

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

FEBRUARY 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

Feb 7	General Sharing & Loss by Suicide
Feb 15-17	Chapter Leadership Training Program in Atlanta, Georgia
Mar 6	SPECIAL PROGRAM see page 3
Apr 18-20	Chapter Leadership Training Program in Oak Brook, Illinois
Jul 17,18,19	TCF National Conference 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. 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.

JANUARY REFRESHMENTS

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

**MARCH 6TH 7:45PM TCF VALLEY FORGE MONTHLY MEETING,
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Valley Forge & Henderson Roads, King of Prussia, PA**

GUEST SPEAKER - ALAN PEDERSEN

Alan Pedersen has been performing for more than 25 years. An accomplished singer and award winning songwriter, he spent several years writing and recording music in Nashville, Tennessee. Alan has had several songs recorded by other artists.

His writing has not been limited to music, he has written commercials, radio news copy, and collaborations for television shows and other comedy projects. His performing credits are numerous as well. Alan has worked as an actor, stand-up comedian, keynote speaker/emcee, and in radio as a network news and sports reporter for Westwood One Communications.

Currently living in Englewood, Colorado, Alan is the father of four boys and an angel.

In August of 2001 Alan's life took a tragic turn, his 18-year-old and only daughter Ashley was killed in an automobile accident. This tragedy would take his life in a direction he never imagined. Struggling for months to find answers and trying to cope with tremendous pain and anger, he entered a grief program in Denver, Colorado and began attending monthly meetings of a support organization (The Compassionate Friends.)

Alan credits these organizations with saving his life and inspiring him to honor his daughter's life by helping others. In July of 2003, Alan released a CD of songs he had written about his walk through the valley of grief, titled Ashley's Songbook. In 2006, he released a follow up CD titled "A Little Farther Down The Road." Alan now helps others by sharing his story of faith and hope. His message is simple; grief and loss offer the opportunity for ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. He believes that healing begins when we once again give of ourselves by helping others.

Alan speaks and plays his music for churches and grief organizations around the country. In 2008 Alan will release his third CD of original music about the journey bereaved families must walk.

Alan has performed at National Conferences for The Compassionate Friends, Bereaved Parents of the USA, and the World Gathering on Bereavement. Alan will travel and speak to chapters of TCF, BP-USA, and other grief organizations dedicated to helping families grieving the loss of a child.. See his website: www.everashleymusic.com

You do not need to be a member of the TCF Valley Forge Chapter to attend. Everyone is welcome to the above event, there is no charge. In order that we have some indication of how many attendees to plan for, please contact one of the chapter leaders:

Ann Rapoport email: ann@tcfvalleyforge.org or (484) 919-0820 cell phone

Rhonda Gomez email: sugar@tcfvalleyforge.org or (484) 919-0820 cell phone

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.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

There will always be times when it's hard to remember your strengths. These are the times when you need to give yourself special attention. Be kind to yourself...Kindness nurtures and gives hope to growing dreams.Respect yourself...Listen to your needs, and treat yourself as you would a friend. Encourage yourself...Remember what you truly want, and fight for it as you would your life. Appreciate yourself...Don't take for granted the qualities that make you unique. Focus yourself...It is with discipline and motivation that you will move towards your goals. Be giving towards yourself...In that way your strength will thrive, and you'll be realizing your goals a day at a time.

Gail Mutterperl

SHARED THOUGHTS ON REMEMBERING THE SAD AS WELL AS THE HAPPY TIMES

February is the month we express our love to those significant persons in our lives. For many bereaved parents and siblings, it can be a time of increased pain. We miss the exchange of love from the person who has died. Our Douglas died on February 7th. Valentines day has always been a difficult time, because of being so close to his anniversary. Both holidays and anniversaries can renew our personal grief.

Our love does not end with the death. There still is a need to talk of our deceased, and how much they mean to us. Caring relatives and friends that will listen without judging, can be very helpful. We need to express our feelings, and feel understood, when we are both happy and sad. It is important to tell those trying to help us, that remembering that very special person who was such a significant part of our life is essential to our healing. They also need to know the importance of remembering the sad times for tears, as well as the happy times for laughter and smiles. Most non-bereaved feel only happy memories heal. Perhaps, this is because that is what feels most comfortable for them.

There is no way of knowing what another bereaved person is really experiencing. There are times we all hide our feelings. Often, we are concerned about family members close to us, and are afraid of adding to their suffering, so consequentially we avoid talking about the issue. We must remember they too may need to share their feelings, whether it be good or bad memories. We can offer comfort, understanding, and give them permission to express themselves.

