

# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

## APRIL 2009

### 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 2 General Sharing**

**May 7 General Sharing**

**Aug 7-9 National Conference , Portland OR**

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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**Marie & Ken Hofmockel welcomed a healthy new grandson, Darwin Steven Hofmockel on Feb 15, 2009. Darwin is the son of Kirsten & Michael Hofmockel of Ames, Iowa.**

**NEW FRIENDS**

**Elaine & Tim Thomas, son *Seth Peterson* (24)**

**Linda Massey, son *Gene* (23)**

**Judy Zollers, son *Sam* (24)**

**Shirley & Herb Druker, daughter (50)**

**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**

**Jamie & Rose Marie Cote, in memory of brother/son *Mark's* anniversary  
and in memory of father/husband *Paul Cote***

**Catherine Dardozzi, in memory of her son *James's* birthday**

**Ann Rapoport, in memory of her son *Brian's* anniversary**

Anyone wishing to donate refreshments (cheese & crackers, fruit, cakes, cookies, etc. ) in memory of loved ones, please call **Ann Rapoport or Rhonda Gomez (484)919-0820, or you may sign the refreshment chart** located on the refreshment table. Beverages are provided by the chapter.

**LOVE GIFTS**

**Nina Bernstein, in loving memory of my beloved son *Andrew Voluck.***

**Catherine Dardozzi, in loving memory of my son, *James Dardozzi***

**Harold & Marcia Epstein, in loving memory of our grandson *Andrew Voluck.***

**Shirley & Philip C. Kennedy, in loving memory of our son, *Philip V. Kennedy.***

**Elaine & James Madden, in loving memory of our son *Andrew Madden*  
and *Brian McShone.***

**Joy Conard Settles, in loving memory of my son *R. Gary Korn.***

**Marilyn Toole, in loving memory of my son *Ted Toole.***

**SuperValu - Rebate from ACME receipts**

**NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL**

The newsletter is available by email to those who wish to receive it in this form. You will receive the newsletter earlier if you opt to receive the newsletter by email. If you chose to use the email method of receiving your newsletter, and later decide you want to receive it by postal service, you will have the option to switch back to the old method. If you wish to receive the newsletter by email please contact: Frank Gomez fgomez@hybridpoplars.com



**Anniversaries continued**

**Edward & Mary Stimson, son *Keith Stimson* 4/7**  
**Fred & Irene Sutton, son *Jim Sutton* 4/16**  
**Tracey Sutton-Vitabile, brother *Jim Sutton* 4/16**  
**Patricia Trippley, son *William* 4/12**  
**Shirley Weir, son *Robert H. Weir* 4/22**  
**Joan & Ed Young, son *Jed Young* 4/2**  
**Robin Zelenak, brother *Ryan Auch* 4/29/96**

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**Birthdays**

**Lucille Bagwell, son *Lew* 4/17**  
**Jeannette Barnett, daughter *Jeannette Rojo* 4/7**  
**Phyllis & James Casey, son *Jim "Jimmer" Casey* 4/18**  
**Martin & Mary Conway, son *Neal* 4/8/1980**  
**Marie D'Orazio-D'Pietro, daughter *Carla D'Orazio* 4/1**  
**Ginny Ebert, son *Jason* 4/17/1972**  
**Sandra Estep, daughter *Stacy Drapikowski* 4/28**  
**Marybeth Ferguson, daughter *Julia* 4/13**  
**Dan & Robyn Fisher, son *Robert "Bo"* 4/1**  
**David & Amy Freese, son *Derek Freese* 4/20**  
**Joan George, son *Erick George* 4/14**  
**Stephanie Grier, son *John "JD" Grier* 4/15**  
**Nancy & Gerald Hall, son *Douglas Hall* 4/15**  
**Beatrice Hallermeier, son *Robert George Hallermeier, Jr.* 4/6**  
**Anita Hampton, daughter *Theresa Hampton* 4/11**  
**Othell & William Heaney, son *Roger Heaney* 4/17**  
**Jeanne R Helmers, daughter *Betsy Helmers* 4/7**  
**Cynthia Hornyak, daughter *Meredith* 4/1**  
**Robert Huss, son *Daniel* 4/18**  
**Dennis & Lois Ianovale, son *Dennis* 4/18**  
**Dorothy & Carl Johnson-Speight, daughter *Carlana Speight* 4/6**  
**Millie Jones, grandson *Shawn Dian* 4/18**  
**Roxanne Kamilatos, daughter *Dina* 4/29**  
**Susan Kelleher, son *Jake* 4/24**  
**JoAnne Laraio, son *Michael* 4/14**  
**Karen & Francis Legieko, son *John Francis Legieko* 4/8**  
**Lynne & John Malloy, son *David Gross* 4/13**  
**Betty Manzi, grandson *Ronnie T. Seal, Jr.* 4/17**  
**Elaine Marino, son *Mark Joseph Marino* 4/20**  
**Kathy Mason, son *Avery Mason* 4/1**  
**Michelle & Chris Mazzio, son *Brendan Mazzio* 4/18**  
**Robert & Marjorie Meckley, son *Douglas Meckley* 4/25**

