



The Compassionate Friends

Sugar Land/SW Houston Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

A self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved families that have experienced the death of a child.

Monthly Meeting:

November 13, 2013

Always the second Wednesday

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Registration of new members and library opens at 7:00 p.m.

Topic: Preparing for the Holidays

**First Presbyterian Church
502 Eldridge Road
Sugar Land, Texas**

Directions: Eldridge Rd. (FM 1876) intersects Hwy. 90A two lights west of the Sugar Land exit of Hwy 59. The church is north of 90A, just past the RR tracks, the second building on the right. Enter the double doors at the back of the building.

Chapter Co-Leaders

Tricia & Donald Scherer
donaldraysdad@Yahoo.com

Marguerite Ward

Chapter Contact

Sandy Crawford
(281) 242-5015

Chapter Email Address

sugarlandtcf@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor

Marguerite Ward
P O Box 231
East Bernard, TX. 77435
Phone: (979) 335-6070
E-mail: mjward@elc.net

Love Gifts should be sent to:

Treasurer

Douglas Ledkins
1830 Landmark Drive
Richmond, TX 77406
Phone (281) 341-5985
E-mail:

Doug_Ledkins@whitetucker.com

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Holidaze

I was getting ready to go to the store to purchase candy for the “great pumpkin day” which brought my attention to the holidays of preceding years: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah and New Years – those days that threaten us so much.

This is the fifth holiday season since my son Douglas’s death, yet I still have a fleeting desire to run and hide. Although last season was not as terrible as the one before, I know this year there will be tears shed and some lonely times. Such times are very private moments of grief for me now.

If you are bereaved, I hope that you will take some time for yourself during the holidays. Take the time to cry and take time to be alone. Try not to take on assignments from other family members who cannot know the exhaustion you experience. Ask for the things you think you need. Others cannot read your mind, yet it is so difficult to tell someone that you are hurting and need something from him or her. There is no requirement to pretend you are okay when, in fact, you are not.

Healing is a slow process requiring a lot of work. I always know when others have never experienced a great loss, for they will say time will heal all wounds. What they do not know and cannot know is that healing a great grief requires hard work which time only permits.

Time itself cannot heal anything. It is not the passage of time in itself, but the pain and suffering endured and the struggle to reclaim one’s life which through time earns a new life. Others see only the end result without realizing the work that went into the healing; therefore, others can only allude to superficial and trite remarks.

Take the time you need to complete your work, to heal your spirit, your mind, and your body and your will to live again. Be good to yourself. Remember that healing is possible through your own effort and determination, and not simply by the passage of time.

By Shirley Corrigan, Bereaved Parents USA of Northern Texas,
from “Where Are All the Butterflies”

www.bereavedparentsusa.org



Welcome

We extend a warm welcome to those who attended their first TCF meeting or received their first newsletter last month. We deeply regret the circumstances that brought you to our TCF Chapter. The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance, not for profit, self-help organization that offers support and understanding to families who have experienced the death of a child. You are cordially invited to attend our monthly meeting (always the second Wednesday of the month).

Meetings are open to everyone and free of charge. The purpose of our support group is not to focus on the cause of the death or the age of the child. It is instead a place to focus on being a bereaved parent, along with feelings and issues that evolve around the death experience of a child. You are free to talk, cry or sit in silence, we respect the individuality of mourning. Comments shared in the meetings remain confidential.

To Our New Members

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But, you have nothing to lose and much to gain. Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. It may be the second or third meeting before you find the right person—or just the right words spoken that will help you in your grief work.

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. Each meeting we have new parents. 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 get softer.”

Lovingly Lifted from TCF –Tyler Texas Newsletter

LOVE SHARES

In Memory of

Given by

Personal information has been deleted
from the internet version of this
Newsletter.

Consider giving a Love Share in your child’s memory. Help us continue our mission to help grieving parents. All Love Shares are tax deductible.

DAYS OF THANKS

In a year when much was given, much was taken, too.

So we pause and give our thanks for what now is.

Think, too, of what once was,

And we are grateful for the threads of lives gone by

Threads that enrich the fabric of this, the life we know.

- Lois Wyse

“If we are loved and remembered, then we live on forever in the hearts of those who love us. —Ten Menten

National Headquarters

P.O. Box 3696

Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696

Phone: toll free (877) 969-0010

Fax: (630) 990-0246

E-mail:

Nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

National Website:

www.compassionatefriends.org

Chapter Webmaster

Tricia Scherer

Sugar Land-SW Chapter Website:

www.sugarlandtcf.org

**Regional Coordinator

Annette Mennen Baldwin

19702 San Gabriel Drive

Houston, TX 77084 281-578-9118

Email: amennenbaldwin@hotmail.com

Thanksgiving Marks Beginning Of Holiday Madness and Sadness

In our society we have turned the holidays into a never ending round of parties, shopping, cooking, preparations for guests or travel and stress, lots and lots of stress. It begins in October with the not so subtle reminders from our friendly retail stores. Most of us dread this time of year because as members of Compassionate Friends, we have one more item on our list and it invariably is at the top.....my child is gone.....how can I handle the holidays?

