



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 2018

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

<http://www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org>

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

(Our next meeting is Tuesday, July 10th)

at

Cypress Creek Christian Church

6823 Cypresswood Drive

Spring, Texas 77379

The Church is on Cypresswood Dr. between Stuebner-Airline and Kuykendahl, about 2 miles North of FM 1960 West. It is located between the courthouse and Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the church parking lot. We will meet in the Church Forum.

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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
1999 - Jared Mayfield, Son of Robbie Lampkins
1986 - Kristina O'Masters Palmer, Daughter of Laurie Martin

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
2016 - Matthew Coers, son of Michelle Guerrero
2015 - Brian Smith, Son of Cindy Smith
2005 - Patrick O'Masters, Son of Laurie Martin
2017 - Kristina O'Masters Palmer, Daughter of Laurie Martin

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, July 10th at 7pm. We will meet in the Church Forum. The middle building on the Church property.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new member, **Betty Macias, lost her son Jerret in March 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.

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.

Don't forget the 41st. National Conference in St. Louis, MO. July 27-29. If you are planning to attend the conference please let us know. We would love to hear about your experience.



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

Reflections from a Chapter Leader
David Hendricks
Chapter Leader
TCF Houston Northwest

It's been over 21 years since my son David died in an automobile accident at age 35. It's been over 18 years since I became chapter leader and facilitator at our TCF Chapter. Over these many years at our meetings I have witnessed bereaved parents who could barely come through the door, barely breathe, whose emotions were at the surface and who needed to be with other parents who had lost children.

These same parents who could not imagine life without pain or having fun or even laughing, somehow can make it to a different place where there is joy and where the good memories dominate the bad ones. This transition takes between 3 and 6 years, but the new normal usually comes about in years 4 and 5. That's when they quit coming to TCF meetings because the pain of the meetings is greater than the good they get out of the meetings.

I call it graduation. Just when these parents are great contributors and valuable in our meetings, they quit coming. From a Chapter Leader and Facilitator point of view, I really miss these "graduates", but I am glad that their new normal allows them to not need TCF. But TCF still needs them.

Before our meetings start, there are smiles and sometimes laughter among some of the "veterans". This can be a shock to the newly bereaved. I point out to them that we are also bereaved parents and that the smiles and laughter that seems out of place, show that there is hope for a better future.

I emphasize to our group that it is important to manage your expectations.

I tell the newly bereaved that the grief journey is not measured in days, weeks or months. It is measured in years. The airlines tell you if the oxygen masks drop, put yours on first so you will be able to help others. In the same way, take care of yourself first. Do whatever it takes to deal with your loss. Only then will you be able to deal with the rest of your life.

The early time frame of grief comes with generally well intentioned comments from friends, relatives, co-workers and strangers: "are you feeling better", "have you recovered", "are you over it", "he's in a better place", "it's just God's will", "at least you have other children", "I know how you feel, I lost my dog last month", "I want the old person back".

Sometimes we ignore the questions and comments. Sometimes we try to explain our feelings. Sometimes we just explode, inwardly or outwardly. We face these questions, we face our grief, we face all of our relationships, and we face ourselves. Grief work is hard. We say our grief is so intense because the love of our child is so intense.

There are no short cuts on working through our grief. One of the benefits (if I can use that word) of coming to TCF meetings is "empathy". Most of our grief is focused inward. At a TCF meeting, we listen to other parents tell their story, and our grief is turned outward as we feel their pain. This empathy is physically and emotionally beneficial. It changes us from being totally inward focused to

being open to fellow travelers and to their stories and issues. Everyone listens and is attentive at a TCF meeting even if we've heard the story many times.

There are an abundance of tools to help us in our grief journey: TCF meetings, therapy and counseling, journaling, scrapbooking, TCF chat rooms, TCF facebook, articles, books, medication, meditation. As we work through our grief, we are often presented with "redemptive possibilities". These are things we can do now, that we probably would never thought of if our child were still alive. These include setting up a foundation, starting a scholarship, working with a group or activity your child was involved in, volunteering at a place to honor your child, special projects, special events, providing material goods where they are needed, and many other opportunities once our eyes are open. Don't expect to find redemptive possibilities when your grief is fresh. It takes time for our eyes to be open to them.

So it is possible, given enough time and enough work to find joy in your life, to laugh again, to be open to new things, and to not having your first thought of the day and the last thought at night to be of the loss of your child. I have seen it over and over again.

To the newly bereaved (and I mean for at least the first two years), the previous paragraph reads like fiction. But it is true. Nothing can compensate for your loss, but the "new you" will be able to navigate through life.

