



The Compassionate Friends

Sugar Land/SW Houston Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH 2020

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

Monthly Meeting:

February 12, 2020

Always the second Wednesday

Time: 7:30 p.m.

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

Topic: How Much I Love My Child

**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
dkrmom@hotmail.com
donaldraysdad@yahoo.com

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) 533-0099
E-mail: mjward0123@gmail.com

Love Gifts should be sent to:

Treasurer
Douglas Ledkins
431 Old Colony Dr.
Richmond, TX 77406

This newsletter may be reproduced and given to anyone who may find comfort from it.

Journaling to Heal

Each time I look back over my grief journey, I remember the important role that journaling played in my first and second years of grief. Handwritten entries, some sentences, sometimes just a few words describing my emotions, helped me to define where I was in my daily life.

As I review the tear-stained pages, I am reminded of the deep, deep pain and the catharsis of the journal. Whether I was angry, in pain, deeply depressed or just too exhausted to think, I wrote a few words, maybe even a few lines each day. I saw it as my connection to my son.

As time progressed, my journaling became writing and eventually I returned to the computer and began forming coherent thoughts and sentences, with subjects and messages to my child, myself and to others. But the process started with the healing of the journal. I learned to be very honest with myself in my journal because I never shared it with anyone. I didn't put on a mask or rationalize in my journal, as no one else would be reading it. I was completely candid, and I soon recognized my weaknesses, regrets, strengths and successes. Pure honesty and great insight were achieved in my journal's conversation with myself.

Grief therapists recommend journaling to bereaved parents quite frequently. Some people are able to find an outlet for their daily roller coaster of emotions through journaling. Some seek answers and others seek questions. Many parents feel they are connecting with their child through their journal. There are as many reasons to journal as there are types of journals.

While journaling may not be for everyone, we encourage each of you to at least attempt it for a week. Give it your best effort. If, as some have found, it offers you nothing and is a chore, not a treasured time, then stop and seek other forms of outlet. But if, as many have found, it offers you a place for your thoughts, your messages, your self-revelation and self-evaluation as well as a refuge from the world, then by all means, continue to journal.

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

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

**“The few certainties in our existences
are pain, death and bereavement.”**

—Jane Wilson-Howarth

With Compassionate Friends You Need Not Walk Alone

Telephone a Friend..... If you need someone to talk to and can't find a TCF meeting to go to, please call one of our volunteers below. They are a little farther down the road in their grief journey and would be glad to talk to you.

Child Loss - (Tricia) 832-541-4959

Child Loss - (Marguerite) 979-533-0099

Child Loss - (Sandy) 281-242-5015

Support for Fathers - (Doug) 713-515-9906

**Murdered Child/
Sudden Death - (Michelle) 832-603-7112**

TCF—Katy Chapter meets 2nd Tuesday of each month 7:00 p.m.

Website: <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/chapter/tcf-katy-tx-chapter/>

TCF of Houston Inner Loop Chapter meets 3rd Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm
(Newly bereaved meeting at 6:30)

Website: <http://www.orgsites.com/tx/tcfhoustoninnerloop/index.html>

****To locate a TCF Chapter located in your area with monthly meetings please go to the national TCF website at—<https://www.compassionatefriends.org>**

Next Event Dates

February 12, 2020 - How Much Do I Love My Child.

March 11, 2020—To Be Decided

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

Henrik and Ghislaine Thomsen

713-557-6637

thomsen.tcfkaty@gmail.com

LOVE SHARES	
In Memory of	Given by
Personal Information Deleted For Internet version of 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 and can be sent to our Chapter Treasurer:

**Douglas Ledkins, 431 Old Colony Dr.
Richmond, TX 77406 (713) 515-9906
Doug_Ledkins@whitetucker.com**

“We bereaved are not alone. We belong to the largest company in all the world — the company of those who have known suffering.” —Helen Keller

Button Making Machine

A button making machine has been given to our chapter in loving memory of Brandi Ward. It is available for anyone who wishes to have a picture button made of their child. If you would like to have a button made, please contact Marguerite Ward at 979-533-0099 or by email at mjward0123@gmail.com

The mission of the Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive. We are grateful for the faithfulness of parents, grandparents and friends who remember beloved children with love gifts. Our chapter is operated entirely by volunteers dedicated to furthering the work of TCF.

