



# The Compassionate Friends

Sugar Land/SW Houston Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

MARCH & APRIL 2016

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

## Monthly Meeting:

**April 13, 2016**

Always the second Wednesday

**Time: 7:30 p.m.**

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

**Topic: Annual Balloon Liftoff**

**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

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## *But You're Absolutely Normal!*

Grief is a normal reaction to loss, and it shows up in many ways you might not expect. If you've...

- been angry with doctors or nurses for not doing enough
- been sleeping too much or not enough
- noticed a change in appetite
- felt no one understands what you're going through
- felt friends should call more or call less or leave you alone or invite you along more often
- bought things you didn't need
- considered selling everything and moving
- had headaches, upset stomachs, weakness, lethargy, more aches and pains
- been unbearable, lonely, and depressed
- been crabby
- cried for no apparent reason
- found yourself obsessed with thoughts of the deceased
- been forgetful, confused, uncharacteristically absentminded
- panicked over little things
- felt guilty about things you have or haven't done
- gone to the store every day
- forgotten why you went somewhere
- called friends and talked for a long time
- called friends and wanted to hang up after only a brief conversation
- not wanted to attend social functions you usually enjoyed
- found yourself unable to concentrate on written material
- been unable to remember what you just read

...you're normal. These are all common reactions to grief. They take up to two years (or more) to pass completely, but they will pass. You'll never forget the person who has died, but your life will again become normal, even if it is never exactly the same. Take care of yourself. You will heal in time.

Joanne Bonelli  
TCF, Greater Boise Area, ID



## 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**

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### **Chapter Webmaster**

Tricia Scherer

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### **\*\*Regional Coordinator**

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## 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.

Never compare your grief.  
You - and only you  
walk your path.”

— Nathalie Himmelrich, Grieving Parents:  
Surviving Loss as a Couple

## NO ORDINARY SPRING

This spring is no ordinary spring at all.  
It dances on with unbecoming weather;  
Now more like winter than December was,  
And then again as soft as early summer.

This is no ordinary spring at all.  
It meets your heart with  
unexpected dangers,  
Now with the loneliest of memories,  
And then again with unforgettable laughter.

This is no ordinary spring at all.  
This is like life itself, a changing season.  
Accept the wintertime of grief,  
and then Reach for the hope  
of summer and of healing.

~ Sascha Wagner “For You From Sascha



## HEALING VS. RECOVERY

I have heard the term “recovery” and “healing” used interchangeably to refer to the goal of processing grief. I would like to propose the idea that recovery carries with it the assumption of an injury or illness and that when the necessary repair has taken place, the person will return basically to the same person he was previous to the injury or illness.

When a child dies there is, indeed, an injury of massive proportions. All systems—physical, mental, and spiritual— are affected. There is physical pain, emotional retching, spiritual upheaval, and struggling. All this may be occurring simultaneously. Though there may not be bleeding in the physical sense, there is emotional hemorrhaging. The body and psyche are in crisis. Bereaved parents are often unable to eat, they may experience sleep disturbances and disorientation. Believe it or not, all these reactions are normal. Grief is a normal part of life. This is not a mental illness or some chemical imbalance in the brain. What is not normal is to experience the death of a child.

The major difference between recovery and healing is that the goal is not to return to who we were before our child died. That goal is impossible to achieve. To continue to try to achieve a goal of recovery is to assume that life will be basically the same, with a few minor adjustments...such as we will set one less place at the table, buy less food, feel sad on holidays and cry a bit more. But our lives have been permanently and irrevocably changed and we are, in fact, becoming different people. The “becoming” is the healing.

During this process we examine every facet of our lives and/or belief systems. This is a journey, not a “repair.” By living through this journey we become different people. True, we may basically look the same, but we are not the same as before our child died. We look at life in a new way. Our interests change and our priorities change. We will have a new and deeper level of understanding and compassion for those experiencing pain—all kinds of pain.

We will have a different understanding of spirituality. We ourselves will feel new and different. We will carry some of the old person with us through the healing process, but we will emerge different.

We are healed...not recovered.

~By Birdie Tracy, TCF Shoreline Chapter

## THE TATTOO

“Mom, when I turn 18 I'm going to get a tattoo!” Hannah announced. “Hannah, what would you possibly want permanently inked on your body that you won't be embarrassed about when you're 80??”

It was about a year between the time Hannah made that statement and when she died. In those first years after they pass time isn't relevant anymore, blocks of time fade into oblivion when nothing matters. I do remember that very shortly after her death I “understood” why people got tattoos and I had to get one “for her”. It made sense to me at the time that it would be one of the few things I could still do for her and, in a way, for me too, one last thing we could share.

The design came easy as each property of the tattoo had to mean something. I went to the tattoo parlor with hopes the artist would bring it to life the way I saw it in my heart. I sat in the chair a bit apprehensively as he prepped my forearm, not my bicep where it could easily be hidden from the public. I chose this location so it could be seen by anyone and everyone, to show Hannah was here and she mattered, plus, in that location people would see it and ask about her, after all, it is my job to keep her memory alive. Part way into the process the artist asked me if it hurt to which I answered, “not near as much as her death”.

