



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.

SEPTEMBER 2020

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

**We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.
(Our meeting is on hold amid the Covid 19 virus)**

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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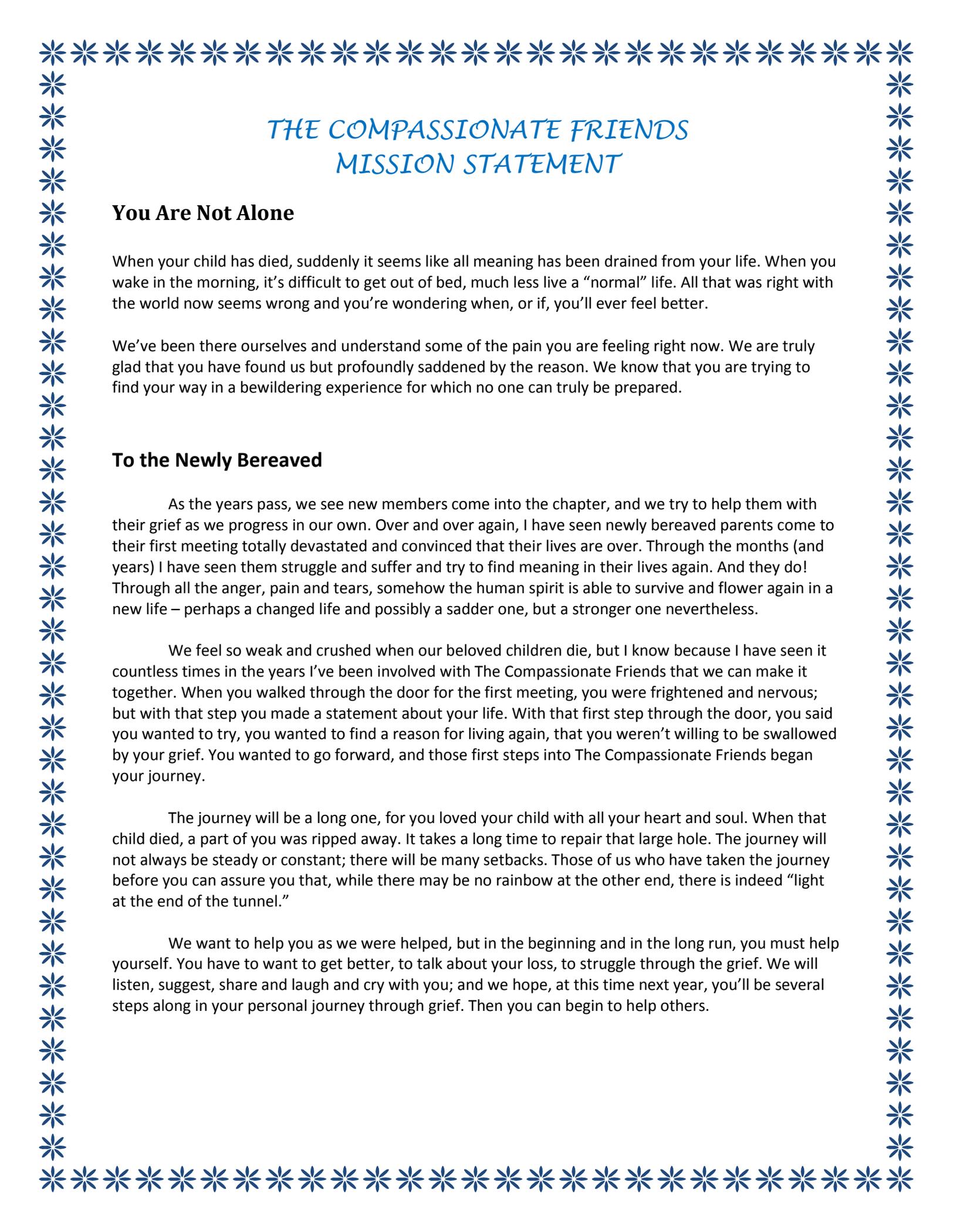
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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

You Are Not Alone

When your child has died, suddenly it seems like all meaning has been drained from your life. When you wake in the morning, it's difficult to get out of bed, much less live a "normal" life. All that was right with the world now seems wrong and you're wondering when, or if, you'll ever feel better.

