



# *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 2024**

### **HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

[www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org](http://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 Tsafarides, Son of Gerri Tsafarides  
1997 - Parker Coogan, Son of Tim and Amy Coogan  
1991 - Eric Castelo, Son of Debbie Castelo  
2008 - Jake Hickford, Son of Henry Hickford  
2004 - Gabriella Grace Pena, Daughter of Servando & Jeanne Pena  
1973 - Antonio Ramos Jr., Son of Rosie Aguirre  
1990 - Joshua Bell, Son of Jamie Bell

**"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 14th. 7pm. at Trinity Lutheran Church, 5201 Spring Cypress Rd. 77379.**



The Compassionate Friends (TCF) 47th Annual National Conference will be held July 12-14 in New Orleans! TCF's National Conference is an enriching and supportive event for many newer and long-time bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. Attendees come and find renewed hope and support, as well as strategies for coping with grief. Participants create friendships with other bereaved people who truly understand the heartbreaking loss of a child, sibling, or grandchild. Lifelong friendships are often formed and rekindled each year at TCF conferences.

### ***Early Bird Registration Rate Until May 20<sup>th</sup>***

**Adult Registration ~~\$325~~ early bird rate \$285**

*(early bird rate ends May 20 at midnight, CST)*

**Active Military/Student Registration ~~\$245~~ early bird rate \$210**

*(early bird rate ends May 20 at midnight, CST)*

**Child Registration (9-17 years old) ~~\$200~~ early bird rate \$165**

*(early bird rate ends May 20 at midnight, CST)*

### **Hotel Reservations**

This year's conference will be held at the New Orleans Marriott. Reservations can now be made online at TCF's dedicated [reservation link](#). Our discounted room rate with the Marriott is \$144 per night plus applicable taxes and fees. Please note that each attendee can reserve a maximum of two rooms. Many attendees arrive on Thursday since the conference begins early on Friday morning. We also have pre-conference activities that are offered on Thursday evening, that attendees find beneficial. We look forward to seeing you in New Orleans!

*Dear Compassionate Friends,*

*When I lost my daughter DeAndria in July 2008. I thought the world had come to an end. I thought I was the only one who had lost a child, I thought the sun would never shine again, I thought I'd never smile again let alone wanting to see another day. When I found Compassionate Friends all that changed. Compassionate Friends help me find a new normal, a new way of living. When I attended my first conference I learned that I was Not Alone. I learned that the sun will shine again, I learned that I will smile again. The conference gave me a new look on life on how to handle this grief walk we're on.*

*If you haven't attended a conference put this one on your calendar. I've had the opportunity to attend several and have walked away with a new look on life.*

*If you'd like to speak with me personally feel free to reach out. I can't make it this year due to a prior commitment however I'm looking forward to the next one.*

*Regards,  
Loretta Stephens  
andersonloretta@sbcglobal.net  
Dees mom*

### **Jennifer Bryson Story**

It was Jennifer's last birthday on earth. None of us knew that on 9/12/2021. We had celebrated the day before due to schedules. Jennifer took her dog, Finn, out that morning early and a baby squirrel fell out of a tree nest right at her feet. Jennifer thought it was dead but on closer inspection found it was alive. She took Finn inside and googled what to do. She made a soft nest in a box, duct taped it to the tree trunk where the nest was and placed the little guy there hoping mom would retrieve it, watching and waiting all day. No luck. The wildlife rehab wouldn't open till Monday so she brought the box into the garage and gave the little guy droppers of pedialight all through Sunday night, warming towels in the dryer and placing them around him. The next day Jennifer's Dad and she took him to wildlife rehab. They declared him a survivor and said he would do well. We treasure this story for many reasons, but mostly because it showed her heart. Jennifer couldn't leave a defenseless creature without offering aid and love.

Bless her and keep her safe in Your love and light, please God.

