



The Compassionate Friends

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

MAY & JUNE 2018

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

Monthly Meeting:

May 9, 2018

Always the second Wednesday

Time: 7:30 p.m.

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

Topic: Annual Balloon Lift-off

**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.

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Mother's Day Revisited

Many of us in TCF do not look forward to Mother's Day. On this holiday, when the whole nation is celebrating the joys of parenthood, grieving parents often feel a special anguish.

Mother's Day this year looms as a particularly difficult milestone for me, Sunday, May 10, 1998, is not only Mother's Day but also the second anniversary of the death of my ten-year-old son, Jacob. Because this day of private sadness also happens to be a day of public celebration, I decided that I should start thinking early about the occasion. I engaged in a little research about the holiday and learned a story that I think is worth sharing.

Mother's Day was the creation of a woman named Anna Jarvis in the early years of this century. Anna, who never married and never had children of her own, devoted herself to establishing a national Mother's Day as a way of honoring her beloved mother, who died on May 9, 1905. In Anna's view, her mother deserved a memorial because she had lived selflessly and endured considerable suffering - seven of her eleven children had died in early childhood. According to historians, Anna's mother mourned the deaths of her children throughout her life.

Anna insisted that the holiday always fall on a Sunday so that it would retain its spiritual moorings. Because of her efforts, President Woodrow Wilson finally proclaimed the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day. Although Anna couldn't prevent the new holiday from quickly becoming a marketing phenomenon, she did try. Speaking out against "the mire of commercialization" that threatened to engulf Mother's Day, Anna attempted to preserve her creation as a true "holy day," a time for solemn reflection and prayer.

Mother's Day, then, was borne of a daughter's grief and love. More importantly, it was intended as a tribute to a bereaved mother-a brave woman who lost multiple children but who managed to live with an abiding kindness and generosity toward others. I like knowing this background, and my attitude towards Mother's Day has been colored by the knowledge. The holiday now makes me think of the common sorrow that links all bereaved parents. I feel a bond with Anna's mother that stretches over time and space. In a broader sense, the woman for whom the holiday was founded reminds me of people I've met at TCF who have continued to live productive, meaningful lives in the face of unthinkable loss.

Finally, Mother's Day in its origins symbolizes both the joy and the vulnerability inherent in parenthood. Anna's mother knew all too well that from the moment a child is born, hope and the possibility of tragedy go hand in hand. She understood the fragility of life.

Enriched by its own history, Mother's Day is easier for me to tolerate. The coincidence of dates this year-Mother's Day and the anniversary of my son's death-is not as jarring as it once seemed. Although the commercial images of the modern Mother's Day still make me wince, I can turn off the television and envision the kind of day that Anna Jarvis had in mind: a time for quiet reflection and the sharing of cherished memories.

Barbara Atwood, In memory of Jacob, TCF, Tucson, Arizona

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

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LOVE SHARES

In Memory of

Given by

Personal information deleted from 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 and can be sent to our Chapter Treasurer:

**Douglas Ledkins, 431 Old Colony Dr.
Richmond, TX 77406 (713) 515-9906
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“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

—Albert Schweitzer

OLDER GRIEF

Older grief is gentler. It's about sudden tears swept in by a strand of music. It's about haunting echoes of first pain at Anniversaries. It's about feeling his presence for an instant one day while I'm dusting his room. It's about early pictures that invite me to fold him in my arms again. It's about memories blown in on wisps of wood smoke and sea scents.

Older grief is about aching in gentler ways, rarer longing, less engulfing fire.

Older grief is about searing pain wrought into tenderness.

~Linda Zelenka TCF, Jacksonville, FL

A Bear Hug for Father's Day

As Father's Day approaches, we are reminded of the significant contributions and unique love of fathers and stepfathers. Their defined role, after the death of their children, is to support their wives and surviving children. But their pain is deep.

Men, by their nature and in response to our society's expectations, do not usually grieve as openly as women. They do not talk as candidly about their loss. They generally do not reach out to others for comfort. They are, after all, the rock, the solid center of the family. Their wife's pain supersedes their pain because women are fragile. Or so we are told.

