



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.

JULY 2016

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

**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, 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.

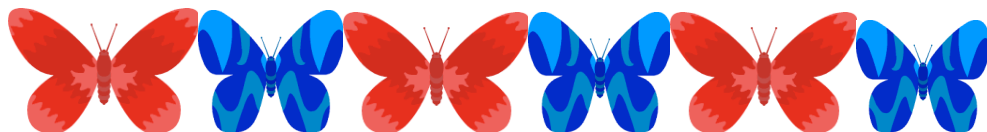
To the Newly Bereaved

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.



Our Children, Siblings and Grandchildren Remembered

JULY BIRTHDAYS

1983 - Nicole Berrow, Daughter of Rosie Berrow
1971 - Amy Wells, Daughter of Kerry & J.R. Wells
2010 - Delaney Womack, Daughter of Carrie & Eric Womack
1984 - Kristine Ashley Bergaila, Daughter of Kathleen Livingston
1968 - Van Holland, Son of James & Olivia Holland
1985 - Sean Hengel, Son of Laura Hengel
1972 - Gregory Whitney Vinson, Son of Lance & Marilyn Vinson
1960 - Evanna Johnson, Daughter of Nelwyn Heath and
Sister In Law of Christal Janis
1980 - Andrew Rininger, Son of Philip & Ellen Rininger
1982 - Geoffrey Lynn Meier, Son of Gary Meier
1989 - Kylar Shotwell, Daughter of Tracy Bradley
1982 - Chance Wilcox, Son of Shelli Ralls
1967 - John Steven Sims, Son of Marilyn Sims
1999 - Ahjzanae Adore Triplett, Daughter of Alesia Abbott
1993 - Patrick Burns, Son of Ray & Amanda Burns
1991 - David Kerpchar, Son of Sally Kerpchar
1971 - Joel Sloan, Son of Jim & Glenna Sloan
1982 - Adam Brown, Son of Greg & Debbie Brown
1979 - James (Jimi) Nicholas, Son of Fred & Linda Nicholas
2015 - Kacie Joiner, Daughter of Julie Joiner

JULY ANGEL DATES

2008 - Aaron Michael Wolf, Son of Laura Wolf
2006 - Chasen Sean Shirley, Son of Debbie Shirley
2008 - DeAndria Sharee Anderson, Daughter of Rawn & Loretta Stephens
2010 - Evanna Johnson, Daughter of Nelwyn Heath and
Sister In Law of Christal Janis
2008 - Lloyd Ross (Rossi) Moore, Jr., Son of Carolyn Moore
2010 - Sanai Caden Johnson, Daughter of Octavia Johnson
2012 - Brett Collins, Son of Bill & Geri Collins
2010 - Ahjzanae Adore Triplett, Daughter of Alesia Abbott
2011 - Christopher Birken, Son of Elizabeth Birken
2013 - Zy-Air Stoval, Son of Jerome & Dora Stovall
2010 - Austin Haecker, Son of Debbie Haecker & Grandson of Carolyn Cooper
2013 - Jacob Landon, Son of Brenda Landon

*Death leaves a heartache
no one can heal,
Love leaves a memory
no one can steal. ~*
Found on a headstone in Ireland

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, July 12th at 7pm.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new member **Malea Basile, she lost her son Jonah February of this 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.

Articles & Poems for Our Newsletter

Please submit your poems, writings or a brief article about your child or your grief journey for our newsletter. Email them to me, Linda Brewer at llbrewer67@hotmail.com. I will be happy to include it in the next newsletter.

A Special Request of our "Old" Members:

As time goes by and our healing progresses, often times we may not feel the same need to attend meetings. What you may not realize is how much you have to offer to our new members. Think back to the time when your loss was new and you thought you would never get through the unbearable pain. Remember the encouragement you received from those who were further down their grief journey-those who listened to you, cried with you and told you that someday the pain would not be as overwhelming as what you were experiencing when your loss was new.

