

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 2021

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

http://www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

Trinity Lutheran Church Family Life Center, Room #204 5201 Spring Cypress Rd. Spring, Texas 77379

The Church is located on the corner of Spring Cypress Road 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

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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.



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*	Our Children, Siblings and Grandchildren Remembered	*
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**************	JULY BIRTHDAYS	*****
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	1983 - Nicole Berrow, Daughter of Rosie Berrow	X
	1971 - Amy Wells, Daughter of Kerry & J.R. Wells	
米	2010 - Delaney Womack, Daughter of Carrie & Eric Womack	*
*	1984 - Kristine Ashley Bergaila, Daughter of Kathleen Livingston	**
*	1968 - Van Holland, Son of James & Olivia Holland	*
4	1985 - Sean Hengel, Son of Laura Hengel	
	1972 - Gregory Whitney Vinson, Son of Lance & Marilyn Vinson 1960 - Evanna Johnson, Daughter of Nelwyn Heath and	\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\
7/	Sister In Law of Christal Janis	77
*	1980 - Andrew Rininger, Son of Philip & Ellen Rininger	*
米	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	
不	1999 - Ahjzanae Adore Triplett, Daughter of Alesia Abbott	7/
米	1993 – Patrick Burns, Son of Ray & Amanda Burns	米
*	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	
彩	2015 - Kacie Joiner, Daughter of Julie Joiner	*
米	1999 - Jared Mayfield, Son of Robbie Lampkins	米
*	1986 - Kristina O'Masters Palmer, Daughter of Laurie Martin	*
4	1997 - Ethan Tyler Brown, Son of Erica Poorbaugh	4
	2018 - Kingston Bowen, Son of Lakisha Washington 1984 - Justin Moyer, Son of Valli Moyer	\(\lambda\)
7/	1986 - Chad Moyer, Son of Valli Moyer	7/
*	1989 - Chance Barton, Son of Sherry Barton	*
米	1505 Chance Barton, Son of Sherry Barton	米
*	******	*
*	You are rooted deep	*
2	within my soul.	1/2
	A part of me forever	
彩	In the deepest parts	※
米	of my heart	米
*	there you are.	*
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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
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2011 – Christopher Birken, Son of Elizabeth Birken
2013 – Zy-Air Stoval, Son of Jerome & Dora Stovall
2010 – Austin Haecker, Son of Debbie Haecker and
※ 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
2015 - Brian Shirth, Son of Chidy Shirth 2005 - Patrick O'Masters, Son of Laurie Martin
2017 - Kristina O'Masters Palmer, Daughter of Laurie Martin 2018 - Kingston Bowen, Son of Lakisha Washington 2018 - Austin Balogun, Son of Yokima Whittaker 2020 - Eric Castelo, Son of Debbie Castelo
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2018 - Austin Balogun, Son of Yokima Whittaker
2020 - Eric Castelo, Son of Debbie Castelo
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※ You Are Not Forgotten ※
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You are not forgotten, loved one
Nor will you ever be,
** As long as life and memory last
We miss you now.
As time goes by
We'll miss you more. Your loving smile, your gentle face
No one can fill your vacant place.
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CHAPTER NEWS

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Our next meeting is Tuesday, July 13th at 7pm. A virtual zoom meeting will be held Tuesday, July 27th at 7pm.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members, **Deborah Maly lost her daughter Roxane Rucker in August last year; Gavin and Rachel Wheeler lost their son Dylan in April 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 one comes to judge another. You will find that children are being mourned who have died from all ages and all causes. The pain is the same-that of the loss of hopes and dreams that will never be realized.

Come and join with others who understand much of what you're feeling more than most people, simply because we've been there. Know that there will be sadness and tears as we talk about our loss, but there will also be joy and laughter as we remember special times with our children. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to, but you will certainly be given that opportunity.

We ask but one thing from you, that you attend at least three meetings before you decide if The Compassionate Friends is right for you.

TCF National Conference

The Compassionate Friends 44th National Conference will be presented virtually this July 16, 2021 - July 18, 2021. We invite you to join us for an informative and supportive weekend from your own home. The early bird registration rate of \$80.00 has been extended until June 25th. Register here.

