



# ***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.*

## **NOVEMBER 2018**

### **HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

[www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org](http://www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org)

Cypress Creek Christian Church  
6823 Cypresswood Drive  
Spring, Texas 77379

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

**(Our next meeting is Tuesday, November 13<sup>th</sup>)**

The Church is located between Stuebner-Airline and Kuykendahl, about 2 miles North of FM 1960 West. We meet in the Forum (center building) of the Church located between the Courthouse and the Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the church area parking. 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.





**Lighting a candle, cherishing a birth.....**

## **NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS**

1951-Pamela Ann Roberson, Daughter of Doris & Dale Hockstra  
2005-Carson Hayes Gurgonus, Son of Amber Gurgonus  
1976-Bryan Belveal , Son of Linda Belveal  
1974-Michael Shrum , Son of Mike & Melva Shrum  
1980-Michael Brent Police, Son of Jack & Sally Police  
1984-Phillip Matthew Terrell, Son of Phillip & Mary Jo Terrell  
1968-Jenny Nolan Burgess, Daughter of Jenelle Chamberlain  
1998-Samantha Alonso, Daughter of Joanna Alonso  
1985-Alan Jerome Austin, Son of Rhonda Austin  
2004-Brett Collins, Son of Bill & Geri Collins  
1978-Shelly Vick Hopkins, Daughter of Brandon & Paula Lansford  
1985-Erin Johnson, Daughter of Rebecca Johnson  
2012-George Milo Morfin, Jr., Son of Diana Abidin  
1988- Katrina Martinez, Daughter of Amy Kohl  
1991- Devyn Sloterdijk, Son of Janet Sloterdijk  
2004- Lhwhyh Yhshrhal, Son of Taneshia Carey  
1985- Adam Kujawa, Son of Larry and Sara Kujawa  
2014 -Luke Curry, Son of Lynsy Curry  
1989- Kellie Martin, Daughter of Denise Martin



***Today I celebrate the life you lived and the blessing that you were to me  
during your time on Earth. I remember you. I feel you.***

***I know you exist in my heart and elsewhere.***

***I love you.***

***Today, in your honor,***

***I celebrate Life.***



**Lighting a candle, remembering a life**

## **NOVEMBER ANGEL DATES**

2010- Trace Thornton, Son of Nina Thornton  
2007- Garrett Conrad Ford, Son of Leigh Heard  
2009- Makaylin Angel, Daughter of Jennifer Edwards  
2005- Ava Helena Wallheimer, Daughter of Angela Wallheimer  
2007- Kate Bronstein, Daughter of Pat Gallien  
2008- Melissa Ellen Blackbird, Daughter of Will & Pam Blackbird  
2008- Charles James Booth, Son of Mary Booth  
2005- Ryan Matthews, Son of Frances Matthews  
11/19 Jonathon Kuta, Son of Larry & Terri Kuta  
2009- Lance Anderson, Son of John & Dianna Brumley  
2009- Phillip Matthew Terrell, Son of Phillip & Mary Jo Terrell  
2007- Megan Kathleen Ratliff, Daughter of Ann & Garvon Ratliff  
2011- Nancy Elizabeth Gonzalez, Daughter of Dulce Gonzalez  
2010- Kristen Roberts, Daughter of Tom & Geneva Montgomery  
2012- George Milo Morfin, Jr., Son of Diana Abidin  
2014 - Kristi Whitehorn Hill, Daughter of Susan Whitehorn  
2014 - April Ann Ulrich, Daughter of Doug & Josette Tharp  
2015- Baron Neelley, Son of Bo & Allison Neeley  
2015- Sean Weinstein, Son of Steve & Sherry Weinstein  
2015- Creighton Heslop, Son of Barry & Kris Heslop  
2015- Marc Pournier, Son of Jolena Pournier  
2014- Jamie Leonard, Son of Carrie Newman



### ***My Angel Day***

*Yes Mom, this is my Angel Day  
From my earthly life, I know I left quite soon  
But only to enter my greatest reward in Glory  
Far beyond the moon*

*Today you'll perform your loving rituals  
And do your best to keep my memory aware  
Yes Mom, this ritual is for both of us  
For I am both here and there*

## CHAPTER NEWS

**Our next meeting is Tuesday, November 13th at 7pm.**

Our warmest welcome to our new members, **Candy Jennings, lost her son Gerald in September 2018; Lakisha Washington, lost her son Kingston Bowen in July 2018; and Ira Johnson, lost his son Ira.** We understand how difficult it is to walk through the doors to a TCF meeting. We have all taken that first step and we reach out to you in friendship and support.

