



Newsletter of the San Diego Chapter of "TCF"  
**The Compassionate Friends**  
 A non profit self-help organization for families who are grieving the death of a child.



July / August  
2020

Issue 150

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Location, see p. 3

Next Meeting

**Cancelled!**  
 Wednesday  
 July 1<sup>st</sup>  
 Back to  
 Zoom p 6

Wednesday  
 August 5th  
 Uncertain  
 Check Website

*These pages Dedicated with Love to:*



Andrea Lynn Montisano



Kristina Michelle Bennett

♥ Always In Our Hearts ♥



John Thomas Gittelson



Joshua James Lubrich

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 Oakbrook, IL 60522-3696  
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 Web Site: [www.compassionatefriends.org/](http://www.compassionatefriends.org/)

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## Donations and Love Gifts

Dedications and Love Gifts go towards the cost of: printing and mailing of this Newsletter; outreach activities to the newly bereaved; and other expenses necessary to continue our chapter in San Diego. These donations are tax deductible. Our sincerest thanks to all who honor their children in this way.

- ♥ Yvonne & Lucien Bennett-Niang — In Loving Memory of their daughter Kristina.
- ♥ Debbie & Dominic Montisano — In Loving Memory of their daughter Andrea.
- ♥ George Gittelson — In Loving Memory of his son John.
- ♥ Sandi and Mark Terrell — In Loving Memory of Joshua. To our beloved son & brother, Joshua: “We Love You and Miss You Forever and Always!! You will always be our "Jewel" in the family, one to be "Gone But Never Forgotten!" We miss you more with each passing day! You're still a part of everything we do; you're on our hearts, just like a tattoo, just like a tattoo, we'll always have you. Love, Mom, Dad, Best Friend Zachary and Stephane, Ryan and Kiersten with Granddaughter Lily Mae, Andrew and Virginia with Grandson's Andrew Joshua and Austin Lee, Best Friend Jason and Brittney with Grandson's Dylan Amir and Jayce Benjamin and Best Friends Forever, Persio!”

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## Missing You

I just can't believe it...  
 The sun still rises and sets,  
 The moon and stars still shine,  
 The flowers still bloom, The birds still sing.  
 I expected a change in everything  
 I just can't believe it...  
 It still gets dark and light,  
 The ocean still has waves,  
 The rain still rains, The wind still blows,  
 Is it because they do not know?  
 I just can't believe it...  
 I thought the world would stop  
 When in my house I found  
 an empty chair, a missing smile  
 I thought it would stop For just a while.  
 I just can't believe it...

Gretta Viney  
 TCF Yakima, WA

# The Compassionate Friends

## Mission Statement

"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".



## Telephone Friends

Ever feeling blue and need someone to talk to, who understands and cares. Just pick up the phone and call:

- LONG TERM ILLNESS     Lynn Lyon  
(760) 639-4601
- ONLY CHILD     Wendy Jones  
(619) 371-2335
- ALCOHOL RELATED     Elizabeth Richardson  
(619) 280-1832
- PARA HABLAR EN ESPAÑOL     David Bolaños Keyser  
(760) 310-3632

# Sorry, July Meeting Cancelled!!

**Meeting Place and Times**  
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF SAN DIEGO MEETS ON  
The first Wednesday of the month at:

**Nobel Recreation Center**  
8810 Judicial Drive  
San Diego, CA 92122

**Taking I 805 north exit Nobel Drive heading west, stay in right lane for right turn to Judicial Drive; move to left lane making left turn at first Traffic Signal. Follow parking lot down to the end (2<sup>nd</sup> Bldg.) There'll be a few Stair steps a few paces more, entrance to right. Walkway near. Ample parking. Nobel Drive runs east – west about one mile north of hwy. 52.**

**Latest on Meeting Updates: [www.sdctf.org](http://www.sdctf.org)**

## OF NOTE

**The Compassionate Friends is not a religious organization. All bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents are welcome to TCF no matter your personal religious beliefs.**

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## About Our Newsletter

**Cost of printing and mailing our newsletters is expensive. Thanks to all of you who send in a Love Gift whenever you can, we are able to keep our monthly newsletters going. It encourages us when we hear from you.**

**We hope to hear from each of our readers sometime during the year. Your gift does not need to be a great amount to make a difference. It all helps...and it offers each of us the opportunity to remember your child, too, in a special way when we see his or her name. Each child touches our hearts, and in various ways, bonds us together.**

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## To Place Child's Picture In Newsletter

