

# The Compassionate Friends

## The Modesto Area Chapter of The Compassionate Friends

Supporting Families After a Child Dies

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

[www.modestoriverbanktcf.org](http://www.modestoriverbanktcf.org)

August 2022

[tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com](mailto:tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com)

### MONTHLY MEETING

7:00 PM

Bridge Covenant Church  
2201 Morrill Road  
Riverbank, CA 95367  
(Corner of Oakdale Rd and Morrill Rd)

Please join us at our  
next meeting on

Monday, August 8<sup>th</sup>

\*Please arrive by 6:50 p.m.  
so we may begin promptly  
at 7:00 p.m.\*

### Upcoming Meetings

Sept 12<sup>th</sup>

Oct 10<sup>th</sup>

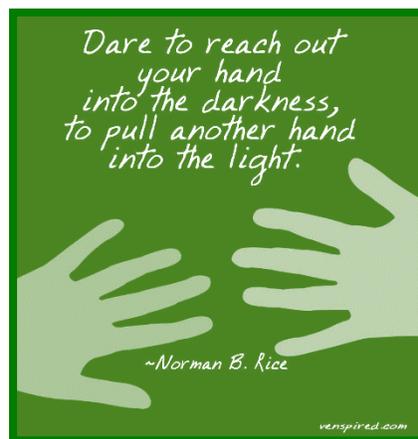
Nov 14<sup>th</sup>



## Our Mission

The mission of  
The Compassionate Friends:

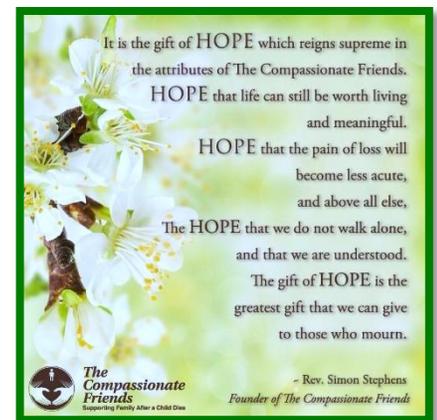
When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.



### MESSAGE LINE

(209)622-6786

Please leave a message and  
a steering committee  
member will return your  
call.



### 2022 Steering Committee

**Tracey Parker**  
Chapter Leader

**Devon Homme**  
Secretary

**Elsie Freeman**  
Treasurer

**Janet Neal**  
Outreach Coordinator

**Vacant Position**  
Hospitality & Library

**Chad Homme**  
Public Relations

**Kris Leitner**  
Newsletter Editor

**Mike & Suzanne Casity**  
Website

For the rest of my life I will search  
for moments full of you.

- Anonymous

Are you taking a vacation? Visiting  
family? Moving? Helping someone  
new to TCF to find a chapter?

Use the link below to find TCF  
chapters in other cities and states

Chapter Meeting Locator -  
Compassionate Friends



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Monthly Meeting**

**Thursday, August 25<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.**

***Please join us for an online meeting***

**Modesto Area TCF Chapter Meeting**



*Offering Help After A Suicide Death*

Friends for Survival Inc. - Suicide Bereavement, Bereavement Support

*The group meets, by Zoom, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m.*

Pre-registration is required @ [Meetings \(friendsforsurvival.org\)](https://www.friendsforsurvival.org)



This National Grief Awareness Day on August 30 is dedicated to raising awareness of the myriad ways in which individuals cope with loss. It offers resources to those going through personal losses and reminds us to support people we know who are grieving. National Grief Awareness Day, founded by Angie Cartwright in 2014, hopes to encourage open communication on loss and bereavement and better inform the public on the facts of grief.

[\(click on the picture for more information\)](#)

# Eight Years

It's been eight years since my unimaginable journey began ... What does that mean exactly? It means that I have survived a parent's worst nightmare. I have outlived my child. I have continued to breathe in and out for 2,921 days, wishing at some point during every one of those days, that life had provided a different outcome. I have existed 70,127 hours aware that there will always be a void – an empty chair – a deep despair that cannot be assuaged. I have endured 4,207,594 minutes knowing that what might have been will never be. I have survived 252,455,616 seconds without a piece of my heart and somehow it is still beating.

