



The Compassionate Friends

The North Port Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child or Grandchild dies

Winter 2026 Edition

The turning of the year doesn't erase the weight of the last. If you are entering this new year with a grieving heart, be gentle with yourself. You don't have to have "new year energy." You don't have to leave your love, or your loss behind in December.

May the coming year bring you gentle days, moments of unexpected light, and the permission to heal at your own pace. You are not alone in the quiet. ✨

Never forget.

How far you've come. Everything you have gotten through. All the times you have pushed on even when you felt you couldn't. All the mornings you got out of bed no matter how hard it was. All the times you wanted to give up but you got through another day. Never forget how much strength you have learned and developed along the way.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Third Tuesday of the month

Next Meeting:

January 20, 2026

6pm

LOCATION:

Shannon Staub Library

4675 Career Lane

North Port, FL 34289

LEADER:

Beth Wooten

bethwootenlcs@gmail.com

(469)-475-1650

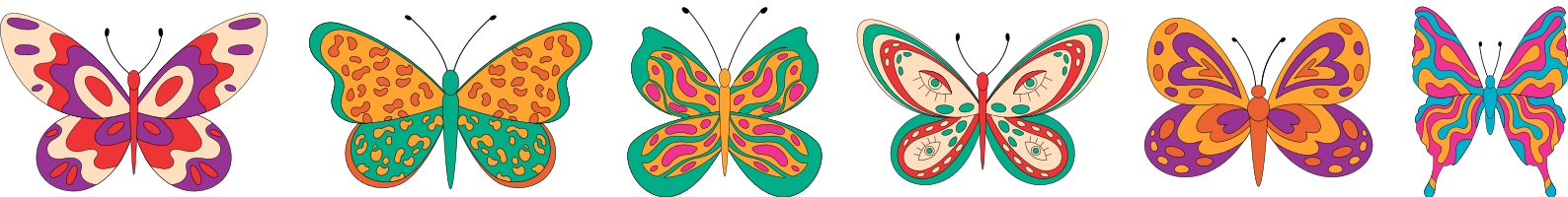
NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Dawn Stephens

Morningofthesun@aol.com

Have something to share? A poem, a story, what you did in honor of your child? Email Dawn!

Our meetings offer a supportive environment where you can grieve, remember, and honor your child, grandchild, or sibling. We're delighted to have you join us!



BUTTERFLY RELEASE

SAVE THE DATE!

March 22nd

Garden of The Five Senses

4299 Pan American Blvd

North Port, FL 34827

12pm

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A PRE-PAID EVENT

RSVP AND PAYMENT DUE BY 3/7/25

OPTIONS TO PAY:

*** CASH AT 1/20 OR 2/17 MEETING**

*** MAIL CHECK MADE OUT TO NORTHPORT COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS TO BE RECEIVED BY 3/7, TO BETH WOOTEN, 27915 ARROWHEAD CIRCLE, PUNTA GORDA, FL 33982**

*** PAY VIA PAYMENT LINK PROVIDED VIA EMAIL WHEN YOU RSVP PAY VIA CREDIT CARD. (SAME RSVP/ PAYMENT AS CANDLELIGHT)**

The Chapter is providing:

One complimentary butterfly to release in honor of their child(ren), grandchild, or sibling for Group members who want to attend (ie if you have been to one of our events or meetings)

We will provide- waters, pastries, and some fruit.

All other butterflies are \$10 each - can have their family members and friends pay for a butterfly in honor of their loved one to be released.

Bring a chair and a beverage if you like.

Managing grief in the new year



When coping with grief during the new year, there are several alternative approaches that can be more supportive and nurturing than traditional celebrations.

Here are some ways to navigate this challenging time.

Choose self-care instead of self-improvement

Instead of setting rigid self-improvement goals, prioritize self-compassion and self-care. This means getting adequate sleep, eating nourishing food, and moving your body every day. Instead of viewing these activities as opportunities for improvement, look at them as a way of treating yourself with kindness so you can support yourself through grief. Avoid adding pressure with unrealistic expectations, and take each day as it comes.

Create meaningful rituals

Develop personal rituals or traditions that provide comfort and honour your loved one. This could include lighting a candle in their memory, planting a tree, or simply making time each day for quiet reflection or journalling.

