



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

August 2019

tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Soon after Grant transitioned, I was blessed to feel his essence. I still feel him, hear him, and connect with him often. Each year he has presented me with a word. Even the first year, with only 4 months left in 2014, he made sure to reach me. He works through music, poems, nature, social media, books, articles, friends and family.

This year, almost from the first day, he made sure I was aware of what he wanted me to know. This year it was a phrase, "letting go". At first, I wondered, what could this possibly mean? In prior years, the words were gratitude, strength, choice, awareness & joy. "Letting go" just didn't fit. How could I let go of him? Still, I trusted in him and in what he was trying to convey and that with time and patience, clarity would come.

Sure enough, I began to understand what he was telling me. I needed to "let go" of hurts, slights, anger, sorrow and other emotions weighing on my heart. It wasn't a matter of letting him go. He wanted me to understand this unnecessary baggage was taking up space, and it was time for other new, more important elements to find a home within my heart. I was apprehensive at first. There was *stuff* I'd hung onto for a long time. It has been a process of reading, meditating, weeping, and forgiving myself and others. It has become evident what he is sharing with me. He has let me know that it is time to *let go* of the deep grief that holds me back and let it transform into love.

When our child dies, a piece of us goes with that child. It's nothing we have control over. We are connected to our child, earth-bound or beyond the veil; we are joined forever. I believe the most precious part of this journey, for me, has been to discover that while Grant may have taken a piece of me with him when he died, he also left a piece of himself. Not just with me, but with everyone he loved and knew. I am so grateful for this knowledge. It lightens the difficult days and brings deeper meaning and joy to the special days, and it provides a peace in day-to-day living.

I found a beautiful poem earlier this year that expresses my personal feelings about grief and love:

If I was to survive, grief had to become a part of my essence. In that realization, I felt a release: Grief was love and had been right from the start. Only then did I understand why grief had never left my side and never will – because it was the love for my child, and that is everlasting. Katja Faber

I miss Grant every minute of every day. It's overwhelming to try to fathom that five years have passed. When I look back, I see how far I've come and I ask myself, "Would he be proud of me?" And I receive his answer, "Yes Mom, I am beyond proud of you!" A wise woman told me, "Kris, you are a 'Shining Light Parent'. You are the mom of a beautiful shining light. This is sooooo much better than referring to yourself, for the rest of your life, as a *bereaved mom*." I am so very thankful to be blessed to be the mother of this beautiful boy, my shining light son.

Kris Leitner ♥ Grant's Mom

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 12th.
*Please arrive by 6:50 PM
so we may begin promptly
at 7:00PM**

Upcoming Meetings

September 9th
October 14th
November 11th

MESSAGE LINE

(209)622-6786

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



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



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

august *EVENTS*

Lunch with the Ladies

Date: Sunday, August 18th

Time: 1:00 P.M.

Location: Devine Swine 825 W. Roseburg Ave., Modesto 95350

To RSVP- call or text Tracey at 209-996-2040 or email tefmodestoriverbank@gmail.com.

Saturday Morning Breakfast with the Dads

Save the dates Saturday, August 3rd and Saturday, September 7th for breakfast with other bereaved dads in our chapter.

8 am at Perko's in Riverbank, 2120 Patterson Rd, at corner of Oakdale Rd. Confirm with Chad at 209-338-8496 or chomme@gmail.com, or Norm at 209-345-0601 or nandrews6863@charter.net, & they'll save a seat for you.



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.*

MORE EVENTS

Paint Night at the Casity's



Please join us on Saturday, August 10th at 6:00 p.m. @ 1567 Parkview St., Manteca, CA
Mike has promised a delicious barbeque. Side dishes provided by our Steering Committee members.

Lorie Avila, a local artist, will be instructing us as we paint a butterfly scene on canvas.

The cost is \$25 per which will include all the supplies you need.

To reserve your spot please RSVP to Tracey by phone or text at 209-996-2040 no later than
Monday, August 5th.