Where is my child? I've asked that question from the moment of Grant's death. In my opinion, that question can only be answered from within. I will tell you that, for me, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that my son is never very far. I have had so many precious experiences letting me know that he is still very much a part of what I do. His sense of humor remains intact ... his intelligence grows ... his love and concern for the people he cares for is unwavering.

How have I survived his death? Is there some magic potion? Is there some secret? First, I survived because I chose to. I made the conscious choice to continue on. Believe me, I contemplated other options on the darkest nights. Any parent who has endured this will probably tell you the same thing. It is shattering to move through the acute grief that consumes you when your child dies. You feel literally ripped to shreds by the sharp, protruding pieces of who you once were. In the beginning you wonder if your heart can physically endure the pain. It's the most difficult thing I've ever done – choosing to live on. Second, nope/negative/nada there is NO magic potion that will help. If only it were that easy. Third, is there a secret? Actually there is, however, you have to find it for yourself. Each one of us must search for the answer(s). We are as individual as our children and what works for one may not work for another. For me, it's been a combination of things. If you reach within yourself and also ask your child for help a miraculous thing occurs – the secret finds you. It's work and it's exhausting, yet it is so worth it. The discovery brings you so close to where they are now and gives you a comfort that is beyond description.

Why have I chosen to move forward? This one is simple for me – ***because in my heart and soul I know he wants me to.*** Does that mean it's easy? Absolutely not. It's challenging, overwhelming, exhausting, frustrating and difficult. It's a conscious choice, yet it's also wondrous. I believe that by embracing his life and legacy I keep his memory alive in a positive and loving way. The focus then becomes how he lived, not how he died. Knowing he wants me to live out my life doesn't take away the sorrow of missing him. I miss him every single moment of every single day. He is one of my first thoughts when I wake up each day and he is one of my final thoughts as I go to sleep each night.

When will the grief end? I know now that it never will and I am okay with that. I have made peace with it, for the most part and I know that grief is just another facet of the amazing gift within us all – LOVE. It is not a burden to carry my grief. The heaviness that used to weigh me down is gone. That doesn't mean it isn't arduous on some days. When I am triggered by an event or a memory or just missing him a bit more than usual, the magnitude of his absence is intensified. For me, it's been learning how to navigate the challenges. I have found comfort in others' survival stories (*flashlights* - if you will - to lead me through the shadows). I have found a space for my grief and most days I carry it with gratitude. Strange as that may seem, carrying my grief with gratitude has been a gift of grace. A deep and abiding love surrounds my mournfulness now. In my discovery I have come to accept that I would rather have experienced carrying this sweet little creature under my heart for 9 months, been blessed to share in his all too brief and amazing life, bravely endured his death and become the keeper of his legacy ~ than never have known him. It is a painful awakening and it takes time to find an understanding. It gradually occurs through countless tears, sleepless nights, seeking answers and finding peace.

Who am I now? A different soul than I was before. I continue on my quest for understanding and I do my best to honor Grant by living for us both. By keeping the tremendous gifts he left behind alive and well in the hearts of those he loves. Yet, it is also enduring the permanence of his absence. Suffering an anguish that cannot be articulated. Bearing the sorrow of a life that ended far too soon. Carrying my grief with a dignity and grace that makes him proud. It is leaving the bitterness that rears its ugly head from time to time, exactly where I find it. Most of all, it's becoming someone who laughs, appreciates, forgives, learns, strives, believes and loves with my whole heart!

I don't know how long it will be before I am where he is now. Seconds, minutes, hours, days, months or years. I don't focus on that so much anymore. I live each day and do my best to be better than the day before. What I do know is this – on that wonderful day – ALL the hosts in the Heavens will know that I am Home by the joyous shouts that will escape this *no longer grieving mother's heart*. Until then my beautiful boy!