Plan for difficult days.

Set intentions, not resolutions

We all know how hard it is to come up with new year resolutions, and the added pressure of trying to stick to them. Give yourself permission to avoid this ritual and set gentle intentions for the coming year instead. Intentions differ from resolutions in that they focus on overall direction and mindset rather than specific, measurable goals.

Setting intentions allows for more flexibility and compassion, which are crucial when dealing with the ebbs and flows of grief. It acknowledges that progress isn't always linear and that some days will be harder than others. This approach can help remove the pressure of meeting goals and measurable targets, and putting a timeline on your grief.

Examples of intentions include:

"I will be kind to myself as I navigate this difficult time."

"I will honor my loved one's memory in small ways each day."

"I will look after myself by eating well and moving my body each day."

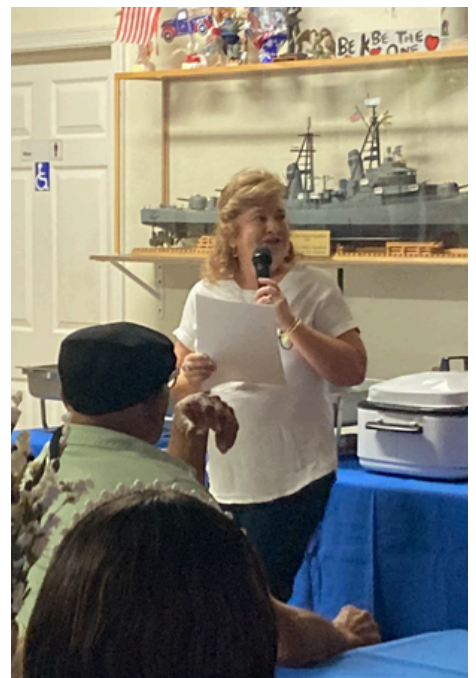
"I will focus on meaningful connections with loved ones each week."

"I will use my breath to centre myself when I feel overwhelmed."

"I will look for something to be grateful for each day."



Thank you for being part of our Candlelight. Forty-four of us came together for a beautiful night of remembrance for our children, grandchildren, and siblings.





ALWAYS WITH LOVE, WE REMEMBER THEM

Michelle Roy honors her daughter, **Mikayla**.

Mike and Ellen Stevens honor their son, **Ryan**.

Francisco Villafane honors his son, **Jomar**.

Robin and Richard Server honor their daughter, **Brooke**.

Sherri Pinna honors her son, **Ryan**.

Angela Daubaras honors her daughter, **Melanie**.

Harry Moore honors **Buster**.

Beverly Mott honors **Benjamin**.

Chuck Henneke honors his daughter, **Kelly**.

Jo Marie Cook honors her sons, **Gregory** and **James**.

Jan Armstrong honors her daughter, **Carrie**.

Tammy Sheen honors her son, **Michael**.

Monika Kozaka honors **Isabella**.

Susan honors her grandchild, **Hayley**.

Melinda honors her daughter, **Charlotte**.

Pamela Scholund honors **Steven**.

Tanya Hall honors her daughter, **Leanna**.

Stacy Becker honors her son, **Ryan**.

Joni and Tom honor their daughter, **Kellie**.

Mae Serrano honors **John**.

Judy Dawley honors **Chris**.

Tammy Brooks honors **Tuano**.

Charise & George Augustine honor **Tiffany**.

Mialy Garcia honors her brother, **Aiden**.

Melissa Jayne honors her son, **Aiden**.

Betsy & Terry Jones honor their daughter, **Kerri**.



ALWAYS WITH LOVE, WE REMEMBER THEM

Linda Wildes honors her son, **Max**.

Jenn and Eric Winship honor their son, **Jakeb**.

Arlene Spadone honors her granddaughter, **Olivia**.

Briana Murphy honors her daughter, **Lexi**.

Karla Relyea honors her daughter, **Megan**.

Beth & Steve Wooten honor their daughter, **Kenna** and unborn **grandchild**.

Gail and Ken honor their sons and grandson, **Tony**, **Jason**, and **Jay**.

Heather Pope honors her son, **Eric**.

Pat Haupt honors her granddaughter, **Lauren**.

