



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.

FEBRUARY 2017

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

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

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

(Our next meeting is Tuesday, Feb. 14th)

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

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Natalia Lopez - Daughter of Melissa Lopez
Devin Giblin - Son of Tanya Giblin
Ryan Mitchell Smith - Son of Anne-Marie Smith
Jonathon Kuta - Son of Larry & Terri Kuta
Jeff Shinsky - Son of Margaret Butler
Jason Allen Denbo - Son of Donna J. Denbo
Jason Lucher - Brother of Kerri Lucher
Ryder & Levi Wagner - Sons of Susan & R.J. Wagner
Jason Robert Kramberger, Son of Nancy & Ken Thornton
Charlotte Caldwell, Daughter of Jason & Rebecca Caldwell
Colton Alderson, Son of Jimmy Alderson and Julia Ware
Patrick Bull, Son of Tom & Gayle Bull
Christopher Gibler, Son of Susan Gibler
William Michael Shaw, Son of Mary Kay Martin
Katherine Collins, Daughter of Kevin & Paula Collins
Miller LaCour Wade, Son of Burton & Julie Wade
Moriah Clay, Daughter of Kim Clay
Amelia Tayloe, Daughter of Matthew & Misty Tayloe
Race Killen, Son of Wendy Killen
Sean Weinstein, Son of Steve & Sherry Weinstein
Creighton Heslop, Son of Barry & Kris Heslop
Jonah Basile, Son of Malea Basile



A Solitary Journey

By: Helen Steiner Rice

Grief is a solitary journey. No one but you knows the gaping hole left in your life when someone you know has died. And no one but you can mourn the silence that was once filled with laughter and song. It is the nature of love and of death to touch every person in a totally unique way. Comfort comes from knowing that people have made the same journey. And solace comes from understanding how others have learned to sing again.



FEBRUARY ANGEL DATES

Lisa Renee Sanders - Daughter of Jim & Peggy Holland
Gregory Whitney Vinson, Son of Lance & Marilyn Vinson
Travis Walden, Son of Janet Walden
Jeff Walker - Brother of Stephanie Thrift
Matthew Brown - Son of Cathy Brown
Ryan Mitchell Smith - Son of Anne-Marie Smith
Michael Shrum, Son of Mike & Melva Shrum
Jerry Dwight Tanksley, Jr., Son of Virginia Tanksley
Christy Wempe, Daughter of Ann & Lance Parks
David Morgan - Son of Brent & Martina Morgan
Emily Crocker, Daughter of Nick & Beth Crocker
David Hendricks II, Son of David Hendricks
Ryder & Levi Wagner - Sons of Susan & R.J. Wagner
Leah Elizabeth Davis - Daughter of Ron & Laura Davis
Logan Xavier Venegas, Son of Rochelle Snyder
Ryder & Levi Wagner, Sons of R.J. & Susan Wagner
Amber Eileen Schulze, Daughter of Lisa Schulze
Joshua Hucklebridge, Son of Elaine White
Sloan Nagy, Son of Tammy Johnson
Tiffany Driscoll, Daughter of Dan & Cindy Driscoll
Ryan Moody, Son of Gloria Moody
William Michael Shaw, Son of Mary Kay Martin
Katherine Collins, Daughter of Kevin & Paula Collins
Miller LaCour Wade, Son of Burton & Julie Wade
Wesley Hundl, Son of Sharon Mondrik
Athena Suniga, Daughter of Selena Suniga
Jonah Basile, Son of Malea Basile



Seeking to forget makes exile all the longer. The secret to redemption lies in remembrance. - Richard von Weizsaecker

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next regular meeting is Tuesday, February, 14th at 7pm. I hope you will join us. I would like to extend a special invitation to our old members. Please join us and share your grief journey with our newly bereaved members. Come and share your wisdom and give back to those in need of your support.

Our small group for parents that have lost an infant, toddler, or have had a miscarriage or stillbirth will meet Thursday, February 16th at 7pm. Contact Julie Joiner at 832-724-4299 for more information.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new members, **Tim and Cheryl Cole, they lost their son Corey in October of last year.** If you have walked through the door to a TCF meeting, we understand how traumatic and difficult that is to do...we have all taken that step and reach out to you in friendship and support.

