

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.

# **MAY 2016**

## **HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

(Our next meeting is Tuesday, May 10th)

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

We are located between Stuebner-Airline and Kuykendahl, about 2 miles North of FM 1960 West. The Community Center is located behind the church, between the courthouse and Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the church/community center parking lot. Follow the posted signs to our meeting room.

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# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

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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

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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.

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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.



\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* 米 米 Our Children, Siblings, and Grandchildren \* Remembered \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* MAY BIRTHDAYS 1993- Richard Allen Ginn, Son of Barbara & Richard Ginn 2008-Aaron Michael Wolf, son of Laura Wolf 2008-Bryan Russell Lewis, Son of Olga Lydia Lewis 2008- Alexander Gene Davis, Son of Janice Davis 2010- Tristen D. Hopkins, Son of Howard & Denise Hopkins 2008- Kayla C. Ladner, Daughter of Stephen Ladner 2003- Jeff Costin, Son of Carol & Richard Costin 2006- Marlinda Raschke, Daughter of Gloria Raschke Sister of Kevin Rasche 2000- Darrel Wayne McSpadden, Son of Janet & Robert McSpadden 2006- Michael Beshara, Son of Mike & Elaine Beshara 1983- Staci Kendall, Daughter of Larry & Tami Kendall 1990- Sewika Tekle, Daughter of Medhin Boakai 1976- Kristen Roberts, Daughter of Tom & Geneva Montgomery 1984- Nancy Lizabeth Gonzalez, Daughter of Dulce Gonzalez 1987- Cherelle Luter, Daughter of Sylvia Green 2005- Nevaeh Ramirez, Son of Amy Ramirez 1986- Allison Todd, Daughter of Ingrid Todd 1977- Misty, Daughter of Terri DeMontrond 1990- Traci Foehr, Daughter of Donna & Bubba Foehr 1982- Justin Ross Heino, Son of Darryl Heino 1986- Steven Jackman, son of Deborah Jackman \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* MAY ANGEL DATES 2009-Brendon Chase Mooney, Son of Richard & Joan Mooney 2010-Shaun N. Finley, Son of Barbara Finley 2002- Braden Hughes Patton, Son of Sherill & Chase Patton 2006- Danny Ewing, Son of Steffani L. Ewing 2003- Ronald Lee, Son of Ana Castellanos 2009- Samantha Short, Daughter of Linda Short 1998- Fallon Ginther, Daughter of Lisa Ginther 2012- Hamzah Zubair, Son of Farah Zubair 2012- Shelly Vick Hopkins, Daughter of Brandon & Paula Lansford 2012- Danielle Basford, Daughter of Jerry & Laurie Basford 2013- Patrick Bull, Son of Tom & Gayle Bull 2013- Sarah Beltran, Daughter of Hila Beltran 2013- Alan James Stokes, Son of Kellie Harris 2014- Milana Ramirez, Daughter of Deann Ramirez 2014- Tremaine Robinson, Son of Toya Robinson 2014- Devyn Sloterdijk, Son of Janet Sloterdijk 2015-Vanessa Whitford, Daughter of Russell & Nury Whitford The Birthdays and Angel Dates of our loved ones are always very difficult times. Please remember to include these families in your thoughts and prayers on their difficult day.



# **CHAPTER NEWS**

Our next meeting is Tuesday May 10<sup>th.</sup> This meeting is our annual Balloon Release. We'll start the meeting earlier than normal at 6:30pm. We'll have a brief meeting in our normal room and then head outside to the children's fountain located on the eastside of the Church. Doug and Josette Tharp have graciously offered to provide the balloons in loving memory of their daughter April. Thanks Doug and Josette. Note cards, and pens will be provided as well.

Don't forget our sub-chapter for parents that have lost an infant, toddler, or have had a miscarriage or stillbirth. This group will meet <a href="mailto:Thursday">Thursday</a> May, 12th at 7pm. same location. Contact Julie Joiner at 832-724-4299 or email <a href="mailto:dtjb19@gmail.com">dtjb19@gmail.com</a>

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members, **Jolena Pourner**, **lost her son**Marc in November last year; and Deborah Jackman, lost her son Steven in

December last year. 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.

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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**

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\*\*\* \*\*\* 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.

Thank you to Ken and Jan Knight for their generous Love Gift in loving memory of their son Christopher.



