



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 2023

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

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

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 Cherlynn 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
1985 - Rachel Livingston, daughter of Beth Rosler
1985 - Darryl Allen, Son of Sandra Allen
2000 - Lucy Schaefer, Daughter of Amy Croston
1975 - Russell Johnson, Son of Sue Johnson

*I'm beginning to know your children
From the things I've heard you tell,
From the pictures that you've brought here
I think I know them well
Our hurt and sorrow are immense
I'm not sure where to start.
Compassion after all is
Your pain in my heart.
My thanks to you for listening
To words wrung from my soul.
We are The Compassionate Friends
That's all I need to know.*

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 Yhshrhal, 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
2021 - Elijah Tsafarides, Son of Gerri Tsafarides
2019 - Brittany Swan, Daughter of Kimberly Swan
2022 - Mary McDonald, Daughter of Brian and Milly McDonald
2021 - Christian A. Carr, Son of Ivonne A. Carr
2020 - Joshua Bell, Son of Jamie Bell

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

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, June 13th at 7pm. Make a special note that we will be in a Room #213 for this meeting.

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.

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 feelings 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.

Still Time To Register

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS 46TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE

July 7, 2023 – July 9, 2023

Sheraton Downtown Denver Hotel

1550 Court Place

Denver, CO 80202

This year's conference will be held at the Sheraton Denver Downtown. Reservations can now be made online at TCF's dedicated [reservation link](#). Our discounted room rate with the Sheraton is \$159 per night plus tax. Please note that each attendee can reserve a maximum of two rooms. Many attendees arrive on Thursday since the conference begins early on Friday morning. We also have pre-conference activities that are offered on Thursday evening, that attendees find beneficial. We look forward to seeing you in Denver!

2023 National Conference Schedule

Thursday, July 6

Time	Event
8:30 am – 5:00 pm	TCF Volunteer Leadership Training
2:00 pm – 9:00 pm	Conference Check-in/Onsite Registration
7:00 pm – 8:00 pm	Meet and Greet
8:30 pm – 9:30 pm	Sharing Sessions

Friday, July 7

Time	Event
7:00 am – 4:00 pm	Conference Check-in/Onsite Registration
8:00 am – 5:30 pm	Main Sessions and Workshops
7:00 pm – 8:30 pm	Friday Evening Special Programs/Workshops
7:30 pm – 11:00 pm	Sibling Dance Party (siblings age 18+)
9:00 pm – 10:00 pm	Sharing Sessions

Saturday, July 8

Time	Event
7:30 am – 8:30 am	Sharing Sessions
8:00 am – 12:00 pm	Conference Check-in/Onsite Registration
9:00 am – 4:30 pm	Main Sessions and Workshops
7:00 pm – 9:15 pm	Saturday Keynote & Candle Lighting Program Dinner
9:30 pm – 10:30 pm	Sharing Sessions

Sunday, July 9

Time	Event
7:00 am – 7:45 am	Chapel Service
7:00 am – 8:00 am	Onsite Walk Registration
8:00 am – 9:00 am	TCF Walk to Remember
9:45 am – 10:30 am	Sibling Sunday Program (all welcome)
10:30 am – 11:00 am	Conference Closing Program

A VISITATION DREAM

My son David died February 26, 1997 after almost three days in intensive care unit in Pueblo, Colorado. Two days later in the late afternoon, after spending two days dealing with medical examiners and death certificates, my surviving three children, David and myself flew back to Houston. We arrived late, and I drove home with my children.

The next day I was scheduled to go to the funeral home to make final arrangements and to meet with my minister to plan David's funeral. I was exhausted and emotionally spent. That night I had my only visitation dream in over twenty six years. David appeared radiant and handsome. His blond hair was gleaming and there were several young men with him who I didn't recognize. He said, "Dad, you're busy, but then you're always busy. But I'm busy too and have lots to do. I just wanted you to know I'm OK." With that he turned and left. That was the end of my visitation dream.

