

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

MAY 2011

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, Valley Forge and Henderson RDs, King of Prussia, PA. Phone **on meeting evenings only** is 610-265-0733. All other times please call Rhonda at 484-919-0820.



Meeting Schedule and other TCF Events of interest Please Mark Your Calendar

May 5 General Sharing & Death by Suicide
June 2 General Sharing
July 15 -17 34th National Conference
Minneapolis, Minnesota (see page 3)

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 (which we call love gifts) 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.**

If you donate to **United Way** at your place of work, and wish your contribution to go to the Valley Forge Chapter of The Compassionate Friends, you may do so by entering: **The Compassionate Friends - Valley Forge Chapter United Way ID# 04-104.** on your pledge form.

**PLEASE MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO:
TCF VALLEY FORGE CHAPTER
SEND TO: CHAPTER LEADER
RHONDA GOMEZ**

Valley Forge Chapter

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NEW FRIENDS

Andrea Rohtoff, son *Jim* (28 years)
Terry & Bob White, son *Steven* 24 years)

We welcome our newly bereaved friends, and are sorry for the cause that brings you. Having been in the depths of despair, we know that it is difficult to share our pain and personal feelings. It is important that you attend three or four meetings before evaluating the benefit of our group to you. Our meetings offer confidentiality, unconditional love, compassion and understanding to all of you.

APRIL REFRESHMENTS

Marie & Ken Hofmockel, in memory of all TCF children & siblings who have gone too soon.

Anyone wishing to donate refreshments (cheese & crackers, fruit, cakes, cookies, etc.) in memory of loved ones, please call **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

Rosalind Gerson in loving memory of *Kimberly Paulson's* birthday, March 1956.

Marilyn & Fred Mountjoy in loving memory of our three daughters,
Barlyn, Maralin, & Marian.

Carol & Art Silverman in loving memory of our beautiful daughter,
Cheryl Beth Silverman on her 48th birthday.

Helen Smith in loving memory of my son, *Robert J. Smith* on his
21st death anniversary 5/15.

Fred & Irene Sutton in loving memory of our son, *Jim Sutton* on his
11th anniversary 4/16.

Marilyn Toole in honor of my son, *Ted*

United Way of Connecticut.

We wish you a Mother's Day of fond memories of the love your child gave to you and those around them.

VOLUNTEER NEEDED FOR CO-LEADER

This position requires that you have at least 18 months distance from the death of your child or sibling, and have attended monthly meetings on a fairly regular basis.

Newly bereaved often need additional support between meetings, a co-leader needs to be willing to accept their calls on the Chapter cell phone.

The co-leader should be available to help plan and attend 3 or 4 special programs per year, the programs are held on Saturday or Sunday afternoons.

The Steering Committee (members who have assigned duties) meets with the co-leaders four times annually in order that all are abreast of how the chapter is functioning.

If you have resolved some of your grief, can accept each member without judgment, and feel capable of helping other bereaved families, it can be very healing to reach out to others in pain.

The Chapter is looking for a volunteer to accept the position of Co-Leader with Rhonda. If interested, please contact Rhonda Gomez. Her contact information is on the front page of this newsletter.

TCF 34TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The conference will be held in Minneapolis/St. Paul July 15-17, 2011. Room Reservations are now being accepted. Room rate is \$129 per night for a King Room or Double Bed Room, single or double occupancy; \$139 for triple and \$149 for quad. Special reduced rates are available on stays from July 10-19, if reservations are placed by June 21.

Reserve your accommodations online at [Sheraton Bloomington Hotel Minneapolis South](#) or telephone 952-835-7800 and mention you are with The Compassionate Friends. There will be a free shuttle pick-up to and from the hotel and the Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport, and complimentary parking at the hotel (Valet service is available \$8 per day).

NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL

We are asking if possible , would you please receive your newsletter by email.

We do not want to remove anyone from our newsletter mailing list who is benefiting from receiving it. We hope it is a help to you while going through your grief, giving you better understanding of your feelings, and letting you know “**We need not walk alone**”.

A newsletter helps to keep our TCF family informed of local and national events. We consider this an important function of our program.

