



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



We need not walk alone.

Volume 6, Issue 4

Tyler, Texas

April 2005

Monthly Group Meeting

Tuesday, April 19, 6:30 p.m.
Clinical Associates of East Texas
2010 Sybil Lane, Tyler, Texas

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National Organization Information

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www.compassionatefriends.org

The Meeting Agenda

6:30 p.m.
Meeting will begin with drinks and refreshments followed by announcement of birthdays and anniversaries and reading of the Credo. We will then have open discussion.
8:00 p.m.
Meeting will close by recognizing our childrens' names. Feel free to visit after the meeting or check out books from our library.

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Second Annual Butterfly Release

The Compassionate Friends of Tyler would like to announce their Second Annual Butterfly Release. The event takes place May 14th, 2005, at the First Baptist Church south campus. The Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization for families who have lost a child at any age and from any cause. This is a non-profit organization, operated entirely on the local level by volunteers. More than 250 people attended the Butterfly Release last year. Please contact Tina Loper at 903-594-2132 or Margie Newman at 903-561-1447 for more information. The media is invited to attend. Please let us know of any promotional opportunities available to help spread the word about this event.

Love Never Goes Away

"Why does it hurt so much? Why is this grief so incapacitating? If only the hurt weren't so crushing." Sounds familiar? All of us have known hurts before, but none of our previous "ouchies" can compare with the hurt we feel. Nothing can touch the pain of burying a child.

Yet most of us have discovered that the sun still comes up. We still have to function. We did not die when our child did, even though we wished we could have, so—we are stuck with this pain, this grief, and what do we do with it? Surely we can't live like THIS forever!

There are no magic formulas for surviving grief. There are a few recognized patterns for grief, but even those are only guidelines. What we do know is that the emptiness will never go away. It will become tolerable and livable—some day.

TIME—the longest word in our grief. We used to measure TIME by the steps of our child: the first word, first tooth, first date, first car—now we don't have that measure any more. All we have is TIME, and it only seems to make the hurt worse.

So what do we do? Give ourselves TIME—to hurt, to grieve, to cry. TIME to choke, to scream. TIME to be "crazy" and TIME to remember. Be nice to yourself! Don't measure your progress through grief against anyone else's. Be your own timekeeper.

Don't push. Eventually you will find the hours and days of grief have turned to minutes and then moments—but don't expect them to go away. We will always hurt. You don't get over grief—it only becomes tolerable and livable. Change your focus a bit. Instead of dwelling on how much you lost, try thinking of how much you had. Try letting good memories come over you as easily as the awful ones do. We didn't lose our child—HE [SHE] DIED. We don't lose the love that flowed between—it still flows, but differently now.

Does it help to know that if we didn't love so very much, it would not hurt so badly? Grief is the price we pay for love. And as much as it hurts, I'm very glad I loved. Don't let death cast ugly shadows, but rather warm memories of the loving times you shared. Even though death comes, LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY!

Darcie D. Sims

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 need not walk alone.

"In the art of losing we can choose who we will be. We break, but we break open so that we can include more of life, more of love. We get bigger in order to carry with us what we choose to continue loving." —*Deborah Morris Coryell*

Welcome

We extend a warm welcome to those who attended their first TCF meeting 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 third Tuesday of the month). The meeting is open to everyone and free of charge. You are free to talk, cry or to sit in silence; we respect the individuality of mourning. Comments shared in the meetings remain confidential.

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 print and mail this newsletter and meet other expenses involved in reaching out to other grieving families (100% of funds are used for this outreach). Donations, along with the name of the person being honored, may be sent to:

The Compassionate Friends of Tyler
P.O. Box 9714
Tyler, Texas 75711

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. The second, third or fourth meeting might be the time you will 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.”

A Stepparent’s Thoughts

I am a bereaved stepparent—stepfather to be exact. Robin Ann Craney, my stepdaughter, was killed at the hands of a drunk driver on June 8, 2001. She was 17 years old.