Kim and Pat honor **John** and **Jesse**.

Kim Raabe honors her son, **Matt**.

Christine honors **Jakeb**.

Irene Ploskina honors her son, **Mikey**.

Dawn Stephens honors her son, **Spencer**.

Valerie LaBoy honors her son, **Daniel**.

Linda Goodwin honors her son, **Trey**.

Cynthia Mascola honors her son, **Michael**.

Dorothy Gray honors her son, **Chuck**.

Pamela McMinn honors her daughter, **Danielle**.

Bonnie Car honors her son, **Troy**.

Heather Ulmer honors her son, **Nathaniel**.

Denise Rado Amendola honors her daughter, **Dana**.

Embracing the New Year with Clarity: Vision Boards for Personal Growth

Nothing can interrupt a dream like the death of a loved one. Our life's narrative not only takes an unexpected turn, but it can feel as if our story has ended. In reality, our story does continue, albeit not as we expected. We know as people who have loved and lost (and from contemporary grief research) that the relationship with our beloved does not end, and continuing bonds not only bring us comfort, but also help us adjust to life after loss.

At some point—maybe it is today—we will raise our head up and look towards our future. Once we have learned to cope with our life after loss, we choose to create the life we desire. So go ahead. Dream for yourself once more, while carrying your dear one close to your heart.

Step 1: Meditate – Take a few moments to reset your mind and body by focusing on your breath. This clears the way for creativity. Now imagine, what do you want to create in your life?

Step 2: Browse & Clip – Look through magazines and clip out the images and words that attract you, and set them off to the side. Some images and words will have a clear meaning to you, while others may have no direct correlation to what you desire. Cut them out anyway!

Step 3: Arrange & Paste – Arrange all of your images on your card stock or poster board and glue them in place.

Step 4: Reflect – Take a look at your completed vision board. Now that you know where you want to go, what is one very small action you can take towards creating the life of your dream? When can you take that step? How will it impact your life?

Step 5: View – Hang your vision board where you will see it at least once a day, such as in the bathroom where you brush your teeth, or in your office or bedroom. Let your vision board work for you by constantly reminding you of what you want to create in your life.



Make Yourself Proud.

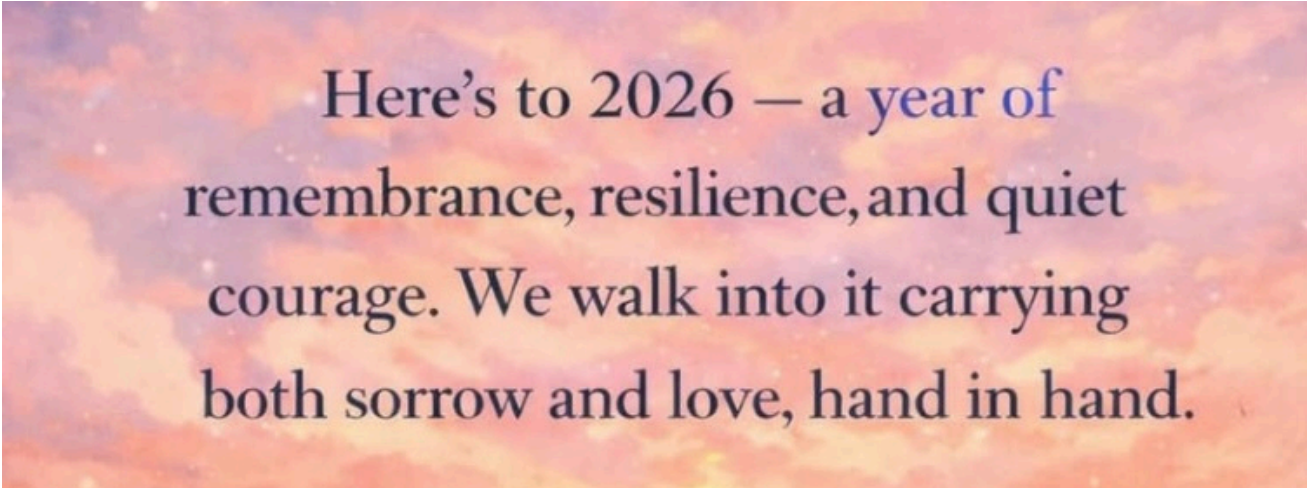
**As the new year begins, let's honor those we've lost by living
gently, loving deeply, and allowing ourselves grace.
We can move forward not because the pain is gone,
But because the love remains.**