As our TCF Credo says, *"We come from different walks of life..."*, but the common bond we now share is the death of a beloved child, grandchild, or sibling. Others cannot understand the terrifying and debilitating emotional issues that occur in our daily lives once this event happens; a TCF member can and does!

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

Love Gifts – A Way to Remember

There are no dues to belong to Compassionate Friends, because we have already paid the ultimate price; the loss of our loved one(s). A Love Gift is a gift of money given in honor of a child, who has died, or a gift of thanksgiving that their own children are alive and well, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help support our Chapter. Your gifts are tax deductible and are used to reach out to other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. Your gifts support this newsletter, our TCF Library, and other Chapter expenses.

Volunteers

We are always in need of volunteers that can help set up before the meeting, greet people at the door, make coffee, bring light refreshments, etc. If you are interested and would like to help please email me, Linda Brewer at llbrewer67@hotmail.com or see David Hendricks after the meeting.

SAVE THE DATE

The Compassionate Friends' 40th Annual National Conference will be held this year in Orlando, Florida on July 28-30, 2017. "Rays of Sunshine, Oceans of Hope" is the theme of this year's Conference.

Although this article doesn't specifically address the loss of a child, it has some good information in it.

How Grief Can Make You Sick

By Dr. Sanjay Gupta

The loss of a loved one can impact survivors' mental and physical health.

"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear," wrote author C.S. Lewis, reflecting on his wife's death. Like fear, grief is a common human response with psychological and physical implications. Losing a loved one is an emotionally painful experience that can have a real effect on the mind and body.

"The best way to understand how grief can affect your health is to understand what bereavement entails: one, a major stressor; and two, loss of a close relationship," says M. Katherine Shear, MD, professor of psychiatry at Columbia University and director of the Center for Complicated Grief.

"Close relationships help regulate our daily psychological and physical functioning," explains Dr. Shear. "Their loss...typically leaves people feeling out of control and disoriented."

Grief and Exhaustion

One of the most common early symptoms of grief is extreme tiredness that makes even routine tasks difficult. "I had no idea that grief would be physically exhausting," says Anna Whiston-Donaldson, whose 12-year-old son Jack drowned in 2011. "My body felt fragile and very tired."

In her book *Surviving Grief ...and Learning to Live Again*, psychologist Catherine M. Sanders, PhD, writes that the bereaved can "become so weak that we actually feel like we have the flu...[and] this weakness frightens and perplexes us."

Difficulty Thinking Clearly

Cognitive effects of grief "can interfere with the ability to think clearly, to make decisions and judgments, and problem solve," Shear says.

Studies have associated bereavement with poorer memory performance and trouble concentrating.

Sense of Being Alone

Grief is often accompanied by feelings of loneliness or isolation. Intrusive thoughts about one's loss "can be debilitating and make a person feel like they're not connected to the world or anyone around them," says traumatic grief counselor Joanne Cacciatore, PhD, associate professor of social work at Arizona State University.

People with prolonged grief disorder, also known as complicated grief, may experience "frequent insistent thoughts of the person who died, a sense of disbelief and difficulty feeling connected to other people...and a range of difficulties related to emotion regulation," Shear says.

Depression and Substance Abuse

According to Mental Health America, a national advocacy group, prolonged grief can trigger anxiety attacks and depression. Research has found that about a quarter of people who lose their spouse experience clinical depression and anxiety in the first year.

Bereavement has been associated with substance abuse, and research published in Substance Abuse Treatment Prevention, and Policy specifically found a greater risk of alcohol-related problems among bereaved men.

Heart Health and Immunity

The emotional impact of grief is often described as "heartache" or "heartbreak," but the release of stress hormones associated with grief can cause actual cardiac problems.

"We know a fair amount about how stress affects the cardiovascular and immune systems, namely by activating both, and in vulnerable people this leads to increased rates of cardiovascular disease and cancer," Shear says. "Acute stress can also cause something called stress cardiomyopathy, which is an acute form of cardiac illness."

One study found that the incidence of an acute heart attack increases 21-fold within 24 hours of the death of a loved one, before declining steadily with each subsequent day. In another study, British researchers found that older people who are grieving are more likely to have weakened immune systems and develop infections.

