



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.

MAY 2017

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.
(Our next meeting is Tuesday, May 9th)

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

When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

To the Newly Bereaved

As the years pass, we see new members come into the chapter, and we try to help them with their grief as we progress in our own. Over and over again, I have seen newly bereaved parents come to their first meeting totally devastated and convinced that their lives are over. Through the months (and years) I have seen them struggle and suffer and try to find meaning in their lives again. And they do! Through all the anger, pain and tears, somehow the human spirit is able to survive and flower again in a new life – perhaps a changed life and possibly a sadder one, but a stronger one nevertheless.

We feel so weak and crushed when our beloved children die, but I know because I have seen it countless times in the years I've been involved with The Compassionate Friends that we can make it together. When you walked through the door for the first meeting, you were frightened and nervous; but with that step you made a statement about your life. With that first step through the door, you said you wanted to try, you wanted to find a reason for living again, that you weren't willing to be swallowed by your grief. You wanted to go forward, and those first steps into The Compassionate Friends began your journey.

The journey will be a long one, for you loved your child with all your heart and soul. When that child died, a part of you was ripped away. It takes a long time to repair that large hole. The journey will not always be steady or constant; there will be many setbacks. Those of us who have taken the journey before you can assure you that, while there may be no rainbow at the other end, there is indeed "light at the end of the tunnel."

We want to help you as we were helped, but in the beginning and in the long run, you must help yourself. You have to want to get better, to talk about your loss, to struggle through the grief. We will listen, suggest, share and laugh and cry with you; and we hope, at this time next year, you'll be several steps along in your personal journey through grief. Then you can begin to help others.





*Our Children, Siblings, and Grandchildren
Remembered*

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- Darrell 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 Elizabeth 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
2011 - Jamie Leonard, son of Carrie Newman

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 9th. 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. Mark and Donna Spivey have graciously offered to provide the balloons in loving memory of their daughter Danielle. Note cards, and pens will be provided as well.

Our sub-chapter for parents that have lost an infant, toddler, or have had a miscarriage or stillbirth will meet Thursday May, 11th at 7pm. same location. Contact Julie Joiner at 832-724-4299 or email dtjb19@gmail.com

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members, **Mark and Donna Spivey, lost their daughter Danielle in February 2015 and Robbie Lampkins lost her son Jared Mayfield in January.** 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.

To our Mothers, we wish you peace, love and memories that bring a smile to your face this Mother's Day.



Butterfly Messages To Our Children

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 e-mail 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

Special Remembrance

By: Beth Crocker
In Loving Memory of Cheyenne and Emily Crocker

Being a bereaved parent is not what I expected, starting with the fact that I didn't expect to be a bereaved parent. Who does that?! I mean, no one EXPECTS to be faced with burying their child. We, as new parents, are so focused on making sure we provide a strong childhood and upbringing to our new child that we refuse to allow those darker thoughts to enter our minds. We don't even want to take up the offer we all get in the mail to sign up our new babies for Gerber's Life Insurance that pays us if our child dies. WHO DOES THAT?! Yes, it would have been smart for us to do that, wish we had.

Then when we were faced with burying our second child, we found ourselves without that baby life insurance again. Then, when we had our HEALTHY third child, we STILL DID NOT DO IT! This time we knew he was healthy, so we didn't want to risk taunting Death. The point is that as a human race, it is natural for us to be positive and hopeful in our daily lives, more so when parenting our children, so when we find ourselves living what we never expected, we are not prepared.

It's been nearly 20 years since our oldest, Cheyenne, passed. A few less since we lost Emily. We have been living the cliché "Life goes on" journey. Our son is nearly 11 now, healthy and loved, if not a bit spoiled. Yes, we have good days... even GREAT days. I thank God for those days. They are needed to balance those days that will never go away. Those days that hit without warning, unexpectedly. There are lots of things that happen that we don't expect when our children die. How we react to them will determine how our lives unfold after our children die. Below is a list of a few of those unexpected things, and the reactive choices we are faced with. The trick for a grieving parent is to choose wisely so our lives will have opportunities for greatness again.

I didn't expect that the grief process after losing Emily, our second child to bury, would move faster, or be easier. At times I didn't think it did, but it did. Each day we were faced with the returning pain, and we had to choose to reject it or embrace it. By embracing it, we were in (a bit) more control. We used it to recognize the love we still have for our girls. We used it to recognize our own strength and ability to get through it as experienced bereaved parents. Then we could (still can) face each day knowing we are better for having known and loved our children. We are better and stronger than most other people.

I didn't expect to be faced with the almost celebrity style respect and admiration we often get from others who "can't imagine" what we live with. I don't like it, it makes me very uncomfortable because I'd rather have my girls back. I know they just want to help us see how strong we are, but it's weird.

I didn't expect to ever feel whole again, but I do... usually. I've learned that what Patrick Swayze said in "Ghost" is true... "The love stays with you". The love is them, still here, just in a different form. So I take it and run with it. I remind myself that I am a better person for having been their mom, and that means I AM WHOLE, despite the fact that my heart is not.

