



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.

MARCH 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, March 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

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- 1983- Aaron James O'Neil, Son of Lisa Thompson
- 1990- Charles James Booth, Son of Mary Booth
- 1993- Alex John Piniewski, Son of Bob & Christi Piniewski
- 1981- Hugo Alberto DeLeon, Son of Lupita DeLeon
- 1989- Todd Perotka II, Son of Todd & Tonya Perotka
- 1998- Liam Young, Son of Jill Young
- 1974- Heather Ann Varosky, Daughter of Edward & Ann Varosky
- 1988- Kate Bronstein, Daughter of Pat Bronstein
- 1994- Samantha Campos, Daughter of Amy Arrant
- 2011- Landyn Elizabeth Tickle, Daughter of Matthew & Shelby Tickle
Granddaughter of Brenda Strahan
- 1983- Rikki Ashley Brown, Daughter of Mike & Gwen Williams
- 2012 – Annabelle Opal, Daughter of Pearl Fisher
- 2003 - Austin Haecker, Son of Debbie Haecker, Grandson of Carolyn Cooper
- 1952 - Gene Ware, Son of Roberta Ware
- 1994 - Joshua Pham, Son of Tony & Peach Pham, grandson of Susan Endaluz
- 1995 - April Ann Ulrich, Daughter of Josette & Doug Tharp
- 1979 - Kyla, Daughter of Ron O'Farrell
- 1973 - Amy Lynn Kramberger, Daughter of Nancy & Ken Thornton

MARCH ANGEL DATES

- 1993- Richard Allen Ginn, Son of Barbara & Richard Ginn
- 2008- Pamela Ann Roberson, Daughter of Doris & Dale Hockstra
- 2002- Brittany Idabell Miller, Daughter of George & Kathy Miller
- 2001- Jenny Nolan Burgess, Daughter of Jenelle Chamberlain
- 2010- Kelsey Buzzanco, Son of Jane Winter
- 2008- Syrina Snow Salazar, Daughter of April R. Torres
- 2009- Todd Perotka II, Son of Todd & Tonya Perotka
- 2007- Heather Ann Varosky, Daughter of Edward & Ann Varosky
- 2008- Amanda Cristina Ramirez-Velazquez, Daughter of Cynthia Cruz
- 2010- Jason Allen Denbo, Son of Donna J. Denbo
- 1999- Cheyenne Crocker, Daughter of Beth & Nick Crocker
- 2001- Jason R. Kramberger, Son of Nancy & Ken Thornton
- 2008- Samantha Alonso, Daughter of Joanna Alonso
- 2010- Julee Ann Serna, Daughter of Virginia Serna
- 2006- Gregory Lynn Meier, Son of Gary Meier
- 2008- Chance Wilcox, Son of Shelli Ralls
- 1992- Kylar Shotwell, Daughter of Tracy Bradley
- 2012 – Annabelle Opal, Daughter of Pearl Fisher
- 2013 – Ryan Bennett, Son of Dan & Cindy Bennett
- 2014 - Julie Less, Daughter of Jim Less, Sister of Susan Less
- 2015 - Moriah Clay, Daughter of Kim Clay

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, March, 14th at 7pm. Mark your calendars for our annual Balloon Release on Tuesday, May 9th. (more information to come).

Our sub chapter group for parents that have lost an infant child, toddler or have had a miscarriage or stillbirth will meet on Thursday, March 9th at 7pm. If you would like more information contact Julie Joiner at 832-724-4299 or her email address is dtjb19@gmail.com

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new member, **Roslen Smith Hamilton. Roslen lost her daughter, Harmony Faith Hamilton in December 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.

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 feelings 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.

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 Please Help!

Please consider volunteering at our meetings. It would be so helpful if someone would lend a hand and set up before the meeting, greet people at the door, make coffee, bring light refreshments, etc. Also, our chapter could really use individuals to help with facilitating a meeting. Let me know if you are willing to help.

**Thanks,
David**



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. We’ll keep you updated with details here, on the national website as well as on our [TCF/USA Facebook Page](#) and elsewhere as they become available. 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.

Hotel Reservations

[Click here](#) to make your hotel reservations online or by calling 888.353.2013 at the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek.

Questions? Please call the National Office at 877.969.0010.



I was humbled by David's request to write something for The Compassionate Friends newsletter. Since most of you do not know me, I'll start with a little of my story.

