



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 2019

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

(Our next meeting is Tuesday, June 11th)

at

**Cypress Creek Christian Church
6823 Cypresswood Drive, Room #3
Spring, Texas 77379**

The Church is located between the Courthouse and the Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the Church area parking. We meet in Room #3 which is down six steps off the main lobby of the Church on the Library side. Follow the posted signs to the meeting room.

Chapter Leader:

David Hendricks

936-441-3840

dbhhendricks@hotmail.com

South Texas Regional Coordinators:

Henrik and Ghislaine Thomsen

thomsen.tcfkaty@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor:

Linda Brewer 936-441-3840

llbrewer67@hotmail.com

National Headquarters, TCF

P.O. Box 3696

Oakbrook, IL 60522-3696

1-876-969-0010

www.compassionatefriends.org

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 Cherlynnne Kirby
1988 - Meredith Iris Wheelock, Daughter of Carey Wheelock
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
1989 - Danielle Spivey, Daughter of Mark and Donna Spivey
2013 - Judah Levi Brown, Son of Mark and Christi Brown
1987 - Corey Cole, Son of Tim and Cheryl Cole
1999 - Austin Balogun, Son of Yokima Whittake

JUNE ANGEL DATES

2009 - Samantha Campos, Daughter of Amy Arrant
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 Yhshrrhal, Son of Taneshia Carey
2012 - Crystal Garza, Daughter of Marta Garza
2015 - Race Killen, Son of Wendy Killen
2016 - Brandon LaFavre, Son of Tersa Kobs
2017 - Sean Michael Gonzalez, Son of Rick and Jazmin Gonzalez
2018 - Elijah James Knight, Son of Stephen and Courtney Knight
2018 - Justin Moyer, Son of Valli Moyer

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday June 11th at 7pm. Thanks to all those who attended our annual balloon release. Thank you to Susan Doss 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 member, **Valli Moyer. Valli has lost two sons, Justin in 2018 and Chad in 2015.** 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.

To Our Seasoned Members

Think back to your first meeting. You were hurt, confused and felt alone in your grief. Remember the comfort you felt when you found you weren't alone and that others had been where you were and survived. Remember the love and support you felt from fellow members on your grief journey. Now you are stronger and may not feel the need to attend meetings for aid and comfort. We need you though. New members need you. They need your encouragement, support and wisdom. If you haven't attended a meeting in awhile please consider coming back to offer hope to those who feel lost and see no hope.

Helping others in need is not only a responsibility of life; it is what gives meaning to life.



There is still time to register!

42st TCF National Conference

July 19 - July 21, 2019

The 42nd TCF National Conference will be held in Philadelphia, on July 19-21, 2019. “Hope Rings in Philadelphia” is the theme of this year’s event, which promises more great National Conference experiences. We’ll keep you updated with details, on the national website as well as on the [TCF/USA Facebook Page](#) and elsewhere as they become available. Plan to come and be a part of this heartwarming experience.

Pre-registration Rates (ends June 15th)

Adult – \$125.00

Senior (65+) – \$115.00

Active Military – \$75.00

Full-time College Students (with ID) – \$60.00

Child – \$60.00

Hotel Reservations

Philadelphia 201 Hotel

201 N. 17th St.

Philadelphia, PA 19103

Or call 215.448.2963 ext. 6415 to reserve a room and use group code TH1326. Room rate is \$145 for guest room with Queen/King or 2 Doubles.



The Compassionate Friends Walk to Remember is a highlight of every TCF National Conference. It was created as a symbolic way to show the love we carry for the children we mourn. Held at 8:30 am Sunday on the final day of the National Conference it starts at the host hotel of the Conference. Special Walk to Remember t-shirts are given to all who register, as well as walk bibs where the names of the children being remembered can be written.

Submit a Name to be Carried | Sponsor a Walk Sign

Even if you are not able to attend, you can be a part of this heartfelt event by sending us the names of the children, grandchildren and siblings whose memory you wish to honor. Your generosity will help us support all bereaved families who have reached out to TCF, as well as those who today don’t know they’ll need our help tomorrow.