Coping and Treatment

While potential health consequences related to grieving are a serious concern, Shear stresses that grief itself should not be treated as an illness. "Grief is the natural response to loss and when we lose someone we love, the loss is permanent and impactful, and grief is also permanent," she says. "No one really gets over an important loss. Grief counselors often talk about positive outcome as finding a 'new normal.'"

Dr. Cacciatore stresses the importance of self-care. "A person needs to take good care of themselves and their grief," she says. "Sometimes remembering things as simple as eating well and drinking water can improve a person's quality of life. Even getting 20 minutes of sunshine outside can help."

RELATED: Managing Grief After the Death of a Loved One

A grief specialist, whether it's a psychologist or a counselor, can help a bereaved person cope with their emotional and physical symptoms. "It provides a safe place for people to be with their grief and to remember their dead without others pressuring them to be okay," Cacciatore says.

One of the ways Whiston-Donaldson, 44, copes with her continuing grief is by writing about it on her blog. "My coping methods have been writing, letting myself feel my feelings, and connecting with others who are hurting," she says.

Shear agrees that sharing and connecting with others is key to finding that new normal following a loss. "We do not grieve well alone," she says. "Part of the natural adaptive process involves reconnecting with others."



Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love. -Mother Teresa

LOVE IS IMMORTAL

Many of us will resent the lengthening of time between our child's life and our own present. Others may welcome the increasing distance in the hope that time itself will be a balm to pain. Yet, all of us perceive, beyond all the hype and expectations, that new years and seasons are merely calendar events.

Whatever problems we have had in the past will follow us into the present. There is no inner demarcation with hurting behind and joy ahead.

Each of us has the same opportunities now as we had before. We can permit time to simply pass, or we can work to mold its passage into constructive growth.

In the deaths of our children we have discovered with certainty that we lack the means to control the most cherished elements of our lives. But we also know that within each of us is the potential to rise above the debilitating anguish we have experienced.

Time continues to move forward and most of us have been too damaged to even play the games of resolutions and dance the rites of spring. We are beyond the futility of such exercises. But, let us each confront this moment and time with an inward commitment to recovery, to living the hours which comprise our existence with the fullness and love of which we are capable.

Hurting will ultimately lessen. Pain will slowly become more bearable. Fears and guilt will gradually pass away. But love, that inner dance of the heart which leaps to our child's name or the memory of an especially close experience that bears only the mantle of endless joy, will not pass away. All else, fame, fortune, distress and dismay, wealth and power, even ourselves, will at last be done.

But love...Love is immortal...May the immortality of love grow secure and healthy again within each of us.

Don Hackett
Plymouth, MA
From ALIVE ALONE



**Though time can change so many things,
I know one thing is true,
Time will never ever change,
the love I feel for you.**

HAPPY VALENTINES DAY

TCF . . . Unconditional Caring

My Son Philip died in August 1994, when he was 26 years-old. He died by suicide, influenced by a genetic illness, bipolar mood disorder (manic depression). I well remember how I flinched inwardly when people began referring to Philip's having "committed suicide." It seemed to diminish my wonderful son, to make him into what he never was: a kind of criminal. I wanted people to remember the beauty of his soul, yet what they focused on was the shocking way in which he died.

So it has been personally important to me to learn that TCF has made a change in the language it uses related to suicide. TCF now uses the terms "died of suicide" or "died by suicide" in all publications and presentations. The new, emotionally neutral language helps to lift the burden of stigma from all of us whose children or siblings died by suicide. It gives us strength and helps us heal.

If your child or sibling has died in one of society's less "acceptable" ways-by suicide, murder, alcoholism, from a drug overdose, AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases or in prison—do know that TCF does not accept society's stigmas. There is no room for blame or condemnation when all our hearts are aching for the children we no longer have. We honor your child and your grief, no matter the cause of death.

Similarly, if you are a parent or sibling who may feel "other" in our oft-judgmental society, please know that you will not be "other" in TCF. We welcome you with understanding and compassion, whatever your age, your race, your ethnicity, whether you are rich or poor, married or single, gay or straight, whatever your religion or lack of religion. We welcome you.

