



# ***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 2021**

**HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

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

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

**Our next meeting is Tuesday, September 14, 2021**

**at**

**Trinity Lutheran Church  
Family Life Center, Room #204  
5201 Spring Cypress Rd.  
Spring, Texas 77379**

The Church is located on the corner of Spring Cypress Road and Klein Church Rd. Please enter off Spring Cypress Road. The meetings are held in the Family Life Center Room 204.

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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  
1991-Matthew Benjamin, Son of Nikki Jolivette

***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 next meeting is Tuesday, September 14th. at 7pm. A virtual zoom meeting will be held Tuesday, September 28th. at 7pm.**

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our newest members, **Tim and Amy Coogan lost their sons Alex and Parker this year and Nikki Jolivette, lost her son Matthew May of this year.** 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

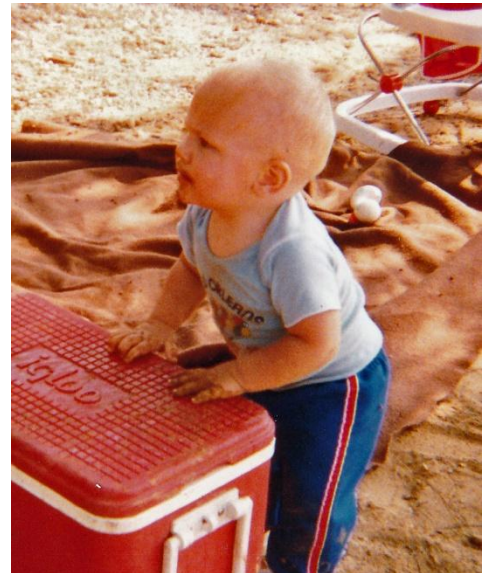
Needless to say, this changed our lives completely. My wife was pregnant when he died and she gave birth just months later to our daughter Nicole. We lost our 3<sup>rd</sup> child, a daughter, just before she was born a year after this.

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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 37<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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



## 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*



## **Dwelling on Our Loss**

To an outsider, the idea of meeting with a group of people for the purpose of discussing death, our personal experiences with the death of our children, the "grief process," etc., may seem grim if not altogether morbid. All of us who are involved in The Compassionate Friends have run into someone who has asked, "Why do you do this?" or "Why don't you just try to let it go?"

The idea of "dwelling on the loss" is always stated with negative connotations, yet dwelling on the death of a child is not something we can avoid. Indeed, "dwelling" is part of the healing process. It's how we come to grips with the questions "Why, what if...?" that uncontrollably pop up in our minds, and it is how we learn to accept the unacceptable.

Certainly, there is a wealth of information in books dealing with death and dying. Our faith, our pastors, priests, and rabbis have much to contribute to our healing. Psychologists, psychiatrists and therapy may be necessary.

The Compassionate Friends encourages grieving parents to utilize any or all of the above tools, but we also realize the value of learning to verbalize, openly, publicly, the grief and the loss we feel . . . not in the privacy of our doctor or minister's office, where we are very sheltered, but openly among people who know full well how hard it is to say, "My child is dead."

We do not put any pressure on people attending our meeting to say anything, but the beautiful part of this group is that it enables you to see people who are "down the long road" a way further and to realize that you will be there in time.

Are we dwelling on our loss? Absolutely. But we are learning to dwell on it constructively, to dwell on it without guilt and without the isolation we have all felt. We learn how to reach out (in time) to others with a compassion that brings healing to others as well as to ourselves.

Philip Barker  
TCF, California



## COURAGE

My brother died three years ago when he was seventeen years old. It was an accident when he fell while hiking in the mountains. I was fifteen and my brother was my hero. I would do anything to make him proud. When I lost him, I could have just given up. I have the courage to love people even though I know that I could lose them. I had many opportunities to just forget everyone else and lose myself. My brother was my best friend and when he died I could have too.

I decided that he would not have wanted me to throw my life away. I try my hardest to work hard in school and live up to what his expectations would have been. I am not living just for him. I am living for myself. A lot of people like to escape their problems by drinking or doing drugs. Alcohol and drugs only make problems worse because escaping a problem is not solving the problem. Self-respect means knowing who you are and treating yourself with dignity. I want people to look at me and to respect me. Staying in school and working to my potential is essential for respect. People cannot respect those who do not respect themselves. As Shakespeare said, "This above all else, to thine own self be true."

I do not make choices based on what the popular decision is. I base my thoughts and ideas on what I believe is right and important. I know that my brother would have been proud of me, because I made it through the most difficult time in my life, without him. I kept living when I lost the most important person in the world to me.

Courage is to keep fighting even though it looks like you are going to lose. When he died, I felt the world crash down on me. Everything I ever hoped for just seemed empty. Even now sometimes it will just hit me that my brother is gone. I have to keep on living and facing the world because that is what life is all about. Sometimes things happen that seem impossible to face. If I do not face my problems, who will?

Life is not supposed to be easy but it is not devastating either. There are so many wonderful things that happen and I have to have the courage to realize it. Life is not just a long line of problems. It is also a long line of answers. I need courage and self-respect to find these answers. I have to trust myself and my future that everything will work out. It always does. The answers to life's problems can only be found through hard work and belief in yourself. My belief in myself comes from a big brother who always had faith in me.

Patricia Kelley  
TCF Richmond, VA  
In Memory of my brother, Sean 8/24/76 - 8/28/93

## 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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