If you are registered and not able to attend all of the sessions live, keynote and conference sessions will be recorded and accessible for 90 days after the conference.

Conference offerings include Keynote Presentations and Workshops, Healing Haven and Sharing Circles, our Candle Lighting Program, Sibling Sunday, a Virtual Silent Auction and Raffle, Crafty Corner, Sharing Sessions, Musical Performances and more!



Annette Mennen Baldwin Mother of Todd Mennen

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The surprise passing of Annette has left a void, especially for those of us dedicated to quality newsletters. Annette has written hundreds of articles for TCF National office data base. We've used countless of her writings over the years in our Houston Northwest Chapter newsletter. Annette was a long time member of the TCF Katy Chapter, Regional Coordinator, and newsletter editor.

She was a "go to" person for any issue of TCF. When I asked her about the fact that I have been Chapter Leader and Facilitator for many years, whereas the National Office wanted short term rotation of these positions, she assured me that what I was doing was a good thing and keep it up until I could find a suitable replacement.

More often than not, after she received our monthly newsletters, she would quickly respond with compliments on our newsletters. Receiving praise from Annette was the best compliment we could receive. She will be deeply missed.

David Hendricks, Chapter Leader Linda Brewer, Newsletter Editor *****************

Benchmarks

Good bye would be too difficult, Although I know you are gone. Instead, I keep you in my heart And your memory lives on. I have redefined my purpose, son, Since you are no longer here. With your death I faced a choice To die, exist or to live free. My life has changed forever, child, I'm redefined each week, You would call these "benchmarks" Of goals set and then achieved. And so I set my benchmarks, Achieving many, reshaping some... But everything is different now Except your mother's love.

Annette Mennen Baldwin TCF Katy, TX In Memory of my son, Todd Mennen



This is an excerpt taken from Annette's book "Child of My Heart A Mother's Grief Journey"

I have been a bereaved parent now for sixteen years. During this time, I have learned a few things, and there is much more to learn in the future. I am evolving. Evolving from what I once was - a person who had reasonable expectations of a life that included my son, his children, graduations, holidays, birthdays and special occasions, to the person I am today, who has virtually no expectations that resemble those I had before my son died.

I have evolved into a more sensitive person. I know what some people think before they even say the words. I feel others' joy as if it were my own. I cheer for the success of others. I feel their sorrow, their failures, their missteps. I watch children play and remember my childhood, my son's childhood and I think of the joy that is childhood. I sit for hours watching birds at our feeders, marveling at the beauty of the natural world.

I have slowed down the pace. I no longer feel the pressure to be here or there, to do this or that, to call this one or that one, to wear certain clothes, to "put on the best face" for strangers. I have liberated myself from the mundane and the materialistic. Instead, I merely feel genuine about others. I have become susceptible to all that surrounds me.

I believe the loss of my child has changed me in many different ways. I see this in the attitudes of those who are in the Compassionate Friends as well. While few of us will tolerate nonsense in our lives because it is meaningless compared with our experiences we will listen intently for long periods to the weeping, hysterical cries of a newly bereaved mother, or we will nod quietly as a parent who is far into grief has a sudden flash of sorrow that is overwhelming. We have a heightened sensitivity to others through no choice of our own. It came with the loss of our beautiful children.

I wonder about what my son would think of events that have unfolded since his death. I have come to conclusions about others that aren't, quite frankly, flattering. Yet, he had come to these conclusions before he died. While I tried to mollify his perception of the dysfunctional people with whom he was burdened, he just said, "that's how it is Mom." and he was right. That's how it is. I have learned to accept people for what they are. If I can help, I will certainly do so. If I can't help, I accept that some things can't be changed, and some people won't change. There is no magic here. It's a simple fact of life. That's how it is, mom."

I volunteer more these days. I give of myself, my knowledge, any wisdom I may have acquired on life's path to others who are in need. I give of my time, my talents and my labors to those who don't ask as well as those who do. I am comfortable with this.