We are asking if you have email, would you consider receiving your newsletter in email format. You will receive your copy earlier if you opt to receive it by email. If you chose to use the email method of receiving your newsletter, 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**

Fred Mountjoy, Speaker



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:

**We will no longer list the birth and death years of deceased persons in our newsletter.
We have concerns this information could be misused, and result in an adversity for the families.**

MAY BIRTHDAYS

Donald Barber, son *Steven W. Barber* 5/19
Laura Bedrossian, son *Teddy* 5/9
Stephen & Barbara Billings, daughter *Laura Elizabeth Billings* 5/22
Bruce & Barb Campbell, son *Greg* 5/30
Loreta & Ken Cericola, son *Anthony Cericola* 5/3
Mary & John Chelius, son *John J. Chelius, Jr.* 5/2
Joanne & Tom Christman, son *Kyle R. O'Neill* 5/23
Anton & Maureen DeMaioribus, daughter *Ann DeMaioribus* 5/17
Vanessa Diaz, friend's child *Samir* 5/16
Helen Dietrich, son *Joseph Dougherty* 5/4
Danielle Evelyn, son *Samir* 5/16
Carol Graber, son *Bobby* 5/17
Judi Griffith, son *Steve* 5/27
Samuel & Mary Lou Hardman, son *Samuel J.* 5/19
Robin Hayman, son *Bradley Hayman* 5/11
Marie & Ken Hofmockel, grandson *Steven Schneibolk* 5/7
William & Marilyn Hudson, son *Robert Hudson* 5/11
Brad Ingerman, son *Justin* 5/18
Jean Jones, grandson *Bobby* 5/7
Edward & Janet Kellenbenz, daughter *Cynthia* 5/31
Loretta Kline, son *Keith Edward Kline* 5/11
Susan Lipson, nephew *Justin Ingerman* 5/18
Maryellen & James Madden, daughter *Anne Marie Madden* 5/18
Jo Makowski, sister *Pamela Makowski Goresch* 5/1
Anne McClenachan, brother *Andy McClenachan* 5/30
Michael & Maria McFadden, daughter *Rachel McFadden* 5/14
Willard & Patricia McLain, son *Gary J. McLain* 5/5
Mike & Jen Meluskey, daughter *Carolyn Meluskey* 5/13
Cheryl Mezzaroba, son *Lon Mezzaroba* 5/18
Thelma Miller, son *Lowell Bruce Miller* 5/14
Ann Murray, son *Jonathan Rapoport* 5/17
Elsie Oreski, son *Gregory T. Oreski* 5/22
Betty & Richard Owens, Sr., son *Richard H. Owens, Jr.* 5/12
Sam & Palma Panichello, son *Joseph Panichello* 5/21
Lyla T. Poulson, brother *Joe* 5/18
Barbara Purtell-Frank, son *Michael John Keller Purtell* 5/28

MAY BIRTHDAYS (continued)

Thomas & Jeri "Bubbles" Reinert, father (Bubbles) *Albert Volpe* 5/4
Larry & Phyllis, son *Scott Alan Rosenthal* 5/26
John & Marie Sanders, son *Matthew Sanders* 5/8
Pamela Schneibolk, son *Steven* 5/7
Janet & Jonathan Schultz, friend *Scott Alan Rosenthal* 5/26
Ann Sherwood, son *David Foster Sherwood* 5/3
Priscilla Shober, son *Jeffrey R. Shober* 5/27
Andy & Alexandra Smith, son *Charlie* - 5/30
Margaret & Matthew Strickler, son *Timothy Strickler* 5/4

MAY ANNIVERSARIES

Madeleine Adler, son *J. Peter Adler* - 5/30
Donald Barber, son *Steven W. Barber* - 5/30
Rob and Janet Beiswenger, son *Jared* - 5/18
Gloria Bello, son *Joseph* - 5/21
Ben Breskman, son *Brian* - 5/26
Martha & Albert Caesar, son *Daniel Mark Caesar* - 5/13
Jennifer Catanese, son *Andrew* - 5/17
Rose Marie Cote, husband *Paul Cote* - 5/27
Jamie (Germaine) Cote Weaver, father *Paul* - 5/27
Franklin & Patricia Cox, daughter *Christen Fox*- 5/26
Bud Cunnane, son *Patrick* - 5/2
Justine Ellinger, daughter *Keira Ellinger* - 5/7
Charlie & Jill Fick, son *Michael Sternberg* - 5/14
Colleen and Dan Fledderman, daughter *Amy* - 5/25
William & Marilyn Hudson, son *Robert Hudson* - 5/11
Janine Johnston, daughter *Ashley Sankus* - 5/16
Joan Kingslake, son-in-law *Guy Thornton Woods* - 5/6
Loretta Kline, son *Keith Edward Kline* - 5/20
Herb & Adaline Leir, daughter *Kimberley Dawn Leir* - 5/18
John & Nancy Logue, daughter *Kaitlyn Logue* - 5/3
Tom & Charmaine Malik, son *Danny Malik* - 5/12
Michelle & Chris Mazzio, son *Brendan Mazzio* - 5/20
Robert McCullough, daughter *Caroline Patricia McCullough* - 5/27
Mike & Jen Meluskey, daughter *Carolyn Meluskey* - 5/22
Mary O'Halloran, brother *Thomas M. O'Halloran* - 5/28
Winnie & James O'Halloran, son *Thomas M. O'Halloran* - 5/28
Anna Packer, daughter *Anna M Packer* - 5/22
Mary & Salvatore Perna, grandson *Nathan A. Bieber* - 5/19
Lyla T. Poulson, daughter *Kimberly Poulson* - 5/21
Sharyn & Joe Pozzuolo, son *Joey Brad Pozzuolo* - 5/19
Christine and Richard Purkiss, son *Adam Clark* - 5/7