**If you wish to have your child's picture in our newsletter please use the Application / Love Gifts form on the back page. Recommended for Love Gifts is \$30. Deadline for submission to the Sept / Oct issue is August 15.**



***Our Children – Loved, Missed and Remembered  
July & August***

**We remember the families of:**



**Birthdays**

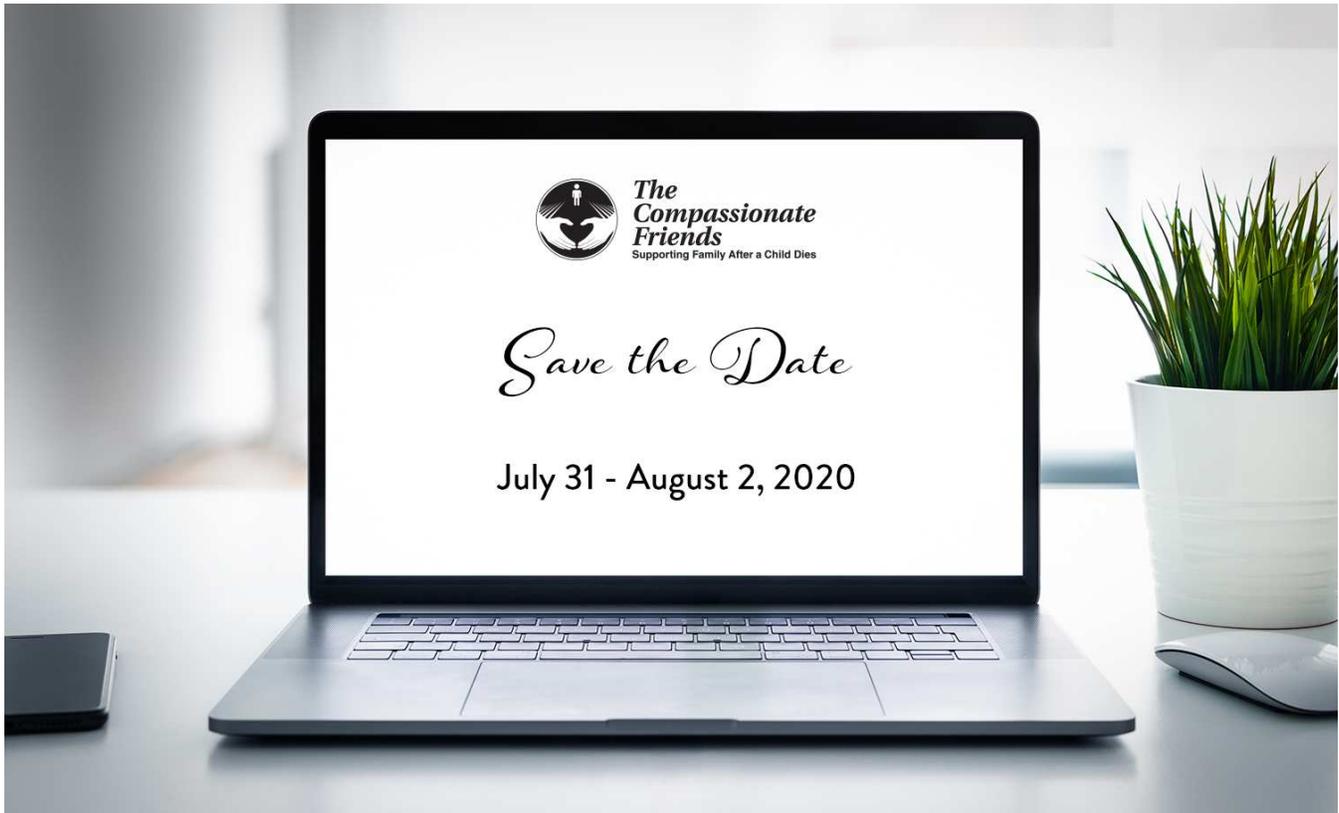
*Alan James Hein, born 7-1*  
*Matthew C. Colbert, born 7-6*  
*Karandeep Singh, born 7-8*  
*John Thomas Gittelson, born 7-15*  
*Heather Rose Powell, born 7-16*  
*Matthew Steven Spiewak, born 7-17*  
*Douglas Lorente, born 7-19*  
*Jerome Allen, born 7-19*  
*Kelli R. Smith, born 7-19*  
*Sara Elizabeth Chandler, born 7-20*  
*Lisa Trujillo, born 7-23*  
*Emily Quinlan, born 7-26*  
*Brittany Star Curcio, born 7-27*  
*Nicole Clark, born 7-27*  
*Ellie Kennison, born 7-31*  
*Trevor Shane Kirby, born 7-31*  
*Michael Lee Collins, born 8-4*  
*Derek Reed Thomas, born 8-5*  
*Andrea Lynn Montisano, born 8-10*  
*Kashad Harvell, born 8-15*  
*Delia Kelly Sables, born 8-16*  
*Lawrence O'Brien, born 8-16*  
*Julie Hart, born 8-21*  
*Nick Jellison, born 8-29*  
*Scott Ray Sturgess, born 8-29*  
*Nicole Kaitlynn, born 8-30*  
*Allison Anne Dunn, born 8-31*

