

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.

SEPTEMBER 2019

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

(Our next meeting is Tuesday, Sept. 10th)

at

Cypress Creek Christian Church 6823 Cypresswood Drive, Room #3 Spring, Texas 77379

The Church is located between the courthouse and Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the church parking area. We meet in Room #3 which is down six steps off the main lobby of the Church on the Library side. Follow the posted signs to the 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.

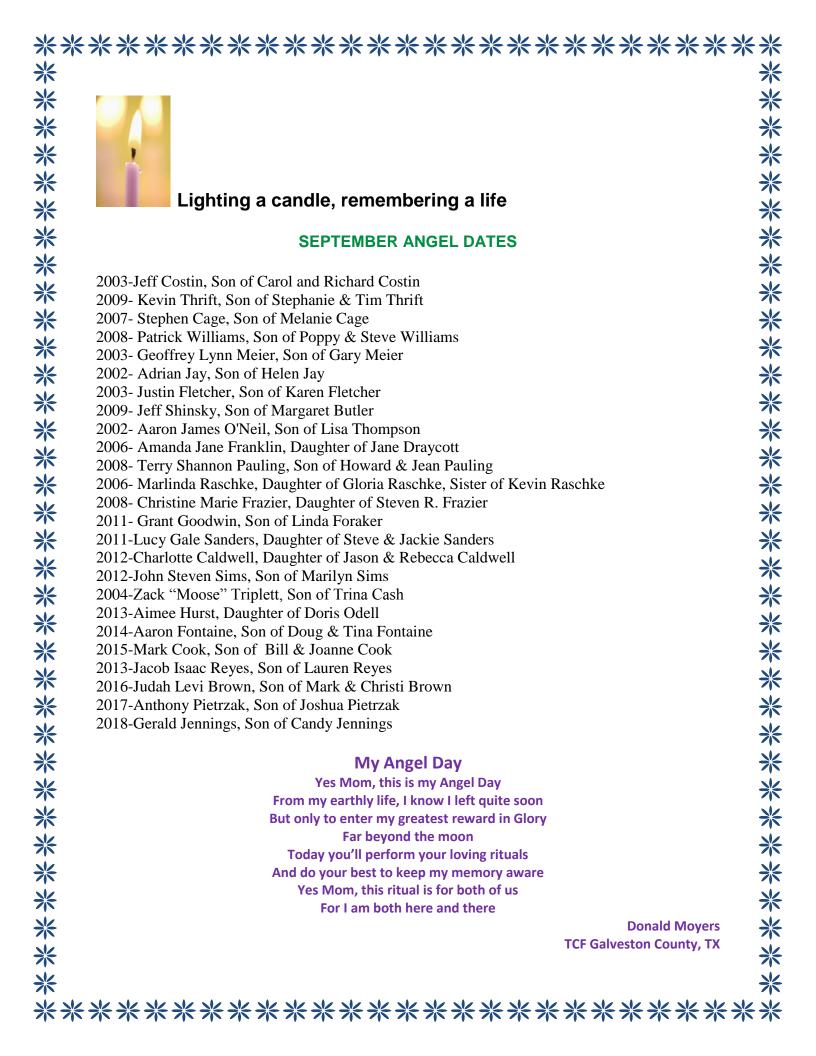
We feel so weak and crushed when our beloved children die, but I know because I have seen it countless times in the years I've been involved with The Compassionate Friends that we can make it together. When you walked through the door for the first meeting, you were frightened and nervous; but with that 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.

