



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.

APRIL 2017

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

**We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.
(Our next meeting is Tuesday, April 11th)**

Cypress Creek Christian Church Community Center
6823 Cypresswood Drive, Room 20
Spring, Texas 77379

We are located between Stuebner-Airline and Kuykendahl, about 2 miles North of FM 1960 West. The Community Center is located behind the church, between the courthouse and Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the church/community center parking lot. Follow the posted signs to our meeting room.

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

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.



Our Children, Siblings, and Grandchildren Remembered

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

- 1980- Gregory Lynn Meier, Son of Gary Meier
- 1983- Justin Fletcher, Son of Karen Fletcher
- 1985- Chance Williams Son of Lynn Williams
- 1987- Ryan Matthews, Son of Frances Matthews
- 1990- Derek Ford, Son of Jackie Ford
- 1988- Stephen Cage, Son of Melanie Cage
- 2005- Sanai Caden Johnson, Daughter of Octavia Johnson
- 2012- Hamzah Zubair, Son of Farah Zubair
- 1979- Tracey, Daughter of Anita Sutphin
- 1988- Travis George, Son of Kathy George
- 1990- Kayanna, Daughter of Shari Lancaster
- 1991- Iman Had, Daughter of Naila Qureshi
- 1982- Joshua Hucklebridge, Son of Elaine White
- 2010- Zy'Air Stovall, Son of Jerome & Dora Stovall
- 1983- Crystal Garza, Daughter of Marta Garza
- 1982- Tiffany Driscoll, Daughter of Dan & Cindy Driscoll
- 2014 - Giavanna Calista, Daughter of Nicole Kelley
- 2014 - Korie Joiner, Daughter of Julie Joiner
- 1989 - Lindie, Daughter of Beth Shelton
- 1994 - Hunter Smith, Son of Lee Smith
- 1995 - Brandon LaFavre, Son of Teresa Kobs

APRIL ANGEL DATES

- 2005 - Chance Williams, Son of Lynn Williams
- 2008- Samantha Dawn Quesada, Daughter of Albert & Dawn Quesada
- 2009- Sandra ReNae Southerland, Daughter of Vivian Southerland
- 1993- Karen Crawford, Daughter of Kim Crawford
- 2010- Keegan Dade Coggon, Son of Kellie & Gavin Coggon
- 2007- Andrew Rininger, Son of Philip & Ellen Rininger
- 2009- Nicole Berrow, Daughter of Rosie Berrow
- 2009- Anthony R. Boras, Son of Walter A. Boras
- 2005- Dillon R. Howland, Jr., Son of Rachel Howland
- 2010- Alex Flood, Son of John & Alice Flood
- 2009- Matthew Peterson, Son of Sharon Peterson
- 2009- Bryan Belveal, Son of Linda Belveal
- 2006- Michael Beshara, Son of Mike & Elaine Beshara
- 2006- Shannon Stovall, Daughter of Charlie & Liz Stovall
- 2008- Eric Reiland, Son of Kimberly Crawford
- 2010- Staci Kendall, Daughter of Larry & Tami Kendall
- 2011- Iman Had, Daughter of Naila Qureshi
- 2012- Samuel Johnson, Son of Tim Johnson
- 2012- Lauren Ovelgonne Tenney, Daughter of Steve & Carol Ovelgonne
- 2012- Tracey, Daughter of Anita Sutphin
- 2011 - Justin McHan, Son of Ronnie & Linda McHan
- 2014 - Angel Joseph Vasquez, Son of Mary Vasquez
- 2014 - Kyla, Daughter of Ron O'Farrell and Monica Reynolds
- 2013 - Wolfgang Jones, Son of Phillip Jones
- 2016 - Radley Moon, Son of Melissa and Daniel

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next regular meeting is Tuesday, April, 11th at 7pm. Hope you will join us. Also, don't forget our new sub-chapter group for parents that have lost an infant child, toddler or have had a miscarriage or stillbirth will meet Thursday, April 13th at 7pm.

Balloon Release

On Tuesday May 9th we will hold our annual Balloon Release. We'll have a brief meeting in our normal room and then we'll head outside to the children's fountain located on the eastside of the Church. If you would like to volunteer to bring balloons please let me know.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new member, **Teresa Kobs, she lost her son Brandon LaFavre in June 2016.** 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.

