



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 2022

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

at

**Trinity Lutheran Church
Family Life Center, Room #204
5201 Spring Cypress Rd.
Spring, Texas 77379**

The Church is located on the corner of Spring Cypress Road and Klein Church Rd. Please enter off Spring Cypress Road. The meetings are held in the Family Life Center, Room 204

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

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

To the Newly Bereaved

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

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

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

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





*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 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
2011 - Jamie Leonard, son of Carrie Newman
1999 - James Ropp, Son of Janet Ropp
1989 - Victor Alberto Renteria Jr, Son of Carla Renteria
1985 - Aaron Kirby O'Neal, Son of Sylvia Ann Roushion
1983 - Bryan Pfluger, Son of Penny McElhaney
2002 - Elijah Tsaftarides, Son of Gerri Tsaftarides
1997 - Parker Coogan, Son of Tim and Amy Coogan
1991 - Eric Castelo, Son of Debbie Castelo
2008 - Jake Hickford, Son of Henry Hickford

**"A mother's love for her child is like nothing else in the world. It knows no law,
no pity, it dares all things and crushes down remorselessly all that stands in its
path." — Agatha Christie, "The Last Séance"**



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
2021 - Shawna Merchant, Daughter of Bitsy Hatch
2020 - Darryl Allen, Son of Sandra Allen
2021 - Matthew Benjamin, Son of Nikki Jolivette
2020 - Eric Garcia, Son of John and Louise Garcia

*You left us so quickly;
there were no goodbyes.
How long this forever,
your death and our lives.*

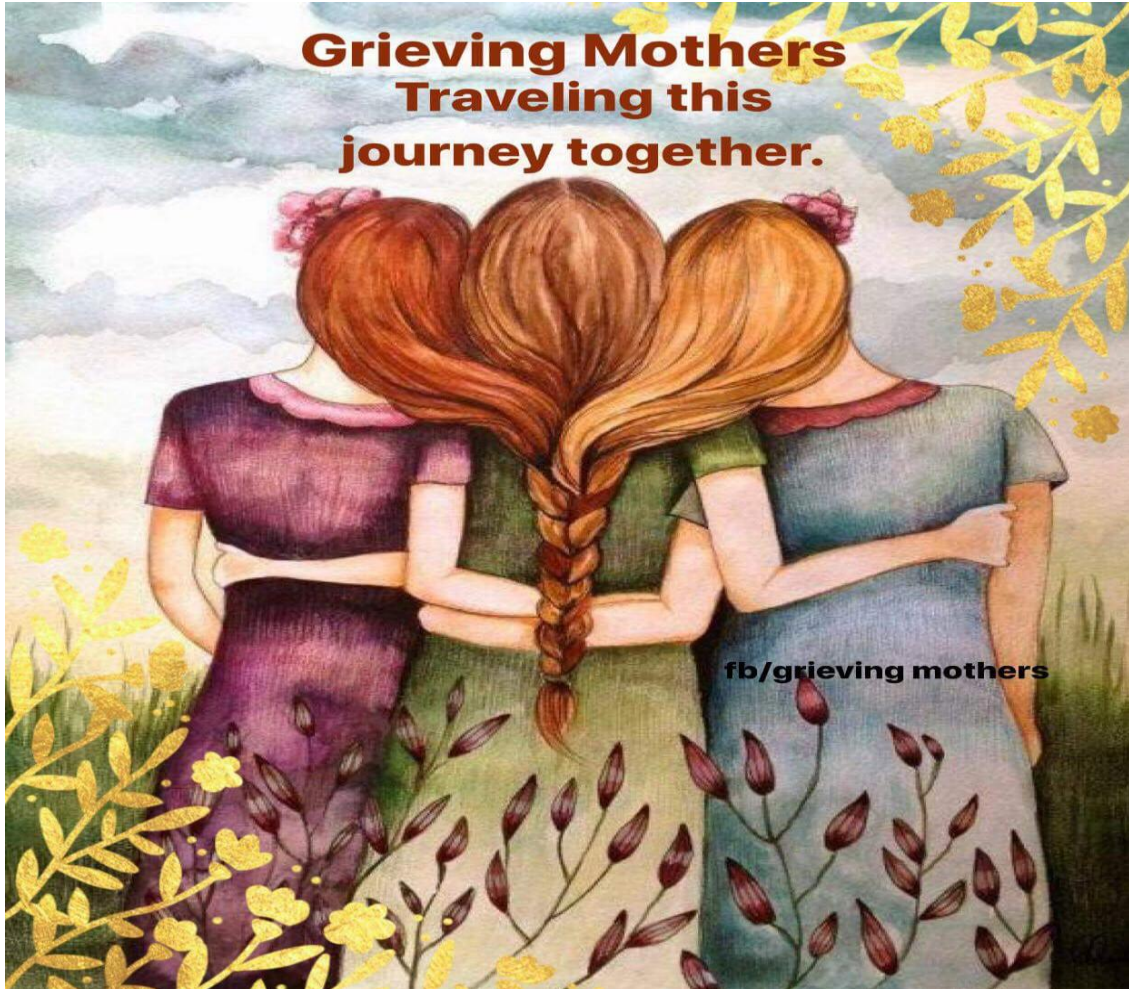
*The sadness, the anger,
the loneliness of three,
preferring four always,
how small, this new we.*