I have less appreciation for money than I once had. Perhaps that is the best thing to come out of this. What was I chasing? What was my son pursuing? What was the point? Bigger, better, faster, farther, more, more, more. It's a shallow existence when one is defined by only materialism. I have learned to let go of preconceptions, and in that letting go, I have been pleasantly surprised by many people.

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How did I get to this place? One minute, one hour, one day, one week, one month at a time. It is a slow journey from crawling through the pits of hell in deep grief to coming back to the reality of here and now. It's as close to a near death experience as I can imagine. Instead of great epiphanies, there are moments of clarity. Instead of instant gratification, there is much success to achieve by taking tiny steps forward, but the effort is well worth making. When I came out from the pits of hell, I realized that my reality was changed; I recognized that I was a different person. I found that all people have a capacity for goodness, but that many will never use this capacity.

But most importantly, I discovered there is a road toward hope that is traveled by each of us. Some walk more quickly, some more slowly, but we each walk that road to hope. Hope represents a life that is tolerable once again. Hope constitutes the acceptance of our child's death and the acknowledgement that we will keep our children alive in our hearts for all eternity as we continue into our tomorrows. Hope is reconciling those two elements: yesterday and tomorrow.

I have learned to adjust to change because change is inevitable. I have learned to stand up for what is right because that is our duty as human beings. I have learned much about the fears of others and even more about my own demons. I have conquered my phobias as a result of my son's death. Nothing my imagination could conjure would equal that gripping pain and the ache that now hangs in my psyche forever.

But most of all, I have learned that my son was right. "That's the way it is, Mom." Shortly before he died, Todd said he wanted to give me a copy of "Who Moved My Cheese?" He never had the opportunity. A few years later I purchased and read it, and I could hear his words in my mind. There are some things in life that one cannot change.



Letting Go

Recently I received an award for volunteering in the community. I was honored to receive it. Some of the people in my life mentioned that it looked like I had "let go" of the pain of losing my child. "Let go?" Of course, they don't understand.

But when the award was mentioned at our monthly Compassionate Friends meeting, a bereaved mother made an interesting observation that touched my heart and reminded me why I need this special group to keep me centered and balanced.

"I remember that article you read to us last Mother's Day....the one your son wrote about how proud he was of you," she said. "Wouldn't it be great to put that article in our memory book with the newspaper article about your award? He was right about you. He was proud of you."

What a great idea! What a wonderful way to bring my son into my life even though he is no longer on this plane. That's what Compassionate Friends do.....they help to bring our children into our lives even though our children are no longer alive. For a few hours each month, our children return to us. We're proud parents who can share our children's stories and keep our children in our lives.....without explaining why we won't be "letting go."

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



Grief: A Lifelong Process

When my son was killed I was certain that I would die. My life went on autopilot, my heart was broken, my will to live was gone and I could see no meaning in the world.

Six months later I was still in a bad place. I could not vary from a routine, I became angry very easily, I rarely laughed and I didn't communicate with many people.

On the first anniversary of my son's death I was a zombie. I dreaded the day. I remembered the last conversation; I went over his death in my mind a thousand times. I started asking myself what if I had done this or that....would my child still be alive? I felt a misplaced guilt that was sadistically hammered home by the wrongful death lawsuit of my former daughter in law and her accompanying attitude that can only be described as purely malevolent. My husband, who was driving the vehicle when my son was killed, spent hours in self-recrimination, hours with attorneys doing depositions, hours quietly sobbing and my response was that we had to buck up. We had no choice. I hardened on the exterior, but inside I was broken into pieces.

I continued to go to Compassionate Friends meetings, became active in our chapter and read books on grief, death, dying and coping strategies. I leaned heavily on my Compassionate Friends as I endured the pain of losing my son and any possibility of a normal relationship with his children. I know the excruciating pain of intentional cruelty and the radiant warmth of compassion.

18 months after my son was killed, I decided that I had to quantify my progress. I began to soften, to give positive reinforcement to those around me. I reached out to others. I stopped thinking of the negatives within myself and began searching for the positives. I began taking down my emotional wall and allowed some people inside.

