

# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

## JANUARY 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

Jan 3	General Sharing
Feb 7	General Sharing & Loss by Suicide
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.**

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**DECEMBER 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.

**NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL**

The newsletter will be 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](mailto:fgomez@hybridpoplars.com)

**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).

We send our compassion and wishes for peace to **Frank & Rhonda Gomez** and family on the death of Frank's mother, **Leonor Gomez** 2/17/11 - 12/9/07. A memorial fund (The Nonita Fund) has been founded in her memory. For details please see website: [www.hybridpoplars.com/nonita.htm](http://www.hybridpoplars.com/nonita.htm)

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We send our love and compassion to **Jack Cohen** and family. Jack's wife, **Toba**, died on December 3rd. Toba & Jack are the founders of the Philadelphia Bustleton Chapter, which is now lead by Joan & Sheldon Plam. Toba & Jack joined Compassionate Friends after the death of their son, **A. Meyer Cohen**, 1/6/63 - 3/24/85. They also lost a son, **Richard Jonathan Cohen**, 12/19/56 - 1/12/61.

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Additional donations to the **Steven Harry Schneibolk** memorial fund, son of Pamela Hofmockel Schneibolk, grandson of Marie & Ken Hofmockel:

**Nina Bernstein**

**Marcia & Roger Alig**

**A. Morton Thomas and Associated, Inc.**

**Jack & Freda Gross**

**Dave & Kathleen Pellegrin**

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**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**

**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.**



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**THERE IS NO BETTER FRIEND**

For over 40 years, I have had the best friend you could ever have. When I told my best friend that I was fat, she never said, "I just lost three pounds without even trying."

When we went to a sock hop together in college and she was offered a ride home, she never ditched me.

When I gave myself a home permanent and left it on too long, she was the only one to sit with me in the bathroom until it grew out.

When I told my best friend my husband gave me two snow tires for our anniversary, she never said, "You should be happy he remembered."

When I was pregnant and my stomach looked like a tray on a car door in a drive-in, she never said, "There's a glow about a pregnant woman."

When I had a miscarriage and everyone else in the world said, "There will be other babies." She cried with me over the one I lost.

When she told me she was staying home for the summer, I wouldn't have dreamed of sending her a card from Spain telling her what a great time I was having.

When her mixer broke down, I never asked her if she had sent in the warranty card so she'd be covered.

When I moved 3,000 miles away, she never once told me what I was doing to her.

When her mother died, I never said, "She had a rich, full life and she was in her 70's."

When I argued with my husband and begged her advice, she kept her mouth shut. She just listened.

When we couldn't get a sitter and had to bring the kids along to her house for dinner, she never fell apart.

When I left my first autographing party and no one showed up, she never once suggested, "They probably didn't see the ad."

When her political candidate lost and mine won, I never said, "Ha, ha, I told you so."

Every time we got together, neither of us had to say, "I'm glad to see you."

Recently, my best friend lost her child. He was her youngest and was in his 20's. I listened to her. I cried with her. I felt pain that I had never known I could feel before. But not once did I say to her, "I know how you feel."

***Erma Bombeck***

## SHARED THOUGHTS ON SHOCK & DENIAL

Shock is often our survival after the loss of a child or sibling. Our minds go into a state of numbness that insulates us from the pain of fully facing the death all at once. We have discussed anticipatory grief with long term illness, and most will say even though the physician predicts the loved one to be terminal, the mind will still hold back in accepting the fact that death is inevitable.

It is natural to deny anything that will bring such unbearable pain. We use this cushion to get us through that very early stage of our grief, whether it be sudden or long-term. Our brain tries to take one step at a time.

In retrospect, the numbness that shock brought, insulated and cushioned me enough to survive. The time we stay in shock varies greatly. It can be an aide in our grief, but we can not stay there forever.

We usually move into denial. I found myself stuck here for a while; I just didn't want to face the fact that future plans did not include Doug. I wasn't finished mothering him, and having many other children did not help in the beginning. I had a lot of unfinished love that belonged to Doug alone, and it could not be directed toward another child. I felt very guilty for being so all consumed with grief, and not being able to function for my surviving children.