We've been there ourselves and understand some of the pain you are feeling right now. We are truly glad that you have found us but profoundly saddened by the reason. We know that you are trying to find your way in a bewildering experience for which no one can truly be prepared.

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.....

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

1961- David Hendricks, II, Son of David Hendricks
1965- Sandra ReNae Southerland, Daughter of Vivian Southerland, Sister of Tim
1989 & 1991- Dillon & Alex Gussie, Sons of Debbie Benavides
1971- Brian D. Klaus, Son of Johnny & Ginger Klaus
1977- Matthew Brown, Son of Cathy Brown
1978-Kenneth Roberts, Son of Brenda Johnson
1993-Brittany Idabell Miller, Daughter of George & Kathy Miller
1981-Nicholas (Nick) Skala, Son of Judy Skala
1955-Deborah Levy, Daughter of Pat Morgan
1986-Evan Michael Smith, Nephew of Kaye Larberg
1960-Jeff Walker, Brother of Stephanie Thrift
1984-Julee Ann Serna, Daughter of Virginia Serna
1982- "Bo" Jared Valdez, Son of Irma & James Valdez
1990-Shannon Stovall, Daughter of Charlie & Liz Stovall
1991-Matthew Allen, Son of Jay & Linda Allen
2003-Ryan Moody, Son of Gloria Moody
1985-Ryan Gibler, Son of Susan Gibler
1961- Donna Weston, Daughter of Roberta Ware
1991-Brayon Molden, Step Son of Reagan Molden
1990-Wolfgang Jones, Son of Phillip Jones
2015-Baron Neelley, Son of Bo & Allison Neelley
1996-Christopher "Cole" Knight, Son of Ken & Jan Knight
2008-Jacob Isaac Reyes, Son of Lauren Reyes
1998-Bryce Cook, Son of Faye Cook
2000-Jacquelynn Borel, Daughter of Rebecca Borel

The Birth and Death of our loved ones are always very difficult. Please remember to include these families in your thoughts and prayers on their very difficult day.

***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

SEPTEMBER ANGEL DATES

2003-Jeff Costin, Son of Carol and Richard Costin
2009- Kevin Thrift, Son of Stephanie & Tim Thrift
2007- Stephen Cage, Son of Melanie Cage
2008- Patrick Williams, Son of Poppy & Steve Williams
2003- Geoffrey Lynn Meier, Son of Gary Meier
2002- Adrian Jay, Son of Helen Jay
2003- Justin Fletcher, Son of Karen Fletcher
2009- Jeff Shinsky, Son of Margaret Butler
2002- Aaron James O'Neil, Son of Lisa Thompson
2006- Amanda Jane Franklin, Daughter of Jane Draycott
2008- Terry Shannon Pauling, Son of Howard & Jean Pauling
2006- Marlinda Raschke, Daughter of Gloria Raschke, Sister of Kevin Raschke
2008- Christine Marie Frazier, Daughter of Steven R. Frazier
2011- Grant Goodwin, Son of Linda Foraker
2011-Lucy Gale Sanders, Daughter of Steve & Jackie Sanders
2012-Charlotte Caldwell, Daughter of Jason & Rebecca Caldwell
2012-John Steven Sims, Son of Marilyn Sims
2004-Zack "Moose" Triplett, Son of Trina Cash
2013-Aimee Hurst, Daughter of Doris Odell
2014-Aaron Fontaine, Son of Doug & Tina Fontaine
2015-Mark Cook, Son of Bill & Joanne Cook
2013-Jacob Isaac Reyes, Son of Lauren Reyes
2016-Judah Levi Brown, Son of Mark & Christi Brown
2017-Anthony Pietrzak, Son of Joshua Pietrzak
2018-Gerald Jennings, Son of Candy Jennings
2019-Ryan Francis, Son of Anne & Greg Francis

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**

**Donald Moyers
TCF Galveston County, TX**

CHAPTER NEWS

Our meetings are still on hold. The corona virus crisis has made grieving, which is already a lonely process, even lonelier because we can't reach out to one another in our normal physical meetings with the personal support that we need and rely on. We are living through some very tough times, but we have been through the worst as parents and we will get through this also. Hopefully we will be meeting at the Church again soon.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our newest members. 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.