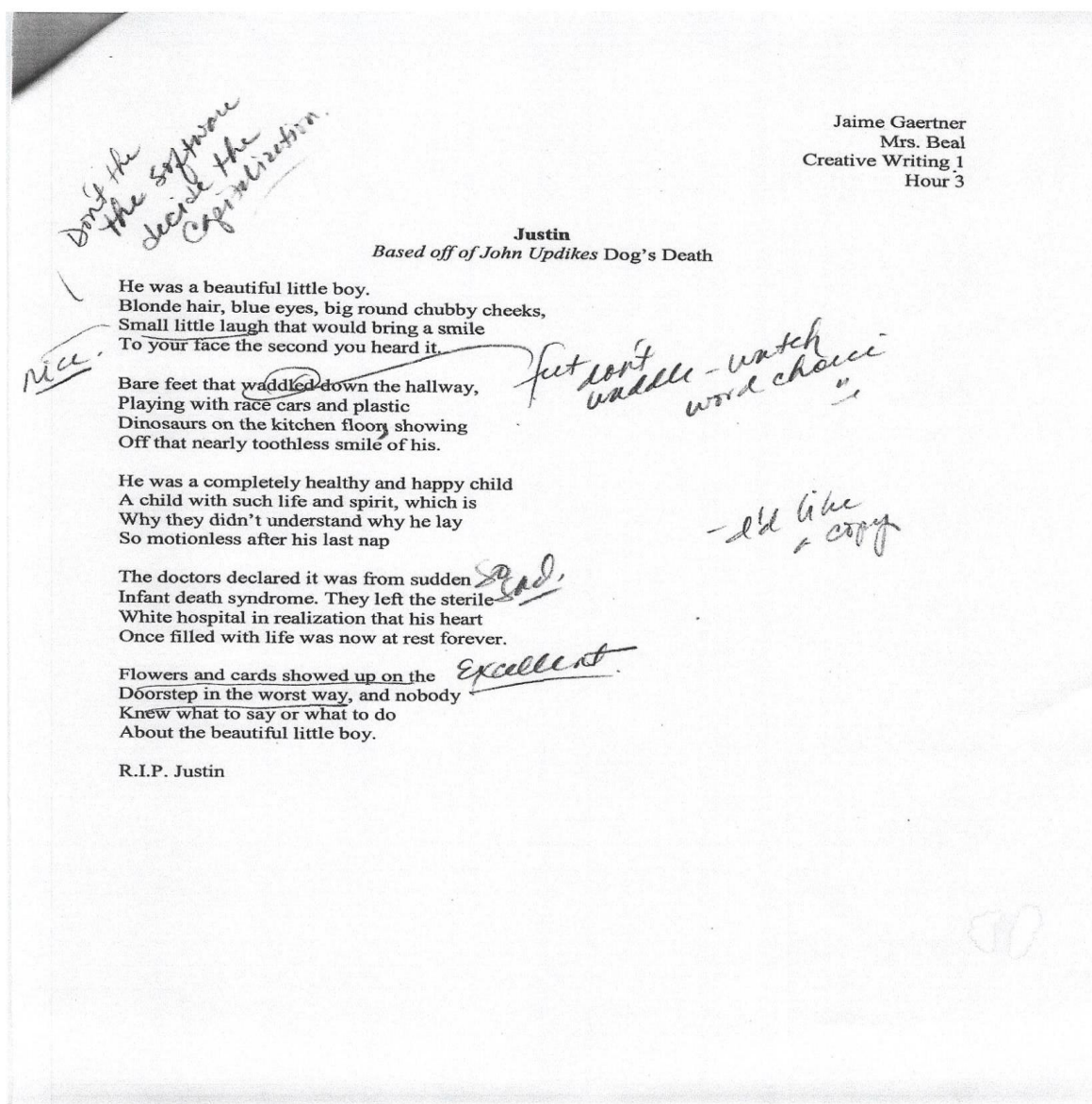
So, even though you may feel that you have found your way back to a "new normal" we miss seeing you and would love to have you come back and join us. Seeing the "oldies" surviving and rebuilding their lives gives the new families hope that they, too, will someday begin to heal.

If you haven't been to a meeting in a while, come back and share some of your wisdom.

You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late. -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Darryl Heino, a member of your chapter, sent me this beautiful poem to share with you. It was written by his niece about Darryl's son Justin. Justin died in August 1983 of SIDS.

