

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

DECEMBER 2007

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

- Dec 6** General Sharing & Loss by Suicide
Collection of gifts for First Step (see page 4)
- Dec 9** World Wide Candle Lighting - **4 PM**
(see page 4 - NOTE TIME CHANGE)
Collection of gifts for First Step (see page 4)
- Jan 3** General Sharing
- Feb 15-17** Chapter Leadership Training
Program in Atlanta, Georgia
- Apr 18-20** Chapter Leadership Training
Program in Oak Brook, Illinois

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.** Donations are also accepted at meetings. We are most grateful for your support.

**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.

NOVEMBER REFRESHMENTS

Rhonda Gomez in memory of their son, *Frankie Jr.* 9/30/72 - 7/17/03

Ann Rapoport in memory of *all children of the Valley Forge Chapter.*

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

**UNITED WAY CONTRIBUTIONS are a major source of our chapter funds. For those pledging to our chapter, through their work place, your contribution should designate:
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS - VALLEY FORGE CHAPTER - CODE #04-104**

In the past The Compassionate Friends had two credos, one for bereaved parents, and one for bereaved siblings. The National Board of Directors have adopted the following credo, which replaces both of the previous credos.

The new credo unifies bereaved families, encompassing parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.

The Compassionate Friends Credo

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

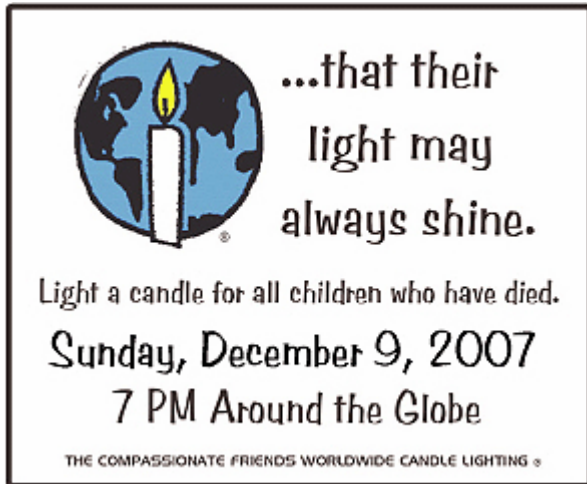
The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us. Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships. We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength; while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. ©2007



The Worldwide Candle Lighting

In loving memory of all children who are no longer with us. The Compassionate Friends extends an invitation for you, your family, and friends to join tens of thousands of persons around the globe for the tenth annual Worldwide Candle Lighting.

On Sunday December 9, 2007, hundreds of Community Candle Lighting Ceremonies will be held in public places. Thousands more will be held informally in homes. The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting is held every year on the Second Sunday in December at 7 PM local time for one hour in each time zone around the globe, a 24 hour Remembrance of all children who have died.

The Valley Forge Chapter of The Compassionate Friends will hold a Remembrance Service on December 9th at 4 PM, (please note time change) at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in the fellowship hall (same place our monthly sharing secessions are held).

We also urge you to light a candle in your home at 7 PM. We chose 4 PM for our local service so that it would be available to everyone, including those who do not drive at night. We hope you will take this opportunity to join us in remembering our children who have died, but will never be forgotten. Let us ensure that their light may always shine.

REMEMBRANCE SERVICE SPEAKER

Barbara Scarlata is an attorney in Media with a practice specializing in family law. She is one of only two Child Advocates in Delaware County, representing the legal interests of the children in the foster care system. She lives in Media with her husband of 28 years, Jack Seward. Jack is also an attorney and works in the Social Security Administration. They have a biological daughter, Laura, age 23 who is a graduate student at University of Alabama, and a son, Sergey, who they adopted from Russia.

Their younger daughter, Erica, was born in 1987, and died just short of her 5th birthday in August 1992 after just a one month battle with leukemia.

GIFTS FOR FIRST STEP

First Step is a program of Chester County for under privileged/handicapped children. For many years our Chapter has collected gifts for them. We will do so again this year, you may bring your gifts to our December 6th monthly meeting, or at the Remembrance Service on December 9th. The children are between the ages of 2 and 6. Both clothing and toys are welcome gifts. Please do not wrap gifts. It is very rewarding to remember your child, by showing love to these children. You may sign it, "from your friend", or your child or sibling's name. This may be the only gift the child will receive. We appreciate your participation in this worthy cause.

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.

THE DASH

I read of a man who stood to speak
At the funeral of a friend
He referred to the dates on her tombstone
From the beginning to the end.

He noted that first came the date of her birth
And spoke the following date with tears,
But he said what matters most of all
Was the dash between those years.

