



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 2019

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

(Our next meeting is Tuesday, May 14th)

at

**Cypress Creek Christian Church
6823 Cypresswood Dr., Room #3
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 step 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.





*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
1999 - James Ropp, Son of Janet Ropp
1989 - Victor Alberto Renteria Jr, Son of Carla Renteria

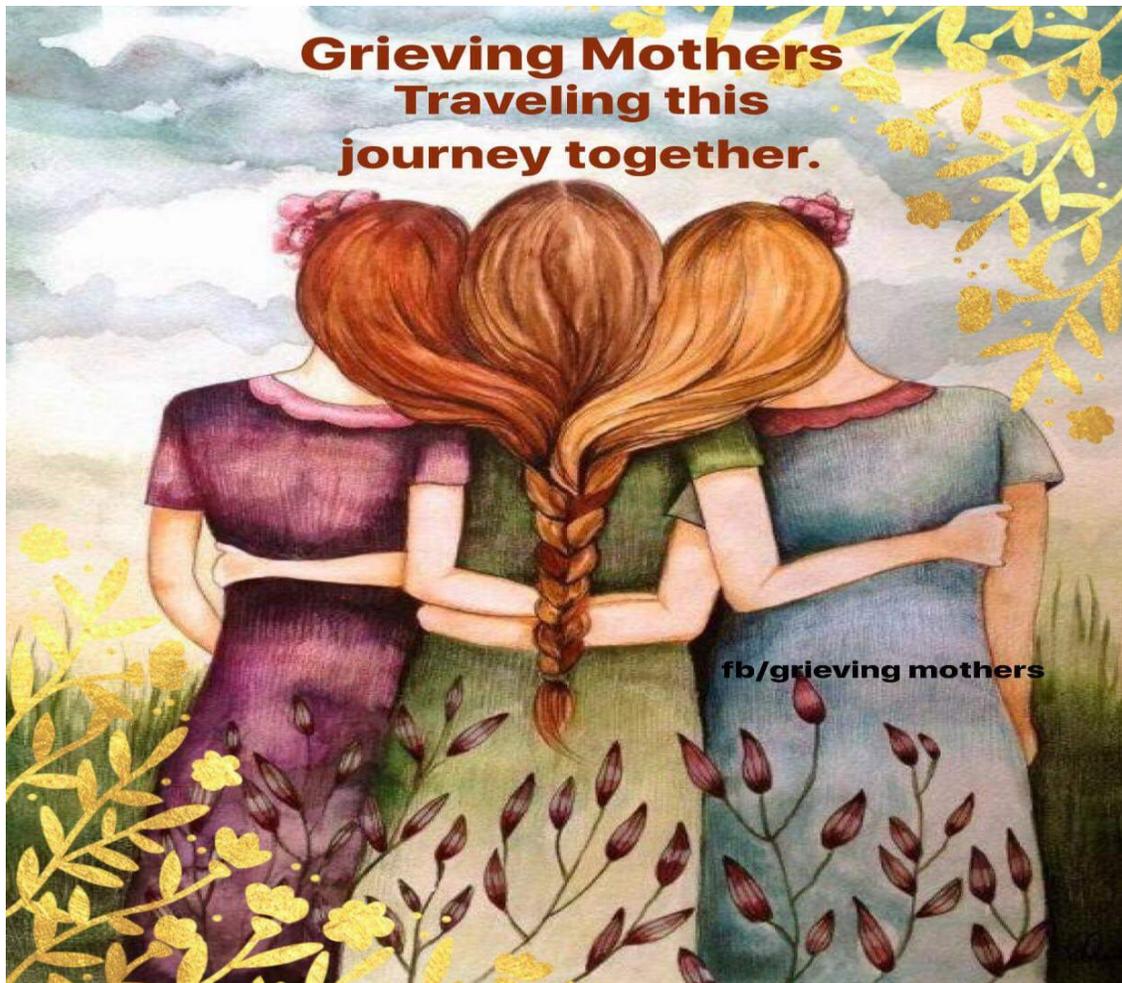
MAY ANGEL DATES

- 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- 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
2017- Joshua Bell, Son of Steve & Donna Bell
2018 - Grace Sanders, Daughter of Mary Parker

