



# ***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.*

## **MARCH 2018**

### **HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

[www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org](http://www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org)

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

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

**(Our next meeting is Tuesday, March 13th)**

**Because of the ongoing renovations at Cypress Creek Christian Church our meeting this month will be held once again at the home of Mark and Debbie Rambis. Their address is: 3607 Bainbridge Estates Dr. Spring, TX 77388.**

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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.





## MARCH BIRTHDAYS

1983- Aaron James O'Neil, Son of Lisa Thompson  
1990- Charles James Booth, Son of Mary Booth  
1993- Alex John Piniewski, Son of Bob & Christi Piniewski  
1981- Hugo Alberto DeLeon, Son of Lupita DeLeon  
1989- Todd Perotka II, Son of Todd & Tonya Perotka  
1998- Liam Young, Son of Jill Young  
1974- Heather Ann Varosky, Daughter of Edward & Ann Varosky  
1988- Kate Bronstein, Daughter of Pat Bronstein  
1994- Samantha Campos, Daughter of Amy Arrant  
2011- Landyn Elizabeth Tickle, Daughter of Matthew & Shelby Tickle  
Granddaughter of Brenda Strahan  
1983- Rikki Ashley Brown, Daughter of Mike & Gwen Williams  
2012 – Annabelle Opal, Daughter of Pearl Fisher  
2003 - Austin Haecker, Son of Debbie Haecker, Grandson of Carolyn Cooper  
1952 - Gene Ware, Son of Roberta Ware  
1994 - Joshua Pham, Son of Tony & Peach Pham, grandson of Susan Endaluz  
1995 - April Ann Ulrich, Daughter of Josette & Doug Tharp  
1979 - Kyla, Daughter of Ron O'Farrell  
1973 - Amy Lynn Kramberger, Daughter of Nancy & Ken Thornton  
1966 - Jeffrey Scott Byers, Son of Deanna Young  
1999 - Evelyn Sweat, Daughter of Nathan & Anna Sweat  
1984 - Brian Smith, Son of Cindy Smith

*"Throughout our lives we are sent  
precious souls...  
meant to share our journey,  
however brief or lasting their stay  
they remind us why we are here.*

*To learn...to Teach...to Nurture...to love."*

*-"Some People" by Flavia Weedn*

## MARCH ANGEL DATES

1993- Richard Allen Ginn, Son of Barbara & Richard Ginn  
2008- Pamela Ann Roberson, Daughter of Doris & Dale Hockstra  
2002- Brittany Idabell Miller, Daughter of George & Kathy Miller  
2001- Jenny Nolan Burgess, Daughter of Jenelle Chamberlain  
2010- Kelsey Buzzanco, Son of Jane Winter  
2008- Syrina Snow Salazar, Daughter of April R. Torres  
2009- Todd Perotka II, Son of Todd & Tonya Perotka  
2007- Heather Ann Varosky, Daughter of Edward & Ann Varosky  
2008- Amanda Cristina Ramirez-Velazquez, Daughter of Cynthia Cruz  
2010- Jason Allen Denbo, Son of Donna J. Denbo  
1999- Cheyenne Crocker, Daughter of Beth & Nick Crocker  
2001- Jason R. Kramberger, Son of Nancy & Ken Thornton  
2008- Samantha Alonso, Daughter of Joanna Alonso  
2010-Julee Ann Serna, Daughter of Virginia Serna  
2006-Gregory Lynn Meier, Son of Gary Meier  
2008- Chance Wilcox, Son of Shelli Ralls  
1992- Kylar Shotwell, Daughter of Tracy Bradley  
2012 – Annabelle Opal, Daughter of Pearl Fisher  
2013 – Ryan Bennett, Son of Dan & Cindy Bennett  
2014 - Julie Less, Daughter of Jim Less, Sister of Susan Less  
2015 - Moriah Clay, Daughter of Kim Clay  
2015 - Nathan Waldron, Son of Dan Waldron