**Here's to 2026 – a year of remembrance, resilience,
and quiet courage.
It's okay to walk into it carrying both sorrow and love, hand in
hand.**

**Your love didn't end when they did
Your memories didn't disappear with time
And your grief is not something to hide.
It is the echo of something deeply beautiful that once existed**

**As this year ends, hold a quiet moment for the ones you wish you
could call
Speak to them in your heart.**

**They heard you then.
And they still live where they always did.
In the safest place you know.
Inside you**



**Here's to 2026 — a year of
remembrance, resilience, and quiet
courage. We walk into it carrying
both sorrow and love, hand in hand.**

MARCIA'S TREE ANALOGY

Written By: Marcia Ashlock on the TCF website



I love trees. I always have. I always wanted to live in a house surrounded by lots of large, mature, beautiful trees. When we moved to our beautiful river property, my husband's favorite feature was the river, but mine was all the gorgeous trees. I loved it! Now just because I love trees, don't think I am a tree expert – I couldn't tell you the difference between a maple tree and an elm tree but I just know I love trees.

One of our trees, a huge, strong tree by the river, was one of my favorites. I loved it so much that my husband attached a beautiful wooden swing to it so we could sit under its beautiful branches and swing while looking out over the river. Sadly, during one severe thunderstorm, lightning struck that tree, severing one of its biggest, strongest limbs. The limb supporting our swing. The next day, looking at all the damage from the storm, I saw what had happened to this beautiful tree. I felt sick looking at the horrible damage done to this tree. Irrevocable damage. The broken limb on the ground just lay there, never to grace the tree again. The stump of the branch still held the swing but was charred and it was clear that the tree suffered huge damage and would likely die due to the extent of the damage. Knowing I was upset, my husband got some tie down straps he kept in his truck, climbed up a ladder to reach the broken off, charred branch and made a tourniquet type wrap around the branch, just before where the damage started.

We didn't know if it would work. We didn't know if that gaping wound in the tree could be repaired. Could come together again after such horrible damage. We waited and watched. For quite a while, we didn't see any improvement, any signs that the hard work he put in to repair it was doing any good. I began to think this was it for the tree. That the damage had been too extensive. Then one day, we noted something amazing – new life was growing out of the charred, damaged stump. A tiny, green branch was sprouting! It wasn't very strong and it looked like it was barely hanging on, but it was there! Finally, a sign of life again! As time passed, more and more branches and leaves started sprouting off that tree that seemed to be too damaged to make it. The leaves on the surrounding branches, that had started to wither, got some of their color back! That thick branch was still able to support the swing and we once again were able to enjoy its strength and gift of shade and comfort!

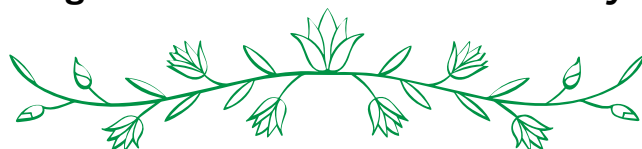
Now that tree, it doesn't look the same. The tree is not as beautiful as it once was. Maybe the tree feels sad that it no longer looks the same. It doesn't look like all the other trees around it that have all their limbs intact. But maybe, just maybe that tree knows that it survived what could have/should have killed it and guess what? It made it. It won't be the same. Won't look the same. Has scars on it that show the trauma the storm caused. But do you know what? It is still standing. It hasn't fallen into the river. It now gives shade again. It is a source of strength again to hold the swing. It is different than it was I bet it wishes it hadn't had the experience it had. But, that tree, that tree made it. It survived.

When we have gatherings at our river, people stand under its shade and feel relief from the hot sun because of it. Bad days have improved when its strong branches allow me to swing in peace from it. It once again is a source of comfort.

