



The Compassionate Friends

Sugar Land/SW Houston Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

MARCH & APRIL 2017

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

Monthly Meeting:

April 12, 2017

Always the second Wednesday

Time: 7:30 p.m.

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

Topic: Balloon/Butterfly Release

**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

Marguerite Ward

mjward0123@gmail.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) 335-6070

E-mail: mjward0123@gmail.com

Love Gifts should be sent to:

Treasurer

Douglas Ledkins

431 Old Colony Dr.

Richmond, TX 77406

Phone 713-515-9906

E-mail:

Doug_Ledkins@whitetucker.com

All contents © The Compassionate Friends

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

THE GIFT OF LOSS by Abigail A. Fuller

Most of you know that I lost my 8-year-old daughter Scout to cancer on July 7, 2007. The past nine months have been by far the most painful of my entire life. I don't know that there is anything worse than losing a child. At first, I didn't want to live-and this is typical for parents who lose a child. In fact, many plan their suicides. For months I woke up every day wishing that the world would disappear. I tell you this not to elicit your sympathy, but so you will know that it was from the depths of this kind of pain that came the unexpected gifts I will talk about today.

I had thought that if Scout died, I would not be able to go on. And yet here I am. And not only am I here, but I have learned more in these past nine months than I ever thought possible. I feel like I have undergone the most astonishingly rapid spiritual growth spurt of my life-sort of spiritual boot camp, if you will. It's tough going, but it makes for fast changes.

What have I learned?

1. I have learned that our culture deals very badly with death.

We ignore it, deny it, and avoid it as much as possible. This is manifested in so many ways: the positive value our culture puts on youth and looking young and feeling young (instead of valuing the wisdom that comes with age); the measures we go to, to keep people alive at the very end of their lives; the way we consign dying and death to hospitals and funeral parlors, instead of allowing these very natural and inevitable things to happen at home.

Why does this matter, our culture's denial of death? Because when death comes-and it always does-we are shocked, frightened, unprepared, at a loss. We don't know how to sit with someone as they die, comforting them and supporting them as they make the sacred journey to the other side. A dead body seems creepy to us because we have never touched one before. We push aside grief and try to "move on" because our sadness is uncomfortable to those around us, and to ourselves. We don't know what to say when a friend or family member loses someone close to them, and so we stay away and say nothing.

Compare our culture with this example:

Sobanfu Some is an African healer and lecturer. She speaks about the way grief is regarded in her culture. In her village, at any given time there is a grief ritual-taking place. Anyone who is grieving is welcome to come, to cry, and to feel together in a community of others as a simple matter of course. The notion of avoiding this process and these feelings is as illogical to them as avoiding a meal when feeling hungry. Holding onto grief is likened to holding onto a toxic substance. It is only through the acknowledgment and expression of the grief that the health of the organism is restored.

Continued on Page 5

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

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

LOVE SHARES

In Memory of

Given by

No Love Shares have been received since the last newsletter.

Please 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.

My Spring Bouquet

The rain poured so often,
the bulbs I planted bloomed
in profusion. I cut them
all to take to your grave,
leaving my yard as empty
of blooms as your death
left our life and hearts

It was a grand bouquet
of flowers, like our lives
when you were here, son.
From the bulbs new flowers
will soon bloom again.
I am sad, but also hopeful...
I know the harsh lessons
of nature are true.

Like the flower,
I will again bloom, too.

Marilyn Arvizo, TCF South Bay LA, CA

But grief still has to be worked through.
It is like walking through water.
Sometimes there is an enormous breaker that
knocks me down.
Sometimes there is a sudden and fierce squall.
But I know that many waters cannot quench love,
neither can the floods drown it.

—Madeleine L-Engle, Two-Part Invention

The Gift of Loss - Continued from Page 1....

And our fear of death is really an aspect of a larger concern: our fear of loss. Think about this: "All relationships end." All relationships end. I read those words recently and was struck by the paradox that while this is so obviously true, we almost never pay attention to it. It's too frightening; I think to live daily with this realization.

In a strange way, embracing the inevitability of loss has given me comfort: what happened to Scout and to me is not out of the order of things, it is PART of the order of things. As my husband said, "Eventually, if she grew up she'd have to say goodbye to us when we died. She just happened to go first."

I've been reading a lot of Buddhist philosophy these past months, and a central precept of Buddhism is that the source of human suffering is an unwillingness to accept loss. But as Mary Oliver reminds us, loss is a part of life, because change is a part of life. So if I face my mortality head on, the next question becomes, What am I going to do with this life that I do have?

The moment we fully acknowledge the inevitability of death is the moment we fully feel the preciousness of life, because it doesn't last. So life and death are parts of a whole-one can't exist without the other. Which brings me to the next lesson I've learned:

2. Happiness is overrated.

I don't think the point of life is to be happy. I think the point of being here on earth is to grow as human beings-to gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for all that is. And guess what: we don't grow when we are comfortable. It is when we are challenged, when we suffer, when we are uncomfortable, that we grow the most. Now, you might argue that as we grow as human beings, we in fact become happier-yes, happy in the truest sense of the word-not fun, ha-ha, laughing at jokes happiness, but a kind of hard-earned happiness that comes from experiencing both pain and joy, both life and death. From realizing that they are parts of a whole. The happiest person I ever met was a Holocaust survivor. My senior year in college I took a course on Literature of the Holocaust, and toward the end of the semester the professor invited this woman to speak to the class. She had the most serene, genuine, warm presence I have ever seen in a person.