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The Compassionate Friends Walk to Remember® is a highlight of every TCF National Conference. It was created as a symbolic way to show the love we carry for the children we mourn. Held at 9 a.m. Sunday on the final day of the national conference it starts at the host hotel of the conference. There is an air of anticipation and excitement as everyone gathers in preparation for the start of the Walk. Finally the Walk begins and, hand-in-hand everyone walks, meditating on a much different time in their lives. Since its inception in 2000, the Walk to Remember has taken on many distinctive facets. There is the main Walk to Remember where those attending the conference join with local bereaved families and others who fly in from across the country just for the Walk. As many as 1400 have participated. Some go the full distance while others only walk a short way knowing that in participating, they are remembering. Special Walk to Remember t-shirts are given to all who register, as well as walk bibs where the names of the children being remembered can be written.

The Walk to Remember is also used as a major fundraiser to help support the work of The Compassionate Friends. Many participants seek pledges from relatives, friends, neighbors, and business acquaintances, turning in the dollars they have raised prior to the start of the event.

# Register Now

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**Please note:** Registration is *required* to participate in TCF national Walks to Remember. Those under 9 are not required to register but still must have a waiver of liability signed for them by a participating parent or guardian.

# SUBMIT A CHILD'S NAME TO BE CARRIED IN OUR WALK TO REMEMBER

Even if you are not able to attend our 17th Annual Walk to Remember® in Scottsdale, Arizona you can be a part of this heartfelt event by sending us the names of the child(ren) whose memory you wish to honor. Your generosity will help us support all bereaved families who have reached out to TCF, as well as those who today don't know they'll need our help tomorrow. If you are reading this, there's no doubt the death of a child has touched your life. When a child dies in a family, life as that family knows it is never the same. They learn to cherish the ways in which they can have their special child remembered. We invite you to submit a child's name so that it can lovingly be carried by volunteers in our 17th Walk to Remember®, a time set aside to honor and remember the children gone much too soon.

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https://32844.thankyou4caring.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=300



# **Special Remembrance**

Sean Weinstein 1997 - 2015 A Tribute to my Son By: Steve Weinstein

We knew Sean was special from when he was young and how quick he mastered things. We also knew he was very determined. When he was in day care, he always wanted to be the leader of activities. He also knew from right and wrong as when I used to pass out donut holes to the kids at day care, he would be watching the kids to make sure nobody got too many or too little.

As he grew, Sean would always question why things were done certain ways, and present his opinion. For a while, we thought he would be a natural lawyer. Sean struggled with meeting new people, but when he did he was a faithful and loyal friend.

In high school, he graduated with honors, and played on the varsity tennis team for 4 years and helped to mentor other kids his last couple years. He also participated in the orchestra playing the violin for a couple of years. He worked at our dear friends Larry and Beth's tennis club one summer and impressed the members with his diligence and maturity. As he became a Junior and Senior, his maturity and wisdom became more evident each day. He enjoyed his last few summers spending time with his close high school friends.

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Of course he was apprehensive as he was going off to college as he would have to meet new people. He was lucky as he got a wonderful roommate named Charlie. As we communicated with him, it was evident that he was becoming acclimated even better than both we and he could have hoped for. He was interested in dentistry and joined both the dental club and Red Cross society. He was looking forward to shadowing dentists this summer. He was pulling a 4.0 in college and wanted to be a sophomore assistant next year. We had no idea how impactful he had already become with his peers at college. We read many letters of tribute to Sean when we were looking at his phone and it just made us prouder that he was making a difference in other people's lives despite the challenges of college. We have even received a letter from one of his college professors saying how diligent and serious he was.

To anyone who Sean helped in high school, college or just life in general, the best thing you can possibly do to honor Sean is to pay if forward!

When he last came home, I was overwhelmed by his knowledge of politics, world events, etc. I knew that he would be guiding Sherry and me in the future as we needed him.

Our hearts have been broken and we truly appreciate everyone who has helped us in this tragic time.

I would like to invite one of his friends Mara who texted this to Sean shortly after his passing. We are incredibly touched and grateful to her for her words and tribute.