The following poem was written by my 14 year old niece as an English class assignment about 6 years ago when she was in high school. I just discovered it existed and her mom sent me a copy. I think it is very heartfelt as she missed seeing him by 25 years (my sister Diane, her mom, was about 19 when he died). The emotion is from what she has felt from her family, and story's that she has heard all her life. - Darryl



A Sibling Dies

For Don

It is January first. My heart twinkles once again because the holidays are over. How can a season of light bring so much dark? Thirty years ago, on Christmas morning, my brother died in our home by suicide in a very violent manner. He was 23; my other brother was 24; and I was 19 years old. Our family of five was irretrievably shattered. Don, my brother who died, was so much a part of us. He brought so much joy in his living and then so much pain in his dying. Who am I to grieve him still? The memories well up every December like a deep dark night unbidden. Anger, sadness, rejection, guilt become my Christmas ornaments. "Give me back my family - give me back my Christmas, you creep, Give me back your laughter," I want to shout at him. Who am I to miss him? Who am I to rage when he was the one in the grips of a pain so untenable that he could not speak of it, but only act upon it? Who am I to cry? Well, I'm entitled. I'm a survivor after all. One doesn't get there on a water slide, if you know what I mean. When Christmas rolls around, I do my dance with grief once again. Some years, it's a waltz; other years a tango. It doesn't seem to matter if it's two, twenty or thirty years since my brother died, I get out my dancing shoes. I don't go looking for pain like some wacky masochist. It finds me. Some years I announce - around November 25th, "I'm over this." I act accordingly. I shop for Christmas Cards and don't go near my dancing shoes. It doesn't matter. They find me. It's not like I didn't have therapy. I've had dance therapy, art therapy, regular therapy, travel therapy, friendship therapy, biofeedback/hypnosis therapy, creampuff therapy, swimming therapy, forgiveness therapy, spiritual community therapy, law school therapy . . . Law School therapy? The fun had to end somewhere. Seriously, losing a sibling is heart wrenching and no laughing matter. It took me ten or fifteen years to truly laugh again, let alone make light of myself. That just happened this year. No doubt, because I am writing of it, rather than speaking of it, which I rarely do. It feels safer to write. Other than to therapists, I've spoken of his death to three people in thirty years. Who could understand, I felt, and why diminish his being or expose myself? I adored my brother Don - he made me laugh like a monkey. I adore both my brothers; as a child they were my world. Not very healthy perhaps, but it worked for me. Home life was chaotic and quite frightening because my father was more than a little nuts. My mother's energy was spent containing his insanity and keeping our bodies and souls together. She was part steel, part angora. We never spoke of Don after his death. The community ostracized us; my father took a trip down devil's lane, and my mother mourned my brother until the day she died. I'm sad to say that we never had Don's picture in our home again, because the pain was too severe. It seems we could not get past it. We went to our separate corners and quietly mourned. It was different years ago; so much remained hidden. Self-healing groups were non-existent, shrinks were stigmas, and the Catholic Church unforgiving. I couldn't save him. I was the last person he talked with on Christmas Eve. For months, I barely spoke and relived the shock daily. I ate a lot. Death by mashed potatoes. That was sure to bring him back. I retreated into a private world for several years where if I wasn't dead, I'd sure like to be. This is grief. And it does soften over time. It softens like water softens rock, in its flowing, gentle, rushing, mysterious way. It

softens like a sweet whisper of a memory that lulls you to sleep, knowing that love knits the bones of despair together, tighter, stronger, more curious, more delicious than ever before. Knowing that the fires of your being burn the dross of despair. Knowing that the chamber of the heart is strong beyond measure and can take it and transform the pain into joy. Joy for having known this person, for a day or ten years or two months. Joy for having the courage to be. For knowing yourself in many garments. For taking a risk to love anyone again: a neighbor, a friend, a cat, a lover, a stranger, yourself. The broken heart opens and mends itself. In the middle of the night, when no one is there but many are listening. Joy seeps into me. After all, I'm entitled. I'm a survivor.

By © L. Nicole Dean

In memory of Don

July 26, 2001

Permission to reprint granted to TCF

Grief never ends.... But it changes. It's a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith.... It is the price of love.



Waiting for Answers

Years ago I left my first meeting of The Compassionate Friends and drove home in tears. My son, Max, had died a few short weeks before and I had been anxiously awaiting this evening. These people must have some answers, I thought. With paper and pen in purse, I was ready to take notes and do as they prescribed. I would do anything to ease the ache in my soul.

But when I walked out into the spring air later that night, I felt betrayed. I hadn't heard any answers. Instead of learning how to leave my grief behind, it had been confirmed, made more real with expression. I knew I would miss Max forever. Now I wondered if I would grieve forever. Would it always be this way, a flash of pain aligned with every memory?

During the next months and years, I attended TCF meetings and conferences, read books, raged, kept busy, sometimes spent the day in bed. I wrote, cried and talked about Max. Slowly, I discovered the answers I had long feared *were* true: yes, I will grieve forever, and yes, my memories will often provoke tears. But something had changed.