3. I have learned to let go of what I cannot control (and to cherish what I have).

This lesson was a gift that first came when Scout was diagnosed with cancer in January 07. During those first days, as I sat crying in her hospital room, I realized, "I cannot control the outcome of this. But what I can do is love her with every ounce of my being for as long as she is here." And I did that. I was also determined not to allow the terror of losing her to distract me from enormous gift of having her there right then. But the possibility that I could lose her gave me the gift of a deep, attentive love with her. I remember her asking me last spring, "Mom, why are you kissing me so much?" Letting go of what we cannot control means also letting go of the fantasy that somehow if we are good, if we are kind, if we believe in God, if we make the right choices, then nothing bad will happen to us. When Scout died, I wondered, "Why her? Why not some kid who was a bully, who didn't have a happy life, who was dumb, whose parents didn't care about them?" And I realized after a time that the answer to, "Why me?" is "Why not me?" Nothing makes me or my family immune from death or illness or injury. (And of course the life of a kid who is a bully or not so smart or whose parents don't care about him are just as precious as my daughter's life.) But I suffered a loss of innocence: I realized I am not immune from tragedy.

No, we can't control what happens to us... but we can make do with what we've been given. What really matters in life is not what happens to you, it's what you do with it.

Continued on Page 6

The Gift of Loss - Continued from Page 5...

4. I have learned that when your heart breaks, it breaks open.

I think of it this way: each of us builds a hard shell around our heart to protect ourselves from deep pain. (But in my vision, the shell doesn't keep pain from coming into your heart-because the pain is already there, it's an unavoidable part of life, because loss is an unavoidable part of life. Rather, the shell keeps the pain in, confines it, so we don't have to think about it or feel it.) But this same shell also keeps in feelings of deep joy and deep love and of peace, of oneness with the universe. So, since my heart was broken from losing Scout, I have experienced not only the greatest pain of my life, but also the greatest love and gratitude I have ever known.

I find I am less interested in judging people, less willing to get in the middle of conflicts, I spend less time speculating about people's motives, more aware of and appreciative of the good qualities in people. I spend more time amazed at and grateful for what life has brought me-especially Scout. What a miracle that she was here, for eight perfect years, that I got to be her mom.

In my extended family, there has been an astonishing change since Scoutie went up. I have four sisters, and my mom and dad are still around, and we have always been close, but with conflict. But since July, each and every one of my sisters and both my parents have shown an enormous generosity of spirit, not only toward me, but toward each other. Scout's death changed my parents' relationship, my relationship with my husband, and more.

5. I have learned that love is the strongest force in the universe.

I told this story at the celebration of Scout's life in September, so some of you have heard it. In late August, my friend Marcie said to me, "You are going through such an extraordinary time. What are you learning?" I told her that I didn't know; I was too deep in grief to see that yet.

Later that night I was lying in bed and suddenly the answer to her question came to me-and it was so simple that I had almost missed. The big lesson in all this, in Scout's illness and our struggle to get her cured and our deep sadness upon losing her-the overarching theme in all this is not loss, or cancer, or how unfair the world is, but LOVE. As I lay there, I found myself actually grinning. My love for Scout, and Neil's love and Leo's love and my sisters' love for Scout, Scout's love for us, the outpouring of love that my family received from friends and colleagues and neighbors: everything else pales in comparison to that love.

Most importantly, I realized when I lost Scout that nothing, but NOTHING, could take away my love for her, and so I would always be connected with her in that way. Cancer could take away her body, but it could not touch my love. Love can outlast time, distance, and even death. It is, indeed, the strongest force in the universe.

As anyone who has suffered a terrible loss will tell you, I would return all of these gifts in a second if it meant I could have Scout back. But I can't have her back. A few months ago while I was swimming laps, I thought to myself, "My life is over." And the universe spoke to me-or maybe it was God, depending on your beliefs-and said gently but firmly, "No, it's not over; it's just different." I can't have Scout back--and so the important question is, What do I do now with what I have? Here, now, in this life that is so very different from the one I had, and from the one I wanted-and this is where I find myself. Where do I go from here? I have these unexpected gifts to help me along the way, and I feel they are gifts from Scout.

*Delivered at the Wednesday chapel service at Manchester College, April 2, 08.

Abigail A. Fuller, Associate Professor of Sociology and Social Work, Director, Peace Studies Program
Manchester College aafuller@manchester.edu ~reprinted from Love Never Dies <http://www.loveneverdies.net>

ARTICLES FOR NEWSLETTER

Chapter members are encouraged to write about their grief journey and submit for publication in this newsletter at mjward0123@gmail.com

“Give me strength to break out of the cocoon of my grief. But may I never forget it is the place where I grew my wings, becoming a new person because of my loss.” —Janice H.