**Birthdays continued**

- Bob & Janet Milnazik, daughter *Kim* 4/24**
- Roger Morris, daughter *Katie* 4/10**
- Eugene & Lynn Myers, son *Scott Myers* 4/23**
- Marlene Patrone, son *Richard Patrone* 4/20**
- Rosemary Peterson, son *Donald R. Peterson* 4/1**
- Thomas & Mary Jane Poore, son *Bradley Poore* 4/25**
- Trish & Bell Rich, daughter *Renee Rich* 4/20**
- Jacqueline Rider, son *Josua Rider* 4/7**
- Thelma & Ike Rosen, son *Thomas Grisafi* 4/24**
- Marie Shippen, son *Michael Morgan* 4/19**
- Art & Carol Silverman, daughter *Cheryl Beth Silverman* 4/23**
- Barry & Sigrid Snow, son *Robert Snow* 4/28**  
son *Kevin Snow* 4/19
- Kathy Thomas, daughter *Alicia Minnick* 4/29**
- James & Betty Treichler, son *James Treichler Jr.* 4/21**
- Ann VanLandingham, son *Eric VanLandingham* 4/21**
- Ellen & Dale Weaver, son *Jeffrey M. Weaver* 4/12**
- Linda Weaver, daughter *Krista "Binky" Weaver* 4/29**
- Christine & Raymond Welker, son *Zachary Graham* 4/23**
- Jackie Wesley, daughter *Teresa Ellen Wesley Hough* 4/25**

**AFTER THE STORM COMES THE RAINBOW**

Happiness does not depend on what happens outside of you, but rather on what happens inside of you. It is measured by the spirit in which you meet the problems of life. The master secret of happiness is to meet the challenge of each new day in remembering to look for the rainbows as assurance that God is with us through the storms of life.

*Author Unknown* –  
TCF, Holmdel, NJ

Look at yourself in the mirror.  
Say to yourself "It is hard to lose a child."  
Say to yourself "It is reasonable to hurt."  
Say to yourself "Healing takes time."  
BE GOOD TO YOURSELF

*Sascha Wagner*

Grief cannot be conquered  
Like an enemy  
Grief can only be changed  
From pain  
To hope  
From hope  
To deeper life  
*Sascha Wagner*

## SHARED THOUGHTS ON HOPE THROUGH SHARING

Many bereaved parents and siblings attend Compassionate Friends National & Regional Conferences. As we share with each other, it is obvious that hope brings us together. The very fact we are there means we want to help ourselves. Many speakers & workshop presenters come, at their own expense, to help others better understand their grief. There are very newly bereaved and many with distance from their grief, but all are there with hope to help themselves, or to attend leadership workshops, so they can come back with new insights on how to help others. Many attendees are fragile with fresh grief and only have a glimmer of hope, but they come to build on what they have.

There are times in our grief when we feel we cannot survive, and the intense pain can cause such momentary despondence, that we don't want to survive. The gentle encouragement of those who are further down the path can give us hope that we can make it. They help to build self-confidence by telling us that tears, anger, guilt, fear, low self-esteem and all those painful aspects of grief are normal and we need to deal with them. We have learned that the best way to get past such feelings is to express them. It is very helpful to share with someone who has experienced and know the depth of despair it takes to get through grief.

We know our tears can be very warm and bring solace, or they can come from a raging anger for the loss of our child or sibling, or the injustice that life brings. We also know they can be private or shared. But, the one thing most of us have learned, they are very healing, and cleansing. Shedding tears does not mean we have lost hope. Mourning helps us to accept (but not approve) of the situation we are in. We are recognizing the fact our loved one is gone, and how we will miss them. As Sascha Wagner writes, "Grief cannot be conquered like an enemy. Grief can only be changed from pain... to hope... from hope... to deeper life". This cycle is necessary to go on with life, and eventually face the challenge of our tomorrows.

It is difficult, but we must allow ourselves to feel the pain of grief. It is normal to cry, to be enraged, to be confused, and sad. But, we have found strength in sharing. It can help to prevent self-pity. And no matter how dark our path, we learn we can still believe in rainbows. For it is hope that can eventually overcome our nightmare and bring dreams back into our lives, so we can again cherish the love and loved ones around us. We know all this comes so very slowly. We must take time and be patient and first learn to stand, before we can walk.