On March 23, 2001, my son, Jason died from a reaction to a medication given to him by his doctor less than 10 days prior. His autopsy showed that he died from Myocarditis, an inflammation of his heart. Jason was 26 years old. Needless to say, I was devastated. I read many books on the death of a child and then found my way to my first Compassionate Friends meeting. We were living in Maryland at the time and that first meeting is still burned into my memory, there were over 100 people in attendance! I left the meeting in tears and my husband questioned whether it was the right place for me. I told him I was crying because I had never experienced so much pain from so many people at one time. Continuing to go to meetings was one of the best decisions I ever made. We continued with that group until we moved back to The Woodlands and I attended the Northwest Houston Chapter. From there, we moved to Dallas for 2 years, then back to Spring. During all of this time, it didn't matter where we were, The Compassionate Friends was my lifeline to sanity.

I had support from my family and friends but unless you have lost a child, it is impossible to relate to what we go through. Everyone grieves differently and in their own way and in their own time. Quite frankly, it took me 5 years before I felt like my old self, until I achieved my "new normal." To this day, nearly 16 years later, I still think about and cherish the memories of my son every day.

I learned so much from sharing with other members of TCF and attribute my ability to cope with the tools I learned from the "old timers." Genuine love and compassion from the family of TCF is beyond measure.

In 2010, I had surgery to remove a brain tumor, leaving me legally blind and unable to drive. Unfortunately, I have been unable to attend meetings since.

About 4 years ago, my only surviving child, Amy was diagnosed with Vasculitis. She had obtained 2 Master's Degrees and started on her PhD when she got sick. Her life as she knew it, all of her hopes and dreams, came to a screeching halt. The past 2 years she was in

excruciating pain and suffered many severe infections. She spent 70 days in the hospital during that time. Thankfully, as a retired Paramedic, I was able to care for her at home, giving her the IV medications she needed. In September of last year, her doctors basically told us there was nothing more they could do for her and suggested she enter hospice. Amy made the decision to do so, and after 10 days in home hospice care, she died on October 12th.

So here I am again, grieving the loss of a child, my last child. Amy was 43 years old, my best friend and, truly, the only other person who had shared all of the memories of her little brother, Jason.

I feel an emptiness like no other. I will never hear anyone call me “mom” for the rest of my life. I question my purpose. I ask “why?” I think the word “miss” is so inadequate. I am angry. I am jealous of those with children and grandchildren. But I am grateful for the time we had, the memories, the love we shared,

I am grateful for all that I learned from TCF. I don't judge how I feel, I don't surround myself with people that don't support me and let me grieve in my own way. I will survive. My husband, my kids' stepfather is amazing. He understands and supports me and gives me the space I need. I know I'm allowed to do this my way and that's what I'm doing. I know it takes time. The world goes on, but for me, there is and always will be a void that can never be filled. My only consolation is that my two beautiful children, that loved each other so much, are together again. I have two Guardian Angels looking out for me, I will survive.

So, bless you all, the surviving parents, grandparents and siblings. We are all now members of an exclusive club - one no one wants to be a part of, but unfortunately, we don't get to choose our challenges, just how we handle them.

I pray for your peace.

Nancy K. Thornton

Mother of:

Amy Lynn Kramberger 3/9/1973 - 10/12/2016

Jason Robert Kramberger 2/28/1975 - 3/23/2001





Steve and Sherry Weinstein , members of our chapter, lost their son Sean in November 2015. Steve wanted to share this heartfelt letter he and Sherry received from friends they met on a cruise over 20 years ago.

Dear Sherry and Steve

We apologize for not responding sooner to the death of your dear son Sean. We want you to know how special it has been to keep in touch with you after only knowing you by chance on a cruise ship. We have kept almost all of you Christmas cards and letters through the years. We have enjoyed getting to know Sean and were just devastated to hear what happened to him. Please accept our heartfelt sympathy.

We are very aware that Sean's 20th birthday was Feb 18th. That is why we are writing now. WE are returning your Christmas letters of proof that Sean became so special to us. You have always been in our hearts as special distant friends. We loved reading about his milestones and the love and pride and warmth you had as a fun loving, travelling close family. Our world needs more love & friendship like our families have shared through the years. Sean was a beautiful child. He made a difference in our lives as you have as well.

We wish you strength & peace as life goes on. Our prayers will always be with you until we all meet again in eternity. Our hope for you is that life goes on in Sean's memory with good times, tender moments & love surrounding you. Please know that Sean was important to us & his memory will live on forever.

All our love,

Elaine & Tim Atkinson

There are no easy paths to finding your way through your grief, but The Compassionate Friends organization and its members are here so that you will never have to feel alone in your journey.