By: Kris Leitner ~ Grant's Mom

# *We Don't Recover From Grief, and that's Okay*



*After some discussion with our insightful readers, we're adding a brief preface to this article. We feel it's important to clarify upfront that when we say we don't recover from grief or experience "grief recovery", we do NOT mean that we don't recover from the intense pain of loss. It is important for all grieving people – despite their loss and experiences – to believe in the hope for healing. No one should expect to live with the anguish associated with acute grief forever.*

*Our belief is that grief encompasses more than just pain. We believe that over time grief changes shape and comes to hold space for many different experiences and emotions – some of these experiences may be painful – like a milestone or the anniversary of a loved one's death – but some of them may be comforting – like warm memories and the enduring role that your loved one plays in your life. With that, the original article is presented below.*

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I need to tell you that, in the face of significant loss, we don't "recover" from grief. Yes, I'm using the royal "we" because you and I are all a part of this club. I also need to tell you that that *not* recovering from grief doesn't doom you to a life of despair. Let me reassure you, there are millions of people out there, right now, living normal and purposeful lives while also experiencing ongoing grief.

All the things you've heard about getting over grief, going back to normal, and moving on – they are misrepresentations of what it means to love someone who has died. I'm sorry, I know us human-people appreciate things like closure and resolution, but this isn't how grief goes. This isn't to say that "recovery" doesn't have a place in grief – it's simply 'what' we're recovering from that needs to be redefined. To "recover" means to return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength, and as many would attest, when someone very significant dies, we never return to a pre-loss "normal". The loss, the person who died, our grief – they all get integrated into our lives and they profoundly change how we live and experience the world.

What will, hopefully, return to a general baseline is the level of intense emotion, stress, and distress that a person experiences in the weeks and months following their loss. So perhaps we recover from the intense distress of grief, but we don't recover from the grief itself.

Now you could say that I'm getting caught up in semantics, but sometimes semantics matter. Especially, when trying to describe an experience that, for so many, is unfamiliar and frightening. Grief is one of those experiences you can never fully understand until you actually experience it and, until that time, all a person has to go on is what they've observed and what they've been told.

The words we use to label and describe grief matter and, in many ways, these words have been getting us into trouble for decades. In the context of grief, words like denial, detachment, unresolved, recovery, and acceptance (to name a few) could be interpreted many different ways and some of these interpretations offer false impressions and false promises. Interestingly, when many of these words were first used by grief theorists starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, their intent was to help *describe* grief. I have no doubt that in the contexts in which they were working, these words and their operational definitions were useful and effective. It's when these descriptions reach our broader society without explanation or nuance, or when they are misapplied by those who position themselves as experts – that they go terribly awry.

So going back to the beginning, we don't recover from grief after the loss of someone significant. Grief is born when someone significant dies – and as long as that person remains significant – grief will remain.

Ongoing grief is normal, not dysfunctional. It's also not dysfunctional to experience unpleasant grief-related thoughts and emotions from time-to-time sometimes even years later. Humans are meant to experience both sides of the emotional spectrum – not just the warm and fuzzy half. As grieving people, this is especially true. Where there are things like love, appreciation, and fond memory, there will also be sadness, yearning, and pain. And though these experiences seem in opposition to one another, we can experience them all at the same time.

Sure, people may push you to stop feeling the pain, but this is misguided. If the pain always exists, it makes sense, because there will never come a day when you won't wish for one more moment, one more conversation, one last hello, or one last goodbye. You learn to live with these wishes and you learn to accept that they won't come true – not here on Earth – but you still wish for them.

And let me reassure you, experiencing pain doesn't negate the potential for healing. With constructive coping and maybe a little support, the intensity of your distress will lessen and your healing will evolve over time. Though there will be many ups and downs, you should eventually reach a place where you're having just as many good days as bad...and then perhaps more good days than bad...until one day you may find that your bad grief days are few and far between.

But the grief, it's always there, like an old injury that aches when it rains. And though this prospect may be scary in the early days of grief, I think in time you'll find that you wouldn't have it any other way. Grief is an expression of love – these things grow from the same seed. Grief becomes a part of how we love a person despite their physical absence; it helps connect us to memories of the past; it bonds us with others through our shared humanity, and it helps provide perspective on our immense capacity for finding strength and wisdom in the most difficult of times.

