



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 2018

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

(Our next meeting is Tuesday, October 9th)

at

Cypress Creek Christian Church

6823 Cypresswood Drive

Spring, Texas 77379

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.....

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
2007-Sean Michael Gonzalez, Son of Rick & Jazmin Gonzalez
1990-Patrick O'Masters, Son of Laurie Martin
1992-Jerret Macias, Son of Betty Macias



***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
- 2017-Reagan Ottnat, Daughter of Stacy Ottnat
- 2017-Bryce Cook, Son of Faye Cook



CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, October 9th. at 7pm.

We welcome the new TCF South Texas Regional Coordinators, Henrik and Ghislaine Thomsen. Henrik and Ghislaine joined the Katy TCF chapter three years ago after the death of their daughter Andrea. Ghislaine is also the co-leader of the Katy chapter. Congratulations Henrik and Ghislaine.

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

Our warmest welcome to **Erica Poorbaugh. Erica lost her son Ethan Tyler Brown in August of this year.** Attending your first TCF meeting can be difficult. Feelings can be overwhelming. We have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Please attend two or three meetings before deciding if TCF is right for you. There are no dues or fees. If you choose, you need not speak a word at a meeting.

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.

Congratulations to our very own Beth Crocker for receiving The Compassionate Service Award from TCF National Office for her Public Service Announcement. Congrats Beth!



IF YOU ATTENDED THIS YEAR'S 41st NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND THE WALK TO REMEMBER IN ST. LOUIS, MO. ON JULY 29, 2018, YOU CAN VIEW PHOTOS FROM THE CONFERENCE ON THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS FACEBOOK PAGE.

<https://www.facebook.com/TCFUSA>



The 2019 National Conference, "Hope Rings in Philadelphia" will be held July 19-21. The Butterfly Boutique is requesting donations. Here is what they need:

In order to be successful and raise money ... we need donations of items to sell. We would like to have new and gently used pre-owned items. We need anything: that you have purchased or were given that has angels, butterflies, hearts, hummingbirds, dragonflies or any other appropriate subject matter. It could be jewelry (pins earrings, rings necklace, ankle bracelet) or jewelry box ..maybe a scarf or a tote bag ...a candle or coasters ...could be a Christmas ornament or decoration ...kitchen or bath towel (new of course), framed pictures, artwork or handmade items ...Seraphim angels or Susan Lordi Willow Tree, Butterflies on anything ..a chair or lamp...a night light or magnet ..note paper, a pen, something you may have purchased at the national conference and never used ...even heart things...wallet, a watch. At the national convention they even sold items that did not have butterflies or hearts like Coach wallets and Vera Bradley items...so any and all items that can be sold would be greatly appreciated.

Contact Betty Valentine at 302-328-5722 or Pam Bennett-Santoro at 973-539-9255.

Save the Date:

**Sunday, December 9, 2018
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.

actually find ourselves laughing and socializing again as we are surrounded by others who share our pain as well as our healing. There is no better place to find support than The Compassionate Friends.

Len Mysiewicz and Deb Clifford-Parents of Jessica Alene Mysiewicz
Peotone Illinois



The Gate to Tomorrow

There is a gate that each of us has unknowingly passed through. This gate opens only one way.....once we have passed through this gate we cannot return to the other side. Each of us stepped through the gate at a different time and in a different way. This gate opens to the world of parents whose children have died; it is their gate to every tomorrow.

There is no other place that compares with life in this world beyond the gate; there is no sorrow like the sorrow inside the gate. The numbing pain and perpetual agony we experience when first stepping through this gate are so overwhelming that we often don't immediately realize that there will be no return. But we will never return to life before the gate.

The new world inside the gate is populated with friends who are strangers and strangers who are friends.

Our perspective on life has changed forever. Few of our friends from life before the gate will linger with us now; these people are now the strangers. Our pain is all encompassing; they have lives to live, things to do, plans to make, happiness to capture. We are no longer part of their picture. Rare is the friend who stands by us inside the gate.....stands by us until one of us dies and leaves the world inside the gate.