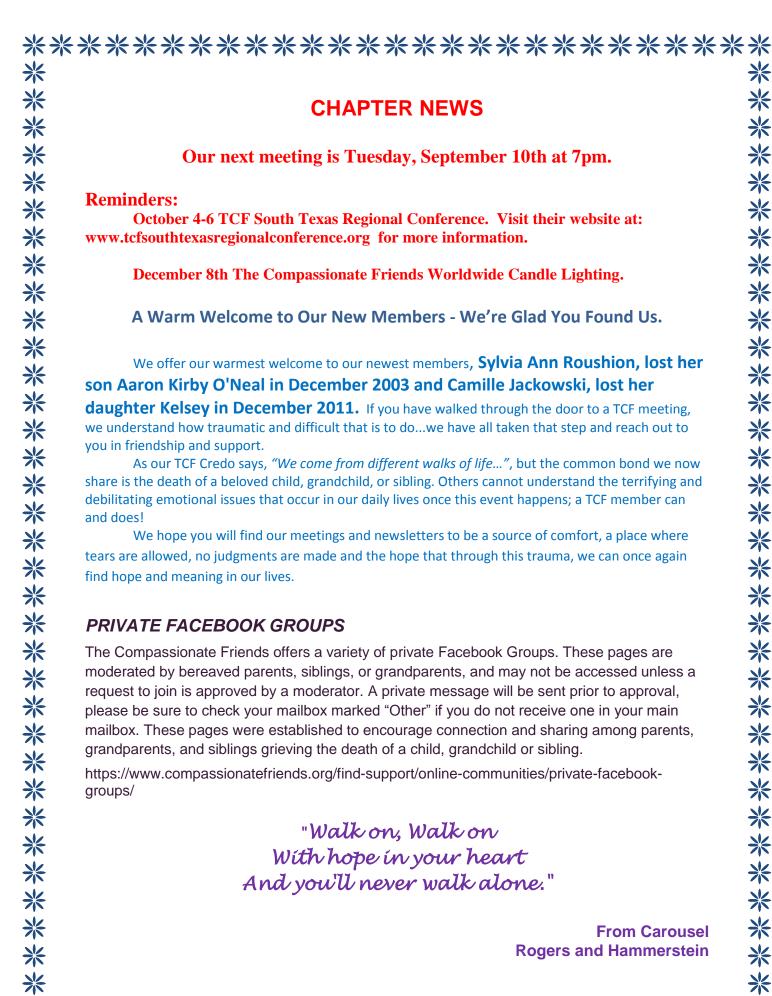
The journey will be a long one, for you loved your child with all your heart and soul. When that child died, a part of you was ripped away. It takes a long time to repair that large hole. The journey will not always be steady or constant; there will be many setbacks. Those of us who have taken the journey 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.









moderated by bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, and may not be accessed unless a request to join is approved by a moderator. A private message will be sent prior to approval, please be sure to check your mailbox marked "Other" if you do not receive one in your main mailbox. These pages were established to encourage connection and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings grieving the death of a child, grandchild or sibling.

https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/private-facebookgroups/

> "Walk on, Walk on With hope in your heart And you'll never walk alone."

From Carousel Rogers and Hammerstein

Below is an email I received from a former member of our chapter, Judy Skala. Judy lost her son Nick, August 9, 2009. Judy, like most people, emotionally crawled through the door the first time she came to a TCF meeting. But she came back, and over time, became a valued contributor, particularly to the newly bereaved. She moved "way" north to Wisconsin in 2014, but stays in touch. Her son Nick, researched and became active in advancing ideas for a Single Payer Health Care Plan. His work was sighted in Congress by Representative Dennis Kucinich. We really miss Judy and her way of sharing her grief journey at TCF.

From: Judy Skala < <u>judyskala@hotmail.com</u>>
Sent: Tuesday, August 13, 2019 10:56 AM

To: David Hendricks < dbhhendricks@hotmail.com >

Subject: Re: COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS AUGUST NEWSLETTER

Hi David,

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I want to thank you and all my friends at TCF Houston who helped me learn and believe that I would survive the loss of my son Nick. Making myself walk into that 1st meeting was the best and bravest thing I could have done at that time for myself.