[We Don't Recover From Grief, and that's Okay - Whats your Grief](#)

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*"The pain passes but the beauty remains." -- Pierre August Renoir*



# *The Edge of Grief: A Summer Reflection*

*By: Ellen Frankel*

Will it ever stop hurting so much? Will we ever get over the grief? These were the questions being put on the table by participants in a support group I was facilitating for those who were recently bereaved. They debated the often cited notion that time heals all wounds, for the wounds they brought into that room were large, deep gashes, raw and oozing and too tender to touch. It was nearly impossible for most of those present that night to imagine a time when the pain would ever be bearable. There was "before" and now there was "after." The death of their loved one turned their hearts inside out, and their lives upside down.

As a bereavement counselor, it is my job to help create a safe space to give voice to the unspeakable, and to companion others in their grief journey as they travel into the wilderness of their soul in search of their own inner knowing and truth. But it's a messy business, this grief work. There is no GPS saying where to turn, or when to recalculate, or when you will ever arrive at your destination.

One man asked, "Does it ever go away, this pain? Do we ever really heal after losing someone we loved?"

His question resonated with the group members and they began discussing and exploring with one another. One woman, whose mother died a couple of months prior asked another member who had lost her loved one nearly a year ago if the grief changes at all, and if so, how? While they talked, I listened. Then a group member turned to me and asked, "What do you think? Do we ever get over the pain of our loss? Does the grief ever end?"

I waited a moment, thinking how I wanted to respond as their group facilitator, but before I could get the words out of my head, my broken heart answered from its own truth instead. The words came from my heart as a daughter whose father had died a year ago, and as I spoke them, I heard them for the first time.

This is what I told them:

When you break a glass on the kitchen floor, you have to be careful when you go to clean up. The glass is sharp -- so very sharp -- so as you pick it up, piece by piece, you have to go slowly, touch the glass cautiously, because even the slightest encounter with the edge can pierce your skin and you hurt and you bleed. The shards of glass are harsh and the edges cut deeply.

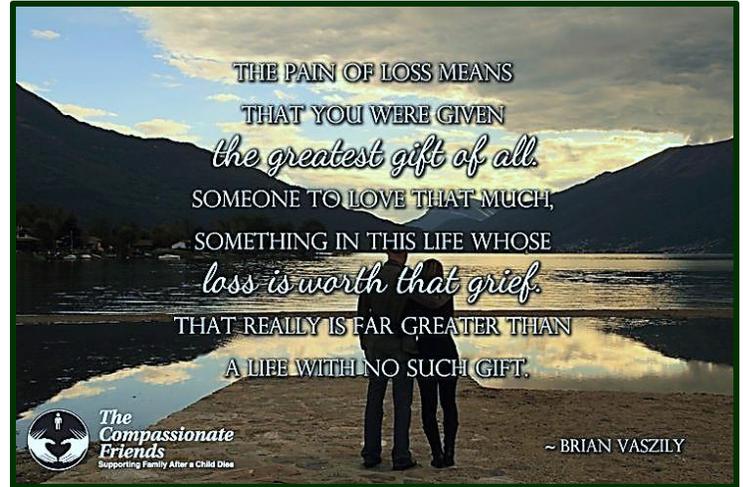
Now imagine that those broken pieces of glass have been thrown into the ocean. They are at the mercy of the current, and have to let go into the forces of nature. Some days the ocean roars with big forceful waves and the glass is tossed and churned and thrown along with the rocks and sand. Other times the ocean is gentle, and the glass is stroked by the rhythm of the tide. Yet just as the gentle ocean lulls the glass with its soothing melody, another storm hits and the glass is once again pushed against the force of currents, the force of the moon and the heavens. And yet again, at some point the ocean quiets, the flow is once again soft, the waves flow like the inhalation and exhalation of the breath, arriving at the shore, hugging the sand.

