



# *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.*

**OCTOBER 2017**

**HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

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

Cypress Creek Christian Church Community Center  
6823 Cypresswood Drive, Room 20  
Spring, Texas 77379

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

**(Our next meeting is Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup>)**

**Because of the flooding at Cypress Creek Christian Church our meeting this month will be held once again at the home of Mark and Debbie Rambis. Their address is:  
3607 Bainbridge Estates Dr.  
Spring, TX 77388**

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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.....**

## **OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS**

2008-Maxwell B. Heath, Son of Carrie & Dirk Heath  
1986-Brendon Chase Mooney, Son of Richard & Joan Mooney  
1981-Amanda Cristina Ramirez-Velazquez , Daughter of Cynthia Cruz  
1986-Tara Michelle Rose, Daughter of Angie Rose  
1972-Grant Koval, Son of Linda Koval  
1983-Kevin Donat, Son of Diane Donat  
1999-Joselito C. M. Boquilon, Son of Raulito & Kim Boquilon  
1980-Felipe Danny Sanchez, Son of Lupe Sanchez  
1968-Travis Davis, Son of Sharyl Davis  
1988-Kayla Lower, Daughter of Lori Morris  
1994-Braden Hughes Patton, Son of Sherill and Chase Patton  
1963-Robert Elizeus, Son of Joanne Wycoff  
1988-DeAndria Sharee Anderson, Daughter of Rawn & Loretta Stephens  
1989-Michael Vincent Ledwig, Son of Mary Ann Ledwig  
1985-Jenny, Daughter of John and Debbie Ryan  
1975-Aimee Hurst, Daughter of Doris Odell  
1967-Julie Less, Daughter of Jim Less, Sister of Susan Less  
1994-Vanessa Whitford, Daughter of Russell & Nury Whitford  
1981-Michael Haner, Son of Jeanne Haner  
1991-Jacob Landon, Son of Brenda Landon  
1971-Tony Dizona, Son of Rosemary Dizona  
1982-Nathan Waldron, Son of Dan Waldron



***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**

### **OCTOBER ANGEL DATES**

2010 Delaney Womack, Daughter of Carrie & Eric Womack  
2010 Sean Hengel, Son of Laura Hengel  
2004 Kristal Randolph Gilbert and Unborn Son,  
Daughter and Grandson of Josephine Babineaux  
2009 Travis Davis, Son of Sharyl Davis  
2009 Patrick Noel Jernigan, II, Son of Juanice Jernigan  
2009 BreAnna Brashear, Daughter of Julie Jones  
2004 Kristine Ashley Bergaila, Daughter of Kathleen Livingston  
2008 Bryan Russell Lewis, Son of Olga Lydia Lewis  
2008 Shane Woodson, Son of Theresa Woodson  
2008 Kayla C. Ladner, Daughter of Stephen Ladner  
2009 Natalia Lopez, Daughter of Melissa Lopez  
2007 Deborah Levy, Daughter of Pat Morgan  
2011 Katelyn Holmes, Daughter of Melinda Holmes  
2012- Kimberly Wise, Daughter of Patsy Grubbs  
2009- Allison, Daughter of Ingrid Todd  
2013-Braiden Mainor, Grandson of Barbara Herring  
2011-Nevaeh Ramirez, Daughter of Amy Ramirez  
1995-Christina, Granddaughter of Barbara Thomas  
2007-Ryan Gibler, Son of Susan Gibler  
2010-Donna Weston, Daughter of Roberta Ware  
2014-David Arthur, Son of Cathy Arthur  
2014-Brayon Molden, Step-Son of Reagan Molden  
2013-Korie Joiner, Daughter of Julie and Brad Joiner  
2015-Kacie Joiner, Daughter of Julie and Brad Joiner  
2015-Christopher "Cole" Knight, Son of Ken and Jan Knight  
2014-Tony Dizona, Son of Rosemary Dizona  
2015-Lindie, Daughter of Beth Shelton  
2016-Corey Cole, Son of Tim and Cheryl Cole  
2016-Jeffrey Scott Byers, Son of Deanna Young  
2016-Amy Lynn Kramberger, Daughter of Nancy and Ken Thornton



## CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is **Tuesday, October 10th.** at 7pm.

**We will once again be meeting at the home of Mark and Debbie Rambis. Thanks Mark and Debbie for your hospitality. The address is 3607 Bainbridge Estates Dr. Spring, TX 77388.**

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

Our warmest welcome to **Anna Sweat, she lost her daughter Evelyn in August this year. Anna and her daughter Zoey** came to our meeting last month. Anna is a member of The Woodlands chapter. If you have walked through the door to a TCF meeting, we understand how traumatic and difficult that is to do...we have all taken that step and reach out to you in friendship and support.

As our TCF Credo says, *"We come from different walks of life..."*, but the common bond we now share is the death of a beloved child, grandchild, or sibling. Others cannot understand the terrifying and debilitating emotional issues that occur in our daily lives once this event happens; a TCF member can and does!

We hope you will find our meetings and newsletters to be a source of comfort, a place where tears are allowed, no judgments are made and the hope that through this trauma, we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

### *"A Special Remembrance"*

Chapter members please consider submitting a short story about your child for our newsletter. Tell us about the happy times of your child's life, their hobbies, the school they went to or where they worked. Did they have siblings. Or you may consider sharing your grief journey with others so they will come know there is hope after the darkness. Send your articles to me, Linda Brewer at [llbrewer67@hotmail.com](mailto:llbrewer67@hotmail.com)

### Love Gifts – A Way to Remember

There are no dues to belong to Compassionate Friends, because we have already paid the ultimate price; the loss of our loved one(s). A Love Gift is a gift of money given in honor of a child, who has died, or a gift of thanksgiving that their own children are alive and well, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help support our Chapter. Your gifts are tax deductible and are used to reach out to other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. Your gifts support this newsletter, our TCF Library, and other Chapter expenses.



**Save the Date:**

**Sunday, December 10, 2017  
The Compassionate Friends  
Worldwide Candle Lighting**



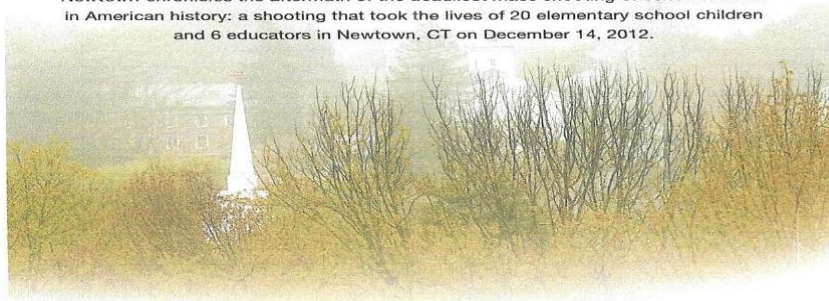
The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7:00 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon.



JOIN US FOR A SPECIAL SCREENING OF

# NEWTOWN

*Newtown* chronicles the aftermath of the deadliest mass shooting of schoolchildren in American history: a shooting that took the lives of 20 elementary school children and 6 educators in Newtown, CT on December 14, 2012.



OCTOBER 19, 2017

RECEPTION 6:30 WITH KIM SNYDER  
DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER

SCREENING 7:30  
Q&A AFTER THE SCREENING WITH KIM

PLYMOUTH UCC  
5927 LOUETTA  
SPRING, TEXAS

[www.NewtownFilm.com](http://www.NewtownFilm.com)

## SPECIAL REMEMBRANCE

*I received this email last month from a former member of our chapter, Judy Skala. I'd like to share it with you. Judy lost her son Nick in August 2009. She wrote an article about Nick for the newsletter in 2014 which I've included after her email. Thanks Judy for sharing your grief journey with us. My best -David*

**From:** Judy Skala <[judyskala@hotmail.com](mailto:judyskala@hotmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Saturday, September 9, 2017 9:09 AM  
**To:** David Hendricks  
**Subject:** Re: TCF Meeting Tuesday, Sept 12th

Hi David,

With Nick's angel date fast approaching I was so glad to see my newsletter pop-up in my inbox. With coffee in hand reading it each month is like gathering with our group again...the friends who helped me survive and taught me that I could move forward in time. I can't wrap my head around the truth that I haven't talked with or seen Nick in 8 years. Sometimes the grief can still come on like a huge wave but recedes more quickly than in the early days. I seem to "feel" Nick with me more if that makes any sense? I feel an inner calmness when I walk in the woods that Nick really is with me and that brings me such joy now instead of sadness...I thought that would NEVER happen.