Siblings tend to consider their parents the primary grievers, and often try to “be strong” for them. No one needs to be strong for another family member. The pretense of “holding it together” can be very damaging, and even deepen our depression. Depression can cause us to withdraw, so everyone needs to put effort into working very hard in keeping communications open.. Frequently, it is much more comfortable for siblings to share with peers, on any subject. When we sense we are pressuring them to talk, we must back off, and respect their wishes, or this can lead to their avoiding family gatherings. Sharing can not be forced.

Many times our support has come from the people we would least expect. Everyone must choose those they feel most comfortable with when sharing their grief. Give our children the same privilege when sharing such a personal part of their life.

One of the ways we can help our family most, is to do our own grief work. This means saving time for ourselves to face our pain, and not run away from it. If we heal and gain some normality back into our lives, it will make it easier for the rest of our household.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel* , TCF Valley Forge

MAY I GRIEVE?

In the daytime, I walk and work, and all;
 But at home, in the evening, I stumble and fall.
 The office says, “Function, smile and get control.”
 But at home I can grieve to cleanse my soul.
 Must I be two people for the rest of my life?
 If I could be just one person for more than one day,
 My freedom to grieve would help light the way.

But society tells me not to be sad,
 They say, “She’s at peace now
 and you should be glad.”
 When grieving the loss of a child is perceived,
 How much easier it is for we the bereaved.

Susanne Demars
 TCF, Hingham, MA

THE PAIN NEVER ENDS

To all of the people who come to our meeting
We are always there to give you a hug and a warm greeting
We know that the first meeting is hard with all of the pain inside
And we know that you will never be the same since your child died.

At first you feel there is no hope for you at all
Then you start talking about your child and everything that you can recall
You start to feel more that you belong here even though your pain never ends
Then you realize this is where you belong and that you have found a friend.

Someone who will listen to all the stories that you will tell
They try to give you strength and they hope that you will get well
We know all that you are going through all the hurt and pain
They are always glad to hear the stories that you tell over again.

If you come to more meetings you find out that is the thing to do
And you find out that there are so many friends that are there for you
They know how you feel and so many days how you are so blue
Because everyone at the meeting have walked in your shoes.

As time goes on you find out we are your new family and friends
And we also know that your pain and sorrow will never end
At the meetings you learn how to keep your child's memory alive
And that is part of your healing and helps you to survive.

As time goes on you learn to help so many others
Who have lost sons and daughters, sisters and brothers
That's when you find out why you came to Compassionate Friends
Because there are so many just like you and the story never ends.

Dee & Jack Heil 12-15-2005
NE PHILA. Chapter Leaders

WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR CHILD. Pour out your feelings to your child. The anger, guilt, love, and broken heart. Keep the letter to yourself or share it with others. Keep it or toss it in the trash. Writing is good therapy. **WRITE:**

What I wish I said to you.

What I wish I hadn't said to you.

What I wish I had done.

What I wish I had not done.

What I wish you would have done.

What I wish you had not done.

What I wish I could ask you.

What I would like to tell you. etc., etc.

BOYS

Boys
 bats, both winged and wood
 bugs, beehives
 dinosaurs
 balls of every size, color
 some hard, some soft
 bikes, big wheels then ten speeds
 baseball cards and bubble gum
 barber hair cuts
 Bert and Ernie lunch boxes
 Batman and Robin, G-I Joe
 but butterflies

cannon balls into the pool
 jack knives, and belly flops
 sun burns, sneakers
 and lost towels
 buck teeth, then braces
 bait, worms or bacon
 burps and farts
 black-eyes, blisters,
 bruises and scabs
 but butterflies
 and then always
 good-byes.

Taddy Dawson TCF Valley Forge, PA

PLEASE DON'T DISCOUNT SIBLING GRIEF

I have come to think of sibling grief as “Discount grief.” Why? Because siblings appear to be an emotional bargain in most people’s eyes. People worry so much about the bereaved parents that they invest very little attention in the grieving sibling.

My personal “favorite” line said to siblings is “you be sure and take care of your parents”. I wanted to know who was supposed to take care of me – I knew I couldn’t.

The grief of a sibling may differ from that of a parent, but it ought not be discounted. People need to realize that while it is obviously painful for parents to have lost a child, it is also painful for the sibling, who has not only lost a sister or brother, but an irreplaceable friend.

While dealing with this double loss, he or she must confront yet another factor. The loss of a brother or sister is frequently the surviving sibling’s first experience with the death of any young person. Young people feel they will live forever. A strong dose of mortality in the form of a sibling death is very hard to take.

The feelings of the siblings are also often discounted when decisions are being made – on things ranging from funeral plans to flower selections. Parents need to listen to surviving siblings who usually know a lot about the tastes and preferences of the deceased.

