



# ***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 2020**

### **HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

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

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

**(Our next meeting is Tuesday, March 10th)**

at

**Cypress Creek Christian Church**

**6823 Cypresswood Drive**

**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.

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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  
2001 - Grace Sanders, Daughter of Mary Parker

"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  
2017 - Jerret Macias, Son of Betty Macias  
2018 - Zach Doss, Son of Susan Doss

*When the links of life are broken and a child has to part,  
there is nothing that will ever heal a parents' broken  
heart.*

*Grief does not ever expire.*



## CHAPTER NEWS

**Our next meeting is Tuesday, March, 10th at 7pm. Mark your calendars for our annual Balloon Release on Tuesday, May 12th. (more information to come).**

### **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.

### **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.

### **NEWSLETTER ARTICLES**

Our chapter welcomes all submissions to our newsletter. Send your articles, poetry, love messages and scanned photos to: David Hendricks at: **dbhhendricks@hotmail.com** The deadline for submitting your articles is the 5th of each month. Errors and Omissions: We try very hard to be sure that all of the names and dates of our children are correct. If you see an error in the newsletter, please contact me.

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





43<sup>rd</sup> TCF National Conference  
July 24-26, 2020 • Atlanta, GA

## HOTEL ROOM BLOCK NOW OPEN FOR THE 2020 TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE – ATLANTA, GA

The Compassionate Friends National Conference is a weekend spent surrounded by other bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings. It is a place where hope grows and friendships are made with others who truly understand. With inspirational keynote speakers, abundant workshops for everyone's wants and needs, and a remembrance candle lighting program culminating with the annual Walk to Remember, this time of healing and hope is the gift we give ourselves. Join us as together we remember and share the everlasting love we have for our precious children, siblings and grandchildren.

We are happy to tell you that our hotel block for the 2020 TCF National Conference in Atlanta, GA July 24-26 at the Atlanta Marriott Marquis is now officially open!

Reservations can be made online or by calling Marriott Reservations directly at (866) 469-5475 and ask for the group rate for The Compassionate Friends 2020 Annual Conference.

<https://book.passkey.com/event/49965389/owner/321/home>

## RELATIONSHIPS

*"Death ends a life, but not a relationship, which struggles on in the survivor's mind toward some resolution it may never find" playwright -Robert Anderson*

The above sentence very well summarizes what we parents are going through. Of course, it matters how your child died, at what age your child died, what kind of support network you have, and other factors. We are drawn to The Compassionate Friends by the death. But here our paths diverge in how we grieve and how our relationship with the deceased plays out.

In my case, I've written about my loss,

You'll be forever that age  
with the same great smile  
I'm growing old without you  
can life be worth while

The answer is life can definitely be worthwhile. And we are given many redemptive possibilities.

And how can I sing  
when I feel such sorrow  
Is God here and  
will He be here tomorrow.

Some of us find comfort in our faith, while others question our faith.

I've also written about my one way conversations:

I still talk to you at times  
and I wonder what you say  
a father shouldn't lose a son  
it's not supposed to be that way

And I still talk to him. I don't know if he doesn't hear or is just too busy to answer. I don't give up; I pray every night. It's only been 23 years.

And I go back to the beginning:

You were taken so young  
Where are you my child  
I long for your touch  
Just to hold you awhile  
My heart fills with anguish  
Despair is my friend  
My journey is lonely  
My thoughts never end

How could I have changed things. Does the guilt go on forever? But I can't change things. I can only keep traveling down that long, unfamiliar road from which there is no return. There are no directions and no time table for that journey.

My spirit is crushed  
Grief took it away  
I'm alone in my thoughts  
It is quiet all day  
And I have this  
unanswered question of why  
Why did this happen  
And why did you die.

But the relationship with our child takes on a life of its own as we seek to remember our child, honor our child, exist with others as we emerge into that being that formed after the death.

Would David be married, would he have children, where would he live, and what would he do? How can I relate to what I don't know. I can only relate to what I know. Or is it ok to imagine?

I can remember our relationship and what happened. I can't remember those things that didn't happen, or is it ok to imagine.