And if you have endured the most terrible tragedy, if you have had more than one child or sibling die or have lost all your children or siblings, you are welcome. Many people are terrified that we are "contagious" because the worst nightmare has become a reality in our lives. They don't want to believe what we know: that neither we, nor they, can keep our children safe and alive. So they avoid us. And they especially may avoid you who have had more than one child or sibling or all your children die, because the horror of what has happened in your lives terrifies them. We welcome you, and we honor your courage and want to be helpful to you in your healing. We offer our compassion and understanding to all parents and siblings and other family members who are on this very difficult journey into healing. May the unconditional acceptance one finds in TCF someday be mirrored in a wiser and more tolerant society.

Kitty Reeve
TCF Marin and San Francisco Chapters, CA
In Memory of my son, Philip



LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY

“Why does it hurt so much? Why is this grief so incapacitating? If only the hurt weren’t so crushing.” Sounds familiar? All of us have known hurts before, but none of our previous “ouchies” can compare with the hurt we feel. Nothing can touch the pain of burying a child.

Yet most of us have discovered that the sun still comes up. We still have to function. We did not die when our child did, even though we wished we could have, so...we are stuck with this pain, this grief and what do we do with it? Surely we can’t live like THIS forever!

There are no magic formulas for surviving grief. There are a few recognized patterns for grief, but even those are only guidelines. What we do know is that the emptiness will never go away. It will become tolerable and livable...some day.

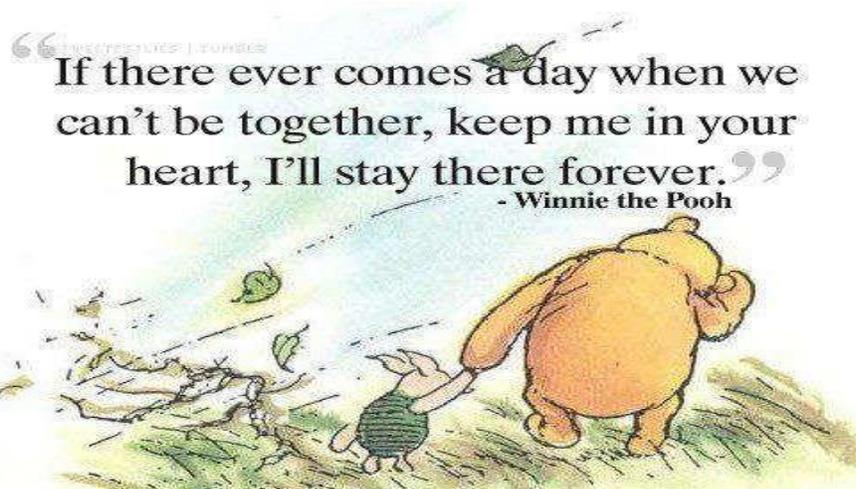
TIME...the longest word in our grief. We used to measure TIME by the steps of our child...the first word, first tooth, first date, first car...now we don’t have that measure any more. All we have is TIME, and it only seems to make the hurt worse.

So what do we do? Give ourselves TIME...to hurt, to grieve, to cry. TIME to choke, to scream. TIME to be “crazy” and TIME to remember. Be nice to yourself! Don’t measure your progress through grief against anyone else’s. Be your own timekeeper.

Don’t push. Eventually you will find the hours and days of grief have turned to minutes and then moments...but don’t expect them to go away. We will always hurt. You don’t get over grief...it only becomes tolerable and livable. Change your focus a bit. Instead of dwelling on how much you lost, try thinking of how much you had. Try letting good memories come over you as easily as the awful ones do. We didn’t lose our child...HE [SHE] DIED. We don’t lose the love that flowed between us...it still flows, but differently now.

Does it help to know that if we didn’t love so very much, it would not hurt so badly? Grief is the price we pay for love. And as much as it hurts, I’m very glad I loved. Don’t let death cast ugly shadows, but rather warm memories of the loving times you shared. Even though death comes, LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY!

Darcie D. Sims



My Perennial Love

Every summer my son gives me flowers. He planted them 17 years ago ... the summer before he died. I remember the day he planted them. Not the exact date, but standing there talking to him as he poked holes in the ground and carefully placed each one. I remember thanking him and thinking how very sweet of him to do that for me.

Terry died the following February. After months of crying and grieving, summer came and with it his flowers bloomed! Of course it made me miss him even more, but how I loved seeing them and knowing that he had put them there the year before. I know nothing about flowers so I was astounded when my mother told me that what he had planted was an annual and not a perennial and that they should not have come back.