### **The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting Sunday, December 9, 2018**



**Our Chapter will again celebrate our children's life by lighting a candle at 7:00pm as we join the wave of light that will cross the globe moving from one time zone to another. Bring your family and friends for this sweet time of remembrance. The Jersey Village High School Theater Department will hostess our candle lighting service. For more information you can contact David Hendricks [dbhhendricks@hotmail.com](mailto:dbhhendricks@hotmail.com) or Linda Brewer, [llbrewer67@hotmail.com](mailto:llbrewer67@hotmail.com) or 936-441-3840.**

**WHERE: Jersey Village High School  
7600 Solomon  
Houston, TX 77040  
(The high school is at Beltway 8 and Hwy 290)**

**WHEN: Sunday, December 9, 2018  
Starts at 6:45 pm (lighting of the candles at 7:00pm)**

**Food, sodas, coffee will be provided. There will be readings, performances and the candle lighting. A message board for you to leave your child a message will also be available and there will also be a balloon release. Please bring a picture of your child to display, (you can take the picture home when the program is finished).**



## And For This I Give Thanks

I am acutely aware that autumn is here. As I write this, the air coming through my window is crisper and the leaves are taking on the golden and scarlet hues of the season. The shorts and tee shirts, which were the summer mainstay of the neighborhood children, are being replaced by sweats and flannels. Pumpkins are replacing pink flamingos as lawn ornaments. The beauty of nature is at its most spectacular. It is unmistakably here, welcome or not...

This will be my fifth autumn, to be followed by my fifth holiday season without my daughter Nina. I find that I am far enough along in my grief to find memories to smile about now, but still close enough to remember those first few years and the piercing stab of pain in my heart that went along with them. Halloween, with memories of the costume party she threw when she was 10 years old, the major production she made out of what she would wear as a trick-or-treater, and as she got older, her enjoyment in passing out candy to neighborhood goblins. Then came Thanksgiving, one of my favorites. I liked the idea of family and friends gathering together with no other purposes other than eating until you nearly exploded and being thankful for each other and the blessings of the past year. No presents required, just the joy of family togetherness - and the knowledge that my children were here, all of them. On that first Thanksgiving the empty chair and place at the table seemed to scream out at me that someone precious was missing. And the message of this particular holiday was thankfulness? What on earth could I ever find to be thankful for?

Some TCF parents have memories of being unable to choke down any morsel of food because they were continually trying to choke back tears that first Thanksgiving. Just wanting to curl up in a ball, pull the covers over their heads, and wake up some time in January after the last remnants of the holidays were cleared away. In all honesty, I cannot tell you even one detail of that first one: where I spent it, who was present, where I was, if I cried all day. I remember nothing.

I do remember three months after Nina had died, though. On a visit to my neurologist I tearfully told him of my depression over her death. His response to me was "Why don't you count your blessings rather than your sorrows? Think happy thoughts and maybe you won't feel so sad." I, of course, asked him if he had ever lost a child. He had not obviously. Only someone uneducated in the school of grief would say something like that.

Almost five Thanksgiving's later, have I found reasons to be thankful? I asked myself this question and decided to put pen to paper. I was surprised to say the list was quite lengthy, so I will only share a few of them. I am thankful for:

- My loving family, and the welcomed joyful additions in the last few years.
- My memory, because now the painful memories are, more often than not, replaced with the beautiful memories of the past, and they were such beautiful memories.
- My life, for whom else will keep Nina's memory alive? Of course, my family, but they have lives, as they should. I am the self-appointed keeper of my daughter's memory.
- Nina. The joy of loving her, the privilege of being her mother. Though I wish it had been much longer, I wouldn't trade those 15 ½ years for anything.