The struggle between what's real and what could have been sometimes rushes in and is overwhelming. At first, I worried I would forget about him. But that was a silly thought of course, we don't forget. Maybe it would be easier if we could. But we can't. We can just go on remembering what the relationship was, what it could have been, and what we imagine it to be now.

The journey doesn't end. The finality is real. Maybe what changes over time is us. I don't think there is a final resolution; and maybe, just maybe that is a good thing.

David B. Hendricks  
Chapter Leader

TCF Houston Northwest Chapter



### **Heeding the Call of Life**

There is tremendous wisdom that is accumulated in one's encounter with grief, and it needs to be shared. Healing takes place when we turn our pain into a positive experience and we realize that helping others is the key to helping ourselves. When that happens, our problems don't look so big. We expand on newfound strengths and we discover that as one door closed, many others have opened. The road to recovery from grief, therefore, is to take time to do things which will enable us to give new meaning to our lives.

That's when our journey through grief becomes a journey of discovering ourselves, our potential, and our resources in the encounter with life. That's when we become BETTER people, rather than BITTER people. In grief, no one can take away our pain because no one can take away our love.

That call to life is to learn to love . . . again.



## And Then There Was Hope

Once, in what is now another life, I thought support groups were for someone else. I felt that with research, personal work, discussions with the elders in my family and wise friends, I would find all the answers I needed. This worked well until December of 2002. My son died. The death of my only child changed everything. My standard methods of "self help" were not going to get me through this. I needed more than even Solomon could give me. And I desperately needed hope.

My first meeting at Compassionate Friends was in March of 2003. My son had been gone almost three months; I was traumatized, I could not speak and I was doubtful that I would ever find even an obscure hint of peace in my life. April's meeting was somewhat better. I spoke a few words. In May I was rocked by the dual anticipation of Mother's Day and my son's birthday. In June I participated in the balloon liftoff; I sprained my ankle as we were walking back from the park. That night, as I sat at home with ice on my ankle, I thought about the past five months. I realized that I was a different person than I had been earlier in the year. I was no longer the woman who walked into her first Compassionate Friends meeting because I was no longer walking alone. There were others at my side, in front of me, behind me, encouraging me, offering gentle suggestions, understanding and listening as I told my child's story over and over and over again.

I discovered that those who had walked this road before me were holding the lanterns of hope to cast light on my life path. It was these people and only these people who could reach me, who could teach me, whose voices could penetrate my fog, whose hearts could help me to begin the healing process.

By the time I marked the first anniversary of my son's death, I was beginning to discover that I had been transformed into a different person. Like my child whose body had died but whose spirit lived on symbolically in the butterfly, I had become a different person. I physically felt the pain of other parents. The first time I offered advice I sat in wonder at the realization that this very effort brought a little more light into my soul. Part of my healing process became the helping process.

Healing is what we seek, but we will never be "cured". As parents who have lost our children, we will never be the same people we were before our child died. I came to accept this fact. But I also found that we can live with this wound which, despite our initial certainty to the contrary, is not usually fatal. It is forever, it is painful, it is the worst wound a human can feel, but it is not fatal. Even when I was wracked with physical pain in my grief, the light of my Compassionate Friends gave me a new perspective, one of hope.

Yes, a part of me died with my son, but the part that remains is constantly changing, continually evolving and always reaching for the light of hope. We each choose different ways to reach for hope, to live our lives as well as we possibly can without our precious children. But eventually we all awaken to hope.

My hope did not come as an epiphany out of the blue, but rather, it was more like a false dawn followed by true, muted rays of the morning sun. My hope was a process. I engaged the process by reaching out to others, listening, learning. I learned that the quick answer is rarely the right answer. I learned that silence often says more than words. I made peace with my pain, and I began to reach out to others with words of hope. For words were my gift to those who had given me so much.

At Compassionate Friends we see many new faces each year. Most parents continue their relationship with the group for at least a year, some for even two years. A few stay three years. The good news is that those who do not choose to come to meetings have chosen to go forward with their lives in a different way. Going forward with their lives is a very positive step and the goal of each bereaved parent. Not all of us stay; not all of us should stay. But for some

of us, the hope continues to rekindle at each meeting. As we meet the newly bereaved and listen to their story, to their child's story, to the outpouring of pure agony and heartbreak, we hold the lantern. These parents will not know exactly what it is that we are doing as they are lost in the fog, as we all once were. Yet, we quietly hold the lantern, we keep the chapter moving forward, we meet parents and talk about their children, about our children, about grief, about life, about death, about pain and about hope. I have chosen to stay and hold the lantern for those who have followed me. For this gives me hope and peace and it keeps my child close to me in even the darkest of nights.

