



# *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 2024**

**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 10, 2024**

**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.

**Chapter Leader:**

**David Hendricks**

936-441-3840

[dbhendricks@hotmail.com](mailto:dbhendricks@hotmail.com)

**South Texas Regional Coordinator:**

**Gene Caligari**

[gcaligari7@gmail.com](mailto:gcaligari7@gmail.com)

**Newsletter Editor:**

**Linda Brewer 936-441-3840**

[llbrewer67@hotmail.com](mailto:llbrewer67@hotmail.com)

**National Headquarters, TCF**

P.O. Box 3696

Oakbrook, IL 60522-3696

1-876-969-0010

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



## 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  
2021-Eliana Albarran, Daughter of Ascencion & Valerie Albarran

***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
- 2023-Eliana Albarran, Daughter of Ascencion & Valerie Albarran

#### 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 10th. at 7pm.**

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our newest member. 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 Worldwide Candle Lighting December 8, 2024**



## 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



## Japanese

Something very strange has happened. In the blink of an eye, in the time it takes to take a breath, in an instant, I suddenly am informed that I now must speak Japanese. Why are they saying such a terrible thing? There is no training, no warning, and no preparation. But now, from this instant on, I must speak in Japanese.

"Wait", I cry out, "I don't know how to speak Japanese."

I am told, *"don't worry, you will learn."*

"But who is going to teach me?"

*"Hmmm, we are not sure."*

"But I still understand English, why can't I just speak English?"

*"We don't know. You were just chosen."*

"But who will I talk to?"

*"Not really sure."*

"What about my family? They speak English."

*"You speak Japanese."*

"But how will they understand me?"

*"They will do the best they can, but you will have to learn to live in their world with only Japanese..."*

"Wait, stop, let's back up. I don't want to speak Japanese!"

*"I am sorry; you really don't have a choice. It is out of your hands. It was never really in your hands, this was just the plan for you."*

"But how do I go on with my life in a world where no one can understand me? It will be as if they cannot hear me?"

*“Your family will try. They will look at you as you talk, and they will try to understand. They will be tolerant to a point, but at some point, you may have to just conform to their way of living and just go along with whatever they are doing.”*

“But I have friends, what about them? I want to keep my old friends around me.”

*“Some of them will try to stay with you. And for a while some will. Some will not be able to take the new language, and they will drift away. But try to understand, they speak English. Their world has not changed. Only yours. Some of your friends will sit with you, and they will hold your hand, and look in your eyes and try to find the old you. They will try to make you speak English. They will take you to familiar places, and do familiar things, hoping you will suddenly change back. But once you have made this change, there is no going back. And it is normal to want them to understand. But you have to remember, that for them to understand, then they will have to leave their friends behind and join you in the world of Japanese. Do you really want that?”*

And then, in that blink of an eye moment, the time it takes to take a breath, I am alone. My family and my friends are still around me, and they are speaking. I hear the words, but cannot respond, I open my mouth and words come out, but they look at me with blank stares. I can sit with them, but I cannot join the conversation. I see them laughing and do not understand what is funny. They try to include me, but after a while when I don't join in, they slowly begin to fade away. No one calls me, they can't talk to me, and they can't understand me. I don't blame them, I understand why.

But can't they see that I am lonely?

I am alone!

And I am incredibly sad!

I have been speaking Japanese for 7 years now. Some of the English is fading from my memory. I can still sit with my family and I can stay with the conversation, I can remember some of our history. But when they laugh, I cannot feel it now. The raw feelings of loneliness have healed a bit. And I can pretend to laugh, and smile at the appropriate times, but I don't feel it in my heart. It is easier to pretend I understand than to try to keep explaining. They still don't speak Japanese. I don't want them to.

I did meet a few people who speak Japanese. And we can talk for hours about “speaking in Japanese!” But we don't share a life together. We don't have a history together. It is nice, don't get me wrong and I am so very grateful for the new friends. But it is sad that what brought us together is such an odd thing. Why were we chosen for this banishment? Were we marked for some strange test? Were we being punished for

some wrong we were unaware of? How did we get this challenge? We talk about it all the time. We try to figure out why me and not someone else?

Once in a great while an old friend or another family member joins us. And that is an even sadder day. Because we know what the first days of this are like. We have adjusted, we have learned to adapt. But they have many, many days ahead of anger, loneliness and yes, always the sadness. But we will help them; we will be here to walk with them and help teach them this new way of life. And when they need comfort, those of us who speak the language will be here.

Anytime.

Just say the word.

“My child died.”

Donna Hastings

In Memory of my son Galen Sean Rhoden



### **Honoring Unhappiness**

I have re-read the book *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl more times than I can count. In it, Frankl quotes from a paper written by Edith Weisskopf-Joelson, who had been a professor at the University of Georgia. She wrote, “Our current mental-hygiene philosophy stresses the idea that people ought to be happy, that *unhappiness* is a symptom of maladjustment...in the present day culture of the United States, the incurable sufferer is given very little opportunity to be proud of his suffering and to consider it ennobling rather than degrading...so that he is not only unhappy, but also ashamed of being unhappy.”

It is my hope that all bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings will have the chance to feel that our unhappiness is honored and respected by others suffering similarly. I hope we will find validation, whether from the embrace of others at chapter meetings, from words read in a newsletter, or from conversations with other bereaved parents and siblings. I hope we will not be ashamed of being unhappy. And when our time is right, I hope we may find some moments of joy and peace even as we keep our grief for our lost children and siblings.

Peggi Johnson  
TCF Piedmont Chapter, VA

## 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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Laura Hengel  
281-908-5197  
[linnemanl@aol.com](mailto:linnemanl@aol.com)  
Auto Accident

Pat Morgan  
713-462-7405  
[angeltrack@aol.com](mailto:angeltrack@aol.com)  
Adult Child

Connie Brandt  
281-320-9973  
[clynncooper@hotmail.com](mailto:clynncooper@hotmail.com)  
Auto Accident

Beth Crocker  
281-923-5196  
[thecrockers3@comcast.net](mailto:thecrockers3@comcast.net)  
Multiple Loss  
Heart Disease

Julie Joiner  
832-724-4299  
[dtjb19@gmail.com](mailto:dtjb19@gmail.com)  
Multiple Loss  
Infant Child

Loretta Stephens  
281-782-8182  
[andersonloretta@sbcglobal.net](mailto:andersonloretta@sbcglobal.net)  
Auto Accident

Lisa Thompson  
281-257-6837  
[lisalou862@yahoo.com](mailto:lisalou862@yahoo.com)  
Fire

Pat Gallien  
281-732-6399  
[agmom03@aol.com](mailto:agmom03@aol.com)  
Organ Donor

Leigh Heard-Boyer  
281-785-6170  
[boyerbetterhalf@yahoo.com](mailto:boyerbetterhalf@yahoo.com)  
Substance Abuse

### FOR FATHERS:

Nick Crocker  
832-458-9224  
[thecrockers3@comcast.net](mailto:thecrockers3@comcast.net)  
Multiple Loss  
Heart Disease

David Hendricks  
936-441-3840  
[dbhhendricks@hotmail.com](mailto:dbhhendricks@hotmail.com)  
Auto Accident

Glenn Wilkerson  
832-878-7113  
[glennwilkerson@thearkgroup.org](mailto:glennwilkerson@thearkgroup.org)  
Infant Child