If you have recently attended your first meeting, you may have left feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you may feel that you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared in meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return.

These feeling are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least three tries before you decide if these meetings are for you.

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 support which will help you travel this journey of grief, and we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

"A Special Remembrance"

Chapter members please consider submitting a short story about your child for our newsletter. Tell us about the happy times of your child's life, their hobbies, the school they went to or where they worked. Did they have siblings. Or you may consider sharing your grief journey with others so they will come know there is hope after the darkness. Send your articles to me, Linda Brewer at lbrewer67@hotmail.com.

To Our Old Members

We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick. THINK BACK...what would it have been like for you if there had not been any "oldies" to welcome you, share your grief, and encourage you? It was from them you heard, "your pain will not always be this bad; it really does soften." Come join us and support our new families.



National Conference News

The Compassionate Friends is pleased to announce that Orlando, Florida, will be the site of the 40th TCF National Conference on July 28-30, 2017. "Rays of Sunshine, Oceans of Hope" is the theme of this year's event, which promises more of last year's great National Conference experience. The 2017 Conference will be held at the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, 14100 Bonnet Creek Resort Lane, Orlando, FL 32821. Call 888-353-2013 for reservations. Plan to come and be a part of this heartwarming experience.

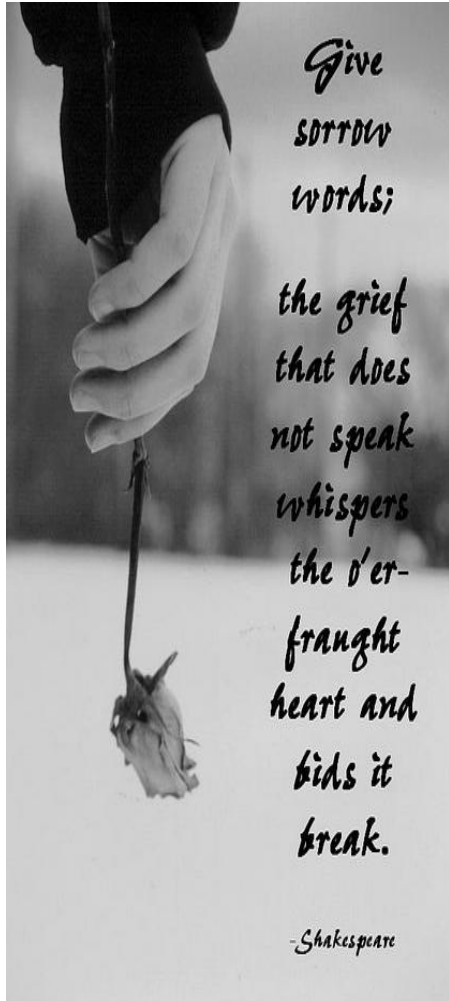
Conference Registration

Register today for the 40th National Conference. Pre-registration will be available until July 7, 2017. Please note: while on-site conference registration will be available, the Friday lunch and Saturday dinner is only available with pre-registration.

Questions? Please call the National Office at 877.969.0010.

"Attending the conference was the best thing I have done for myself. It's a vacation with my son that I will take every year!!"

"I attended my first conference and it was one of the best things I have ever done. The friends I made were incredible and the feeling throughout the whole weekend was so healing. I never thought I would have to belong to such a club, but am grateful it is there to help. Thank you TCF!"



On healing after child loss...

Beth Crocker

September 1, 2013

Well August has come & gone. The birthday month for both my girls, whom we lost in their first years of life. Usually, at this time of year, I post stuff about them & what it's like living with the pain. I try to be positive, I do all the things that seem to work, etc... but not this time. I don't know why. Maybe I'm just tired of doing all the same things AGAIN, maybe I'm just tired of giving it my energy, or maybe I'm just tired.

