



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.

JUNE 2016

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.
(Our next meeting is Tuesday, June 14th)

Cypress Creek Christian Church Community Center
6823 Cypresswood Drive, Room 20
Spring, Texas 77379

We are located between Stuebner-Airline and Kuykendahl, about 2 miles North of FM 1960 West. The Community Center is located behind the church, between the courthouse and Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the church/community center parking lot. Follow the posted signs to our meeting room.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

To the Newly Bereaved

As the years pass, we see new members come into the chapter, and we try to help them with their grief as we progress in our own. Over and over again, I have seen newly bereaved parents come to their first meeting totally devastated and convinced that their lives are over. Through the months (and years) I have seen them struggle and suffer and try to find meaning in their lives again. And they do! Through all the anger, pain and tears, somehow the human spirit is able to survive and flower again in a new life – perhaps a changed life and possibly a sadder one, but a stronger one nevertheless.

We feel so weak and crushed when our beloved children die, but I know because I have seen it countless times in the years I've been involved with The Compassionate Friends that we can make it together. When you walked through the door for the first meeting, you were frightened and nervous; but with that step you made a statement about your life. With that first step through the door, you said you wanted to try, you wanted to find a reason for living again, that you weren't willing to be swallowed by your grief. You wanted to go forward, and those first steps into The Compassionate Friends began your journey.

The journey will be a long one, for you loved your child with all your heart and soul. When that child died, a part of you was ripped away. It takes a long time to repair that large hole. The journey will not always be steady or constant; there will be many setbacks. Those of us who have taken the journey before you can assure you that, while there may be no rainbow at the other end, there is indeed "light at the end of the tunnel."

We want to help you as we were helped, but in the beginning and in the long run, you must help yourself. You have to want to get better, to talk about your loss, to struggle through the grief. We will listen, suggest, share and laugh and cry with you; and we hope, at this time next year, you'll be several steps along in your personal journey through grief. Then you can begin to help others.



Our Children, Siblings, and Grandchildren Remembered

JUNE BIRTHDAYS

- 1990 - Megan Kathleen Ratcliff, Daughter of Ann & Garvon Ratcliff
- 1990 - BreAnna Brashear, Daughter of Julie Jones
- 1976 - Adrian Jay, Son of Helen Jay
- 2010 - Alexandra Kenley Newhart, Granddaughter of Dave & Carol Bell
- 2008 - Keegan Dade Coggon, Son of Kellie & Gavin Coggon
- 1982 - Robbie Hill, Son of Ann Hill
- 1990 - Melissa Ellen Blackbird, Daughter of Will & Pam Blackbird
- 1990 - Ryan Kirby, Son of Cherlyne Kirby
- 1988 - Meredith Iris Wheelock, Daughter of Carey Wheelock
Sister of Mariah Moon
- 1991 - Cody Ryan, Son of Christy Welch
- 2008 - Leah Elizabeth Davis, Daughter of Ron & Laura Davis
- 1973 - Christopher Birken, Son of Elizabeth Birken
- 1985 - Sloan Nagy, Son of Tammy Johnson
- 1990 - Alan James Stokes, Son of Kellie Harris
- 2004 - Aaron Fontaine, Son of Doug & Tina Fontaine

JUNE ANGEL DATES

- 2009 - Samantha Campos, Daughter of Amy Arrant
Granddaughter of Maria Picardo
- 2008 - Robert Elizeus, Son of Joanne Wycoff
- 1998 - Molly Long, Daughter of Carolyn Long
- 2010 - Joselito C. M. Boquilon, Son of Raulito & Kim Boquilon
- 2004 - Felipe Danny Sanchez, Son of Lupe Sanchez
- 2010 - Tristen D. Hopkins, Son of Howard & Denise Hopkins
- 1993 - Robbie Hill, Son of Ann Hill
- 2009 - Maxwell B. Heath, Son of Carrie & Dirk Heath
- 2010 - Alexandra Kenley Newhart, Granddaughter of Dave & Carol Bell
- 2004 - "Bo" Jared Valdez, Son of Irma & James Valdez
- 2009 - Michael Brent Police, Son of Jack & Sally Police
- 2011 - Erin Johnson, Daughter of Rebecca Johnson
- 2011 - Meredith Iris Wheelock, Daughter of Carey Wheelock
Sister of Mariah Moon
- 1995 - Cody Ryan, Son of Christy Welch
- 2013 - Matthew Allen, Son of Jay and Linda Allen
- 2013 - Lhwhyh Yshrhah, Son of Taneshia Carey
- 2012 - Crystal Garza, Daughter of Marta Garza
- 2015 - Race Killen, Son of Wendy Killen

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday June 14th at 7pm.

