



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 2022

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

<http://www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org>

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

at

**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

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
- 1997 - Ethan Tyler Brown, Son of Erica Poorbaugh
- 2018 - Kingston Bowen, Son of Lakisha Washington
- 1984 - Justin Moyer, Son of Valli Moyer
- 1986 - Chad Moyer, Son of Valli Moyer
- 1989 - Chance Barton, Son of Sherry Barton
- 1990 - Beau Kocina, Son of Carolyn Kocina

You are rooted deep
within my soul.
A part of me forever
in the deepest parts
of my heart
there you are.

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 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
- 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
- 2021 - Matthew Hanzi, Son of Nelda Hanzi
- 2021 - Alex Coogan, Son of Tim and Amy Coogan



You are not forgotten, loved one
Nor will you ever be,
As long as life and memory last
We will remember thee.
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.

Written by the family of Odessa Anne Box

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 members, **Darlene McGhee, lost her daughter Keri in 1974, her son Patton in 2010 and her grandson Wes in 2021; Jessica Chapa lost her son Jonathan in April 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 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



TCF 45th National Conference
Houston, TX • August 5-7, 2022

The Second Time Around

As bereaved parents, our lives are marked by events that are characterized as “before” and “after.” In the past decade there have been three events that have changed my life forever. The first occurred on May 4, 1997, when my son Richard Jr. died suddenly by suicide at the age of 24. He was about to enter basic training in the US Navy the next day. Life as we knew it came to an end. After the initial shock and denial began to subside, we begin our very long and lonely grief journey.

My wife needed to find answers, was filled with guilt and anger, and needed to explore the whys and what-ifs. I began to read everything I could find that dealt with death of a child, suicide, and grief. I tried to move quickly through the steps so that I could “get on with my life.” We all grieve very differently, but at the time I had no idea that this is normal. I tried to get my wife to move along with me, but it didn't work. We eventually settled back into our jobs, and the subject of our son's death often ended in conflict. As time marched on, my grief was neatly buried in a package that sat in a place nobody could find. My son was certainly not discussed at work, but I was functioning and felt I was doing okay.

The second event occurred about two years later. I was on a bus touring the West when I met a couple named Ceil and John. We were placed together for dinner and as pleasantries were being exchanged, the dreaded question surfaced: "How many children do you have?" Ceil later told me that the minute I hesitated, she knew I was a bereaved parent. The rest of the week was spent talking of my son's life, his death, and my journey for the last two years. I had found people who really were interested in what I had to say. They didn't change the subject and they didn't run away. For the first time since my son died, I could talk freely outside of my home. Ceil told me about TCF, and with my promise to find a local chapter when I returned to Boston, we said our goodbyes. She also told me of a TCF National Conference being held in Virginia the following year.

Ceil is a persistent person, and when I returned home I found the local chapter. To my surprise, I found that the meetings were held in the same parish where my son was buried.

I attended the first meeting and felt I had found a new home that was safe and loving. I could now tell my story to people would listen and not judge.

The next year I attended my first TCF National Conference. One of the first people I met was a woman whose four children had died. I was overwhelmed by the numbers, the love, and the sharing that took place during those three days. I attended a workshop given by Rich Edler on “Finding Joy Again.” He spoke of gifts that we received from our children who died and about a new life with new meaning. He even suggested that we might become better persons because of what we had been through. I hadn't experienced any of these gifts, but I was uplifted and hopeful. When it was time to leave, I was frightened to reenter the real world. It is painful to take off the badge I had worn the previous three days.

It didn't take long for me to find one of those gifts. Shortly after returning home, I learned that the brother of a colleague had died. I knew that I must go and talk to her mother because I had been there and I could. I was frightened, but somehow the words just came to me. We talked of her pain and about TCF, and she soon became a regular at our meetings. For the first time, I saw something positive that resulted from my son's death. My life once again had new meaning. I became more committed to and involved in TCF. I was learning that “helping is healing,” and the more I gave, the more I seemed to get back. More gifts arrived as I became able to speak and write about my journey.

November 21, 2004, brought the third event that further defined my life. We were sitting with four other members of TCF from different parts of the country at lunch discussing the upcoming 2005 National Conference at the Copley Marriott. My wife was with me and one other member of our chapter and, of course, my friend Ceil. Of the six of us, two had suffered multiple

losses. On the way home we discussed how remarkable it is that people can go on and do remarkable things with their lives after suffering such loss. At that moment we did not realize we were also already members of that group of those who have suffered multiple losses. We drove by the mortuary in Boston, and I mentioned how horrible the journey to identify my son had been almost eight years earlier. At that time I did not realize that my daughter Lynn's body had already been taken there. We arrived home to the news that our daughter Lynn had died earlier that day. The journey had begun once again. Our TCF friends arrived, and my friend Ceil stayed with us until after the funeral, giving up Thanksgiving with her family. We were surrounded by love and support, and I again realized what it means to be "A Compassionate Friend."