My grief was now more forgiving, my tears almost sweet with memory. Max's life took shape again as the anguish of his death began to recede. If I would always miss him, I would also always have him with me in so many ways. I wanted to carry his memory into the future: the joy, the lessons, and the inevitable pain. How could I do otherwise?

As I walked to my car after that first meeting, the TCF chapter leader caught up with me. "How can I stop this pain?" I asked. She put her arm on my shoulder. "Just do what feels right to you," she said, "Listen to your heart. And we'll be here to listen, too."

Sometimes the best advice is none at all.

Mary Clark

In memory of Max

TCF, Sugar Land-SW Houston Chapter, TX

My Precious Grandchild

I waited for that moment and it arrived one special day.
My first glimpse of you nearly took my breath away.

I was apprehensive about being called a grandma it's true,
until the first time i was called grandma by you.

Being a mother was a wondrous joy for me,
I gave it all I had with great responsibility.

Then I watched my child become a father of his own,
now I could be a grandma and explore the great unknown.

You brought so much joy when you entered this world;
you were grandma's pretty angel and daddy's little girl.

I loved to take you shopping, I loved to brush your hair,
in fact I loved taking you with me almost anywhere.

All those years of joy were filled with promise of much more,
how we could have known that sadness soon would be in store.

The ringing of the telephone, a knocking at the door,
in an instant all that mattered most didn't matter anymore.

The hurt was great for me and for my child so wracked with pain,
without my pretty angel life would never be the same.

We gave each other comfort and we held each other tight,
somehow we have weathered the darkest of the night.

Today we still cry and we always ache for you,
but we also take some time remembering that you lived too.

Your smile forever sparkles and your laugh will always be,
because my precious grandchild you are still a part of me.

By: Connie Sheets

Taken from: We Need Not Walk Alone

Winter 2014



There is no pain so great as the memory of joy in present grief.

January, 1994

Dear Compassionate Friends,

I wrote this letter for my co-workers and posted it in the office where everyone would see it because I found that although everybody had been extremely kind and generous during Laurie's last brief illness, some of them didn't seem to know how to deal with me or what to say after she died. The idea for the letter and some of its contents are from a book on grief work by Bob Deits. (Editor's note: the book referred to is Life After Loss: A Personal Guide Dealing With Death, Divorce, Job Change and Relocation. It is in our chapter library.)

Marcia Davis, TCF
Contra Costa County, California

Dear friends and co-workers:

I want to thank all of you for your kindness and support during the last few months. I have experienced a loss that is devastating to me. It will take time, perhaps years, for me to work through the grief I am having because of the loss of my daughter, Laurie. Although Laurie was our oldest child, she was the child of my third pregnancy, so she was very much wanted by the time I gave birth to her. She was also the child who was most like me, both in appearance and personality. Perhaps because of this, I actually feel I have lost a part of myself. I would gladly have given my life in exchange for hers, had I had that option.

I will cry more than usual for some time. My tears are not a sign of weakness or a lack of hope or faith. They are symbols of the depth of my loss and, I am told, a sign that I am recovering. I find that I become angry without there seeming to be a reason for it. My emotions are all heightened by the stress of grief. Please be forgiving if I seem irrational or unfriendly at times.

I need your understanding and your friendship more than anything else. If you don't know what to say, just touch me or give me a hug to let me know you care. Do not be afraid to mention Laurie's name - she is gone from this life but she will never be gone from my memory or my heart. And please don't hesitate to call me - it is reassuring to hear from supportive friends.

If you, by chance, have had an experience of loss that seems anything like mine, please share it with me. You will not make me feel worse. And if I get emotional or tear up - you are not making me cry - I am crying inside all the time anyway!

This loss is the worst thing that could happen to me. But, I will get through it somehow and I will live again. I will not always feel as I do now - I will laugh again.

Thank you all for caring about me. Your concern is a gift I will always treasure.

*Sincerely,
Marcia*

Marcia Davis
In memory of Laurie
TCF, Contra Costa County, CA



Vacations

Vacation time can be painful for bereaved parents. Caught up with normal demands of making a living or keeping a household going, we have less time to think than we do on vacations, especially the "take it easy" kind-at a hideaway, tucked away somewhere.

In the summers following Tricia's death, I found vacations could bring a special kind of pain. We avoided going to places where we had vacationed with her. At one time, I thought Williamsburg might be off my list forever since we had a very happy time together there. I tried it one summer three years later and found that she walked the cobbled streets with me. Now that nine years have passed and the pain has eased, maybe the happy memories we shared in Williamsburg can heighten the pleasure of another visit there.