For the dash represents all the time
That he spent alive on earth.
And now only those who loved him
Know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own;
The cars, the house. the cash,
What matters is how we live and love
And how we live our dash.

So think about this long and hard,
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left,
That can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough
To consider what's true and real
And always try to understand
The way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger,
And show appreciation more
And love the people in our lives
Like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect,
And more often wear a smile
Remembering that this special dash
Might only last a little while.

So when your eulogy is being read
With your life's actions to rehash
Would you be proud of the things they say
About how you spent your dash?

Linda Ellis

SHARED THOUGHTS ON THE HOLIDAYS

This time of year that we have always faced with joy and excitement, frequently turns to fear for those facing their first Christmas, Chanukah, or whatever your choice of holiday is (or perhaps your second year, that still seems like the first). The tinsel, holly, music, and joy around us seem overwhelming.

Remember, we are grieving people, and are very limited to what we can give. To reduce pressure on ourselves, it helps to be realistic and don't over commit. Failing to follow through adds to our depression and lowers our self-esteem.

It is important to take time out to grieve and express our emotions, which can relieve a lot of stress. We have a right to mourn even though those around us are celebrating a joyous occasion, and those around us have a right to be joyous. When analyzing our depression over the holidays, we have to admit we are feeling so low because of missing those wonderful times, which we too, enjoyed. For now, it may be necessary to separate ourselves from the celebration, and concentrate on the greatest gift we have ever given our child, grandchild, or sibling, the gift of love. That gift can still be given to our loved one. For those of us who have a religious belief, it may be a time to reflect on our faith.

Shopping for family and friends sometimes creates a feeling of guilt, because we cannot buy for the missing family member. It helped me to begin by treating myself to seven new ceramic Christmas balls with each child's name and birthdate. I did not put Doug's death date on his, for it is his life I want to remember. I also bought a wreath for my front door, that I planned to take to the cemetery the week before Christmas. This made me feel that I could bring part of his home to him. Each year I purchase a new decoration for our home in his remembrance. I don't announce it to anyone, but I know why it's there. These things help to give the feeling that he is not left out. This may not be good for everyone. You may want to find "your special remembrance" project to get you through.

It is important for us to discuss plans with other family members in our home. Firstly, to know what they need to get themselves through, and secondly, for you not to bear all the stress of decision making. Be flexible, there is no right or wrong rules, you can run away, or stay at home. Some stay at home and make changes. Others stay at home with no changes, and face it head on. (This was the best for me, because I have six surviving children) Sometimes well meaning non-bereaved individuals want us to lay our grief aside during the holidays. They don't understand our need to grieve. It is very appropriate to say, "I have to do this holiday my way, for I think this is best for me".

In my early stages of grief, I felt there would never be another happy holiday. The pain softens, and though it is different, I look forward to and enjoy holidays. I cannot expect you to believe this can happen to you, for I did not believe others before me. We must remember, even though our holiday is not good, it may be the best we can have, given the situation we are in. No matter where we spend our holiday our deceased loved one's memories will be with us. May you find hope to believe your holidays can be good again.

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

A SIBLING SPEAKS OUT

What happens to the children when a Brother or sister dies? In some ways it is a very different experience from that which parents go through, while in others it is very much the same. Part of the reason for the difference is that the child who has died has a unique relationship with each family member. Part of the reason for the similarity is that all have suffered a loss.

One of the strongest desires expressed by siblings is that they are much more likely to want to return to a normal routine. They want to return to school fairly quickly and to go out with their friends. They want their parents to stop crying, not because they don't care but because they do care and want to see the hurt stop. Just because a child wants to go to a movie doesn't mean he isn't grieving. I think that children are much less exposed to socially "appropriate" behavior after someone has died and may do things that do not fit into an "appropriate" role.

Another strong feeling I see is that of guilt. As much as parents know about their children, there are some things they will never know. A child's private thoughts, or an exchange between children, may never come to the parents attention. The source of child's guilt is frequently the result of an argument, a hastily shouted "drop dead," or a similar fleeting thought. These incidents come back to haunt children, as though one such incident had something to do with the death.

There are a few more concerns that may develop. One is how to take over for the dead child--for example, the household chores that were always done by him or her, but that now have to be done by someone else. Related to this concern is a situation in which a child always shared a particular activity simply because the sibling did it too. After the death, the surviving sibling may feel compelled to continue the activity, because to give it up would be to take away a reminder of the dead sibling. Another concern is that whatever happened to the brother or sister may happen to the survivor. This is particularly acute if the sibling who died was older. As the child approaches the age of the sibling when he or she died, a feeling of anxiety may develop. Many children realize this fear to be groundless, but

find themselves wondering if they will survive. Consequently, birthdays are often occasions with unexpressed conflicts.

