

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

A self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved families

APRIL 2008

Inside Valley Forge

Meetings are on the first Thursday of every month at 7:45PM (ending at 9:30PM). We meet at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall at Valley Forge and Henderson RDs, King of Prussia, PA. Phone on meeting evenings only is 610-265-0733. All other times please call Ann or Rhonda at 484-919-0820.

Meeting Schedule

Please Mark Your Calendar

Apr 3	General Sharing
Apr 4-5	W. PA Regional Conf.
Apr 18-20	Chapter Leadership Training Program in Oak Brook, Illinois
May 1	General Sharing/Suicide
Jul 17	TCF National Pre-Conf. (see pg. 3) Regional Coordinator & Professionals Sibling Get Together Registration, Sharing Sessions for all
Jul 18-20	TCF National Conference (see pg. 3) Nashville, Tennessee - see website: www.compassionatefriends.org

We encourage newsletter writings from our members. You may also submit articles written by others, please include the author of all articles submitted. **The cut-off date for newsletter entries is the 15th of the preceding month.**

ARTICLES SHOULD BE SENT TO THE NEWSLETTER EDITORS.

There are no dues or fees to belong to The Compassionate Friends, or to receive our newsletter. Your tax deductible donations given in memory of your loved one enables us to defray the cost of chapter expenses, particularly the newsletter, meetings, and our outreach to the newly bereaved. **Please include any special tribute you wish printed in the newsletter along with your gift.**

**PLEASE MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO:
TCF VALLEY FORGE CHAPTER
SEND TO: RECORD KEEPER, FRANK GOMEZ
PLEASE SEND ALL OTHER CHAPTER MAIL
TO CHAPTER CO-LEADERS
ANN RAPOPORT or RHONDA GOMEZ**



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NEW FRIENDS

We welcome our newly bereaved friends. We are sorry for the cause that brings you. We have all been in the depths of despair, and know that it is difficult to share our pain and personal feelings. We hope you will attend three or four meetings before evaluating the benefit of our group to you. We offer confidentiality, unconditional love, compassion and understanding to all of you.

MARCH REFRESHMENTS

Anyone wishing to donate refreshments, please call **Ann or Rhonda (484)919-0820**.

LOVE GIFTS

Acme Rebate Program

Thanks to all those who have been supporting this program.

Please forward register receipts to Marie & Ken Hofmockel (see address on page 1).

TCF 31st NATIONAL CONFERENCE - Nashville, Tennessee

www.CompassionateFriends.org

toll-free phone 877-969-0010

Listed below are some of the conference highlights. The conference registration forms are too lengthy to print in our newsletter. Please use the National website listed above to download your registration form, or call the Valley Forge Chapter, 484-919-0820, to receive a copy by mail. Registration forms will also be available at the regular monthly meetings.

THURSDAY ACTIVITIES (Pre-Conference)

Professional Registration 8 - 9 am
Professional Outreach Program 9 am - 4 pm
Regional Coordinators meeting. 10 am - 4 pm
Conference Registration 3-10 pm
Hospitality Room open 12 noon - 10 pm
Sibling Orientation 7 - 8 pm
Sibling Social & Sharing Session 8 - 9:30 pm
Sharing Sessions for all 7 - 9:30 pm

FRIDAY ACTIVITIES

Conference Registration 7 am - 5 pm
Annual Meeting 8 - 9 am
Orientation 1st time attendee 8 - 9 am
Opening Ceremony 9:15 - 10:30 am
Workshop 11 am - 12:15 pm
Lunch with speaker 12:30 - 2:30 pm
Workshop 2:45 - 4 pm
Workshop 4:30 - 5:45 pm
Southern Style Buffet 6 - 7:30 pm
Nashville Bluegrass Band 7:30 - 8:30 pm
Sharing Sessions 8:30 - 10:30 pm

SATURDAY ACTIVITIES

Conference Registration 8 am - 12 Noon
Workshop 9 - 10:15 am
Workshop 10:45 - 12 noon
Lunch 12 noon - 1:30 pm
Workshop 1:30 - 2:45 pm
Workshop 3:15 - 4:30 pm
Banquet/Candle Lighting/Speaker 6:30 - 9 pm
Sharing Sessions 9:30 - 11 pm