Our sub-chapter for parents that have lost an infant, toddler, or have had a miscarriage or stillbirth will meet (same location) on Thursday, June 9th at 7pm. Contact Julie Joiner at 832-724-4299 or email dtjb19@gmail.com for more information.

Our balloons were released at our last meeting and held by invisible strings that attached to our hearts forever. Our children were lovingly remembered last month. Thanks to everyone that attended the balloon release. It was a special tribute to our children. A special thank you goes to Doug and Josette Tharp for bring the balloons.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members, **Selena Suniga, lost her daughters Ariel and Athena and Carrie Newman lost her son Jaime**. 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.

If you have recently attended your first meeting, you may have left feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you may feel that you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared in meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return.

These feeling are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least three tries before you decide if these meetings are for you.

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 support which will help you travel this journey of grief, and we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

Love Gifts – A Way to Remember

There are no dues to belong to Compassionate Friends, because we have already paid the ultimate price; the loss of our loved one(s). A Love Gift is a gift of money given in honor of a child, who has died, or a gift of thanksgiving that their own children are alive and well, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help support our Chapter. Your gifts are tax deductible and are used to reach out to other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. Your gifts support this newsletter, our TCF Library, and other Chapter expenses.

Thank you to Bill and Joanne Cook for their gift in memory of their son Mark and thank you to James and Nancy Green for their gift in memory of their grandson Alan Stokes. Your donations to our chapter are greatly appreciated.

There is still time to register!

**The Compassionate Friends
39th National Conference**

July 8-10, 2016.

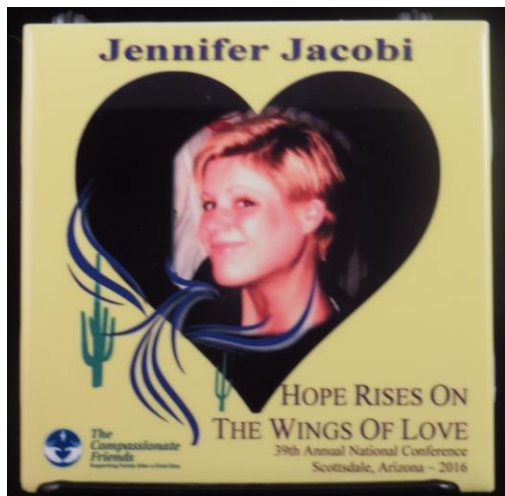
**The Conference will be held at The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess
7575 East Princess Drive, Scottsdale, AZ, 85255**



Wings of Love Photo Tile

This year's Conference Committee will offer a "Wings of Love" photo tile. Your loved one's picture will be custom printed on a 4.25" x 4.25" ceramic tile with superior UV and scratch resistance. These tiles are scratch resistant but are not recommended to use as coasters or backsplashes, etc. Ceramic photo tiles are for displaying photos in a frame or stand. The minimum donation for each picture submitted is \$15.00. If you

cannot attend the Conference and would like the photo tile sent to you, then an additional \$6.00 donation is requested to cover postage and handling. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks after the Conference for your "Wings of Love" photo tile to reach you.



It is strongly recommend ordering the photo tile online by placing your order and emailing the child's digital image directly to 2016lovephotos@gmail.com.

For questions, email 2016lovephotos@gmail.com. Deadline for placing an order is June 15, 2016.

I Almost Went Home

by Diane Cassidy

(a member of the Troy, Michigan TCF Chapter)

(taken from 2014 We Need Not Walk Alone Magazine)

When my Katie Kates went to Heaven on May 18, 2005, she was 19 1/2 yrs. old, and the world as I knew it was destroyed.

I did not know anyone who had lost their child. I felt like I had suddenly been dropped into a foreign country with no friends, cell phone, map or money and I did not even know the language. I was completely alone in an unfamiliar world. Family, friends and my church tried to help, however I no longer lived in their world and they most certainly had no idea what to do or say to me.

I didn't want to be in my own home, my daughter died in the middle of the night peacefully, when she was sleeping in her own bed, with me in the next room. I did still believe in God, however, I felt God must be very angry with me to take my baby! I had tried to live a good life, I wondered what could I have possibly done to deserve this?