I have a son named Greg. His Mom remarried so I saw him on weekends, did the trips, and long summer visits as many divorced parents do. I did not get the chance to be a part of his life and see him every day. I got to hear about his activities and accomplishments all after the fact. When you marry someone with kids, you get another chance.

After several months of dating my (now) wife Cindy, I finally met her kids, Chris and Robin. Robin was almost 7 years old at the time. I remember that first meeting clearly because she wasn’t feeling so good. She ended up getting sick and had to go home. What a first meeting that was! After that, I became totally involved in the lives and activities of both of the children. I remember one of those nights well! Cindy and I attended parent-teacher conferences for both kids, a Cub Scout Pack meeting and a Girl Scout Brownie meeting—not bad for a single guy, who had been unmarried for 13 years!

Over the years, I got to know Robin’s likes, dislikes and all of her friends—and she had a lot of friends! I attended and participated in all of Robin’s activities, supporting her in her many endeavors—including gymnastics (her favorite). I was there when she had migraine headaches, running her to the doctor when her mother couldn’t, encouraging her, supporting her—all the things Dads do for their kids. I want to tell you in no uncertain terms, being a stepparent is so much harder. You get the responsibility and, often times it seems, none of the respect. “Mom said I could so I don’t have to listen to you” or “You can’t tell me what to do, you are not my dad” and so forth. I tolerated and dealt with her emotional outbursts when she became incensed at anything (sometimes it seemed everything) during the teen years. All Dads know how trying those times can be!

Now I am a bereaved stepparent—the one in a kind of “no man’s land.” I am not biologically connected to Robin; I sometimes feel like an outsider around people who were once a family—mother, father, son and daughter. Many of our friends have worried about Cindy and Chris. They often ask me “How is Cindy doing?” or “Is Chris OK?” Although I knew and lived with Robin for 10 years, very few ask, “How are you doing?” I am only the stepparent. The idea that this tragedy cannot be as devastating to me as it is to Robin’s “real family” is incomprehensible.

One definition for the word father is “father figure: one often of particular power or influence who serves as an emotional substitute for a father.” This is what I was for Robin. She loved to push my buttons—but that was part of our relationship—as frustrating as it could be. Robin is the only daughter I will ever have. I was every bit a father to her. I love her and I miss her. We, the stepparents of children who have died, grieve for our children too. Only society puts the “step” in the name. Parent is still the biggest part of who we are. We hurt because they were our children too—often without the support and understanding that is demonstrated towards the biologically connected parents. These beautiful children with whom we developed emotional bonds are now gone out of our lives; and we, too, endure the same feelings of loss and sadness.

Tony Cinocco ~ TCF, Denver, CO



We need not walk alone.

"Grief over the death of a child is the hardest work that most of us will ever do. While we all wish for the pain to stop, we need to remember that we grieve intensely because we loved intensely. It is unrealistic to expect that grief to ever totally go away, because the love we have for our child will never go away. Our grief is an act of love and is nothing for which we should be ashamed." —*Elaine Grier*

Announcements

You are invited to meet with us for dinner at El Charro's on 5th Street at 7:00 p.m., Friday, April 1. We thought a casual get-together with other members would be a nice change of pace. We hope to see you there!

NEW MEETING TIME! Please make note of our new meeting time listed on the front page of this newsletter.

We will be holding our Second Annual Butterfly Release in May. Details are on page one of this newsletter.



Love Gifts

Sam Smith in memory of Stacey Smith

Victor & Margie Newman in memory of Jeremy Newman

Carolyn Kuhn in memory of Phillip Kuhn

Claudette Brown in memory Terry Wayne Brown

Sherri Tutt in memory of Lisa Tutt

Anonymous donations



Newsletter Submissions

TCF Tyler welcomes all submissions to our newsletter. Send articles, poetry, love messages and scanned photos to:

TCF Tyler • 5401 Hollytree Drive, 1204 • Tyler, Texas 75703
Or e-mail text and photos to: info@TylerTCF.org

We reserve the right to edit for space and/or content. Deadline for submissions is the 3rd Tuesday of each month. TCF Chapters may copy articles from this publication provided credit is given to the author and the original source.

Errors and Omissions: Please notify us if any of your information is incorrect.

