



# *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 2023

### 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 14th)**

**Trinity Lutheran Church**

**Family Life Center #204**

**5201 Spring Cypress Rd.**

**Spring, TX 77379**

The Church is located on the corner of Spring Cypress Road and Klein Church Road. 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.





## 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  
1998 - Brayden, Son of Bill and Lisa Miluszusky  
1988 - Danielle Devillier, Daughter of Wendy Devillier

*"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  
2022 - Jennifer, Daughter of Jim and Donna Bryson

*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 14th. 7pm. at Trinity Lutheran Church, Family Life Center Room 204, 5201 Spring Cypress Rd., Spring 77379.**

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new member, **Sue Johnson, lost her son Russell in 1993.** 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.



**Save \$65 off the Regular Adult Conference Rate by registering now.**

The Special Opening Rate of \$245, which is a savings of \$65 per person, ends on March 31st!

## 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 26 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. Be 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 set 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



## **WHY ME? - The Unanswerable Question**

Most of us have pondered this question at some time in our lives, especially since the death of our children. It resurfaces periodically in discussions with the newly bereaved. I have never been completely satisfied with the responses given and have gone away considering "Why me?" to be an unanswerable question.

That was until recently when an article was brought to my attention. The writer states that no one is immune to disaster. "Whatever else separates us, suffering is the common bond of our humanity." He told the tale of several people shattered by great losses, including the death of a child, each searching for an answer to "Why, why me?"

They came together in their suffering. Though unable to prevent the pain, these fellow griever found that by sharing their hurt, standing together and supporting one another they could endure devastating losses.

"Why me?" is a singular and lonely question, but it doesn't have to be. Together we can give hope to the hopeless and comfort to the suffering. All we need to do is reach out, then maybe the "Why me?" will answer itself.

Polly Moore  
TCF Nashville, TN

## The Grief of a Parent Who Has Lost an Infant

To experience the loss of an infant is to grieve for what never was. After all the months of anticipation and preparation, the actual birth of a child brings the feeling of hope and fulfillment. Should the child be stillborn, or die hours, days or even months later, the unrealized dreams become a source of pain for parents. No parent ever expects to outlive his child; the death of an infant is often the loss of a child unknown even to his parents. The expected stages of grief (guilt, disbelief, anger, etc.) can have new directions for the parents who have lost an infant.

**1. Shame and Guilt** - Especially if the infant was stillborn or had a birth defect, the mother may feel she has failed as a woman. "Other women have live, normal babies, why can't I?" Should an infant die months after birth, parents find it hard to resolve feelings that it was their fault.

**2. No Memories** - Parents may only have "souvenirs of the occasion" (birth certificate, I.D. bracelet) by which to remember their child. If the infant is older, they may have pictures and a few belongings, but they still feel they hadn't really gotten to know their child.

**3. Loneliness in Grief** - It is hard for friends and relatives to share your grief for a child they never knew. If the child is newborn, they may give the impression you are grieving unnecessarily, they hope you can "forget this baby" and "have another one."

**4. Neglected Fathers** - Too often the sympathies of professionals and friends are directed mainly to the mother. It is important to remember that the father had made plans for this baby, too.

**5. Mothers vs. Fathers** - Since the mother has bonded with her child during the pregnancy, her grief may be much deeper than the father's, who only came to know this child after birth. It may be difficult for a father to understand why his wife's grief is so profound and so prolonged.

Claire McGaughey and Sue Shelley  
TCF St. Louis, MO



### For Loved Ones Lost From My Special Angel:

The gap between those who have lost children and those who have not is profoundly difficult to bridge. No one whose children are well and intact can be expected to understand what parents who have lost children have absorbed, what they bear. Our children now come to us through every blade of grass, every crack in the sidewalk, every bowl of breakfast cereal, every kid on a scooter. We seek contact with their atoms – their hairbrushes, toothbrushes, their clothing.

We reach out for what was integrally woven into the fabric of our lives, now torn and shredded. A black hole has been blown through our souls and, indeed, it often does not allow the light to

escape. It is a difficult place. For us to enter there is to be cut deeply and torn anew, each time we go there, by the jagged edges of our loss. Yet we return, again and again, for that is where our children now reside. This will be so for years to come and it will change us, profoundly. At some point, in the distant future, the edges of that hole will have tempered and softened, but the empty space will remain—a life sentence.