PRIVATE FACEBOOK GROUPS

The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private Facebook Groups. These pages are 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-facebook-groups/>

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

**From Carousel
Rogers and Hammerstein**

Justin Ross Heino
May 5, 1982 - August 24, 1983

I was asked the other day, because you have been on this grief journey of a dad for so long, how have you done it?

Our 1st child, our son Justin Ross, was healthy and full of life. Just a day after returning home from a vacation, he laid down for his afternoon nap and did not wake up. I did not know such things could happen to a 16-month-old, but it did. After a lengthy and in-depth investigation into his death turned up no cause, it was ruled Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Today it would be ruled Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood as today SIDS is used only for unexplained death in children up to 12 months old.

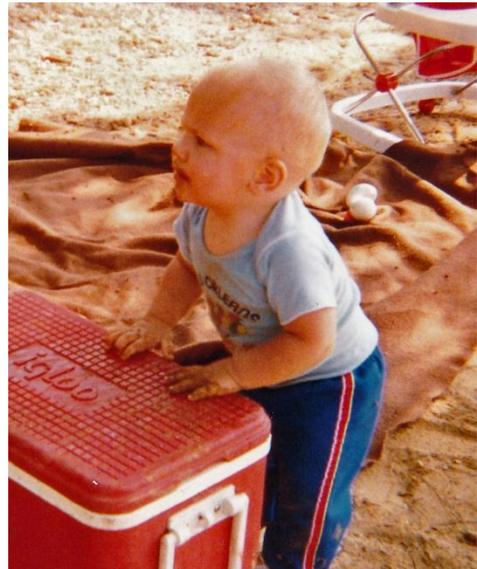
Needless to say, this changed our lives completely. My wife was pregnant when he died and she gave birth just months later to our daughter Nicole. We lost our 3rd child, a daughter, just before she was born a year after this.

I don't really know how we got through those early days. We lived in a fog – a place of uncertainty and confused reality. You can't remember things from moment to moment but then reality strikes and waves of grief overwhelm you. This roller coaster lasts what seems like forever, but is probably worse the 1st year or 2.

Then you try to make sense of what has happened but there is no logic to anything in the world. People do not understand what you are dealing with and have all sorts of helpful suggestions. Only a couple of months after his death, I was told I needed to suck it up as I was going to be a new father again and had to be strong. I tried, but this is something you cannot do. All it did was drive my emotions down, only to erupt into a fury of anger and depression later. This was the cycle I lived on for many years. We did not have a social network as today. We had no Facebook groups or person to person meetings of other grieving parents. We isolated ourselves and dealt with it in the unhealthiest way – of being alone.

Oh, by the way, I am writing this on the 37th anniversary of his death.

Today we have a better community to help deal with such tragedy. The Compassionate Friends have been a wonderful addition to my life. To know that you are not the only one who is struggling is very beneficial. I also found the Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood Foundation. They are there to support parents from the 1st day of this journey. They support meeting and talking with others who have been on this road and have somehow gotten down it a ways.



I didn't find a support group for the 1st 25 years, but after I did, I was able to get a better grip on my grief. To talk to others is the best healing I have found. I am able to share the love of my children with those who have nowhere to share the love and loss of their children. The world seems afraid of us and doesn't want to discuss the mortality of ourselves or our children. We have been forced to face it and somehow live with this every day.

Advice ?

