



Bridgeport, Connecticut Chapter

January/February 2026

Newsletter

Volume 26 No. 1 & 2

Dedicated with love to all children who have died and their parents, families, friends...

The Compassionate Friends

TCF is a national non-profit, self-help support organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to families grieving the death of a child of any age from any cause. There is no religious affiliation and no individual membership fees or dues are charged.

Mission Statement

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

“...how complicated and individual grief is; the time required for healing cannot be measured against any fixed calendar.”

Please contact us at 475-882-9695

Leave your name, number and message, and we will return your call. Please send all correspondence to the following address:

TCF c/o Leslie Minasi, 34 Cedar Hill, Easton, CT 06612

Email: contact@tcf-bridgeport.org

TCF Website: www.tcf-bridgeport.org

Facebook: www.Facebook.com/pages/The-Compassionate-Friends-Bridgeport-Chapter

National Office Address:

The Compassionate Friends
48660 Pontiac Trail #930805
Wixom, MI 48393
630-990-0010 877-969-0010

Regional Co-Ordinator

Mary Lemley
203-483-9935
Mklem43@aol.com

MONTHLY MEETINGS

When: Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of Every Month year-round. If the Stratford School system lets the children out early or if school is closed due to inclement weather, Sterling House will be closed and the meeting for the month will be cancelled.

Our next two meetings will be held on:

January 13, 2026 6:45 – 8:45 pm

February 10, 2026 6:45 – 8:45 pm

Where: Sterling Community Center
2283 Main Street, Stratford, CT 06614

Directions:

Take I-95 North from Bridgeport. Get off Exit 32 West Broad Street. At the end of ramp, go straight to the second traffic light which is Main Street. Turn left. Sterling Community Center is a Victorian Brick House on the opposite side of the street. Park in Sterling Community Center's parking lot. Use back or side entrance. We meet in the downstairs large room. Phone: 203-378-2606 Please bring a canned good or nonperishable food item to the meeting for the Food Pantry.

Bridgeport/Stratford & Vicinity Chapter

Steering Committee

Chapter Co-Leaders

Dr. Charles Kochan and Claudia Margitay-Balogh

Secretary: Janet Spray

Treasurer/Website Coordinator: Leslie Minasi

Zoom Coordinator: Kristen Cable

On line newsletter: Claudia Margitay-Balogh

Michele Peloso

Hospitality: Dee Tutka

Community Outreach and Librarian: Michele Peloso

LIVING LIFE IS STILL AN EFFORT

By: Annette Mennen Baldwin in memory of her son Todd Mennen TCF Katy, Texas

I am a different person since my child died. I am a different person than I was six months after my child died, and I will be a different person in another year. My basic personality is still intact. Most of my mind works well enough, and my perception of life, love, people, and events is probably heightened but fairly unchanged. Still, I am a different person.

Now I have to work at living my life. I make myself do the things that I once took for granted such as getting dressed each day, going to work, and handling responsibilities I have chosen to accept. I make myself laugh at silly jokes. Sometimes, I even have to force myself to really listen to others. I am surprised when I laugh spontaneously, smile for no particular reason, or say something "prophetic."

What is going on here? Who am I? Why has the joy of life disappeared?

I believe I have found the answer to these questions and even to questions I haven't yet asked. It lies in the nature of losing one's child to death. Initially, we work very hard to maintain sanity. Gradually, we expand the boundaries of our lives. Carefully, we add events, people, responsibilities, and simple enjoyment. We soon learn that our progress is measured in months and years, not in days and weeks.

My awakening to this new reality came at a meeting of The Compassionate Friends. It has been rekindled at each meeting since then. I learn about myself by observing others. I see the sorrow in each parent. I see parents whose children have been gone for many years and can still weep openly and later talk about a special event they are planning. I see parents whose loss was recent. They appear to be normal, controlled, and sociable on many levels, and then they suddenly and mysteriously crumble before my eyes. I note the change that occurs in someone's voice or in his or her body language, or in their perspective as they share their experiences.

That's the journey. We set our own limits as to what is acceptable for us. Over time we shift from minimalist boundaries to a good representation of the person we once were. We have major setbacks: birthdays, holidays, death anniversaries. We have minor setbacks: a picture, a forgotten scent, a baby shoe, a poignant memory. We sob, we scream, we withdraw. But we do go on. With the help of our Compassionate Friends, we move forward and are supported when we suffer a setback. We each deal with the many facets of our grief. We learn from others. We teach others. We grow from the dialogue. Our kindred spirits bring questions, answers, and peace.