For the first few years after Tricia's death, we found fast-paced vacations at places we had never been before, to be the best. The stimulation of new experiences in new places with new people refreshed us and sent us home more ready to pick up our grief work. That is not to say when we did something or saw something that Tricia would have enjoyed, we didn't mention her. We did, but it seemed less painful than at home.

One caution: Do allow enough time for sleep; otherwise, an exhausted body can depress you.

We've said it many times: YOU HAVE TO FIND YOUR OWN WAY, YOUR OWN PEACE. Let vacation time be another try at that; but do give yourself a break in choosing the time and locale where that can best be accomplished. Don't be afraid of change-it can help with your re-evaluation of life.

Elizabeth Estes
TCF Augusta, GA
In Memory of Tricia

GRIEVING IN PAIRS

How many times have people said, "Well, thank God you have each other." How many times have you felt "each other" to be entirely inadequate at meeting your needs?


Alarming statistics are available telling us of the rocky road parents encounter in their marriage after the death of a child. We sometimes see in ourselves a touchiness or quickness to become irritated that wasn't there before. It always seems that my "bad" day is my wife's "good" day, or the day she wakes up crying was the day I had planned on playing tennis.

Or sometimes, even more difficult, we both have a bad day and find no help from the other in pulling things back together. How can one person hold up another when he is himself face down in the mud?

Every person grieves differently. This is a rule that even applies within a family. And the needs of every individual are different. While you may need to talk and talk and talk, your spouse may need some time alone to reflect inwardly.

You have both been through the worst experience of your life. And while at times you can face recovery as a team, sometimes you must develop the patience to be able to wait out certain needs alone or with someone else. Realize that no matter how it is shown, your partner hurts, too.

Gerry Hunt
TCF White River Junction, VT



Just because you cannot see me
does not mean I am not there.
Just because I am in Heaven
does not mean I do not care.

I often see you crying,
you often say my name
I want to hold you tight,
I want to ease your pain.

It's easy for me for I know Heaven is real.
If you knew the truth,
how much better you'd feel!
One day we will meet again, but only when the time is right.

When you step out of the darkness,
I will be standing in the Light.

-John F. Connor

Living Life Is Still An Effort

My husband's family held a reunion in July. We planned to attend and told the family to count on us. But when it came time to buy the tickets and make a commitment, I found I couldn't do it. I simply did not want to deal with the hassles of traveling, leaving home, getting out of my daily rhythm.

I am a different person since my child died. I am a different person than I was six months after my child died. And, I will be a different person in another year.

I find that I am evolving; my basic personality is still intact, most of my mind works well enough, my perception of life, love, people and events is probably heightened but fairly unchanged. Still I am a different person.

Now I work at living my life. I make myself do the things that I once took for granted....such as getting dressed each day, going to work, handling a number of responsibilities I have chosen to accept. I make myself laugh at silly jokes. Sometimes I even have to force myself to really listen to others. I am surprised when I laugh spontaneously, smile for no particular reason or say something "prophetic". What is going on here? Who am I? Why has the joy of life disappeared?

I believe I have found the answer to these questions and even to questions I haven't yet asked. It lies in the nature of losing one's child to death. Initially we work very hard to maintain sanity. Gradually we expand the boundaries of our lives. Carefully we add events, people, responsibilities and simple enjoyment. But our progress is measured in months and years, not days and weeks.

My awakening to this new reality came at a meeting of The Compassionate Friends. It has been rekindled at each meeting since then. I learn about myself by observing others. I note the change in their voice, their body language, their perspective. I see the sorrow in each parent. I see parents whose children have been gone for many years still weep openly and later talk about a special event they are planning. Then I see parents whose loss was recent yet they appear to be normal, controlled and sociable on many levels and they suddenly and mysteriously crumble before my eyes.

That's the journey. We set our own limits as to what is acceptable for us. Over time we shift from minimalist boundaries to a good representation of the person we once were. We have major setbacks: birthdays, holidays, death anniversaries. We have minor setbacks: a picture, a forgotten scent, a baby shoe, a poignant memory. We sob, we scream, we withdraw. But we do go on. With the help of our Compassionate Friends, we move forward and are supported when we suffer a setback. We each deal with the many facets of our grief. We learn from others. We teach others. We grow from the dialogue. Our kindred spirits bring questions, answers and peace.

Who am I today? A fairly well balanced mother of one beautiful child who no longer is alive. I am where I should be. When will I stop evolving? Probably never.

Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX
August 1, 2005



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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