Your voluntary tax deductible donations honor your loved one(s) in a meaningful way by enabling us to offer resources, such as this newsletter, books, brochures and special programs to bereaved families in our area. 100% of the funds are used for this outreach. Donations, along with the name of the person being honored may be sent to our chapter’s treasurer. If you have any questions, please contact our chapter treasurer:

**Douglas Ledkins, 431 Old Colony Dr.
Richmond, TX 77406 (713) 515-9906
Doug_Ledkins@whitetucker.com**

TCF ONLINE SUPPORT

The Compassionate Friends offers “virtual chapters” through an Online Support Community (live chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child. The rooms supply support, encouragement, and friendship. The friendly atmosphere encourages conversation among friends; friends who understand the emotions you’re experiencing. There are general bereavement sessions as well as more specific sessions.

**PRIVATE TCF
FACEBOOK GROUPS**

The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private Facebook Groups. These pages are moderated by bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, and may not be accessed unless a request to join is approved by a moderator. Please click on the link next to the group you wish to join and answer the screening questions so we can confirm your request. If you are waiting approval, please message one of the administrators. Join requests to our Facebook groups must be requested personally, therefore when you wish to share the group with someone please pass along the link to the group.

These groups can be found on the National TCF website at <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/>

Another Holiday . . Valentine's Day.. looms near

Valentine's Day certainly isn't one of our most significant holidays, nor is it a religious holiday as it was centuries ago celebrating St. Valentine. Some would even argue that the day has been increasingly commercialized by Hallmark, florists and candy companies for mere sales. Nevertheless, it is still a day I have always acknowledged and celebrated with decorations, cards, gifts (not to mention chocolate!) and recognition of those in my life who I love dearly.

So, like all of you, I am mourning the loss of my greatest lifetime love and ultimate Valentine, my child. And as I continue this ever-morphing journey of grief, I am thinking of how I can honor my son not only on this Valentine's Day but for the rest of my life. My son's life was worth living and because he is no longer here to live it himself, I have to do it for him. That is now my role as his mother.

So, what work can I do to ease my grief and allow this Valentine's Day to be marked with more joy than sadness, unlike previous Valentine's days? How can I move above the grief to honor him? I DO have control over whether this burden gets any lighter.

I read a blog the other day by Melanie DeSimone, another grieving mother, that really resonated with me. She outlines five thought processes we can adopt to do the hard work that grief requires. I've then elaborated with my 'take' on them.

"Longing for the past all the time only brings sorrow."

We can't turn back time. We will rob ourselves of happiness if we focus on heartache we can't undo. Although my mind often takes me to the past, to regrets, to "what ifs" . . . going into year three I try to purposely remove myself from those thoughts whenever possible. At the least, I don't allow myself as much time as I used to in the wallowing.

"Daily choices add up." When I practice small actions each day such as making a phone call, writing a card, reaching out, journaling, getting with friends or attending something joyous, I build confidence that I can do the bigger things in future days. According to DeSimone, "I strengthen my "can do" muscle every time I use it."

"Doubt doesn't disappear."

Suffering and circumstance have a way of pushing the boundaries of our beliefs. Facing my doubt forces me to explore the edges of my faith. If we knew absolutely what life will hold in the future, we would probably react in fear rather than in hope. Tragedy can definitely

choke up our faith and enforce our disbelief if we allow it. I choose to believe I will be reunited with my son one day.

"My mental diet matters more than I might think."

What I feed my mind has a huge impact on my outlook. If I focus on sadness, tragedy, hateful speech and media that feeds my fears and despair, then those feelings grow stronger. If I instead focus on hopeful stories, good conversation, faithful friends and inspiring reading, I feed the part of my heart that helps me hold onto peace, joy and hope.

"I need a space where I can be completely honest about what this journey is like."