SUNDAY ACTIVITIES

Walk Registration 7 - 8 am
TCF Walk To Remember 8 - 9 am
Closing Ceremony with speaker 10 -11:30 am

THE CONFERENCE WILL PROVIDE:

103 workshops on Friday & Saturday
Sharing Sessions Thu. Fri. & Sat.
Complete Sibling Program - age 9 -17
Remembrance Walk
Hospitality Rooms - Parents & Siblings
Photo Memory Board
Reflection Room
Butterfly Boutique
Book Store

GUEST SPEAKERS

Dr. Frank Lewis speaking Friday Opening
Dr. Lewis is a surviving sibling, speaker, author, and pastor who led the sibling support group of TCF Las Vegas for 10 yrs.

Bruce Murakami speaking Friday Lunch
Bruce bonded and teamed up, in the name of safety and saving lives, with the drag racing teen who ended the life of his wife and daughter, a story that was made into the Hallmark Hall of Fame movie Crossroads. A Story of Forgiveness.

Darrell Scott speaking Saturday Banquet
Darrell's daughter was the first to be killed at Columbine, started "Rachel's Challenge" in her memory, a program presented at more than a thousand high schools to Inspire students to pass along kindness and compassion.

Ann Hood speaking Sunday Closing
Ann is a bereaved parent, the award winning author of 9 novels including Comfort: My Journey Through Grief, and has been published in Redbook, Parents, Ladies Home Journal, and a number of other magazines.



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

The 31st TCF National Conference in July 2008 will be in Nashville, Tennessee, Music City U.S.A. The conference committee plans to decorate the conference area with real 7-inch vinyl records that have pictures of our children in the center. (While the records will be pressed with grooves, there will be no music on them.)

You are invited to send a picture of your child that will be mounted on a record and displayed at the conference. A minimum donation of \$10 in U.S. funds (check or money order only) will sponsor a record. For an additional \$5 your child's record will be mailed to you after the conference. Additional family members and friends are also invited to sponsor a record. This makes the child a very real part of the 2008 conference.

If you are interested in attending the 2008 conference and seeing your special record, information will be available on the national website at www.compassionatefriends.org or by calling the national office toll free at 877-969-0010.

Using the pattern to the right cut thin, white card stock and paste a picture of your child in the square. Print the child's name in the semi-circle area below the picture.

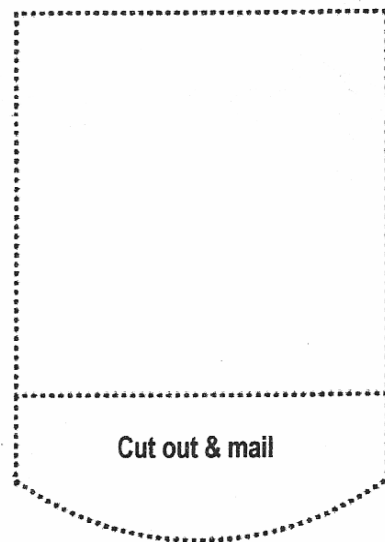
Mail the (1)picture, (2)this form and (3)your check to the address below.

Make check or money order payable to:
TCF National Conference.

Enclosed is the picture for the record,
minimum \$10 per picture: \$ _____

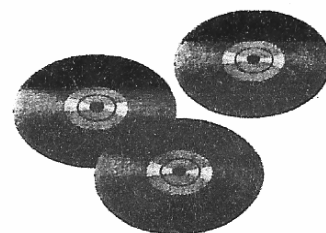
Please mail my record to me after the conference –
I am enclosing an additional \$5 for shipping and handling \$ _____
(Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.)

Total amount enclosed \$ _____



Mail picture and payment to:
**TCF Conference – Record
P.O. Box 50833
Nashville TN 37205**

If you want the record mailed to you, **print** your name and address on the mailing label below.



OUR CHILDREN & SIBLINGS LOVED, SADLY MISSED AND REMEMBERED

Each month some of us must face those special, but difficult days of birthdays and anniversaries. This Month we ask your thoughts and prayers for the parents/siblings/relatives of the following children:

Additions or corrections to this list should be given to the editors, Marie & Ken Hofmockel.