The next day I went to the funeral home and met with my minister. That afternoon I called David's mother, who was in Germany with a broken leg and couldn't make it to the funeral, to report what was going on. Before I could give her my report, she said let me tell you about a dream I had last night. She said David appeared glowing and totally handsome. He had several friends with him. He told her he was busy, but he wanted her to know he was OK. Two dreams, one message, delivered personally on two different continents on the same night. Yes, I believe in dreams and signs. I have lived with that dream as comfort since David's death.

After listening to other parents describe their dreams, I differentiate a visitation dream from a dream about the deceased in several ways. In a visitation dream:

- 1) Both parties know about the death.
- 2) The deceased speaks directly to the parent.
- 3) The deceased wants to assure the dreamer that he or she is OK.

In addition and in general, the deceased looks great, has a definite glow, is busy so can't stay long and the conversations occur in "mind speak" rather than words. Each party just knows what the other is saying.

I pray regularly for another visitation dream, but it hasn't happened. I've had some signs, but I sure would like David to speak to me.

David Hendricks
In Memory of My Son David
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter



Big Plans

Before my daughter died I had big plans. I was an avid gardener. Every chance I got I was out in the yard. My entire back yard was a butterfly, hummingbird garden. It was a certified backyard habitat registered by the National Wildlife Association and a certified Monarch butterfly way station registered with National Monarch Society. If I wasn't riding my John Deer mower in the front yard, I was probably planting or pruning in the back. I was taking classes to receive my organic gardening license and my husband and I even bought a lovely little 13 acre vegetable farm in Comfort, TX, complete with a homestead on it from the 1920's and a year-round, spring fed creek. I was going to retire in Comfort and raise and sell organic vegetables.

Then Angela died. I thought I was going to die. I lay on the couch for a year. I screamed, I cried, I went to counseling and to TCF meetings. Slowly, I tried to get back into the rhythm of life. My back yard was a mess due to lack of maintenance. My front yard didn't look much better. I half heartedly tried do my gardening. I didn't have the energy or the enthusiasm I once did. Things weren't as beautiful as they once were. The colors of the flowers weren't as vivid as they once were not nor did they smell as sweet. When I planted, the earth didn't feel good in between my fingers like it once did. I started getting horrible headaches every time I tried to work outside. It felt like the back of my head was coming off. I thought that it was either stress or perhaps allergies. I came down with one sinus infection after another. I finally went to a specialist. I needed sinus surgery to correct my abnormally small sinus passages. After all these years I spent loving the outdoors and gardening, I now needed sinus surgery? It didn't make a lot of sense to me at the time. I now believe that somehow the grievous loss of my daughter was such a blow to me physically that it weakened my defenses and my precarious sinus condition manifested itself.

Take good care of yourself. The loss of a child is the worst blow a person can suffer. When we lose a child we are encouraged to reach out for help through family, friends, clergy, professional counseling, support groups, etc. All of these outlets can be invaluable in helping us as bereaved parents to survive the impossible. One important aspect of dealing with loss that is often over looked is our physical health. The physical effect that the loss of a child has on our bodies can be just as real and devastating as the impact that it has on us spiritually, mentally and psychologically. Make sure that your doctor is aware of what you are going through. Be careful not to miss your annual checkups. Try to get enough sleep and if you can take a walk and get some fresh air. Come to TCF meetings. You will find empathy and understanding. And most of all, try to keep on loving yourself.

Janet G. Reyes
TCF Alamo Area Chapter, TX

FATHERS DAY

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 one year, 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

Father's Day Is Still a Time for Celebrating . . .

A long time has passed since I've enjoyed a holiday—or for that matter any special occasion.

With Father's Day coming up shortly, I've decided that this year I'm celebrating.

The kids used to love when special occasions came along. I can still remember Stef's eighth birthday, only three months before her death, and how proud she was when we told her she could invite her best friends over for a birthday party. She wore her prettiest blue trimmed party dress with the lace ruffles.

The games they played still stick in my mind. There was "pin the tail on the donkey" and then "Simon Says." I remember clothes flying everywhere in a contest to see which child could put on a complete set of clothes fastest over her party clothes. I remember the hotdogs, punch and cake, the party favors. I remember Stef's giggles.