We aren't ready to move on, so we frequently tell ourselves it is all a bad dream that will go away. We don't want to be a part of anything that says our child is dead. The pain is too great to admit our loss is permanent. We can never approve of the happening, but we eventually have to acknowledge the fact that it did happen, so that we can establish where we are. Once we totally acknowledge the death, we move on to other stages of grief.

No matter how well we have learned the grief stages, we can not rush through them to reach the other side. It is called grief work because of the effort and time it takes. We must lean into the pain. It is so gut-wrenching, and we have all had feelings that we just can't survive it. But it softens, we learn to live and love ourselves again. We regain our ability to feel, look for a tomorrow, and all those good memories that we worried about forgetting are still there. When the healing takes away the gut-wrenching pain, the memories can be pleasant. I wish you could be where I am, without going through where I have been. Peace is there for us, but never comes as soon as we would like it to. Be patient with yourself

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel*, TCF Valley Forge

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### REMINISCING

I thought about you today,  
As I bade farewell for school.  
I thought about you today,  
When I heard a certain song.  
I thought about you today,  
As the teacher passed the test.  
I thought about you today,  
When the kids jumped in the leaves.  
I thought about you today,  
as a stranger passed my way.

I thought about you today,  
When I got drenched in the rain.  
I thought about you today,  
As I sat in church and prayed.  
I thought about you today,  
When I embraced an old friend.  
I thought about you today,  
As the day turned into night.  
I will think of you again,  
When I close my eyes and dream.  
*Lori Phillip*, TCF - Scranton, PA

***Count on grief to increase vulnerability.***

Human beings are most comfortable when they are in control of their lives and circumstances. Death, even when it's expected, represents the ultimate "change in plans." When a loved one dies, our former safety and security no longer seem to exist. Instead, we may experience feelings of helplessness and vulnerability that are frightening, as well as disarming. Yet it is precisely this vulnerability that can break down walls of resistance to new thought processes and open the way for new perspectives.

***Count on grief to create change.***

Grieving is a walk through unknown territory. Familiar internal and external stabilities disappear in a whirlwind of changing thoughts, feeling and emotional flux. We are reminded of our pain at odd times and in unexpected ways. Emotions hover near the surface and tears are hard to control. The stress of daily living taxes our protective defenses to the limit. Depression seems to slip in from nowhere, and anger erupts without warning. Because grief requires so much emotional energy, our finesse for social game-playing is greatly diminished. The bereaved meet the world at a disadvantage, continually surprising themselves and others with unpredictable responses to familiar situations.

***Count on grief to change social structure.***

The bereaved find their social networks changing and transforming around them. Disappointment with family and friends is a common theme. Those we expected to "be there for us" may not be able to meet our needs, and friends we didn't know we had appear "out of nowhere" to fill the void. As we come to terms with whatever limitations and expectations we have for ourselves, we also become aware of the limitations of others. Not everyone we care about will receive what they need from us while we're grieving. Not everyone who cares about us will be able to fully share our pain.

***Count on grief to stress marital bonds.***

Grief, like any other stress, complicates relationships. One grieving partner taxes a relationship – two grieving partners find their pain doubled. Because grieving is an unpredictable, moment-to-moment process, couples must be prepared to build flexibility into their union. Marriages are challenged when each expects too much from the other, and neither receives adequate support from social or extended family networks. Marriages are strengthened when each partner feels supported and is allowed individuality and freedom from expectations.

***Count on grief to define priorities.***

The bereaved often find themselves realigning their goals and objectives. For most of us, nothing is easily taken for granted after the death of a loved one. We understand that "now" is the only time there is, and that tomorrow may never come.

Relationships are more precious than ever, and we are less comfortable with "unfinished business" relating to those we care about. Because the cares and concerns built into our busy lives pale in comparison to our loss, the emphasis on people versus things takes on far greater meaning.

***Count on grief to increase spiritual awareness.***

The pain of grief prompts spiritual investigation into both the known and the unknown. Answers we were sure of before are not always satisfying in the context of our present reality. God is questioned and religion is held up for examination. Typically, there are many stages of distancing, moving toward, and moving within old and new spiritual concepts and beliefs. Our struggle for inner peace and unity seizes many priorities. In the majority of cases, our connection to ourselves and the universe becomes far more defined.