I read the August newsletter on 8-9-19, Nick's 10th Angel Date. It is incomprehensible to me that it could be that long since I have seen him or talked with him. On the other hand I never thought I could survive his death at all and yet here I am. The last 10 years have been lessons in learning my new normal in each moment, hour, day, month and year. I'm not the same person I used to be but that's okay...I shouldn't be. I learned how life can change in a moment and try to remember that everyday. My son Eric's emergency heart surgery 6 months after Nick died was another reminder...and his 2nd one 2 yrs ago. He's doing great and we spend as much time as possible together. We now talk about Nick with laughter and great funny memories of times together...never thought that would be possible and I'm so glad you and TCF proved me wrong. Thank you!

Lastly, the story about Signs in the newsletter is spot on for me. It was a few years after Nick's death that I would notice my grief overwhelming me and something of Nick would pop up...song on the radio, a favorite food of his or the brightest star. We are camping in Hayward WI this week and were on our pontoon boat on Nick's Angel Date when a Bald Eagle showed up. It was a very windy day and the eagle seemed to be playing with the winds following the boat for quite a while. We believe that was Nick's hello Mom and Dad, I'm still with you...it was a GOOD day not just an Angel Date.

Sorry this was so long David...but miss you guys tons!! I can never thank you enough for all you do, and I still look forward to the newsletter each month, such a great job!!

Judy



PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 111th, CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

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.

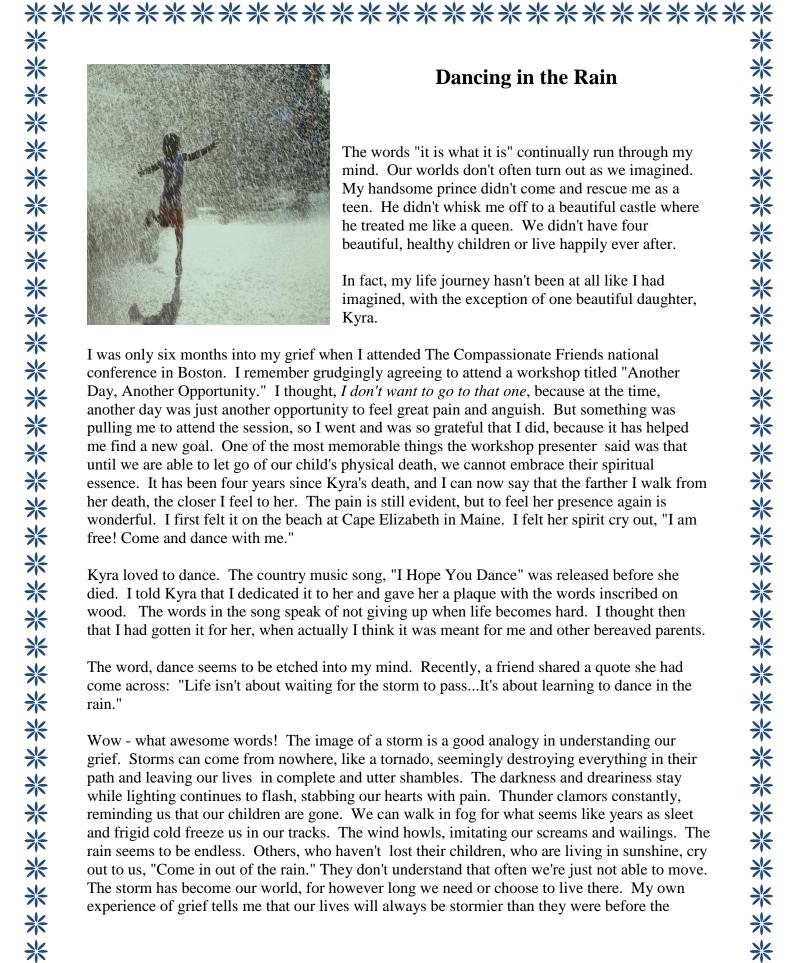
When Nick spoke about single payer health care, he was lucid and persuasive. He wielded complete command of a steady stream of facts and figures. He earned the respect of health care advocates of all stripes not only by making a persuasive case that single payer was needed, but also by working tirelessly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

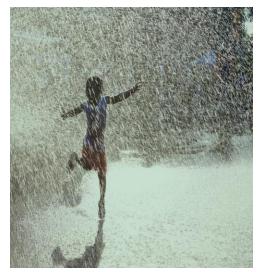
When it came to social justice, when it came to making sure everyone had the best, health care possible, when it came to standing up to powers and pressures that keep America without guaranteed health care for all, Nick was admirably uncompromising.