Yet, as I look into the eyes of so many bereaved fathers, I see a deep, gripping pain. The tears left unshed, the words that are never spoken, the anger, guilt and agony....all remain in the eyes of the bereaved father.

What can a father do? Talk with other bereaved fathers. Read books written by bereaved fathers. Talk with spouses, private counselors and close friends who are not as structured in their "male" societal roles. Try to attend three meetings of Compassionate Friends. You don't have to talk. But you might decide to express a single thought or idea, logically presented, to the small group. You might find peace in this place, and then again, you might not. But, as my own dad often said, "Step up to the plate and see what happens." He was a pretty wise man.....a child of the depression, a football player, Greatest Generation, WW II Marine, a fighter, a provider, a protector.....a man's man. He endured much in his 78 years, and I only saw him cry a few times.

But when his friend lost a child, my tough dad was the first one to reach out with a bear hug that wouldn't let go until the tears began to flow. They both cried. They both knew that the agony of losing a child was far worse than the horrors of war. Together, they cried.

Happy Father's Day...May your bear hugs be many and your memories become sweeter with each passing year. May your child live forever in your heart so that peace embraces you always.

Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
And my father, James M. Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX

"I don't think of him every day; I think of him every hour of every day." —Gregory Peck, in an interview many years after his son's death

Where Is My Child Now ?

By Claudia Waller, TCF Alexandria, PA

So many times after my son died, I found myself asking questions. Where has he gone? Is there a life after? Is there really a heaven? Was his life with us worth anything?

I read. I talked to people. I prayed. I cried. I became depressed and yelled at God. Then I found Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's book *Children and Death*. She responded to a mother's letter and shared her wisdom and experience. She told that grieving mother (and through her, me) that out of her pain - if she chooses - comes a great amount of compassion, increased understanding and wisdom, and love for others who are in pain. It is her choice whether out of her tragedy comes a blessing or a curse, compassion or bitterness.

She concluded her letter with these words. "I want you to know that our research in death and life after death has revealed beyond a shadow of a doubt that those who make the transition are more alive, more surrounded with unconditional love and beauty than you can ever conceive. They are not really dead. They have just preceded us in the journey all of us are going to take. They are with their former playmates (their guardian angels.) They are with family members who preceded them in death and are unable to miss you as you miss them since they are unable to feel any negative feelings. The only thing that stays with them is the knowledge of love and care that they have received and of the lessons they have learned in their physical life."

Believing that my son is happy and at peace, that he feels no pain, and knowing that he is aware of the love and care we have for him, has diminished the need for all those questions and the anger. **I still feel the emptiness, and I miss him. But I am consoled. I loved him. My love mattered. He is fine.**

"Grief is a great teacher when it sends us back to serve and bless the living. We learn how to counsel and comfort those who, like ourselves, are bowed with sorrow. We learn when to keep silent in their presence, and when a word will assure them of our love and concern."

—Gates of Prayer, Reform Judaism
Prayer Book

The Power of Talking

One of the most valuable things you can do is talk through your grief with a good listener. We now know that the stress level of grieving people can be cut in half when they talk about their loss to someone who does not judge or advise them.

Having someone as a sounding board to hear your thoughts and feelings bounced off is the greatest gift you can receive. Too often, everyone wants to make you feel better; so they try to give you advice rather than just listen.

Repeating your story is healthy. Talking about your loss works like a sponge. Each time you talk, a little more of the emotion is squeezed out and the need to talk about the incident becomes less after awhile. It's as if your story is being framed in your mind. Soon you can hang it on the wall. You'll always have it there to look at whenever you want, but you no longer have to carry the whole thing around with you and be emotionally burdened and controlled by the past.

There will be times when no one is around to listen. Keep a journal to write down your thoughts and feelings. Buy a journal just for this purpose. Write when there's no one around and you need to talk. Talk out loud as you write, if it makes you feel better. Research shows journaling decreases stress by up to 35%.