This past December my son Eric had to have another heart surgery. His yearly scan revealed another aortic aneurysm and his valve was leaking. We had hoped to have the surgery in Houston with the same doctors who saved him in 2010 but the hospital would not accept his insurance. He lives in Maui now so we traveled there to be with him through the surgery/hospital stay. I stayed with him 6 weeks until he could drive again. Surgery was a success! They did have to put in a mechanical valve but surgeon does not expect any future problems.

Eric is back at work and on his paddle board again...we couldn't be happier or more grateful! We will be visiting him in October.

I hope everyone is doing okay in the aftermath of Harvey. Watching the news coverage was heartbreaking yet seeing the outreach of neighbors and strangers to take care of each other was amazing....just like the folks opening their home for your September meeting. I know how much I looked forward to our meetings each month.

I always remember the speaker who brought the large rock...not sure if it said "grief" or "journey" on it but she said that while carrying it starts out feeling like the greatest weight in your hands and heart it will become more bearable and lighter as you move up, down and forward in your own grief journey.

I have rambled on long enough...David I hope you are well and send you a big hug for still doing so much for so many others. Thank you!!

Miss you all! Judy

**Nicholas Matthew Skala**  
**September 16, 1981**  
**August 09, 2009**

Sunday August 9, 2009 at 9:04 PM I received THE phone call every parent fears; the call no parent expects, wants or can believe.

The Chicago Police Dept contacted me and my world changed forever. Nick died just shy of his 28<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Nick was brilliant and kind hearted with a great sense of humor. He found his path in life (or maybe the path found him?) in advocating for healthcare for all. He believed healthcare was a human right and dedicated his much too short life to the cause.

2014 brings me to the 5<sup>th</sup> year of my grief journey.

Some things NEVER change...I still think of and miss Nick every single day.

Some things DO change...most days now I smile when I think of him instead of crying.

I learned so much from Nick and always feel proud and privileged to be his Mom. His life was based on helping those who couldn't defend or protect themselves. He loved Chicago and did freelance writing before becoming a research associate at PNHP (Physicians for a National Health Program). His work at PNHP led him to Northwestern School of Law where he was a 3<sup>rd</sup> year law student when he died. He wrote the house bill (HB 311) legislation for IL state single payer healthcare while also speaking at hearings in Washington to promote single payer at a national level.

Attached is the Congressional Record in memory of Nick's work...it tells his story. He is also remembered by the healthcare community in several You Tube videos of his speeches at hearings and town hall meetings.

He had so much more to do in life – but now I am able to focus on how much he did accomplish...how many lives he touched and helped.

The Compassionate Friends was (and still is) a lifesaver for me. It taught me I could grab on and “float” through the grief rather than “sink” in it. The group held my hand every step of the way. Once I took the difficult step of attending my 1<sup>st</sup> meeting I soon realized I needed this group of people who understood EXACTLY how I felt.

March was my last meeting with the Houston group.

I am moving to WI on 3-27-14...before packing started I located the TCF chapter in the area.



My heart filled thanks to everyone I've met who shared their stories, support and love with me these past 4 years. All of you have helped me learn how to cope with life "before and after Nick".

My special thanks and a big hug to David and Nancy.

