



# *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.*

## **JULY 2017**

### **HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER**

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, July 11<sup>th</sup>)**

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*

**JULY BIRTHDAYS**

- 1983 - Nicole Berrow, Daughter of Rosie Berrow
- 1971 - Amy Wells, Daughter of Kerry & J.R. Wells
- 2010 - Delaney Womack, Daughter of Carrie & Eric Womack
- 1984 - Kristine Ashley Bergaila, Daughter of Kathleen Livingston
- 1968 - Van Holland, Son of James & Olivia Holland
- 1985 - Sean Hengel, Son of Laura Hengel
- 1972 - Gregory Whitney Vinson, Son of Lance & Marilyn Vinson
- 1960 - Evanna Johnson, Daughter of Nelwyn Heath and Sister In Law of Christal Janis
- 1980 - Andrew Rininger, Son of Philip & Ellen Rininger
- 1982 - Geoffrey Lynn Meier, Son of Gary Meier
- 1989 - Kylar Shotwell, Daughter of Tracy Bradley
- 1982 - Chance Wilcox, Son of Shelli Ralls
- 1967 - John Steven Sims, Son of Marilyn Sims
- 1999 - Ahjzanae Adore Triplett, Daughter of Alesia Abbott
- 1993 - Patrick Burns, Son of Ray & Amanda Burns
- 1991 - David Kerpchar, Son of Sally Kerpchar
- 1971 - Joel Sloan, Son of Jim & Glenna Sloan
- 1982 - Adam Brown, Son of Greg & Debbie Brown
- 1979 - James (Jimi) Nicholas, Son of Fred & Linda Nicholas
- 2015 - Kacie Joiner, Daughter of Julie Joiner
- 1999 - Jared Mayfield, Son of Robbie Lampkins

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**JULY ANGEL DATES**

- 2008 - Aaron Michael Wolf, Son of Laura Wolf
- 2006 - Chasen Sean Shirley, Son of Debbie Shirley
- 2008 - DeAndria Sharee Anderson, Daughter of Rawn & Loretta Stephens
- 2010 - Evanna Johnson, Daughter of Nelwyn Heath and Sister In Law of Christal Janis
- 2008 - Lloyd Ross (Rossi) Moore, Jr., Son of Carolyn Moore
- 2010 - Sanai Caden Johnson, Daughter of Octavia Johnson
- 2012 - Brett Collins, Son of Bill & Geri Collins
- 2010 - Ahjzanae Adore Triplett, Daughter of Alesia Abbott
- 2011 - Christopher Birken, Son of Elizabeth Birken
- 2013 - Zy-Air Stoval, Son of Jerome & Dora Stovall
- 2010 - Austin Haecker, Son of Debbie Haecker & Grandson of Carolyn Cooper
- 2013 - Jacob Landon, Son of Brenda Landon
- 2016 - Matthew Coers, son of Michelle Guerrero

*Death leaves a heartache  
no one can heal,  
Love leaves a memory  
no one can steal. ~*  
Found on a headstone in Ireland

## CHAPTER NEWS

*Our next meeting is Tuesday, July 11<sup>th</sup> at 7pm.*

*Our sub-chapter for parents that have lost an infant, toddler, or have had a miscarriage or stillbirth will meet (same location) on Thursday, July 13<sup>th</sup> 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. 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.

### Articles & Poems for Our Newsletter

Please submit your poems, writings or a brief article about your child or your grief journey for our newsletter. Email them to me, Linda Brewer at [lbrewer67@hotmail.com](mailto:lbrewer67@hotmail.com). I will be happy to include it in the next newsletter.

### A Special Request of our "Old" Members:

As time goes by and our healing progresses, often times we may not feel the same need to attend meetings. What you may not realize is how much you have to offer to our new members. Think back to the time when your loss was new and you thought you would never get through the unbearable pain. Remember the encouragement you received from those who were further down their grief journey-those who listened to you, cried with you and told you that someday the pain would not be as overwhelming as what you were experiencing when your loss was new.

So, even though you may feel that you have found your way back to a "new normal" we miss seeing you and would love to have you come back and join us. Seeing the "oldies" surviving and rebuilding their lives gives the new families hope that they, too, will someday begin to heal.

If you haven't been to a meeting in a while, come back and share some of your wisdom.

