



# The Compassionate Friends

## Modesto~Riverbank Chapter

*Supporting Family 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)

September 2019

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

### A Journey of Love and Grief

My journey of love began on April 8, 1981, the day Steven, my oldest son, was born. Steven taught me the true meaning of unconditional love. He was a loving and giving soul, always the first one to jump in to help. He had compassion and tons of empathy. He helped several of his friends seek sobriety. He was super smart. He was a talented and gifted student for years, always bringing home the top grades. As he grew older, he was a total joy, when he was sober.

Steven was 26 when he left us due to an accidental drug overdose. He had abused drugs for a few years, and in the back of my mind, I knew there was a chance I could lose him. I always told myself these things happen to other people, not my son. He had been clean and living in a sober-living house for 10 months. Steven fought hard to break the pull that addiction had on him. He had a job, a cell phone and a bank account. Things were looking good. I was cautiously optimistic that this time he would finally conquer the disease of addiction. Then I received the call that made me what every parent fears the most: a bereaved parent.

That one phone call on September 10, 2007, sent my world into a downward spiral of disbelief, shock, and deep grief. I made it through those first few days on sheer will power, needing to do the best I could do for the last time for Steven.

On September 10, 2019, it will be 12 years since my world was changed forever, and my journey of grief began. Twelve years? How is it even possible that I have survived?? It has been a roller-coaster ride, changing from moment to moment and day to day. Just when I think I have my grief under control, the next wave of grief hits me and I am gasping for air.

I am pleased to share that the waves are no longer as big as they once were. Now, there are only a few days of sadness each year. I can once again feel true joy that in the beginning I thought impossible. I talk to my son when I need to, and ask for his help on things that are tough. He sends me signs that he is still with me, such as a song on the radio or orange roses that just seem to be right where I am at the time that I need them. I feel his presence and his tenderness. I love and miss him every single day. My goal in life is to live each day to make my son proud, and I hope that I succeed on most days.

There is no time limit on grief, and time does not heal all wounds. It's what you choose to do with that time that will help you begin to heal, my friends.

Without the love and support from Journey of Hope in Texas and The Compassionate Friends here in California, I am not sure where I would be today. I just know it would be a darker place. Thank you to all who have loved, hugged, cried, listened, and encouraged me along the way. Together we are survivors.

Elsie Freeman  
Steven's mom

### MONTHLY MEETING

7:00 PM

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

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*Please join us at our  
next meeting on  
Monday, September 9<sup>th</sup>.  
\*Please arrive by 6:50 PM  
so we may begin promptly  
at 7:00PM\**

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### Upcoming Meetings

October 14<sup>th</sup>

November 11<sup>th</sup>

December 9<sup>th</sup>

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### MESSAGE LINE

(209)622-6786

*If you leave a message  
a steering committee member  
will return your call.*

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Visit us on Facebook  
The Modesto-Riverbank  
Area Chapter of TCF



Find us on Instagram at  
[modestoriverbankarea\\_tcf](https://www.instagram.com/modestoriverbankarea_tcf)



## *Lunch with the Ladies*

*Date: Sunday, September 29<sup>th</sup>*

*Time: 1:00PM*

*Location: Applebee's - 1272 E. Yosemite Avenue, Manteca 95336*

*To RSVP - call or text Tracey at 209-996-2040 or email [tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com](mailto:tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com).*

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## *Saturday Morning Breakfast with the Dads*

*Save the dates Saturday, September 7<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup> for breakfast with other bereaved dads in our chapter.*

*8 am at Perko's in Salida - 4642 Kiernan Avenue*

*Confirm with Chad at 209-338-8496 or [chomme@gmail.com](mailto:chomme@gmail.com), or Norm at 209-345-0601 or [nandrews6863@charter.net](mailto:nandrews6863@charter.net), & they'll save a seat for you.*