This will be my eleventh Thanksgiving without my son. We had 36 wonderful Thanksgiving celebrations together, and now it's just me. My only child is gone, my grandchildren now live solely in their mother's world. I am not a part of that world.

But I am learning to cope with this reality. I am learning that I can hold on to the traditions that don't cause me sadness and let go of those that do. As bereaved parents we fall into a unique category. As humans we accept that the loss of parents, spouses, aunts, uncles, siblings, friends and acquaintances is inevitable. But never, never, were we taught or conditioned to the idea that our children would or could precede us in death. The very notion of this shook us to our core.

Now we have lost our child to death. Nobody prepared us for this mind numbing loss. The rules have been broken. We have no coping skills. Our friends usually can't help. Our families try, but until one endures a loss of this magnitude, the ability to fully comprehend the never ending rounds of sadness is simply not there.

We do have a support system.....we can choose to participate or simply be there, in the moment, at our Compassionate Friends meetings. Here we find our most meaningful and helpful connection with other parents.....parents who are walking the road we now walk. These bereaved parents are here to help us on this unfamiliar road. They cannot answer every question because the answers don't exist to most questions. When will this pain end? When will life go back to "normal"? There are different types of pain and new kinds of normal. We gather each month to help each other, to lean on each other, to find hope in each other's ability to function. From this meeting of kindred souls we do derive some solace, some peace and some hope.

I have watched the newly bereaved, raw in their sadness when they first attend a meeting. As the months move forward, I begin to see a change in these parents. Each changes in a different way, for each experiences their loss and their grief process in a different way. Some changes aren't apparent for months, even a year or two. Learning that we are not alone in the grievous

burden of our loss is comforting. Learning that others have developed ways to cope with the holidays, the birthdays, the death anniversaries and other special occasions gives us the hope that we, too, will one day feel comfortable in our new "normal."

I have chosen to accept this group of gentle, kind and compassionate friends as an integral part of my life. The first holidays were horrible. I learned that I had to do what I felt was right. I learned to let go of the expectations of others and live in the moment. Even if I plan to do something and change my mind, I feel no guilt. I learned that those who truly love me understand. I have found that I am truly becoming myself....my new self. It is a slow process. There are setbacks.

Holidays are extremely difficult for every parent who has lost a child.....it matters not how long ago our child died. The pain is fresh, new and raw at this time of year. This is the season for leaning on our compassionate friends, for asking questions, expressing fears, anxieties, doubts, depression and anger and for finding the comfort, hope and understanding that each of us so desperately seeks.

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



The Brain Must Follow the Heart

Some survivors try to think their way through grief.

That doesn't work.

Grief is a releasing process, a discovery process, a healing process. We cannot release or discover or heal by the use of our minds alone. The brain must follow the heart at a respectful distance.

It is our hearts that ache when a loved one dies. It is our emotions that are most drastically affected. Certainly the mind suffers, the mind recalls, the mind may plot and plan and wish, but it is the heart that will blaze the trail through the thicket of grief.

Carol Staudacher in *A Time to Grieve: Meditations for Healing After the Death of a Loved One*





Chanukah Then and Now

By *Stephanie Hesse*

TCF Rockland County,

New York TCF North Palm Beach County

Then – Chanukah was always a special and joyous holiday in our home. Peter, Carol, Linda, and I gathered around the dining room table, lit three menorahs, and sang the blessings. We had a repertoire of songs and we took turns choosing the song we would sing next. We especially enjoyed teasing Peter with one song that added a verse each night. At least once during the holidays, we had potato latkes (pancakes) which Linda loved.

Sometimes when the girls were at college, they would call and we would sing the blessings long distance. We usually had at least one party with extended family and friends celebrating our heritage and our connectedness.

Now – I light one menorah in the kitchen. If Carol is home, she joins me, but Peter chooses not to participate. The tears no longer stream down my face as they did the first year, but my voice quavers as I sing the familiar words.

There are no latkes just as there aren't some of her other favorites on other days. I have guests on other occasions but there are no Chanukah parties. Although Chanukah brings little happiness at this time, perhaps there will be joy and laughter in the future. But for now, I'm doing what is right for me and coping as well as I can.



My Hope for You... that you will be able to find Christmas in your heart.

This Christmas has been harder for some reason, than the ones of the last two years - for a lot of different reasons. As I read this newsletter every day, I am touched by each and every story and frequently find myself crying for all the children and for all the parents who are surviving.

Reading your pain around Christmas has been particularly sad for me. I never had a Christmas with Diana so I only miss what might have been. I don't have to face empty chairs, empty rooms....she never had one. I have been touched by your trials, though. And wanted to share something out of the book "The Quotable Evans" by Richard Paul Evans that has helped me in my quest for peace.