"Daddy's Love"
By: David Hendricks
In loving memory of my son David B. Hendricks II

I may not always be there to catch you when you fall
But I'll always be there when I can
There will be moments when we don't see eye to eye
One day I know you'll understand

Chorus

DADDY'S LOVE
IS HIGHER THAN A MOUNTAIN
DADDY'S LOVE
IS DEEPER THAN THE SEA
IT'S ONE THING I CAN GIVE YOU...UNCONDITIONALLY
DADDY'S LOVE IS A WHOLE LOT STRONGER
THAN A HUNDRED YEAR OLD OAK TREE
THE LOVE I HAVE TO GIVE YOU
IS THE LOVE MY DADDY GAVE TO ME

When you were a baby, and I would hold you in my arms
What a joy it was to watch you grow
As the years pass by, I still hold you in my heart
And if I haven't told you lately
I want you to know

Chorus

When I'm there to help you in times when troubles come
Don't be surprised to know I really care
I can't solve all your problems
But I can give you what you need
Cause you and I have such a love to share

Chorus

Knowing you're a part of me has been my biggest thrill
And when you have children of your own
You will know just how I feel

For three years after David died, in 1997, I worked on a project that included a music CD and an elaborate photo album. It kept me busy, and I felt like I was honoring David with all the effort. When it was over, there was a definite void for a while, but as veterans of this process know, you work through it.

The music CD included original songs like "Daddy's Love". It was professionally produced with musicians, singers and technicians. "Daddy's Love" was my attempt to show a father's unconditional love over

time for his child. It was also my way of being the man in the middle between my father and my child. Thus the line in the song, "The love I have to give you is the love my Daddy gave to me".

I hope all you Dads have a gentle Father's Day, with a little laughter, some joy and lots of good memories. I hope someone says your child's name and tells you a story about your child. Be easy on yourself, and keep your love ones close.



Father & Son 1993

HOPE

Momentarily hidden by grief's agony

HOPE

Not the absence of pain and sorrow

HOPE

The belief in joy and laughter's return

HOPE

Whispers the promise of tomorrow

Hope changes as we do and it can be so disguised that we may not recognize it, but it can be found in the moments of our memories - Darcie Sims

Justin Ross Heino

Father's Day has rolled around again. It was such a wonderful holiday when I did not know what loss truly was, but this day has changed over the years.

The picture of the young man is our 1st child, our only son, Justin Ross Heino. This was taken on vacation when he got to meet his grandparents, great grandparents and lots of aunts, uncles and cousins for the 1st time. If you look closely in the picture, he is blowing his grandma a raspberry, as she was showing him pictures of me as a baby in a photo album.



This is the last picture we have of him.

He died the day after we returned home. His death was ruled SUDC (Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood) which means no physical cause was ever found. He was perfectly healthy and just died while taking his afternoon nap.

This caused much confusion and loss of understanding of what is even possible in our world. If this could happen, nothing else I knew could be true.

The birth of our next child just 6 months later showed that life does move on, even when we don't understand why.

The joy that we knew with him was also there with our daughter, but in a much more profound way.

His birthday just passed; it is on Cinco de Mayo. He turned 37. So much time has passed with having only a year and a half of memories with him. These memories have sustained my love of him through all of these years.

I can remember that raspberry as it happened minutes ago. I remember the joy of his love as he is still beside me or in my arms. These things not even time can erase or destroy. I hold him in my heart as I always have and I don't think that will ever change. I refuse to let time or distance take that away. I am and will always be his father, his love fills me with the same pride as any other parent.

We have shared many great loves and losses over time. Our lovely daughter has given us a granddaughter that loves as no one else can. She is a true joy!

We lost our youngest daughter, before she was to be born. Being a parent has some of the greatest moments in it. Some of those moments are sheer love. Some of them are sheer pain and brokenness. But being a father includes all of this. On Father's Day, I remember both the love and the loss, but it is what makes me the father I am.

My heart goes out to all the fathers who are struggling on Father's Day and all of the other days of the year. Please allow your child's love be the best part of your memories.

Darryl Heino
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter

FATHERS DAY

By: Charlie Stovall
Father of Shannon Stovall

When our daughter, Shannon, was 15 years old, she was killed by an elderly driver at her school. She was a beautiful young lady, full of life, love, and compassion for others. She had a big Heart, and to my wife Liz, her brother Colin and me, the Heart has special meaning. To us it is a symbol of Shannon and of her love. She never signed her name without drawing a heart. The logo designed for her fundraiser is comprised of a Heart, Wings, and Flip flops. "The Heart Remembers" is on her memorial. We testified in Austin for the law that restricted elderly drivers . . . on Valentine's Day. I could go on . . .