***Count on grief to strengthen compassion.***

Grief tears down the boundaries between ourselves and others. Bereavement enhances our humanness and strengthens our ties to the world around us. Our loss is a life-changing event; we will never again be the people we were before. Pain somehow opens us to greater levels of awareness and a greater capacity for compassion and understanding. Bereavement provides the catalyst to become more giving, more loving, and more fully aware.

***Count on grief to define the past and open doors to the future.***

For the bereaved, the world is completely new. The death of a loved one becomes a reference point around which we define where we've been and how we structure a path for tomorrow. Grief provides a "crash course" in some of the most profound lessons life has to offer. As bereaved individuals, we find ourselves with fewer answers but far more insights. In time, we learn there is no loss without gain and no sorrow without joy. As death closes doors behind us, new doors open before us.

*Ioanetta Hendel*

**On Sibling Grief  
From a Grieving Sibling**

I am a surviving sibling. Fifteen months ago I was not even familiar with the term...now I am one! How am I doing? What are the guidelines to measure my progress? Why can't I remember when I was told of my brother's death...or the days following the accident for that matter? Did I go crazy? Was it yesterday, or was it over a year ago? Did I laugh just today when I never thought I would laugh again? What is this peaceful feeling that I feel from time to time? Is it healing?

Lee, 29, was my little brother. I remember trying to alternately protect or tease him, make him laugh or make him cry. He was like having a real live baby doll to play with since I was 10 years older than he. (Our Mother said he was the cleanest little boy in the neighborhood. I guess having 3 older sisters is the reason for that!!!)

How can I explain the pain I felt on learning of his accident. I wanted to go to him right away to see that he was OK, but our cousin, Judy, said that wasn't possible. I guess that was when I was told that he was dead...but I don't remember that. I only remember screaming.

When was it that I began to heal? Probably at the same time that I thought I was going totally, certifiably crazy! Then, someone told me about The Compassionate Friends and what they did. I wondered if they could help me but doubted that they could. After all, how could they understand how much I hurt at having lost my precious baby brother or how close we had always been and how he always helped me. Why should they even care about me? But, you know what...they did help. With the help and support of this group of wonderful caring people, I am alive today and working toward a fruitful life. I will never be the same as I was before June 18, 1992, but I truly believe I have become a better person.

While Lee's life taught me so much, his death taught me some invaluable lessons. I have learned to become more aware of life and my own mortality and am more attuned to other needs. I no longer take anything for granted. I miss him terribly but take solace in the belief that he is happy in his new world and that one day we will be reunited.

Sibling grief takes a tremendous amount of time and work. Sometimes just thinking of my brother, looking at his picture, or hearing his favorite song, "God Bless America," reduces me to a teary mess. Sometimes these same things make me smile. But, I am surviving and have developed a new perspective on life. I am closer to and cherish my family more than ever and realize how very important they are. I am dedicated to helping other surviving siblings work through their grief. I pray daily for peace, not only for myself and my family, but for everyone making this journey through grief. One thing that I have found to be most helpful during the past fifteen months of grief work has been to talk about and to be honest about my feelings. I encourage siblings (and parents) to try to hook up with a support group such as The Compassionate Friends to talk out your feelings and concerns. After all, we've already paid an extremely high price to join this group...the life of our loved one...so why not take advantage of what they have to offer.

You may even find yourself helping someone else (even though you might not believe that now.)

*Sunday Lee Stanton*  
Wyoming Valley, PA

**Random Reflections**

It's been a year now  
And the books say I should be  
Getting back to "normal."

But I still can't pass your picture  
On the bookcase without  
Touching your face.

I still wake up in the night  
Sometimes and can almost  
Hear your voice in the quiet.

I still run to the window when the  
Dogs bark at night with the hope  
In the back of my mind that somehow  
You've wandered into the yard.

I still whisper your name into the wind  
When I walk down our lane in the still  
Of evening and strain to hear an  
answer.

When I'm troubled and upset  
I still talk to you like  
I always did and  
Imagine the advice you'd give me.

