



# *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 2023**

**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 12, 2023**

**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  
1971-Jennifer Bryson, Daughter of Jim and Donna Bryson  
1987-Ryan Wyckoff, Son of Marlena Wyckoff  
1973-Mark Kramer, Son of Carol Kramer

***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  
2021-Taryn Tidmore, Daughter of Renee Tidmore  
2021-Christopher Caswell, Son of Margie Caswell  
1993-Russell Johnson, Son of Sue Johnson  
2022-Stephen Offenburger, Son of Mary Raub

### 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

## CHAPTER NEWS

**Our next meeting is Tuesday, September 12th. at 7pm.**

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our newest members, **Titilayo Traylor, lost her daughter Galencia Symore in 2016; and Barbara Young lost her son Bruce in**

**2023.** 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->



 **The Compassionate Friends**  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all  
children who have died

**Worldwide  
Candle  
Lighting®**

... that their light  
may always shine.

**Sunday, December 10, 2023  
7 PM Around the Globe**

## Signs and Triggers

Based on my many years as Chapter Leader and Facilitator, I want to offer my observation on what I call signs and triggers.

I define a sign as something observed by a parent that generally produces a positive response. Example would be: a butterfly that lands on your shoulder when you're at the cemetery; a wind chime rings unexpectedly with no wind present when you were thinking about your child; you keep finding dimes when your child collected dimes; a sole bald eagle follows your boat for 30 minutes. These signs are an indication your child is still present in your life.

I define a trigger as something observed by a parent that generally produces a negative response. Example would be: seeing your child's favorite cereal in the grocery store and not being able to buy it for your child, seeing someone who resembles your child from the front, but probably more often from the back; your child's friends are going off to college and your child is not; in my case, it's Princess Diana. David and her died in the same year, were the same age and both died in automobile accidents. Whenever she gets publicity I automatically think of David not being here. These triggers are a reminder that your child is not present in your life.

Signs and Triggers are just part of being a bereaved parent. Expect both and embrace the pain as well as the memories.

David Hendricks  
TCF Houston Northwest Chapter  
In Memory of my son David B. Hendricks II



*Remember Me  
To the living, I am gone  
To the sorrowful, I will never return  
To the angry, I was cheated  
But, to the happy, I am at peace  
And to the faithful, I have never left.*

**SEPTEMBER  
IS NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION  
AWARENESS 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."*

### **Suicide Grief**

To lose someone to suicide is complex and confusing. It's unique from other ways people die because someone ended his or her own life. They made a choice and that leaves those of us left behind wondering if there is something we could have done to change that choice. Often, there were mental health issues involved that also could have included substance abuse. There is just not one factor that goes into a suicide death.

The grief journey we must travel after suicide often is treacherous because we aren't sure what to expect. Life never prepares us for the kind of grief (and the reactions that tumble after it) that suicide loss brings. We also don't realize that we don't have to travel it alone. There are many other people out there who are going through a similar journey (or are much further along on the road) and would welcome some company or a chance to help us. Ultimately, we must find our own way and our own hope and peace. The Compassionate Friends is here to help, no blame or shame, just Love.



## Peace

Today is the one year anniversary of the day my son realized he could no longer live. I know this because he told us so in the writings he left behind. It is not the anniversary of his death.

What I remember of the day is that it was not unlike any other. There were no family fights or friend drama. There were no failed tests or poor academic projects.

It was just a day like today.

That week was just like any other as well. Tom attended high school and college classes, and we worked, going through our days just as we always do. But Tom found a way to spend special time with each of us before he left. He and L.J. spent Monday night playing music together. I tried to record it, but it was not perfect, so I deleted the file that night. Tuesday night he and I made his favorite meal together, pasta with hot sausage red sauce. Then, we played a complicated Wii game which consisted of me pushing random buttons to fend off the bad guys while he worked his magic on the most powerful villains. We played for a few hours, until my hands hurt and I could not see straight from all of the blurred images on the television. He played the music he loved and told me which was his favorite song. I listened to it through his ears, but cannot remember the song name. That night, he peeked his head in our room, and played with the light switch, turning it on and closing the door behind him with a mischievous grin. He spent the next few days with his father, doing the things they loved to do together, including gaming with a great bunch of folks on Friday night. He spent Saturday and Sunday at our house, doing homework, playing on the computer, and listening to music.

That Sunday, as I cooked in the kitchen and talked casually with him, he wrote his final farewell to us.

We had no idea of his pain, his plan, or our future.

In his note, he told us that past week had been the happiest he could remember because he was able to live during that time without fear and anxiety of the future. So a part of me is at peace, if that's possible, because he was able to spend his final hours free from his demons. But how I wish, in that week, he had found the strength to fight through the darkness and tell us of his inner war. How I wish I had seen past his armored wall into his soul, so I could pull him through to the light of our love. I wish we could have shown him how many people appreciated him and were impacted by him, and how many would have stood by his side as he fought his undiagnosed illness so he could win his battle with a full army. I wish...

I miss him every hour of every day. I miss his humor, his intelligence, his presence, his thoughtfulness and his soul. Someone recently responded on one of my posts that maybe Tom misses me, too. I hope he is beside me as I write, and can feel the outpouring of whatever is stronger than love, that I have for him. I pray that through his death, he found the peace he could not find in life.