Little has been written about those who have suffered multiple losses. The impact has been devastating. Our family has shrunk by 40 percent. My surviving child, Libby is 24 years-old and has gone from the youngest to the only surviving child. There are now two empty rooms in our home. But some things are different from the first time we experienced loss. From the moment I heard of Lynn's death, I knew that being newly bereaved the second time was the last place I ever thought I would be. I also knew that, as bad as I felt, it would not be like that forever. I had traveled this road before. I knew that I was not alone, had acquired new tools, and had a very large family of TCF-ers I could lean on. I knew that my wife and I would grieve very differently, as we had before, but that was okay, and we would respect each other's way of dealing with grief. And I also knew I must carry on my involvement with TCF in order to survive. I now had two children whose memories must be kept alive. Rich Edler had taught me that I could help because I had been there.

Because my family was that much smaller, we each had to do more to make Richard and Lynn proud of us. For the next six months I was kept busy with plans for the 2005 National Conference. It was a labor of love done in memory of my children. My wife and daughter also helped, and we all learned that "helping is healing." I also realized that becoming involved with the conference was a way to postpone some of the pain and emptiness that I knew would resurface.

It was 12:30 p.m. on Sunday, July 3. The 28th National Conference has ended, and most of those who had attended had left the hotel. I looked around to see if there were any more good-byes to say, anymore of those TCF hugs to receive before I left the world of understanding, comfort, and love. I had inhabited this place for the past three days and was reluctant to reenter that "other world" where we are invisible in our grief to most whom we meet. How difficult it is to take off the badges that we all wear so proudly, giving our children faces, as well as names. They are the tools we use to tell others our stories. I'd had the chance to visit and share with many friends. I had been educated, entertained, and wrapped in support. I had also had the privilege to serve on the conference committee and share my experience in a workshop. This work has helped to give purpose to my life and the lives of my children. Many members of our chapter experienced a TCF conference for the first time and we have shared our experiences. We have been brought closer by working together and walking in memory of our children. As I think of the last six months, I realize that this conference will stand as a very important part of my grief journey.

I had left that cocoon and once again was brought back to the realization that my grief is still very raw and I have far to go. But I also see that I walk with so many ready to help. I know that we may distract ourselves with work or other activities, take our grief in measured doses, and postpone our journey to regain some strength, but it is a journey that will still lie ahead. Darcy Sims talked about grief that after over twenty five years is still just "under the surface," ready to make its appearance at any time. As time goes on we become better able to manage the grief and place it in that spot when we need to.

November will be a difficult month for my family as we remember my son Richard's 33rd birthday on November 16 and the one-year anniversary of my daughter Lynn's death on

November 21. Some years it is harder to give thanks than others. I have received many gifts this year. The best ones came with a badge, a child's picture, and a TCF hug.

Rick Mirabile
TCF South Shore Chapter, MA
In Memory of my son, Richard and my daughter, Lynn

Rick Mirabile is a chapter leader and newsletter editor for the South Shore, MA, TCF chapter in Hingham, MA. He lives with his wife, Ellen. His surviving child, Libby, lives in Greenwich, CT.

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Summer Days

No one can really give us the comfort we crave that could only be achieved by getting our Chelsea back. There is nothing we want more than to hold Chelsea in our arms: to hug her, to kiss her, and to hear her sweet voice again. However, I found some solace in completing a project she started months before her passing.

On our inner yard fence, she had begun painting flowers on the fence boards adding color and décor to our backyard. Summer soon got hot, and we suggested giving it a break. But before she could resume the project, she had passed. Following the shock and turmoil of this horrible event, I had it in the back of my mind of returning to her project. But the thought of it would break me down in tears. I put it aside, but soon I continued to ponder it.

And finally, I built the courage, the courage to face the challenge of completing Chelsea's project. I gathered paints, brushes, and sketches. I knew what I needed to do, but I knew it needed one thing that was not in the original plans. Besides the floral designs she had painted on the fence, it now called for butterflies! So, I got started. The first attempts were devastating; brush in hand, I would just look at the fence and start crying. So, I would have to pack it up. But I knew I wanted to do this more than anything to honor our Chelsea. I knew we could look at the finished project and reflect that this is what Chelsea would have done had she been here. So, I pushed on continuing the project with tears flowing from my eyes, and salty sweat burning my eyes so severely that I had to continually wipe them.