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry
From *Stars in the Deepest Night—After the Death of a Child*

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday May 10th. 7pm. at Trinity Lutheran Church, 5201 Spring Cypress Rd. 77379.

This is a special Mother's Day issue of our newsletter. Happy Mother's Day to all moms.



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

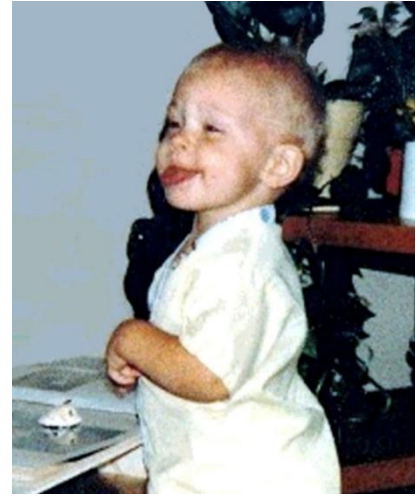
39 Years

Early in our marriage, we were blessed with a wonderful child. Our son Justin was healthy, vibrant, and full of life. He loved his family and loved the outdoors. When he was 15 months old, we took an extended summer vacation to visit all the family he had not yet been introduced to. His grandparents, great grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were greeted with lots of hugs and kisses. Another source of joy on that trip was that we had just found out we were going to have a second child, but that announcement was for another time.

The day after we returned home, Justin took his afternoon nap and never woke up.

We never received a medical explanation for his death. It was simply attributed to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Today it would be ruled Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) as he was over a year in age.

Needless to say, this put our world in a spin. Not knowing precisely what happened to Justin led to apprehension and anxiety about having another child so soon. I was told by someone I loved and trusted that I needed to get over this grief; that I was going to be a dad again in just a short time. I took the advice, buried my feelings, and showed everyone I was “a man.”



When our daughter Nicole was born, just months later, we hovered over her and watched her every breath. She was issued a heart monitor that we had her wear constantly to alert us of any abnormalities in her breathing or heart rate. This was both a curse and a blessing. It constantly went off with false alarms and we still watched her every breath. There was no relief.

In this period, I had started a new construction business. Running a new business, grieving a lost child, and raising an infant was almost more than I could bear. And then, before Nicole was two years old, we lost our third child, before she was born.

Those days remain a blur, it all happened so fast. Everything produced intense emotional responses, the wonderful and the horrible. It's hard to make sense of it even today.

Somewhere in that mix, I was also involved in a bad car accident and had a severe back injury. My fog of grief was compounded by the fog of painkillers and other drugs prescribed by my doctors. I quickly discovered it was much easier to hide in a fog of narcotics than to face the reality of our family.

When tolerance reduced the effectiveness of the drugs, I supplemented them with alcohol. I am sure you know this is a recipe for disaster. I was actively trying not to deal with grief and pain and anxiety. I was trying to just force it all away. For you that have not had this experience, what happens is you rally and cope for a few years and then you have an emotional and mental breakdown from not dealing with these issues. Then you start the cycle all over again.