"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.tcfouthtexasregionalconference.org/tcf-southtexaconference.aspx or
visit them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TCFSouthTexasRegionalConference/.

Out of the Darkness Walk

Modesto Walk

Saturday, September 14th

Graceada Park – Modesto, CA

Check in/Registration time: 9:00AM

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



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Love Remains



There is this defining moment in grief...which separates the past from the future. It is this bizarre collision of who you were and who you will become. It is memories and dreams that literally shatter head-on and transform your world forever. And it is where many people get stuck.

The place where you cling to memories because it is all you have left. The place where you are afraid to release those dreams because there is such finality in that. I listened to all the advice. I read the books. And I searched and waited for this overwhelming peace. For life to somehow pick up where I left off in the middle of grief. But it didn't. I was not comforted by photos or remembering the past. There was just this huge and empty void. And this hole in my heart that was impossible to fill.

I spent days numb...simply going through the motions. Everything was falling apart around me because there was no way to go back, yet it was inconceivable to move forward. The ache in my body reminded me every day that my arms were empty. The notion of being a mother on this earth without her child is abstract. In a perfect world, it wouldn't happen.

In the early stages of grief, I wasn't sure how I could navigate this life after loss. Nothing can prepare your heart for death. The blow of reality that hits when the waves of shock settle is insufferable. Your old life has vanished and this disorienting new existence is a sub-par comparison. It is irrevocable. And that is the only certainty in this new uncertain world. Death became this vast and infinite hole in my life. Danger was everywhere and fear was engulfing. There was no escape. Was death a cruel punishment or simply a careless happenstance? I found myself living a life of bondage. Trapped in the throes of grief. Exactly where I had intentionally set out not to land. And for all my purposeful efforts, I could not budge. It was a daily battle. And while the struggle internally was taking place... outwardly, I was determined to hold it together. I had children who deserved it. I wanted to teach them resilience. Their life had to remain as normal as possible so that the devastation of death did not consume their future. The evolution of grief is fascinating. And in time, my self-defense mechanism became a desperate search to block out emotion. It was how I coped. If we can't feel pain, we won't hurt. And it worked.

They say "time heals". It doesn't. No one tells you that the pain of death revisits on a whim. Death knows no boundaries. It is an imposing presence that strikes without warning in spite of any healing that has taken place. At any given moment it threatens to uproot your life and spiral you into a deep and unending abyss.

There is a great illusion in grief. A lie that tells us if we just walk through, it will be better on the other side. But the truth is...there is no other side. There is only before and after. There is only with and without. And for the remainder of your life, you will consistently view it like this. You will have to learn to exist in whatever means of survival you can. My marriage fell apart in grief. There were no warning signs. There were no red flags. It just ceased. Ended. Because you can't go back. I could feel life laughing at me. Mocking me. For all the judgments I had once cast. For the deception that I had it all. Grief brings shame. Brokenness. Despair. You will learn to recognize the face of pity. And you will become aware of the game of avoidance that most people play. You will want to run from the silent stares and the downcast eyes that deflect from meeting yours.

There is a balance in grief. A slow dance between letting the pain wash over you and pretending it doesn't hurt. It is a constant back and forth. A one step forward, two steps back process. Keep going. When the pain threatens to bring you to your knees and it hurts to even take one more breath...keep going. Because you cannot get stuck in this plateau. And sometimes it is easier to stay where you are than move where you need to go. There can be no victory in death if you do not allow it. One more day. You live in the moment because if you just get through today...maybe, just maybe, tomorrow will not hurt so much. It is here, in this valley, where your bones are weary and your body is bearing the weight of your suffering, where you can be transformed.