Drawing on the knowledge that surviving siblings have about supposedly trivial things – such as favorite clothes or music – can serve two purposes when planning funeral or memorial services. First, their input helps ensure that the deceased receives the type of service he or she would have liked. Second, their inclusion in the planning lets them know they are still an important part of the family.

I realize that people are unaware that they are discounting sibling grief. But then, that’s why I’m writing this – so people will know.

Jane Machado, TCF, Tulane, CA

GUIDELINES FOR GRIEVING COUPLES

Realize the death of your child will hurt more than you imagined. It will rearrange your life and world view. Your relationship with your partner will be stretched. There are some things you can do to reduce strain on your relationship.

You and your partner will grieve differently. Let go of the assumption that you "ought" to do it alike. Respectfully make room for each other's style.

Increase the amount of time you spend in each other's company. Listen to each other as much as you can. Do special little things for each other.

Realize you cannot meet all your partner's needs. You have limits. You are both overextended. Do seek appropriate outside support when you need it.

Focus on what you need. Let go of trying to get your partner to do something different about his or her own grief.

Grief takes its time and is not very predictable. Let go of trying to conform to anybody else's idea of how you ought to be doing.

Women, if you don't see "Dad" grieving in ways you recognize, stay clear of the trap of deciding this means he doesn't care about the baby (or you) very much. Ask him what he does with his sadness and sense of helplessness. Remember you both hurt. You will both feel it and show it in different ways.

Men, if your partner needs to talk about the baby and her grief more than you can absorb, encourage her to find additional places to talk. Show her you care in other ways. Keep clear of the trap of thinking you aren't doing it "right". Let go of trying to get her "through it" easier or faster.

Remember other parents have survived this much pain. Life will be meaningful again.

Keep remembering life will become meaningful again.

From "Coping with infant or Fetal Loss:
The Couple's Healing Process" By *Gilbert and Smart*

GRIEVING IN PAIRS

How many times have people said, "Well, thank God you have each other!" How many times have you felt each other to be entirely inadequate at meeting your needs.

Alarming statistics are available telling us of the rocky road parents encounter in their marriage after the death of a child. We sometimes see in ourselves a touchiness or quickness to become irritated that wasn't there before, it always seems that my "bad" day is my wife's "good" day, or the day she wakes up crying is the day I am planning to play tennis.

Or sometimes, even more difficult, we both have a bad day and find no help from the other in pulling things back together. How can one person hold up another when he is, himself, face down in the mud?

Every person grieves differently. This is a rule that even applies within a family. And the needs of every individual are different. While you may need to talk and talk, and talk, your spouse may need some time alone to reflect inwardly.

You have both been through the worst experience of your life. And while at times you can face recovery as a team, sometime you must develop the patience to be able to wait out certain needs alone or with someone else. Realize that no matter how it is shown, your partner hurts, too. *Gerry Hunt*

GRIEF WORK IS HARD WORK

When I first began my journey of grief following the death my only child, Todd, I didn't comprehend that I would have to take an active role in what would come to be defined as "grief work." All I knew was the pain, the shock, the sorrow, the desire to go to sleep and never awaken. My child was dead, and I had no desire to live.

As the months and then the years passed, I began to realize that I was, albeit unconsciously, doing grief work. Once I realized I could not walk this road alone, I became involved in our Compassionate Friends Chapter. That was the beginning of my "grief work." A few months later I enrolled in a six week program for bereaved mothers. More grief work. I have since attended seminars, retreats and workshops. From each effort I gained something new, something insightful, something that eased my burden just a bit, something that helped me to cope with this, the worst, of all losses.

I consumed books. Some were about grief; others were about life. I watched movie, some about grief and some about life. I talked with friends.....sometimes about grief and sometimes about life.

Along the way I found that if I reached out to others, I was, once again, doing grief work. You see, I discovered that grief work is healing work. It doesn't dry my tears, nor does it mend my broken heart. Instead, it allows me to accept that I am in this place and living in this moment. That doesn't sound like much.....unless one has lost a child to death. Lost a child to death. What a horrifying thought. Yet now I can say it to others, talk with others who are raw and new in their grief and know that I have come to accept that my son is gone from this plane. My grief work will continue until I die.

When we attend workshops, seminars, special presentations, Compassionate Friends meetings and privately contemplate the depth of our loss and changes in our lives, we are doing grief work. Each of us travels this road differently, but we owe it to ourselves to do our grief work. Not easy work, not fun work, not immediately rewarding work, but this is work, just the same.

In memory of my son, Todd Mennen *Annette Mennen Baldwin* TCF, Katy, TX

Our thanks and appreciation to:



Springfield, Pennsylvania

For funding this issue of our newsletter