To My Sister

You touched us all, you loved us all,
Forever giving, forever caring,
Forever forgiving.
Never wanting in return.
Blessed are those who shared your life.
Rich are those who carry your memories.
Please rest now; your chores we will finish.
'Til we meet again...

Cindy Keltz ~ Arlington Heights, IL

Summertime

It sounds so easy. A soft, warm word—time to run barefoot, time to leave windows open all night. Summertime. Somehow it seems, doesn't it, that it's especially meant for children. Children on beaches, children on swings, children in large pools, children in tiny tubs.

We who do not have all of our children with us may feel the summertime in two ways. One is to remember shared events and adventures—there were so many. Long rides in a hot car, a nap in the back seat. The famous question, "Are we there yet?" Everything from a heat rash to ice cream cones and sand castles.

For us, another way to feel summertime is the special emptiness brought about by children who are no longer on this earth. They used to trot along on hikes in the hills; they used to gather wood for an evening fire. Now summer brings us again the melancholy awareness of their absence. Have you ever walked on some unfamiliar path, surprised about not having been there with the children? Even when there's nothing to remember, we are reminded of the children's absence.

We have been diminished by death. Some of us may still have living children. Other parents have no children left. They have lost an only child, perhaps. Or all of their children died. And here we are, grateful for the warmth of summer mornings, aware of the ripe beauty of nature, trying to deal with our children's absence with all the grace of which we are capable. Often we do not want to burden others with our grief. Or we may be convinced that others don't wish to share our distress. We have learned, after all, that the world around us is not always able to understand how we feel.

Besides, we were taught to be brave. Many of us will do everything we can to appear "normal" after our loss. But we were also taught to be honest. And when you feel the hurt, when you seem almost to be lost in the shadows of this golden summertime, don't hide your sorrow. The grief of your spirit can perhaps be kept a secret on the outside. Yet, your deepest feelings, unexpressed, can burn into your existence with harmful force.

You can be both brave and honest. You know that it's brave to share grief, be it old grief or new grief. And revealing that sorrow is also honest. Of course, nothing can wipe away much of your pain, but sharing grief is helpful. You will know that after you have expressed the painful sorrow you once kept hidden, and you find yourself, finally, smiling at the memories and the blessings of past summertimes.

Sascha Wagner





We need not walk alone.

“Courage, it would seem, is nothing less than the power to overcome danger, misfortune, fear, injustice, while continuing to affirm inwardly that life with all its sorrows is good; that everything is meaningful even if in a sense beyond our understanding; and that there is always tomorrow.” —*Dorothy Thompson*

April Birthdays



Allen Price
4-11-77 ~ 3-29-04
Son of Deborah & Floyd Holcomb



John Patrick
4-17-65 ~ 10-13-03
Son of Rod & Shirley Carnahan



Brady Bryant
4-30-01 ~ 5-2-01
Son of Windy & Bradley Bryant



Cheryl Cook
4-25-73 ~ 12-10-02
Daughter of Connie Graebner



Christopher Loper
4-28-94 ~ 12-21-00
Son of Tina Loper



Kathy Robertson
4-23-57 ~ 10-23-01
Daughter of Carolyn Love



Tim Cole
4-15-69 ~ 9-15-97
Son of Mary Miller



Jeremy Newman
4-15-80 ~ 1-10-02
Son of Victor & Margie Newman



Brian St. Clair
4-26-60 ~ 7-26-97
Son of Janet St. Clair

Thank you for your generous donations to TCF of Tyler. These 'love gifts' allow us to provide our local chapter with special events, the TCF Newsletter, our Web site and more!