MAY ANNIVERSARIES continued

Joan & Earl Reigel, daughter *Melissa Reigel* - 5/4
Joan Santillo, son *Brian Gambone* - 5/3/
Lynn & Stephen Scartozzi, daughter *Christine Marie Scartozzi* - 5/28
Janet & Jonathan Schultz, friend *Christopher Harvey* - 5/6
Cathy Seehuetter, daughter *Nina Seehuetter* - 5/11
Helen Smith, son *Bob Smith* - 5/15
Andy & Alexandra Smith, son *Charlie* - 5/30
Karl & Sue Snepp, son *Dave Snepp* - 5/31
John & Rose Stanley, daughter *Susan Stanley* - 5/29
Robert & Nancy Thompson, friend *J. Peter Adler* - 5/30
Deb Walter, son *Evan* - 5/10
Terry & Susan Weikel, daughter *Jennifer* - 5/11

WE'RE ALIKE, YOU AND I

We're alike, you and I.

We've never met. Our faces would be those of strangers if we met. We would barely perceive the other's presence if we passed on our walk through the mists. We're unknown to each other until the terrible words have been spoken: **"MY CHILD DIED."**

We're alike, you and I.

We measure time in seconds and eternities. We try to go forward to yesterday... Tomorrows are for whole people, and we are incomplete now – the tears, after a time, turn inward to become invisible to all, save you and me. Our souls are rumpled from wrestling with demons and doubts and unanswerable prayers. **"GIVE ME BACK MY CHILD"**

We're alike, you and I.

The tears that run down your face are my tears and the wound in your soul is my pain, too. We need time, but time is our enemy, for it carries us farther and farther from our lost child. And we cry out: **"HELP ME."**

We're alike, you and I.

And we need each other. Don't turn away, but give me your hand and for a time we can cease to be strangers and become what we truly are, a family closer than blood, united by a bond that was forced upon us – but a bond that can make us stronger, still wounded, to be sure, but stronger for our sorrows are shared. **"WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE"**

Judy Dickey, TCF Greenwood, IN

SHARED THOUGHTS ON "MOTHER'S GUILT"

The month of May has always been an ego booster for most of us mothers, as we receive cards of praise and flattery from our children. But now that our child has died, and we are walking around with a hole in our soul, those same greeting cards can cause us guilt by not feeling worthy of the words.

We most always refine our priorities, and make new standards for ourselves after the death of our children. One of those priorities is don't put off spending time together or expressing our love. With our hindsight of knowing the child's' life was cut short, we critique our motherhood as though we could have been super-human. We measure our mothering performance as though we could have given 100% of our time to our precious child. We punish ourselves with guilt, by remembering specifics of harsh words or deeds. Most often these are very normal human things most parents do and say. We know we cannot change, or take back, any infliction we place upon our child.

When we were entrusted with the gift of our children, we were not given hindsight, or the ability to be perfect. We were expected to handle all the other responsibilities placed upon us by other family members, and many mothers dealt with jobs to provide financial support for the family. This means there was not time, nor energy, to be the perfect parent. We were even expected to make mistakes, but now guilt holds us responsible for all our parental shortcomings. I have learned if we did what we thought was right at the time, or the best we could, that was all we could do. It is unfair to measure our performance as a parent with hindsight or super-human powers that we did not possess.

I'm sure our children did not judge us nearly so harshly as we judge ourselves. You may find it very helpful to tell your deceased child how you feel, what you wish you could have done, and how much you love them. I, personally, feel they are in an all-knowing state, and can better understand our expression of love. I'm sure a lot of our guilt would subside, if our children could express their image of us as parents.

Love is the greatest gift we have ever given or received. Just the fact we hurt so badly, and our pain is so intense, tells us we had great love for our children.