From the outside looking in, it appears to be an insane way to try to live your life. For me, trapped in that cycle, it seemed like the only way to survive. Daily life was just a distraction while the inside turmoil was the real struggle. Masking it with alcohol and drugs only delayed the inevitable eruption of pain and emotion that demanded release. Sadly, I can tell you I lived this way for far too many years.

It took a wonderful doctor to wean me off all the drugs and show me I still had not dealt with any of the underlying issues. Even though more than 20 years had passed, I had not dealt with anything, and it was like starting over from the first day again, only this time clean and sober.

I was blessed to have people come into my life and lead me to a group whose mission is to support people in this condition. Compassionate Friends became my vehicle to navigate a way out of the vicious cycle and face the things I had not wanted to deal with for so long. In this group, I met other people who were in worse positions than I was. I listened to their stories and allowed myself to put my life in perspective. Talking about my story with others who knew exactly where I was and where I had been, was the way I started my journey back to healing.

No matter how long it has been, we still need to walk into that pain, to begin to deal with it and face it, so we don't let it control us. 39 years after my son's death, I am not the same person I was. I can look back at the memories with my son and those hard times with a different attitude. I attend Compassionate Friends meetings with a different purpose today. I go to help others become better equipped to cope with the day-to-day life that their new reality brings. I can only do this today because others were there for me when I needed them. Thank you to this wonderful group and the wonderful members who share their broken hearts with others.

Darryl Heino
Houston Northwest Chapter
Compassionate Friends

Second Sunday of May

*Many happy memories
Linger in our hearts this day
As we each remember our child
Who has left this earthly plane.
The day is bittersweet for us,
The mothers who have lost so much,
For to remove all pain could well
Erase the precious life we touched.
Tears will trace the memories of
Other, happier Mother's Days,
As we dwell in a quiet reverie
This Second Sunday of May*

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



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My Thoughts on Mother's Day

**By: Sharon Mondrik
Wesley's Mom**

He gave the best hugs..... That's one of my favorite memories of my sweet son, Wesley.

He had the sweetest smile, the kindest eyes. So very true, and what others said to me.

Wesley was musically talented at trumpet, drums, and was learning the guitar. He had the best voice – although he'd never admit it. But his teacher and others agreed with me, even at the young age of 10 when he sang at the 5th grade Talent Show.

Even more important than these, was Wesley's sweet and compassionate spirit, and the kindness he showed others. Many stories that were told to me later after he passed. It's unfortunate I didn't know the stories sooner. I would have told him how incredibly proud I was of him. How he made such a difference in others' lives. I think he knew; I hope so.

I wonder sometimes, how a boy who was struggling so much himself trying to fight off the negative thoughts, that dark relentless voice of depression. How could he reach out and help others? Where did that strength come from?

All I can think is that he loved his family and friends. It made Wesley feel better to help someone else. To take the focus off himself. How did my son know that at age 18 – when I'm still learning this?

I think Wesley was trying to teach me, his family and friends – by his example.

We are his legacy, and I will keep trying to make him proud. The way he always made me.

I'm hoping Wesley is in Heaven looking down on me....and smiling.

Although Mother's Day will always be met with sadness - a part of me is no longer here. I am changed, but I am still blessed. These thoughts of Wesley are what I choose to remember. He was and is the strongest person I've ever known.

I love you Wesley so very much. I miss you every hour of every day. My love hasn't stopped because you left, it just keeps growing until I see you again.

Forever Wesley's Mom



"Mothers hold their children's hands for a short while, but their hearts forever."

— Unknown



Grieving Mom's

You Are the Mother of All Mothers. I have to tell you this. You didn't fail. Not even a little. You are not a horrible mother.

You didn't choose this. You didn't want this to happen. You didn't do anything wrong. It just happened. To you. Despite your begging, pleading, praying, hoping against all hope it would not. Even though everything within you was screaming no, no, no, no, no.

God didn't do this to punish you, smite you, or to teach you a lesson. That is not God's way. You could not have prevented this if you tried harder, prayed harder, or were a "better" person. Nor if you ate better, loved harder, yoga more, did x, y, or z to the nth degree—fill in the blank with any other lie your mind devises. You could not have prevented this even if you could have predicted the future like no one can.

