

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

OCTOBER 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

- Oct 2 General Sharing
- Oct 5 Autumn Brunch - 1PM - Peppers
(please see page 3 for information)
- Nov 6 General Sharing & Loss by Suicide
- Dec 14 Children's Memorial Day Service
2PM Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
(please see page 3 for details)
- Jan 8, 2009 General Sharing - please see page 2
Please note January meeting is
scheduled for the second Thursday

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.

**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.

SEPTEMBER 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

Please note that the date of the January 2009 meeting will be held on January 8th, since the first Thursday falls on a holiday, New Year Day.

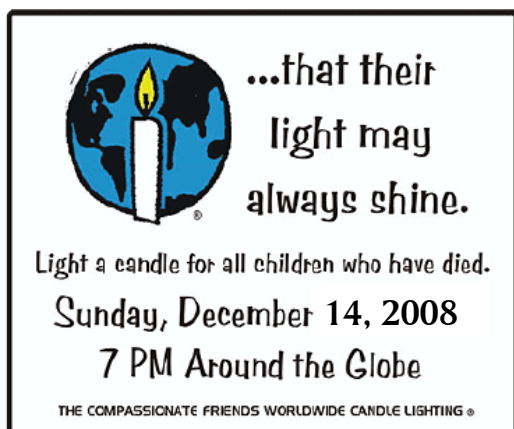
AUTUMN BRUNCH BUFFET
Peppers Restaurant
239 Town Center Road
Valley Forge Shopping Center
King of Prussia, PA

We hope you have made reservations to attend the Autumn Brunch on **October 5, 2008, 1PM**. This is a social gathering to share the afternoon with other bereaved families, and the opportunity to feel comfortable speaking of our loved ones.

Speaker: Marcia Alig - Topic "Finding The Treasures"

Directions: Town Center Road intersects 202, one traffic light south of Henderson Road. Peppers will be on your left, next to K&G Fashion, Men's Super Store.

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting



Held annually the second Sunday in December, this year December 14, 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 14th at 2 PM, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in the fellowship hall (same place our monthly sharing secessions are held). We also urge you to light a candle in your home at 7 PM.

GUEST SPEAKER JOE PURIFICO

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.

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.

OCTOBER'S MEMORIES

October's here, the air is bright,
The leaves decked out in fancy dress,
The clouds in shapes of animals
Hang in the sky so blue.

This was our time of year,
Your favorite.
How many times did you come in,
Cheeks glowing, eyes sparkling,
Smelling of the leaves you jumped through
As a child and even after you grew up.

How many times did you say
“Just smell, just feel the air, I love it,
Crisp, with a hint of winter coming.”

Our time, but now only my time.
Time to dream dreams that won't be.
Time to wish wishes that can't come true,
Time to remember and treasure each day
We had together.
Time for October's memories.

Arden Lansing, TCF, Northfield, NJ

SHARED THOUGHTS ON GRIEF IS INVISIBLE,
HELP OTHERS TO UNDERSTAND IT

Often the same holidays that once brought us much joy can now compound our depression. Thanksgiving can be an abrasive time for the newly bereaved. We find it difficult to count our blessings, when such an integral person is gone from our lives, and with them went the sunshine of our tomorrows. Even those of us who are blessed with having surviving children, find it difficult to express our thankfulness. We are so all consumed with such enormous feelings of love and loss, that we cannot think past our pain. It is important to forgive ourselves for our feelings, for they are human and normal. I believe they are acceptable with our Supreme Being, for he is probably the only one who genuinely knows the depth of our despair, how long and hard the journey of grief is, and how the pain penetrates our very soul.

Our support system ends about the same time the insulation of shock wears off. If we were an amputee, those around us could see not only do we have to adjust to making a new and different life for ourselves, but also live with the fact we are no longer whole. Our loss is not visible, so it is not fair to expect or blame our friends and family for not knowing what to do or say. They try to shield themselves from our pain, and the uncomfortableness. This leads to wanting to rush us through our grief so they can feel better faster. Many of us may have responded in the same manner prior to learning about grief first hand. We hurt ourselves when we cut off family and significant friends. It is much more helpful to express our needs in a loving manner, and educate the world on grief of bereaved parents and siblings. Most will appreciate your telling them how to help you. But, if we express our needs in an abrasive manner, we cannot expect a positive response. One of the major difficulties is we don't know how to help ourselves, and are not honest about how we feel on a daily basis.

Many times we try to run away from our feelings, for they frighten us. We should not lay an issue aside, until we have dealt with it. We need to intentionally plan time to talk about our child or sibling, our frustrated love, the shattering of our future dreams, and how this has reduced us to feeling non-productive and a sub-standard human being. It can take a lot of sharing of feelings to learn to love ourselves again. Once we love ourselves, it is much easier to love others.