*"The world loves closure, loves a thing that can, as they say, be gotten through. This is why it comes as a great surprise to find that loss is forever, that two decades after the event there are those occasions when something in you cries out at the continual presence of an absence."*

*—Anna Quindlen*



## CHAPTER NEWS

**Our next meeting is Tuesday, March, 13th at 7pm. Mark your calendars for our annual Balloon Release on Tuesday, May 8th. (more information to come).**

**Since last September Mark and Debbie Rambis have continuing to host our chapter meetings at their home. We are so very grateful for their hospitality. As some of you know firsthand, the destruction and recovery from hurricane Harvey is a long slow process. Construction on Cypress Creek Christian Church is moving along. I check in with them monthly for an update, and I am hopeful we will be back at the church in April.**

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

We offer our warmest welcome to all our 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 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.

**What non-bereaved parents and others often fail to understand is the fact that someone is dead may mean that they are not alive, but it doesn't mean they do not exist.**

***Always end your day with a positive thought.  
No matter how bad things are,  
tomorrow is another chance to make things better.***



# 41ST TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE

**JULY 27 - JULY 29**



The Compassionate Friends is pleased to announce that St. Louis, Missouri, will be the site of the 41st TCF National Conference on July 27-29, 2018. “Gateway to Hope and Healing” is the theme of this year’s event, which promises more of this last’s great National Conference experience. The 2018 Conference will be held at the Marriott St. Louis Grand Hotel. We’ll keep you updated with details here, on the national website as well as on our [TCF/USA Facebook Page](#) and elsewhere as they become available. Plan to come and be a part of this heartwarming experience.

## [Register Now](#)

Adult Registration: \$115  
Child Registration (9-17) \$55  
Full-time College Student Registration \$55  
Active Military Registration \$55

To help plan your time in St. Louis, view the general [conference schedule](#). We also have a list of the [Workshops](#) available.

## **Hotel Reservations**

TCF’s discounted rate with the Marriott St. Louis Grand Hotel is \$140 per night plus tax. Reservations can now be made [online](#) or by calling the Marriott Reservation line at 800-397-1287. Please note that each attendee will only be able to reserve two rooms. If your group needs to reserve a larger block of rooms, please contact the National Office to make arrangements for your reservations.

Transportation to/from the Marriott St. Louis Grand Hotel to/from the St. Louis Lambert International Airport (approximately 15 miles)  
GO BEST Express 877-785-4682: \$21.00 one way  
Estimated taxi fare: \$40.00 one way  
Bus service: \$7.00 one way  
Subway service: \$3.50 one way



*I was humbled by David's request to write something for The Compassionate Friends newsletter. Since most of you do not know me, I'll start with a little of my story.*

On March 23, 2001, my son, Jason died from a reaction to a medication given to him by his doctor less than 10 days prior. His autopsy showed that he died from Myocarditis, an inflammation of his heart. Jason was 26 years old. Needless to say, I was devastated. I read many books on the death of a child and then found my way to my first Compassionate Friends meeting. We were living in Maryland at the time and that first meeting is still burned into my memory, there were over 100 people in attendance! I left the meeting in tears and my husband questioned whether it was the right place for me. I told him I was crying because I had never experienced so much pain from so many people at one time. Continuing to go to meetings was one of the best decisions I ever made. We continued with that group until we moved back to The Woodlands and I attended the Northwest Houston Chapter. From there, we moved to Dallas for 2 years, then back to Spring. During all of this time, it didn't matter where we were, The Compassionate Friends was my lifeline to sanity.

I had support from my family and friends but unless you have lost a child, it is impossible to relate to what we go through. Everyone grieves differently and in their own way and in their own time. Quite frankly, it took me 5 years before I felt like my old self, until I achieved my "new normal." To this day, nearly 16 years later, I still think about and cherish the memories of my son every day.

I learned so much from sharing with other members of TCF and attribute my ability to cope with the tools I learned from the "old timers." Genuine love and compassion from the family of TCF is beyond measure.

In 2010, I had surgery to remove a brain tumor, leaving me legally blind and unable to drive. Unfortunately, I have been unable to attend meetings since.

