



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 2025

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

Our next meeting is Tuesday, September 9, 2025

at

**Trinity Lutheran Church
Family Life Center, Room #116
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 Jolivet
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
2023-Madilyn McMillen, Daughter of Matthew and Monica McMillen

***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
2024-Hudson Curtright, Son of Steve and Mitzi Curtright
2023-Hunter Skinner, Son of Troy Skinner and Marjorie Hunter
2016-Jeff Timpanaro, Son of Pat Timpanaro

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, September 9th. at 7pm.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our newest member, **Jennifer Doyle, lost her daughter Ember, May 2025.** 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!

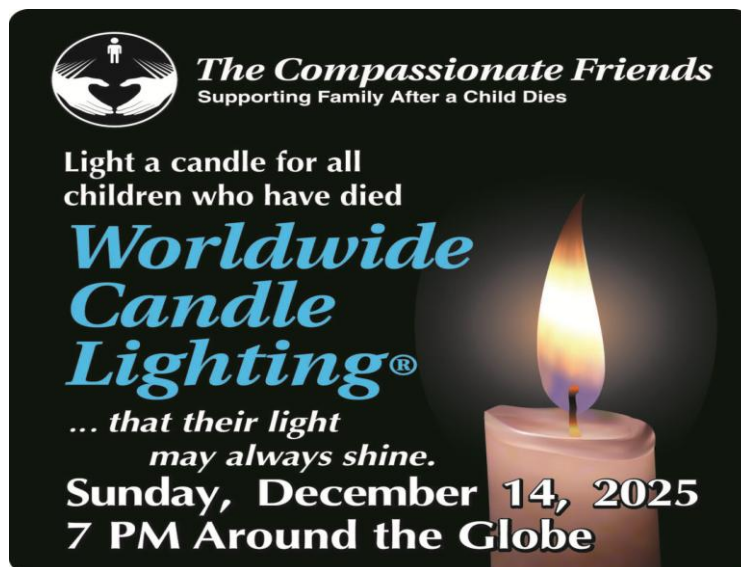
We hope you will find our meetings and newsletters to be a source of comfort, a place where tears are allowed, no judgments are made and the hope that through this trauma, we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

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>

Save the Date





Please join us on October 25, 2025, for The Compassionate Friend's Fall Virtual Bereavement Support Event. This special gathering will include workshop presentations on a variety of grief topics that have a Q&A opportunity at the end of each plus recordings of our main session presentations at past TCF National Conferences. This online gathering will offer a range of workshops on grief, loss, coping, and healing and will focus on support for bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents, whether you are newly bereaved or a more seasoned griever. We invite you to join us for an informative, caring, and supportive day from the comfort of your own home.

***** In case you aren't able to attend on October 25th or want to listen to additional sessions, your registration fee includes access to a recording of the full day's event for 90 days after the virtual gathering, through January 25, 2026.***