It was hard to imagine how life went on. I became a robot, automatically doing what I needed to do and most of what I was expected to do. However, no one was home. I no longer was present, I was still in this foreign country all alone, lost, hopeless for the first year, I just wanted to die.

In May of 2006, my oldest daughter Christina found The Compassionate Friends. She wanted me to attend the National Conference in Dearborn, Michigan which was only a half hour from my house. I told her "NO!" I wanted nothing to do with TCF, I couldn't even take care of my own grief, how in the heck was I supposed to deal with thousands of others who also had had their lives destroyed? She asked me to do it for her; I told her I would try.

It was difficult to say no to my daughter, and therefore I decided to give the TCF Conference a try. Christina lives in another state and so I arrived at the Conference a day before her. I was trying to keep an open mind but I did not want to be there. When I pulled up to the hotel valet, I did not unpack my car, I decided to register and look around first.

There were so many bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings, it was much more crowded than I expected. I lasted less than an hour; I did not speak to anyone and kept to myself. I decided to leave and asked the valet to get my car. Two bereaved dads came up to me wearing TCF badges and said "You're leaving, aren't you?" I acted like I did not hear them, but they would not go away. To make a long story short, they talked me into staying just for the night, and offered some advice. "Don't think about the Conference, go to your room, order room service, take a long hot bath, watch a funny show or movie, sleep, wake up in the morning, go to the Opening Ceremony, then make your decision. Please stay, you will be happy you came."

For some reason, what these two caring bereaved dads said to me made sense, and that is exactly what I did. I showed up to the Opening Ceremony, I found hope and new friends and my new normal world to live in that is no longer foreign to me. I'm thrilled I went!!

In the past nine years, I've been to seven Conferences; this year will be my eighth. I am the person who is outside whenever possible and watches for those alone, getting ready to leave. I try to give them a plan to hopefully find hope, just like the two dads gave to me.

So, if you're afraid to come to a TCF's National Conference, I understand, because I have been there. I am now the woman standing just outside the front doors at every TCF Conference looking for someone like me who is thinking about leaving. If you see me, stop by and say hello to Katie Cassidy's Mom and we'll chat.

TCF is HOPE.



On Pain and Healing...

In pain management used for patients with chronic pain, it is taught not to tighten around the pain but to relax and allow the pain to be present. The idea is that when pain is resisted, it intensifies. When we breathe deeply and acknowledge the presence of pain, it has room to move and can dissipate more readily. Pain is there to tell us something, to warn us of possible danger. This is as true for emotional, spiritual and mental pain as it is for physical pain. When pain speaks, we need to listen. All it takes is paying attention to our pain so that when it comes we remember to breathe and get soft. We don't want to fight with our pain. We want to learn from it.

Time does not heal. But healing does take time. Give yourself the gift of time. To become whole means that as we open to the pain, we open to the loss. We break open and, as a consequence, we get bigger and include more of life. We include what would have been "lost" to us if our hearts and minds had closed against the pain, we include what would have been lost if we had not taken the time to heal. As singer/songwriter Carly Simon tells us: "There's more room in a broken heart."

From the chapter, "Time Does Not Heal All Wounds,"
of the book, "Good Grief," by Deborah Morris Coryell



"God puts rainbows in the clouds so that each of us - in the dreariest and most dreaded moments- can see a possibility of hope" - Maya Angelou

On Cleaning Out His Stuff

It has been 18 years since my son Chris was killed in a car accident. I have been using his room as my computer room for the last six years but I have not cleaned out his drawers or closet-they were almost as he left them. After recognizing that I needed more space and the job finally "had" to be done, I decided to finally begin the process of throwing some of Chris' high school papers away. After all, it had been 18 years-surely I had progressed far enough along in my grief to finally begin to deal with "his stuff."

Surprisingly I found the task challenging and gut-wrenching. I still had a difficult time working my way through some of the items I found, as I poured over notebooks, papers and drawings. One of the papers was an evaluation from a career counselor. Just reading over her findings brought a wave of tears that was almost uncontrollable. She had captured our boy with accuracy and tenderness, sensing this was a young man of character and warmth. She talked about his smile when he acknowledged that he didn't like camping very much, so he could not see himself as a forest ranger. She saw a young man who had a quiet and gentle strength. With a lump in my throat, I shared it with my husband and both of us "choked up" with tears.

