

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

A self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents and siblings

DECEMBER 2006

Inside Valley Forge

All 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 Roads, King of Prussia, PA. Phone on meeting evenings only is 610-265-0733. All other times please call Mary Jane or Ann at 484-919-0820.

Meeting Schedule

Please Mark Your Calendar

Dec 7 - General Sharing & Suicide

**Dec 10 - World Wide Candle Lighting Service
2PM (see page 3)**

Dec 7 & 10 - Collection of Gifts for First Steps

Jan 4 - General Sharing



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The next issue of the Valley Forge Chapter Newsletter will include both January and February. This change applies to the January/February issues only.

The new cut-off date for newsletter entries will be 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
MARY JANE POORE OR ANN RAPOPORT**

NEW FRIENDS

Michelle Doll son, **Justin Suellen & Stephen King** daughter, **Dannelle Rossi Susan Leonard** grandson, **Nathan**

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 that 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.

REFRESHMENTS

Marilyn Toole son, **Ted Toole**

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

LOVE GIFTS

Susan Bonfiglio in loving memory at Thanksgiving for my wonderful son, **Jim Bonfiglio** whom I love and miss always. Thanks for the beautiful memories.

Bobbie Coyle in memory of my son, **Whit Coyle**
Ann DiDonato in loving memory of our precious son, **Kenneth DiDonato** on his 2nd anniversary & 41st birthday with lots of love always in our hearts and minds.

Nora & Peter Heiss in memory of our beautiful daughters, **Kathy Heiss McCaughan** and **Noreen Heiss Schmucker** We miss you so much, our hearts are broken.

Joanne & Thomas Lennen in loving memory of our son, **Scott C. Lennen** on his 43rd birthday.

Always in our thoughts, forever in our hearts.
Mom & Dad

Peggy & John O'Brien in loving memory of our son, **Rick O'Brien**

Sheldon & Joan Plam in memory of our beloved and cherished son, **Michael Tobiah Plam** on his 12th anniversary. We will miss and love you forever.

Harry & Merrily Spiess in loving memory of our son, **Ryan Spiess**.

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 7th monthly meeting & December 10th at the World Wide Candle Lighting Service. The children are between the ages of 2 and 6. Both clothing and toys are welcome gifts. It is very rewarding to remember your child, by showing love to these children. Please **DO NOT** wrap your gift. This may be the only gift the child will receive. We appreciate your participation in this worthy cause.

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting



Held annually the second Sunday in December, this year December 10, The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe as they light candles for one hour to honor and remember children who have died at any age from any cause. As candles are lit at 7 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor children in a way that transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious, and political boundaries.

The Valley Forge Chapter of The Compassionate Friends will hold a remembrance service on December 10th at **2 PM**, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in the fellowship hall (same place our monthly sharing sessions are held). We also urge you to light a candle in your home at 7 PM.

We chose 2 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.

SPEAKER: Dr. Yvonne Kaye

Dr. Yvonne Kaye is an international speaker with a wide range of subjects, including post traumatic stress disorder and bereavement, specializing in the death of children. She is a certified Thanatologist, veteran radio talk show host, author, columnist and Interfaith Minister, believing in the power of the human spirit. Involved with long term illness and crises, Dr. Kaye is a strong advocate of humour and spirituality. She uses her own life experiences as a basis for her work. She is a Spiritual Coach and her philosophy is "Laughter is the miracle healer". Dr. Kaye recently received the prestigious Matty Muir Award 2005 for work with victims of crime.

Dr. Yvonne Kaye has given much support for many years to The Compassionate Friends. She has been a speaker on numerous subjects at many varied occasions of TCF Chapters in our area. Dr. Kaye has often been a keynote speaker at Regional, National and International Conference of TCF

www.yvonnekaye.com - irrevrev@comcast.net - 215-393-5464

NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL

The newsletter will be available by email to those who wish to receive it in this form. The printing and mailing of more than 650 monthly newsletter is our largest chapter expenditure. You will receive the newsletter earlier if you opt to receive the newsletter by email, because of the delay in printing and bulk mailing. 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

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

We are actively seeking a volunteer to assume the responsibility of the Newsletter Editor for the Valley Forge Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. This position entails preparing a master copy of the newsletter that is ready for printing.

