



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 2023

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.

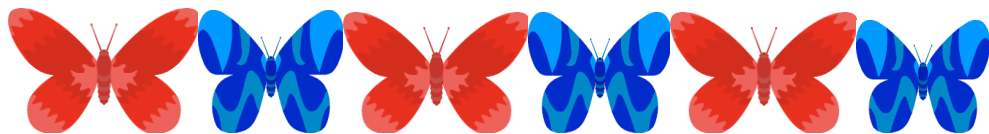
To the Newly Bereaved

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
2020 - Ruby Abrol, Daughter of Bina Abrol

**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 11th at 7pm. Our meeting room for this month is in room #213.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members. 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.

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

Our chapter welcomes all submissions to our newsletter. Send your articles, poetry, love messages and scanned photos to David Hendricks at: dbhhendricks@hotmail.com. The deadline for submitting your articles is the 5th of each month.

PRIVATE FACEBOOK GROUPS

The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private Facebook Groups. These pages are moderated by bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, and may not be accessed unless a request to join is approved by a moderator. A private message will be sent prior to approval, please be sure to check your mailbox marked "Other" if you do not receive one in your main mailbox. These pages were established to encourage connection and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings grieving the death of a child, grandchild or sibling.

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/private-facebook-groups/>



July's Child

Fireworks race toward heaven
Brilliant colors in the sky.
Their splendor ends in seconds
On this evening in July.
"Her birthday is this Saturday,"
I whisper with a sigh.
She was born this month,
She loved this month
And she chose this month to die.

Like the bright and beautiful fireworks
Glowing briefly in the dark
They are gone too soon, and so was she
Having been, and left her mark.
A glorious incandescent life,
A catalyst, a spark...
Her being gently lit my path
And softened all things stark.

The July birth, the July death of
my happy summer child
Marked a life too brief that ended
Without rancor, without guile.
Like the fireworks that leave images
On unprotected eyes...
Her lustrous life engraved my heart...
With love that never dies.

Sally Migliaccio
TCF Babylon, Long Island, NY



**"May love be what
you remember
most."**

— DARCIE SIMS

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



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



No You Don't Need "Closure"

By: Stephen J. Forman

There are few among us who have not experienced the loss of a friend or loved one. Often it comes without warning, in an accident or, as we've seen all too often recently, an act of terrorism. The experience of loss after a lingering illness like cancer, though more expected, is just as deeply felt. As time passes, we often hear how important it is to gain closure-a way of tidying up to help us move on with our own lives.



The reality is that closure is a myth. My personal and professional experience with those who have lost friends and family, including children, has taught me that going on with life is not the same as gaining closure. The wound of loss is a part of each person's life forever. We continue to think about those dear to us, though perhaps not every day or with the same intensity. Recollection is sometimes provoked by a date on a calendar or, less predictably, by a sight, sound, aroma, melody or place that evokes the missing person.

These personal moments, seemingly forever paused in time, can cause us to feel alone, especially during sentiment-filled holidays. The danger of the idea closure is that it heightens this aloneness, by giving us a false expectation that these experiences should and will at some point end. They won't.

No matter how much time has passed, memories remain. To deny them is to deny precious moments of love, fellowship, gratitude and inspiration. Grieving changes the experience of loss, but does not eliminate it, and is not intended to do so. To close the memory does not sustain the healing or help in proceeding with life. Such echoes from the past are voices in the present and are sometimes warmly felt.

As humans we all yearn to remember. Nearly every culture has its way of preserving the past. We build memorials to perpetuate collective memory, whether it is the Vietnam Memorial or Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., the field of empty chairs in Oklahoma City, or the 9/11 Memorial in New York.

Cemeteries offer a communal "safe space" where grief is openly welcomed and expected, forever. Visitation rights to a plot do not suddenly expire six months after a burial, a time that some in the medical community suggest is the "normal" grieving period. In the Jewish tradition, the acknowledgement of the annual *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of the death of a family member, is always done in the presence of others, provoking a collective memory of the person.

These occasions sometimes formal, but more often spontaneous are not about closure. Rather they are about the fullness in each of our lives that came from our family, loved ones, and friends, as well as others who were touched by that person's presence.

In my work as a cancer physician, I often write to the family of a loved one who was under my care, months after the death. It is a time when most of the people who helped support them through the days and weeks immediately after have gone back to the busyness of their own lives. The bereaved are left alone with their own feelings and thoughts. The letters are a chance to remain connected, but also a way to convey that their loved one is an important memory for us, too. These words of acknowledgement are always welcome, reassuring those whose lives have become interwoven with ours that their loved ones are alive within us, as they are in their own families.

A few months ago, I ran into a woman who many years ago had, at a very young age and early in her marriage, lost her husband to cancer. Since then she had moved away, met another man whom she adored, married him and had a family. Together they raised their children. She had built a successful career. Seemingly she had found closure from the tragedy of her early life. As we finished talking and

she began to walk away, she turned around, and with eyes full, and said: "I think of him almost every day."

*Taken from the Wall Street Journal
Dr. Forman leads the Hematologic Malignancies
and Stem Cell Transplantation Institute at City of Hope.*



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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