I don't have all the answers but what I do know is this...life is not worth existing in without hope. Today, when I look back, I can't believe it was me. I can't believe we walked through that. And that we resurfaced. I also can't believe that grief remains. That the pain continues to be an integral part of who you are no matter how long the span of time. But so does love. And love wins. Love always wins. www.stillstandingmag.com/2019/01/24/love-remains

I Am Not Gone

*You were not meant to save me
I wasn't meant to stay
So please stop blaming yourself
Since I have gone away
My time on Earth was over
There's something you should know
My soul had reached its Growth there
It was my time to go
Don't cry for all the Could Have's
The What If's and If Only
Let go of all the guilt you hold
Then you won't feel so lonely
I Graduated life there
And into Heaven's light
I live within God's peace here
My soul is perfectly Bright
Life there is but a chapter
Of a book that carries on
I'm just on the next page now
I really am not gone
The Angels up in Heaven
Help me watch you as you live
Your life there isn't over yet
You have so much to give
Your life there will touch others
Just as my life there touched you
So be sure to touch them softly
And place love within their view
Just know this will make sense someday
We will look back and smile
You are just merely passing through
We only stay there for a while
So please hold on to my love
As you walk through life each day
And know that I am right here
And Right here, I'll always stay*

Fara Gibson



In the Light

*A shadow of joy flickered - it is me. I told you I
wouldn't leave. My memories, my thoughts are
imbedded deep in your heart. I still love you.
Do not for one moment think that you have been
abandoned. I am in the Light.*

*In the corner, in the hall, the car, the yard these are
the places I stay with you. My spirit rises every time
you pray for me, but my energy comes closer to you.
Love does not diminish - it grows stronger.*

*I am the feather that finds you in the yard,
the dimmed light that grows brighter in your mind,
I place our memories for you to see. We lived in our
special way, a way that now has its focus changed.*

*I still crave your understanding and long for the
many words of prayer and good fortune for my soul.
I am in the Light.*

*As you struggle to adjust without me, I watch
silently. Sometimes I summon up all the strength of
my new world to make you notice me. Impressed by
your grief, I try to impress my love deeper into your
consciousness.*

*I am with you and I am in the Light. Please don't feel
bad that you can't see me. I am with you wherever
you go. I protect you, just as you protected me so
many times.*

*Talk to me and somehow I will find a way to answer
you. Mother, Father, son or daughter, it makes no
difference. Brother, sister, lover, husband or wife, it
makes no difference. Whatever our connection, friend
or even foe, I see you with my new eyes.*

*I am learning to help wherever you are, wherever I
am needed. This can be done because I am in the
Light. When you feel despair, reach out to me. I will
come. My love for you truly does transcend from
Heaven to Earth. Finish your life with the
enthusiasm and zest that you had when we were
together in the physical sense.*

*You owe this to me, but more importantly, you owe it
to yourself. Life continues for both of us. I am with
you because I love you and I am in the Light.*

~ Author Unknown

Reminders

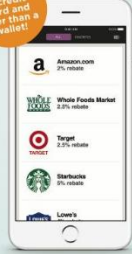
Please remember to send in your child's photo so that it can be added to the new
ICF Modesto-Riverbank website.
Send photos to: scasily@comcast.net

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!!

Support our cause whenever you shop!




You can use the Benefit app to pay for everything from groceries and clothing to dinner out and travel. We get a portion back every time you buy, and the amount we raise can make a big impact for the people we serve. See how easy it is!

Easy as a credit card and safer than a wallet!



- 1 Download the app.**
Benefit is a free download on your iPhone® or Android™ device.
- 2 Set up your secure profile.**
Benefit partners with top banks and financial institutions to ensure that your data is handled securely, and that your bank and credit card protections remain in place.
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Simply type our name or ZIP code in the Beneficiaries tab and select our name from the search results.
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When you're ready to pay, use the app to instantly purchase a digital gift card for the amount you need. You just show your phone at the checkout counter in a store, or use the gift card online.

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The golf tournament was a great success. The chapter was pleased to be a part of it. It was an honor for us to participate and help the Casity's to honor their beloved daughter.



I Will Always Talk About You Like You Are Still Alive



I tell stories about you all the time. Sometimes, I remember to use the past tense ~ that *was* your favorite drink, that *was* the song you loved to dance to, that *was* the type of car you drove.