- Smiling a genuine smile, laughing a hardy laugh, and finding my sense of humor again. I sincerely believe that Nina likes to hear me laugh and that she would want me to find humor in life again.
- My sight, because I commented (for the first time in five autumns) on the magnificent colors of the autumn foliage and the grandness of Minnesota's most sumptuous season. I didn't think I'd ever notice again. But I did.
- The Compassionate Friends, who showed me there is life after the death of a child; who allowed me to express my emotions, listened patiently, understood my pain, and welcomed me into their hearts. They helped salvage what remained of my sanity and I will be eternally grateful.
- The opportunity to give back, through TCF meetings and this newsletter. To bring hope to the newly bereaved in the knowledge that it won't always hurt this bad, and that you will make it with the love and support of family and your Compassionate Friends. And, that there will come a time that you too will find things to be thankful for again.

I am told, by those who know, that peace and acceptance are that light we are searching for at the end of the tunnel. Though I find myself still looking for it at times, those further down the grief road have reassured me it will come. Maybe not this Thanksgiving or next, but that it will. And I believe them.

Cathy Seehuetter  
TCF ST. Paul, MN  
In Memory of my daughter, Nina



## SPECIAL REMEMBRANCE

**Garrett Conrad Ford**

**12/18/80 - 11/2/07**

*David,*

*I am attaching the article that I promised you. I am hoping it has some meaning for other bereaved parents.*

*Today is Garrett's "Angel date.." I find it hard to believe that it has been over ten years since I hugged him (he had the best hugs), heard his laugh (he had a great one) or heard him play his guitar or cello. I have always told my children I love them OFTEN (much to the dismay of my two younger boys when they were teenagers.) One of them once told me it was "highly annoying." Garrett would just grin and say, "I know, I know you love me Mom."*

*There was one more thing he said that was just too personal for me to include in this article. Actually, it was something he said to his fiancé, Nikki, and she shared it with me at the hospital that awful week. He said, "Nikki, I love you more than I have ever loved anyone --- except maybe my Mom." I carry that with me too.*

*I want to thank you for all your love and support over the past ten years. I don't know how I would have made it through the grieving process without you and the other bereaved parents that I have met through Compassionate Friends.*

*Hugs,  
Leigh*

## 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 ten 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

*Leigh has been my faithful right hand helper at TCF meetings (although she sits to my left) for a number of years. She knows what to say and is particularly helpful to parents whose child has been involved with drugs. Leigh is a caring, loving friend and special mom who has blessed my life. It's hard to write about your child, but Leigh has shared her heartfelt story.*

*Thanks Leigh  
David*



## THANKSGIVING PRAYER

I'm thankful this Thanksgiving  
That my grief is not so new.  
Last year it was so painful  
To think of losing you.  
Death can't claim my love for you  
Tho we are far apart,  
Sweet memories will always be  
Engraved upon my heart.  
Time can never bring you back.  
But it can help me be  
Thankful for the years of joy  
You brought our family.  
To all the parents with grief so new  
I share your loss and sorrow.  
I pray you find with faith and time  
The blessings of each tomorrow.

Charlotte Irick  
TCF, Idaho Falls, ID

## To Our Family and Friends

The "Holiday Season" is a time of family – festive gatherings, worshiping together, sharing love and gifts, and cherished memories. For the bereaved parent, these aspects of the season are precisely what makes us dread its arrival.

The absence of our child when the "whole family" gathers seems to accentuate our incomplete family. We are sorely reminded of "how it used to be" and don't want to accept what is now. We need patience and understanding of our family and friends to help us through the holidays as best we can.

We may want to change the way we spend Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Hanukkah. If the family traditionally gathers at one house, perhaps the gathering place could be changed, especially if the gathering home is that of the bereaved. If we do prepare the meal, be aware that we may not have the energy we have had in the past and will need a lot of help.