The strangers who are now friends live inside the gate with us. Some have just come through the gate; others have been here a long, long time. But these strangers who are now friends share our experience; they understand our need to talk about our children, each life and each death. They applaud our tiny advances toward acceptance and serenity and peace. Although we can never go back to life before the gate, we now have our compassionate friends.....once strangers but now kindred souls who share our lives and our world.

Life will not be the same again, yet life can be good again. Inside the gate we will each find ourselves with the help of our compassionate friends. They listen carefully to stories about our child. They know our child's name better than they know our name. And that's how we want it to be....remember our children. Remember with us.

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



A Grief Journey in Review

As I write this I am listening to Johnny Horton singing “Whispering Pines.” This is a melancholy song, yet a sweet one. It reminded me of the day that my son died and the journey I have taken since then.

Todd was in a car accident in mid-December.....almost on the winter solstice. He died on December 19. This is significant to me. I was raised in the cold, snowy part of the country. My son was returning from that area when the accident that took his life occurred. I remember recounting the events second by second when my son died. I remember how Todd disliked the shortened daylight of winter. How ironic that his death came on what was nearly the shortest day of the year.

We have just passed summer solstice. Todd has been gone for over 4 ½ years. I still miss him, and I think about him each day. I am a different person since my son died. My life has changed dramatically. The cast of characters in my life has changed somewhat. Solitude has become an important part of living for me. I no longer weep endlessly and fall asleep from exhaustion. I no longer walk the floor at night. The periods of manic rearranging of my house have slowed to something approaching normal for me.

Somewhere on this horrible journey of grief my subconscious mind accepted the fact that I will never see Todd again. I have accepted his death. I am rarely jolted by the sudden thought that Todd is not on this plane. My beautiful child, the baby who grew to be such a special man, is gone. This is part of who I am now. I now keep Todd in my heart. I talk about him with strangers as if he were still alive. With those who know me, I speak of the loss of my only child with quiet acceptance, and I share the many joys of my child's life.

Life has begun to improve. I am even thinking of a vacation next year. I am making more plans than I have in over four years. I have accepted what I cannot change. This is a milestone for me, because I have always been able to change the variables, to make things right, to bring back normalcy. But I won't be able to change the fact that my son has died.

Along the way I have had moments of epiphany....only brief ones, but epiphanies of various sorts. Most of the change has been gradual. Talking with other parents, reading, writing, listening to music, to radio programs, to speakers, going to seminars, watching movies....all of these efforts have helped me. But it was up to me to take those first steps. It was my choice to remove the crepe and add a colorful wreath to the front door. It was my choice to reach out for help and accept what those who shared my grief journey offered.

Much has changed in my life since that first year of grief. Much will change in the future. I have learned that change is the essence of life. I have learned from wonderful people; I have learned from negative people as well. Each person who transcends my life has taught me something about grief, about living, about moving forward into the light.

I don't know where I will be in five years or ten years. I dream about my son. We often have great conversations in those dreams. Sometimes he is a small child, sometimes a grown man. When I awaken I feel as close to Todd as I will be on this earthly plane.

Shortly after the summer solstice this year, a strange thing happened. My grandson and his girlfriend came home early which was odd because they planned to be out late. I was reading and listening to a news show. “Don't freak out, Nanny”, my grandson said. “We were in an accident.” I just looked at him.

Then I asked if he was hurt. “No, but the guy who was driving jumped out of the truck and ran away. He was doing 80 mph in the rain. He hit a curb, fishtailed, braked and spun around twice. Then the truck smashed into a utility pole. Annalee hit her head on the door panel. I bounced around in the back seat....I didn't have a seat belt on.” The EMTs had checked them out. I did the same. Then I sat down. I smiled at him. “What?” he said.

“What, what. What have you learned tonight?” I responded. “I’m never riding with him again.

I’m never riding with anyone who is drinking. I’m never riding with anyone who drives like a spaz or drinks,” he said, summarizing the situation.

That was good. I smiled. Just shortly after summer solstice my grandson escaped death. The truck was a total loss. The driver was nowhere to be found. But Todd’s son was alive, unhurt. His girlfriend was fine. I later confirmed with a deputy on the scene that it was a real miracle anyone walked away. Yet they did. They walked away from that mass of twisted steel and smashed plastic.