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)





Dancing in the Rain

The words "it is what it is" continually run through my mind. Our worlds don't often turn out as we imagined. My handsome prince didn't come and rescue me as a teen. He didn't whisk me off to a beautiful castle where he treated me like a queen. We didn't have four beautiful, healthy children or live happily ever after.

In fact, my life journey hasn't been at all like I had imagined, with the exception of one beautiful daughter, Kyra.

I was only six months into my grief when I attended The Compassionate Friends national conference in Boston. I remember grudgingly agreeing to attend a workshop titled "Another Day, Another Opportunity." I thought, I don't want to go to that one, because at the time, another day was just another opportunity to feel great pain and anguish. But something was pulling me to attend the session, so I went and was so grateful that I did, because it has helped me find a new goal. One of the most memorable things the workshop presenter said was that until we are able to let go of our child's physical death, we cannot embrace their spiritual essence. It has been four years since Kyra's death, and I can now say that the farther I walk from her death, the closer I feel to her. The pain is still evident, but to feel her presence again is wonderful. I first felt it on the beach at Cape Elizabeth in Maine. I felt her spirit cry out, "I am free! Come and dance with me."

Kyra loved to dance. The country music song, "I Hope You Dance" was released before she died. I told Kyra that I dedicated it to her and gave her a plaque with the words inscribed on wood. The words in the song speak of not giving up when life becomes hard. I thought then that I had gotten it for her, when actually I think it was meant for me and other bereaved parents.

The word, dance seems to be etched into my mind. Recently, a friend shared a quote she had come across: "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass...It's about learning to dance in the rain."

Wow - what awesome words! The image of a storm is a good analogy in understanding our grief. Storms can come from nowhere, like a tornado, seemingly destroying everything in their path and leaving our lives in complete and utter shambles. The darkness and dreariness stay while lighting continues to flash, stabbing our hearts with pain. Thunder clamors constantly, reminding us that our children are gone. We can walk in fog for what seems like years as sleet and frigid cold freeze us in our tracks. The wind howls, imitating our screams and wailings. The rain seems to be endless. Others, who haven't lost their children, who are living in sunshine, cry out to us, "Come in out of the rain." They don't understand that often we're just not able to move. The storm has become our world, for however long we need or choose to live there. My own experience of grief tells me that our lives will always be stormier than they were before the

hurricanes came and took what was most precious to us. But, we do have a choice. We can stay hunkered down under the false protection of denial. We can lock ourselves up in a protective shell and never come out. Or, we can learn to dance in the rain. However, each bereaved parent must decide what feels best to them.

I find myself thinking, It's hard to crawl, walk, or breathe without her and she wants me to dance? She must have forgotten all those times I tried and she said, Mom, you can't dance!" Then I realize that she's not referring to my ability when I hear, Dance, mom, dance! Dance in the rain. Dance because you can't change what has already been done. You have the choice to sit it out or dance. Listen for the music, keep your eyes wide open, go forward, follow the music and dance. Follow me. I am not behind you; I am in front of you. I am free and I am dancing.

She taught me to hear the music and her song continues on. Without it, I couldn't dance.

I believe if we allow our children to lead us to dance in the rain that they will eventually dance us out of the serve storms of pain and into the sunshine of peace.

Julie Short TCF Southern Illinois "in loving memory of Kyra" *************



TIME ROLLS ON

Whether we see time going by or not, whether we are aware if it is winter or spring, May or June, day or night...time keeps rolling on.

I remember back in those early days of grief, when time seemed to stand still. I remember looking at the clock, realizing that it was 3:00 a.m. and being surprised that it was nighttime. I remember not knowing or caring whether it was a Sunday or a Tuesday... But I did know when it was a Wednesday. I knew it was a Wednesday each week because Wednesday was the day our daughter died.