About 4 years ago, my only surviving child, Amy was diagnosed with Vasculitis. She had obtained 2 Master's Degrees and started on her PhD when she got sick. Her life as she knew it, all of her hopes and dreams, came to a screeching halt. The past 2 years she was in

excruciating pain and suffered many severe infections. She spent 70 days in the hospital during that time. Thankfully, as a retired Paramedic, I was able to care for her at home, giving her the IV medications she needed. In September of last year, her doctors basically told us there was nothing more they could do for her and suggested she enter hospice. Amy made the decision to do so, and after 10 days in home hospice care, she died on October 12th.

So here I am again, grieving the loss of a child, my last child. Amy was 43 years old, my best friend and, truly, the only other person who had shared all of the memories of her little brother, Jason.

I feel an emptiness like no other. I will never hear anyone call me “mom” for the rest of my life. I question my purpose. I ask “why?” I think the word “miss” is so inadequate. I am angry. I am jealous of those with children and grandchildren. But I am grateful for the time we had, the memories, the love we shared,

I am grateful for all that I learned from TCF. I don't judge how I feel, I don't surround myself with people that don't support me and let me grieve in my own way. I will survive. My husband, my kids' stepfather is amazing. He understands and supports me and gives me the space I need. I know I'm allowed to do this my way and that's what I'm doing. I know it takes time. The world goes on, but for me, there is and always will be a void that can never be filled. My only consolation is that my two beautiful children, that loved each other so much, are together again. I have two Guardian Angels looking out for me, I will survive.

So, bless you all, the surviving parents, grandparents and siblings. We are all now members of an exclusive club - one no one wants to be a part of, but unfortunately, we don't get to choose our challenges, just how we handle them.

I pray for your peace.

**Nancy K. Thornton**  
**TCF Houston Northwest Chapter**  
**Mother of:**  
**Amy Lynn Kramberger 3/9/1973 - 10/12/2016**  
**Jason Robert Kramberger 2/28/1975 - 3/23/2001**





## 6 Things I Wish People Knew About Grieving the Loss of a Child

By: Malka Ahmed

Grieving the loss of a child is a grief that is unique. It is a loss that is still largely considered taboo, and when someone experiences the tragic loss of losing a child, there are very few societal norms that can guide family and friends when their loved one finds themselves in the path of an unfathomable loss. I lost my daughter a year and half ago, and I still consider my grief to be very new. But it surprises me every time I meet up with a friend or see family, and their reactions to my pain. Here, I've compiled the six things I wish people understood about grieving the loss of a child:

### **One: Grief and Love are the same.**

Please don't think that because I am still grieving for my child even after all this time that there is something wrong with me, or that I need to get over it. I grieve deeply for the loss of my child because I also love her deeply. Love never dies, therefore neither will grief.

### **Two: I will never get over it.**

I may look like I finally got my life back together, I may have even gone on to have more children or embarked on a new career, but my child and the trauma of losing her is always one step behind. My tears may have dried, and I can probably utter my child's name without breaking apart, but please know that I will never, ever get over the fact that she is gone.

### **Three: Silence is deafening.**

I know it must be very difficult and confusing to know what to say to someone who has lost a child. I know how uncomfortable and unfathomable it must be to you, but please know that wrongly worded sentiments are easier to forgive than your silence. My world has forever been shattered, a simple "I'm sorry" will do.

### **Four: My child is irreplaceable.**

It doesn't matter when my loss may have occurred, whether it was an early miscarriage, or if I had the chance to spend a few moments with my child before she died. Babies are not interchangeable and any subsequent child born after is not replacement.

### **Five: I'll always live in a parallel universe.**

No matter how much time has gone by, when an important holiday or occasion occurs, my mind is going to retreat into another universe where my child would have been present. I will calculate how old they would be and how they would look. This whole entire universe is something I hold on my own, so if you find me retreating inward during a significant day, please know that I am in that place that I share uniquely with my child and my imagination. It's just how things are always going to be.