I like to think that my son is still on this earthly plane in some form. Watching.....watching over his children. That’s what he did in life.

And so my journey continues. I no longer “freak out” about the unchangeable. My child would be glad to know this. “You’re acting like Dad,” my grandson said. “He was always cool.”

“I guess I’m cool now. But there was a time.....”

I’ve changed. My perspective is the unique one of a mother who has lost her only child. And the journey continues until I, too, meet the angel of death.

Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX
July 5, 2007

Over the last 14 years Annette has written many articles about her grief journey and I have used many of them in our newsletters. They are wonderful and meaningful experiences of her journey as a bereaved parent. I've always found her writings to be positive and encouraging. She is such a talented writer. She has been the newsletter editor for the TCF Katy Chapter, and South Texas Regional Coordinator for Compassionate Friends. Annette will be passing on her duties at the Katy TCF and is starting a new chapter in her journey. She will be publishing her articles for bereaved parents. As she once said "change is the essence of life". Thank you for all your inspiring articles Annette. We wish you the very best in your new journey and in life.

*Linda Brewer
Newsletter Editor*

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares. - Henri Nouwen

My Witch and My Angel

For Zoë Halloween is just about as good as it gets. Not much in my daughter's world beats candy, costumes, friends, make-up, and staying up late even on a school night. Life at age six can be gloriously simple.

But I don't know much of what my son Max thought of Halloween. When he died at age two, he only had one real "trick-or-treat" to his credit. That year—1987—I dressed him in a pumpkin costume and we traipsed to a few neighbors. I took far too many pictures. Max was a fiend for sweets and with the candy ration lifted for the evening, he had to be living well.

I imagine that year would have been his last dressed as a mommy-pleasing pumpkin. At three or four I knew he would demand Ninja or pirate costumes; I would have laughingly bought them and maybe even the plastic sword. I would have let him paint grotesque stitches across his nose and wear fangs that glowed in the dark.

Instead, this is Zoë's year to cast aside the girly version of Max's pumpkin cap. The beloved pink princess frills and red nail polish are being exchanged for a witch hat and black glue-on fingernails sharpened into talons. For the first time, she wants to be Scary and Ugly. With mahogany lipstick and smoky eyes, she will fly out the door in less than a month to cross one more threshold that her brother did not.

I can see the evening now. As I assemble face paints on the counter, I will take a deep breath — the same one I take every year at every holiday and milestone. With my unsteady hand I will design witchy warts and create wrinkles on Zoë's perfect face. I will declare her the Scariest and Ugliest of All.

But as I help my little witch into her costume, I know my eyes will fill with tears. I will think about the years that were supposed to be: a young boy as Dracula, a 13 year-old teen in baggy clothes escorting his little witch-sister down the block. Who would he be now, the toddler we knew, the boy we lost? What would our life be like if the scary things were still just make-believe?

Zoë will see my tears, but she won't be alarmed: in our family's emotional lexicon, sad and happy often go together and crying is as OK as laughing. She will ask me why I'm sad and I will tell her the truth: I am thinking about Max and wishing he could be here.

And although she is now the mean and fierce Witch Zoë, she will nod her head with understanding. Her plastic nails will lightly graze my arm as she reaches to pat me. Suddenly the frown on her face will disappear and she repeats what has become her annual Halloween revelation: "Mommy, it's OK. Don't forget that Max can go 'trick-or-treat' as an angel." She describes a glittering figure, luminous wings aflutter, giant treat bag at the ready. I smile at the idea and the moment passes.

Later, I light the candle in the pumpkin and watch Zoë skip next door to show off her costume. She heads up the sidewalk, stopping halfway to turn and wave to me. She makes her scariest face

and yells, "Mom—take my picture!" I raise my camera and look through the viewfinder. As the flash glows briefly in the dusk, I see a beautiful angel standing in the shadows beside her. But this angel doesn't wear white and his wings have been clipped. I am sure he never had a golden halo. He is a small chubby boy with a jack-o-lantern face on his tummy and chocolate on his fingers. It is 1987 and he is having a really great Halloween.

Just like his sister.

Mary Clark
In memory of Max
TCF, Sugarland, TX

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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



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.

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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