Write a letter to your loved one who left you or died. This can be a very powerful process. Share your thoughts and feelings. Pour them out on paper. You may feel emotionally drained afterwards. You may even find it helpful to write a letter back to yourself from the person who died or left.

Others have found that talking aloud or into a tape recorder is helpful... Playing the tape back and listening to yourself... decreases the stress even further. Some stand in front of their mirror to talk. As a friend once said to me, "Don't worry about talking out loud to yourself. It's

good to have a conversation with an intelligent person.

However you do it, remember - Talking is one of the best medicines of all. While some people won't want to listen to you, you will also find they can say some naive, hurtful things...It helps to know they do not understand the impact of their words. Some really want to help but do not know how.

...Know that you honor the person every time you mention their name. People will know they made a difference in their time on earth and in others' lives.

A feeling shared is a feeling diminished!

Excerpts from "More Than Surviving, Caring for Yourself While You Grieve" Kelly Osmont, MS, LCSW

Benchmarks

Good bye would be too difficult,
Although I know you are gone.
Instead, I keep you in my heart
And your memory lives on.
I have redefined my purpose, son,
Since you are no longer here.
With your death I faced a choice
To die, exist or to live free.
My life has changed forever, child,
I'm redefined each week,
You would call these "benchmarks"
Of goals set and then achieved.
And so I set my benchmarks,
Achieving many, reshaping some...
But everything is different now
Except your mother's love.

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

**The Average Person Tells
Four Lies a day or 1460
Lies a Year, a Total of
87,600 by Age 60.
The Most
Common
Lie is:
"I'm Fine."**

“We have suffered, but we have survived;
We are hurting, but we are enduring”

Ben Van Vechten

“They did not leave us a legacy of pain and suffering ... they left us a legacy of love”

Alan Pedersen

“The death of a child is so painful, both emotionally and spiritually, that I truly wondered if my own heart and spirit would ever heal...I soon learned that I could help myself best by helping others...It wasn't until Robin died that I truly threw myself into volunteer work. That precious little girl left our family a great legacy: I know George and I care more for every living person because of her. We learned firsthand the importance of reaching out to help because others had reached out to us during that crucial time.”

Barbara Bush
1925-2018

20 Questions

It is smaller than a breadbox. It is larger than a car.
It is rain bowed, striped, and polka-dotted
but colorless by far.

Its memory's like an elephant. It's forgetful as a fish.
It's emotional as a postcard
and hopeful as a wish.

It is busy as an ant. It is lazy as a bee.
It is weak as flavored gelatin
but hardy as a snow-pea.

It's hated as a jelly fish. It's loved as family.
It's plain as a doughnut
yet hidden as your keys.

It is ordinary as paper.
It is creative as a kid.
It is loose as a shoe
and stuck as a lid.

It is Grief.
It is Love.
It is Hope.

Jacqui McPeck
TCF of Spokane, WA
In Memory of my brother Zachary Ian McPeck

**Mother's Day...Father's Day...
Graduations...Proms**

Spring comes—and with it comes the uneasy awareness of difficult days ahead. For those who are still going through all the "firsts" without your child, we share with you some special ways other parents have coped and managed. Mother's Day...Father's Day...graduations...vacations...these are special family times which often catch us unaware and bring unexpected tears and painful memories of young lives cut short. It does get better! And you can make these special days better with some planning and with encouragement from those who have already been there. Whatever the "special day" that lies ahead for your family, try to focus on doing something meaningful and tangible in remembrance of your child. Share as a family thoughts and suggestions about planting a tree or starting a rose garden, donating a book to the library or school, putting flowers on the altar, lighting a special candle or taking that long talked-of vacation. Tears and moments of sadness are okay, for they are expressions of love.

Remember:

- Take one day at a time.
- Keep things simple by playing down the holidays and special days, while they are so painful.
- Change your routine from past years.
- Make plans to be "busy" during at least part of the day (go out to lunch or to a movie, or visit friends).
- Give your older children some "space." They not only feel your extreme sadness at these times; they also have their own feelings to deal with.