Everything from that moment on was measured by a different standard of time. At first we marked the hours, then the days, then the weeks. All time was measured by how long it had been since she had passed on from our world. Days became weeks, weeks became months, and now ...months have been years. For us, the marking of time has evolved.

Our family history will forever be divided into "before..." and "after..."but we have gradually become aware of time again. We keep a calendar, we make appointments, and we schedule ourselves into events and commitments.

Once again, time is rolling on

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When Someone Takes His Own Life by Norman Vincent Peale

In many ways, this seems to be the most tragic form of death. Often the stigma of suicide is what rests most heavily on those left behind...

The Bible warns us not to judge, if we ourselves hope to escape judgment. And I believe that this is the one area that Biblical command especially should be heeded. For how do we know how many valiant battles such a person may have fought and won before he loses that one particular battle? And is it fair that all the good acts and impulses of such a person should be forgotten or blotted out by his final tragic act?

I think our reaction should be one of love and pity, not of condemnation. Perhaps the person was not thinking clearly in his final moments; perhaps he was so driven by emotional whirlwinds that he was incapable of thinking at all. This is terribly sad. But surely it is understandable. All of us have moments when we lose control of ourselves, flashes of temper, or irritation, or selfishness that we later regret. Each one of us, probably, has a final breaking point — or would have if our faith did not sustain us. Life puts far more pressure on some of us than it does on others. Some people have more stamina than others...

My heart goes out to those who are left behind, because I know they suffer terribly...The immediate family of the victim is left wide open to tidal waves of guilt: "What did I fail to do that I should have done? What did I do that was wrong?" To such grieving persons I can only say, "Lift up your heads and your hearts. Surely you did your best. And surely the loved one who is gone did his best, for as long as he could. Remember, now, that his battles and torments are

over. Do not judge him, and do not presume to fathom the mind of God where this one of His children is concerned."

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A few years ago, when a young man died by his own hand, a service for him was conducted by his pastor, the Reverend West Stephens. What he said that day expresses far more eloquently than I can, the message that I'm trying to convey. Here are some of his words:

"Our friend died on his own battlefield. He was killed in action fighting a civil war. He fought against adversaries that were as real to him as his casket is real to us. They were powerful adversaries. They took toll of his energies and endurance. They exhausted the last vestiges of his courage and his strength. At last these adversaries overwhelmed him. And it appeared that he had lost the war. But did he? I see a host of victories that he has won!

"For one thing – he has won our admiration – because even if he lost the war, we give him credit for his bravery on the battlefield. And we give him credit for the courage and pride and hope that he used as his weapons as long as he could. We shall remember not his death, but his daily victories gained through his kindnesses and thoughtfulness, through his love for his family and friends...for all things beautiful, lovely, and honorable. We shall remember not his last day of defeat, but we shall remember the many days that he was victorious over overwhelming odds. We shall remember not the years we thought he had left, but the intensity with which he lived the years that he had. Only God knows what this child of His suffered in the silent skirmishes that took place in his soul. But our consolation is that God does know, and understands."

"There is no suffering greater than that which drives people to suicide; suicide defines the moment in which mental pain exceeds the human capacity to bear it. It represents the abandonment of hope."



A Visitor

Yesterday, an out of town acquaintance stopped by. We could easily be friends, if days were longer and our lives not so complicated. After small talk pleasantries, he grew silent and pensive. I knew then this was more than a social call. It was apparent his pain was deep, and he was struggling to start what would be a difficult conversation. He looked up from his lap, and he told me I was the first person he has talked to about this because he knew I would understand.

He spoke of his daughter who had recently attempted suicide, the details of which are unimportant here. His eyes welled up, and he unsuccessfully fought their overflowing. His lip trembled, and as I handed him a tissue, he asked me what he did wrong. He asked me how he could have missed his daughter's significant suffering. It is so apparent he loves his daughter

unconditionally and supports her emotionally, academically, and socially. And yet, he feels as though he somehow let her down, causing her to take this drastic step.