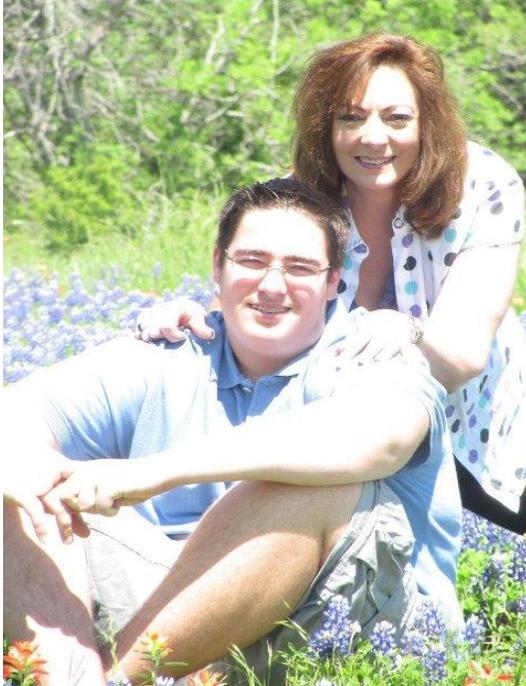
CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday May 14th. This is our annual Balloon Release meeting. All family and friends are invited to attend this special meeting. We'll start earlier than normal at 6:30pm and have a brief meeting in room #3 and then head outside to the children's fountain located on the eastside of the Church. Susan Doss has volunteered to bring the balloons. There will be note cards, and pens available to write a note to your child.

This is a special Mother's Day issue of our newsletter



The strongest person in the world is the grieving mother that wakes up and keeps going every morning.



Cole Knight **September 1996 - October 13, 2015**

On a rainy Friday night in September of 1996, my only son, Christopher Cole Knight made his appearance two weeks early as if to say, "let's get this party started". He weighed 6 lbs. 15 oz. so he wasn't early, just ready. From the beginning I knew what a miracle he was because I had been a preemie weighing less than 4 pounds. The fact that I was able to have a healthy boy was just miraculous. Cole was the son of two retail management parents so he bonded quickly with kids at daycare where he spent a lot of quality time. Soon he was (or so he thought) running the place that had opened when I was 6 months pregnant. He would stay at Kids R Kids until he was 12 years old.

He loved everything about it! School was also a fun time, and Cole started his social networking at a young age. He met his buddy, John Austin while waiting on the corner for the school bus at age 7. It was there that I also met his mom, Wanda. Wanda and I bonded quickly because she shared the name of my dear mom. Wanda was not a common name. Cole started hanging out with John Austin and his two younger brothers Cade and Riley. He would spend time with them sometimes while waiting for John Austin to get home. Soon enough they asked if Cole could attend church with them at Grace Presbyterian. He was thrilled to attend with them and soon was showing up at their house on Saturday night with a change of clothes for church hoping for another invite. Grace Presbyterian was Cole's new home. It was here that he soon learned more about giving back.

Cole had been eager at Gleason Elementary to have friends with special needs and be the guy to help them out whenever he could. He became a true friend to many. We also learned that Cole's lunch account was disappearing way too fast, sometimes by eating one extra lunch, but also by giving away lunches to friends who truly needed the money for a healthy lunch. At Grace, Cole soon learned about mission work. He learned that while working hard to help others, he would ultimately be the recipient of so much more. Soon he was going to Port Arthur to help with hurricane damage as well as mission work in downtown Houston helping the homeless. He soon made it to New York with John Austin on a mission trip. After graduation from Jersey Village High School in 2015, Cole accomplished his goal of getting baptized.