The anticipation is often worse than the day itself!

From Fox Valley TCF Chapter, Aurora, IL

Well, everyone can master a grief
but he that has it.

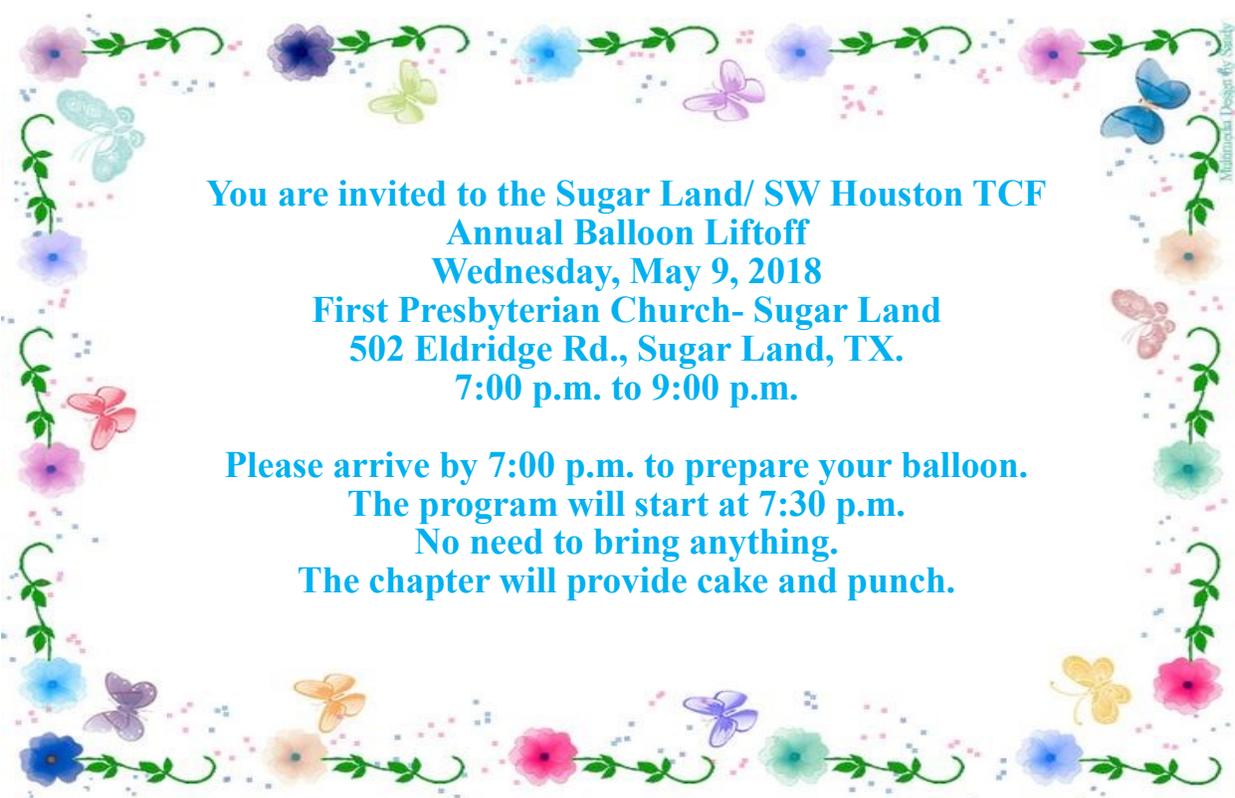
William Shakespeare



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

Honoring 21 Years of Support and Friendship
for Bereaved Families

MAY& JUNE 2018



**You are invited to the Sugar Land/ SW Houston TCF
Annual Balloon Liftoff
Wednesday, May 9, 2018
First Presbyterian Church- Sugar Land
502 Eldridge Rd., Sugar Land, TX.
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

**Please arrive by 7:00 p.m. to prepare your balloon.
The program will start at 7:30 p.m.
No need to bring anything.
The chapter will provide cake and punch.**