We never get over the loss of our child, and there is no such thing as closure. We just get through the loss and emerge as the "new you". Keep watching for the redemptive possibilities.

To all the "veterans" of this process, remember those who were there for you when your grief was new. Please consider coming back for a visit or two. Your experience and wisdom is very beneficial to our entire group.

So the message of these reflections is hope. Hope for a new you, as you feel your way along this grief journey. As you travel down that long, unfamiliar grief road from which there is no return, be gentle with yourself and work hard, and remember there is hope.

**"In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all.
It comes with bittersweet agony.
Perfect relief is not possible, except with time.
You cannot now realize that you will ever feel better.
And yet this is a mistake.
You are sure to be happy again.
To know this, which is certainly true,
will make you somewhat less miserable now.
I have experienced enough to know what I say."**

Abraham Lincoln

Let Life Be Renewed

By: Kitty Reeve

As I write, I await the airport van and the beginning of a year of living overseas. It is the realization of a lifelong dream, and I know how fortunate I am.

The feeling of being fortunate is as much about the fact that I want the dream again as it is about having it happen, however. For many years after Philip's death life became something to be endured. The energy for dreams, much less working to achieve them, was zero. Unfortunately, you know this road well, also.

I write about this renewal of life because it means so much to me, and because I did not expect it.

It is startling (and gratifying) to find my old enthusiasm for life ratcheted up several notches, and the energy for work surfacing again. In other words, I am living with some of myself that had been submerged all these years since Philip died. It is good to have that back, however tempered. I never thought it would return.

When I mentioned my experience to another bereaved parent, she said. "I must admit that I have experienced similar feelings of renewed energy for life. In the process of the daily activities of our lives and the continuous interaction with people, we are moving on, and so, to hear your renewed interest in life is understood, and I rejoice."

It isn't that the renewed investment in life is as it was before our children died. It is tempered, more thoughtful, restrained in some ways. I can't believe anyone could face the horrible trauma we all have and not see life through different eyes. But what's important is that the aching pain of the first few years can indeed give way to a desire to live and a true interest in life. I had given up on having my former enthusiasm and vitality back, but it returned on its own. I am as surprised as anyone else.

If you are feeling renewed and more alive, perhaps you'll share your feelings with another bereaved parent. It is the holding out of hope that enables many of us to keep going through the darkest days of those early years.

Kitty Reeve, a journalist, is a former newsletter editor for the Marin and San Francisco Chapters of TCF. Her son, Philip Ganote, was 26 years old when he died on August 16, 1994. Article taken from We Need Not Walk Alone Summer 2002

One of my favorite poems by Emily Dickinson begins: "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul." In the early years of my grief after my daughter Coty died, it was hard to imagine I would ever feel that flutter of hope again. Through The Compassionate Friends, I found others who had not only survived, but had built a new life in honor of their loved ones. I felt the rustling of those little feathers and knew that hope would live again in my soul.

Kathleen Willoughby, Coty's mom
Loss to Homicide moderator



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



Compassion:

Compassion is such an easy word, yet it is not at all easy to achieve. Compassion means suspending one's own critical and advisory inclinations to help someone. Compassion is leaving oneself outside. Compassion is not approval. What the other person may need is often not at all what the compassionate helper believes to be helpful. The helper may want to give advice, or talk about himself/herself. What the griever needs, however, may well be a listener, a focused attention on the griever and on the loss the griever sustained. Often, compassion means not doing something – listening rather than speaking, crying rather than comforting with words.

Compassion is not an easy task, but it is among the greatest gifts we can give each other.

-Sascha

Borrowed Hope

Lend me your hope for awhile,
I seem to have mislaid mine.
Lost and hopeless feelings accompany me daily.
Pain and confusion are my companions.
I know not where to turn.
Looking ahead to the future times
Does not bring forth images of renewed hope.
I see mirthless times, pain-filled days, and more tragedy.

Lend me your hope for awhile,
I seem to have mislaid mine.
Hold my hand and hug me, Listen to all my ramblings.
I need to unleash the pain and let it tumble out.
Recovery seems so far and distant,
The road to healing, a long and lonely one.
Stand by me. Offer me your presence,
Your ears and your love.
Acknowledge my pain, it is so real and ever present.
I am overwhelmed with sad and conflicting thoughts.

Lend me your hope for awhile.
A time will come when I will heal,
And I will lend my renewed hope to others.

— Eloise Cole, TCF Ireland Chapter



A Journey to the “New Normal”

May 31 marked seven years since my only sibling Dave died from cancer at age 32. This June 28 we would have been celebrating Dave’s 40th birthday with a big party, and I’d be kidding him about going bald, just like all the Snepp men before him. Instead, I’ll be getting ready for the TCF National Conference, at which I’ll share memories of his brilliance, great smile, and sense of humor with those who will never have the pleasure of meeting him in person.

