

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2007

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

Jan 4 - General Sharing

**Feb 1 - General Sharing
- Loss by Suicide Sharing**

Mar 1 - General Sharing

**Apr 4 - PLEASE NOTE WEDNESDAY
(see page 8)**

This 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**



Valley Forge Chapter

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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

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

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:

FEBRUARY

CHANGE OF APRIL MEETING NIGHT

We will meet **Wednesday** evening April 4, 2007 due to Maundy Thursday religious holiday.
The parking lot will be filled with church members attending the service on Thursday.
This change applies to the April meeting only.

SHARED THOUGHTS ON HEALING LOVE

When we think of our deceased children and siblings, it is most often attached to our fond memories and love. Sometimes it can even be inter-mingled with anger, particularly if they contributed to their death. The anger is not caused by hate, but by the fact we are now deprived of showing and sharing our love to them. These same tender feelings that brought us joy while our loved ones were alive, cause us to grieve. Our heart knows there will be no more new memories, that is why we hold and cherish those we have so dearly. It is the love remembered that gives us hope in the midst of our sorrow.

It is more the life and love of our children and siblings, rather than the death, that gives us the need to go to Compassionate Friends. It provides a safe haven to speak of those we love, and to share the memories. If the child was too young for physical memories, there are still memories of anticipation of what our child might have been. What to do with our unfinished love, and pain of not seeing the child or sibling experience life outside the womb, or a short childhood, all needs to be shared with love and understanding.

One of the reasons our children and siblings are so sadly missed is because of the love and kindness they showed. Remembering this helps to keep them close and alive in our hearts. One way of honoring our loved ones is by showing love to those around us, particularly our family. Sometimes, this can be very difficult when we are grieving, for the natural thing to do is to lash out at anyone, or anything, that crosses our path. Most of the time a response will be returned in a similar temperament, for the tone we have set with our dialogue.

The whole family is hurting. Parents dreams have been shattered, we have fallen apart to the degree we feel our life can never be put back together again. We know we are not functioning as the stable parent we were, the guilt of letting our surviving children down adds to our pain. We want so badly to remove the pain from the whole family, but we don't even know how to help ourselves. This helpless feeling lowers our self-esteem. The siblings have lost their parents, as they knew them. Many have to cope with a new family structure of being an only child, or now the oldest, or youngest. It takes a lot of love and understanding to get through the horrendous ordeal. Love is a gift that must be exchanged to be effective, we all need it to heal. This is a time for caring, touching and hugging one another. We hope you can give and receive your share.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel* , TCF Valley Forge

SIBLING CORNER

REFLECTIONS

With the death of my sister come some painful realizations; that life isn't always fair or predictable; that sometimes even my best still isn't good enough; and that from the day of her death, the happy events in my life would always be tinged with sadness.

Despite the pain and loss, death has also left me with some valuable lessons and precious gifts. As a result of my sister's death, I have a greater appreciation of life and a greater compassion for those who hurt. I have learned to be a survivor and to have a successful career and productive life in the face of tremendous grief and loss. I have been gifted with good friends and special people to help me through the rough times. But most of all, I have been given the gift of time – time to heal and time to replace those painful memories of death with priceless memories of my sister's life.

Cathy Schanberger

The breath of winter
painted fragile stars
on all the windows
of my quiet house.

And there I found
your face,
more fragile even than
the season's art,
a wonder to my eyes.

How can it be
that winter paints
such secret things
in white-and-silver sheen
for those who cry alone
at frosted windows?

Sascha Wagner

I wish I could tell everyone who has lost a loved one how important it is to let themselves, and their family, remember. Forget, if you can, the sickness or tragedy that took them, but give them a place in your life. My family speaks very naturally of their father and their sister. We remember the fun, the love, and the closeness... We have memories to cherish, and we shouldn't cheat ourselves by not doing that. I don't mean that we should constantly talk about them, but when something we're doing reminds us of something good that happened when we were still a whole family, we don't hesitate to say so.

Lettie Petrie

Love Lives On

Those we love
are never really lost to us --
we feel them
in so many special ways --
through friends
they always cared about
and dreams they left behind,

in beauty that they added to our days ...
in words of wisdom
we still carry with us
and memories that never will be gone ...
Those we love
are never really lost to us --
For everywhere their special love lives on.

by *Amanda Bradley*

Friends are those rare people who ask how we are and then wait to hear the answer.