**House of Representatives**  
**Dennis J. Kucinich**  
**OF OHIO**  
**IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**IN MEMORY OF NICHOLAS MATTHEW SKALA**

*Madam Speaker, I rise today in memory of Nicholas Matthew Skala for his extraordinary service to our country. He dedicated his short life to advocating for full health care coverage for every man, woman and child in the United States.*

*Nick wielded a sharp intellect in his pursuit of single payer health care. I first met him when he was working for Physicians for a National Health Plan (PNHP), where he quickly became a trusted and valuable source of knowledge. He was always ready with an answer to the hardest, most arcane questions and he had the references to back his answers up.*

*When Nick spoke about single payer health care, he was lucid and persuasive. He wielded complete command of a steady stream of facts and figures. He earned the respect of health care advocates of all stripes not only by making a persuasive case that single payer was needed, but also by working tirelessly and strategically to make it a reality.*

*When it came to social justice, when it came to making sure everyone had the best, health care possible, when it came to standing up to powers and pressures that keep America without guaranteed health care for all, Nick was admirably uncompromising.*

*Born in Libertyville, Illinois on September 16, 1981 and raised in Spring Grove, Nick graduated from Richmond -Burton High School and Columbia College. While in Texas, he founded and became the President of the University of Houston Campus*

*Greens Chapter. After graduation, he became a Research Associate for PNHP between 2004 and 2007. Then he enrolled in law school at Northwestern University. He became active in the American Constitution Society. In the summer of 2009, he completed an internship in the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee. He would have graduated from law school in 2010.*

*.Madam Speaker and colleagues, please join me in celebrating and honoring the life of Nicholas Matthew Skala and in recognizing his contribution toward making the world a better place. Thank you, Nick.*

*(Appearing in the Congressional Record on September 10, 2009; Volume 154)*



## **UNDERSTANDING MY BANANAS**

**By-Louise Lagerman**

A bereaved mom posted a picture of her beautiful little girl, happily munching on a banana. Under the picture the mother had written that eight months after losing her little girl, she and her surviving children were finally able to go to the food store to buy bananas again. She went on to describe how traumatic the experience was; that people who have not lost a child can't understand how challenging it can be to face your fears, to walk into a store to buy bananas-the whole time thinking of your child's love of bananas and that now she wasn't here to enjoy them. She said it ripped to the core of her soul, reducing her to tears. Her simple words had a profound effect on me. I knew just how she felt. Having been crushed with the anguish and heartache of losing our children, little ordinary day-to-day things like bananas can bring us to our knees. I wrote back to the mother and said I was so sorry she lost her beautiful little girl; that I understand how she felt because I have my bananas too.

The bereaved mother wrote back and thanked me for truly understanding when so many people do not. As grieving parents we all have our triggers-or bananas, if you will. Every time I see a Mini Cooper car or a young, pretty women with long light brown hair wearing a certain name brand of clothing, or hear a certain song on the radio, my heart breaks, and these are just a few examples. All bereaved parents have them. Realizing and understanding these triggers will help you prepare for those times when your're faced with your own bananas. The dictionary's definition of a trigger is an event that precipitates other events. It is my hope that the day will come for each of us that when confronted with our own bananas, that we can instead smile and be comforted with the exquisite and beautiful memories of our beloved children as they envelope us in their love.

## October's Memories

October's here, the air is bright,  
The leaves decked out in fancy dress,  
The clouds in shapes of animals  
Hang in the sky so blue.  
This was our time of year, your favorite.  
How many times did you come in,  
Cheeks glowing, eyes sparkling,  
Smelling of the leaves you jumped through  
As a child and even after you grew up.  
How many times did you say  
"Just smell, just feel the air.  
I love it, crisp,  
With a hint of winter coming."  
Our time, but now only my time.  
Time to dream dreams that won't be.  
Time to wish wishes that can't come true  
Time to remember & treasure each day we had together.  
Time for October's memories.

Arden Lansing, TCF, Northfield, NJ



## Remember Life

I do not ask that you forget your dear departed. I want you to remember. I only ask that you remember more than the moment of death, more than the funeral, more than the house of mourning.

**Remember life! Remember the whole life, not the final page of it.**

*Rabbi Maurice Davis, TCF/Baltimore, Maryland*

## Redemptive Possibilities

We have talked often at our chapter meetings about "Redemptive Possibilities". I define a Redemptive Possibility as something that a bereaved parent, grandparent or sibling does to help others that would never have been done without the loss of a child.