Your Loving Parents  
Donna and Jim Bryson



## **The Red Guitar In Memory of Sean July 14, 1985 - October 10, 2010**

The old red guitar sits mutely on the black metal stand. Silence from the instrument resembles the quiet found on cold winter mornings after snow has noiselessly fallen and blanketed the ground during the dark night. A mother tenderly picks up the guitar and brushes away any dust that has accumulated since it was stilled. With tears flowing down her cheeks, she lovingly holds the guitar tightly to her chest, right in front of her broken

heart. And she remembers.

This guitar once belonged to a boy, an explorer of life with a sharp mind, quick wit, and a deep love of music. He especially enjoyed listening to “oldies” that his father would play on their stereo. *Led Zeppelin*, *Crosby Stills Nash and Young*, and *The Allman Brothers* gave cause for him to smile, dance and twitch his fingers as though he were strumming his own musical instrument. He longed to “jam” like the great ones of rock and roll.

“If only I had a guitar!” he would dream as he imagined himself on stage with Eric Clapton or Stevie Ray Vaughn.

In second grade only one wish appeared on his Christmas list, a guitar. He knew exactly which stringed instrument he wanted. Electric, shiny, and red, it stood erect and proud in the front window of The Guitar Shop. After much urging and pleading with his father, they went inside where he held the guitar in his small hands. He stroked the long neck feeling the tension of the silver strings through his fingers. He just knew this would be the guitar for him. And it was.

The guitar and the boy were forever friends. When young, he and the guitar would go to lessons together. Hours were spent practicing chords they had learned. This task was difficult for him as his young fingers were not quite long enough to reach the strings just the way the teacher had shown. But they persevered; the boy and his guitar. Soon melodious sounds were heard coming from this twosome. Not yet the music of the “great rock and rollers”, but they were on their way.

As the years passed, the boy grew, into a teenager and finally a young adult. He never lost his love for his guitar and the music they made together. Sometimes they performed for family or friends. Other times, they played alone, just the two of them. The boy drew great solace as he became enveloped with tunes that came to life as he strummed his fingers over the nickel-plated steel strings on the red guitar. They had a wonderful life full of rhythm and harmony.

But that all ended on a fateful day in October. Train. Tracks. Explosion. Fire. Darkness. Nothing. That day the boy and the music died.

Now the guitar only gives comfort that comes from the silence of memories. It sits hushed on the black metal stand and waits for me-the boy's mother- to pick up the guitar that once belonged to the boy, my son, Sean, and hold it tightly over my chest, right in front of my broken heart.



And I remember.

Laura Hengel,  
Sean's Mom



### **International Bereaved Mother's Day May 5, 2024:**

International Bereaved Mother's Day is observed annually on the first Sunday of May, which is May 5<sup>th</sup> this year. It is comprehensible that the majority of people have never heard of it, given that the mainstream media does not cover it. The [world](#) is typically busy preparing for Mother's Day at the same time each year. Corporate entities and marketers bombard our inboxes, displays, and messages with Mother's Day reminders. Imagine, however, how devastating this must be for mothers and guardians who have lost a child. International Bereaved Mother's Day honors mothers who have lost a child. A chance to communicate or discuss all that they may have endured. Women experiencing child loss are also mothers, even if their offspring have passed away.



## GIFTS FROM MY SON

I lost my son, Garrett, to a drug overdose just a few weeks prior to his twenty-seventh birthday. He was a loving son, a gifted musician, a caring friend, and one of the kindest people I have ever known. He had a special gift for loving people and accepting them—just as they were. It took me some time to understand that he was not oblivious to the faults and limitations of others. On the contrary, he loved others (including me) in spite of their faults. After fifteen years, I still miss him—every day.