### **Six: I am forever changed.**

The day my child died is the same day a big part of me died too. I won't go back to being my usual innocent and carefree self again. It will take time for me to find myself, and return back home. But when I've figured out a way to put together all the broken pieces, I won't look the same. Please understand that.

If you have experienced the loss of a child or pregnancy, what do you wish other people would understand about it?

*This post originally appeared on [Still Standing Magazine](#)*

**HOPES AND DREAMS**  
**In Memory of My Daughter Debbie**  
**by: Pat Morgan**  
**TCF Houston Northwest chapter**

On October 29, 2007, the bottom dropped out of my world. My only child who had been fighting a MRSA infection for three months developed blood clots in her legs and was suddenly gone from me and this world. She was fifty-one.

Wow, you think. You had her all that time. You should be grateful because I only had my child a fraction of that time. Wrong. No matter when your child crosses over there is never enough time.

My first thought when the doctor came to me was: Well, I cared for her all her life, loved her, educated her, nursed her, laughed and cried with her. She can't take this last journey alone. I must go with her – see to her – make sure she's not frightened. We will do this as we did everything - together. This soon passes, especially if you have other responsibilities; other children, a husband, a job where they depend on you, elderly parents, animals and all looking to you for answers. And at this point you don't even have questions. You are in a very dark place where every breath is grabbed for, every thought must be monitored (no, don't go there) and there is only one thing you know for sure, your life, such as it is, will never be the same. And it won't.

So, you start the work of survival. Trying to sleep, almost afraid because of the dreams, bouncing around the five grief steps, walking the dogs, taking your mother to the doctors. Doing but not feeling. You're numb and scattered and you cry all the time. I cried when I didn't know I was crying. All of a sudden there would be tears streaming down my face. It happened once in the dentist's office and he looked down and asked, "Am I hurting you?" "Nope, I replied. "I just lost my daughter." He didn't question me again but I bet when I walked out of there and waiting patients saw my face, they thought of looking for a new dentist.

It took weeks, months and years for me to get on with it. And only recently I realized in the middle of a crying jag, set off by a movie we had seen together, that I was not only mourning the loss of my child, I was mourning the loss of the hopes and dreams that she represented in my life. And I knew I was crying for myself as well as missing her so much. The passports we got that summer that will never be used, there will be no wedding plans, no son-in-law that would never be good enough, no grandchildren, no use for the box of cookie cutters I had collected. Was I even a mother any longer, I thought?

Of course, I am. I will always be and the memories, those lost hopes and dreams, will always be with me as she will always be with me. But over time I have developed new hopes and dreams, new skills, new interests and through prayer and meditation have found a way to co-exist with them all. That's not to say I don't still have my "bubble ups" but they're fewer and farther between. And, guess what, it's spring.

*Pat Morgan has been a member of our chapter for several years. She always has been a source of good humor and wisdom while relating stories of her journey. She is a professional playwright, wrote a book "Angel Tracks", published by All Things That Matter Press, and has been an asset to our group. Thanks Pat - David*

## Some People Say . . .

"I wouldn't go to one of those grief meetings. It's morbid—people sitting around talking about the dead." How wrong those people are! In so many ways, those who attend are saying, "I am hurting now, but I want to go on with my life." They are saying, "I am crying now, but I want to laugh again." They are saying, "I am sick in body and soul; help me get well." I see these things as healthy, not morbid.

It is not easy to walk into a meeting of any kind alone, especially one where the subject is very emotional; but once there, it takes only a few minutes to find out we are not alone; that there are those who care about us and want to help us. We see others hurting and suddenly we want to help them. I don't see that as morbid.

A grieving parent wants to talk about his beloved child who is no longer physically part of his life. That child has died with a tragic suddenness or as a result of an illness that usually takes older people. We want to know why or find a reason or some meaning in our child's death. I don't see any morbidity in trying to understand.

Memories of our child are all we have left. We have a driving need to hang on to those memories lest we lose that small bit of our child. It is not morbid to want to keep that small part alive forever, at least in our hearts and minds.