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"We love you Sean I hope you're in a better place and I hope you know that we love you very much. I feel so lucky to have known you. Honestly, you were one of the best guys here. You made me feel so comfortable during the first week, despite the fact that I was internally freaking out and was sad about being out of state. You helped boost my confidence during that week, that hey, I will be fine and I will meet amazing people and will make amazing friends. You made me laugh and smile after a tough day and you empathized with me when I was homesick. You were kind, always caring for us, and so humble. God.... Sean, you're the type of guy that I know I'll tell my future kids about, once they get into college. The guy that I hope they meet in uni. Remember first Friday and the kazoos? Remember the deep philosophical talks and bad puns? Remember that it's okay to count every calorie on your FitBit as long as you give yourself a break once in a while. Thank you for always being happy to see me, for having a smile on your face at all times, for being there for any of us when we had a bad day. I feel so lucky to have known such a kind, understanding, compassionate guy. I'm so blessed for the time that I got with you even if it was way too short. Rest in peace. Hope I see you one day. . . . . I just woke up. You were the first thing on my mind. One thing I learned from losing you; to cherish every moment, to live life by the day Our friends will probably get sick of me constantly taking pictures of them, trying to hang out with them, messaging them constantly or saying I love them one too many times, but I think you'll agree that it's better to overdo than regret never doing these things. You touched our souls; I hope we touched yours too. . . . It's a beautiful day outside. The sun is shining. Is this your way of telling us that you're okay? Your name is tangled in phone lines and half written letters. It's caught in our veins and we can hear it in our thoughts. Your name is an echo heard around the world. Heaven must be so beautiful now that you're there"

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"We will never get over the death of our son and the pain is very present. However, the overwhelming tributes written by his fellow students and a few teachers remind us of the respect everyone had for him and what a great person he was. We would like to follow in his footsteps and become better people, helping when we can, but unfortunately it will have to be baby steps for a while." - Steve and Sherry Weinstein



### **MY TREE**

About forty years ago my husband and I planted two trees in our backyard. The silver leafed maple gave it up a few years later as did the husband, but my pear tree will not go down and it takes a royal beating. For the first few years it bore fruit and I made heavenly pear cobblers from its labor. Then it suddenly stopped its yearly bounty, (not being pollinated I was told) and just bloomed its delicate white

flowers every spring. Each flower then turned into hearty green leaves that shaded the yard and me all summer and fall until winter again comes to Houston and even my tree takes a rest from the heat.

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Because there are utility lines running across the yard, the City of Houston comes around every four-five years and guts my beautiful tree. But, does my tree give up? Never. Even mortally wounded I spy slim branches reaching straight up bravely filling in the gaps. The following spring it blooms where it can and slowly year after year it heals.

When our children pass over – we are my tree.

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We can survive this although we think not. We, like my tree, are gutted, in shock, and mortally wounded. But, we have choices. We can say, "yes" to opportunity as in time our tender branches reach upward, or "no" and just slowly die out. Opportunity may start small. Call a friend, get a pedicure, join a book club, go to a movie but stretch that branch out and start breathing again. We can do it. When the phone rings and opportunity is on the line, say "yes" and begin to bloom again.

God Bless Pat Morgan Houston Northwest Chapter 米

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Although we seem so far apart,
You're always here within our hearts.
You filled our lives with joy and pleasure
You were to us a precious treasure.
A little while shall pass and then,
We'll see each other once again.
Loved, remembered and held so dear,
In minds and hearts you're always here.



Hope is not pretending that troubles don't exist. It is the hope that they won't last forever. That hurts will be healed and difficulties overcome. That we will be led out of the darkness and into the sunshine.



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Spring is a time for growth and renewal. As a child, teen, and then an adult, I always looked forward to spring with anticipation. The thoughts of green grass, budding trees, and blooming flowers of all varieties and colors were a welcome change from the long cold, dreary Michigan winter.

It was a magical time of year. When I was a child, each member of my family watched anxiously to lay claim to being the first to spot the familiar hop-hop of the returning robin, the first sign that spring was actually here. We could finally take off the gloves, shed our heavy winter coats and boots, and roll down the windows on the car to hear the laughter of children playing outside and smell the fresh mown grass as we'd drive down the road.

That's the way it was for me on the first day of spring 12 years ago. I remarked how beautiful the tulips looked as they danced in the wind. The trees were budding, and there was magic in the air. My kids and I shed our heavy winter coats, flinging them in the backseat, rolled down the windows of the car, and started singing in celebration of the beautiful day we were experiencing.

And then . . . *IT* happened.

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Suddenly, undeniably, horrifically—my world, my spring, my life changed.

My 5-year-old son, Stephen, died that first spring day. His 8-year-old sister, Stephanie, my firstborn, died a few hours later, enough past midnight to list the next day on the death certificate. Gone was the laughter, the magic, the beauty of my world.