SHARED THOUGHTS ON A PAIN THAT SPRING CAN'T FIX

Sometimes spring can make us feel even more depressed, we often begin with our shoulds, oughts, and time frames. In past winters, when we were suffering from cabin fever we looked to spring to motivate us. Many non-bereaved will even tell us, we should feel better for spring is here. Or, we ought to get out more, now that the weather is nice. We sometimes put more guilt on ourselves, when we are depressed on a glorious day. A gloomy day can be more comfortable, for we feel our spirits don't have to rise to meet our surroundings. The grief we are enduring is probably the greatest pain we will ever know.

Seasonal changes frequently have an opposite effect than they used to have on us, the changes can close a time frame that we had set to reach a certain goal in our grief. When our expectations have not been met it lowers our self-esteem. We are frequently our own worst enemy, when it comes to putting impossible expectations on ourselves. I believe our creator put earth's beauty here for us. But when our pain is so great, it is difficult to enjoy its beauty, we should not feel guilt for lack of appreciation. When in the depth of despair, it is hard to feel good about anything. Grief is not curable, but the pain will soften, and we will one day feel better (I could not believe this in my early grief). The road to healing is very long, but it is not endless, as it may now seem.

The evolution of progress will have many setbacks, even though we are having a long-term positive trend of healing, it is often hard to see progress. We never understand why our child died, and it is never over, but we can become functional human beings again. We must first do our grieving, for that is when the healing takes place. Our grief causes us to face reality and imagine our future without our loved one. As painful as this is, we must go through it, we can not go around it. We need to let go of our shoulds, oughts, and time frames, and take one step at a time. But we need to get a good foothold, before moving on. Putting something behind us too early can cause us to deny, and not acknowledge the loss. Grief can't be rushed. Most of all, we must have hope, that is the light at the end of the tunnel.

My pain has healed so I can work, play, and enjoy family and friends again. When I think of Douglas, my pain is no longer intense and gut wrenching. It most often is fond memories that I love to share with others. I do have a need to speak of my child, but not so extensively. We at The Compassionate Friends, have come to know each other's child through our sharing.

As I look forward to spring, with great anticipation, it makes me realize how much we can overcome, and that grief doesn't have to dominate the rest of our life. We can lead productive and wholesome lives again. It takes a lot of patience, hard work, and prayers to find happiness again. I hope you will not try this hard road alone. The Compassionate Friends can lighten your path.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel* , TCF Valley Forge

By my helping I will be helped
If I accept your anger then my anger is accepted.
By my caring I am cared for.
When I listen I will be listened to.
And all these things mean
On the lonely road of grief I will not be alone.
My recovery will be a little gentler,

And my child will not be forgotten
Because the memory of him can be shared
With you who understand how I feel --
My special Compassionate Friends

Shirley Egan
TCF, New South Wales, Australia

PLEASE ASK

Someone asked me about you today,
It's been so long since anyone has done that.
It felt so good to talk about you
...to share my memories of you
...to simply say your name out loud.
She asked me if I minded talking about what happened to you
or would it be too painful to speak of it.
I told her I think of it everyday and speaking about it helps me
to release the tormented thoughts whirling around in my head.
She said she never realized the pain would last this long
She apologized for not asking sooner.
I told her, "Thanks for asking."
I don't know if it was curiosity or concern that made her ask,
but I told her,
Please do it again sometime soon."

Barbara Taylor Hudson
POMC, Cincinnati, OH

SILENT GRIEF

Grief is sometimes silent – like snowflakes
falling on a dark winter's night – but never
peaceful or serene or pretty like the pure white
snow. When grief is silent, the tears seem to
turn to ice, like the snowflakes, before they
reach our eyes.

Grief is sometimes raging – like a monstrous
thunderstorm – with all its fury and bolts of
lightning striking our hearts at every angle.
When grief is raging, the tears come in torrents,
like the rain, and flood our soul.

Grief, whether it be silent or raging - hurts.

Verna Smith
TCF, Ft. Worth, TX

SO YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND

You say to me, "It's been a year, when will your grieving end?"
Why can't you be like you once were my smiling happy friend?