Bereaved parents' groups, blogs, Facebook pages, etc. have been an important component of my continued healing. Leaning into others on this shared path is comforting, reassuring, and understood. But I have to be attentive to how much time I spend reading and listening to other parents' stories if I notice that I'm soaking up too much pain and not enough solace.

So, this year unlike previous years, rather than approach Valentine's Day with heartache, devastation and grief, I am determined to approach with gratitude and practice these five suggestions. In addition to being grateful for my husband and friends (and yes my little doggie) who love me and who I love as well, I am grateful for the life and love that was Dylan.

Dylan's Mom, Allyson Edward

The Long Forever

You left us so quickly;
there were no goodbyes.
How long this forever,
your death and our lives.

The sadness, the anger,
the loneliness of three,
preferring four always,
how small, this new we.

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry
From *Stars in the Deepest Night—After the Death of a Child*

EVEN IN THE DARKNESS THERE IS LIGHT

Posted April 4, 2017 on
The Compassionate Friends Facebook Blog Page

When your child died, you were thrown into the dark night of the soul. You can hide in fear and despair or you can make friends with the darkness. Begin on a clear, starry night. Preferably, not when it is 30 below zero!

If you live in the country, you are in the right place. If you live in the city, get out of town! Get away from the lights and sounds of the city. Go find “the middle of nowhere” and step into the darkness with no distractions. Close your eyes and listen. Hear the howling of the coyotes in the coulees, the wind caressing the prairie and the beat of your own heart. Even the eerie whir of electricity as the energy surges the length of the high lines.

Now open your eyes and look at the ground around you. Then let your eyes move upward and outward. Are there trees nearby creating shadows in the moonlight? Do you see a yard light or two from country homes? Do you see the glow of a distant town on the horizon?

From the horizon, let your eyes scan upward to nature’s nightlights. There is no more majestic sight than the night sky as it stretches over the prairie in all its glory. The stars are endless and fascinating. The ever-changing moon glows in gentle radiance. And if you are lucky, the aurora borealis blesses you with an appearance. Remember, even in darkness there is light.

Feel and see the immensity of it all. Know the darkness. Feel the darkness. Wrap yourself in it and release your fears. Exchange them for familiarity with and knowledge of the night. Absorb the solitude and peace of the world around you. Just as your physical senses can make peace with the darkness in this world, so can your spiritual senses make peace with the darkness in your soul. There are tears and anguish there, but there are also lessons to be learned and there is rest to be found.

Do not rush to leave the darkness. Be calm there. Feel it, absorb it. Let the darkness be a place where you learn to be patient with yourself and gain the wisdom and strength to go on. Let people you love and those who love and care about you provide the starshine and moonlight.

Remember, even in darkness there is light. Know this, most of all: that the darkness in your soul is part of the cycle of life. You will again walk in the light of day where you will carry the remembrance of your child and live the lessons you learned in your soul’s deepest night.

JoAnne Rademacher ~TCF/Minot, ND

Bereaved Parents

Different ages
Different stages
Different issues
Same pain
Daily strain
Occasional tissues
Our children have died
Often is all we know
A fact we fear to hide
Despite our ever-present woe
We live with pride
Though broken-hearted
To love, remember, and grow

Victor Montemurro
TCF Medford, NY

GRIEF: THE PRICE WE PAY FOR LOVE

Grief is a NATURAL and NORMAL reaction to loss...loss of any kind. It is a physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological response. The death of a loved one is perhaps the most devastating loss one may experience. Yet, grief occurs following any change in our lives. Even positive changes can bring a momentary grief response.

Grief is a complex process, guided by our past experiences, our religious beliefs, our socio-economic situation, our physical health and the cause of loss. Loss, anger, fear, frustration, loneliness and guilt are all part of grief. It is important to understand that grief is NOT a sign of weakness nor a lack of faith. GRIEF IS THE PRICE WE PAY FOR LOVE.

Grieving may cause physical and behavioral changes such as sleep irregularities, changes in appetite, gastrointestinal disturbances, “heart ache”, restlessness, spontaneous crying, irritability, sighing or muscle tension.