Who am I today? I am a fairly well-balanced mother of one beautiful child who no longer is alive. I am where I should be. When will I stop evolving? Probably never.



LOVE GIFTS

A "Love Gift" is a donation given in memory of our children by family or friends who wish to support the work of our chapter. There are no fees or dues to belong to The Compassionate Friends. All contributions are voluntary. Our Bridgeport & Vicinity Chapter depends solely on donations to fund our meetings. A "Love Gift" will help defer expenses such as our website, meeting place, newsletter, telephone, Candle Lighting Event, books, brochures, and supplies which help to assist grieving families. **These gifts are much needed and are always welcome.**

"Love Gifts" are acknowledged every two months in the newsletter. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. *The Compassionate Friends is a registered 501(c)(3) organization.*

Please make out your "Love Gift" check to:

The Compassionate Friends Bridgeport Chapter
c/o Leslie Minasi, treasurer
34 Cedar Hill Road, Easton, CT 06612

In Loving Honor of **Shawn Gerte's**

1 Year Angelversary (11.17.2024)

"It's been a year since you left us. We miss you and love you every day. Keep watch over us, our dear Shawny. You are always in our hearts and soul."

All our love, Mommy and Raymond

In memory of my son, **Austin Buoni**

God Bless The Compassionate Friends!

Happy 27th Birthday
my beautiful
Sean Garrett Rice
Mommy loves you!
Gwen Rice

In Loving Memory
of my daughter **Lauren Tvardzik**
on her second Angelversary
"I miss you now and forever with every
beat of my broken heart, but I know
you are happy and at peace."

With All My Love, Mom

Remembering Marshall
On January 18, 2026, I honor
Marshall D. Maxwell on what
would have been his 33rd birthday.
Marshall Matters!
Always loved, Always remembered,
Rest in peace, son

*In loving memory of our
granddaughter Kaylena on
her angelversary.
Love, Vincent & Kathleen Cercone*

*Viviana,
Your love and light
continue to shine on,
today and forever.*



Our Children

Loved, Missed, and Remembered....

May we keep parents, siblings, and grandparents observing these birthdays during January and February in our thoughts and in our hearts.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Adam Jarvis	January 1	Bria Marie McConnell Villanueva	January 14
Ryan Joyce	January 2	Kadeelyn Konstantino	January 15
Joann Simko Pasanella	January 3	Ryan Charles Brennan	January 18
Jennifer McLeod	January 5	Marshall D. Maxwell	January 18
James Blomberg	January 5	Stephen M. Ceslik III	January 18
Salvatore (Sammy) Darigo Jr.	January 5	Brian Watcke	January 19
Laurie Povinelli	January 6	Roy H. Smith Jr.	January 20
Austin Buoni	January 7	Henry Roger Girard Jr.	January 20
Victor M. Marella, Jr.	January 8	Lisa Marie Mancini	January 21
Ryan Phillips	January 8	Jared Arthur Levine	January 21
Wendy Joan Carpenter	January 8	Kevin Kuczo	January 21
Maria Skenderis Isola	January 9	Sarah Cynthia Koury	January 22
Bernard E. Koetsch II	January 9	DJ Art	January 24
Scott Lawrence Boos	January 10	Christopher Reyes Perez	January 24
Kaylene Cerccone	January 10	John R. Jones IV	January 26
Fred A Poppa Jr.	January 11	Stephen D. Tomasky	January 26
John Napolitano	January 11	John Brady Chapin	January 26
Marissa Irene Irwin	January 11	Sean Garrett Rice	January 29
Jayden Chetlen	January 12	Kathleen Eileen Bye	January 29
Denise Glover	January 13	Christopher Hubinger	January 30
Ciara O'Driscoll	January 13		