**Hopefully, you will try to attend the National Conference in Portland, OR, in August, so you can take the hand of a Compassionate Friend and not try walking alone. If you are further along in your grief, PLEASE COME to support the more fragile ones in their fresh grief.**

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel*, TCF Valley Forge, PA

**REFLECTIONS OF A STEP PARENT**

Time cannot steal the treasures  
that we carry in our hearts  
Nor ever dim the shining thoughts  
our cherished past imparts  
And memories of the ones we've loved  
still cast their gentle glow -  
To grace our days and light our paths  
wherever we may go.

**TCF Wabash, Indiana Chapter**

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**SUICIDE**

As I sit and listen,  
to what others have to share.  
I stop, and I wonder,  
just why I'm really there.  
I listen to each person,  
as they share about their pain.  
And from each heart  
they share with us.  
Just, why it is they come.  
Their eyes sometimes,  
so full of tears, and thoughts  
of questions why?  
Why, did this have to happen?  
Why did they have to die?  
Each one's pain is different  
and yet it's all the same  
We all grieve for loved ones,  
that suicide has claimed.  
This death has now become,  
the common bond we share,  
We need to remember each other,  
as we go to God in prayer.  
Pray that He will lift us up,  
and help us to abide,  
That someday soon we all may be  
True survivors of suicide!

*Kathie Perdue*

SHARING & HEALING newsletter

I watched my mate go through pure hell.  
And I felt helpless, useless, and  
sometimes ... invisible.  
Other times - I stood strong while  
bearing the brunt of my love's anger  
that lashed out at the world -  
As an angry God would open the heavens.  
With roaring thunder and lighting.

I was accused of not understanding  
And surely . . . I could not.  
I felt heavy pain for my step-child  
The one I took as my own.  
I grieved for the good times we had together,  
The tugs at my heart that always  
pierced through any resentments.

The guilt weighed heavily on my shoulders  
for the times we didn't communicate  
And I wonder if . . .  
I could have made it better.  
At the funeral home, I felt even a pang of  
yes . . . jealousy toward the  
natural parent of my beloved step-child.  
Knowing that they and my mate shared  
a private room from the past  
that I could never ... ever...enter.

Life must go on...This day-to-day existence  
But things are different now.  
I offer my support  
As I see eyes staring off into  
a distant land  
I hold a hand  
and kiss away the tear drops.

With an added sorrow, I wonder  
If my love will return to me or  
stay in that far-off land...forever

For deep in my heart I know that this  
tragedy will bring us closer together  
Or tear us completely apart.

*Peggi Hull*

Houston-Bay Area Chapter, TCF

THE SEARCH

I looked for him by babbling creek  
where he fished without a care  
but inner voice said, "He you seek  
is no longer there."

I looked for him on tree-lined street  
dirty sneaks and tousled hair  
But the sound was other children's feet  
and they echoed ...no, not there.

I looked for him on yellow bus  
they descended pair by pair  
But amid the squeals of fun and fuss  
I realized he's not there.

I looked for him on sandlot  
under skies so blue and fair  
but someone else held down his spot  
he wasn't playing there.

I looked for him within his room  
walls stripped clean and bare  
But the unmussed bed revealed the truth  
no one had slept there.

I looked for him tinkering  
on the car he gave such care  
But a gentle voice came from afar  
and said, "He is not there."

I looked for him at mealtime's bell  
but no one filled the chair  
The empty place spoke, oh so well,  
that he would not be there.

I looked for him in dream at night  
my eyes fixed in a stare  
By his own hand my son had died  
and I knew he was not there.

For within my soul there sprang a sound  
of a truth that would be free  
"Your son was lost, and now is found,  
He dwells on high with Me.

"I give to you my dazzling grace  
in every tear you cry,  
No matter what the trial you face  
my Love will never die."

I find him now in loving tear  
in every praise-filled prayer  
It is through Love I now can hear;  
"Indeed, your son is there."

*Nancy Thompson -  
TCF Valley Forge, PA*

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COME WALK WITH ME

Come walk with me a while  
along this bitter path  
Where traveler, not by choice  
walk uphill all the way  
The weary road is paved  
with broken hopes and dreams  
And phantoms gather tolls  
steal your memories.  
Who are these travelers, sad -  
who journey on this road?

They're Moms and Dads who've lost a  
child and must survive, it's said  
This street begins in Hell, you see  
and ends somewhere in time.  
Come walk with me, my friends  
along this bitter path  
for I have been this way before  
alone, I thought I was -  
Until some strangers shared my pain  
named Courage, Hope and Love.

**TO MY BIG BROTHER**

You were the best big brother.  
You were such a true true friend.  
You were someone to whom I could always  
talk and always could depend.

Its hard to believe that you are not here.  
Smiling, laughing ... Oh, I feel a tear.

I think back on many times gone by  
and I just keep asking myself, why?  
But, it makes me smile and it makes me laugh.  
To think back on sweet memories of the past.