"We stand here encompassed by winter: the barren trees with their fallen leaves, the silent riverbed. Nothing is more certain in life or in nature than death. We accept it as the way of things. Perhaps we are able because we have faith in spring. Yet somehow it seems different to us when death comes early. Much as we might bemoan an early winter, we feel robbed of something due. We feel cheated. Sometimes we rage. And sometimes we blame. And in doing so, we say to God, 'my will be done, not Thine,' and we forget about the promise of spring....In the cold of our soul's winter, we bury our hearts. And then we wonder why it is dark and why we feel so alone. And we risk spending so much of our lives occupied with our loss and what we have not, that we forget the beauty of what is and what we have still. And this is sometimes the greater loss...This I know. There are more ways to lose a child than death. Perhaps those who lose a childhood to death are more fortunate than those who let the chalice of childhood slip from their grasp without ever drinking of it." Richard Paul Evans...The Looking Glass

When I read this, I don't hear that we have to forget our children or that we should not be sad that they are gone. I hear that there is still much life to live, much love to share. This Christmas I plan to focus on the beauty of what is and what I have still, to look at Christmas again with the wonder of a child, and to trust that the promise of spring will be fulfilled.

My wish for each and every one of you is that you will find the beauty of what is and what you have still in the face of the deepest sadness – that you will be able to find Christmas in your heart.

Peace, Love, and Joy to you all,
Michelle Kissman, Atlanta TCF
~reprinted from TCF Atlanta Online Sharing

I'm Beginning

I'm beginning to know your children
From the things I heard you tell.
From the pictures that you've
brought here
I think I know them well
Our hurt and sorrow are immense
I'm not sure where to start.
Compassion after all is
Your pain in my heart.
My thanks to you for listening
To words wrung from my soul.
We are The Compassionate Friends
That's all I need to know.

Jack Brown TCF Louisville

Autumn

By Lily de Lauder
TCF Van Nuys, California

In the fall
When amber leaves are shed,
Softly — silently
Like tears that wait to flow,
I watch and grieve.
My heart beats sadly in the fall;
'Tis then I miss you most of all.

Friends in your life are like pillars on your porch.
Sometimes they hold you up, and sometimes they lean on you.
Sometimes it's just enough to know they're standing by.

~ Anonymous ~

“So it’s true, when all is said and done,
grief is the price we pay for love.”

— E.A. Bucchianeri, *Brushstrokes of a Gadfly*

“Deep grief sometimes is almost like a specific location, a coordinate on a map of time. When you are standing in that forest of sorrow, you cannot imagine that you could ever find your way to a better place. But if someone can assure you that they themselves have stood in that same place, and now have moved on, sometimes this will bring hope”

— Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*

The passage of time alone does not cause our grief to end, but its softening touch helps us to survive.

~ Wayne Loder



Reading Corner

Choosing Hope: A Mother's Story of Love, Loss, and Survival

By Ginny Dennehy

A chronicle of family love, unspeakable loss, and the power of healing

Ginny Dennehy was living the dream: a good marriage, two wonderful teenagers, a fulfilling career. Life in Whistler, B.C., seemed tailor-made for her outgoing, athletic family of four. But in 2001, the world turned upside down when her son, Kelty, committed suicide at the age of seventeen, hanging himself in the loft of their family home.

Lost in a fog of grief, Ginny found the strength to go on. She poured her energy into the Kelty Patrick Dennehy Foundation, raising both funds and awareness to fight depression-related suicide by young people. And then, just eight years after losing Kelty, another unfathomable tragedy: her daughter Riley died of a heart attack in Thailand. She was just twenty-three.

Candid and deeply moving, Ginny’s powerful story will serve as an inspiration for others struggling with the weight of grief.

Book description from Amazon.com

“Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.”

— Vicki Harrison

“But grief is a walk alone. Others can be there, and listen. But you will walk alone down your own path, at your own pace, with your sheared-off pain, your raw wounds, you denial, anger, and bitter loss. You'll come to your own peace, hopefully, but it will be on your own, in your own time.”

— Cathy Lamb,
The First day of the Rest of My Life



The Compassionate Friends
Sugar Land—SW Houston Chapter
P. O. Box 231, East Bernard, TX. 77435

Honoring 20 Years of Support and Friendship
for Bereaved Families

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NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2013

 **The Compassionate Friends**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all
children who have died

**Worldwide
Candle
Lighting®**

*... that their light
may always shine.*

**Sunday, December 8, 2013
7 PM Around the Globe**

**The Sugar Land Chapter of the
Compassionate Friends invites
families and friends to their annual
Worldwide Candle Lighting Service.**

Date: Sunday, December 8, 2013

**Time: 6:00 p.m. registration
6:30 p.m. program begins**

**Place: First Presbyterian
Church Sanctuary
502 Eldridge Road
Sugar Land, Texas**

After the program we will gather in the
large meeting room next door
for refreshments and fellowship.
Each family is asked to bring a
snack to share with others.