If you find you have gained enough strength, and are ready to reach out to help others, we hope you will consider being a part of the team that ensures our organization will be available to bereaved families.

It is very healing and rewarding for us to contribute time in memory of our Child or Sibling. We most often receive as much, if not more, than we give.

If you are interested in helping, please contact:

Ann Rapoport 484-919-0820 or email: libbyann47@yahoo.com.

For job details contact:

Marie & Ken Hofmockel 610-337-1907 email: kenhofmockel@comcast.net

MARK YOUR 2007 CALENDAR

30th National Conference of The Compassionate Friends
July 20-22, 2007 --July 19th Pre Conference Professional Day
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Eastern Pennsylvania Regional Conference
September 28, 29, & 30, 2007
Radisson Hotel in King of Prussia.

Volunteers are always needed to work at conferences. This is a tremendous experience where much healing takes place. We expect 300 + attendees. If you have an interest in being part of the conference team, please contact the Regional Coordinators as listed on page 1 of our newsletters. We hope you will join us in this event.

SUNRISE SUNSET

song lyrics from Fiddler on the Roof

Is this the little girl I carried?
Is this the little boy at play?
I don't remember growing older
When did they?

When did she get to be a beauty?
When did he get to be so tall?
Wasn't it yesterday
When they were small?

Sunrise, sunset
Sunrise, sunset
Swiftly flow the days
Seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers
Blossoming even as we gaze

Sunrise, sunset
Sunrise, sunset
Swiftly fly the years
One season following another
Laden with happiness and tears

What words of wisdom can I give them?
How can I help to ease their way?
Now they must learn from one another
Day by day

They look so natural together
Just like two newlyweds should be
Is there a canopy in store for me?

Sunrise, sunset
Sunrise, sunset
Swiftly flow the days
Seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers
Blossoming even as we gaze

Sunrise, sunset
Sunrise, sunset
Swiftly fly the years
One season following another
Laden with happiness and tears.

Submitted by **Jacqueline Rider**, TCF Valley Forge, in loving memory of my children
son, **Matthew Rider** 2/14/82 - 2/14/82
son, **Joshua Rider** 4/7/78 - 11/5/99
daughter, **Michelle Connelly** 9/24/66 - 4/14/05

SYMPATHY

Neither poetry nor prose can ease the pain of one's bereavement, or justify the loss,
but time and the tides of life lighten every burden and soothe every heart.

Gerri Taran

SHARED THOUGHTS ON GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

As we approach the holidays, it is normal for our fears to become magnified. The holidays put an extra burden on us physically, financially, and emotionally, this can be an overwhelming time. Sometimes friends and family forget the stress and depression we are coping with.

It is unfair to expect the non-bereaved to understand what we are experiencing, and to know the length of time it takes to work through our grief. Before our loss, we could not fathom the depth of despair it takes to get through our anguish. This may be a good time to be honest, and tell family and friends, "we are both physically, and emotionally drained, we plan to participate in the holidays as much as we are capable. But, that we do need understanding, and to be excused from painful gatherings, so we can grieve, remember our child or sibling and heal through doing these things." When responding to invitations, it is helpful to be very open (but kind), and ask them to not pressure us to do more than we are capable.

Part of our celebration, is to reminisce the beautiful time our family was all-intact, enjoying just being together. Now we face these same holidays knowing the circle will never again be complete, the intensity of it all makes us afraid. We are aware of the shattered dreams, and how our future will always remain somewhat fragmented. It is very difficult for newly bereaved to accept that it will get any better. But, those of us, who have more time in our bereavement, know the pain will soften, but special occasions will always tug at our emotional stability. We have also learned that those occasional tears are OK, and now that we are much stronger, we can tolerate the down times, for we have much more resilience.

Frequently, we try to take on more than we can handle. It is important to not over burden ourselves, for that increases our fatigue, and lowers our self-esteem when we can't fulfill our commitment. You may want to re-evaluate your traditions, and decide which ones are really important to you, and are they worth keeping.