**Anniversaries**

*Joshua James Lubrich, died 7-1*  
*Mark Metz, died 7-1*  
*Heather Rose Powell, died 7-2*  
*Michelle Cleveland, died 7-2*  
*John Thomas Gittelson, died 7-6*  
*Kenneth W. McCormick III, died 7-6*  
*Kristina Michelle Bennett, died 7-12*  
*Matthew Aiden Baxley, died 7-14*  
*Justin Knapp, died 7-28*  
*Rick E. Pieramico, died 7-30*  
*Katie R. Dix, died 8-11*  
*Yehudit Sherman, died 8-2-*  
*Craig Thomas Markley, died 8-2*  
*Daniel A. Pitcher, died 8-5*  
*Lindsey Faye Whelchel, died 8-6*  
*Brent Foster Whelchel, died 8-6*  
*Scott Ray Sturgess, died 8-8*  
*Michael Lee Collins, died 8-11*  
*David Ward Ray, died 8-13*  
*Richard Wilson, died 8-14*  
*Mitchell Szegi, died 8-16*  
*Todd Schulman, died 8-17*  
*Alexis Morgan Dale, died 8-20*  
*Lawrence Wayne Hennessee, died 8-20*  
*Pamela Broderick, died 8-20*  
*Sumi Suresh, died 8-31*  
*Delia Kelly Sables, died 8-31*

# 43RD TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE

## JULY 31 - AUGUST 2



WE ARE EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE TCF'S FIRST VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

PLEASE SAVE THE DATE – FRIDAY, JULY 31, 2020 TO SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2020

Thank you to all who completed [our survey](#) last month requesting feedback about conference alternatives due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We had over 1,000 responses with overwhelming support for TCF to offer the safer option of a virtual national conference this year. Since that time, we have been working diligently to evaluate the possibility of organizing a virtual conference.

TCF's Virtual Conference will provide an important opportunity for our community to connect in a way that is feasible right now. It also offers the opportunity for many people to attend who may not have been able to do so in the past for a variety of reasons.

The three-day conference will include:

- Keynote Sessions
- 70 plus workshop choices
- Sibling Sunday
- Candle Lighting Ceremony

## Virtual Conference Continued

- Sharing Circles
- Silent Auction
- Entertainment

Additional information:

- The conference will take place on a Zoom platform with an [online registration](#) system.
- Registration fees for the three-day event will be \$65 per person (early bird registration) and \$85 per person after July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020.
- Information about the TCF Walk to Remember along with more conference details will be shared in the coming weeks.
- Training and orientation will be offered prior to the conference for attendees who may need some extra technology support in order to participate.

Although we would all love to be together in person, we can still connect, support, and gather as a community through a virtual event. We will continue to navigate this new environment we're in and we hope you will join us!

[registration](#) will open soon, and we will make an announcement with a registration link provided when that happens. For now, please save the dates and look forward to connecting virtually with your TCF family through an enriching and inspiring virtual event.

Sincerely,

Shari O'Loughlin  
Connor's Mom & Patti's Sister  
*Chief Executive Officer*

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## San Diego Chapter

Zoom Meeting July 1 at 7 PM.

Link will be provided to us by Gary Hochstetler.



## THOUGHTS FROM A GOLD STAR MOM

*Posted on May 25th, 2020*

If you have already endured the death of a child, spouse, parent or sibling while in service to our country, you probably already know what I am about to say. If you are a warrior who lost one of your battle buddies, a comrade in arms, due to combat or due to the effects or exposure of what happened while on a mission... then you too will understand what I am about to say.... because you have been there.

Like myself and countless others I have talked to, there seems to be one thing that we all have in common. It is a constant continual struggle daily with the anger, the pain, the sadness, the uncertainty, and the survivors guilt questions that haunt us on a daily basis.