I didn't expect... get ready... to hear my husband say the loss of his mom is more difficult than burying his two little girls. WHAT????!!!! Yes, it's true. HOW????? ...the pain of loss is built up of the memories and the relationship shared. They had a VERY SPECIAL and very rare mother son bond, built on 57 years of life together. It's hard to explain, harder to understand, but I think I'm getting it.

Everyone grieves differently, based on the relationship, and how it was left at the time of the death. We can prepare all we want, or ignore all the signs telling us we need to prepare. Either way, death comes to us all. How we choose to live with it will define how our lives unfold. I miss my girls more than words can say. Anyone who has buried their child knows this gut wrenching misery. There was a time when I feared this day, the day I would say that my girls are JUST PART OF MY JOURNEY. The day that I would say my life is MORE than being their mom. I didn't expect I could ever say this. ...but I do now, and it's OK. It has not lessened the love or weakened the memories one bit. The LOVE never dies, so neither do they.



*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*

Reflections On The Loss Of My Children.
In loving memory of Jason and Amy Lynn Kramberger
By: Nancy Thornton
April 12, 2017

Today marks the 6 month anniversary of my beautiful, amazing daughter's death. I miss her beyond words. She was diagnosed with Vasculitis 4 years ago and her last 2 years involved 24/7 care. So, I am traveling this journey through grief, again. In 2011, my son died from a reaction to a new prescription he had been given less than 2 weeks prior.

So, now I sit here feeling very empty and alone. Missing my children, focusing on the fact that there isn't a living person on this earth who will ever call me "mom" again. Like most of you, when I was younger, I just assumed I would be a mom. I would watch them grow and they would be here to help me as I grew old. That's all gone now. No more dreams, just memories.

That all being said, I want to address just how do we face going on, a future without our children? I am blessed with a wonderful husband who has supported me through these horrific losses. He wasn't their biologic father - he was more than that - he was a true, loving dad and I will always be grateful for that.

But what about the rest of the people in our lives? Family and friends. Families can be a positive support, or, sometimes not. Hurtful things are sometimes said. Not intentionally, of course, but, rather because they don't know what to say. Those closest to us are pained to see us in pain. They want us to "move on," thinking this advice will help us push through, not only for the bereaved parent but for those who are witnessing our pain. It's up to us to acknowledge that it's difficult for the entire family but it's okay to tell them that this is our journey to travel in our own way and in our own time. There will be no end for us. A part of our heart is gone forever. It's just like when people are hesitant to say our child's name for fear of upsetting us - they don't realize our children are on our minds all of the time and it is comforting to have our child remembered. To hear their name or a story about our child, have them included on special days or holidays, reaffirms their place in the family. Here's the tough part - it may be up to us, the parent to tell our family what we need.

Our friends usually will all be there for us in the beginning but then, one by one, they often seem to disappear. It's truly a time when we find out who is there for us for the long run.

The most common phrase is "call me if you need anything." Seriously? Your drowning in sorrow and struggling to get out of bed in the morning after tossing and turning through sleepless nights. Do you need anything? Sure, to go back in time to when your child was alive, when your life

was “normal.” You need for this nightmare that is now your life to end. So, you don't call because what you need is not something anyone can give you.

My only advice is to call, especially to that one person you may know who will be there, unconditionally, for you. Who will come and just listen, hold your hand, let you cry; we all need that one person. It may be a family member or it may be a friend. Also, attend Compassionate Friends meetings, everyone there knows what you are going through and will listen to your story and support you through your journey.

You will survive, but it takes time, understanding and forgiveness for those that don't/can't understand. Reach out, you are not alone. At some point, you will be able to look back on your life with your child and smile, remembering the good times, focusing on life.

I wish everyone on the most horrific journey of their life, peace.



“The Hill”

A traveling man sat down to rest from his journey by the side of the road. As he rested, another man passed by. This other man, the traveler observed, walked very slow and was bent forward, his expression was troubled and pain reflected in his eyes.

"What ails you fellow?" called up the wise, but simple man. "Come and join me and take a rest, for your form is such that I see a need in you to share the burden that you carry."

The other man sat down, stared far into the distance for a while and then began. "I have lost the very dearest person known to me." Tears welled up in his eyes as he spoke, he then fell silent for a short time before continuing. "I feel that I am constantly walking up a hill and that the wind is always against me, my feet are as heavy as clay and in my stomach I carry hot coals. I say to myself now that I must turn back to ease this pain. If I walk back down the hill then maybe I will find that all of this is not true and that my loved one will be waiting to greet me."

The traveler sat listening to the other man's story, and replied. "You must not go back down the hill. You need to reach the top, for thereafter you will find the path will level, the wind will soften, your feet grow lighter and the hot coals will cool. To go back down the hill will prolong your pain, for the path to your healing is forward and up the hill."