Cole was excited to attend a mission trip to Nicaragua with Grace and Living Water International, to build a well for a community where water was needed. The next day after returning home, he attended a mission trip to Denver, Colorado which would ultimately be his last mission trip. Both weeks were life changing for Cole and it was after these trips that he shared with me his plan of wanting to become a youth minister.

He would soon be starting at Blinn College in Bryan on the "Two at Blinn, then you're in, plan". As it was always his goal to be a Texas Aggie.

There is much more to share about our dear Cole, but he was in an automobile accident on October 6, 2015, and left us all on October 13, 2015. Unbeknownst to us, Cole had

registered to be a donor at the age of 16 and has been able to give the gift of life to many. We have been fortunate to know his liver recipient, Michael and continue to stay in touch. Such a blessing. Other blessings continue to allow us to be able to put one foot in front of the other on a daily basis, with Cole along side of us every step of the way.

Cole Knight Missions Scholarship at Grace Presbyterian was created by Cole's dear friends at church as a tangible way to carry on Cole's mission to help pave the way for individuals who display that same servant heart and passion for serving God through serving others. We have been blessed to be a part of the selection committee for the scholarships and the recipients are no doubt exactly who Cole would have picked himself.

We continue to be blessed by a scholarship in Cole's name at Jersey Village High School in the amount of \$1,061 dollars, which of course was his football jersey number. Cole was able to bring love and joy to so many, that he lives on through others. So blessed to have had him for 19 years and truly blessed to be his mom. Missing you, my Coleman.

Jan Knight
Cole's Mom
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter

This was written by one of Cole's best friends.

You're the greatest friend I ever had,
And even though it may sound sad,
I doubt that there's another man,
Who can love his neighbor the way you
can,
For there isn't one that I have met,
That can meet the standard you have set,
It measures tall, and far, and wide,
And your memory I'll hold inside,
For even though your light is gone,
Your legacy I'll carry on,
Through the lives I touch and people I
meet,
I'll aim to show a love so sweet,
That they will know the God that saves,
His work, through you, still making waves,
Is proof of the fruit of the gentle soul,
I found inside my best friend Cole.





Zach Doss
December 1984 - March 15, 2018

My son, Zach died on March 15, 2018. So I have just completed my year of firsts. Zach was 33 and truly I expected he would live forever. He often stated that he would. Apparently God had different plans for him and me I suppose. It has been a hard year. Zach was a PHD Fellow at University of Southern California. He had completed his first book and was on the cusp of a wonderful career doing what he loved most, writing.

Because we both shared a love of words, I have received comfort in the poems and letters friends and family have sent me. One of the things that has given me great solace is a poem my brother sent me. It is called "Surprised by Joy" by William Wordsworth. In this poem Wordsworth struggles to cope with the death of his little daughter. He refers to her as "my heart's best treasure". That so describes my son to me. My heart's best treasure. I love you Zach.

Susan Doss
Zach's Mom
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter

SURPRISED BY JOY
By William Wordsworth

Surprised by joy—impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom
But Thee, long buried in the silent Tomb,
That spot which no vicissitude can find?
Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind—
But how could I forget thee?—Through what power,
Even for the least division of an hour,
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
To my most grievous loss!—That thought's return
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;
That neither present time, nor years unborn
Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