My son's life was such a gift to me. He was the oldest of my three sons, and we shared all those wonderful things a mother shares with a first child. He brought music to my life—both literally and figuratively. He left me with many gifts, but some of the greatest gifts he left to me were the words he spoke. I carry them with me, and I am sharing them now in the hope that they may resonate with other parents who have lost children under similar circumstances:

“It's not your fault”

I became aware that my son had a drug problem at the age of nineteen. He spent several years in and out of recovery. Since addiction is a problem that effects the entire family, this also meant that I spent substantial amounts of time in family counseling, family meetings, educational seminars and twelve step programs. In one of those early family meetings I expressed my regret that I had not seen the warning signs of addiction sooner. Garrett's response was simple. He said, “This was not the example you set for me. You taught me right from wrong, and I knew better. This was my decision, and I was pretty good at hiding all of this from you. I knew I could come to you for help. Mom, it's not your fault.”

“Take care of yourself”

Once when attending individual counseling, Garrett invited me to a session with his counselor. He said he needed my help, which I was anxious to provide. However, his request caught me off-guard. He said, “Every time I look in your eyes, I see the worry and concern that I have caused. I am worried about you. In order for me to take care of myself and my recovery, I need you to take care of yourself. Please go to counseling, attend a meeting, or do whatever you need to do to take care of yourself.” Every now and then, when I am not heeding his request, I hear his voice.

“That's what my Mom does—she helps people”

Garrett was hospitalized and had just been moved from intensive care the preceding day. The roommate in his semi-private hospital room was blind, and the gentleman was having difficulty contacting his daughter, who was in labor in another hospital across town (he wasn't sure which one.) We managed to find her and contact her by telephone. He was relieved to learn that both his daughter and new grandchild were doing well. When he thanked me, Garrett smiled a crooked smile and said, “That's what my Mom does – she helps people.” I have worked as a health care professional for many years. When in the midst of grief, I have become discouraged and questioned whether my life still has meaning and purpose. I have remembered Garrett's simple statement and it has helped me to move forward.

“I have THE BEST Mom”

Garrett spent almost two sober years in a Christian discipleship program for people with drug and alcohol addiction. He started as a student, later served as an intern, and eventually joined the staff. Whenever I would visit or attend a service the choir was leading, Garrett would come and take me by the arm, and lead me across the room to someone he knew. He would

always say, "Hey, I want you to meet my mom. I have THE BEST mom." Since losing a child to addiction, there have been many days when I have felt that I failed as a parent. When the guilt creeps in, I have to remind myself that my son had a different opinion. At the end of the day, perhaps it is his opinion that matters most.

In loving memory of my son Garrett  
Leigh Heard Boyer  
Houston Northwest Chapter TCF