Ed Cunningham, TCF Savannah, GA

QUIET TIME

An important way to push stress out of your life is to take advantage of quiet time. Choose a time when you can be alone with your thoughts and feelings. Sound scary? Read on...

There is a tendency to run from the pain of grief – to keep so busy and push yourself so hard that all you can do is fall in bed at night and go right to sleep. You may keep from feeling the pain, but it will catch up with you in some form in the future. It may be in the form of a disabling disease, frequent colds, a sudden heart attack or grief in years to come.

Stop and...open up the picture album and remember times past.

Take a walk where there were special memories.

Sit down during the day and reflect.

At the beginning of these quiet times you may have a rush of feelings. Feel them. You won't break, and nobody has ever cried forever. Once you have gone into them, you will eventually begin to quiet down. At this time you could play some quiet music or put on a tape with some relaxing sounds, such as ocean waves or gentle rainfall.

Rest when you can. During this time your body is trying very hard to heal your emotional wounds and you may tire easily. Take a nap in the middle of the day. Yes, even at your place of work if possible. When I returned to work the week after my son's death, I found a couch in one of the women's rest rooms. I would curl up under a velveteen blanket for about 20 minutes after lunch. That helped me get through the rest of the day. Plus, it was the only place I could have a good, private cry in that kind of environment.

It's very common to have sleeping difficulties. Grievors frequently have trouble getting to sleep or wake during the night and are unable to go back to sleep. You have a lot on your mind, and it's hard to turn it off.

If you're having trouble sleeping at night, try the following tips before resorting to sleeping pills. Some medicines ward off your feelings so that when you stop taking them, it's as if your grief just begun.

- get out of bed if you wake up and can't go back to sleep within 10 minutes. Stop fighting wakefulness and do something else for a while.
 - don't make yourself sleep in a bed which has memories if it's too difficult, or put a pillow where the empty spot is. George Burns found comfort sleeping in his wife's bed after she died. A widow found comfort in wearing her husband's pajama top and laying on his side of the bed.
 - have a good book or magazine handy to read.
 - keep your journal next to your bed and write out your thoughts and feelings.
 - watch TV or read.
 - drink warm milk. It has a chemical which helps bring on sleep.
 - listen to relaxation cassette tapes, such as ocean waves or whale sounds. If you have never tried them you'll be surprised at how soothing they are.
 - play an affirmation tape.
- Or, if you're a snuggler, just rest in bed, not "trying" to go to sleep. Enjoy the soft feel of your pillow, the cuddliness of your mattress and covers.
- Give yourself the gift of time out, awake or sleeping.

Kelly Osmont, TCF S. Chester Co., PA

**COURAGE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF FEAR AND PAIN,
BUT THE AFFIRMATION OF LIFE DESPITE FEAR AND PAIN.**

Rabbi Earl Grollman

FAMILY TIES

Every time a new person is added to the family by birth, marriage, adoption, etc., everyone begins to readjust and reorganize to new roles they must assume. Husband and wife work out the give and take necessary to establish a family system. Mothers and fathers find new roles when children enter the picture, and adjust their sleeping, eating, loving, working and being. Brothers and sisters truly learn what sharing and change are all about when a new member is added.

Everyone, in fact, becomes a changed individual in this new system. New patterns of trusting and communicating are established. Like the mobile we hang above the crib, the family works toward establishing stability; each part balances the whole.

The family mobile is susceptible to many forces of change; winds from outside and within. But blown and disturbed, each piece moves and sways until eventually the mobile becomes stabilized once again.

When one of the parts is suddenly removed, as in the death of a child, the very core is threatened. Cut off one of the parts of the mobile and it becomes frenzied, looking for stability and lost balance. It sways to and fro, bobbing and weaving, tilting up and down.

When our child dies, we are inevitably faced with this chaos in the system. How can we seek to balance our ship of life when we, as a part of that system, feel pain, confusion and imbalance? If we were the anchor before, we find ourselves adrift, unable to hold in the current. If we were the steering wheel, we begin to spin uncontrollably. The propeller shaft is bent; the spare oar is missing; there aren't enough life preservers to go around. How do you save the ship – the mobile – the family?