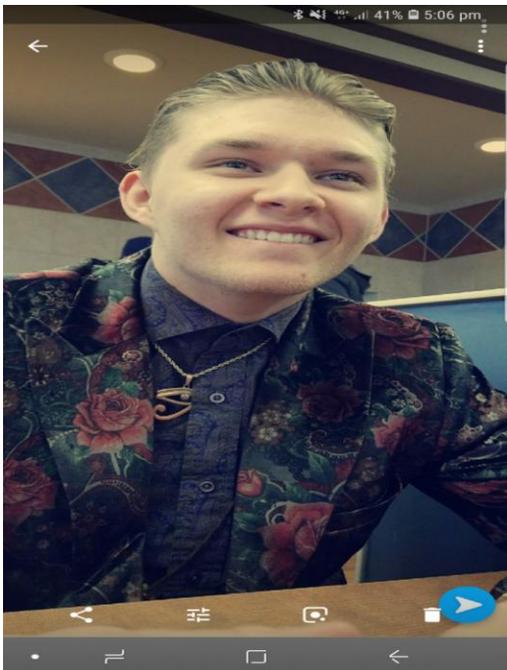
Analysis of Wordsworth's Poem

This poem, which begins in joy, ends in sorrow. At first, he experiences joy, and he is very surprised by the feeling. It is a feeling he never expected to experience again. And so he quickly turns to share it with someone, but that someone is gone. All at once, he becomes acutely aware of his grief. It sweeps over him and blots out any hint of joy that was once there. Wordsworth had turned to share his moment of joy with the very one whose loss he was suffering. Thus, it felt to him like he had just experienced the shock of loss all over again, and grief took over him as it had done when he first heard the news of the death of the one he loved so dearly. The poem ends with the realization that his joy would always be swept away in grief, because no amount of time could ever bring back to him that "heavenly face" which he was missing so dearly.



My Journey **By: Janet Ropp** **In Loving Memory of my Son James** **May 14, 1999 - October 13, 2018**

My journey with addiction started when I was a young girl. I grew up with a mother addicted to alcohol and an absent father. At the age of 19, I married a great guy but soon discovered he was



addicted to drugs and alcohol. My daughter Janelle was born first then 15 months later my son James was born. Terror seemed to flood me with the thoughts that my children will be exposed to their father's alcoholism and my codependency. I got into recovery and began a new journey.

I raised my two children in a completely sober home. No alcohol, drugs or even medications. I attended Al-anon (recovery meetings for people who have been affected by another person's addiction) regularly to learn how to live better and healthier. For me, Al-anon was my life support. I wanted to stop the cycle that was blowing through my family. I wanted to give my kids a fighting chance at a healthy life. I worked on my defects and my

shortcomings. I was determined to get in front of this illness and save my kids.

As I was focused on getting better, my ex-husband was getting worse. He had remarried after we divorced. His new wife was mean and viscous. She ended up physically abusing my son James. I found out and stopped the kids from ever going over there again. Their father could come and visit with them but strict boundaries were put into place. My ex-husbands ongoing addiction cost him everything. He was living homeless in downtown Houston. He lost touch with the kids around the ages of eight and nine. The kids were heartbroken. At this point, the kids had already seen far more than they ever should have with their dads using and experienced too much from their step-mom. In some ways, I felt relieved that he was out of the picture.

I knew that the family drama and dysfunction had an effect on my children. James was diagnosed with ADHD at a young age. He was on Adderall for most of his childhood. I was not convinced this was the correct diagnosis since there was a lot of stress going back and forth between homes, but the school system cornered me. The medication worked to help James focus better but it stole his spirit. At the age of ten we removed him from the medication per James request. I went to more meetings, and set up counseling for all of us.

When James was 13 he started dabbling with street drugs. His behavior was getting more aggressive. My daughter was struggling with personal issues of her own. I decided to get us involved in Cornerstone, a city wide recovery group for teens and families who are struggling with all types of unhealthy behaviors. My daughter loved it but James fought it. Over the next six years we would continue to fight the battle of addiction in our home.

James was such a pleasant personality. He was shiny, witty, smart, athletic, warm and tender. I could see that his self-esteem and self-confidence had taken a hit somewhere. He struggled with knowing who he was and with acceptance. His using had gotten so hard at times; I had to have him leave the house. This became our regular routine. When he was sober, he was great and lived at home, but when he was using he would leave the house and stay gone for however long. I felt like I was going crazy most of the time. I was riddled with fear and worry. James went through three different rehabilitation centers, two city wide recovery groups for teenagers and counseling. My daughter was already going to a sober high school in downtown Houston. James would later attend this school too but was missing too much time, they eventually let him go.