For those of us who have been able to maintain our relationship with our Supreme Being, find it helpful to concentrate on our spirituality, rather than the commercialism of the holidays. It often helps to do something to commemorate our children, or sibling - a remembrance service, light a candle, buy an ornament, write notes to our loved one, visit the grave, only you and your immediate family can decide what will get you through the holidays. It often helps to set aside some special time for our grief, to deal with our feelings, and express our love for our child or sibling in private.

Remember, getting through the holidays will help us take one more step in our healing process. It is unfortunate that we have to experience this pain to grow, and regain control of our life. Each of these hurdles helps to strengthen us, to get us through today, and into tomorrow, where we may find hope and peace.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel*, TCF Valley Forge

**We wish all of you a very meaningful Holiday,
May love be what you remember the most.**

CONCERNING SIBLINGS

It's been said that when a child's brother or sister dies, actually three people are lost: the sibling and both parents. The sibling also loses a friend, playmate, confidant, role model, and lifelong companion. For the parents, the loss of a child is often so traumatic that they have little left to give to the surviving children. Yet the surviving sibling has fears, needs, and anxieties that must be explored and addressed if the child is to avoid negative long term consequences. Listed here are normal feelings siblings might have concerning the loss along with some suggestions on what to do to encourage their expression.

Normal Thoughts

- * "Did I cause the death?"
- * "Will the rest of my family die?"
- * "Who will take care of me now?"
- * "I'm all alone now."
- * "Half of me died."
- * "I'm different from all the other kids."
- * "I'm not a child anymore."
- * "I feel left out."
- * "Things will never be the same again."
- * "No one cares about my grief, only about my parents grief."
- * "I can't cry because it will make my parents more upset."
- * "I feel guilty to be happy or to laugh."
- * "Why wasn't it me?"
- * "Will I die young too?"
- * "I made it happen by wishing him dead!"
- * "If I act like my sibling, maybe my parents will feel better."
- * "Maybe my parents would love me more if I died!"

Normal Feelings

- * Impatient and angry at the world.
- * Resentful over the attention the parents are getting.
- * Resentful over the attention they are not getting.
- * Fearful of having to replace the sibling.
- * Guilt for feeling relieved over the death after a long illness.
- * Guilt over all the "bad" thoughts, words, and fights with the deceased.

How To Help

- * The bereaved parents should constantly remind themselves to be sensitive to the feelings of the surviving children.
- * The parents should strive to maintain as much of a normal routine as possible for the survivors.
- * The parents should encourage grieving, openness and the expression of feelings in the children by grieving openly and expressively in front of them.
- * Reassure them that they are not going to die, too.
- * Reassure them that they are loved, wanted and okay.
- * Reassure them that they did not cause the death in any way.
- * Give lots of physical reassurance in the way of touching and hugs.
- * Contact the teacher/teachers or school counselors.
- * Ask them what and how they would like the school to be told.
- * Prepare them for questions and remarks they can expect at school.
- * Encourage them to resume their normal activities at their own pace.
- * Remember the sibling's birthday and anniversary of the death.
- * Remember the sibling at special family gatherings and functions.
- * Don't be afraid to talk about the child that died.
- * Talk about all the qualities of the child that died - positive and negative.
- * Talk about the differences between the siblings - good and bad.
- * Don't promise them a replacement sibling with talks of having another child.
- * Remember surviving siblings cannot become, or replace, the deceased - brother or sister.

TLC Group grants anyone the right to use this information without compensation so long as the copy is not used for profit or as training materials in a profit making activity such as workshops, lectures, and seminars, and so long as this paragraph is retained in its entirety.

Adapted From: *Helping Children Cope With Loss*
Buz Overbeck – Joanie Overbeck
 TLC Group, TX 1995

THE NORMAL FAMILY

If you think you are going insane,
 THAT'S NORMAL.
If all you can do is cry,
 THAT'S NORMAL.
If you have trouble with the most minor decisions,
 THAT'S NORMAL.
If you can't taste your food or have any semblance of
an appetite,
 THAT'S NORMAL.
If you have feelings of rage, denial and depression,
 THAT'S NORMAL.
If you find yourself enjoying a funny moment and
immediately feeling guilty,
 THAT'S NORMAL.
If your friends dwindle away and you feel like you
have the plague,
 THAT'S NORMAL.