No, there is nothing more you could have done. You did everything you possibly could have. And you are the best mother there is because you would have done absolutely anything to keep your child alive. To breathe your last breath instead. To choose the pain all over again just to spend one more minute together. That is the ultimate kind of love. You are the ultimate kind of mother.

So wash your hands of any naysayers, betrayers, or those who sprinted in the other direction when you needed them most. Wash your hands of the people who may have falsely judged you, ostracized you, or stigmatized you because of what happened to you. Wash your hands of anyone who has made you feel less than by questioning everything you did or didn't do. Anyone whose words or looks have implied this was somehow your fault.

This was not your fault. This will never be your fault, no matter how many different ways someone tries to tell you it was.

Especially if that someone happens to be you. Sometimes it's not what others are saying that keeps you shackled in shame. Sometimes you adopt others' misguided opinions and assumptions. Sometimes it's your own inner voice that shoves you into the darkest corner of despair, like an abuser, telling you over and over and over again you failed as a mother. Convincing you if only this and what if that, it never would have happened. Saying you coulda, shoulda done this or that so your child would not have died.

That is a lie of the sickest kind. Do not believe it, not even for a second. Do not let it sink into your bones. Do not let it smother that beautiful, beautiful light of yours.

Instead, breathe in this truth with every part of yourself: You are the best damn mother in the entire world.

No one else could do what you do. No one else could ever mother your child as well as you can, as well as you are. No one else could let your child's love and light shine through the way you

do. No one else could mother your dead child as bravely. No one else could carry this unrelenting burden as courageously. It is the heaviest, most torturous burden there is.

There is no one, no one, no one who could ever, ever replace you. No one. You were chosen to be your child's mother. Yes—chosen. And no one could parent your child better in life or in death than you do. You have within you a sacred strength.

You are the mother of all mothers.

So breathe, mama, keep breathing. Believe, mama, keep believing. Fight, mama, keep fighting for this truth to uproot the lies in your heart—you didn't fail. Not even a little.

For whatever it's worth, I see you. I hear your guttural sobs. I feel your ache deep inside my bones. And it doesn't make me uncomfortable to put my fingers as a makeshift Band-Aid over the gaping hole in your heart until the scabs come, if and when they do.

It takes invincible strength to mother a child you can no longer hold, see, touch, or hear. You are a superhero mama. I see you fall down and get up, fall down and get up, over and over again. I notice the grit and guts it takes to pry yourself out of bed every single day and force your bloodied feet to stand up and keep walking. I see you walking this path of life you've been given, where every breath and step apart from your child..



THIS BEREAVED MOTHER'S DAY

Let us recognize all mothers who have lost a child

Let us acknowledge their strength and eternal love

Let us remember their beautiful children today and always

The Sacred Seashore

My dear Danielle,

Although I am technically still your mother, there is no longer any joy in my heart; only just an empty hole where it once was. I have lost the most precious gift that was ever given to me; you! I know that you were only on loan to me by God, but I wasn't ready to give you back so soon.

On March 29, 1988, I was blessed to become the mother of the most amazing human being. God chose me the responsibility to love, cherish, and protect you. You changed my life forever! I never believed that you, this tiny, little girl would give me the greatest purpose in my life. I could not believe that I could love someone so much. I saw you grow into this amazing little girl. As you developed, your personality started to shine through and make you into the wonderful woman that you would become for the rest of your short life. You were so kind by the way you would always go out of your way to give and help those in need. You have no idea how proud I was of you. You were beautiful, caring, sweet, gentle, nice and so many other wonderful qualities. I hate Mother's Day, your birthday, holidays, and the day you died. Now I can only spend those days at your grave.



You gave me the most loving grandchildren, Talyn , Riley , Kacie , and Landon. This horrible, horrible disease robbed him of the chance to know what a loving, adoring, and gentle mother you were and you weren't given the chance to see his beautiful little face, his sad little lip when he was about to cry, the way he giggled, crawled, walked, talked, and so much more. It just wasn't fair. Your children shouldn't have to grow up without you.