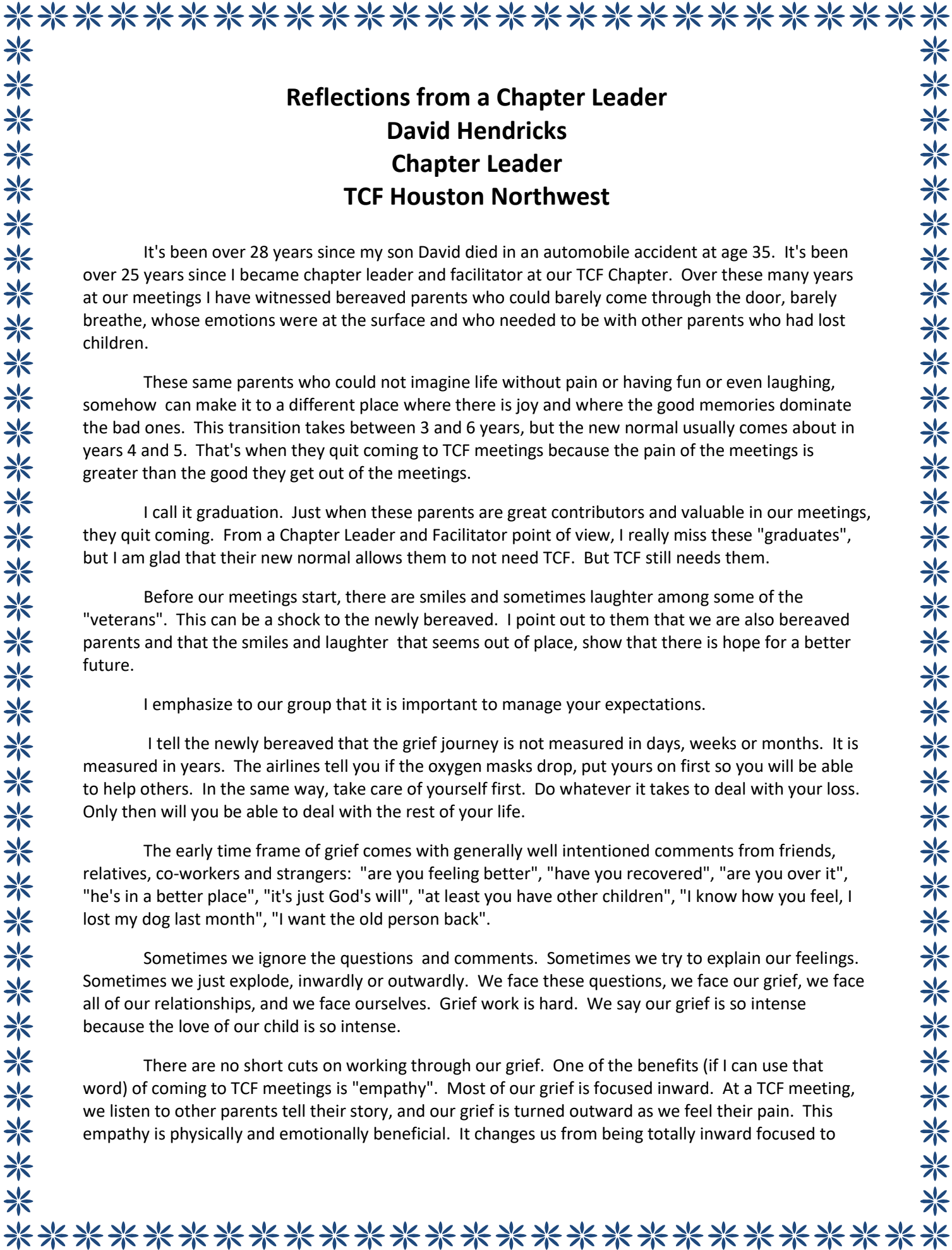
Registration

Special Opening Rate: \$75 until September 16, 2025 (*midnight EST*)

Early Bird Registration: \$95 until September 30, 2025 (*midnight EST*)

Regular Registration: \$125 after September 30, 2025





Reflections from a Chapter Leader

David Hendricks

Chapter Leader

TCF Houston Northwest

It's been over 28 years since my son David died in an automobile accident at age 35. It's been over 25 years since I became chapter leader and facilitator at our TCF Chapter. Over these many years at our meetings I have witnessed bereaved parents who could barely come through the door, barely breathe, whose emotions were at the surface and who needed to be with other parents who had lost children.

These same parents who could not imagine life without pain or having fun or even laughing, somehow can make it to a different place where there is joy and where the good memories dominate the bad ones. This transition takes between 3 and 6 years, but the new normal usually comes about in years 4 and 5. That's when they quit coming to TCF meetings because the pain of the meetings is greater than the good they get out of the meetings.

I call it graduation. Just when these parents are great contributors and valuable in our meetings, they quit coming. From a Chapter Leader and Facilitator point of view, I really miss these "graduates", but I am glad that their new normal allows them to not need TCF. But TCF still needs them.