Well, on Father's Day a few years ago, Liz and I went fishing in Port A with my old friend, Brian, from Dallas. Father's Day for me, just like Mother's Day for Liz, is a bittersweet day - Proud to be a father, proud of our son, Colin, yet missing our beautiful Shannon so much. My first fish that day was a very large redfish, just under the limit of 28 inches. Not paying much attention to anything but the length and girth of that bad boy, we threw it in the cooler. . . . but not before Brian snapped a picture of me holding that fish, the largest redfish I had ever caught.

It wasn't until the next day that Brian, while looking at all the pictures he had taken that weekend, sent me this picture and said, "check out the spot on that redfish".



My Father's Day gift from Shannon

Sean Weinstein

As Father's Day approaches, I am filled with so many thoughts about our precious son Sean. I reflect on the ritual of running around the kitchen table when he was eating baby food and he would open his mouth for the spoon. I remember him trying to walk for the first time, using the door handle as his aid. Sean was very animated when he was young and he needed a little extra to keep him calm and interested. We discovered the flying washcloth when he was taking a bath and the process of putting socks on the ceiling fan to keep him calm. One of the great joys I remember is when I got a call from day care and Sean slowly and excitedly said "Daddy, I made poopie in the potty"

It was evident Sean was gifted intellectually from a young age. He could count to 100 before age 3 and knew all the planets. Elementary school was easy for him and he always seemed to push the teachers with extra questions. I remember his third-grade teacher saying she couldn't wait to see what path he took when he grew up. We always did at least one fun thing over the weekend but his favorite was going to Mountasia to play putt putt and play the video games. I remember the smiles of other parents when Sean would jump up and down excitedly when he won in air hockey as I would "accidentally" miss the puck on the last point.

When Sean got to middle school, he was showing his athletic versatility in baseball, basketball and especially tennis. He had a love for the game and did not want to put his racquet down. He would take lessons, go to tennis drills and play in tournaments. He reached the championship level at age 12. My best Father's Day memory was when Sean won several rounds in the consolation draw and found himself in the finals. His opponent was a boy that Sean had not won a game from several months earlier. Sean played brilliantly and won pretty easily and won a medal. It was a thrill watching him play so well. This was so special on Father's Day and I was beaming with pride and thought life could not be better than this.

Sean acclimated to High School very well. He was pretty much a loner at times through middle school but got in with a good group of friends and had a few of the best summers of his life. He also appreciated high school as he put it "you can sleep in class in high school and the teacher won't wake you up, not like in Middle school". High school was challenging academically but Sean did well. He was at the point where we could not help him with homework. He played varsity tennis for 4 years and he was always happy when we could see his matches and also watch his tennis lessons. We also went on some nice vacations together and his maturity level was showing. Sean said that he realized that he was difficult at times earlier, and he acknowledged what we went through. Sean was easier over time and



the last 2 years of high school was like a dream. Sean started working, got a girlfriend and started playing golf. Sean and I would go out and play once a week and he was always so excited to play on a good course. It was so enjoyable watching him do so well in everything and his last year ended perfectly as his grades and ACT scores were good enough to get him into Texas A&M.

College was a time when he thrived. He was finally appreciated for who he was versus the shallowness of high school. He was always smart but only truly applied himself in college. He was pulling a 4.0 his freshman year while making many friends. He and his friends would have long philosophical conversations. He also helped many people that had trouble acclimating to school. He took up a passion for racquetball and was soon dominant among his friends. He was majoring in chemistry with the thought of going to dental school. He joined the Dental club and the Red Cross club. When he came home from school over Thanksgiving, I was amazed by the level of intelligence in his conversations. I commented to Sherry, that he was not going to need our help much in the future. As he left to go back to school on Sunday, the weather was iffy and I told him to please be careful. I will always remember the last words I ever heard him speak. "Don't, worry dad, I got this".

It was evident that he made such an impression on so many of his dorm mates as more than 60 kids drove down from A&M for his service. Even the head of the Chemistry department drove down. We received so many written tributes which were so beautiful that we could only read a few a day as they were so emotional. We even got a letter from an academic counselor who said that when she met Sean, he was the type of student we always hope for. We are so proud of the young man Sean became and he is always in our hearts. Sean was truly my greatest accomplishment and while the pain may diminish, I will never feel whole again.