You were my absolute best friend. I couldn't wait for my off days so we could eat Mexican food, get our nails done, and going to Hobby Lobby (your most favorite place in the world!) Oh, how I miss that. It seems like every place I go reminds me of you, I think about you all day and night and I can't get you out of my mind, the songs I hear, and I'll see or think of something funny and I find myself picking up the phone to tell you things, but then I remember, you're not here anymore.

Then in the beginning of January, you began to tell me and Kevin that you weren't feeling well. This was strange because you never got sick and if you were sick, you never told anyone. You were always so healthy. You never smoked, drank, did drugs, and you ate the right food. So when you asked Kevin to take you to the ER, I got scared. Then several more doctor's visits and more trips to the ER and no one could tell you what was wrong. After all the blood tests and every other test there were, the doctor's ordered a bone marrow biopsy. Then we were given the devastating news; you had Leukemia! You were immediately taken to MD Anderson. Over the next year. You were given chemotherapy and would get into remission and every time you would relapse while waiting for your bone marrow/stem cell donor. you would relapse. You went through this 6 times, but you kept fighting; You were a WARRIOR! I know you were fighting and fighting for the kids. You suffered through so much pain and

disappointment. You were never going to quit because you knew those babies loved you and needed you. Sweetheart, you fought with all your might, but this was just too much for your fragile, little body. I was so proud of you, and I didn't want to lose you, but I couldn't bear to see you suffer anymore.

I want you to know that the kids are holding up and I know how much they miss you. But they are fine, so don't you worry sweetheart. Dani, I know you wouldn't want me to, but the only place I find peace, is sitting at your grave. There, I can talk to you about the kids, how much I loved you and miss you. I tell you about what's going on in this crazy world and how much has changed. I can tell you how sorry I am for the things I didn't say or say enough and the things I should not have said. If I could only have you back for one more day so I could tell you how much I loved you, how proud I was of you, how blessed I was to have had you. I have so many regrets that I want to make right. These weigh so heavily on my heart and oh I wish I could take those back. You were the best daughter a Mother could have!

Momma loves and misses you so much and I know that I will see you again one day!



Wendy DeVillier
Danielle's Mom
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter

Mother's Day is a day of appreciation and respect. I can think of no mothers who deserve it more than those who had to give a child back.

~Erma Bomback

MEMORIES

I wrote this article a few years ago. When we think of our children, the loss is poignant, yet the memories are beautiful and ours to treasure. I hope this gives you some peace on Mother's Day as you treasure the special memories of your child.

The kaleidoscope of my mind holds millions of memories of my son, Todd. The small flutter announcing himself. A tiny fist grabbing my fingers for the first time. A one-year-old's blue blanket as he stroked its border with one hand and sucked his thumb with the other. Matchbox cars. A red tricycle. Building model cars. His first bicycle. A concussion. A saucer sled. His first "big boy" bed. Giggling until hiccups overtook him. His best Halloween costume. His white poodle, Fluffy. His lifetime best friend, Allen. Winning in track. Purple tennis shoes. Purple walls. Pink Floyd. The four-year paper route. Sunday mornings driving him on the paper route. His first car. His first GTO and the sound of the engine. The basketball hoop on the garage roof and the thump-thump of "shooting" into the night. The first prom. High School graduation with Grandpa in attendance. College days. Tears at Allen's sister's funeral. A 12-year restoration of a 1965 GTO. Car Shows. The new business after college graduation. Marriage with Grandpa in attendance. First house. The birth of his first child. Acceptance to A&M. Graduation with an MBA from A&M with Grandpa in attendance. Birth of twin daughters. New job in the corporation. Birth of his youngest daughter. Tears at Grandpa's funeral. Building a new home in Austin. The laughter he shared with his children. The joys he gave to me. The meaningful relationship with my adult child. The last day I saw him. The last conversation. There are books of details in each thought. A mother's memories glide effortlessly into the future. And that is as it should be.

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

An important way to cope with grief is having an outlet, be it interpersonal, be it artistic, that will allow you to not have to contain your grief, but will give you an opportunity to express it, to externalize it to some degree.

~ R. Benjamin Cirlin, Grief counselor



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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