Moving up from Osborne Street  
and joining a new school.  
Greg and Grant were always there  
even when we joined the pool.

Then we went off to Ocean City  
to spend our summers at the shore.  
The sand would drift the ocean roll  
and the gulls would often soar.

I watched you go through LaSalle,  
and then off to Penn State too.  
I was your little sister  
who was so very proud of you.

I think of you quite often.  
For your thoughts I'd give a penny.  
Did you know I had a son last year.  
I know he'd love his uncle Denny.

You'll be with me forever.  
And although we are apart.  
You live forever in my memories  
and always in my heart.

*Kimberly Kearns Minetola*, Phila., PA  
for her brother, **Dennis Kearns, Jr.**  
9/18/57 - 9/28/93

**EACH LIFE AFFECTS ANOTHER'S**

We may not always realize that everything we do  
Affects not only our lives but touches others, too.  
A single happy smile can always brighten up the  
day

for anyone who happens by.  
And a little bit of thoughtfulness that shows  
someone you care,  
Creates a ray of sunshine for both of you to share.

Yes, every time you offer someone a helping hand,  
Every time you show a friend you care and  
understand.

Every time you have a kind and gentle word to  
give,  
You help someone find beauty in this precious  
life we live,  
For happiness brings happiness,  
and loving ways bring love,  
And giving is the treasure  
that contentment is made of.

*Author Unknown*

**I'M TIRED OF BEING STRONG**

“Forgive me Lord, but I’m tired of being some of  
the things I’ve tried so hard to be ... I’m tired of  
being so capable, so efficient. I’m tired of the  
compliment, ‘You are such a strong person, I  
admire your strength’. I’m tired of being  
considered so patient and understanding that  
people dump their troubles on me. I’m tired of  
being so cheerful. I want to be free to be cross and  
complain and not get a ‘buck up, old chap’ routine.  
I’m tired of being considered so independent, so  
strong. Sometimes, at least sometimes, Lord, I  
want to be weak and helpless, able to lean on  
somebody, able to cry and be comforted. Lord, I  
guess there are just times when I want to be a child  
again, running to climb on my mother’s lap.”

*Marjorie Holmes* “Hold Me Up a Little”

AFTER TWO YEARS

Two years ago my ten year old daughter, Stephanie, was struck by a car and died. To lose Stephanie will be the most difficult thing my family will have to survive. It has been a difficult time, not just for my husband Donald and myself, but for our two remaining children, Krista and Kevin. Our lives changed that day, and will never be the same again.

When asked, people will most likely tell you we are doing good, going on with our lives, and that we are fine. If you look up the definition of fine, it means superior or sharp. I can tell you the pain my family has had to bear from the loss of Stephanie is very superior and sharp, like the edge of a knife.

People's expectations of a grieving parent truly amaze me. It certainly hasn't gotten easier to face each day. Whether it is one week, one month, one year or two years, the pain is always there. Time does not change the fact she is dead and not a living part of my family. The only thing it does is distance the day you last saw her.

Let's face it, you actually have no choice, except to continue your life, even though that is the last thing you want to do. One thing I am learning is that my grieving for Stephanie will never go away. What I have to do to survive is let it happen. Don't make apologies or excuses for the way I am. This is very hard because people who know you, want you to be the way you were before her death, and you just can't. It's impossible.

I can remember day dreaming about all the things Stephanie would do as she grew older. I imagined things she and I would do together; helping and guiding her and just being part of her life. Most important of all not just being her mother, but becoming her FRIEND. Now I find myself day dreaming of what would have been and how it should be. Desperately trying to remember everything she liked and enjoyed doing and praying I will dream of her each night when I sleep.

When I see other families together, I want the family I once had. I want my little girl to greet me at the door with her cheerful hello and her beautiful smile. I want to go to her school concert, and tuck her into bed each night. The list goes on and on. Knowing what I had, and what I could have, makes Stephanie's loss so much more painful. I do know if I was told "I have a special gift for you but you can only have her for 10 years", I would have wanted her. I just would have appreciated our time together all the more.

I am changing, my family is changing. I have no idea of what will become of us. Hopefully we will continue to grow closer with each passing day, in a way we never expected. We will survive. I do know what will never change, and that is the love I have in my heart for a beautiful blond, blue eyed little girl named Stephanie. I love her and wish I could change what has happened, but I can't. What I have to do is learn to live without her.



**Peggie Finan**, TCF -Valley Forge, PA Chapter  
Daughter: **Stephanie Ann Finan**, 10/5/82 - 7/24/93

**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.

written (1985) by *Ellen Bruno* / Valley Forge, PA TCF  
dedicated to her son *J.B.* who died at the age  
of 29 of a massive heart attack 9/15/84