Recently, the family of the almost three year old boy who was killed by an alligator at Disney World in June 2016, started a foundation in Nebraska. The Lane Thomas Foundation was founded to give honor and light to Lane's life. The Foundation is dedicated to supporting families of children needing life saving organ transplants. The foundation fulfills this mission by funding non-medical expenses borne by the families, promoting public awareness and sponsoring clinical research. Their effort has received national attention.

If we as bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings are open to "Redemptive Possibilities", they will appear to us. It may take a year or two or three, but those "Redemptive Possibilities" are out there for us to discover. They can be little or they can be big. They are healing and keep us looking outward rather than always looking inward.

David Hendricks



## FINDING MEANING IN LIFE

You should expect that you will never really "get over" the death of your child, but you will learn to live with the loss, making it a part of who you are. Your child's death may compel you to rethink your priorities and reexamine the meaning of life. It may seem impossible, but you can go on to find happiness and purpose in life again. For some parents, an important step may be to create a legacy for your child. You may choose to honor your child by volunteering at a local hospital or a cancer support organization. Or, you may work to support interests your child once had, start a memorial fund, or plant trees in your child's memory. It is important to remember that it is never disloyal to your child to re-engage in life and to find pleasure in new experiences.

Each of your children changes your life. They show you new ways to love, new things to find joy in, and new ways to look at the world. A part of each child's legacy is that the changes he or she brings to your family continue after death. The memories of joyful moments you spent with your child and the love you shared will live on and always be a part of you.

***Seeking help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength....  
It takes bravery to be vulnerable with another person.***

## Losing My Son to Drugs

*The death of my child brought a pain like no other, and made me question every parenting decision I've made*

BY: DIANNEE CARDEN GLENN

I thought for a minute. On the surface, losing a child to overdose is no different than losing a child to disease, violence or an accident. I don't think the loss itself is any more or less painful. The level of grief over losing a child is only linked to the immeasurable love you had for them in life.

When you lose a child, nothing is ever the same again. Parents are not supposed to outlive their children. Every facet of your life has a memory of your child. Every room in the house, every trip in the car, a song, a picture, a book, a walk in the park. There is a hole in your heart that will never be filled. You search and search for answers that just aren't there. Holidays, birthdays are never the same.

You dial their phone number to tell them something and then it hits you that the phone is in your purse — but you still let it ring so that you can hear his voice: "Hello, this is Michael. I'm sorry I missed your call but leave a message and I'll call you back." You don't know why you carry it and keep it charged, but it is comforting to know it is there. That message will be the only connection ever to what his voice sounded like.

You save his clothing unwashed in a plastic bag so that you can open it and still smell his smell lest you forget. You close your eyes, breathe deep and for just a minute he is there with you. You beg, you bargain, you plead to wake up and make it all not true. You find that tears are healing. You walk up the sidewalk from the car to the cemetery and put flowers and balloons and mementos on a plot of grass, because that is the place that has his name on it, the last place you saw the box that held his body.

You hear and smell and feel things that can't possibly be there. And you talk — you talk to the dead. You work on your religion, because you have to believe that there is a better place, another place where angels sing and there is no more pain. Losing a child is a pain like no other. It creeps up on you. You go to the grocery store and as you walk past a box of Cap'n Crunch cereal, tears begin to roll down your cheeks. When you feel so much pain, it seems impossible that people can just pass by with their shopping carts, why they go on with their lives like nothing has happened. You wonder why they can't tell that someone important is missing.

What is different about losing a child to overdose? Losing a child to addiction means you didn't get to say goodbye, and you have to deal every day with the stigma of being a parent whose child died from drug use (if you are brave enough to be truthful about the cause of death). You question your every decision. You look for what you did wrong, what you didn't say, why you didn't have a second sense that something was wrong. You look back over the years, dissecting each part of their life — looking for clues. And you look at yourself and ask all of the what-ifs. You look for blame but mostly you blame yourself. You find an online group of mothers just like you, where there is no stigma and everyone has the same questions and feels the same pain with no judgment. You force yourself to read the coroner's and toxicology report hoping there is an answer there. And you cry — a lot





## 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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