It has been 3 years and 3 months since Todd was killed and, in hindsight, I can see the progress I have made. Initially each step was difficult. Now I move forward much like an amputee, progress is steady, but it is slow. I will never be the same again. A part of me has been confiscated by death. This is my reality.

I can laugh now, I can enjoy other people, I can see the beauty in each child I meet, each sunrise and each day. But I can also see and acknowledge the ugly side of this world. There is much cruelty in our world. There is much sadness. Some days I focus on the beauty and joy and some days I look at the cruelty and ugliness.

But the choice is mine to make. If I have a day that is good, it is because I have willed it to be so. If I have a bad day, I have also chosen this.

For I have discovered that grief is a lifelong journey. Our children are with us forever. I close my eyes and see my son. I dream of him at night; our conversations are very interesting, very reassuring. He is with me. And because I always told him that the world is what you make of it, then I must also tell myself the same thing. My world is what I make of it.

Yes, I still grieve. I still miss my child. To hear his voice would be a gift worth more than my life. But I have my memories....memories of raising a beautiful son who became an exceptional man. Our time together was the most meaningful experience of my life. I knew it then, I know it now. There is a void in my life that will never be filled.

My world was never perfect. It certainly will never be perfect. Each day I ask myself what kind of day I want this to be. Sometimes I want it to be a bad day. My sadness overwhelms me and I choose to exorcise it with a bad day. I have the right to have a bad day: my only child is dead. But these days I usually want it to be a good day.....the kind of day my son would have enjoyed.

Annette Mennen Baldwin In Memory of my son, Todd Mennen TCF, Katy, TX



The Paths to Peace

As bereaved parents, we look to others for answers about our grief journey. For eight years I have listened as so many parents spoke about the combination of factors which brought peace to their hearts and allowed them to move forward into a different, less painful, life. I have read books, watched movies, attended seminars and retreats. I have gone to 93 Compassionate Friends meetings. And I have discovered one key factor in finding peace and resolution on this terrible grief journey: there is no single element or singular combination of elements that answers the needs of more than one parent. Each parent must patiently seek those elements that will enhance the individual and a unique personal journey: there is no magic map to finding the path to peace.

There is one common denominator in this quest for the peace on our long journey, and that is patience. Patience with ourselves is mandatory, because the grief journey after the death of our precious child is so horrible, so painful, and so isolating that our psyches and our bodies take so very much time to begin the healing process. There are setbacks. There is progress. Each of these comes in spurts. Each is partially reversed and the process begins anew.

Friends and family do not thoroughly understand our perspective on our unique journey. We must make allowances for them. But we must ask that allowances be made for us. For we are finding ourselves while on a path that we did not choose. We are lost. We are weakened. We are heartbroken. Each of us in our own way is seeking the formula that is uniquely our own.

Some parents find a kind of peace in their religion. Some parents are angry with their God. Many parents seek private counseling. Other parents read prolifically about the grief journey, seeking some element which resonates with them. Many parents come to Compassionate Friends meetings and actively participate. Others attend meetings and say little. Some parents slip into denial and proceed on the old path of their lives. We each make choices. We are

different people with different experiences, backgrounds, cultures, genetic hard wiring, education and combination of abilities.

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The path to peace is found by searching, by reaching out to every resource available. We will reject much of what we find; but if we search, we will find what we need.

For many of us, finding other bereaved parents presents an opportunity to listen to the stories of their child and their journey and, within those stories, we find many threads that fit our unique journey. Many stories, many journeys, many new threads are shared in group discussion and in private discussions. We find "seasoned" grievers who provide perspective on our feelings, and listen to our story. We find newly bereaved parents who touch our hearts and remind us how we have built our path to peace brick by brick. Their pain brings reflection and new revelations about our own grief journey.

I found kindred souls at Compassionate Friends. These kindred souls have allowed me to explore the various aspects of my being and gradually create a path of peace for myself. But the journey does not suddenly end. We walk this path for the rest of our lives. And if we do the hard work and face our demons early on, we accept the unacceptable and face life on our own terms. And that is as it should be.