The springs that followed were no longer filled with anticipation or magic. They were dark and ugly and filled with memories too painful to talk about. I wanted nothing to do with "spring." If H.G. Well's time machine had existed, I would have entered it at the end of winter and fast-forwarded through spring.

As time marched on and one spring followed another, I learned an important lesson in my journey through grief: As much as I wanted to, I couldn't fast-forward through the hard spots. I couldn't go around them. I had to go through them slowly, like a dog paddling through water, so I could get to the other side. Somehow doing this taught me to cope, to endure, to face tomorrow and all the first days of spring that followed. It's much like the transformation that takes place when a butterfly emerges from a dark, cold, seemingly lifeless chrysalis.

A few years ago, as winter was drawing to a close and the first day of spring was quickly approaching, I looked out the kitchen window toward the budding pear tree in the backyard and discovered it was full of chirping robins. I smiled and knew that spring somehow wasn't going to be so bad. It was once again time to enjoy the smells of the season, the beauty of the budding trees, and the magic that the season had to offer. And I knew Stef and Steve would have wanted that for me.

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

Reprinted from We Need Not Walk Alone, the national magazine of The Compassionate Friends.



# **Butterfly Messages To Our Children**

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As balloons fill the northern sky, floating up and away on the wings of wind and love, I am astonished by the sense of peace which sweeps over me. I have sent my child a message written on a butterfly shaped note attached to a balloon. In my mind's eye, I know that my child will read that message and understand that his mother's love for him is eternal and unconditional. The void left in his absence is often overwhelming, and the pain frequently escalates from a quiet sadness to a screaming ache which shatters me. My child knows the pain I have felt and will always feel without him in my life. I express it every year on a little butterfly note. He knows he is loved.

This butterfly message is an important ceremonial part of my life now. Instead of an email or letter, I send my child a note once a year. This ceremony is moving, the bagpipes are haunting, the readings are reflective and touching. I stand with other parents and notice that they, too, are watching the balloons until they disappear into the heavens. I am imagining my son plucking his balloon from the heavens and reading my message. Other parents are imagining this, too. Our communication to our child will be understood.

As parents who have lost children to death, we face new ceremonies and new traditions. As the years roll by, many of us will cling to those ceremonies and traditions. We are forced to replace the traditions of the past, before our child died, with new, fitting tributes that acknowledge our child's life and the meaning of that life to us. The Compassionate Friends provides us this opportunity to share our feelings and our need to honor our child in the company of others who understand us and encourage us to speak openly about our child and our sorrow. This tribute to our child has deep meaning and touches our souls with its simplicity and grace.

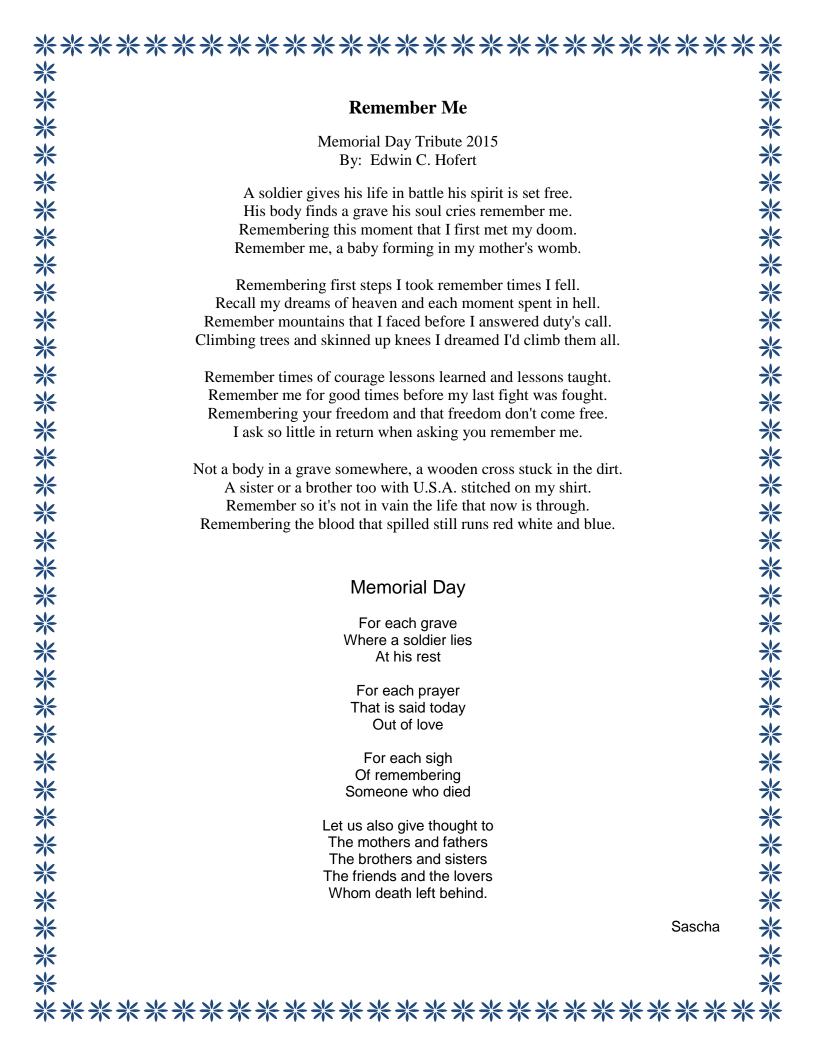
Our ceremony is brief by most standards, but meaningful beyond words. No speaker could reach us as this ceremony does. For a small window in time, we are reaching out to our children, honoring them, remembering them openly and communicating with them. Tears are shed. Hugs are shared. Memories form a kaleidoscope in each parent's mind as we watch our balloon join with the others on its journey to our children.