You still find yourself begging for a do-over. One that would have led to different circumstances. One that would have had a different outcome that didn't end in the death of a Fallen Warrior. It is hard not to go there especially on Memorial Day.

Many probably already know what I am speaking about because they, like I, are alive and someone that we love has died.

When people say they cannot imagine what it must be like to lose a child... I tell them they are right and that there will just never be the appropriate

words. The only way I can even begin to convey to them the feeling of what we have been through... is to tell them to imagine being in a helicopter that is traveling up high over an ocean. There is no land in sight. Then, suddenly... for no reason that YOU can comprehend....you are shoved out the door without a parachute... and then WHAM you hit the water hard.

As the initial shock begins to wear off... you [start](#) to feel the pain and it's excruciating. You think... this can't be happening. This can't be true. But then the reality starts to seep into your subconscious...but you are numb with disbelief. You can hardly move. While trying to come to your senses you notice that the helicopter starts to move out of site.... and that you have been left below in the cold turbulent water with a storm brewing around you.

You don't know what to do... you feel you should do something... but you can't think. Your body moves.... but your mind is not working. You look for land... but all you see is water. You know you should swim.... but have no clue as to which way to go. Your body tires from treading water. It is an effort just to keep your head above the waves. It is an effort just to breathe. You have fleeting thoughts about how it might be so much easier to just fill your lungs with water and allow yourself to sink... plummeting down into the depths of the ocean below. The wind is howling... the sky is black and the waves are enormous. You fear the storm will never end and you don't know how you will survive.

Then one day you start to realize that the turbulent storm is beginning to wane. The waves that were once over 40 feet high are subsiding. You slowly begin to realize that you are swimming... even though you are unsure of your direction. You begin to start thinking you may be able to survive... if only you can find something to hold on to.... and then you see it. It's just a plank of wood... but it allows you to grab hold and it gives you hope.

As you drift though the water.... still clinging to the board.... you become aware that you are not alone. There are others in the water with you. Some have been in the water longer than you.... and they have somehow managed to lash their planks together. They have built a boat. And not only have they built a boat but they are rowing. Throwing you a life line they pull you in. Although they greet you with open

arms.... they wish they did not have to welcome you aboard... because they know the price you have paid for this trip is way too high.

But without hesitation they take you on board their vessel. With their knowledge and experiences though this tough journey they comfort you, they provide a safe haven for you to tell your story, they listen, and they listen.... and they listen.... because they understand, because they get it. They encourage you to speak your loved one's name, to share your Warrior's story... to share with them your journey. They give you hope.

Although, unsure of your destination... knowing that your life will never be the same again...you join them and slowly begin to row.

My name is Kelly Kowall and I am the proud gold star mother of Spec. Corey Joseph Kowall. On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, my son was killed in Afghanistan on a combat mission. My life as I knew it came to an end.

It was on an evening, many years ago, that two soldiers knocked on my door and then proceeded to pushed me out of that helicopter. I remember screaming during my fall... and I remember my cries of anguish and [pain](#) after hitting the water. Although the ocean is a treacherous place when there is a storm, when the waters are calm... it can be quite magical and healing. I guess that is

why I envision my journey of grief to that of being adrift in an ocean as I try to survive and navigate my way to a new world. Although the waters are not always calm.... for the moments when they are... they can provide time for hope and healing. How do I know? Because I have been out in that ocean. I have endured many storms... and I will continue to do so as they come.... but mostly I know... because I am a survivor.

Bless each and every one of you during this Memorial Day as we reflect on the Warriors who made the ultimate sacrifice for our continued freedom. A [debt](#) that can never be repaid... but one that we have the obligation to remember and honor.

As a Gold Star Mother, my hope will always be that each one of us will always be able to find a safe port or harbor when a storm blows in... as we continue on OUR grief journey. Be kind to yourself on this Memorial Day and may our Warriors NEVER be forgotten!



## KELLY KOWALL

Kelly Kowall (Proud Gold Star Mother of SPC Corey Kowall) President & Founder of My Warrior's Place.

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



## DEATH CHOSE HIM

*Posted on March 14th, 2020*

I have struggled with a question for many months now. Was Tom mentally ill, or did he just decide he could no longer go on? Is mental illness a label we put on someone who dies by suicide to lessen the blow of the loss and make it more palatable for those left behind?