But the pain has reared its ugly head more this year. Cheyenne was supposed to celebrate turning 18, going off to college, voting for the first time, & all that comes with being a new adult. Emily was going to be 12. Ahhhh adolescence! No comment there. Given the sheer beauty of this child, I'm sure the boys would have been running away from the point of a shotgun about now. Her porcelain skin, jet black hair, & eyelashes that could sweep a floor would be irresistible to any smart young boy

As for me, I just put my head in fantasy. I spent hours watching marathon runs of Merlin, took David to the pool, ...well, ok, I dragged him to the pool kicking & screaming something about wanting to stay home & play minecraft all day. As usual, the school year began with a week of teachers' inservice. Day three was Cheyenne's birthday, the first of two in one week. I woke to

the alarm, sat up & the fountain of tears came rushing in ...no, they came exploding in! I could not stop. All the way to work, sitting in my office, sitting through meetings. I called my department chair, Cindy, to say I would be late to the meeting, not sure if I could be around anyone. She lovingly said come anyway, we will hold you. Thank God for Cindy.

I got it out of my system, & by the time we had finished the workday, been to the cemetery to do flowers, & gone to eat, I was way better. The next birthday, for Emily was much easier. I had a classroom full of students who politely sat through the first of what will be many moving stories I share with them to teach them that love never dies. It stays with you forever. I spent that day not teaching theatre, but teaching faith. That's right, I taught about FAITH in a public school. DEAL WITH IT!

The last several years I thought I was healed enough to start talking to the public, ideas of Ted Talks have been floating through my head, starting a support group at the school for the teenagers who have lost their family members, etc... I was HEALING!

I revisited my old support group with a friend who brought her neighbors, newly bereaved, to the meeting. When it was my turn to talk I lost it. After 14 yrs I found myself a total inconsolable mess. I guess I am not healed yet. What was I thinking? I have been self-medicating my grief with hobbies out the ying-yang, staying so busy that I won't have to feel the pain. I chose (smartly) when to let it out... because I was in control ...yeah, right. Whatever.

As a theatre teacher (long hours all year) & a mom of a 7 yr old boy, I have plenty to keep me busy, but

now I know it is time to step back, face the music, & deal with the pain. I'm still not sure how I will do this, but I have to. Never once in all these years, not even when it was happening... and it happened TWICE, did I ever question God's plan. Never once have I said "why". One thing I am proud to say is that I have an unusually strong relationship with the creator of the universe, not influenced by religion, but by my own relationship with God. What I say & do each day is between Him & me, no one else, & I know that my God will hold me through it all just as I held my children through it all: with LOVE, COMPASSION, & SUPPORT. ...even when I'm wrong.

I was recently given a great gift from a student & her mom. It is the memoirs of Barbara Bush, signed with a beautiful note.

She & the former President have also lost a child. Their sweet beauty, Robin, was 3 yrs old, as was Cheyenne. I remember after we lost Cheyenne, our first of the two, as we attended the Astros games, with seats just a couple sections down from the Bush family, I would spend more time watching the First Lady as she kept scores on all the players than I spent watching the game. I would just sit there & think to myself "If she can do all the things she has done, so can I!" God put everyone together on this planet so we could commune, support, and provide as needed for one another. Religion is irrelevant, but FAITH, good, positive, living-in-the-light kind of faith, is essential for success & happiness. My daughters came to this mortal world for their own reasons, their own impact on the universe. And so did I. Just as they would both be leaving the nest at 18, I must let them go, always keeping them in my heart & my soul. In a letter to his mom, President Bush said:

"But she is still with us. We need her, & yet we have her. We can't touch her, & yet we can feel her. We hope she will stay in our house for a long, long time."

Well said, Mr. President!

My girls live on, celebrating their birthdays, and continuing to teach us how to live in the light. So I will continue, adjusting each moment to make room for more time to face the music. I will spend more time in meditation, and in faith. Love will get me there.



Can We Get To Heaven Without Suffering?

Reflections During Lent

By: Caroline Flohr

Below is the personal monologue I shared with my church for their Lenten Series. I invite you to read, share your personal story, and offer your insight. Is it possible to reach God without pain, suffering, and prayer? If so, how?

"I have been blessed with 5 children. Today they range in age from 10 -26. But when my youngest was 6 months old, and my oldest was 16, one of my twins, Sarah, was killed. It was a car accident. 8 teenagers. A midnight joyride. August 2004.

Never once did I give thought to losing a child. Certainly I'd never given thought about what Mary experienced as her son carried the cross to save the world. When I was asked to contribute to Mary's part, I found myself returning to those first few years when the grief overwhelmed.

