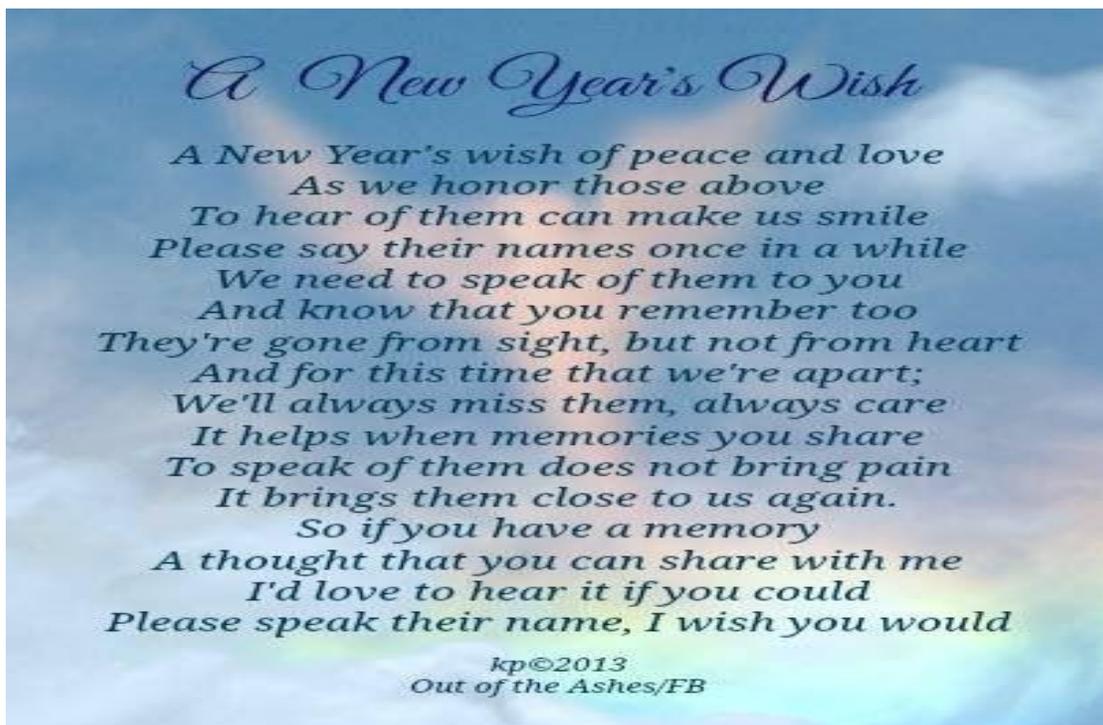
The New Year is upon us and with its arrival are the usual concerns surrounding New Year's Resolutions. It has become popular over the years to take inventory, and consequently make a list of those things that we are going to finally try to accomplish during the new year. The list invariably includes all those intentions we have never been successful in keeping in the past before but somehow feel we might have more resolve this time around. Resolutions are tough and often too harsh. When we look at the list of "never done" and try to muster up a me

list of "to do", the attempts seem discouraging and downright overwhelming. Should we really try again? The loss of our child has surrounded us with a grief that is encompassing, and draining. Do we really care about well-intentioned resolutions?

This year I decided to try a new approach. Instead of resolutions, I am going to take a serious look at possibilities. The more I thought about it the more attractive a list of possibilities became. Possibilities are neither harsh nor burdensome, but rather they have an air of lightheartedness about them. On some level they present an invitation to open a door to wishful, even wistful thinking while at the same time weaving a thread of reality. Possibilities captivate the spirit. They could be a real winner.

With possibilities there are no deadlines-no voice of doom to shout our lack of effort and accomplishment. Possibilities can be very simple with few demands but with amazing results and satisfaction. Defy normal convention and allow your imagination to wander. You might even want to be a little daring. Take a walk in the rain, soak up sunshine, take up painting, cook up a storm, renew a forgotten friendship, lie in bed till noon, stay awake until midnight and laugh with the late-night talk show hosts, to name but a few. The list is as long or as short as you wish it to be. Most important of all, possibilities are not threatening. They invite us to consider and then explore. This is only a beginning. Be childlike. Jump right in. In this New Year I wish you Happy Possibilities.

Rosemari Clogher
TCF Shoreline Chapter, Northford, CT.



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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