Steve Weinstein
Sean's Dad
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter

A Father's Day Poem

Bittersweet is the word I would use
Happy and sad both at once and confused
That is the feeling I get every June
On Father's Day and it's coming up soon
I will do my best to partake in the fun
Maybe barbeque and take in some sun
But a part of me will be very sad
Cause I won't hear you say
Happy Father's Day dad

Alan Pedersen, TCF/USA

Real Men Do Cry

On January 19, 1996 my life was forever changed when my brother, Carl died. I will never forget the moment a family friend called me out of my chemistry class to give me the awful news of Carl's death. Time stood still as I listened in disbelief as I was told how he was found at the bottom of a radio tower. Those few endless minutes triggered a series of painful recollections and realizations which surface from time to time in quiet moments as well surfacing suddenly at inopportune times. Such painful recollections do not occur as frequently today as they did in the days and weeks following his death. Others who have walked through the early days of grief and those currently walking amidst the swirling haze of early grief know the continual bombardment of pain and memories as the permanence of loss is painfully realized.

My early days of grief brought me home for a week away from my new existence as a college freshman which seemed suddenly so distant. While home for the week I sought to escape my thoughts by watching television, such brief respites from my intense pain were not only necessary, but few and far between. As I walked into the den, I caught my father sitting on the edge of the couch in the grip of his own painful moment of grief. I could see him facing the stark realization that his son would never again walk through the door, ask to go deep sea fishing, try to weasel a couple of bucks before rushing out the door. I sat quietly down beside him, not quite knowing if he would be receptive or embarrassed by my presence. I slipped an arm up over his shoulders which began to shake silently before my arm could even come to rest. The silent shakes of his shoulders gave way to heart wrenching, gut churning, whole body sobs. I reached up across his chest to grasp his opposite shoulder and lowered my cheek onto the shoulder nearest me; feeling his tears fall across my forearm. I couldn't tell you how long we sat there sharing our tears, our pain.

It was the first time I had ever seen my father truly break down, the first time I witnessed something more than a single stoic tear trickle down his cheek. As I look back on the experience I recognize it as a turning point in our relationship. His intense pain did not create for me a greater burden in my grief. I was not frightened. My world did not cave in because my father allowed me to see him grieve. In all honestly, my world was enriched because my father not only allowed me to see him grieve, he allowed me to grieve with him, beside him in a moment which laid the foundation of our current relationship. His actions let me know it is alright for me to allow myself to feel pain, but to share it with my family. I do not hesitate to call my parents, or show up at their doorstep when I am desperately missing Carl, or grieving the loss of our unrealized future. I desperately want Carl to know my daughter; to be an uncle to her as just as much as I desperately desire to be an aunt to the children he will never have. Grief is not only missing what was, but missing what would have been.

I am grateful to my father for showing me I am not alone in my grief. Only time can lessen the pain of grief, but my pain is more bearable when I share my grief. I have grown up with the knowledge of people who believe real men don't cry. Maybe they haven't lost a son. Maybe they haven't had a chance to be an example to the daughters who share their grief. As General Schwarzkopf said in an interview with Barbara Walters when asked if he was afraid to cry, "I'm afraid of any person who won't cry."

Carrie Kears
In Memory of my brother, Carl
October 11, 2005

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.