***You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late.** -- Ralph Waldo Emerson*

**SPECIAL REMEMBRANCE**

*In Loving Memory of My Daughter, Danielle Spivey  
By Mark Spivey*

*I wrote this, as it fits my life, for my daughter Danielle Spivey by  
changing the words to the last song Glenn Campbell wrote "I'm Not  
Gonna Miss You."*

I'm still here but yet you're gone,  
My heart is torn, it's all so wrong,  
The shell of the man, of who I am,  
The Dad that loves you, till the end,

You're the last daughter I will love,  
I pray you hear me from above,  
And most of all,  
I'm always gonna love you,  
I'm always going to miss you,

I'm never gonna walk you down the aisle,  
Never again, see your smile,  
The tears they flow, from my eyes,  
The pain's so great, I want to die,

I'm never gonna know what you'd go through,  
Or all the things you'd say or do,  
Comfort you through all your pain,  
One thing constantly remains,

I'm always gonna miss you,  
I'm always gonna love you.



One of my favorite poems by Emily Dickinson begins: "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul." In the early years of my grief after my daughter Coty died, it was hard to imagine I would ever feel that flutter of hope again. Through The Compassionate Friends, I found others who had not only survived, but had built a new life in honor of their loved ones. I felt the rustling of those little feathers and knew that hope would live again in my soul.

Kathleen Willoughby, Coty's mom  
Loss to Homicide moderator

## Special Remembrance

### The Red Guitar By Laura Hengel In Loving Memory of Sean July 14, 1985 – October 10, 2010

The old red guitar sits mutely on the black metal stand. Silence from the instrument resembles the quiet found on cold winter mornings after snow has noiselessly fallen and blanketed the ground during the dark night. A mother tenderly picks up the guitar and brushes away any dust that has accumulated since it was stilled. With tears flowing down her cheeks, she lovingly holds the guitar tightly to her chest, right in front of her broken heart. And she remembers.

This guitar once belonged to a boy, an explorer of life with a sharp mind, quick wit, and a deep love of music. He especially enjoyed listening to “oldies” that his father would play on their stereo. *Led Zeppelin*, *Crosby Stills Nash and Young*, and *The Allman Brothers* gave cause for him to smile, dance and twitch his fingers as though he were strumming his own musical instrument. He longed to “jam” like the great ones of rock and roll.

“If only I had a guitar!” he would dream as he imagined himself on stage with Eric Clapton or Stevie Ray Vaughn.

In second grade only one wish appeared on his Christmas list, a guitar. He knew exactly which stringed instrument he wanted. Electric, shiny, and red, it stood erect and proud in the front window of The Guitar Shop. After much urging and pleading with his father, they went inside where he held the guitar in his small hands. He stroked the long neck feeling the tension of the silver strings through his fingers. He just knew this would be the guitar for him. And it was.

The guitar and the boy were forever friends. When young, he and the guitar would go to lessons together. Hours were spent practicing chords they had learned. This task was difficult for him as his young fingers were not quite long enough to reach the strings just the way the teacher had shown. But they persevered; the boy and his guitar. Soon melodious sounds were heard coming from this twosome. Not yet the music of the “great rock and rollers”, but they were on their way.

As the years passed, the boy grew, into a teenager and finally a young adult. He never lost his love for his guitar and the music they made together. Sometimes they performed for family or friends. Other times, they played alone, just the two of them. The boy drew great solace as he became enveloped with tunes that came to life as he strummed his fingers over the nickel-plated steel strings on the red guitar. They had a wonderful life full of rhythm and harmony.

But that all ended on a fateful day in October. Train. Tracks. Explosion. Fire. Darkness. Nothing. That day the boy and the music died.

Now the guitar only gives comfort that comes from the silence of memories. It sits hushed on the black metal stand and waits for me-the boy's mother- to pick up the guitar that once belonged to the boy, my son, Sean, and hold it tightly over my chest, right in front of my broken heart.

And I remember.





*Below is an excerpt from a book I recently read by William McRaven. He is currently the Chancellor of the University of Texas System. Prior to that, he was a Navy Seal for 38 years and rose to the rank of Admiral. He was Commander of U.S. Special Operations from 2011-2014.*

*He wrote a best selling book, "Make Your Bed" based on a commencement speech given at the University of Texas.*

*The following is an excerpt from his book which to me describes why Compassionate Friends works. TCF meetings are the only place you can go where everyone in the room understands.*

*Marine Lieutenant General John Kelly was at that time and still is a Compassionate Friend to others . The empathy and understanding he displayed could only have been done by a bereaved parent. He gave hope to those he met, and he gives hope to all of us. - David*

The large room at Dover Air Force Base was filled with grieving families-inconsolable children sobbing in their mother's arms, parents holding hands hoping to gain strength from each other, and wives with a far off look of disbelief. Just five days earlier, a helicopter carrying Navy SEALs and their Afghan Special Operations partners, and flown by Army aviators had been shot down in Afghanistan. All thirty-eight men on board were killed. It was the single greatest loss in the War on Terror.