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Sarah Beth Robinson Huszar	February 1	Jorge Ospina	February 18
Angel Valle	February 2	Evon Edwards	February 19
Caitlin Logan	February 4	Ashley Joy	February 19
Michelle Peters	February 4	Andrew Bobko	February 20
Andrew James Donnellan	February 5	Brandon Michael Velez	February 22
Christopher Mulligan	February 5	Adele Adesuwa Iyamu	February 23
Brenna McNameey	February 5	Gary Salvatore Bellard	February 23
Karen Wegman	February 7	Sean Russell	February 24
Brendan Thomas Murren	February 7	Mitchell Elliot Harris	February 24
Thomas Chisholm	February 10	Marcus Ramos	February 24
Amanda Lynn Daigle	February 10	Howie Tassitano	February 24
Matthew Alterio	February 10	William Cleary	February 25
Grace Marie Evanko	February 15	Jean Phillip Lominy	February 29
Brian James Chepya	February 13	Robert S. Murphy	February 29
Dawn Kosarko	February 14		
Alex Recupino	February 14		
Donna Carpenter	February 15		
Valerie F. Poppa	February 15		
Alyssa Anne Mushin	February 17		



OUR CHILDREN LOVED, MISSED, AND REMEMBERED

JANUARY ANGELVERSARIES

A life that touches the hearts of others goes on forever...

Sincere Pettway	January 3	Angel Valle	January 20
Charles Robert Martin	January 4	William Mariano Vargas	January 22
David L. Carlson	January 4	Jorge Ospina	January 22
Christopher Joseph Haley	January 4	Jessica Elizabeth Kolaric	January 26
Kenneth (KJ) A. Bartek Jr.	January 4	James Hrzic	January 27
Brian John Lilly Jr.	January 4	Jonas Blackwell	January 29
Issiah Matthew VanWagner	January 5	Ozzy Zack	January 30
John Scinto	January 6	Stephen M. Ceslik III	January 30
Robert Smuniewski	January 8	George W. Juleson IV	January 31
Denise Pietrowski	January 9	William (Billy) Rudolph	January 31
Chelsea Marie Cunha	January 10		
Scott Milo	January 11		
Kevonna Edwards	January 12		
James Carbone	January 12		
Brendan Thomas Murren	January 12		
Bria Marie Villanueva	January 12		
Henry Roger Girard Jr.	January 14		
Lauren Alexandra Tvardzik	January 14		
Stephen D. Tomasky	January 15		
Michelle Peters	January 16		
Gina Dechello	January 16		
Ciara O'Driscoll	January 16		
Adam Jarvis	January 17		
Conor Poholek	January 18		
Julian Cerrato	January 19		
Jason Walowitz	January 19		

“Love’s heart that was
once broken by loss
is restored to love again
by the heart compelled
to love.”

OUR CHILDREN LOVED, MISSED, AND REMEMBERED

FEBRUARY ANGELVERSARIES

A life that touches the hearts of others goes on forever...

Jamie Ritter	February 2	Marci Byiteck	February 19
Debra Napolitano	February 4	Darrell Bennett	February 20
Kristin Ann Carveth	February 4	David Ehman	February 21
Masha Robinson	February 4	Nathan Burrows	February 22
Kevin Kuczo	February 4	Erin Babineau	February 22
Amber Kingersky	February 5	Eric S. Hultzberg	February 26
James (Jimmy) Casey	February 5	Keith McCarthy	February 26
Charles Anthony Curcio	February 5	Paul-John Heron	February 28
Colin J. Bussolari	February 6	Alexa Rae Heron	February 28
Danny Murphy	February 7	Ryan Charles Brennan	February 28
Dexter Hill	February 7		
Kadeelyn Konstantino	February 7		
Nick Felisko	February 8		
Nancy Keller	February 8		
Christa Joenell Luttmann	February 10		
Beverly Bruno	February 12		
Bobby Bonacci	February 12		
Michael Wigglesworth	February 13		
Lorenzo Z. Deaderick	February 14		
Zoe Elizabeth Anyan	February 15		
Donna Carpenter	February 17		
Joseph Kowalczyk Jr.	February 18		



We Are the Bereaved

By Antoinette Nelson, Chase's mom



Antoinette Nelson writes a morning coffee post every day since her son Chase was killed on March 15, 2021 by a drunk driver. Her beautiful, blue-eyed boy will forever be 21.

We are the bereaved.

Some of us may retreat

Some of us may gather.

Some of us may remain stoic

Some of us may weep for days

Some of us a life-time.

Some of us will speak of them often

Some of us may not

Some of us may speak of wanting to join our child while struggling to live for others.

Some days manic

Some days we can't

And some days we can.

This Is us...

We are the bereaved.

Imprisoned by it -

Slave to love

and to a life lost.

Bound by grief -

We did not choose this.

It chose us.

This is normal.

This is normalizing grief!

by Antoinette Nelson