Children also share some of their parents' feelings: the loneliness, the looking for comfort, the feeling that no one else really knows what they're going through. They also share unanswerable questions:

"If I could have. . . ?" and "What if...?"

A child's life is changed forever when a brother or sister dies. If I could advise parents, it would be to say, "Children do not grieve the same way as parents do because of different relationships. Keeping these differences in perspective will help you understand why children sometimes do the things they do. It helps to consider a child's point of view when you are hurting so much. During such an emotionally draining time as grieving, don't leave anything to chance; don't assume anything. Making sure you and your children are aware of each other's feelings will mean less confusion, less tension, more sharing, and more growing together as a family."

Julie Peterson TCF, Pawtucket, RI

TO MY BROTHER

Wherever we look,
You are there.
You are the light
On the water.
You are the blossom
On the tree.
You are a thought,
And you are a feeling.
Wherever we are,
You are.

Martha Dubinsky
TCF, Chappaqua, NY

BEYOND SURVIVING

Hundreds of books have been written about loss and grief. Few have addressed the aftermath of suicide for survivors. Here again, there are no answers; only suggestions from those who have lived through and beyond the event. I've compiled their thoughts.

1. Know you can survive. You may not think so, but you can.
2. Struggle with "why" it happened until you no longer need to know "why", or until you are satisfied with partial answers.
3. Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings but all your feelings are normal.
4. Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy, - you are in mourning.
5. Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself.
6. You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do.
7. Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean that you will act on those thoughts.
8. Remember to take one moment or one day at a time.
9. Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.
10. Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
11. Give yourself time to heal.
12. Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence in another's life.
13. Expect setbacks. Don't panic if emotions return like a tidal wave. You may only be experiencing a remnant of grief; an unfinished piece.
14. Try to put off major decisions.
15. Give yourself permission to get professional help.
16. Be aware of the pain of your family and friends.
17. Be patient with yourself and with others who may not understand.
18. Set your own limits and learn to say no.
19. Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
20. Know that there are support groups that can be helpful, such as The Compassionate Friends or Survivors of Suicide Groups. If not, ask a professional to help start one.
21. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
22. It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, i.e. - headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep, etc.
23. The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.
24. Wear out your questions, anger, guilt, or other feelings until you can let them go.
25. Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and go beyond just surviving...

Iris Bolton, Author of "My Son, My Son"

YOU AND YOUR GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Do what is right for you during the holidays. Well-meaning friends and family may try to prescribe to you what you should do during the holiday season, or more specifically, on the holiday itself. Discuss your plans with a trusted friend who won't judge the decisions you make about how and with whom you will spend your time. As you become aware of your needs, share them with your friends and family.

Include in your conversation the name of the person who has died. If others sense you are able to talk about your loved one, it may help them recognize your need to remember the joy of having loved the person who was an important part of your life.

Be with people you find supportive and comforting. Identify those people around you who understand that holiday times heighten your feeling of loss and who will allow you to talk about your experience.

Embrace your treasure of memories. Perhaps one of the best legacies that exists after the death of a loved one is memories. Holidays always stimulate us to think of times past. If your memories bring laughter, let yourself smile; if your memories bring sadness, let yourself cry.

Be tolerant of your inability to function at optimum level. Your feelings of loss will probably leave you feeling fatigued and your energy level will naturally slow down – respect what your body and mind are telling you as you work to lower your expectations of operating at high levels of efficiency.

Do plan ahead. Decide what family traditions you want to maintain and what new ones you may want to start. Knowing how you will structure your time tends to help you anticipate schedules rather than just letting things happen.

From: "You and Your Grief During Holiday Season"
By *Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.*

LONELINESS AND HOW TO OVERCOME IT

Why are there times when a bereaved parent feels lonely, even though surrounded by loving people, and people the bereaved parent loves? Loneliness is the outgrowth of separation from one who has given meaning to life. Yes, other relationships offer meaning, but it is normal for the searing pain from the loss of one's child to supersede the pleasure from other experiences. Part of yourself had been invested in another person. When that person has died, in a sense, you are lonely for a part of yourself that has been destroyed. At times you look around you and think that no one else is experiencing the pain you are feeling; that no one else's world has been shattered. *This self-centeredness is a natural part of the grief process. Do not deny it, but DO NOT HOLD ON TO IT AS A WAY OF LIFE.* Give yourself permission to accept help from others and then to reach out and help others. Although your child is not here to give continuity to your life, by having lived and having given purpose to your life, your child can be the bridge of your continuity with life as a thinking, loving and active person.

Ruth Eiseman TCF Northwest Chapter, CT