Anger and guilt are common emotions. You may feel angry with God, your spouse, your children or with others, either involved or totally separate from the death. You may be angry with yourself. Guilt feelings often accompany or follow anger. You may want to withdraw and be left alone.

Depression, feelings of emptiness or hollowness may temporarily overcome you. You may experience headaches, tightness in the throat or chest, muscle aches, or a burning sensation in your stomach. Grief hurts! You may, for a while, become preoccupied with images of your loved one. You may “see” or sense your loved one’s presence. You may begin to wonder if you are going crazy.

You can help yourself through grief.

1. Acknowledge the loss.
2. Accept the pain of grief. Try to live through it, not avoid it.
3. Share your thoughts and feelings. Find enough compassionate listeners. You can talk more than one person can listen!
4. Understand that each person has an individual timetable for grief. Each person grieves separately and differently. We each move through grief at our own pace.
5. Find your sense of humor. Try to hang onto it!
6. Get some physical exercise. If nothing else, jog your memory.
7. Learn to hug again.
8. Accept yourself. Begin to understand you are someone new. Acknowledge that change.
9. Begin to become the person you already are.....
10. Remember, though death comes, LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY!!!!!

- By Darcie Sims

THOUGHTS ON MARY TODD LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln has always been my most admired and respected figure in the history of our country. After standing in front of his statue at the Lincoln Memorial, no one could ever forget the terrible, marked sadness in his face, his forlorn and melancholy attitude.

I have been picking up, from other chapter newsletters, the many pieces of prose and poetry attributed to Lincoln which speak so poignantly of grief, and I have researched the Lincoln life. It is for his wife, Mary, for whom I cringe now when I read how life dealt with her. Washington gossip circles referred to her “mental state,” and that she was “deranged” and “eccentric.”

The Lincolns had four sons. Edward, their second son, died in February 1850 when nearly four. Their third son, Willie, was born in December of that year and died in February 1862 at the age of 11. Then, the tragedy of tragedies. In April 1865, President Lincoln was assassinated in front of his wife’s eyes. Her grief must have been worse than inconsolable.

How could life deal such a terrible fate to one woman? How could any one of us deal with such multiple tragedies? We know how easy it is to feel as if we are “going crazy,” and how common that feeling is. To share that feeling in Compassionate Friends is more than wonderful...to be assured that it is common, to learn and understand from other bereaved parents why we feel that way, and that it will pass, helps immeasurably.

But tragedy stalked Mary Lincoln’s footsteps, for not quite six years later Tad was killed at age 18 in January 1871. History books do not say, but I pray that Mrs. Lincoln had one compassionate friend who understood her grief over the death of her three sons and her husband. One friend wrote of her: “Poor Mrs. Lincoln. She’s been a deranged person”. Yes, of that I am sure. And I thank God for The Compassionate Friends!

~ *Mary LaTour, TCF Dallas 1 Chapter*

A REMNANT

Posted on February 6th, 2020 on the TCF FB page

I am a wretched seamstress, although there have been numerous attempts on my part over the years to remedy that. At this point, I am fairly content with my ability to sew on a button. I can also, with help, produce a pretty snazzy pillowcase.

During those previous attempts to acquire some skill, I did have to occasionally venture into a fabric store. In most fabric stores, there is a “remnant table.” Leftover pieces from bolts of fabric. Often not in sufficient quantity to make much of anything. Always sold at a discount. Sometimes a very steep discount.

These scraps may be from fabric that never was anything more than cheap. It may be a design or color that has gone out of fashion. In some cases, it may be a small fragment of something that was once a fine, valuable fabric. But what does one do with such a leftover?

I sometimes think of myself now as a remnant, a trace of the person I used to be before my son died. Whether the fabric that was my former self was cheap cotton, gaudy polyester, sturdy woven wool, or a finely made silk is up for debate. But here I am a remnant, wondering what to make of what is left. Or, indeed, sometimes wondering if it is even worth the effort.

I guess one option is to sort of throw myself in the proverbial trash heap. But I try...most of the time? some of the time?...to find ways to be useful and productive and engaged. I try to stay off the trash heap. I try to make something out of what is left.