In less than an hour, a large C-17 transport aircraft was scheduled to land at Dover, and the families of the fallen heroes would be escorted to the flight line to meet the flag-draped coffins.

I had attended dozens of services for fallen soldiers. It was never easy, and I often wondered whether my words of solace made any difference to those who lost loved ones or whether the shock of their loss made everything I said incomprehensible.

As my wife, Georgeann, and I began to talk with the families I struggled with the right words. How could I truly empathize with their pain? How could I tell them that the sacrifice of their son, their husband, their father, their brother, their friend was worth it. I did my best to console each one. I hugged them. I prayed with them. I tried to remain strong for them, but somehow I knew my words fell short.

Then as I knelt down beside an elderly woman, I noticed the family next to me talking with Marine Lieutenant General John Kelly. The military assistant to the Secretary of Defense. Kelly was tall, lean, with close -cropped gray hair and dressed in an immaculate Marine uniform. The family was gathered around him, and I could sense that his words of sympathy and encouragement in the face of this tragedy were having a profound effect on the grief-stricken parents and their children. He smiled and they smiled. He hugged and they hugged back. He reached out his hand and they grasped it tightly.

After embracing the parents one last time and thanking the family for their sacrifice, Kelly moved on to the next group of heartbroken survivors. During the next hour, John Kelly touched almost every family in the room. More than any other visitor that day Kelly's words resonated with every parent, every wife,



every brother and sister, and every friend. His words were words of understanding. His were words of compassion, and above all, his were words of hope.

Only John Kelly could have made a difference that day. Only John Kelly could have given them hope, because only John Kelly knew what it was like to lose a son in combat.

Marine First Lieutenant Robert Kelly was killed in Afghanistan in 2010 while serving with the Third Battalion, Fifth Marines. General Kelly and his family had struggled with the tragedy, just like the families at Dover that day. But the Kelly family had survived. they had endured through the pain, the heartache, and the inconsolable sense of loss.

As I watched him that day he also gave me strength. The truth is, when you lose a soldier you grieve for the families, but you also fear that the same fate may someday befall you. You wonder whether you could survive the loss of a child. Or you wonder how your family would get along without you by their side. You hope and pray that God will be merciful and not have you shoulder this unthinkable burden.

Over the course of the next three years, John Kelly and I became close friends. He was a remarkable officer, a strong husband to his wife, Karen, and a loving father to his daughter, Kate, and oldest son, Marine Major John Kelly. But more than that, without ever knowing it, John Kelly gave all those around him hope. Hope that in the very worst of times we could rise above the pain, the disappointment, and the agony and be strong. That we each had within us the ability to carry on and not only to survive but also to inspire others.

Hope in the most powerful force in the universe. With hope you can inspire nations to greatness. With hope you can raise up the downtrodden. With hope you can ease the pain of unbearable loss. Sometimes all it takes is one person to make a difference.



## Vacations

Vacation time can be painful for bereaved parents. Caught up with normal demands of making a living or keeping a household going, we have less time to think than we do on vacations, especially the "take it easy" kind-at a hideaway, tucked away somewhere.

In the summers following Tricia's death, I found vacations could bring a special kind of pain. We avoided going to places where we had vacationed with her. At one time, I thought Williamsburg might be off my list forever since we had a very happy time together there. I tried it one summer three years later and found that she walked the cobbled streets with me. Now that nine years have passed and the pain has eased, maybe the happy memories we shared in Williamsburg can heighten the pleasure of another visit there.

For the first few years after Tricia's death, we found fast-paced vacations at places we had never been before, to be the best. The stimulation of new experiences in new places with new people refreshed us and sent us home more ready to pick up our

grief work. That is not to say when we did something or saw something that Tricia would have enjoyed, we didn't mention her. We did, but it seemed less painful than at home.

One caution: Do allow enough time for sleep; otherwise, an exhausted body can depress you.

We've said it many times: YOU HAVE TO FIND YOUR OWN WAY, YOUR OWN PEACE. Let vacation time be another try at that; but do give yourself a break in choosing the time and locale where that can best be accomplished. Don't be afraid of change-it can help with your re-evaluation of life.