Letters from his girlfriend and his return letters back to her were comforting and lovely. His warmth, kindness and tenderness as a 17-year-old young man "in love" for the first time, came through as he wrote from his heart. Just seeing his handwriting again was such a cherished treasure. Lyrics from the many songs he wrote for "the band" were deep and inspiring. Some of his reports from school had encouraging comments from the teachers. I saved some of his childish drawings of Smurfs, "A Sweet Story" (a second-grade drawing of children running into the arms of Jesus) and his many stuffed animals-or "his kids" as he used to call them. He had named them, drew them all and then placed them in a scrapbook. What a precious gift to hold on to. I'll show it to my grandchildren some day.

Then I began the arduous task of organizing the cards, notes and words of comfort we received as the days, weeks and months after Chris' death passed by. Many shared how they remembered events he attended, and conversations they shared with our son, which we were not aware of. Some shared how they were praying for us. I saved rain and mud-soaked notes that were left on his grave-so many missed him in those early days of overwhelming grief, especially his classmates. What beautiful and wonderful human beings touched our lives so many years ago and gave us the strength in those early days of bereavement to go on. It continued to bring tears to my eyes and yet, the tears were those of gratitude for the many who had taken our grief and for a time, had cried with us and carried some of it for us. It warmed my heart to recall that so many cared and grieved with us. The prayers continued throughout the first year and beyond. We could not have made it without those human arms of love around us, listening ears, tear-soaked eyes and encouraging words.

Although I was drained after two days of tossing, remembering, crying and organizing, I was comforted for having done this job that I had dreaded for years. It brought me back in touch with my grief and I felt so much closer to Chris than I had felt in a long time. I felt as though I had had a visit with him. I was reminded of what a special young man he was and how I was privileged

to have been his mom. One thing I know for sure, the love for Chris, the memories we shared with him and the compassion shown to our family will remain in our hearts far longer than “the stuff” and that is what is really important.

Carole Dyck
TCF Verdugo Hills, CA
In Memory of my son, Chris Dyck
October 17, 2012

God inspires people to help other people who have been hurt by life, and by helping them, they protect them from the danger of feeling alone, abandoned or judged.” —Harold Kushner

Forgive Unto Forever

Grieving is a fierce and overwhelming expression of love thrust upon us by a deep and hurtful loss. Yet, grieving is frequently such an entanglement of feelings that we often fail to recognize that ultimately forgiveness must be an integral part of our grief and our healing. For what is love, if forgiveness is silent within us? We learn to forgive our children for dying, ourselves for not preventing it. We begin to forgive our God or the fate we see ruling our universe. We start to forgive relatives and friends for abandoning us in their own bewilderment over the onslaught of emotions they sense in our words and behavior.

I believe we must be open to the balm of forgiveness. Through its expression in our lives, be it through thought, word, or deed, we find small ways to seek life once more. Deep within us, forgiveness is capable of treading the wasteland of our souls to help us feel again the love that has not died.

It is the beginning of release from the dominance of pain, not from the continual hurt of missing those we have lost, but from lacking the fullness of the love we shared with our child. That love lives with strength inside ourselves and yet our beings are so entrapped in a whirling vortex of anger, despair, frustration, abandonment, and depression that we often feel it only lightly.

Let us all heed the quiet message heard so softly in that maelstrom of the spirit. Forgive, forgive, and forgive unto forever. Let love enfold our anguish, helping us to learn to grow and strive beyond this hour to a rich tomorrow.

Don Hackett
TCF Hingham, MA



A Father's Day Like No Other

In June, 2000 it was my third Fathers day without my son Christopher. He died in an industrial accident on September 28, 1997. This was such a lonely day for me as my only surviving child had been out of the country for over a year. I had no one to celebrate being a father with. It started as a very dark and dismal day indeed.

After trying to avoid the trip to the cemetery for most of the day, there was nothing left to keep me away. So my wife Robyn and I went to the cemetery to visit Chris' grave.

While deep in emotion and feeling like I had nothing to look forward to, we were sitting by Chris' headstone remembering how much fun he was and how terribly sad it was not to have him to hold and tell him that I loved him. I was wishing so badly that he could be here to spend the day with me.

I had put my head down to let the tears run off my face. I felt a small breeze come up; it was an unusual breeze in that it came from the northeast, which in June is not a common occurrence. I looked up and noticed this balloon with a lead weight dragging behind it, dancing ever so slowly towards me. We watched it dance across the grass and then the balloon bounced directly into my chest. The balloon had a message that I **know** was from my son Chris. It said "Worlds Greatest Dad". I was so surprised and happy to have received this "Father's Day Gift". I thanked him for the wonderful gift and for cheering me up. There was no one else around or near us; we were not sure where the balloon had come from. I did not notice it at the time but a woman and her 2-year-old son had come to visit her father's grave, which was about 150 yards away from Chris. Robyn and I sat around for another fifteen minutes or so and then decided to leave.