The heat was intense, the sun was beating on the back of my neck, but I was feeling accomplishment in the project. I couldn't stop. I just couldn't put the brushes down. Days passed, and those days turned to months, as I would add to it day after day. It was growing bigger and bigger, covering the full-back fence and the side fence as well. The butterflies and flowers were blending together in a beautiful orchestration of harmony. I knew this little girl,

and I knew how she would draw. Her expressions of art were flowing through me with such vibrancy that I could feel her in every stroke. It was indeed a labor of love for the child I loved so much. I know she is looking at that fence. I know she was part of it. I think I have honored her in a way only I could. I love you, Chelsea.

There are many different ways of coping with the loss of a loved one, such as in memorial functions, lighting a candle, reading books, writing letters or journals, or even planting a garden. All of these can be part of the healing process but never of forgetting the love of your deceased child.

By Millie Hunton, Co-Leader,
TCF Greater New Orleans Chapter 1615



Rebuilding Your Life One Piece at a Time

Death, especially unexpected death, changes one's life in ways that cannot be expected. With the death of someone close, one's world is forever changed.

One analogy I have found myself using with clients is the following: If you were to imagine the day before your loved one died, there was an intact picture of your life. The picture may not have been perfect, but it was there and it made sense. There was a beginning, a middle and an expected end.

With death comes the destruction of that picture. It is as if the picture is taken out of your hands, smashed to the ground in a thousand pieces and then some of the most treasured pieces are forever taken away.

The challenge with grief is to then take all of those pieces which are left and attempt to make a new picture. The picture of the life you once had is impossible to recreate, as much as one may try, it cannot be recreated with pieces missing. A new picture must be assembled with the pieces that are left and with new pieces that are picked up along the way.

The process of "putting the pieces back together" is one that often feels chaotic and confusing. It may sometimes be surprising to find out how much thinking is involved in the grief process. Thoughts bounce around trying to connect "what was" with "what is" and struggle to make sense out of what seems to be incomprehensible. With each piece, the bereaved, through trial

and error, find where each piece belongs or even if it belongs at all. This process is different for every person and does not adhere to any kind of timeline. This (what feels like endless) thinking is the work that grief demands – it is the creation of a new picture of your life – created one piece at a time.

Written by Stephanie Elson, lifted from the Tears to Hope August/September 2007 newsletter of The Amelia Center, Birmingham, AL, providing a place of hope for grieving



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

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.

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.

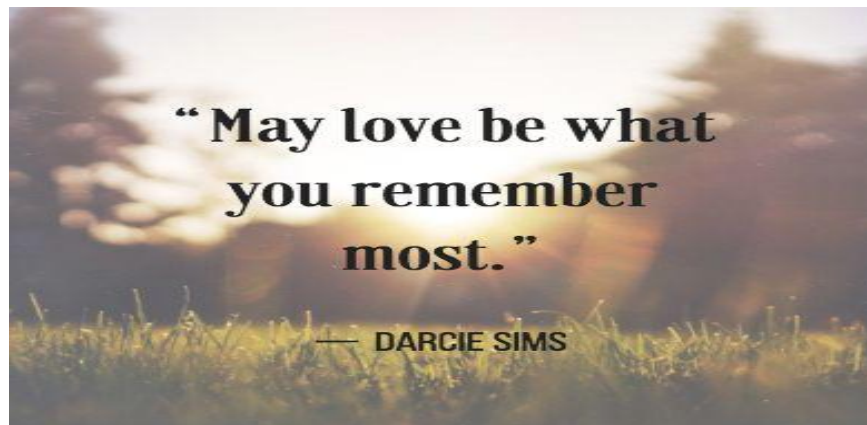
Becoming easy in my harness was no small task, nor did it happen in magical stages with epiphanies proclaiming, “here is a milestone, a moment you can remember for the wisdom you found.”

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 shines from deep within my soul as I now hold my child in my mind and heart. My child is with me in my harness as I continue on the balance of my life’s journey. For this mother, hope is knowing that death does not restrict me from my child’s life. Death changes only the plane of our relationship, for I am his mother and he is my son. We will love our children for all eternity. That is the freedom in our harness that comes with consciously choosing hope.

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



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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