If your blood boils and hair in your nose curls when
someone tells you, "It was God's Will,"
 THAT'S NORMAL.
If you can share your story, your feelings with an
understanding listener – another bereaved parent,
 THAT'S A BEGINNING.
If you can get a glimmer of your child's life rather
than his/her death,
 THAT'S WONDERFUL.
If you can remember your child with a smile,
 THAT'S HEALING.
If you find your mirrors have become windows and
you are able to reach out to other bereaved parents,
 THAT'S GROWING.

Edith Fraser

MEMORIES OF DOUG

I close my mind, and fight the thoughts,
that haunt me even still.
The winter night, the sudden crash,
the road beside the hill.
The tree's still there, it hurt it not,
the screeching is long since gone.
So why do thoughts keep turning back
to just before that dawn?
It still sounds clear, the thoughts and sounds,
that brought me there that night.
The tears that fell, and prayers we said,
to help him with his fight.
Time passes by, and clears my head,
But never can it clear that night
for all of endless time.

Kevin Hofmockel, TCF Valley Forge
written 3 months after the death of my
brother, Douglas 8/27/65 - 2/7/82

CHANUKAH

Chanukah is here.
I see the candles glow,
red, pink and blue.
But you're not here to
see their pretty shadows.
I shop for gifts.
And this year, again, once more,

I won't be in a quandary
of what to buy.
I give you my love,
My precious son,
for that is eternal.
And once again.
it will have to do.

Ginette Kravet Central Jersey TCF

The depth of your sorrow diminishes slowly and, at times, imperceptibly. Your recovery is not an act of disloyalty to the one who has died. Nor is it achieved by forgetting the past. Try to strike a delicate balance between a yesterday that should be remembered and a tomorrow that must be created.

Author Unknown

HANUKKAH

At this season of lights,
 We remember the light you brought
 into our lives:
 The light of your laughter
 The light of your wit and intelligence
 The light of your love
 May the time not be distant when the
 memory of these lights
 Will illumine our hearts and minds
 And eradicate the darkness therein.
Stephanie Hesse TCF Rockland Co. NY

A CHRISTMAS WISH

I'll miss you at Christmas
 When laughter's every where,
 When church bells chime
 In merry rhyme
 And warmth is in the air.
 I'll think of you at Christmas
 Of when you were with me,
 Of simple joys and silly toys
 And days that used to be.
 I'll miss you at Christmas
 When children's faces glow,
 And gaze in childish wonderment
 At Santa and presents in a row.
 I wish a Christmas miracle
 Could bring you back this way,
 And we could be together
 For one more Christmas day.
Lily deLauder

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS

Beyond the Christmas trees, the angels and
 stars and beloved carols ... beyond the presents,
 the shopping, the baking and cooking ,, beyond
 all of these sights and sounds of Christmas ...
 beyond all of these ... there is **HOPE**.

HOPE ... for the bereaved parent, even at
 Christmas, one of the most, if not the most,
 painful times of the year, there is an essence of
HOPE . **Hope** ... it is **HOPE** that sustains us
 through the days of grief and anger and
 frustration and loneliness.

The **HOPE** is that someday the pain of the
 deaths of our children will be eased. The **HOPE**
 is that someday our smiles will be real. The
HOPE is that once again we will laugh and love
 and cry completely without fear and hollowness.
 It is the **HOPE** that some day we can remember
 our children with a tenderness merely tinged with
 sorrow and not overwhelmed with it.

So it is that for each of you, I offer HOPE ...
 peace, compassion, love, sympathy,
 understanding, sharing, and listening. In the
 sharing of our grief with one another and in the
 emotional support we give to one another, we
 receive and understand all of these gifts.

Wabash Valley Chapter / TCF Terre Haute, IN

Those we hold dear never truly leave us. They
 live on in the kindness they showed, and the love
 they brought into our lives.

Isabel Norton, Central Iowa Newsletter

Time does not really heal a broken heart; it only
 teaches a person how to live with it.

By A. L. Sheppard, Jr., Fort Worth

Sometimes when just one person is missing--
The whole world seems so empty
author unknown