Perhaps we'll try to avoid the holiday altogether by going away for a few days. Whatever our thoughts are for coping with the day, please take our feelings into consideration when you make your plans.

For some of us shopping for gifts is a painful experience. The stores' festive decorations and music belie our mood, as we feel forced into participating in the "season." We think longingly about that special gift we won't be buying this year. Again, our depression saps us of the energy to do the things we have done in the past, and we need your understanding for the things that remain undone.

Perhaps the single most helpful thing you can do for us is to include our child in the holidays. We want to hear his/her name, to have you recall fond memories of their lives, to know that you, too, are feeling their absence and remembering them with love.

Getting through the holidays is a rough task for bereaved parents. We need to handle them in a way that we feel is best for ourselves and our families. We ask for your love and support during this especially difficult time.

Marge Henning  
TCF West Orange, NJ



*"Our healing will eventually cause our pain to move out and make room for our loved ones memories. We learn to make a new life for ourselves. Holidays get better and we learn how to live again." —Marie Hofmockel*

## GRATITUDE.... THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

I am convinced that the real key to happiness is gratitude. I did not come upon this insight. I learned it from Dennis Prager, a wonderful and gifted man who is both author and talk show host for KNBC radio in Los Angeles. I give him all the credit. But I have thought a lot about this idea after my son, Mark, died five years ago tomorrow.

At first I was offended by people who smiled or even laughed during The Compassionate Friends meetings. These were the people who seemed to have somehow re-entered the land of the living. How dare they greet each other with hugs. How dare they laugh. How dare they appear normal when their children have died. But over the last seven years I have learned three valuable lessons:

- Life goes on and we must too. Gradually the pain eases and the warm memories replace the sadness. Gradually we return to life. One day we find that it's 11:00 in the morning and we have not thought about our child yet. At first we feel guilt. But then we also realize we are going forward. We will never forget. But we decide that the loss of our child will not be the all-consuming factor in our life. We choose to enjoy friends again. We choose to go out to dinner again. We choose to laugh again. I am convinced that this is what our children would want for us. The pain does not bring our child back. It only makes us miserable without end.

- Become grateful for what we have, not focused on what we have lost. I see people in our chapter meetings who have gone through "every parent's nightmare" and want no part of life again. But, I ask that these compassionate friends also think about the ways they have been blessed, as well as hurt. In my experience, most people have more to be thankful for than they realize: health, other children, a loving family, a career they enjoy, financial security, life in a free country, a faith that works for them, a true best friend, a spouse who they love. Nobody has it all. But compared to most of the world, we have a lot.

- The life we now lead will be better than it would have been. That does not make our child's death a good thing. It just means that our child's life mattered, and it has changed us forever. It means that in some small way the world will be better because our child lived, and we are the ones who can make it so. We have a new sense of priorities. We don't "sweat the small stuff." We know what matters because we know what is irreplaceable. And we know how deeply other people hurt because we, too, have been there. We "know how they feel."

And when our life is different and better because our child lived, then that child is never forgotten. Each of us would do anything in the world to go back in time, but we can't. It is up to us now to go forward, and we can.

Richard Edler

TCF South Bay/LA, CA

In Memory of my son Mark Edler

As published in We Need Not Walk Alone, 1999 Anniversary Issue

## THE KEEPERS OF MEMORIES

You make friends because you have things in common.  
We are friends because of our children.  
The older ones, the younger ones,  
the one who never even had a chance to breathe.

They are our reason for being.  
Our heartbeat, our life's blood.  
Whether we have lots of memories or only a few,  
we are joined by an unbreakable bond.

We are the ones left behind, to remember  
and carry the torch for those we remember so lovingly.  
We are there for ourselves and each other.  
Because we understand the pain of loss.

We must also be there for those who unfortunately join our ranks.  
Because we are the parent of lost children,  
the bruised hearts,  
the keepers of memories.

Cheryl Pelletier  
TCF Concord NH



## 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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