It took a lot of healing before I could be glad there was a tomorrow. It took a lot of guilt before I could realize a moments rest, or a laugh, was not forgetting my child. We can learn to make the death less significant, the love for our child and the life they had be the purpose for remembering. Once we reach this plateau, memories are comforting, the gut-wrenching pain subsides, and we make life meaningful once again. We wish you the strength to bear your grief, and find a meaningful tomorrow. God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel*, TCF Valley Forge

"In remembering our children,
In sharing with each other,
In supporting each other,
We ease our pain,
We share each step,
We help smooth the road,

And we serve as witnesses
to the fact that we can
make it beyond grief,
As we support each other."
Roy Peterson, TCF

TAKE THE TIME . . . TO HURT, TO CRY . . .

Wordless and worldless -- Endless and forever, grief goes on --
It takes the best -- And leaves the rest an empty shell -- Life is Hell.

David was dead four months when I wrote that in my journal. Time is my enemy. As I envisioned the future of my life, I saw only a vast expanse of desert - dry, parched, and empty.

It is now a year and a half since David's death, and I recognize that time has become my friend. Now, when I look to the future, I see hills and valleys - struggles, to be sure, but, also, moments spent at the summit. What has happened? Time is healing.

Take the time . . .

To hurt . . . The pain is great and the temptation to run away is great. But, there is no avoiding, no escaping the hard feelings. If you cover them over, they only re-surface later in a potentially more destructive way.

To cry . . . It may feel like once started, you can never stop. But you have every reason to cry, and when you have cried enough, you will stop.

To "fall apart." . . . If you have a broken leg, you would not expect yourself to function at full capacity right away. Your wound is much greater - you have a broken heart. Confusion, inability to concentrate, lethargy, imagined glimpses of your dead child are a normal part of the grieving process and do not mean that you are going crazy.

To be "selfish." . . . Mourning is an egocentric time, a time for turning inward and introspection.

To "identify" . . . and seek out resources in your environment that can help: friends, clergy, Compassionate Friends, a counselor. Talk to them.

Having done all that - having lingered in the valley of the shadow - it is time to begin the climb out.

Take the time . . .

To engage again in activities that were once pleasurable. They may hold no joy the first few times; someday they will and that will be all right.

To laugh without guilt. Savor the good moments in the day, brief though they may be. Through your child, you can re-discover the beauty of a sunset.

To care for your health. Grieving is a physio-, as well, as psycho-logical stress. Your body needs protection.

To be patient. Wanting to live again and learning to live again takes time. The path out of the other side of the valley is steep, and we all often stumble. But with time - time spent doing the work of grief - you can find the path to a world made richer by your love.

EVERYTHING IS A FIRST

Everything is a first. Many moments must be faced. There are the first holidays, the first anniversary, the first birthday. Thoughts about my brother Dave will always be with us. It's never more than a sentence away from me -- NEVER! The ordinary cannot be ordinary. A certain phrase, a look, or an article of clothing can trigger thoughts and emotions. The joy of my senior year in college was interrupted by sad reality. FORGET? How is this possible? The days and months following my brother's death were filled with grief. Flowers and food were everywhere -- love and concern were translated into strength that kept me moving one step at a time. People don't know what to say -- nothing is NORMAL.

Tragedy has brought a seriousness to my life. Thoughts about the meaning of life and the unimportance of a lot of things I have previously found important are circulating in my mind. I think about my own funeral now. When will it be? Tomorrow, next week, next year, before or after my parents? There are good days and bad days. I am learning to deal with all of this. People ask me, "How are you?" Here is my answer; "I am mad, Dave died at the age of 17. I am angry that my parents have to go through this. I am confused about my role in the family. I am jealous of other families. I am sad. I am fearful about the future. I am hopeful things will get better. I am courageous. I think about my brother every day. I will be strong"

Lisa Ann Jones,
Avoca, PA

*Tears don't erase all the hurt,
Tears don't bring the dead to life,
But tears do help to ease the pain.*

Phillip W. Williams

A LETTER TO MY BROTHER

Suddenly you're gone. I'm still here. Why? How can this be? Someone tell me the reason, the answer.

How can I fill the void, the space once so full of life? What will I do? How will I be strong for others when the sting of pain is so real, so near?

Though everyone seems calm, my soul screams at the injustice, the unfairness of losing you. I miss you, I think of you everyday and feel you in my heart always.

Whatever the reason for your leaving, I know your living had a reason. Despite the brevity of your life, you lived a lifetime's worth. You blessed us with your presence, your specialness.

I have only to think of you to feel the joy you've left as a legacy. You shaped the purpose of my life. I can see the world through your eyes.