BY PEGGI JOHNSON

After adopting two children, Peggi resigned from her corporate career in telecommunications and devoted herself to full time motherhood. When her son, Jordan, died by suicide at the age of 19, Peggi, her husband Jeff, and her daughter Claire were devastated and dumbfounded. They joined the Arlington, VA Chapter of TCF and Peggi edited the newsletter for six chapters in the Washington, DC area for two years. After her husband’s retirement, they relocated to Charlottesville, VA where they joined the Piedmont, VA TCF Chapter. Peggi previously served as chapter co-leader and edited the chapter newsletter. She is a volunteer for hospice and writes articles for TCF.

"Grandparents are in a unique situation. We're faced with this double-whammy of not only mourning the loss of our grandchild but also trying to be there as support for my daughter and son-in-law."

~ Briellyn's Grandpa, David Dieterle

Life After Loss Life

By Jo Pearce

After loss, I've read many a counseling book
They quote it similar to divorce or wrong route in life took
I have to disagree that grief for a lost life
Is much different to bad choices or breaking up with your wife

You can choose a better route or meet another mate
But when life is gone, you're out of time, it's too late
I've experienced loss following illness, when it's expected
Watching a loved one die, doesn't leave you unaffected

I recently lost my father and as grief falls into place
I can close my eyes and still see his smiling face
Being with him and making the most of every day
I knew it would help me when he finally slipped away

Holding his hand, stroking his hair, whispering I love you
Fearing the end would come soon, it was all I could do
But I had the chance to show my love before his death
Wanted him to be at peace when he took his final breath

My daughter's death was a tragedy, too shocking to bear
Her young life taken too soon, wasn't right, wasn't fair
It was difficult to grasp that she would never come home
I would never see her face, or hear her voice on the phone

No chance to hold her close to me, or my love to declare
Couldn't even say goodbye, because I wasn't there
This is torture, a life snatched without you knowing
It's mentally exhausting and difficult to keep going

This loss is not overcome, it stays and torments your soul
Your heart broken forever, your life never again whole
The only time I will find peace from this ongoing wretchedness
Is when I am finally reunited with her, after my own death

You cannot quote redundancy or broken marriage as a loss
I've experienced both, tough times, but life comes at a cost
You lose faith, you lose friends and your own will to live
It saps your energy, empties your feelings, nothing left to give

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"It is the capacity to feel consuming grief and pain and despair that also allows me to embrace love and joy and beauty with my whole heart. I must let it all in."
—Anna White

"Unable are the loved to die. For love is immortality." —Emily Dickinson

"I love you every day.
And now I will miss you every day." — Mitch Albom

"We never truly get over a loss, but we can move forward and evolve from it."
Elizabeth Berrien

"If you suppress grief too much, it can well redouble."
—Moliere

"Tears are the silent language of grief."
—Voltaire

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love." —Washington Irving

"What cannot be said will be wept." — Sappho

"Grief is in two parts. The first is loss. The second is the remaking of life."
— Anne Roiphe

"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear."
— C.S.Lewis

"This is what I like about photographs. They're proof that once, even if just for a heartbeat, everything was perfect."

— Jodi Picoult

"What we don't need in the midst of struggle is shame for being human."
— Brene Brown

"Being an almost mother isn't a thing. You have seven children, whether they made it here or not doesn't take away from the fact they existed. They were yours, and they were loved fully if only for those small moments.

You are a mother, Grace. I am so, so sorry you were never able to hold your babies, but you are, and always will be, a mother."

— Brittainy C. Cherry, Disgrace



The Compassionate Friends

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

Honoring 22 Years of Support and Friendship
for Bereaved Families



JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH 2020

SPRING

Spring is not far away -
there is a smell of growing things about.
The snow looks somehow
even more perishable now.
Spring is not far away -
And memories move to another place,
Remembering: a squeaky swing
in the garden, going back and forth,
back and forth...
Remembering a bicycle taken out
for its first ride...
Remembering: incredibly wet boots,
cold hands, kissing-fresh face...
So many things remembered,
How many lost?
Not one, not one.
The heart remembers always.
Spring is not far away.

~ Sascha Wagner