This tribute and message to our children is one of two ceremonial gatherings that we, as Compassionate Friends, share each year. Remember. Always we remember our children. Others may wish to forget, put the unpleasantness behind them, but we, the parents of children whose lives were too short, will never forget. We have established our traditions and we look to each other for hope and support as we walk this lonely road.

And so, as our balloons completely disappear into the heavens, we are immersed in peace and serenity, and we share a light meal and memories of our children with our Compassionate Friends.

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







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For a long time after the death of a child, bereaved parents are convinced that healing will never occur, and that the loneliness, anger, guilt and despair, which control life so completely, will never change. This feeling is so strong that when others try to reassure the grieving one, the response is usually, "It's different with me! You don't understand!" This is the "normal" response to what is probably the most severe stress a human will ever face.

Fortunately, there are compassionate friends who once felt this same way who have learned that, out of this morass of loneliness, anger, guilt and despair, there finally arises a ray of hope. Though small and fleeting at first, this hope becomes the light which leads the wounded parents through the dark valley and into acceptance of their child's death. And this healing will occur even though there is still no understanding of "Why?"

It is by working through our guilt (both real and imagined), facing our anger including anger at God and even at the dead child, crying our way through our despair (with carefully chosen professional help if necessary), that the loneliness will lessen, and hope will be seen as surviving when it was thought gone forever. Each one must use one's spiritual beliefs in his or her own way to assist in this process.

Full recovery—in the sense that the effects of grief will finally disappear never to return—return not occur, although the term "recovery" is used. I prefer the term "healing," a process whereby our lives come to a new "normal." Healing implies (a) our accepting the unacceptable (the death of our child), and (b) our slowly learning to resume productive relationships with others. This is done all while we continue to love and miss the dead child.

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Since we still love the children who have died, we will still experience grief, but it will no longer control our lives. Just as we cannot stop the flashbacks which occur so suddenly and unexpectedly during grief, neither can we prevent healing from occurring. We may slow the process by failing to do our grief work, but we cannot stop it!! One of the greatest hindrances to our healing is the fear that our dead children will be forgotten. We will not forget them, nor will they be forgotten by others, even though we may not realize it at the time! Perhaps the greatest obstacle to healing is the failure to forgive—ourselves, the dead child, others involved with the child's death, even God if we hold Him responsible. For only through forgiveness and forgiving are we truly able to handle our guilt and the anger that comes from the guilt we presume in others.

We enhance the healing process when we do our grief work, when we have gratitude for the time we had with our child, when we recall the happy times we experienced with our child (or during pregnancy, if that's all we had), and when we pick up the shattered pieces of our existence (as our child would want us to do), slowly resuming productive living.

No matter where you are in your journey toward healing, bolster the hope that arises within you. Your healing is probably the best memorial you may erect to your dead child!

Robert Gloor TCF Tuscaloosa, AL





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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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Auto Accident/Fire Organ Donor Substance Abuse

#### **FOR FATHERS:**

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Multiple Loss Auto Accident Infant Child

Heart Disease