Thought for the Day

It is not easy returning to the world of normalcy when your world is so upside down. It is not easy to stop being a mother or father to your child that has died. The thought for the day is a word — **patience** — patience with yourself who suddenly and powerlessly has been thrown into this horrid nightmare; patience with your spouse who always seems to be having an up day when you are having a down day; patience with relatives and friends who wish to help but seem to hurt with hollow advice and logical words; and patience with time, for it takes time to adjust, and time can move so slowly. **PATIENCE!**

Rose Moen
TCF Carmel-Indianapolis, IN



Grief Matured

I am very sad that you are in a place where you would even be reading such an article. That said ... I am happy you are reading at all. Sometimes one finds it unfeasible to read anything for months. Be patient and have faith in yourself.....your world will one day be brighter.....there really is light in the present darkness.

After the death of our son Adrian ten years ago the make-up of our world totally changed. Life as we knew it suddenly became foreign and far away. Every single view or trust that personally defined us was transformed & rewritten. The pain of this unthinkable tragedy caused horrific disorientation. Our family unit & the role that each played was off balance & totally disorganized. I remember standing motionless in the dark looking through shocked eyes of grief watching the world move along with bold audacity of “normalcy.” Trying to grasp the ordinariness of daily living after the devastating loss of our 26 year old son was impossible. We were crippled & dissolved into a joyless existence, void of color; scrambling to take cover. Those early unforgettable days were long & lonely. The rippling effects were enormous! I was certain we would never survive or cope. I felt helpless watching my husband and Adrian’s big brother struggle in their own private way. We were traveling the loss profoundly differently. We were in the infancy of our journey and the compass for navigation was broken.

This all sounds pretty bleak doesn’t it? I share it with purpose. It helps to hear and read about the experiences of others when you are floundering around during those early days, months and years after child loss. We need and are desperate for a life-line while searching for a safe harbor. It helps to read or hear that there is possibly a future that will once again take encouraging form and perhaps even make sense.

Before I go on, I can't express strongly enough that there is no agenda as to when positive shifts come about. We all experience them at different times and definitely in no particular order. There is some instability to the shifts as well. We lose our children under many circumstances making the components of what we deal with sometimes broadly unlike. That said, every Mom & Dad suffers greatly and there are countless similarities in our voyage.

Jumping ahead to today; I have been thinking a great deal over the years of how grief matures and how it continuously changes shape. It certainly does not "go away" but the force of it softens. Eventually this unwelcome resident seemed to incorporate itself into our reconstructed lives. We began to respond to it differently....we became surprisingly familiar with it. We embraced it for what it was. Absolutely not the challenge we were looking for, as you well know. The pain decreased slowly becoming more manageable to digest. Grief still visits on the oddest occasions but we now walk with this uninvited companion. Those walks are shorter and less difficult. We developed a memory of "recovering" from waves of sadness. We learned over time that despite the undeniable injustice of Adrian's senseless death, we were actually creeping forward without our son in this world. We in fact, experienced joy on occasion and then more often. It was shocking to gradually realize we were essentially going to come to terms with this and find quality in life again. We re-emerged as different people in some ways while discovering cheerfulness and becoming useful human beings once again. We now experience an odd sort of peace and comfort with grief. In that peace & comfort we can budge. The sadness is always there (because we can never forget our children) but certainly not "Up Front". It no longer controls us.

With much courage, determination and support "Grief" has a chance to mature and we grown-up with it. We become reconciled. How can it be otherwise? Our world is filled with unbelievable tragedy, pain & loss. There must be something built inside all of us to eventually find our way. What a gift.....otherwise the planet would come to a complete halt.

Article written by: Helen Jay
Mother of Adrian
June 1976 - September 2002

Helen Jay came to several of our meetings a number of years ago. Besides being a bereaved mom, she is a mentor and trained facilitator working with parents thru an organization called Bereaved Families of Ontario Midwest Region (BFO). It is a not for profit organization offering support services to individuals and families that have experienced the death of a loved one. Helen also wanted to share this touching moment and picture of her grandson Keanan with his Uncle Adrian.

I think it is a testament as to how our loved ones are never forgotten and remain alive. The little boy in the picture is our 5 year old grandson, Keanan. He wanted to have supper with

uncle Adrian. No one knows why...we checked, and his parents checked. There was no special occasion or date. It just happens. This is the second celebration Keanan has totally, independently created for/with his Uncle Adrian. This child is amazing to us! He is so special. We are so fortunate. The first celebration (Pic not included) was last year after reading on the calendar it was Adrian's Birth-date....it would have been his 40th actually. Keanan had a party! Feel free to share if you think it appropriate. I think it is very touching and inspirational on so many levels. It may offer a glimmer of hope to the newly bereaved.