The final months before James passed was filled with worry. James was in jail for three months for swallowing a great deal of Xanax during a traffic stop. He overdosed and was taken to the hospital. I later learned that he was in jail. I didn't bail him out; I tried to use this as a learning lesson. His demeanor was slowly changing in jail and when he got out he was complaining of feeling depressed and angry. He was upset that he now had a felony on his record for swallowing the Xanax. He was back to using all types of drugs on a regular basis. I couldn't get to him. I couldn't reach him. He didn't have a phone, I would call his friends to leave messages, and then he would call me back. Something in my gut was ringing loud that something was wrong. I was getting a facial the day the call came in.

Nothing prepares a parent for this call. My 19 year old son was found deceased behind an abandoned restaurant along I-45. I could feel my heart being torn out of my chest. My little James! Disbelief, pain, guilt, fear, powerlessness and anger were all present. Later, I turned numb and my brain shut down. I couldn't remember anything, no focus or attention span at all. I couldn't function! My grief took on a life of its own and I was simply along for the ride. I had no control over anything. I was living in intense pain every day with no relief. I looked for grief support immediately.

I found Compassionate Friends and started immediately. I later found The Grief Recovery Method, and later became a Certified Grief Recovery Specialist. I have been in school over the past three years getting my counseling degree but now I have decided to specialize in grief and trauma. I took a 12 week leave of absence from work. I stay home and put as much time into myself as I can. I do yoga several times a week, meditate daily, journal often, try to exercise or eat healthy (which is not consistent) and pray. I'm trying to discover who this new person is, what I like, what I want, who I am, my purpose and my new direction in life. I'm completely lost. I am still looking all the time for more support or direction with how to move through this relentless pain and how to live with this hole in my heart...haven't found much so far.

Overall, I don't have any answers for this terrible tragedy. I know that I fought long and hard trying to get in front of this illness through self-honesty, self-reflection, being pro-active and education. My only goal was to spare my kids from this terrible illness and in a sense I feel like I failed them. Maybe this was how it was going to end regardless of what I did or maybe James would have spent most of his life in torment or disarray. I will never know. The pain is still there and probably always will be.

I lived on hope for many years. Hope that James would pull out of this and circle back around, hope that we could live as a happy family or hope that the rehab's and treatment centers would open his eyes, or hope that James would find the strength to fight this illness as I did. I now live on hope that I can find myself in all of this, that I will find a direction or a path for myself, or that I can move through another day. One aspect that I've learned is that nobody wins with addiction. I've lost many people to addiction even though they are still alive. Now, I've lost my only son to death itself. I love you James!

Janet Ropp
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter
James's Mom



The reality is that we don't forget, move on, and have closure, but rather we honor, we remember, and incorporate our deceased children and siblings into our lives in a new way. In fact, keeping memories of your loved one alive in your mind and heart is an important part of your healing journey. ~ Harriet Schiff, The Bereaved Parent

Memories

By: Nancy Thornton, Mother of
Amy Lynn Kramberger 3/9/1973 - 10/12/2016
Jason Robert Kramberger 2/28/1975 - 3/23/2001

My name is Nancy Thornton. I have been traveling this journey through grief for a while. This is my story, unique to me as everyone's is to them. Though we all suffer an unbearable pain, we deal with each day in our own way. There is no "right" way or "wrong" way, just our way.

My son, Jason, died 18 years ago at age 26. His death was unexpected, he died in his sleep from Myocarditis, an inflammation of his heart. I had never experienced such pain in my life and often wished I would just die, too, so I could be with him.