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*Suicide Loss Support Group  
7 pm at the Sutter Health Education Center  
in the back of McHenry Village, suite B.  
The group meets the third Monday of each month.  
For more information, contact Norm at 209 345-0601  
or at [nandrews6863@charter.net](mailto:nandrews6863@charter.net).*

"Deep in the Heart of Hope" is the theme for the regional conference in South Texas. October 4th-6th, bereaved families from across the country will gather in Houston TX. There will be over 25 workshops, sharing sessions and panels to choose from, a Crafty Corner, a Candle Lighting Dinner and a very moving *Walk to Remember* on Sunday morning! With Ghislaine Thomsen, Maureen Wittels and Alan Pedersen all scheduled to be speakers it promises to be a weekend full of love, support, and compassion. For more information or to register you can visit their website. [www.tcfsouthtexasregionalconference.org/tcf-southtexasconference.aspx](http://www.tcfsouthtexasregionalconference.org/tcf-southtexasconference.aspx) or visit them on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/TCFSouthTexasRegionalConference/](http://www.facebook.com/TCFSouthTexasRegionalConference/).

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# **OUT OF THE DARKNESS WALK**

**Sponsored by: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
(AFSP)**

## **Modesto Walk**

**Saturday, September 14<sup>th</sup>**

**Graceada Park – Modesto, CA**

**The Compassionate Friends – Modesto/Riverbank Chapter  
will be there in support of this event**

**Check in/Registration time: 9:00AM**

**Walk begins: 10:00AM/Walk ends: 1:00 PM**

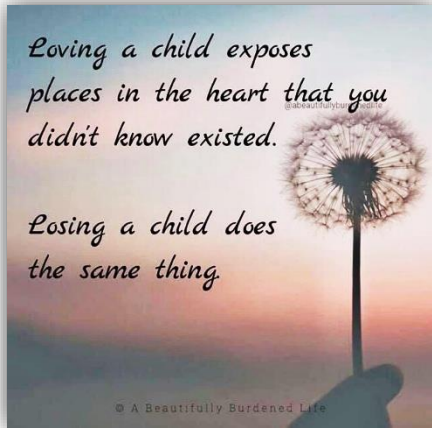


**click the photo for information about the Modesto Walk**

**or visit**

**[www.afsp.donordrive.com](http://www.afsp.donordrive.com)**

# Child Loss and Secondary Losses



While I certainly had no real idea in the first hours or even weeks what losing a child entailed, I understood plainly that it meant I would not have my son to see, hold or talk to.

I wouldn't be able to hug his neck or telephone him.

He wouldn't be sitting at my table any more.

But the death of a child or other loved one has a ripple effect.

It impacts parts of life you might not expect. As time went on, I was introduced to a whole list of losses commonly called "**secondary losses**".

Here are some:

**Loss of a large chunk of "self"**. My son possessed part of my heart and part of my life. It was violently ripped away when he died. **There is part of me that was uniquely reflected from him ~ like a specialty mirror.** I can never access that part of me again.

**Loss of identity.** Before my child died I was one kind of mother. I was a mother of four living children who were making their way in the world as successful adults. I was a mother looking forward with happy anticipation to the next years. Now I am still a mother of four children but one whose heart has been changed by tragedy and sorrow. **Tomorrow is still bright, but there's a shadow just behind it.**

**Loss of self-confidence.** I used to enter a room without a thought to how I'd be received or perceived. That's definitely not the case now. I'm self-conscious-constantly wondering if I'm saying or doing the right thing. I never know if a grief trigger will (at best) pull my attention away from conversation or (at worst) send me scurrying for the bathroom.

**Loss of sense of security.** I think every parent has moments of fear over his or her child. When they first go off someplace without us, when they get a driver's license, travel abroad, go to college. *But all the awful things I imagined didn't hold a candle to the reality of waking one morning to a knock on my door and the news that my son had been killed.* The bottom fell out of my (relatively) safe world. Bad things, random things can and do happen. Once it happened to **ME**, it changed how I processed everything. The passing years have softened some of the anxiety but I will never be able to assume safety again.