As I left the salon I left with Hannah permanently emblazoned on my arm for the world to see. A heart with her name inside written in a beautiful script with a rosebud through it, Rose is her middle name. A rosebud is symbolic of a young life that ended too soon. It is surrounded by a crown of thorns to show that her death will always hurt...

~ Kim Pietruszewski, Hannah ZumMallen's mom  
TCF/St. Paul, MN Chapter

I loved you your whole life.  
I will miss you for the rest of mine.

Author Unknown

## Butterfly Messages To Our Children

As balloons fill the sky, floating up and away on the wings of wind and love, I am astonished by the sense of peace which sweeps over me. I have sent my child a message written on a butterfly shaped note attached to a balloon. In my mind's eye, I know that my child will read that message and understand that his mother's love for him is eternal and unconditional. The void left in his absence is often overwhelming, and the pain frequently escalates from a quiet sadness to a screaming ache which shatters me. My child knows the pain I have felt and will always feel without him in my life. I express it every year on a little butterfly note. He knows he is loved.

This butterfly message is an important ceremonial part of my life now. Instead of an e-mail or letter, I send my child a note once a year. This ceremony is moving, the bagpipes are haunting, the readings are reflective and touching. I stand with other parents and notice that they, too, are watching the balloons until they disappear into the heavens. I am imagining my son plucking his balloon from the heavens and reading my message. Other parents are imagining this, too. Our communication to our child will be understood. As parents who have lost children to death, we face new ceremonies and new traditions.

As the years roll by, many of us will cling to those ceremonies and traditions. We are forced to replace the traditions of the past, before our child died, with new, fitting tributes that acknowledge our child's life and the meaning of that life to us. The Compassionate Friends provides us this opportunity to share our feelings and our need to honor our child in the company of

others who understand us and encourage us to speak openly about our child and our sorrow. This tribute to our child has deep meaning and touches our souls with its simplicity and grace.

Our ceremony is brief by most standards, but meaningful beyond words. No speaker could reach us as this ceremony does. For a small window in time, we are reaching out to our children, honoring them, remembering them openly and communicating with them. Tears are shed. Hugs are shared. Memories form a kaleidoscope in each parent's mind as we watch our balloon join with the others on its journey to our children.

This tribute and message to our children is one of two ceremonial gatherings that we, as Compassionate Friends, share each year. Remember. Always we remember our children. Others may wish to forget, put the unpleasantness behind them, but we, the parents of children whose lives were too short, will never forget. We have established our traditions and we look to each other for hope and support as we walk this lonely road.

And so, as our balloons are absorbed into the heavens, we are immersed in peace and serenity, and we share a light meal and memories of our children with our Compassionate Friends.

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



**ARTICLES FOR NEWSLETTER**

Chapter members are encouraged to write about their grief journey and submit for publication in this newsletter at [mjward@elc.net](mailto:mjward@elc.net).

*Hope gently whispers  
To the broken heart  
That still beats  
To the rhythm of love and memories  
Forever missing  
Forever changed.*

*~Tanya Lord*

“My life was suddenly divided into BEFORE and AFTER and there was no going back to BEFORE. But then I realized I had a choice to live the AFTER. I had to decide.”

from “A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance” by Brenda Neal

I will honor you  
With laughter  
I will honor you  
With tears  
I will honor you  
With hope  
I will honor you  
With smiles  
I will honor you  
With sighs  
I will honor you  
With laughter  
I will honor the  
LOVE  
That never dies

*~Tanya Lord*

**THE MUSIC IS FOREVER**

One life, like the song strummed softly on the strings,  
Makes music to the ears of those who hear it sing.  
Discordant notes and harmony, together make the sounds,  
But the space between the notes is where the meaning may be found.

A life, may be as brief as a note on a page,  
Or as long as a symphony with all the movements played.  
But long or short, the melody has its meaning, though unfinished,  
And for those with ears to hear it, the meaning’s not diminished.

Somewhere the song continues it sweetly singing phrase,  
The music is forever, not just for those days.  
One life, like a song, strummed softly on the strings,  
Makes music to the ears of those who hear it sing.

*~ Karen Howard  
TCF, Miami, FL*

He that conceals his grief  
finds no remedy for it.

*- Turkish Proverb*

Bereavement unravels like a piece of cloth, the fabric of your life over time you will be able to reweave your piece of cloth, but the cloth will have a new pattern. - Author Unknown

Sometimes living takes the life out of me...  
I have only one heart and I feel like it is broken.  
The lovely flowers have faded and died, just like my two sons.

Heartache upon heartache, more than I can carry.  
Does anyone know why? What do I do when my memories are not enough?

I have a personal tornado going on in my mind.  
This tornado has blown my little world apart and now I need to find the pieces, piece by piece. Yet, I know, two pieces will always be missing...

*~ Maxine Haglund-Blommer,  
Joshua & James Haglund’s mom  
TCF/St. Paul Chapter*

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, love leaves a memory no one can steal. -Irish Headstone



**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, 2016**

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**NEW DATE FOR  
BALLOON LIFT OFF**

**Who:** Sugar Land/SW Houston Chapter of  
The Compassionate Friends  
**When:** Wed, April 13, 2016  
**Time:** 7:30 PM  
**Where:** First Presbyterian Church of Sugar Land  
502 Eldridge Rd.  
Sugar Land, Texas

Please come early to write your butterfly message.  
Light refreshments will be served after the program.