What kept me going was the fact that I had another child who needed me. Amy was 28 at the time. We grieved together, we cried together, we reminisced together. Having someone who knew Jason's life story helped me cope. Amy "broke" when she lost her brother. Siblings



often are forgotten and the depth of their pain underrated. She lost her brother, best friend and the one person who shared her lifelong memories.

The memories - some are so painful, they are hard to face and some are so joyful, they bring a smile to our faces, through the pain. There were days that the memories would just fill my head and it was like rewinding a film and

playing it over and over.

I find that remembering gives me peace. Sometimes, I would spend hours looking at old pictures and just think about years past. When friends or family would share their memories, it was wonderful. Just hearing his name gave me joy. Sometimes people are uncomfortable talking about our lost children, afraid it will be too hurtful for us. Don't they realize we never forget?

Amy and I attended The Compassionate Friends meetings for several years and the support we got and knowing we had a "safe" place to express ourselves helped us get through the worst of times.

Looking back, it took me 5 years before I felt like myself again.

I suffered from medical problems, including a brain tumor, which has left me legally blind. I could no longer drive and, consequently, could no longer attend meetings. Amy moved in with

me and my husband to help. She finished her degree, obtained 2 Masters Degrees and was working on her PhD, when she became sick. She was diagnosed with Vasculitis.

The plan for her to help suddenly changed and I became her caretaker for the next 4 years as her health declined. Then the unbelievable happened - she died October 12, 2016.

How could I possibly deal with the loss of my beautiful daughter, my only living child, my best friend? Well, I'm here to tell you I'm still struggling with that answer. Again, the memories.

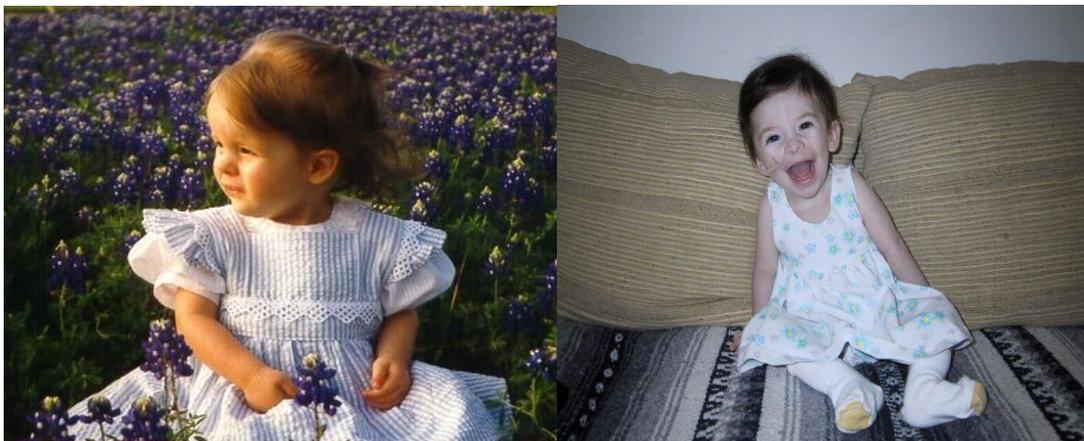
All of us bereaved parents have two days every year that are particularly hard to deal with. Birthdays and the anniversary of the day our child became an angel. Both of these dates will bring deeply emotional memories and painful feelings. How you decide to handle these days, either by having a party or a ritual or by being alone is a personal choice; but no matter what you choose, it takes time to put the pieces of your life back together and mark another year without your child.

So, my only advice is cherish your memories, they're all we have.

Nancy Thornton
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter



We All Need Support
By: Beth Crocker
Loving Memory of Cheyenne and Emily Crocker



It's been 20 years since our oldest daughter passed, and 16 since our second daughter went. So much has changed. I knew it would, I feared it would. The decades since came gently, for the most part. The only thing that would occasionally get me was whenever

I'd realize how much time has passed, or how much has changed since then, I'd be shocked, because in many ways it still seems so much more recent. I can't say how long it feels, it's vague, but fresh. It's so long ago, but still so real on my heart.