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As I looked at him through my own tears, I saw myself eleven months ago. In his voice, I heard my own asking those same questions. And just as I was told by so many, "It is not your fault," I know those words sounded hollow when I spoke them to him.

We carefully choose our children's school districts, teachers, classes, and extracurricular activities, to develop our children into caring, successful, intelligent beings. We monitor their media intake and their friendships. We provide quality family time to be sure we stay connected. We have those important and difficult conversations to help prepare them for adulthood. And yet, even if we do everything as "right" as we possibly can, something we can't yet understand happens in some of our children, leading them into a spiraling darkness, unable to ask even those who love them the most for help. And so many do such a good job of hiding their symptoms, we are unaware of their pain while sitting right beside it.

Through tears, my visitor asked me what happens next. The most painful part of the conversation was explaining his journey will likely be harder than mine, because Tom was successful on his first attempt, so my journey with my son is over. But his daughter survived her attempt, so his journey is just beginning. Just as he cannot imagine my pain, I cannot imagine his.

Kimberly Starr TCF Facebook Loss to Suicide Group In Memory of my son Tom

Tears on Their Shoulders

Thank God for friends. Can you imagine your life without your close friends? I have never been one to have a great many friends. I know many people who I care for and love, but there are only a few people that I consider close friends. A true friendship goes far beyond just knowing and caring for someone. A true friend is a person you feel comfortable sharing your deepest feelings with. A true friend is one who does not mind a few of your tears on their shoulder.

Since the death of my daughter, I have had the opportunity to meet and talk with many other bereaved parents. There are far more of us than most people realize—far more than I ever realized until I became one. The grief of losing any loved one is hard to overcome. The grief of losing a child is the hardest to overcome. In fact, I dare say that we never overcome it. We simply learn to deal with it.

One of our greatest gifts as bereaved parents is close, understanding friends. Most of us find that developing friendships with other bereaved parents gives us more comfort than any other relationship. Hopefully, our friendship with our spouse will deepen and give us that comfort; but I have found that does not always happen. I am sure there are psychological reasons

why bereaved husbands and wives cannot always be as comforting to each other as we wish we could, but I know it is true in many cases. Perhaps it is because we are trying so hard to be strong for each other that we hold back some of our emotions. I suppose every couple is different, depending on their personalities and situations. The point is, very often we are not as comfortable sharing or expressing our grief with our spouse as we are with a special friend. I would really like to hear other bereaved parents' points of view and opinions about this subject.

The point of this writing is the importance of loving friendships. I have talked to so many bereaved parents who state that they just do not have anyone that they feel comfortable talking to about their grief. It is not that they do not have friends and relatives, they just don't have any that they can or will share their feelings with. They feel isolated and alone in their grief, and to me that would be unbearable. That is one of the many reasons that I am so happy to have found The Compassionate Friend's. Through T.C.F., I have met people that I consider true friends—friends that never mind a few tears on their shoulders—friends that I never mind feeling their tears on my shoulder. In my opinion, a good cry with a friend that has gone through the loss of a child—a friend who knows how it feels—is more healing than anything else I can imagine. Thank God for counselors and therapists, but without understanding friends with loving shoulders to cry on, I believe we miss out on deep, healing grief relief.

We miss our children. Our lives are forever changed without them. There is a void in our souls that nothing can fill, and in many ways we don't want it filled. But we do want relief, and true friends that don't mind our tears on their shoulders are one of our greatest sources of that relief. May the Lord lead you to that special friend, a compassionate friend, with whom you can share your deepest thoughts and feelings, one who will always offer you a shoulder to cry on when you need it. May you offer your shoulder to someone in need as well. There is blessed healing to be found with loving friends who are happy to allow tears on their shoulders.

Dr. Sam Smith, Butterfly Ministry, TCF Tyler, TX





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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Infant Child