**From Beth Crocker  
In Memory of  
Cheyenne Crocker  
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.

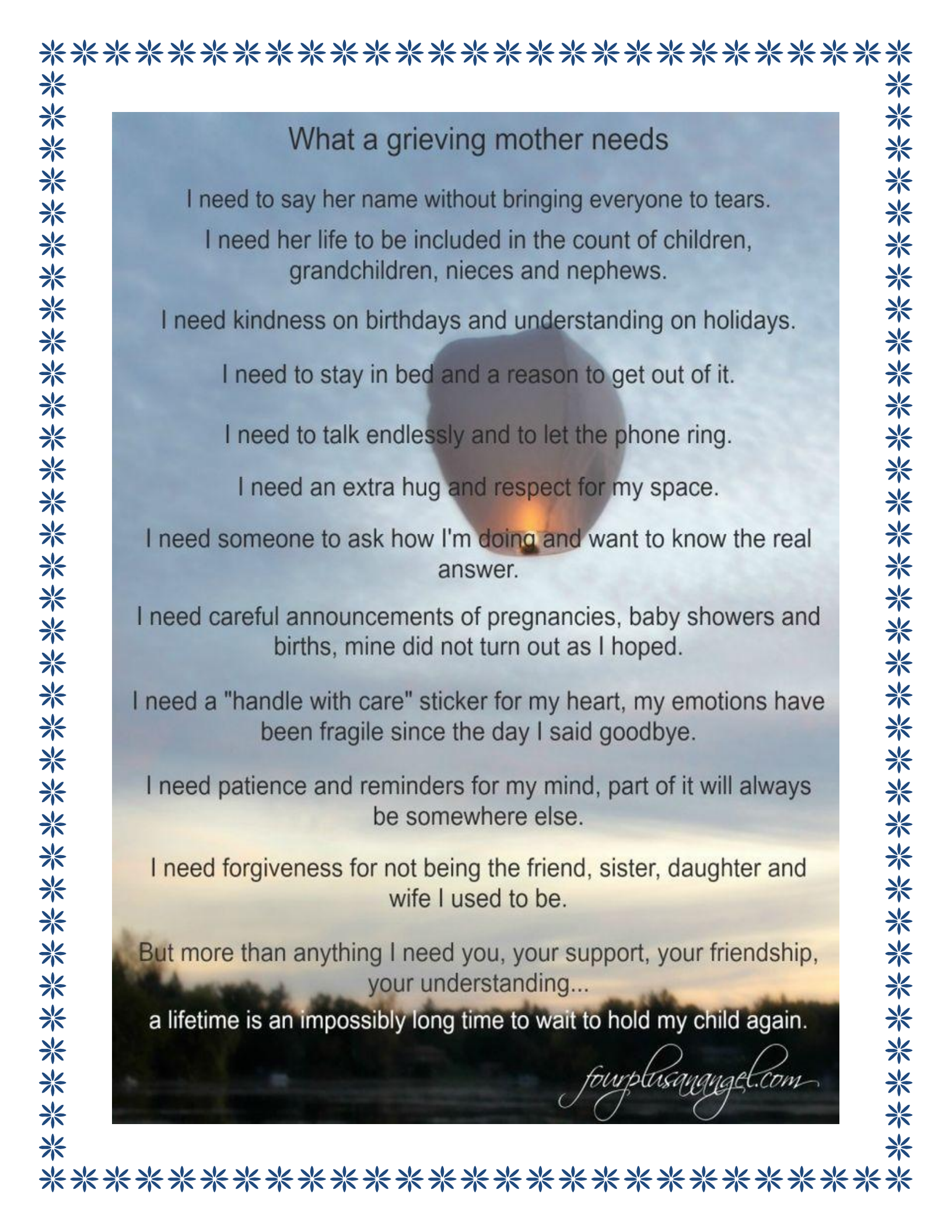
I didn't expect to be faced with the almost celebrity style respect and admiration we often get from others who "can't imagine" what we live with. I don't like it, it makes me very uncomfortable because I'd rather have my girls back. I know they just want to help us see how strong we are, but it's weird.

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.





## What a grieving mother needs

I need to say her name without bringing everyone to tears.

I need her life to be included in the count of children,  
grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

I need kindness on birthdays and understanding on holidays.

I need to stay in bed and a reason to get out of it.

I need to talk endlessly and to let the phone ring.

I need an extra hug and respect for my space.

I need someone to ask how I'm doing and want to know the real  
answer.

I need careful announcements of pregnancies, baby showers and  
births, mine did not turn out as I hoped.

I need a "handle with care" sticker for my heart, my emotions have  
been fragile since the day I said goodbye.

I need patience and reminders for my mind, part of it will always  
be somewhere else.

I need forgiveness for not being the friend, sister, daughter and  
wife I used to be.

But more than anything I need you, your support, your friendship,  
your understanding...

a lifetime is an impossibly long time to wait to hold my child again.

*fourplusanangel.com*

## Phone Friends

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All of the people on the following list are bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. They understand what you are going through and have all wished to be included in this list in the hope that anyone who needs to talk will reach out to them. They are willing to talk with you at any time you need their support. Some have listed the specific area in which they have personal experience but they do not intend to imply that that is the only topic they wish to talk about. We all have experienced this journey through grief and it encompasses much more than the specifics surrounding our individual loss. Having a compassionate person to listen when you are having a bad day or just need someone to reach out to when you feel overwhelmed can make the difference in getting through one more day. We have all been there and understand, please feel free to contact any one of us.

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