“He that conceals his grief finds no remedy for it.” —Turkish Proverb

“Does it help to know that if we didn’t love so very much, it would not hurt so badly?

“If only they knew that when I speak of him, I am not being morbid. I am not denying his death. I am proclaiming his life. I am learning to live with his absence. For twenty-six years he was a part of my life, born, nurtured, molded and loved—this cannot be put aside to please those who are uncomfortable with my grief.”

Grief is the price we pay for love.
And as much as it hurts,
I’m very glad I loved.”

—Darcie D. Sims

—Jan McNess

“Death plays no favorites it seems. We are all vulnerable, and most losses hurt to the core of our being.”

—Anonymous

“And Compassionate Friends is just full of teachers. Do they have all the answers? Maybe not. But they are there for you, and sometimes, that's what you need the most.”

—Sharon Peymon

“To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness.” —Erich Fromm

“Grief is a sacred time, where we can rearrange our fragments into a new definition of wholeness”

- Stephanie Ericson, Living Enrichment Center, Wilsonville, OR

It is the gift of hope which reigns supreme in the attributes of The Compassionate Friends. Hope that all is not lost. Hope that life can still be worth living and meaningful. Hope that the pain of loss will become less acute, and, above all else, The hope that we do not walk alone, that we are understood. The gift of hope is the greatest gift That we can give to those who mourn.

—Rev. Simon Stephens, Founder,
The Compassionate Friends

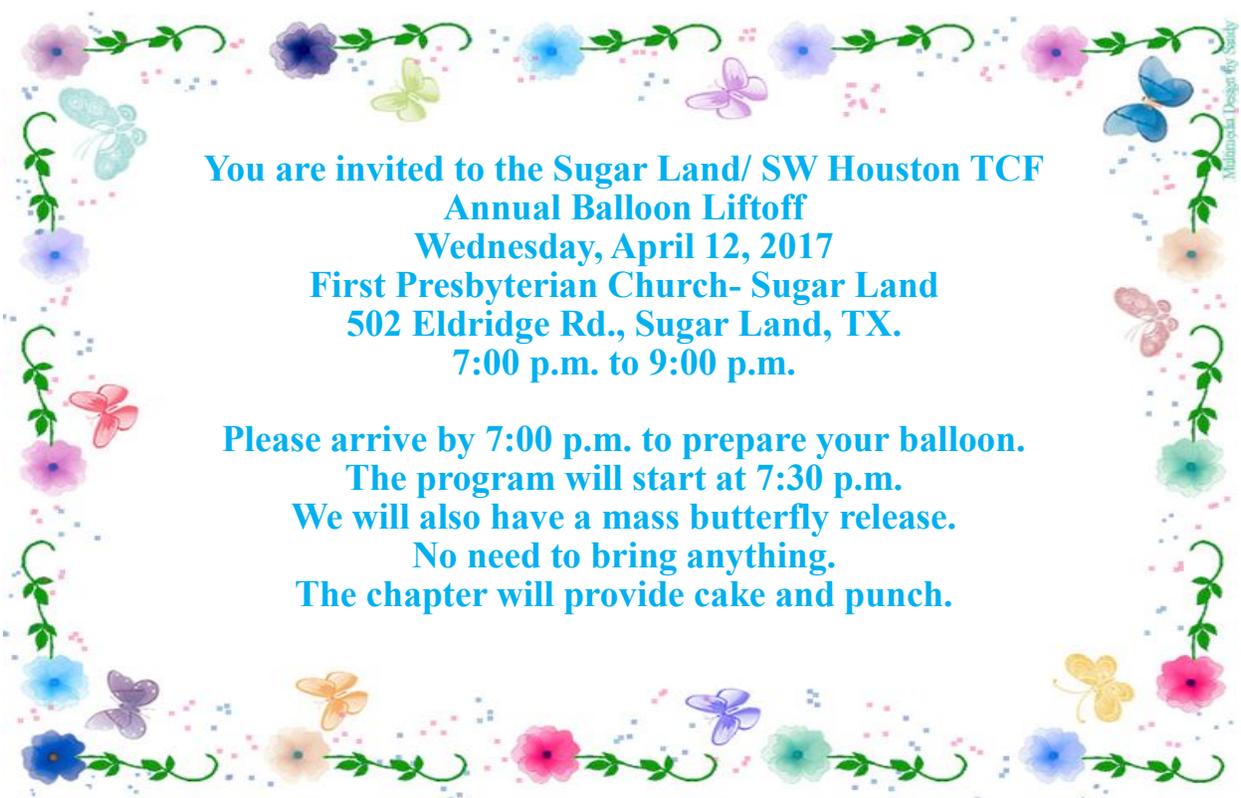


The Compassionate Friends
Sugar Land—SW Houston Chapter
P. O. Box 231, East Bernard, TX. 77435

Honoring 21 Years of Support and Friendship
for Bereaved Families



MARCH & APRIL, 2017



**You are invited to the Sugar Land/ SW Houston TCF
Annual Balloon Liftoff
Wednesday, April 12, 2017
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.
We will also have a mass butterfly release.
No need to bring anything.
The chapter will provide cake and punch.**