As grief is our companion, time moves forward; the pain becomes less searing, less encompassing. We learn to co-exist with our loss. We treasure our memories, we love our children and our hearts ache with our terrible loss. Yet, we have moved forward on the path. We are holding the lantern for others who find themselves on this path in life. We give this gift of hope with our presence which symbolizes the future of every newly bereaved parent. I remember my child as I walk this road with you.

Annette Mennen Baldwin  
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen  
TCF, Katy, TX



## GRIEF IS LIKE A RIVER

My grief is like a river –  
I have to let it flow,  
But I myself determine  
Just where the banks will go.  
Some days the current takes me  
In waves of guilt and pain,  
But there are always quiet pools  
Where I can rest again.

I crash on rocks of anger –  
My faith seems faint indeed –  
But there are other swimmers  
Who know that what I need  
Are loving hands to hold me  
When the waters are too swift,  
And someone kind to listen  
When I just seem to drift.

Grief's river is like a process  
Of relinquishing the past.  
By swimming in Hope's channel,  
I'll reach the shore at last.

Cynthia G. Kelley  
TCF Cincinnati, OH

## The Tracks of My Tears

It was the fifth of November, the year 2005  
A beautiful sunny afternoon, the time was quarter till 5  
When I opened the door and heard those words  
Our heart were broken, our lives changed forever  
Our son wouldn't come home again, not today...not ever

My tears began falling on the door steps that day  
This couldn't be happening, I pleaded, I prayed  
I lay in his room, holding his clothes and his dog  
I cried through the night into the next day

I couldn't stop crying for days after you died  
Weeks turned to months, eyes blinded by tears  
I still seek my daily refuge in the walls of my shower  
It's been nearly nine months more than three years

Your car in the driveway could easily make me cry  
It was your favorite -- all shiny and black  
It's gone now, but the memories remain  
Wish there was some way time could bring you back

Monday always seems to be the hardest day  
I can't believe you're gone. I still want to know why  
Another week begins without you in our lives  
I guess that will always make me cry

I still shed my Sunday tears  
On the hillside when I visit your grave  
Ask the same questions, say the same prayers  
I know you would want me to be brave

I cried tears of joy the day you were born  
I cried tears of blood the day you died  
When the tracks of my tears have finally ended  
I'll no longer have a reason to cry

Tom Murphy  
Greater Cincinnati TCF - East Chapter, OH  
In Memory of my son, Brennan Murphy

## ***The Luck of the Irish??***

My name should have been O'Loder, for it seemed like I had the luck of the Irish. After all, I grew up in a great home with a wonderful family. I received an excellent education. I got a great job where I met a special person who became my life's partner. I began my own business, which became very successful.

And the greatest luck of all—my daughter was born. It wasn't planned, but God knew what was best. Three years later we were blessed with a son. Stef and Steve lived and played together with a special love.

I still remember the St. Patrick's Day assignment Stef brought home only days before the accident that took her life and that of her brother. Asked to tell why she was lucky, she wrote, *"because I have a brother!"*

A few days later my life lay in a shambles—the best part of my life gone. Stef was only eight and Stephen just five. They hadn't had a chance to really experience what life was all about. It was painfully obvious my name did not start with an O'.

Three years have now passed since that day. The shock of the moment has worn off. My wife and I have somehow survived the deaths and now have a new wonderful son and daughter with which to share our lives—and our love.

But, perhaps, the luckiest thing of all that happened to us since the accident is that we have made new, very special friends—Compassionate Friends who have helped us with our survival.

We have a new family of special people who have survived the unluckiest day of their lives and are able to share their loss with us. Isn't this really what "luck" is all about?

Wayne Loder

TCF Lakes Area Chapter, MI

In Memory of my daughter and son, Stephanie and Stephen Loder

### ***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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