I'd like to say it's better, it's easier, now... and it is, mostly. After 20 years I've pretty much run the routine cemetery visits into the ground. Posting pictures of the flowers I do four times a year... two birthdays and two passing dates. There was a time when family would join us. They faded away, making excuses, and who can blame them. I'd like to think I'm a happy person, or at least positive person to be around, I don't want my grief bringing others down, or sucking their energy from them. But when I'm left with no support, I find myself wondering, doubting, who I am. My husband, son, and I have been making those cemetery visits alone now for some time. It's nice, too. Maybe I miss the extra support, but it can also be more peaceful.

Then again, sometimes I need the support. The 20th was tougher than I was ready for, but I got through it. Barely. I was a wreck the whole week leading to it, and that might have been all, then back to my current life, but it wasn't all. By the end of the day I was very painfully aware that out of a combined sibling total of 7, between my husband and me, not counting their spouses, not a single one of them made any effort to reach out and check on us that day. My best friend did. Not my siblings. Not even a text message. I posted pictures on my social networks all week, mentioning my extra struggle with the 20th anniversary, and our siblings saw and acknowledged these posts, but not one of them had so much as commented on any of the threads. They knew. They didn't bother.

So why would I be using this not-so-supportive story to support bereaved parents? I want to remind you that you are not alone, and those with you are not necessarily who you would expect. We need support. We can't do this alone. It hurts when the flesh and blood of our children can't make time for us, I mean our children were their nieces and nephews, and the hard days just pass right by them without a thought. I know, they did think about our girls, and your children are remembered, too, but what we need is for them to tell us they are thinking of us on those days. First, we need to tell them that we need them in those days. After that, it's up to them, so surround yourself with those who support you. No matter the connection. Those are the people you need. Time does heal... almost. Create a new you. A you that still includes your child, and welcome only those who are ready to meet the new you, and walk the journey with you. Leave the rest behind. They are happy in their lives, and will never understand yours. That's ok, it's not their path. It's yours.

Beth Crocker
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter



Sean Weinstein
By: Sherry Weinstein
In loving memory of my son, Sean.

After we lost our son, Sean, I found myself reflecting more on all the little things and all the milestones of his life growing up – his first steps, his first words, his first day of school, his first soccer goal, his first girlfriend, his high school graduation. There were so many memories that I had tucked away since he had grown. Now as I as I bring more memories to light, all those memories have become such precious treasures.

It was so wonderful seeing Sean grow through the years and become this thoughtful, caring young man. Around the time most parents were complaining about their teenagers, Sean was getting easier and easier. He was always one to have a good conversation, both with friends and parents. We were blessed to have so many wonderful conversations with him. Sean especially had a big impact on the people he met in just the three months he was in college. We could see that the bonds he made ran deep. In many of the notes we received, they spoke of long philosophical talks with Sean, being genuine and a good listener, being unique and thoughtful and of course, funny and a quick wit. We can see that the friendships and the impact he made will be with them throughout their lives.

Sean also started playing tennis at a very young age. He became more serious around the time he turned 10. The three of us would go to the neighborhood courts and hit for hours. Many Mother's Days were spent on the tennis courts – playing, talking, laughing and just having a lot of fun.

One of the things that I also enjoyed was when Sean told us that he was joining the orchestra and wanted to play the violin for his elective in middle school. I was thrilled since I had played the violin in junior high, which he had not known. So, for several years, we got to enjoy the performances and competitions through the beginning of high school.

One of my favorite Mother's Day, when Sean was in middle school, he and his dad surprised me as I was coming back from an errand. As I was walking back to the house from our detached garage, I noticed a bunch of goodies and flowers sitting on the patio table. Then, Sean came out from behind the garage, serenading me with his violin. They both made me so happy that day! That was a moment I will always treasure in my heart!

Sherry Weinstein,
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter





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

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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