**Loss of faith.** I did not "lose" my faith. I never once doubted that God was still working, was still loving and was still in control. But I most certainly had to drag out every single thing I thought I knew about how I thought He worked, loved and superintended the world and examine it in light of my experience of burying my son. **It took a long time to work through all the pat answers I had been offered and myself doled out to others for years that didn't fit with my new reality.** I am learning that doubt is not denial and that I have to live with unanswered questions.

**Loss of family structure.** I've written before that a family is more than the arithmetic total of the number of members. **There were six of us. But we were so much more than six when we were all together!** Our talents, personalities and energy were amplified in community. When my son's large presence was suddenly whisked away, every relationship got skewed. We've fought our way back to a semblance of "whole" but still miss him terribly. We can function, but we will never be the same.

**Loss of my past.** Memories are funny things. They are plastic and subject to change. And my recall of an event is limited to my own perspective. For a memory to be rich and full, I need input from others who were there as well. One vessel of family memories is no longer available to add his unique contribution. **Every time I pull out a photo or dig down deep in my heart to draw up a treasured moment, I realize I've lost something I cannot recover.** The joke, the glance, the odd detail are all gone.

**Loss of the future I anticipated.** I'm a planner by nature. Not a detailed, OCD, got-everything-in-order kind of planner, but a "big picture" kind of planner. When my son left us in 2014, things were going (*pretty much*) according to plan. Each child was well on his or her way to the career path they had chosen. I was easing into an empty nest and exploring options for life after homeschooling. My husband was entering his last few years of a lengthy career. **It's hard to explain to anyone who hasn't experienced it, but when your world is shaken by child loss, everything gets scrambled. You can't just pick up where you left off and keep going with the pieces that remain.** There's a prolonged period of confusion and everyone is impacted differently and in ways you could never imagine. **All of us have changed dramatically in the years since my son left us.** He is not the only thing missing from the rest of our lives. Holidays are altered. Birthdays are different. We have to plan special events around uncomfortable milestone dates that roll around every year whether we want them to or not. It's a constant readjustment to life as it **IS** instead of life as I thought it **WOULD** be.

**Loss of ability to focus and function.** Oh, how this surprised me! I was in some kind of zone for the first month after my son left. My other children were home, we had to make it through planning his funeral, two graduations and cleaning out his apartment. I also had to handle paperwork for my husband to take short-term disability due to grief. **I cried a lot, wrote down dozens of notes but managed to do what I had to do. Then I crashed.** I couldn't remember a thing. I couldn't read more than a couple sentences at a time. I hated the telephone. I could barely stand to hear the television. I had to make a list of the most basic things like brushing my teeth, feeding my animals, turning off all the lights before bed. It was awful! **And it didn't really get better for well over a year.** I still suffer from a very short attention span, low tolerance for noise and an inability to accommodate last minute changes. I don't schedule anything back to back. I live in a rural area and sometimes shop in the nearby town. I will start the day with a long list and shorten it repeatedly as I go along because driving in traffic, crowds and random sounds ramp up my anxiety and make me want to go home with or without what I came for. I have changed the way I do so many things. **My pre-loss memory has never returned.**

**Loss of patience.** I am at once impatient and long-suffering. I have zero patience for petty grievances, whining and complaining. Yet I have compassion for other people living hard and unhappy stories. I berate myself for not being "better" and, at the same time, extend grace to others who aren't "better" either. I want to shake people who bowl over weak, hurting, desperate souls. I don't have time for moaning about rain when you were planning a picnic but will listen for hours to a mama tell me about her missing child.

**Loss of health.** I had a number of chronic health conditions before my son ran ahead. Within the first year of his departure, I was hospitalized twice. My experience is not unique. Some parents suffer immediate health effects (*heart attack, blood sugar spikes, anxiety/depression*) and some see a slow decline over time. In part because child loss, like any stressor, will negatively impact health and also because sometimes bereaved parents stop doing the things that help them stay healthy. At almost five years, I've learned how to manage the stress better although some of my health issues continue to get worse. It's hard to tease apart what is age, what is disease and what is grief.