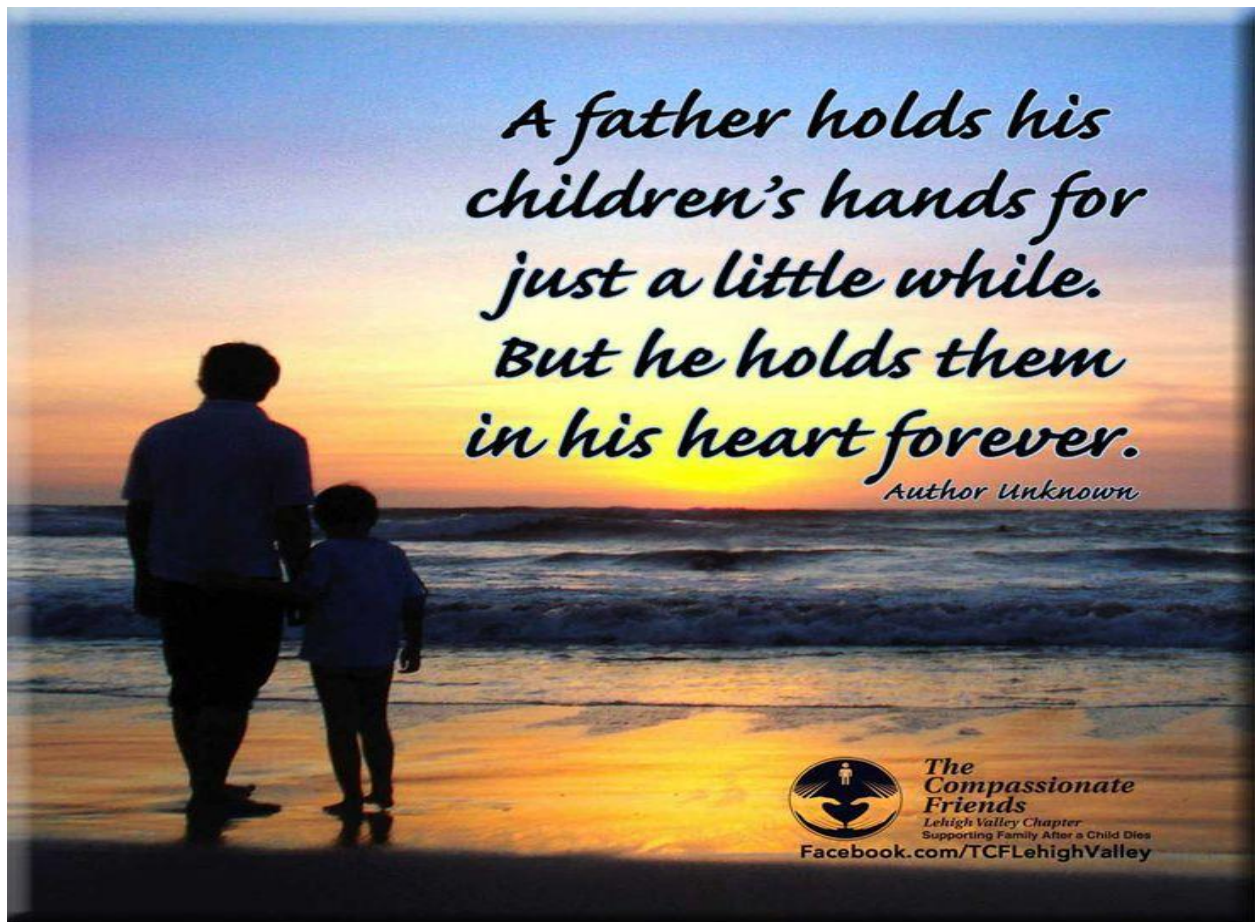
November will be a difficult month for my family as we remember my son Richard's 33rd birthday on November 16 and the one-year anniversary of my daughter Lynn's death on

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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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.

Laura Hengel
281-908-5197
linnemanl@aol.com
Auto Accident

Pat Morgan
713-462-7405
angeltrack@aol.com
Adult Child

Connie Brandt
281-320-9973
clynncooper@hotmail.com
Auto Accident

Beth Crocker
281-923-5196
thecrockers3@comcast.net
Multiple Loss
Heart Disease

Julie Joiner
832-724-4299
dtjb19@gmail.com
Infant Child
Multiple Loss

Loretta Stephens
281-782-8182
andersonloretta@sbcglobal.net
Auto Accident

Lisa Thompson
713-376-5593
lisalou862@yahoo.com
Auto Accident/Fire

Pat Gallien
281-732-6399
agmom03@aol.com
Organ Donor

Leigh Heard-Boyer
281-785-6170
boyerbetterhalf@yahoo.com
Substance Abuse

FOR FATHERS:

Nick Crocker
832-458-9224
thecrockers3@comcast.net
Multiple Loss
Heart Disease

David Hendricks
936-441-3840
dbhhendricks@hotmail.com
Auto Accident

Glenn Wilkerson
832-878-7113
glennwilkerson@thearkgroup.org
Infant Child