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



# The Choice

**Dedicated to those who have left and those who are left**

I chose my time, I chose my way  
I chose to stay, not another day

Don't hurt yourself, don't wonder why  
I made my choice, my sweet goodbye

Cry for me not, I have my peace  
Please respect, my short-lived lease

It wasn't to punish, or cause great pain  
No upper hand, nor spiteful gain

It was a thought, a mood, a chance  
Our worlds have changed, a circumstance

For the tearful eyes, I leave behind  
To make you suffer, was not in mind

I am ever near, so remember me  
And the stupid stuff, that caused such glee

Take all these thoughts, and give them space  
Banish bleaker ones: they have no place

And because I trust, you love me so  
You'll understand, I had to go

I'll suffer not, I won't grow older  
There's nothing more, for me to shoulder

I didn't explain, I made my choice  
And so this poem, becomes my voice

So pray for me, I pray for you  
I pray for strength, to carry you

Because  
I chose my time, I chose my way  
I chose to stay, not another day

Amen (or whatever you believe)

## THE GRIEF OF MENTAL ILLNESS

I know now that my daughter, Laurie was mentally ill. I did not understand the meaning of this 20 years ago when her depression and "strange" behavior preceded a suicide attempt while in college. Despite all the help we could get for her, she succeeded in completing suicide five years later, at the age of 25, in 1980.

Her psychiatrist then agreed to talk to me—he said, with tears in his eyes, she had been a serious schizophrenic patient. For reasons of patient confidentiality, I was not privy to this information earlier. WHY couldn't I have learned about this before it was too late?

The grief I felt as a bereaved parent was compounded by the truth of her illness. There is a stigma with mental illness. Society has been slow to understand and to accept mental illness. There is grief with mental illness—for the loss of the child that we wanted to be normal. Why did this have to happen to my child?

Was this my fault? Guilt rears its ugly head. Why didn't I see the early signs that she needed help? I felt anger—wanting to blame others for what happened. I was frustrated—with the professionals who could not/did not "fix it." I was disillusioned with the public and private mental health system and its limited resources for the mentally ill and their families. Laurie fell between the cracks and is gone.

Thirteen years later I have come to terms with her suicide. I know now there are many reasons for mental illness, most of which are beyond my control. Mental illness is a disease. It can be the result of genetics, a chemical imbalance in the brain, or a nutritional deficiency/allergy—NOT bad parenting.

I have learned that in grief and in loss, most people want to/need to "talk about it." The magic of sharing feelings and experiences with others who understand (because they've been there), is a healing process. For me, The Compassionate Friends, a national peer-support organization for bereaved parents and siblings, has provided this outlet on a local and national level. I have also participated in a local chapter of The Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and have learned so much more about mental illness through sharing with others who are coping with this stigma and grief. The National Alliance for Mentally Ill slogan in 1991 was "the most shocking thing about mental illness is how little people understand it." How true! How sad!

After Laurie's suicide, initially the most therapeutic healing for me was to publish a book of her writings, material I found expressing her thoughts, visions and frustrations from the ages of 15 to 25. This actual documentation of a mentally ill young person is poetic, loving, humorous, depressing and spiritual. Perhaps her words will help other to see and understand this disease. Her words express intuitive insights in a most articulate way, despite the message of helplessness and hopelessness. As a bereaved parent I felt a strong motivation to perpetuate the memory of Laurie in a positive way. Public education and acceptance of mental illness as a disease is helping to change attitudes. We are learning to be more open and honest about it. We are learning to cope and go on with our lives.

Maybe it was the mother in me, but I never thought I would lose her. Now through the grief and later understanding of this disease, I have found a new purpose in my life. Reaching out to help others caught in the quagmire of grief—from mental illness, from suicide, from the death of a

child, through support groups and writings, in turn has been a healing process for me too. I know that Laurie's 25 years on this earth have made a difference.

Carol Katz  
TCF Regional Coordinator, MA  
In Memory of my daughter, Laurie



## 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

## 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

## The Beautiful Name of Parent

People often ask why there is not a word for someone who has lost a child. For me the answer is quite simple; I am and always will be a parent. The death of our child does not take that precious title away from any of us. Nothing and no one can ever change the fact that we are parents. We gave life to, nurtured and raised our children, for however long or short their lives were. "Parent" is a living word. It is an eternal word.

Our children would want us to remember that we are their parents now and forever. They would want the name of "parent" that was bestowed on us at their birth to live on in our hearts. We are still actively parenting our children. We continue to bring life to our children by loving them now and forever. There is not and should never be a word to signify the endless love of a parent.

Janet G. Reyes

TCF Alamo Area Chapter, TX

## Phone Friends

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All of the people on the following list are bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. They understand what you are going through and have all wished to be included in this list in the hope that anyone who needs to talk will reach out to them. They are willing to talk with you at any time you need their support. Some have listed the specific area in which they have personal experience but they do not intend to imply that that is the only topic they wish to talk about. We all have experienced this journey through grief and it encompasses much more than the specifics surrounding our individual loss. Having a compassionate person to listen when you are having a bad day or just need someone to reach out to when you feel overwhelmed can make the difference in getting through one more day. We have all been there and understand, please feel free to contact any one of us.

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