That love between mother and child... in each of us, deep down, we know a mother's love. It's a bond that is always there; the good and the bad, it never goes away. Beginning with the knock at my front door that August morning my faith was challenged and reshaped like I've never known before.

I was raised Catholic, and, it's fair to say that until Sarah's death I took my faith for granted. Do know that I love all religions. I believe that all religions offer value and guidance. But when the fireman knocked at my door and told me in less than a handful of words that my child was dead, a strange sense overcame me as if I wasn't alone. Moments earlier I had been dreaming about Sarah. She was hopping into the back of a blue pickup, promising that she'd never leave me. Somehow, in that moment when the fireman delivered the news, I knew that everything would be okay. It was as if God's grace swooped in. And that strange sense has never left me.

When Mary watched her son trudge the dirt path burdened with a wooden cross, she had to ask to be let through. That was her son. Imagine the tensions, the judgments...didn't these soldiers, these onlookers have hearts? How could these people be so cruel?

I will never forget those early weeks after Sarah's accident... the judgments from parents, kids, and people we didn't even know. Everyone had something to say, an opinion to offer. For months, the newspaper printed editorials that held no truth. Where were their hearts? I dug deeper into my faith. My Catholic roots offered support. I needed God on my side. I needed Mary's gentle heart to envelop me. The rosary became my best friend.

When Mary cried out to her son one last time, he tried to shield her from view, tried to protect her. Jesus didn't intend for his mother to suffer. I know Sarah didn't intend for her family to know such pain. Daily I turned, and continue to turn, to Mary. How did she manage her grief? How did Mary weave the pain into her life? We all know loss and grief. It's raw and real and returns when least expected. I find peace when praying. I find courage, perseverance, hope, and faith when focusing on Mary.

I remember well the last time I saw my daughter. Mothers never forget those moments. It was a Sunday afternoon. She grabbed a box of frozen mac and cheese and said "I love you, mama," as she raced out the door to spend the night at a friend's house. I am sure Mary never forgot that last encounter with her son.

Now, as I said earlier, things happened, and continue to happen today, that I can't explain. Some may say that I am forced to believe if I want to see my child again. But, given all the coincidences, those things that can't be explained...I know for certain that life continues after death, that God's love is real, that His way is the Way. I am certain that it is God's grace intervening when I least expect it, reminding me that I never walk alone".

Caroline Flohr is the author of "Heaven's Child"

The Cord

We are connected, my child and I,
by an invisible cord not seen by the eye.

It's not like the cord that connects us 'til birth
This cord can't been seen by any on Earth.

This cord does it's work right from the start.
It binds us together attached to my heart.

I know that it's there though no one can see
The invisible cord from my child to me.

The strength of this cord is hard to describe.
It can't be destroyed, it can't be denied.

It's stronger than any cord man could create.
It withstands the test, can hold any weight.

And though you are gone, though you're not here with me,
The cord is still there, but no one can see.

It pulls at my heart, I am bruised...I am sore,
But this cord is my lifeline as never before.

I am thankful that God connects us this way
A mother and child, death can't take it away!



*The
Compassionate
Friends*
Lehigh Valley Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Author Unknown

[Facebook.com/TCFLehighValley](https://www.facebook.com/TCFLehighValley)





The Robin's Song

It's spring once again. Our part of the world is turning back towards the sun; trees are leafing out; wildflowers are blooming. Robins are again singing to one another. And, I believe, also singing to those who are grieving.

Before my daughter Lori died in the summer of 1991, I was under the misperception that only the English robin had a glorious song. That smaller, red-breasted scalawag of a bird delights all who hear it, and I had felt that we in the United States had been short-changed when they'd misnamed its larger, boring, American cousin the same sweet name. All I'd ever heard our robins do was cheep!

Then one spring day in the year after Lori died, during one of the darkest times of my grief, my ears and heart flew open with surprise at a song I heard outside my window. I distinctly heard, in the midst of my pain, a bird singing loudly and clearly, "Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio! . . . Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio!" I went outside to see what marvelous bird might have been sent to sing to me. I could barely see the bird at the top of the neighbor's poplar tree, so, while hoping this exotic, magical bird wouldn't fly away while I was gone, I went to find our binoculars.