The memories also wander back to the party our family threw for Stephen's fifth birthday, only three days before the accident which also claimed his life. I still have the picture in my mind of that goofy orange cap someone had given Steve. He loved it, but it was at least two sizes too small. When he tried to put it on, the bill of the cap was up and Stephen flashed us one of those impish grins that reminds you of Spanky and Our Gang.

As I'm writing this, the tears are flowing down my cheeks remembering the good times we had together.

A lot of things changed when the kids died. Christmas, Easter, birthdays all became days other people celebrated. But not us.

I've done a lot of thinking since then. I know Stef and Steve are in a better place than I could ever imagine and that every day is a holiday for them. In my mind, I think Stef and Stephen would be sad if they felt their Mom and Dad couldn't celebrate life anymore.

Pat and I now have another son, Christopher, plus we have our fourth child on the way. We're trying to rebuild our lives and I feel we have been blessed along the way. Of course, Christopher is too young to understand Father's Day, but even without him here, I would still consider celebrating Father's Day.

I can still remember the Father's Day a couple of years before Stef and Stephen died. With their mom, they had searched all over for something special for me, finally


deciding on a T-Shirt that said "World's Coolest Dad." I still wear that now faded shirt occasionally despite the many grass stains and grease marks.

When Father's Day arrives, I think I'm going to pull out that old T-Shirt and wear it.

I'm going to lay down out in the grass, letting the warm breeze hit me. And I'm going to pretend I'm being caressed by Stef and Steve. I'm going to remember . . . and I'm going to celebrate!!!

Wayne Loder

TCF Lakes Area, MI
In Memory of Stephanie and Stephen Loder



Lost love is still love...
It just takes a different form, that's all.
You can't hold their hand...
You can't touse their hair...
But when those senses weaken
another one comes to life...
Memory...
Memory becomes your partner.
You hold it... you dance with it...
Life has to end... Love doesn't.
— Mitch Albom

Thinking about all the dads who are remembering a child on Father's Day
From all of us at RowanTreeFoundation.org

A Fathers 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 "World's 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 Fathers 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

How Dad Copes

It will be four years on May 31 this year since our son Nicholas passed away. Wow. I never imagined in a million years this would happen to us. It is difficult to deal with the aching pain I still feel in my heart. Nicholas's friends are getting married and having children. Though we are happy for them, our sadness deepens with the thought of how different it could be if he were still here.

The anxiety that begins to build in the latter part of April in preparation for the anniversary of Nicholas's passing gets stronger and stronger as the day comes near.

Past years were shock years. I couldn't figure out how to deal with it all. I would listen to other parents that are further along in their grief for coping strategies, but it did not seem to help. How could anyone help me heal my heart after it was broken into a trillion pieces?

I have found that speaking about Nicholas to friends, family, and new acquaintances helps me tremendously. At first it was difficult to do because it does make some people uncomfortable. The more I do it, the easier it gets, and the better I feel. Talking about my son has been like a pressure relief valve for me.

I also make time to think about Nicholas and release my emotions. This time alone to reflect and weep brings overwhelming, though temporary, relief. Dads tend to hold back tears and feelings. We like to think we can maintain control. My advice is don't try. Instead, let your feelings go in private at a time and place of your choosing.

Thinking back to the beginning of this tragic event in our lives, I should have sought counseling from a grief therapist. My wife and I both should have done this. I truly believe this would have helped us develop better coping skills. At that time I didn't think private counseling would help. I was wrong.

Finally, The Compassionate Friends (TCF) volunteers are available to us all. TCF volunteers understand your loss and the dual problem of "maintaining control" for the sake of our family. Our chapter newsletter lists names and telephone numbers of other fathers and mothers ready and willing to assist us. I am one of the parents who volunteers to talk with grieving fathers. I have even become active in the administrative aspects of our chapter. Now, I tell parents, "we sincerely regret the circumstance that has brought you to this group." This is a club none of us dreamed we would ever join. I thank TCF for helping my family and me and for allowing me to help others.

Albert Tapia
TCF Katy Chapter,
In Memory of my son, Nicholas Albert Tapia

*What do we live for if not to make life less difficult
for each other? ~ George Eliot*



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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