And at some point, there you are, on a warm, sunny July day, walking along the seashore when you stop because just in front of you, sitting amidst pebbles and rocks and periwinkle shells is a piece of sea glass. You bend down to pick it up, marveling at your good fortune to find this treasure. Holding it in your hands you feel its smoothness and the places where the sea glass might have a slight ridge. You can rub it on all of its sides, for no longer are there sharp edges. Instead, the edges have become solid and smooth and you can hold it tightly in your hand without fear of injury. In fact, holding it in your hand feels fortifying and strengthening. We actively seek these brilliant pieces of sea glass precisely because they echo the beauty of survival, of resiliency, and of hope.

With tenderness and love you are able to hold this piece of sea glass and learn its unique features. Where once the edges of the glass were jagged and sharp, now the edges are ever softly rounded, so that you can run a finger over them repeatedly, and it will not take your blood.

That is how grief can change, I told the group members. Those are the edges of grief. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, the great Chassidic Rebbe said, "Nothing is as whole as a broken heart." I think that is why so many people on the beach, children and adults alike, feel that finding sea glass is like finding a treasure. When we hold a piece of sea glass, we hold in our hands what was once part of something broken, something that was sharp and painful to the touch. When we hold it after its time of being housed in the ocean of life, it becomes stronger in the broken places and each small piece we find tells us that we too, are a treasure. We too can grow stronger from our grief. A friend of mine, who lost three family members within a two-year period, told me that each loss has made her a kinder person. Each loss has made her softer at the edges.

I looked into the faces of the group members, and we all took a moment to look at one another and breathe. Our broken hearts understood this in a way that allowed us to look at the gnawing gash of our wounds and understand that even in our pain, healing had already begun. Even in our most piercing and painful moments, the edges of grief are touching the forces of nature, the ebbs and the flows, and in its own time, there would be a grief that we could hold as a treasure of love, of memories, of beauty and connection.



## ♥ LOVE GIFTS ♥

Love gifts can be made in memory of your child, sibling or grandchild in any amount. Donations received are used for our annual Candle Lighting Program each December, for sending our monthly newsletter via US mail and for community outreach. We are here to reach out to other bereaved families who may not be aware we are here to lend our support after the death of a child. Please send your tax-deductible donation to the PO Box below.

*Stella Villegas, in loving memory of her beloved son, Luciano Juan Garnica*

If you wish to make a Love Gift Donation

Please fill out the information below and send with a check to:

The Compassionate Friends  
 Modesto Area Chapter  
 PO Box 578713  
 Modesto, CA 95357

Child,  Sibling or  Grandchild \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Passing \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Donation amount \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Your email address \_\_\_\_\_

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Would you like your gift listed in our monthly newsletter in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling?

The amount will remain anonymous Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

The Compassionate Friends is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Donations are tax deductible.

Check out our closed Facebook page, *The Modesto Area of TCF*. Make a request to join the page and an Administrator will approve your request.



Join us on our Instagram account page. You can find us at – *modestoriverbankarea\_tcf*.



Our Steering Committee wants to provide the best possible support to each of our TCF Chapter members and friends. Please contact a member of the Steering Committee with any concerns you have or any ideas about how our Chapter can be of support to you and others. We're also available if you'd like to talk about your child or some aspect of the challenges of your bereavement journey. You can reach us by email at: [tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com](mailto:tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com) or by phone at 209-622-6786 or on Facebook.

## OUR CHAPTER PHONE TREE

If you are struggling and need to talk, we are here for you. We have set up a phone tree and someone is available day or night. You can call or text us at (209)622-6786 and one of the Steering Committee will get back to you as soon as possible. You may also reach someone through the email address, [tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com](mailto:tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com), or on our private Facebook page, which you can find by searching for *The Modesto-Riverbank Area Chapter of TCF*.

If you would like to be a part of our phone tree and be available for other members, please contact us through one of the above mentioned methods and we will add your name and number to our list.



Please remember to send in your child's photo so that it can be added to the new TCF Modesto-Riverbank website. Send photos to: [scasity@comcast.net](mailto:scasity@comcast.net)

Visit our website for information and to stay up to date on chapter events.

[www.modestoriverbanktcf.org](http://www.modestoriverbanktcf.org)

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