At this point in my grief journey, most will be good memories of how Dave lived, rather than bad memories of how he died. I can’t recall the moment when that shift of perspective occurred, but I would like to share a few memories and milestones that have marked the way:

- Months after Dave died, I went to see the movie “Big”, starring Tom Hanks, and “lost it” when his mother stared out the window wondering if she’d ever see him again. I watched the movie again recently and didn’t lose it.
- It was three months before I felt up to sharing with anyone the details of the day my brother died at his home in Bellevue, Washington, in the company of Mom, Dad, and me. On the way home from that emotional conversation, I drove the wrong way down a one way street in downtown Chicago – it might be smart to have a friend drive you to your first few TCF meetings!
- I discovered that the grief path is not a straight line. A few good days can be followed by several bad ones. I’ve heard other TCF members call this their “roller coaster ride.”
- For a year, I couldn’t keep the radio on if “Wind Beneath My Wings” came on. For the next year, I kept it on but cried through it. Now, I can usually make it all the way through without any tears!
- With the help of TCF, I realized that despite friends expecting it to be possible, I’d never be “back to normal.” My focus instead shifted to finding my “new normal”. While I can’t point to a time when that happened (probably after the 1990 TCF Conference), THAT was a milestone.
- For three Christmases after Dave died, I didn’t put up a tree in my condo. For Christmas, 1991, as I was getting out ornaments for my first tree since his death, I came across a bunch of ornaments that he had had in his apartment. I came totally unglued then, but now I look forward to seeing those ornaments each Christmas.
- It was three years before I felt that I had enough emotional energy to pursue a relationship. Even now, I don’t have a lot of tolerance for guys I go out with that gripe about their brothers or sisters.

My most vivid “landmark” to date along my grief journey came in February 1993. Following my Dad’s father’s death in December, 1992, we were in Atlanta cleaning out my grandfather’s apartment, and I came across a pile of post cards and letters that Dave had written to my grandparents through the years. Earlier in my journey, a “blind side” such as that would have sent me into a tailspin. In this case, though, my immediate reaction was one of happiness, for I had found a part of Dave that I didn’t know I still had! I saved a few of the post cards, sent a couple to my cousin who was referenced in some of the letters, and (amazingly) threw the rest away. It was fun to share the memories, but I didn’t feel the need to hang onto them. It was at that point, nearly five years after Dave’s death, that I truly felt as if I was closing in on that “new normal.”

Karen Snepp
Frisco, Texas

From the TCF Stages Newsletter, Summer 1995
In Memory of my brother, Dave



Summertime

It sounds so easy. A soft, warm word—time to run barefoot, time to leave windows open all night. Summertime. Somehow it seems, doesn't it, that it's especially meant for children. Children on beaches, children on swings, children in large pools, children in tiny tubs.

We who do not have all of our children with us may feel the summertime in two ways. One is to remember shared events and adventures—there were so many. Long rides in a hot car, a nap in the back seat. The famous question, "Are we there yet?" Everything from a heat rash to ice cream cones and sand castles.

For us, another way to feel summertime is the special emptiness brought about by children who are no longer on this earth. They used to trot along on hikes in the hills; they used to gather wood for an evening fire. Now summer brings us again the melancholy awareness of their absence. Have you ever walked on some unfamiliar path, surprised about not having been there with the children? Even when there's nothing to remember, we are reminded of the children's absence.

We have been diminished by death. Some of us may still have living children. Other parents have no children left. They have lost an only child, perhaps. Or all of their children died. And here we are, grateful for the warmth of summer mornings, aware of the ripe beauty of nature, trying to deal with our children's absence with all the grace of which we are capable. Often we do not want to burden others with our grief. Or we may be convinced that others don't wish to share our distress. We have learned, after all, that the world around us is not always able to understand how we feel.

Besides, we were taught to be brave. Many of us will do everything we can to appear "normal" after our loss. But we were also taught to be honest. And when you feel the hurt, when you seem almost to be lost in the shadows of this golden summertime, don't hide your sorrow. The grief of your spirit can perhaps be kept a secret on the outside. Yet, your deepest feelings, unexpressed, can burn into your existence with harmful force.

You can be both brave and honest. You know that it's brave to share grief, be it old grief or new grief. And revealing that sorrow is also honest. Of course, nothing can wipe away much of your pain, but sharing grief is helpful. You will know that after you have expressed the painful sorrow you once kept hidden, and you find yourself, finally, smiling at the memories and the blessings of past summertime's.

Sascha Wagner



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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