Robin Holeman
Tuscaloosa, AL 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

DEALING WITH YOUR GRIEF

For those of us who are newly bereaved, discussion of this topic may give some guidance and encouragement, as we discover that there is something we can do to help alleviate the devastating pain of the loss of our child. For those of us who have already been down that path and continue to do our "grief work", our discussion may provide new avenues of self help. By our sharing, we reach others who will recognize our expressed experiences as their own, and come to know that we understand as perhaps few others can, that we have survived and that they can survive and go on with their lives, not in the same way, but in a measure of peace and serenity.

We have suffered a shock and pain unknown to others and unthinkable to us before the loss of our child. Both our physical and mental beings have been severely affected. There is no abracadabra that will remove the pain and confusion, but the effects can be lessened and softened by some steps which give us something to do about something which nothing can be done.

Physical Needs and How to Meet Them --

1. Eat right. Try to include fresh vegetables, fruit and nourishing food. Some find it helps to eat small meals.
2. Get sufficient sleep and rest - this varies with the individual. For now, you may need to avoid responsibilities and activities that you took care of for others without a second thought. Let someone else do it this year and let them know that you may be able to assume this responsibility again later.
3. Exercise regularly. Some of us walk at the University Mall and at the County High track. Spa workouts are helpful.
4. Find a doctor who recognizes the special problems of grief. This may be difficult as we understand that grief is not emphasized greatly in training of doctors.
5. DECREASE alcohol and medication consumption.

Mental Needs of Bereaved Parents - What You Can Do

1. Be nice to yourself. Learn what your capabilities are at this time and don't expect too much of yourself too soon. You be the judge of what to do. Don't let others impose their "shoulds", "ought to" and "guilts" on you.
2. Include some time with others as you can. try not to seclude yourself. Try to make the effort to keep in touch with people who make you feel better, not worse.
3. Seek professional help if necessary, but be sure to check out the credentials of the counselor, especially regarding training in the area of grief.
4. If married, don't expect too much of your spouse. He or she may not be able to give at this time - you are in the same river of grief, but are in two different canoes. Make allowances of each other - don't be judgmental.
5. Learn to express your anger in constructive ways, such as - writing it down, talking it over with a close friend or a Compassionate Friend, be physically active, attend as many meetings of The Compassionate Friends as you can. **Please remember, you may experience emotional hangover after a meeting and know that this, too, is a part of our healing and grief work and another step on our road to recovery.**

THANK YOU REV. SIMON STEPHENS AND TCF FOR:

(Rev. Simon Stephens is the founder of The Compassionate Friends)

- TENDER** (1) **HOPE** - when I believed in **none anywhere.**
- (2) **REASSURANCE** - I'm **not** "crazy"! Confusion, displacement, preoccupation, forgetfulness, timelessness, panic, my journeys into **HELL** - all part of "normal" parental grieving. OK to feel **and** express feeling, or remain silent.
- (3) **ENERGY** - An infusion via newsletters, a note or phone call when I'm exhausted, depleted, flat, not able and not caring to function.
- (4) **UNDERSTANDING** - my bitterness and rage, there by miraculously reducing both.
- (5) **CONTINUING GENTLE REMINDER** - to accept that most despairing of facts - **MY CHILD DIED!**
- (6) **WATCHFULNESS** - Strive not to get stuck in denial, anger, etc. My child would not want this for me.
- (7) **RESPIRE** - a release of tension from desperately "holding myself together".
- (8) **COMPASSION** - " I know your pain". TCF members truly do.
- COMFORTING** (9) **FORGIVENESS OF SELF** - for real and imagined commissions and omissions as I'm forced to review my life, accept my humanity.
- (10) **LOVE** - doesn't die. My significant others do not replace my child but do expand my caring.
- (11) **SELF ESTEEM** - Slow rebuilding of a DESTROYED SELF. I will be worthwhile again and able to help others someday.
- (12) **AWARENESS** - **I AM BLESSED** - My child lived and we loved.
- (13) **FAITH** - My child, and your child, is in another dimension in **PEACE** and **LOVE.**
- FRIENDSHIP** (14) **SHARING** - I'm not alone. In my stark despair, others reach out or will reach out. Grief is very personal, but others are in a parallel lane.
- (15) **ENCOURAGEMENT** - I'll fall back but I'll move forward again.
- (16) **PATIENCE** - First with myself, then with others; only **TIME, TIME, TIME** can dull this agony.
- (17) **REFUTES** - my desire for and attempts at isolation.
- (18) **ACCEPTANCE** - I'm a **DIFFERENT SELF FOREVER** -the death of my child was the death of so much of me.
- (19) **HUMOR** - can again be part of me despite the underlying devastation, the never ending awareness of this most searing, irreplaceable loss. My child smiles with me.
- (20) **THANK YOU** - **TCF LEADERS** for giving so much of yourselves, for all your work behind the scenes.

Ellen Bruno / Valley Forge, PA TCF
dedicated to her son **J.B.** who died at the age
of 29 of a massive heart attack 9/15/84