The pain of losing our children can never stop totally, but we can help to ease it to the point we can live with it. We would be very angry if someone would judge us as unfairly as we judge ourselves. We must first learn to love ourselves again, so we can love others. We love our children, even with their flaws. We must respect our children enough to know they love us, even when we are not the perfect parent. Don't minimize their love by thinking they were not capable of forgiving, or understanding that we did our best, and that was good enough.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel*, TCF Valley Forge

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

tho' you spoke not a word

'tho' you spoke not a word,
yet did you speak to me...
through the power of silence,
when lips and tongue
are still...and
the hearing and feeling,
the knowing and hoping
are
by the spirit...together:
looking, touching, sensing, trusting

i heard 'tho' you spoke not a word
and felt 'the tender words'
spoken by your touch
that said to me:
"i'm here for you,
i'll stay, and not run
from the ache
i feel
in your grief."

i heard 'tho' you spoke not a word
and looked to see 'the silent words':
spoken by your eyes
that said to me:
"i really care about you,
you are important to me
as in the
pain
i see in you"

i heard, 'tho' you spoke not a word
and 'took heart'
spoken by your constancy
that goes on and on,
that said to me:
"as long as your need
exists
and beyond,
i'll share in
the work
of
your tears"

i heard 'tho' you spoke not a word
and knew 'the comforting words'
spoken by your presence
that said to me:
"i'll walk with you
in the loneliness
and
the emptiness
that is
your sorrow"

indeed –
'blessed are (we) who mourn;
for (we) shall be comforted'
'tho' you speak not a word'
our spirits together
touching
looking
trusting
sensing
my very dear compassionate friend.

Tom Jones, Chaplain York Hospital, PA

My child died.
I felt my life died, too.
I went to a support group
And there I met you.

You said my life would
Have meaning again.
Your words didn't mean much to me.
But I watched as you helped others
As you listened and gave so tenderly.

You were my symbol of hope
That someday life would be worth living.
You showed me how to start.
That living again begins with giving.

Marilyn Willett Heavilin
TCF, Redlands, CA

My pain helps me live with my loss

The morning our 20-year old daughter Lee took sick with her last illness, I was trying to write a letter of sympathy to a friend, wondering if it would make any difference.

Five days later, I knew. It made a difference.

I discovered it was better to reach out than turn away, to say the wrong thing than say nothing.

But in living through losing Lee, I also discovered I had something to say to others who suffered the loss of someone they loved.

Pain is better than forgetting.

It has been almost 18 years since she died, but Lee is still with us. The pain has not so much lessened, as it has become familiar, like the pain that continues in the leg that has been amputated. Her death is part of us.

I steel myself pretty well for the expected moments of pain. Her birthday in March, her death day in August, Thanksgiving, Christmas, even, these days, listening to an Albinoni oboe concerto knowing it is not she practicing in the next room.

But there is no protection from the blindside hit. Lee waves from a passing car. She appears ahead of me on a street in Siena, wearing a backpack; I rush to catch up with her but she turns a corner and is gone.

She stands in the shadows, just outside the living room. I hear her counsel when I have a problem and pay attention. At the concert I sit beside her in the center of the orchestra.

It is not all tears. We laugh at the same old jokes - and some new ones. Every submarine sandwich, I eat, I share with Lee. It was her favorite.

When I thought I was dying of a heart attack, Lee stood - in the blue jumper she had made - waiting at the end of a brightly lit tunnel, smiling.

But, I often say in a letter of sympathy, people will want you to get over it, snap out of it, buck up, forget. Of course we have to get on with life, to find salvation in routine that suddenly seems trivial, to fulfill our responsibilities to the living. But not to forget.

It is far better to remember, to mourn! To weep, to rage, than to allow the one who is gone to disappear.

In a way, I welcome the pain. I hurt; I remember.

So, I say in my sympathy letter, they should learn to accept the pain, even in a way welcome it, by comparing it to the terror of forgetting.

And as an elder of the tribe who has experienced loss, I write for them to remember in their own way, to mourn in their own way, to do what would be appropriate for the person who has gone and, more important, to do what needs to be done for the living.

The night Lee died we went to a musical in which her sister was appearing in the chorus. Lee would have wanted that, no matter if others approved.

We chose cremation because it was what we thought she would have wanted and it was, we discovered, what each of us wanted for ourselves. We paid no attention to the relative who said, "I don't know how you could burn her up."

We did what we had to do.

We could not handle a formal funeral, bringing the family from afar, after her quick dying, so we had a private service at the graveside.

I wept - frequently - and Minnie Mae did not. No guilt, no public measuring of pain. I dream of Lee and Minnie Mae does not. That does not mean that one of us mourns more deeply than the other. No guilt. No keeping score.

We love in our own way; we grieve in our own way.

And in this terrible loss we have found strength. When we are tested by other events, we have a measure of our ability to survive.

And we are also reminded that life is fragile.

In my letters reaching out I tell others what Lee's passing taught us: to listen to each other and to ourselves, to live the gift of life with caring and celebration. Today. Right now.

By Donald M. Murray
SPECIAL TO THE BOSTON GLOBE