When your child leaves this life before you do, it changes everything. Not only things you might expect, but many you'd never imagine. It's a constant balancing act, readjusting every day to new challenges. Struggling to keep my head above the waves.



You can still get photo button made of your child, grandchild or sibling with our new button machine! Buttons can be made at 6:30 pm on our meeting nights. Bring an extra copy of a photo or a photocopy of it, that can be cut into a circle 3" in diameter. Close-up photos usually work the best. You may bring a graphic design instead of a photo, if you wish. This will be a wonderful way to get acquainted with each other's children! Magnets are also available!!

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)

# SAVE THE DATE

Sat, October 26, 2019  
12:00 PM – 3:00 PM  
Heyam's Home  
677 Three Chimneys Way  
Oakdale, CA 95361

## Modesto-Riverbank TCF 5th Annual Fall Luncheon

A cartoon owl wearing a brown and white patterned headband with three feathers (two green, one brown) on top. The owl has large white eyes and a brown body with a white and brown checkered pattern on its chest.

Raffle Prizes

Silent Auction

Fabulous Food

Door Prizes

Click on Hootie to take you to the [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com) website for full details of the event or contact the chapter by phone (209)622-6786 for more information. Tickets will be available to purchase at the September and October monthly meetings.

# Missing You is Exhausting



Grief is exhausting. Missing someone can be incredibly draining. Everything seems like a solo climb of Mount Everest.

## **From the Grieving Heart:**

*I'm exhausted. I wake up each day and sigh. My body feels heavy. Everything takes so much effort. Brushing my teeth is a workout. Not sleeping well doesn't help. Not eating well doesn't help either. My head feels like it's stuffed with cotton. My eyes hurt.*

*I live in a daze. It's like I'm sleep-walking through life. Missing you is exhausting. My heart is deflated. Part of me seems to have left with you.*

*What's wrong with me? I don't feel like myself at all. I want my old life back. I want you back.*

*I'm so tired I can barely think. I manage to gear up for what I must do, and somehow function enough to get through it. Then I crash on the other side. I zone out for minutes at a time. I hope this gets better.*

## **Grief is exhausting**

Grief demands incredible energy. Life in fight-or-flight mode is exhausting. Fatigue is natural and common during times of loss.

If someone was hit by a bus, we wouldn't expect them to jump up and carry on as usual. If they survived the collision, they would be transported to a hospital, preferably to one with a trauma center, for emergency life-saving treatment. Once their life is out of danger, the stabilizing process takes time. Then the healing and recovery process can begin. During this time, all their physical energy is being channeled toward simply staying alive. Fatigue and exhaustion are routine fare for those recovering from life-threatening injuries.

We've been hit by the Grief Bus. It can stun and flatten us. We don't simply shake the collision off and walk away unscathed. Our wounds are invisible but real. The emotional pain can be intense and draining. Pain, in any form, taxes our system and exhausts us.

Rest becomes a priority. Fatigue takes a toll over time. We simply can't do as much. Our performance at work might be off. We need more space and margin in life than ever. Taking ourselves and our grief seriously is critical. Being patient with ourselves is important.

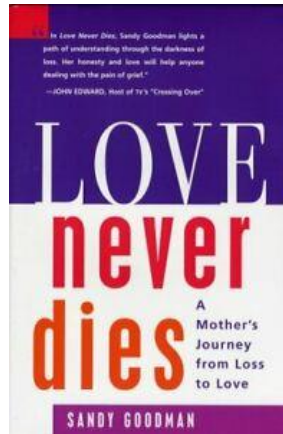
Like other grief challenges, the fatigue will change over time. Our hearts, souls, and bodies will adjust and recover. Time doesn't heal all wounds, but healing does take time.