But sometimes, it slips my mind and I speak in present tense. I still refer to your house as your house, even though someone else is living there now. I still celebrate your birthday. I still talk to you, even though my words are aimed at the sky instead of a phone.

I think a part of me still believes that you're still alive. I think a part of me refuses to accept that you're gone. And that's okay with me.

I really dislike the way that people look at me when I talk about you, like they need to find a way to change the subject, like the pain is still too fresh in my mind, like it's dangerous for me to speak your name.

I don't want you to become some taboo subject, something that our friends or family avoid like the plague. I want to keep telling stories about you. I want to keep talking about you like you're still alive. I'm not crazy. I know that you're gone. I accept that you're not coming back. I'm past my denial phase. However, I'm not going to tear up your pictures and push your memories to the back of my mind because it hurts to think of you. Yes, there's pain associated with you being gone, but there's so much more happiness mixed in.

I never want to forget you. I never want to lose the moments we shared. So I'm sorry if my honesty makes other people uncomfortable, if they would rather have me lock your name away and talk about a lighter subject ~ but I'm never going to stop mentioning how hard you made me laugh, how beautiful your smile looked, how much advice you gave to me that I still follow to this day.

I've reached the point where I can talk about you without bursting into tears ~ and even if I end up hitting a nerve, even if I cry ~ so what? What does it matter? I'm not ashamed that I love you, that I miss you. If someone else can't handle such raw emotion, if they tiptoe around your name, it's their problem. I won't apologize for being human.

I'm never going to forget you and I'm never going to stop talking about you. I love you, and it doesn't matter that you're gone because I'm going to keep your memory alive. I swear it!

thoughtcatalog.com



A Griever's Right to Choose Their Path



Do not let anyone else block your path with their version of how your grief should look, how your faith should look or how your beliefs should look.

There is no one path that a griever should walk. There is not even a right path. There is only your path. As a griever, you are already walking a path that you did not ask to be on. The death of your loved one washed away the life path you were walking with them, and thrust you onto this unwanted and lonely path of grief and loss. A path that initially appear to lead nowhere.

You are left trying to find a passage that will eventually lead you out of the darkness and back to a place where you can begin to repair the pieces of your heart and the fragments of your altered life. A griever has the right to choose which direction will be the most healing for their heart, even if others around them don't understand or agree with their choices.

We all grieve in our own way, in our own time, with our own thoughts about faith, and our own personal beliefs.

Some grievers choose to forge their own path, finding their own solutions as to what will help them heal their grieving hearts. Other grievers prefer to follow a well-traveled path that has been laid out for them by others. They rely on methods and organized beliefs that have worked for other grievers. **Both paths are valid.** Forge your own path or follow an already established trail. This choice is the griever's alone to make.

You may start down one path and realize that it is not right for you. Listen to your heart. Your heart is your inner compass and can help guide you when you need to change direction. Sometimes you will have to walk many paths to finally arrive at the one that is meant for you.

As grievers, we all share a common experience: Pain and loss. As grievers, we are all focused on the same goal: Healing our broken hearts.

Society doesn't always understand our pain or our choices. When we are judged to be grieving poorly or to have chosen the wrong path, we are only put in more pain. Sometimes other grievers don't understand our path either, and that is especially difficult. As grievers, we should do our best to support, and not judge, other grievers. We, as grievers, should have respect and tolerance for other grievers who may be on a different path than us.

There are many paths that all lead to the same destination: Healing.