If you really want an answer, though I wonder if you do,
I'll take you deep inside me, where sadness dims the view.

First, my "friend", for your sake, come close and take my hand.
And we will pray that what I share, you won't have to understand.

The me you once knew is no more, it died with my child.
A voice was stilled forever, yet, the echo drives me wild.

You say you lost Aunt Bertha, so you have known death too,
Aunt Bertha, however, was not your child, and she was eighty, not
twenty-two.

I barely survived those first months, coping was a dreadful task,
I'd tell you I was fine, while sobbing behind my mask.

If I talked about my precious child, you turned away in fear,
You couldn't stand to see me cry, nor would you share my tears.

I wanted to speak of him, please, won't you say his name?
But, you pretend he never was, so he died over and over again.

Oh, I see that you're uncomfortable, you no longer want my hand,
So as it was before we talked, my "friend," you don't want to
understand!

Jay Brady

Flowing more gently
My "River of Tears"
It's banks holding grief
of nine long years.

Ripples of memories
so many kind
In my heart they are
always - "I Find".

Memories of kissing away
childhood hurt
Praying life's pitfalls
you would avert.

You chose to leave your
sadness on earth
For Heaven's peace and
Eternal
Rebirth.

In memory of my son, *Mark J. Cote*
Who took his life nine years ago
March 26 - 1999

Mother, *Rose M. Cote*

COMPASSIONATE SIBLINGS

I had a prayer answered today, one I'd
 like to share.
 I found I'm not alone in my grief, I found
 someone to care!
 I've been in pain for quite awhile, but
 kept it deep inside.
 But now I know there are people in
 whom I can confide!

They'll let me cry or scream or yell,
 and they know just how I feel;
 You see they also know that pain, and
 know it's very real.
 Each one has suffered a loss, one like I
 have known;
 Yet now we stand together.
 This unique group of siblings is bonded,
 you might say,
 And strength to carry on is for what each
 one must pray.

One by one we keep going, although
 painful it might be,
 And the emptiness we feel, many will never see;
 Because we choose what face to show the
 world and courage keeps us going.
 We have a constant ache inside,
 No matter what the outside is showing.

And whether it takes me a year or two,
 Time is all that can heal;
 So I've been sent some "Compassionate Siblings"
 Who know just how I feel.

Bless those who need to be understood
 When tears come and go without warning.
 May we help heal the wounds so deep
 that are hurting all the hearts left empty
 by the death of a sibling.

Stacie Gilliam
TCF/N. Oklahoma City, OK

MOST PEOPLE WHO SUFFER A LOSS EXPERIENCE ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- * Feel tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest.
- * Have an empty feeling in their stomach and lose their appetite.
- * Feel guilty at times and angry at other times.
- * Feel restless and look for activity but find it difficult to concentrate.
- * Sense the loved one's presence, as in finding themselves expecting the person to walk in the door at the usual time, hearing their voice, or seeing their face.
- * Wander aimlessly, forget, and don't finish things they have started.
- * Have difficulty sleeping; dream of their loved one.
- * Experience an intense preoccupation with the life of the deceased.
- * Assume mannerisms or traits of their loved one.
- * Feel guilty or angry over things that happened or didn't happen in the relationship with the deceased .
- * Feel their mood change over the slightest things.
- * Cry at unexpected times.

All of these are natural and normal grief responses. It is important to cry and talk with people when you need to do so. By learning about the process of grief and learning also to express our feelings concerning our experience, we are helped to arrive at a healthy readjustment of our lives and a reinvestment of our emotional energy.

Irma Escue - Hospice Bereavement Team / Boulder , CO

THANK YOU REV. SIMON STEPHENS AND TCF FOR:

TENDER

- (1) **HOPE** - when I believed in **none anywhere**.
- (2) **REASSURANCE** - I'm **not** "crazy"! Confusion, displacement, preoccupation, forgetfulness, timelessness, panic, my journeys into **HELL** - all part of "normal" parental grieving. OK to feel **and** express feeling, or remain silent.
- (3) **ENERGY** - An infusion via newsletters, a note or phone call when I'm exhausted, depleted, flat, not able and not caring to function.
- (4) **UNDERSTANDING** - my bitterness and rage, there by miraculously reducing both.
- (5) **CONTINUING GENTLE REMINDER** - to accept that most despairing of facts - **MY CHILD DIED!**
- (6) **WATCHFULNESS** - Strive not to get stuck in denial, anger, etc. My child would not want this for me.
- (7) **RESPIRE** - a release of tension from desperately "holding myself together".
- (8) **COMPASSION** - " I know your pain". TCF members truly do.