If Tom chose suicide to escape this world, then I as a parent must have failed him somehow, and his death is a conviction of my failures making it doubly hard to [accept](#). But if I can label it as him suffering from undiagnosed depression and known, but untreated, anxiety, that softens the blow a little. I can say he was not willing or able to ask for help overcoming his internal struggles, and that, although still hard to swallow, shifts the blame, at least partly, from me to him. Somehow, that makes it a little easier.

Some people say those who die by suicide choose death over life, take the easy way out, or are selfish. Those words cut into my [heart](#), because I do not consider Tom to be a quitter, not up to a challenge, or someone to put his needs before others'. Although he was cynical and loved sarcasm, he also was generous with his words and deeds. He chose his friends carefully, but once screened into the tribe, they could count on him. He gave thoughtful gifts. He helped family members, teachers, and friends in selfless ways. I have

heard many stories of his simple, thoughtful acts – helping put up chairs at the end of a class period, inviting bullied strangers to join him for lunch, buying a friend a pop and sitting under a tree talking. Tom was a good kid. Imperfect, but aren't we all?

I cannot imagine Tom would choose to execute his final act willingly, knowing the lasting devastation it would cause. The Tom I knew and loved would not have left his lifeless body to be found by those who loved him the most. He would not have abandoned family and friends forever anguished by his absence. He would not have wanted us to suffer in his death as he did in life. He would have thought through the ramifications of his actions. My Tom would not have chosen death; therefore, I must believe mental illness changed him and allowed death to choose him.

*Copyright 2016 Kimberly Starr*



### **KIMBERLY STARR**

After the 2015 suicide of her son, Tom, Kimberly chose to dedicate herself to suicide prevention education and talking openly about her grief journey. Kimberly is honored to have presented at secondary schools for both staff and students and at colleges in both classes and for student groups, as well as for Gold Star Families, service organizations, sororities, young mom groups, hospitals, government organizations, and community events. In addition, soon after Tom's death, Kimberly chronicled her grief journey in short pieces which she compiled into a book entitled *457 Days: A Mother's Journey Along Grief's Path*. She hopes her words can provide solace to others experiencing a similar loss and help loved ones learn to walk beside suicide survivors as they navigate their loss. Kimberly received her bachelor's degree in theater from Whitman College and her master's degree in theater production from Central Washington University. In addition to her writing and prevention work, she teaches theatre classes at both the high school and college levels. Starr is married to L.J. Da Corsi and has two sons, Timothy and Thomas.

## A Journey to the “New Normal”

May 31 marked seven years since my only sibling Dave died from cancer at age 32. This June 28 we would have been celebrating Dave’s 40th birthday with a big party, and I’d be kidding him about going bald, just like all the Snapp men before him. Instead, I’ll be getting ready for the TCF National Conference, at which I’ll share memories of his brilliance, great smile, and sense of humor with those who will never have the pleasure of meeting him in person.

At this point in my grief journey, most will be good memories of how Dave lived, rather than bad memories of how he died. I can’t recall the moment when that shift of perspective occurred, but I would like to share a few memories and milestones that have marked the way:

- Months after Dave died, I went to see the movie “Big”, starring Tom Hanks, and “lost it” when his mother stared out the window wondering if she’d ever see him again. I watched the movie again recently and didn’t lose it.
- It was three months before I felt up to sharing with anyone the details of the day my brother died at his home in Bellevue, Washington, in the company of Mom, Dad, and me. On the way home from that emotional conversation, I drove the wrong way down a one way street in downtown Chicago – it might be smart to have a friend drive you to your first few TCF meetings!
- I discovered that the grief path is not a straight line. A few good days can be followed by several bad ones. I’ve heard other TCF members call this their “roller coaster ride.”
- For a year, I couldn’t keep the radio on if “Wind Beneath My Wings” came on. For the next year, I kept it on but cried through it. Now, I can usually make it all the way through without any tears!
- With the help of TCF, I realized that despite friends expecting it to be possible,

I’d never be “back to normal.” My focus instead shifted to finding my “new normal”. While I can’t point to a time when that happened (probably after the 1990 TCF Conference), THAT was a milestone.

- For three Christmases after Dave died, I didn’t put up a tree in my condo. For Christmas, 1991, as I was getting out ornaments for my first tree since his death, I came across a bunch of ornaments that he had had in his apartment. I came totally unglued then, but now I look forward to seeing those ornaments each Christmas.
- It was three years before I felt that I had enough emotional energy to pursue a relationship. Even now, I don’t have a lot of tolerance for guys I go out with that gripe about their brothers or sisters.