Rushing back, I could hear the bird from each room in the house. After adjusting the binoculars, I was truly amazed to see one of our "boring" American robins come clearly into view! As he continued singing clear as day, "Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheerio!" I marveled at this special message and wondered if my robin was the only one who sang these words. So I looked it up in my Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds and found that my robin was not an anomaly, but that robins are considered the true harbinger of spring, singing "Cheer-up, cheer-up, cheerily."

I stood there that day filled with wonder. I wasn't hearing things; there it was in the bird book: "Cheer-up, cheer-up, cheerily." I thought to myself, "Cheerily . . . No, that isn't what I hear." We had lived in England for a year and our family, especially Lori, who loved to put on an English accent, often said "Cheerio!" to one another when we meant, "Goodbye" or "See you later!" There was no doubt in my mind as I stood there listening. It WAS cheerio. Lori could have found no more perfect way to try to cheer me up AND say "hello"!

Nine springs have passed since then, and although I will always deeply miss Lori's physical presence in my life, those darkest of times are thankfully now mostly in the past. It is spring once again and as I hear the robin singing so hopefully in the highest branches, it takes me back to that first spring song, and I smile, remembering. And I think of all those who are now in the darkest depths of their own grief and pray they too will hear this lovely song.

By: Genesse Bourdeau Gentry

LIFE

*Life is something we all share,
Just like oxygen, in the air.
The way we live it, is up to us,
With a negative or with a plus.*

*Life is something, we should cherish,
We never know, when we'll perish.
Live each and every single day,
Smell the flowers, stop and play.*

*Life is something, we've been blessed,
Choice is yours, choose your quest.
Follow your passions, and you'll be fine,
With the right attitude, you will shine.*



When my son Jim died in 2003, I knew I was a horrible parent. I had failed to save the precious lives of both my children. I blamed myself. Attending meetings and conferences of The Compassionate Friends helped us extend our friendships and a new reality bloomed in my personal circle of grief, I realized how my naivety, ignorance and isolation set me up for additional and unnecessary pain. By sharing and collaborating with other parents who shared similar losses, hope blossomed. Today I find new ways to parent my son and daughter while planting hope into hearts of others. No Shame or Blame - Just Love.

Barbara Allen,
Jim's and Jessie's mom
Patapsco Valley Chapter, Ellicot City, MD

To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow
~ Audrey Hepburn ~

Are We Bitter? It's Our Choice
Marilyn H., TCF Redlands, CA

A few years ago I received a phone call telling me that a drunk driver had killed my friend's husband. The caller said I should go to see my friend. My first thought was, I don't really know the widow all that well. I'm sure she will have lots of friends to help her. What if she doesn't want to see me? What if she thinks I'm intruding?

After some internal struggle, I went to my friend's home. As I walked in, everyone became quiet, and then a whisper sort of rippled around the room, "Marilyn is here!" I saw my friend sitting on the couch. She motioned for me to come sit by her, and she whispered, "I've been hoping you would come. I have so many questions and I think you can answer my questions." My friend and I talked so easily that I nearly forgot anyone else was in the room.

That day I realized that I had gained a position of credibility because I had experienced the death of three of my four sons. Had I asked for that credibility? Absolutely not! But I got it anyway. The only choice I had in the matter was what I was going to do with my experience. Anna Quindlan stated "Our lives are defined by those we have lost." I read that quote years ago, and it stuck with me. So what does it mean?

I think it means that once we have walked through the terrible trauma of the death of our precious child our lives are changed forever. How our lives have changed is totally up to us.

Because our child died:

We can be more sensitive to others. We can be more observant and notice when others seem to feel sad. We can show up quickly when someone dies. We can answer the question, "Am I going crazy?"

We can help someone know it is normal to want to see their deceased child. We can sit and hold someone's hand when they are afraid. We can remember the death date of a child. We can let others know they needn't fear they might forget their child. It won't happen. We can be the one to remember special days of our bereaved friends. We can be the one to help empty out a deceased child's room. We can be the one to understand because: we are different. We have let our lives be defined positively by those we have lost. Here are the other choices.

Because our child died:

We can choose to be insensitive. We can choose to be indifferent to other's pain. We can stay away when a tragedy happens to someone else. We can refuse to offer comfort. We can refuse to talk about our pain. We can cause others to feel uncomfortable and afraid to mention our child's name. We can allow our lives to be negatively defined by those we have lost. It's up to us. We can be bitter or better. It is our choice.

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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