Elizabeth Estes  
TCF Augusta, GA  
In Memory of Tricia



## Summertime

It sounds so easy. A soft, warm word—time to run barefoot, time to leave windows open all night. Summertime. Somehow it seems, doesn't it, that it's especially meant for children. Children on beaches, children on swings, children in large pools, children in tiny tubs.

We who do not have all of our children with us may feel the summertime in two ways. One is to remember shared events and adventures—there were so many. Long rides in a hot car, a nap in the back seat. The famous question, "Are we there yet?" Everything from a heat rash to ice cream cones and sand castles.

For us, another way to feel summertime is the special emptiness brought about by children who are no longer on this earth. They used to trot along on hikes in the hills; they used to gather wood for an evening fire. Now summer brings us again the melancholy awareness of their absence. Have you ever walked on some unfamiliar path, surprised about not having been there with the children? Even when there's nothing to remember, we are reminded of the children's absence.

We have been diminished by death. Some of us may still have living children. Other parents have no children left. They have lost an only child, perhaps. Or all of their children died. And here we are, grateful for the warmth of summer mornings, aware of the ripe beauty of nature, trying to deal with our children's absence with all the grace of which we are capable. Often we do not want to burden others with our grief. Or we may be convinced that others don't wish to share our distress. We have learned, after all, that the world around us is not always able to understand how we feel.

Besides, we were taught to be brave. Many of us will do everything we can to appear "normal" after our loss. But we were also taught to be honest. And when you feel the hurt, when you seem almost to be lost in the shadows of this golden summertime, don't hide your sorrow. The grief of your spirit can perhaps be kept a secret on the outside. Yet, your deepest feelings, unexpressed, can burn into your existence with harmful force.

You can be both brave and honest. You know that it's brave to share grief, be it old grief or new grief. And revealing that sorrow is also honest. Of course, nothing can wipe away much of your pain, but sharing grief is helpful. You will know that after you have expressed the painful sorrow you once kept hidden, and you find yourself, finally, smiling at the memories and the blessings of past summertime's.

Sascha Wagner

## Living Life Is Still An Effort

My husband's family held a reunion in July. We planned to attend and told the family to count on us. But when it came time to buy the tickets and make a commitment, I found I couldn't do it. I simply did not want to deal with the hassles of traveling, leaving home, getting out of my daily rhythm.

I am a different person since my child died. I am a different person than I was six months after my child died. And, I will be a different person in another year.

I find that I am evolving; my basic personality is still intact, most of my mind works well enough, my perception of life, love, people and events is probably heightened but fairly unchanged. Still I am a different person.

Now I work at living my life. I make myself do the things that I once took for granted....such as getting dressed each day, going to work, handling a number of responsibilities I have chosen to accept. I make myself laugh at silly jokes. Sometimes I even have to force myself to really listen to others. I am surprised when I laugh spontaneously, smile for no particular reason or say something "prophetic". What is going on here? Who am I? Why has the joy of life disappeared?

I believe I have found the answer to these questions and even to questions I haven't yet asked. It lies in the nature of losing one's child to death. Initially we work very hard to maintain sanity. Gradually we expand the boundaries of our lives. Carefully we add events, people, responsibilities and simple enjoyment. But our progress is measured in months and years, not days and weeks.

My awakening to this new reality came at a meeting of The Compassionate Friends. It has been rekindled at each meeting since then. I learn about myself by observing others. I note the change in their voice, their body language, their perspective. I see the sorrow in each parent. I see parents whose children have been gone for many years still weep openly and later talk about a special event they are planning. Then I see parents whose loss was recent yet they appear to be normal, controlled and sociable on many levels and they suddenly and mysteriously crumble before my eyes.

That's the journey. We set our own limits as to what is acceptable for us. Over time we shift from minimalist boundaries to a good representation of the person we once were. We have major setbacks: birthdays, holidays, death anniversaries. We have minor setbacks: a picture, a forgotten scent, a baby shoe, a poignant memory. We sob, we scream, we withdraw. But we do go on. With the help of our Compassionate Friends, we move forward and are supported when we suffer a setback. We each deal with the many facets of our grief. We learn from others. We teach others. We grow from the dialogue. Our kindred spirits bring questions, answers and peace.

Who am I today? A fairly well balanced mother of one beautiful child who no longer is alive. I am where I should be. When will I stop evolving? Probably never.

Annette Mennen Baldwin  
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen  
TCF, Katy, TX  
August 1, 2005



## 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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