Our friends will change through this. There is no avoiding it. We grieve for our children in part, through talking about them, and our feelings for having lost them. Some go there with us; others cannot and, through their denial, add a further measure, however unwitting, to an already heavy burden. Assuming that we may be feeling “better” 6 months later is simply “to not get it”. The excruciating and isolating reality that bereaved parents feel is hermetically sealed from the nature of any other human experience. Thus it is a trap—those whose compassion and insight we most need are those for whom we abhor the experience that would allow them that sensitivity and capacity. And yet, somehow, there are those, each in their own fashion, who have found a way to reach us and stay, to our immeasurable comfort. They have understood, again each in their own way, that our children remain our children through our memory of them. Their memory is sustained through speaking about them and our feelings about their death. Deny this and you deny their life. Deny their life and you have no place in ours.

We recognize that we have moved to an emotional place where it is often very difficult to reach us. Our attempts to be normal are painful, and the day to day carries a silent, screaming anguish that accompanies us, sometimes from moment to moment. Were we to give it its own voice, we fear we would become truly unreachable and so we remain “strong” for a host of reasons even as the strength saps our energy and drains our will. Were we to act out our true feelings, we would be impossible to be with. We resent having to act normal, yet we dare not do otherwise.

People who understand this dynamic are our gold standard. Working our way through this over the years will change us as does every experience— and extreme experience changes one extremely. We know we will have actually managed to survive when, as we have read, it is no longer so painful to be normal. We do not know who we will be at that point nor who will still be with us.

We have read that the gap is so difficult that, often, bereaved parents must attempt to reach out to friends and relatives or risk losing them. This is our attempt. For those untarnished by such events, who wish to know in some way what they, thankfully, do not know, read this. It may provide a window that is helpful for both sides of the gap.



## The Pit of Grief

The day my child died, I fell into the pit of grief. My friends watched me struggle through daily life, waiting for the person I once was to arise from the pit, not realizing she is gone forever. The pit is full of darkness, heartache and despair; it paralyzes your thoughts, movements and ability to think. The pit leaves you forever changed, unable to surface the person you once were.

Some of my pre-grief friends gather around the top of the pit, waiting for the old me to appear before their eyes, not understanding what's taking me so long to emerge. After all...in their eyes, I've been in the pit for quite some time. Yet, in my eyes, it seems as if I fell in only yesterday.

Not all of my pre-grief friends gathered at the top of the pit. Some are helping me with the climb out of the darkness. They climb side by side with me from time to time, but mostly, they climb ahead of me, waiting patiently at each plateau. Even with these friends I sometimes wonder if they are also waiting for the pre-grief me to magically appear before their eyes. Then there are the casual acquaintances (or maybe even family members), you know, the ones who say, "Hi, how are you?" when they really don't care or really don't want to know. These people are the people who sighed in relief that it was my child who died and not theirs. You know, the "better you, not me" attitude.

My post-grief friends are the ones who climb with me, side by side, inch by inch, out of the pit of grief. They have no way of comparing the pit climber to the pre-grief person I once was. You see, they started at the bottom of the pit with me. They are able to reassure me when I need strength. They have no expectations, no memories, and no recollections of how I "should" be. They want me to heal, to smile more often and find joy in life. But they've also accepted the person I've become: the "Person" who is emerging from the pit.

Cindy Early, November 1999

From the "old" web page MISS (Mothers in Sympathy and Support)  
Lovingly borrowed from the newsletter of The Compassionate Friends,  
Seattle-King County, WA, July 2001



**"...a bear wedged in great tightness."**

"In a tape called, 'To Touch a Grieving Heart' there is a wonderful little reminder of the *Winnie the Pooh* story by A. A. Milne. You may recall that Winnie goes to visit Rabbit and eats too much honey. Coming out of Rabbit's hole, he gets stuck tight – so tight he can't even sigh. He asks his friends to stay with him, read him a story, and offer words of comfort...and thus to help 'a bear wedged in great tightness.'

Notice that Pooh does not ask to be pulled out of the hole, he asks only for company so he is not alone. I think Grief is like being 'a bear wedged in great tightness.' And, while we cannot make the grief go away for each other, The Compassionate Friends starts and stops with the core idea that we will be there for each other; that 'we need not walk alone.' "

Opening remarks of the late  
Richard Edler's keynote speech at the  
1996 TCF National Conference

## ***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

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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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