I still stop on our dark country road  
Sometime and turn off the car engine  
And lights and wait and hope that  
I can see or hear you.

It's been a year now and the  
Memories are still so vivid  
That I can almost touch them.

It's been a year now and I know  
With all my heart that your  
Presence will never fade in my mind.

*Tammy Walmann* – Miami Co., KS

**THE BEREAVED FATHER**

A bereaved father, feeling he could no longer bear his pain, cried out to his God in desperation. He said, "Please God, you must take this pain from my heart, or I will surely die." His loving God, hearing this prayer, replied and said, "I hear your words my son, and I am saddened to see you in such pain. Therefore, I will grant your request if you so desire, but first you must understand the consequences."

"You will of course have to give up all of your memories of your son and dispose of all of your pictures so he can be erased from your mind completely. Likewise, you will never be permitted to speak or hear his name ever again."

"Unthinkable," said the father, I did not realize what I was asking." He then asked his God instead to help him with his grief, to grow, and to find meaning in his life again. Said his God, "Very well then, I will help you, as I have promised to help all of my children down through the ages."

"You must start by sharing your grief with others and letting others share theirs with you. Be kind, understanding and forgiving of others and yourself. Always remember, your precious child will be safe in my hands until it is time for you to be with him again forever."

***Jack Todd***

**I'LL THINK OF YOU**

It's lonely since you went away;  
You're on my mind each passing day.  
I long to have you here awhile,  
To see your face—your beautiful smile!

To have you greet me at the door,  
Or maybe give me a hug once more.  
But then, if I could have a choice,  
I'd wish - right now - to hear your voice.

I'll think of you—our shared delights,  
Of taking walks on the beach at night.  
I'll think of you in the moon's bright beams,  
And sense you in the rushing streams.

I know someday I'll join you there,  
And then we'll laugh and hug and share.  
We'll dance down heaven's avenue;  
But till that day—I'll always think of you!!

***Lorraine Spear***, TCF Valley Forge, PA  
To our Precious Daughter  
On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of her death—

***Kimberly Jean Spear***  
8/15/78 - 1/30/97  
"Gone But Not Forgotten"

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**I AM THE NEW YEAR**

I am the New Year. I am unused, unspotted, without blemish. I stretch before you three hundred and sixty-five days long. I will present each day in its turn, a new leaf in the Book of Life, for you to place upon it your imprint.

It remains for you to make of me what you will; if you write with firm, steady strokes, my pages will be a joy to look upon when the next New Year comes. If the pen falters, if uncertainty or doubt should mar the page, it will become a day to remember with pain.

I am the New Year. Each hour of the three hundred and sixty-five days, I will give you sixty minutes that have never known the use of man. White and pure, I present them; it remains for you to fill them with sixty jeweled seconds of love, hope, endeavor, patience and trust in God.

I am the New Year. I am here – but once past, I can never be recalled. Make me your best.  
Author unknown

As we face a New Year in our grief, let us seek to fill the days with activities for healing and encouraging others who are hurting. As we reach out to others who are hurting, we receive healing.

***Bereaved Parents Share, December 1996***  
Lovingly lifted from Cape Cod, TCF

*Our Wishes For You*

*To those of you whose pain is fresh and raw, and still have courage  
to come and share with us and give us healing through your pain,  
we send you love and compassion.*

*To those of you whose pain of grief, anger, and frustration has begun to soften,  
we wish you hope and healing.*

*To those of you who have found life can be good again, and can tenderly remember  
your child tinged with much less sorrow, and not be overwhelmed,  
we wish you fond memories and a meaningful holiday.*

*To those of you who are struggling in your marriage or relationship,  
we wish you patience and understanding to accept one another for what you can give.*

*To those of you who are struggling with your spirituality,  
we wish you peace.*

*To those of you who give words of comfort and hope to another in the depth of despair,  
we say "Thank You."*

*To those of you who so willingly lend a hand in doing all the chores  
And those who give financial support, that holds the Valley Forge Chapter together,  
So we can provide a safe haven for all the bereaved to come and support one another,  
we say "Thank You"*

*We send you love, hope, compassion and a hug, and wish you peace.*

*Marie and Ken Hepmeckel*