**Author: Gary Roe**

# Book of the Month

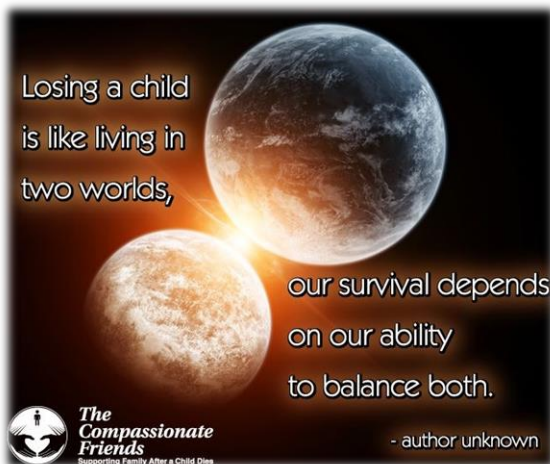
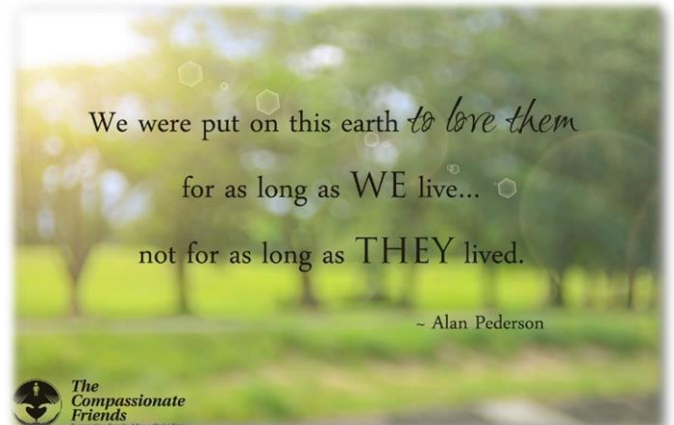
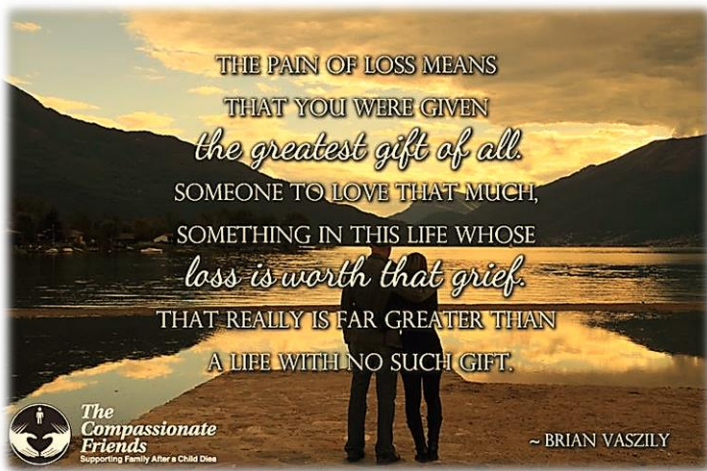


This month's spotlight book is:

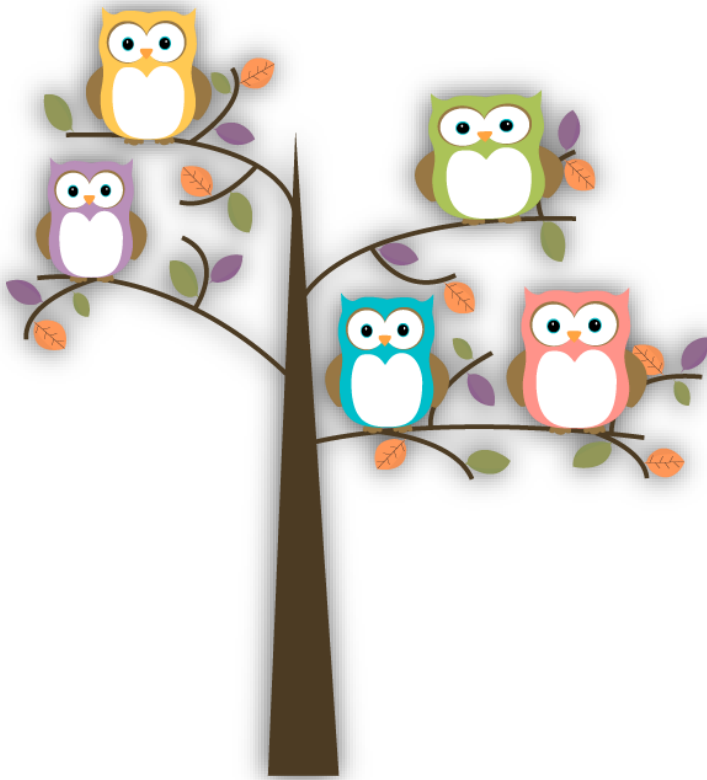


Please take full advantage of our chapter  
to choose from. The library is available before and after the monthly meeting.

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to choose from. The library is available before and after the monthly meeting.







## 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.

Roni Edgmon in loving memory of her son, Ryan  
Thea D'Angelo in loving memory of her daughter, Darice  
Norman Rodriguez in loving memory of his son, Norman Moses

**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/Riverbank 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** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your address** \_\_\_\_\_ **City** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**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**



Your memory is a  
treasure I hold  
in my heart



Thank you 7- Eleven stores at  
2500 Geer Rd., Turlock, CA and  
3225 McHenry Ave., Modesto, CA  
for sponsoring our monthly  
newsletter!!

### 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.*

When a child dies, a parent is still tied to that child. Souls, tied together across universes. It doesn't matter the age when they passed. It doesn't matter how long ago it happened. It doesn't matter— none of it. Their souls are forever tied.

That's the love of a parent. That's the love that is more powerful than death. That's the heart that breaks and keeps breaking until their arms are filled again. It knows no discrimination based off of age, health, or time, it just is, and it always will be. Their souls are forever tied, and there's nothing that can break them.

That's the beauty of unconditional love.

SCRIBBLES & CRUMBS

### 2019 Steering Committee

*Tracey Parker – Chapter Leader*

*Devon Homme – Secretary*

*Elsie Freeman – Treasurer*

*Kris Leitner – Newsletter Editor*

*Janet Neal – Outreach Coordinator*

*Lori Leitner – Hospitality & Library*

*Chad Homme – Public Relations*

*Mike & Suzanne Casity – Website*

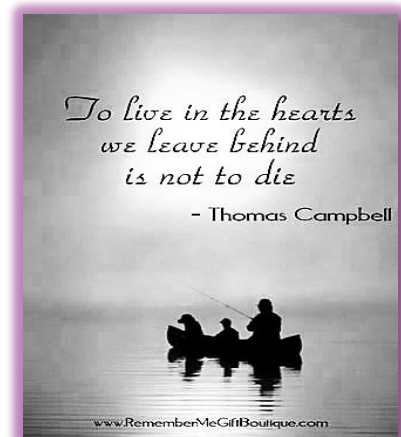
*Our Steering Committee wants to provide the best possible support to each of our TCF Chapter members and friends. Please contact a member of the Steering Committee with any concerns you have or any ideas about how our Chapter can be of support to you and others. We're also available if you'd like to 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.*



Check out our closed Facebook page, Modesto-Riverbank Area Chapter of TCF. Make a request to join the page & an Administrator will approve your request.



Join us on our Instagram account page. You can find us at [modestoriverbankarea\\_tcf](https://www.instagram.com/modestoriverbankarea_tcf).



Visit our website for information and to stay up to date on chapter events. [www.modestoriverbanktcf.org](http://www.modestoriverbanktcf.org)