COMFORTING

- (9) **FORGIVENESS OF SELF** - for real and imagined commissions and omissions as I'm forced to review my life, accept my humanity.
- (10) **LOVE** - doesn't die. My significant others do not replace my child but do expand my caring.
- (11) **SELF ESTEEM** - Slow rebuilding of a DESTROYED SELF. I will be worthwhile again and able to help others someday.
- (12) **AWARENESS** - **I AM BLESSED** - My child lived and we loved.
- (13) **FAITH** - My child, and your child, is in another dimension in **PEACE** and **LOVE**.

FRIENDSHIP

- (14) **SHARING** - I'm not alone. In my stark despair, others reach out or will reach out. Grief is very personal, but others are in a parallel lane.
- (15) **ENCOURAGEMENT** - I'll fall back but I'll move forward again.
- (16) **PATIENCE** - First with myself, then with others; only **TIME, TIME, TIME** can dull this agony.
- (17) **REFUTES** - my desire for and attempts at isolation.
- (18) **ACCEPTANCE** - I'm a **DIFFERENT SELF FOREVER** -the death of my child was the death of so much of me.
- (19) **HUMOR** - can again be part of me despite the underlying devastation, the never ending awareness of this most searing, irreplaceable loss. My child smiles with me.
- (20) **THANK YOU** - **TCF LEADERS** for giving so much of yourselves, for all your work behind the scenes.

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS " CHILD"

Who is "the child"
of Compassionate Friends?
Who knows that secret being of many
beings, that life of many lives?
Entity of love,
united hearts in pain,
Bringing hope to the hopeless,
relief to the morning-weary.
Your passing, unwanted transition,
from here to untouchable eternity,
Plunging lives into despair -
the irony -
you, child of love,
Whose death heaped dark agonies
upon those who carried you
In wombs of brilliant expectation,
preparing for birth, for life.
Came death.
So, yet unfulfilled,
our minds seek respite.
Who are you,
child of Compassionate Friends?
The voice is your child's,
my child's.
It falls recognized on the ears of
its mothers, its fathers
And softly, lovingly,
knowing our pain and doubt
As once it knew our touch, or joy,
our tears, it now knows
Our need for meaning in the
meaningless,
joy in the pain
And it replies, reassuring,
"I am your child . . .
and your child."
I was but weeks from conception,
but days from birth.
My birthdays were few.
My birthdays were many.
I am your baby. Your child.
Your son, Your daughter;
child, adult.
But no age of fruition;
each age not enough.
All ages with hopes unrealized,
goals unachieved, love unexpressed,
Potential unreached,
paths undetermined.
I died too soon.

My death: accident . . . illness . . .
sudden . . . predicted . . .
at home . . . nearby . . . distant.
You were with me . . . I was alone
but knew your loving presence.
I have watched you live it,
relive it,
again . . . again.
I have seen the fear, the guilt,
the longing, the depression,
The anger, the hope, the valleys,
and later, the hilltops.
No mountains here,
And question, always unanswered,
always repeated.
Could I have removed the anguish,
the unrelenting ache
That bespoke my loss,
I would, and more:
I would restore . . . oh, I would
drench you in my love again,
Surround you with my laughter,
enrich you with the fulfillment's
and pleasures
My long life would have brought you -
You whose own lives would have
been freely given to spare mine.
Yet, given no choice there,
you found another . . .
You committed your lives
to others like you:
Those mothers and fathers with
whose offspring I dwell
Whose children are my family
as their parents are now yours.
United, we wait for you . . .
not anxious, but joyful,
for we live in beauty
Feeling, here, the warmth of your
love shared, your hope shared.
We are "the child,"
the unification of your loss:
A child of love
manifested in your compassion,
a child alive in your choice
to go on . . . together.

Joe Rousseau
TCF, Saginaw, Michigan