My most vivid “landmark” to date along my grief journey came in February 1993. Following my Dad’s father’s death in December, 1992, we were in Atlanta cleaning out my grandfather’s apartment, and I came across a pile of post cards and letters that Dave had written to my grandparents through the years. Earlier in my journey, a “blind side” such as that would have sent me into a tailspin. In this case, though, my immediate reaction was one of happiness, for I had found a part of Dave that I didn’t know I still had! I saved a few of the post cards, sent a couple to my cousin who was referenced in some of the letters, and (amazingly) threw the rest away. It was fun to share the memories, but I didn’t feel the need to hang onto them. It was at that point, nearly five years after Dave’s death, that I truly felt as if I was closing in on that “new normal.”

Karen Snapp  
Frisco, Texas

From the TCF Stages Newsletter, Summer 1995  
In Memory of my brother, Dave

**THE  
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FRIENDS  
SAN DIEGO CHAPTER  
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**① OUR LOCAL WEB SITE**

Visit the San Diego Chapter homepage:

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

Email: [leaders@sdtcf.org](mailto:leaders@sdtcf.org)

The San Diego chapter home page has information about our chapter and links to more grief resources.

**TCF Regional Coordinator**

**① OTHER LOCAL RESOURCES**

**MADD** 858-564-0780  
**Empty Cradle** 619-595-3887

**Survivors of Suicide**  
619-482-0297  
[info@SOSLsd.org](mailto:info@SOSLsd.org)

**Bereaved Parents of the USA**  
[www.bereavedparentsusa.org](http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org)

**Parents of Murdered Children**  
**National** 888-818-POMC  
**Local** 619-281-3972

**Alive Alone - for now childless parents**  
[www.alivealone.org](http://www.alivealone.org)

**① INFORMATION ON THE NET**

Visit the TCF national homepage:  
[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

The national home page is filled with information and grief resources on-line. A "chat" room for on-line discussion with bereaved families is available.

**Chat Room schedule:**

Mon 9-10 pm EST: General Bereavement  
Mon 10-11pm EST: Men's Chat  
Tue 9-10 pm EST: Pregnancy and Infant Death  
Thur 8-9 pm EST: No surviving children  
Thur 9-10 pm EST: Siblings (Minimum age is 13)  
Thur 10-11 pm: Grieving Alone (Single parents)

**member web/e-mail**

<http://www.RickPieramico.com>

Charlene Tate  
[caricat83@hotmail.com](mailto:caricat83@hotmail.com)

Elene Bratton  
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[www.jamiesjoy.org](http://www.jamiesjoy.org)

Tami Carter [haley1@san.rr.com](mailto:haley1@san.rr.com)

**TCF INFORMATION PACKAGE**

If you would like to send an information package on TCF to someone you think could benefit, (either for themselves or others) phone 619-583-1555. Leave a message with your name and phone number and the name and full address of the person you would like to receive the package.

*Be a compassionate friend*

**Our Lost Children's Photos for Newsletter**

The recommended donation for your child's photo in our newsletter is \$30. Children's pictures will be in color. Donations and love gifts are always greatly appreciated.

**WE WELCOME YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS**



Deadline for submission to the September / October 2020 Issue of The Compassionate Friend is

Auagust 15, 2020

We warmly welcome your contributions, both original and inspirational writings. Please indicate sources of any non-original texts.



# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Supporting Family After a Child Dies  
San Diego County Chapter

3555 Rosecrans St. #114-569, San Diego CA 92110

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

July / August 2020

## Love Gifts

*Donations and love gifts in memory of your loved one enable us to reach bereaved parents with telephone calls and information, and help defray newsletter and mailing expenses. Please indicate any special tribute you wish printed in our newsletter. When making a donation, please specify the San Diego chapter. Make your checks payable to:*

**TCF, San Diego Chapter, 3555 Rosecrans St. #114-569, San Diego CA 92110**

From: \_\_\_\_\_ In Memory Of: \_\_\_\_\_

## TCF The Compassionate Friends *newsletter application*

New Address

New subscription

Remove from list

Please send newsletter by regular mail.

By email, address \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Birth date: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of death: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Cause: \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_

Your relationship to child: \_\_\_\_\_

Siblings/Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I would like my child's name to be listed on the anniversary pages of the chapter newsletter

Yes, I would like my child's name to be listed on the anniversary pages of the chapter web site  
If you have lost more than one child, please use a separate form for each child.