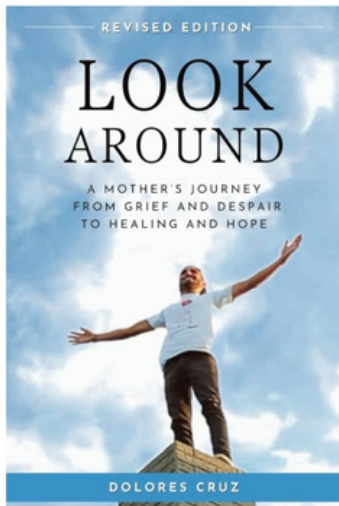
Yesterday, as I was walking on our property, deeply mourning the loss of my daughter, feeling more hopeless, exhausted and heartsick as I had ever felt in my life, I stood under that very tree. I looked up at it and saw the awful scar from what it endured. This may sound silly, but that tree, that tree gave me hope.

My life feels like that tree. A huge storm just wrecked me. A searing pain like lightening tore through me, causing irrevocable damage. At times, I don't know how I will stay standing. Just the thought of normal functioning seems way too much. My life, it will never look the same. I may never look the same. I will never be the same. The me from before that horrible phone call on September 2, 2024 to the me now feels completely different. And I hate that. But, looking up at that tree that day, I felt the tiniest spark of hope. I have hope that this deep severing in my own life will be bound by a wrap that can close this gaping wound in my life. Through the comfort of my dear family and friends, through the wise council of my grief therapist, through the acts of love through meals, groceries and flowers, through songs of promise and hope, through my faith, all these things, they wrap my heart, my soul, my broken heart. It aids in the oh so slow healing of the deep gap in my life, in my heart. I mourn that I will never be the same but find hope that a new me will emerge. I will one day be strong enough to support new life: new hopes, new dreams. I have hope that one day I can be a strength to others in grief, in pain. That they can rest under my strength when they have none of their own.

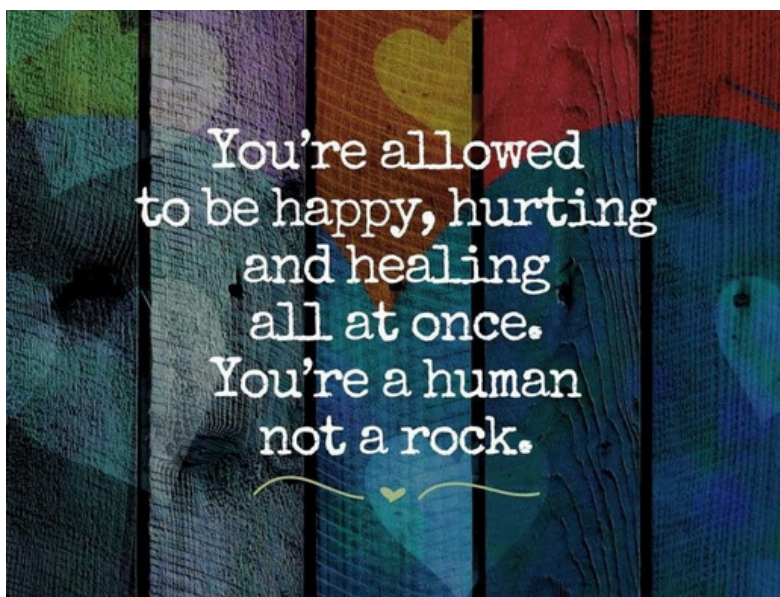
My life certainly does not look like how I pictured it. Definitely not how I wanted it to look. I could drive myself crazy in thinking about how this is not how I planned it, how unfair it is, how much the unfairness of this infuriates me...or, I can just sit with this grief. Allow myself time to both grieve and start to heal. Let the binds wrapped around me help me. Allow others to help me – even though receiving gracious gifts from others is oh so hard. Allow myself the time. Allow myself the grace I give others. Practice acts of self love. And wait. Know that my roots are deep and that I can survive this. I may emerge different than I was but I will still emerge. This is what I learned from my tree.



Book Recommendations:



Movie Recommendation:



You've survived too
many storms to be
bothered by raindrops.
You got this.

When love gift donations are made to your local chapter in loving memory of your child, at the same time it is helping to fund the work of your local TCF chapter. Each chapter is run by Volunteers. If you wish to donate, checks can be made out to: North Port Compassionate Friends.