WHY ME? - The Unanswerable Question

Most of us have pondered this question at some time in our lives, especially since the death of our children. It resurfaces periodically in discussions with the newly bereaved. I have never been completely satisfied with the responses given and have gone away considering "Why me?" to be an unanswerable question.

That was until recently when an article was brought to my attention. The writer states that no one is immune to disaster. "Whatever else separates us, suffering is the common bond of our humanity." He told the tale of several people shattered by great losses, including the death of a child, each searching for an answer to "Why, why me?"

They came together in their suffering. Though unable to prevent the pain, these fellow grievors found that by sharing their hurt, standing together and supporting one another they could endure devastating losses.

"Why me?" is a singular and lonely question, but it doesn't have to be. Together we can give hope to the hopeless and comfort to the suffering. All we need to do is reach out, then maybe the "Why me?" will answer itself.

Polly Moore
TCF Nashville, TN

Life Can Be Good Again

For nearly sixteen years, his voice has been silent. It is a span now nearly equal to the time it was heard. Never did I anticipate life without the sounds that marked his presence. Learning to survive that silence once seemed an impossible task, one so overwhelming I could find no hope or expectation of finding life once more.

He was our son, our only child. The tempo of his growing measured the cadence, the beat, for our own living. His passing left an existence without any value that I could immediately perceive. Ultimately, I came to recognize that I was wrong.

Life still had meaning, but it had fallen to me to find it, just as it had been in the years before his coming. Indeed, even as it had been throughout the time of his living, life still demanded my active participation, my own commitment to give it purpose and resolve.

Hindsight affords an ease in stating this realization that did not exist while struggling in the depths of bereavement. The steps taken to finally seize life again seem logical and ordered while intellectualizing the process but I know that this is much easier to write than it is to experience.

I confess, with both sorrow and gladness, that I can no longer summon the full measure of those savage feelings and the unremitting pain that engulfed me in those early years. Working through them was the most demanding challenge of my life, enacting tolls in physical health perhaps even greater than the long term effects on mind and emotion.

Today, however, I can reflect with gratitude upon a decade of mastery over the sadness. Control of my thoughts returned to me and I know freedom from the utter devastation of those early years.

Looking back reveals essential turning points on the road to healing. Some would seem to generalize easily for anyone. Others seem to respond to personal strengths and weaknesses more particular to an individual.

These points included:

- Self forgiveness for the many deficiencies found within on the endless soul journey that is our lot in the wake of our child's death.
- Forgiveness of others, relatives, friends and associates, who are less affected than are we, who seem unable to help us in our time of deep trouble and need.
- The accepting, at last, the finality of our loss, and that we must gradually unleash ourselves from our former lives and structure anew.
- Learn to communicate value to spouses, friends, and surviving siblings, our love for whom seems shrouded behind the totality of our grief.
- Find ways to give expression to our need to somehow memorialize our child, be it through writing a book, planting trees, sustaining scholarships, or any number of ways. Our need to preserve and safeguard our child's memory is real and deserving of our attention.

- A time comes for many to find new homes, jobs, and purpose. These are often part and parcel of any significant change in our lives.
- Surrender to time, giving ourselves space within it to do our work. Use time to foster healing within, to enable us to grasp today and tomorrow with hope.

No recovery will return us to life as we knew it while our child lived. That life is forever gone and, to a certain extent, we may well have to accept that, as we perceive life today. The finest days of our lives may well be a part of our past. Somehow, we must recognize that this is not unique to surviving our child's death, but is often a portion of the human condition.

Olin is dead. As much as I would wish it otherwise, it will never be. He is not forgotten. His voice, his laughter, his joy, and his shortcomings live on in me.

No day passes without thinking about him. I am grateful for his touch upon my life. Yet, joy is again mine. Pleasure is no longer a forbidden or guilt producing element in daily living. I live, gladly and with purpose, with Olin both behind me in time, but with me internally.

Is this not our goal, to heal, to find strength to love both yesterday and today? Our children have been the richest part of our lives and today should reflect the grace of that love in all that we are today.

Don Hackett

Kingston, MA

In Memory of my son, Olin

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The Compassionate Friends.

Irish Blessing

May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind always be at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
And rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.



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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