Heath Hopson
12-8-87 ~ 4-23-01
Son of Karen Hopson



Zackery Browne
12-14-89 ~ 4-13-02
Son of Tim & Kay Browne
Grandson of Lynda Hanna



Chad Cavazos
9-24-86 ~ 4-20-01
Son of Phyllis Cavazos

April Anniversaries



Sarah Harvey
12-12-89 ~ 4-26-04
Daughter of Brian & Lisa Harvey



Jill Tompkins
11-3-77 ~ 4-24-99
Daughter of Karen Tompkins



Shane McDade
2-17-85 ~ 4-12-03
Son of Lajeania Culligan



Lindsey Stewart
11-6-87 ~ 4-2-04
Daughter of Stephanie Stewart



Christal Murphy
8-14-72 ~ 4-22-03
Daughter of Debbie Johnson



Ron Mitchum
8-3-70 ~ 4-15-00
Son of Glenda Mitchum



Bobby Knott
11-9-68 ~ 4-24-83
Son of Bobby & Virginia Knott



Stephanie Carol Hester
5-9-88 ~ 4-2-04
Daughter of Troy & Glenna Nicolls

Please share your stories, poems or love messages for inclusion in our newsletter.



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“We have a new sense of priorities. We don’t ‘sweat the small stuff.’ We know what matters because we know what is irreplaceable. And we know how deeply other people hurt because we, too, have been there. We ‘know how they feel.’”
—Richard Edler

The Roller Coaster

As a child I enjoyed the thrill of the roller coaster: gliding up the giant track, reaching the top with a momentary anticipation and the thrill of the quick dropping roll to the bottom of the track. The deep turns, first to the right and then to the left were designed to heighten the anticipation of the next climb and drop. In my childhood mind, these curves, climbs and drops were an isolated experience, temporary and fun. The ride would end.

A few months after my son’s death, I dreamed of the roller coaster. But this time it wasn’t fun. It was a nightmare of fear, anxiety and pain; I was so paralyzed that I couldn’t breathe. That dream was the simple symbolism of life since my son died. Now I ride a different sort of roller coaster. The climb to the top is a slow, difficult rise to normalcy. The rapid descent to the bottom is yet another terrible setback. I hang onto the bar of sanity on the curves, first one way, then another. I really want to stop this ride, but it is forever. This ride won’t end.

Today I recalled that roller coaster dream, in all its vivid detail, and I compare it to the roller coaster that is my life now. Are the highs lower and the lows higher? Are the curves softening? Yes, I believe they are. It’s been two years and two months since Todd died. I still weep. Tiny tears still fall unexpectedly. I still have anxiety. I still feel as if the earth has dropped from under me. I still miss talking with my son. I miss seeing him. I ache for that special hug that only my child can give. Yes, I miss my only child very much. My heart has been shattered, my definition of myself has been altered and my loneliness is incomprehensible. But something has changed on the roller coaster of this life.

That something is, of course, me. I work through my grief in many, many ways. I have consciously shifted the paradigms of my life. I have learned to evaluate people from a different perspective. I have become so sensitive to the pain of other parents that I feel it as if it were my own. I have stopped anticipating how I will handle stressful events, anniversaries, birthdays, holidays. I have learned to live without being a part of my grandchildren’s lives. I have learned to keep negative energy and negative people at a far distance. I have learned that a routine provides necessary structure. I have learned to live in the moment, to take joy in simple things, to talk openly about my child’s life and to acknowledge the things I cannot change.

As time moves forward, I will continue to accept what is given and give what I can. I know the roller coaster will level out eventually. For as long as I live, I will keep my child with me, in my heart. That’s all I can do as I ride this changing roller coaster that is now my life.

*Written in memory of my son, Todd Mennen
Annette Mennen Baldwin ~ TCF, Katy, TX*

**Please detach and return completed donation form to:
The Compassionate Friends of Tyler • P.O. Box 9714 • Tyler, TX 75711**

We rely entirely on voluntary donations to support our group. With your help we can continue to provide our valuable services to everyone affected by the loss of a child.

Yes, I would like to make a donation in the amount of \$_____ . (Please make check payable to TCF)

My donation is made in honor and in memory of _____.

Tyler TCF greatly appreciates your support. These ‘love gifts’ are used to provide our monthly newsletter, printed materials, website, special events, our library and more.



I don’t think you ever stop giving. I really don’t. I think it’s an on-going process. And it’s not just about being able to write a check. It’s being able to touch somebody’s life. —Oprah Winfrey





**THE
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