To walk into a bereaved parents' meeting is a loud shout - "I want to live and be happy again." It is a cry that "My child is dead, but I know he would want me to go on and be a better person for the suffering." It is a confirmation that "Even though part of my life is gone, there is a reason to go on." There is nothing morbid about doing what is necessary in order to re-enter the mainstream of life.

*Margaret Gerner, TCF St. Louis, MO*



*There are no easy paths to finding your way through your grief, but The Compassionate Friends organization and its members are here so that you will never have to feel alone in your journey.*

## Remembering the gifts of grief

By Dana Rogers  
Special to The Daily News  
Published June 3, 2012

As I emerge from my “dark night of the soul,” I am aware of changes that have taken place. I am a different person. This is what is meant when people say they are not the same person as before a tragedy.

Feelings are different. Senses are much more acute. Colors are brighter, and small things are just that — small things.

A higher understanding or truth is one of the gifts. Things are much clearer to me now. I can almost feel a person’s sincerity or lack thereof. I can feel love as a tangible thing. I no longer hold grudges, nor am I quick to anger because it is a waste. But I realize anger is a true emotion that I try to use as a learning tool then let it go.

Before my son died, I received a fortune cookie that said, “You have ability to sense and know a higher truth.” For some reason, I kept this. I’m sure it’s because it seemed like a new age thing that sounded cool. But in truth, it has come to fruition. I now grasp the huge meaning of these few words. I think the higher truth is something we are here to learn, but we usually are too busy looking outside ourselves to see this.

When I was first thrust into the pit of despair, there seemed to be no way out and no desire to come out. I had been shattered as in a broken vase and could hold no water. I was empty.

It was during this time that I recognized the prospect of rebuilding myself and of filling my life one ounce at a time. What an opportunity! It’s almost like a second chance.

Most people don’t look at life this way until the end of their days when they might say, “I wish I had ...” It was similar to facing my own mortality. I was given the opportunity to enrich my life by whatever means I wanted.

I was able to see what mattered and what didn’t. However, before I could act on rebuilding, I had to acknowledge the pain I was in and grieve my son’s passing. I was weak as a newborn and had to grow into my own skin. I had to learn to live with this disability.

Now, I am amazed at the life around me.

I am full of awe just being in the present. Each day is a gift. Each person in that day has a lesson for me and is also a gift.

It’s been seven years, and I still fall into the pit, but now when I do, I acknowledge it and still myself, I hope to resurface again as I try to remember the gifts awaiting me. I have a place in the pit that I’ve come to know and not fear. I was born there. I was taught much from there. I



dreamed of my new life from there. Only from the darkness can you appreciate the light.

However, when I'm in the pit, the light is so far away and dim. Sometimes I worry I might not make it out, but then, somehow, I do — a little wiser than before. I don't want to become too comfortable in the pit. It would be easy to just stay there. It's a hard climb to the light each time, but when I'm clear of it, I realize it was worth the effort.

My wish is that you might find your own gifts and share these with those around you.

*Dana Rogers, of Texas City, is treasurer and meeting facilitator for Galveston County Chapter of The Compassionate Friends, supporting families after the death of a child. She writes in memory of her son Rick (April 12, 1981 to Feb. 3, 2005).*



### Thought for the Day

It is not easy returning to the world of normalcy when your world is so upside down. It is not easy to stop being a mother or father to your child that has died. The thought for the day is a word — **patience** — patience with yourself who suddenly and powerlessly has been thrown into this horrid nightmare; patience with your spouse who always seems to be having an up day when you are having a down day; patience with relatives and friends who wish to help but seem to hurt with hollow advice and logical words; and patience with time, for it takes time to adjust, and time can move so slowly. **PATIENCE!**

Rose Moen  
TCF Carmel-Indianapolis, IN

### ❀ Irish Blessing ❀

May the road rise to meet you.  
May the wind always be at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
And rains fall soft upon your fields.  
And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.



## 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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