When we left to go to our car Robyn noticed that the lady visiting her Father was frantic and screaming that her son had locked himself in the car. We went over to see if we could help. The son had locked the doors to the vehicle, the windows were rolled all the way up and the mom had left the keys inside. The outside temperature was very warm and the little boy was starting to sweat. The police had been called to come and open the door but they were not sure that they could get there very soon. I was just about to break out the back window when Robyn said let's try to get him to open the door. She took the balloon and tried to coax the little boy to open the door. She told him through the glass that she would give him the balloon if he would just push the button. She kept pointing to the button that would release the door lock. Suddenly the lock popped open, we didn't notice it at the second the lock popped up, but later we realized that the boy's hand was no-where near the lock when it opened. We got the boy out and Robyn gave the little boy my Father's day gift from Chris. The boy's mother looked at the balloon and asked where we had gotten that balloon because she had left a balloon just like it on her dad's grave the day before. We looked for his balloon and it was gone. It turned out to be the same balloon that had bounced across the grass and bumped into my chest earlier. The balloon was now in the hands of his grandson.

The events of that day have been with me ever since. First of all, I know that my son sent that balloon to me to help me through my sad and lonely Father's Day, and that he also helped to save that boys life.

Mark Kingery
TCF Salt Lake City, UT
In Memory of my son, Christopher

NOT A Matter of Choice

Our son Keith was 29 years old when he decided to end his life by suicide in 1999. Suicide is a frightening word, and it is not only ignorance but fear and stigma that keep people from understanding why someone would take their life. In a way it is easier to think that a person made a "choice," freeing us from knowing the truth.

The word choice continues to perpetuate the stigma of suicide. The definition of choice is "the freedom in choosing, both in the way one chooses and in the number of possibilities from which to choose." In a presuicidal state, an individual is overwhelmed in a given situation. They suffer extreme mental anguish and a painful sense of hopelessness. Their sense of judgment is distorted, and they do not have the ability to make "choices" or options. They usually want to kill the pain rather than themselves.

Suicidal people may be unable to restrain themselves from acting on feelings or impulses. This strong impulse to end the pain is often due to the depletion of the chemical called serotonin. Serotonin is a chemical within the brain that helps restrain impulsive behavior.

"There is no suffering greater than that which drives people to suicide. Suicide defines the moment in which mental pain exceeds the human capacity to bear it. It represents the abandonment of hope," says John T. Maltzberger, M.D., past president of the American Association of Suicidology, practicing psychiatrist, and teacher at Harvard Medical School.

Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in the USA and the second leading cause of death for those ages 25-34. About 30,000 of the 650,000 Americans who attempt suicide each year die. Suicide is almost always the result of depression, an illness of the brain.

We can only imagine the horrible mental torture our son Keith endured. Depression is one of the most terrible and pervasive illnesses of our day. In 1999 the Surgeon General of the United States listed suicide as a national public crisis. Having accurate information about depression is critical. We live in a world where people hang on to old stereotypes. In order to stop future loss of lives by suicide, we must make certain to take advantage of any opportunity to encourage greater awareness. In that goal, we can make great strides to ensure that these stereotypes cease to persist.

By: Carol Loehr
TCF Member Heart of Florida Chapter
Taken from We Need Not Walk Alone
Spring 2004



*Happy Fathers Day
From Your Angel In Heaven*

*Oh, Dearest Daddy
What can I say today
To help mend your broken heart
On this Fathers Day?*

*You know I would be there with you
If only there was a way
Although I am in Heaven now
It's in your heart I will always stay.*

*Just like you where always there for me
I will always be there for you
Just look for a sign and you will see me
In each sunrise and each sunset too.*

*Remember the game we used to play?
"How much do I love you" you'd say with a smile
But this time MY arms are outstretched so far
For my love for you goes on for miles and miles.*

*My love for you daddy
Will always be true
You are the best daddy in the world
And that includes the Heavens too!*

*So I'm sending all my love
To you from Heaven today
and remember I will be with you
Just look for me on this Fathers Day.
I love you Daddy!*



"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt within the heart."

Helen Keller

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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