Before our meetings start, there are smiles and sometimes laughter among some of the "veterans". This can be a shock to the newly bereaved. I point out to them that we are also bereaved parents and that the smiles and laughter that seems out of place, show that there is hope for a better future.

I emphasize to our group that it is important to manage your expectations.

I tell the newly bereaved that the grief journey is not measured in days, weeks or months. It is measured in years. The airlines tell you if the oxygen masks drop, put yours on first so you will be able to help others. In the same way, take care of yourself first. Do whatever it takes to deal with your loss. Only then will you be able to deal with the rest of your life.

The early time frame of grief comes with generally well intentioned comments from friends, relatives, co-workers and strangers: "are you feeling better", "have you recovered", "are you over it", "he's in a better place", "it's just God's will", "at least you have other children", "I know how you feel, I lost my dog last month", "I want the old person back".

Sometimes we ignore the questions and comments. Sometimes we try to explain our feelings. Sometimes we just explode, inwardly or outwardly. We face these questions, we face our grief, we face all of our relationships, and we face ourselves. Grief work is hard. We say our grief is so intense because the love of our child is so intense.

There are no short cuts on working through our grief. One of the benefits (if I can use that word) of coming to TCF meetings is "empathy". Most of our grief is focused inward. At a TCF meeting, we listen to other parents tell their story, and our grief is turned outward as we feel their pain. This empathy is physically and emotionally beneficial. It changes us from being totally inward focused to

being open to fellow travelers and to their stories and issues. Everyone listens and is attentive at a TCF meeting even if we've heard the story many times.

There are an abundance of tools to help us in our grief journey: TCF meetings, therapy and counseling, journaling, scrapbooking, TCF chat rooms, TCF facebook, articles, books, medication, meditation. As we work through our grief, we are often presented with "redemptive possibilities". These are things we can do now, that we probably would never thought of if our child were still alive. These include setting up a foundation, starting a scholarship, working with a group or activity your child was involved in, volunteering at a place to honor your child, special projects, special events, providing material goods where they are needed, and many other opportunities once our eyes are open. Don't expect to find redemptive possibilities when your grief is fresh. It takes time for our eyes to be open to them.

So it is possible, given enough time and enough work to find joy in your life, to laugh again, to be open to new things, and to not having your first thought of the day and the last thought at night to be of the loss of your child. I have seen it over and over again.

To the newly bereaved (and I mean for at least the first two years), the previous paragraph reads like fiction. But it is true. Nothing can compensate for your loss, but the "new you" will be able to navigate through life.

We never get over the loss of our child, and there is no such thing as closure. We just get through the loss and emerge as the "new you". Keep watching for the redemptive possibilities.

To all the "veterans" of this process, remember those who were there for you when your grief was new. Please consider coming back for a visit or two. Your experience and wisdom is very beneficial to our entire group.

So the message of these reflections is hope. Hope for a new you, as you feel your way along this grief journey. As you travel down that long, unfamiliar grief road from which there is no return, be gentle with yourself and work hard, and remember there is hope.



*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.*

HEY SON, IT'S MOM

(To Wesley Hundl on his birthday 8/23/97)



Just needed to tell you, how much

I Miss you, how much I Love you.

How much I miss your Stories,

Your Laughter, your Voice,

Your Presence.

Just needed to tell You

How lonely and sad life is without you.

You were the Heart of our family and

How painful it is to go on

When your heart has been torn out.

Until I see you again, my Son.

Love, Forever Wesley's Mom



YOU

Aren't a were or a was,
You ARE very much still here.
As I carry you with me always.
You ARE very loved.
You ARE always thought of,
You ARE and always will be an
Irreplaceable part of my life. I LOVE YOU

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



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

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.

Laura Hengel
281-908-5197
linnemanl@aol.com
Auto Accident

Debbie Castelo
713-822-7851
dcastelo@sbcglobal.net
Adult Suicide

Connie Brandt
281-320-9973
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Auto Accident

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281-923-5196
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Heart Disease

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832-450-9799
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Teenage Suicide

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Infant Child