As the traveler got up to continue his journey, he said to the other man, "The one you have lost is not at the bottom of the hill but with you all the time, for you carry their spirit in your heart."

Anonymous



Being the Mother of a Child Who Died — On Mother's Day

By Claire McCarthy, M.D.

I am the mother of a child who died. And that makes Mother's Day very hard.

Recently I was talking to a mother whose child had just died. "What about Mother's Day?" she asked, through tears. It was hard to know what to say, because it's a terrible day for those of us who have lost a child. Other days of the year you can maybe make it a few hours without thinking about your loss; other days of the year you can pretend that you are an ordinary person and that life is normal. But not on Mother's Day.

On Mother's Day it's in your face that your child is gone forever. On Mother's Day you can't pretend you are ordinary or that life is normal. All the hoopla, all the Hallmark hype, the handmade cards and flowers and family gatherings, make it almost excruciating.

Our town has a Mother's Day road race for which I am eternally grateful — especially because, in a demonstration of grace's existence, the start and finish are next to the cemetery where my son is buried. On my way I can visit his grave and say what I need to say and look yet again at the name we chose for him carved into stone. At the end of the race, they give all the mothers a flower; on my way home, I go back to the grave and lay my flower there. And then I move forward with the day.

See, that's the real challenge after losing a child: moving forward. It's almost impossible to envision in that moment of loss; how can life continue after something so horrible? But life does continue, whether we like it or not. There are chores to do and bills to pay; morning comes, again and again. So you pick yourself up and you live, but you are never the same.

At first, we are different because of our raw sadness. But over time, the sadness moves from our skin into our bones. It becomes less visible, but no less who we are. It changes into a wisdom, one we'd give up in a heartbeat to have our child back. We who have lost children understand life's fragility and beauty. We who have lost children understand that so many things just aren't important. All that is important is those we love. All that is important is each other. Nothing else.

It can feel very lonely, being the parent of a child who died. Especially on Mother's Day or Father's Day. We feel so different from those around us, all those happy people with children the same age our child was, or would have been. But over the years, I've come to understand that I'm not alone at all.

There is a wonderful Buddhist story about a woman whose son gets sick and dies. She goes to the Buddha to ask him to bring her son back to life; I will, he says, if you bring me some mustard seed from the home of a family that has not known loss. She goes from house to house but can find no family that has not lost someone dear to them. She buries her son and goes to the Buddha and says: I understand now.

That is what I understand now. It doesn't make me miss my son any less, or Mother's Day any easier. But it helps me make sense of it; loss is part of life. There are no guarantees, ever. Our children, and all those we love, are gifts to us for however long we have them.

I understand now too that we are together in this, all of us, in joy and in loss. It's the connections we make with each other that matter — it's the connections we make that give life value and help us face each morning. As G.K. Chesterton wrote, "We are all in the same boat in a stormy sea, and we owe each other a terrible loyalty."

Years ago, I chose words to say each time I go to my son's grave. It makes it easier to have a ritual. And over the years, the words have come to mean more to me. They aren't just about grief anymore. They are about who I am, what I have learned, and what I can give.

"I will always love you, " I say. "And I will always be your mother."

Claire McCarthy, M.D. is a pediatrician at Boston Children's Hospital, an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, and the mother of 6 children. She has written about health and parenting for multiple publications and websites for 25 years, is a senior editor for Harvard Health Publications and an official spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics.



SORROW IS NOT FOREVER – LOVE IS

So often, one attempts to face the whole future at once. But we will not live that period all at once, only day by day. Don't try to face 20 years. Face today. When that has been achieved, face tomorrow. You will find more and more ways in which you can cope.

The Chinese have a saying that a journey of a 1000 miles starts with a single step. There is no way you can take the 15th or the 200th step before you have taken the first.

It can be difficult to face going out again and resuming your regular activities. It can take more courage to face little things than the big things in life. Going out shopping for groceries for the first time can become an ordeal. Making the change more complete could help. Try a different store, a different day or time, and go with a friend. When it seems very hard to decide what to do first, maybe it's not very important where you start, as long as you start. Choose a simple task and get started.

Once you've begun, it will be far easier to set your priorities and you will have gained confidence for already having achieved something.

--The Facts of Death by Michael A. Simpson ~shared by Cathy Seehuetter, Newsletter Editor ~reprinted from St. Paul, MN Chapter, November/December 2007/January

On this Memorial Day

**Remember those who served before.
Remember those who are no more.
Remember those who serve today.
Remember them all on Memorial Day.**



FREEDOMS' MEMORIAL

**This day is set aside to honor those
who took the chance to die.
But they have died in vain if we ever
forget the reason why.
Freedom can be like time
slipping away before we even know.
But we all have the choice
more, a duty to battle freedoms' foe.
Let us give thanks this day
to all those brave
who paid the highest cost.
Not take it for granted
and realize it easily could be lost.**

by Del "Abe" Jones

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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