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



Choosing Hope

Robert Frost once wrote, "You have freedom when you're easy in your harness." I believe I read that in junior high school. It had no real meaning to me at that time. But many years and many tears later, I have come to realize what Frost was referencing.

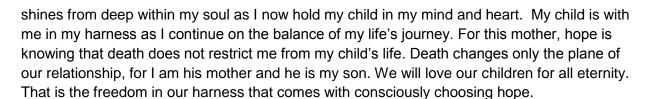
Soon I will be marking the seventh anniversary of the death of my only child, Todd Mennen. Seven years seems, perhaps to some, a milestone. But it's not really. There are no "milestones" on this journey of grief after the death of our children. But we do change. We have no choice. We weep, we evolve, we change, we grow, we learn, we share, we ask for help, we give help, we reach out and finally we become someone different than we once were. That is the reality of this grief.

Becoming easy in my harness was no small task, nor did it happen in magical stages with epiphanies proclaiming, "here is a milestone, a moment you can remember for the wisdom you found."

Wisdom doesn't arrive with fanfare; wisdom seeps slowly into one's mind, forming an ever-changing perspective until, at last, we have come to accept our "harness." Our harness is the death of our child. Once we accept this fact, we move forward into the light of hope and we begin to feel hope and a different type of freedom.

Am I "easy in my harness?" Finally, I can say that I probably am most of the time. There are days when I find it chokingly restrictive and cruel in its pain. But these days are fewer as time passes.

I have found a new kind of "freedom in my harness." It isn't the joyful freedom from the days before my child died, but it is a freedom nonetheless. My freedom is the light of hope that



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Annette Mennen Baldwin TCF Katy, TX In Memory of my son, Todd Mennen

Finding Meaning

One of the characters in Larry McMurtry's book, "The Streets of Laredo" says that, "He could remember the person he had been, but he could not become that person again." I think that's how all bereaved parents feel. Although friends, relatives and others want the old person back, the new person is who we've become.

David Kessler has written six books about grief. His latest is "Finding Meaning: The Six Stage of Grief." Most of us are familiar with Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief. In her book "on Death and Dying", she developed her theories while working with the terminally ill and their families. Her initial focus was not on the loss of a child, but those five stages are used with a variety of grief situations.

Kessler says, finding meaning does not equal understanding. Most of us don't understand why our child had to die. Each of us can find meaning in what we do after the death of our child. Meaning can occur in small moments. Maybe you became a more generous person, or a kinder person, or a more determined person. Or maybe you find a way to commemorate or honor your child.

This last definition of meaning is what we've called "Redemptive Possibilities" in our chapter meetings for years. Redemptive Possibilities means you do something positive to honor your child that you would not have done if your child were alive. Examples are scholarships, helping with whatever your child's interest were, being active in grief groups, donating time and /or money to causes close to you and your child, etc. Meaning is what we make happen after the loss. Finding meaning takes time, even years, to be able to recognize that meaning or to be open to redemptive possibilities.

Finding meaning is part of becoming the new person. The final stage of Kubler-Ross's stages is acceptance. That's also part of becoming the new person. And just like McMurtry's character, you can remember the old person, you just can't become that person again.

David Hendricks Chapter Leader Houston Northwest Chapter

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Tomorrow Will Be Better

When my son died, I felt like there would be no tomorrow. I didn't want a tomorrow. I wanted yesterday with its promise of joy and perfection. I wanted my son to be alive. But he was gone.

Now, when life gets me down, I remember the joys of yesterday, think of all that I was given, take measure of all that still needs to be done, and I promise myself that tomorrow will be better because I will work very hard to make it better.

My grandmother often told me, "If you think you can, you're right. If you think you can't, you're right. What do you think?" As a child I thought this was strange. As an adult, I know it to be true.

Tomorrow will be better. Tomorrow I will, once again, tell my mind to stop the negative thoughts. And my mind will do exactly that, as I command my ship of grief.

> Annette Mennen Baldwin TCF Katy, TX Forever remembering my son, Todd Mennen





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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