Recognize the part you as an individual play in the family and work at resolving your own losses. Encourage the expressing of feelings in yourself and others. Know that each person grieves in his own way and at his own pace, and give them permission to do so.

Understand that sometimes a system cannot rebalance without professional help, and seek this help if needed.

Watch for obsessive behavior in your family, i.e. overprotectiveness, overeating, undereating, alcohol and/or drug abuse, rage and violence, etc., and offer support, sharing and help for the pain – not the behaviors.

How tragic it is when the ultimate loss, the death of a child, leads to an even greater loss; the breakdown of the family, the marriage, the individual. You, as part of the family, can work to make sure this doesn't happen.

Neenan, WI TCF

I want to cry.
Just sometime, let me cry.
do not demand
that constant smile from me.

I promise you
that I will smile again.
Tomorrow I
will be as light as air.

I know you are
uneasy with my tears.
I need to cry.
Please, do not go away.

But hold me now
and let my sorrow be.
Just for today,
this moment: let me cry.

Sascha Wagner

I BELIEVE

I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge.
 That myth is more potent than history.
 I believe that dreams are more powerful than facts.
 That hope always triumphs over experience;
 That laughter is the only cure for grief.
 And I believe that love is stronger than death.

Robert Fulgham, TCF, Boise, ID

DO IT YOUR WAY

I think it's only fair to tell you -
 There is no bereaved **Parent of the Month** award
 nor an award for the one with the stiffest upper lip.
 In fact, what you will find
 if you try to be the most stoic, brave, and strong,
 the one doing too well,
 is instead of reward, you suffer the consequences.

It is not possible to lose someone
 as vital as one's child
 and not have the pain of deep grief.
 You will find a great many non-bereaved people
 will encourage you to play the old,
**"If you'll pretend you're OK
 and it's not really so bad,
 we'll let you come play with us.
 But if you're going to cry
 and talk about your dead child
 then you can't play"** game.

This is one time in your life you don't have to meet
 anybody else's standards. There is nothing more
 unique about you than the way you express your
 grief. And you have that right, however it is mani-
 fested.

TCF Newsletter, Tidewater, VA

NEW YEAR'S WISH

I wish you gentle days and quiet nights.
 I wish you memories to keep you strong.
 I wish you time to smile...and time for song.
 And then I wish you friends to give you love,
 When you are hurt and lost and life is blind...
 I wish you friends and love and peace of mind.

Sascha Wagner, TCF, Des Moines, IA

PERHAPS LOVE

Perhaps love is like a resting place
 A shelter from the storm
 It exists to give you comfort
 It is there to keep you warm
 And in those times of trouble
 When you are most alone
 The memory of love will bring you home.

Perhaps love is like a window
 Perhaps an open door
 It invites you to come closer
 It wants to show you more
 And even if you lose yourself
 And don't know what to do
 The memory of love will see you through.

Oh, love to some is like a cloud
 To some as strong as steel
 For some a way of living
 For some a way to feel
 And some say love is holding on
 And some say letting go
 and some say love is everything
 And some say they don't know.

Perhaps love is like the ocean
 Full of conflict, full of change
 Like a fire when it's cold outside
 Or thunder when it rains.
 If I should live forever
 And all my dreams come true
 My memories of love will be of you.

John Denver

Holiday Wishes

*We send our love and compassion to you who have the courage to come and share with us
even though the pain permeates your very being.*

We wish much healing to you who can see a glimmer of hope, and feel the pain softening.

We wish patience and endurance to you who have multiple losses.

*We wish strength to cope to those of you who have suffered the death of
your only child or all of your children.*

*We wish patience to you who are struggling in your marriage or relationship, and
understanding to accept what each can give.*

We wish peace to you who are spiritually struggling with your faith.

*We wish a meaningful holiday to you whose memories have become gifts rather than
moments of pain. May you feel the warmth
as the sun does shine again.*

*We say "thank you" to you who have reached out to comfort others given them hope, and a
hug that said "I know".*

*We say "thank you" to all who share the responsibilities of keeping the
Valley Forge Chapter together, making it a safe haven for all
the bereaved families to come and support one another.*

Marie & Ken Hefmoeckel