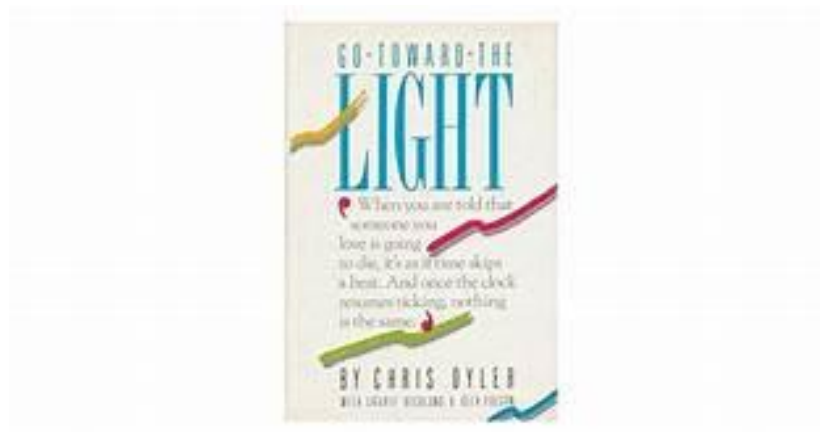
Your faith may be different than my faith. That is ok. Your culture, and how you perceive death and the afterlife, may be different than how my culture views death and the afterlife. That is ok. Everyone who is grieving is fighting a tough battle. We may not understand someone else's path, but that is ok, it is not our path to understand.

As a griever, you have rights. You have the right to choose your individual path to healing. The path is yours to walk. The choice is yours alone to make. Do not let anyone else block your path with their version of how your grief should look, how your faith should look or how your beliefs should look. Don't let anyone stop you from walking your path. The path is yours to choose, and yours to walk. Stay the course. Find your TRUE NORTH.

Book of the Month



This month's spotlight book is:



Please take full advantage of our chapter library. We have a nice selection of books 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.

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 _____

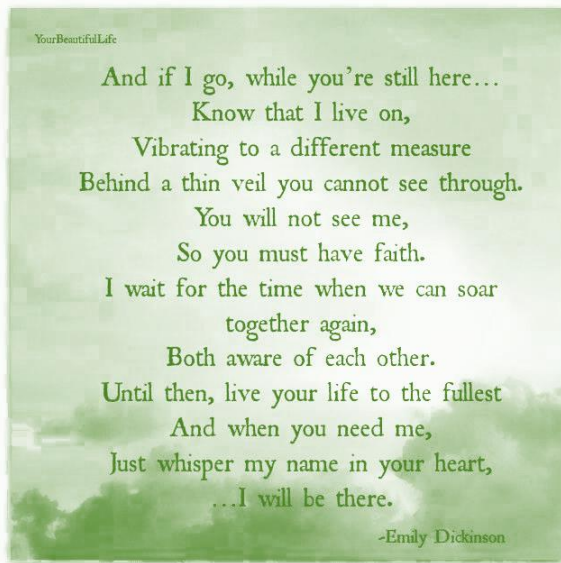
Your Name _____

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.



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 or by phone at 209-622-6786 or on Facebook.

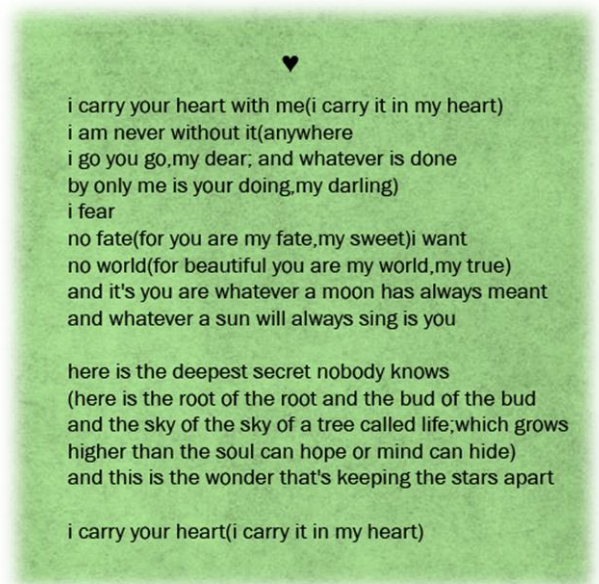


Thank you 7- Eleven stores at
2500 Geer Rd., Turlock, CA and
3225 McHenry Ave., Modesto, CA for
sponsoring our monthly
newsletter!!

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.



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



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