A few weeks ago, our neighbor who moved in last summer, commented on my impatiens. She said she was surprised to see them come back from last year. I told her that they have been coming back every year now for 16 years. Just saying it aloud made me realize how extraordinary that really is!

There is something else I have come to realize. My love for my son did not end when he died. My love for him is indefinite; it is enduring. It is perennial.

Maureen Harman
TCF Tidewater Chapter,



IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER

We can't see you here,
We can't talk to you here,
But we can see and talk to you
In our hearts forever.

We can't touch you here,
We can't kiss you here,
But we can touch and kiss you
In our hearts forever.

We will have aching hearts forever and ever.
We will have pain and grief for all tomorrows,
But we will always love you
In our hearts forever.

Marlene Kimmel Leff
Villanova, PA



SEASONS OF THE HEART

Your special days are unchanging
Seasons of the heart I celebrate.
Your birth, forever spring,
Tender memories relate,
New and green, a dream
From which too soon I awake.

The summer of your life was bright
Laughter needed no reason,
Seemingly endless days of sharing.
Sixteen summers. Short in season.

Your death brought winter without warning,
What sense in all this can be found?
Summer dreams replaced with mourning.
Where is hope now?

But the heart knows what
The mind cannot accept
That when all is lost,
It is love that is left.
Love knows no barriers
Time or distance recognize.
Love does not diminish,
But is constant in our lives.
And like a summer breeze
Uplifts and inspires us
With healing memories.

Peggy Walls
TCF Alexander City, AL
In Memory of my son, Eddie





A Dozen Roses
By Alan Pedersen

If I had a dozen roses, I know just what I'd do.

I'd give each one a name that reminded me of you

The first rose I'd call sunshine,

because you brighten everyday

The second would be beauty, the kind that never

goes away

The third rose would be priceless, like those hugs you

gave to me

I'd name the fourth rose silly, oh how funny you could be

Rose five of course is patience, something you have helped me find

The sixth rose would be memories, the gift you left behind

The seventh and the eighth rose would for sure be faith and grace

Nine would be unique because no one can take your place

The tenth rose well that's easy, I'd simply name it love

Eleven would be angel, I know you're watching from above

I'd think about that twelfth rose, and I'd really take my time

After all these roses are for you my Valentine

I'm sending them to heaven in every color that I know

So twelve I'll name forever, that's how long I'll love you so



Wounded Heart

"Your broken heart requires at least as much care as a broken bone. With proper care you can be confident that you will heal. The same powerful forces that mend a broken bone will heal your emotional pain, but a wounded heart needs time and proper care to heal."

~Harold Bloomfield, MD~

If someone fell and broke a leg, people would rush to their aid. They wouldn't stop to even think about it. Yet, when it's our hearts that are broken, few rush to our aid and even fewer understand. At first, we receive the cards and phone calls wishing us well and telling us "if there's anything I can do"...but they soon taper off to a trickle. Then we begin to hear that we must 'get on with our life,' 'we can't let it get us down,' and we're told just how soon we should be 'back to normal'... we're given a deadline of sorts. When we don't follow the acceptable standards for healing, we are thought to 'need help'...the professional kind... and we're told that we are 'in denial'. These same people, who seem to have all of the answers, not only have never experienced the loss of a child but also tend to not want to get too involved...too close to our pain. They would rather stand off to the side until we're back to our old selves...whatever that is! They're uncomfortable when we speak of why our hearts are broken and they don't mention it for fear of reminding us of how our hearts broke in the first place... as if we could ever forget. When they ask us, "How are you"...it's more a greeting than a question. They don't want to hear how we ache inside, how lonely and empty we feel, how desolate we feel. Why...because they can't fix it. They can't make us whole again. And unlike a broken bone that's healed, we will never be as good as new. We will forever be missing a part of what made us the person that we once were. When our child died, so did a part of our heart and where that piece was, now there is nothing...only a gaping hole that nothing and no one can ever fill. Unlike a broken bone, we will not mend in a few weeks...in fact, we will never fully mend. We learn to live without that piece of our hearts...to live with our loss, to survive...one day at a time!

Jacquelyn M. Comeaux

In Loving Memory of My Angels...

Michelle, Jerry & Danny

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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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