Be kind to yourself. Nothing I have heard or read about in 37 years is more distressing or painful as living without our children. What seems to work one day to alleviate your pain may not work the next. Some days a minute is all you can deal with – then maybe an hour. Any healthy distraction will get you a little into the future and may be able to change your outlook. Remember that you will not stay in the same place you are now – it will change over time.

How do I move forward to another 37 years? Just one moment at a time. I was just informed of a young couple who lost their little girl and was asked to give them a call. I think my son would be happy if I give that struggling dad a call today to share some of his loss with me. Please don't try to do this journey on your own, lots of us out there want to share this road with you.

Justin was only here with us in person for only 477 days. Do we forget our children or their love for us? The 13, 516 days since he died proves that my love for him has not diminished at all. It will sustain me for the rest of my days.

Darryl Heino, TCF Houston Northwest Chapter
Justin's Dad



Grief Matured
By: Helen Jay
Adrian Gordon Jay
June 11, 1976 - September 20, 2002

I am very sad that you are in a place where you would even be reading such an article. That said ... I am happy you are reading at all. Sometimes one finds it unfeasible to read anything for months. Be patient and have faith in yourself.....your world will one day be brighter.....there really is light in the present darkness.

After the death of our son Adrian eighteen years ago the make-up of our world totally changed. Life as we knew it suddenly became foreign and far away. Every single view or trust that personally defined us was transformed & rewritten. The pain of this unthinkable tragedy caused horrific disorientation. Our family unit & the role that each played was off balance & totally disorganized. I remember standing motionless in the dark looking through shocked eyes of grief watching the world move along with bold audacity of "normalcy." Trying to grasp the ordinariness of daily living after the

devastating loss of our 26 year old son was impossible. We were crippled & dissolved into a joyless existence, void of color; scrambling to take cover. Those early unforgettable days were long & lonely. The rippling effects were enormous! I was certain we would never survive or cope. I felt helpless watching my husband and Adrian's big brother struggle in their own private way. We were traveling the loss profoundly differently. We were in the infancy of our journey and the compass for navigation was broken.

This all sounds pretty bleak doesn't it? I share it with purpose. It helps to hear and read about the experiences of others when you are floundering around during those early days, months and years after child loss. We need and are desperate for a life-line while searching for a safe harbor. It helps to read or hear that there is possibly a future that will once again take encouraging form and perhaps even make sense.

Before I go on, I can't express strongly enough that there is no agenda as to when positive shifts come about. We all experience them at different times and definitely in no particular order. There is some instability to the shifts as well. We lose our children under many circumstances making the components of what we deal with sometimes broadly unlike. That said, every Mom & Dad suffers greatly and there are countless similarities in our voyage.

Jumping ahead to today; I have been thinking a great deal over the years of how grief matures and how it continuously changes shape. It certainly does not "go away" but the force of it softens. Eventually this unwelcome resident seemed to incorporate itself into our reconstructed lives. We began to respond to it differently....we became surprisingly familiar with it. We embraced it for what it was. Absolutely not the challenge we were looking for, as you well know. The pain decreased slowly becoming more manageable to digest. Grief still visits on the oddest occasions but we now walk with this uninvited companion. Those walks are shorter and less difficult. We developed a memory of "recovering" from waves of sadness. We learned over time that despite the undeniable injustice of Adrian's senseless death, we were actually creeping forward without our son in this world. We in fact, experienced joy on occasion and then more often. It was shocking to gradually realize we were essentially going to come to terms with this and find quality in life again. We re-emerged as different people in some ways while discovering cheerfulness and becoming useful human beings once again. We now experience an odd sort of peace and comfort with grief. In that peace & comfort we can budge. The sadness is always there (because we can never forget our children) but certainly not "Up Front". It no longer controls us.

With much courage, determination and support "Grief" has a chance to mature and we grown-up with it. We become reconciled. How can it be otherwise? Our world is filled with unbelievable tragedy, pain & loss. There must be something built inside all of us to eventually find our way. What a gift.....otherwise the planet would come to a complete halt.



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

SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH



"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.

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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