

# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

## SEPTEMBER 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

- Sep 4**      **General Sharing & Loss by Suicide**  
(Please see information in box on page 2)
- Oct 2**      **General Sharing**
- Oct 5**      **Autumn Brunch - 1PM - Pepper's**  
(Please see page 3 for registration information)
- Dec 14**     **Children's Memorial Day Service**  
2 PM Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

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**



### Valley Forge Chapter

#### Chapter Co-Leader

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**SUPPORT GROUP FOR SHARING ON LOSS BY SUICIDE**

We wish to thank **Rusty Puglisi** and **Sue Duffy** for their many years of support sharing these sessions. Both of these ladies can no longer facilitate this group.

We are asking for help to maintain this very important part of our program. If you, or know of someone, who would assume the responsibility to lead this group on a bi-monthly basis, please contact Rhonda or Ann, on the chapter cell phone number 484-919-0820.

**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 offer confidentiality, unconditional love, and compassion .**

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**AUGUST REFRESHMENTS**

Anyone wishing to donate refreshments, please call **Ann Rapoport or Rhonda Gomez (484)919-0820.**

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**LOVE GIFTS****TCF LIBRARY BOOKS**

The Valley Forge Chapter will be purchasing some new books on the subject of grief. We welcome title suggestions from anyone, who may have read a helpful book on grief following the death of a child or sibling.

If you wish to donate any of the newly purchased books, a memorial plate will be placed inside the front cover, remembering your child or sibling.

Our library has many books that have been checked out for a while. We know most of us have been guilty of forgetting to return books at sometime. We are asking you to check your homes for TCF books, and return those that you have had for more than two months. If you are not planning to attend a meeting in the near future, would you please mail them to Ann Rapoport or Rhonda Gomez., at the addresses listed on page 1 of this newsletter.

All of the Valley Forge Chapter library books are memorial gifts. The books, or the funds that bought them, were given in memory of someone's loved one.

**AUTUMN BRUNCH BUFFET  
Peppers Restaurant  
239 Town Center Road  
Valley Forge Shopping Center  
King of Prussia, PA  
Phone 610-265-2416**

We hope you will plan to attend the Autumn Brunch. This is a social gathering to share the afternoon with other bereaved families, and the opportunity to feel comfortable speaking of our loved ones. Every one is welcome.

**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.**

**Sunday - October 5, 2008 1:00PM**

**Speaker: Marcia Alig - Topic “Finding The Treasures”**

Marcia’s 8 year old son, Daniel, died in an accident. She helped found the TCF, Mercer County, NJ Chapter, and served as co-regional coordinator of New Jersey, and coordinator of Chapter Leadership Training Programs. Marcia was the 2006 recipient of the TCF Recognition Award. She served on the National Board of Directors from 1984 to 1990, and during her tenure, she held the office of President. She has presented numerous workshops at both regional and national conferences, and has been a speaker at many TCF events. Marcia has given much time and love promoting TCF and its mission.

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**Menu**

- |                |                           |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| Scrambled eggs | Broccoli & cheddar quiche |
| Sausage        | Roast beef                |
| Bacon          | Vegetable medley          |
| Home Fries     | Desert                    |
| French toast   | Coffee, tea & soda        |

**Cost per person \$20.00 (includes gratuity)**

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**Please return this section with your remittance by September 28th**

Please Return reservations to: **Rhonda Gomez, 12 Brook Circle, Glenmoore, PA 19343**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of guests: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of guest: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to: \_\_\_\_\_

“The Compassionate Friends - Autumn Brunch” \_\_\_\_\_

# TCF 31st National Conference - Nashville, TN



E. PA Regional Coordinators



The hospitality area is a good place to relax and meet friends, both old & new.



Sometimes you just have to dance even if it is only in the hotel lobby



All dressed up for the banquet.



Old timers conversing



Siblings at Candle light service



Picture board of our loved ones



CDs with pictures of children & siblings



Free photo buttons for all



Siblings sing at closing program



Bluegrass Band



Strolling in hotel garden



Walk To Remember



**SHARED THOUGHTS ON THE RETURN OF SCHOOL OPENINGS**

Many times seasonal changes can create a mood swing that can bring a setback in our grief progress. Mental health studies have shown depression to be greater as we physically and mentally adjust to a new season. We often note a sagging morale that adds stress this time of the year.

September is particularly a hard month for families whose children would have been returning to school. The display of school clothes, books, bags, and busses can cause intense pain by reminding us that our future dreams of that child are gone forever. We long to bring back the happier days, when September brought excitement of shopping for that special back-pack, or lunch box for our child entering a new grade. We remember the feeling of pride that our child was progressing and meeting the high aspiration we had for them.

It is very natural that we connect their growth and development with the school calendar. Many have warm feelings about the relationship their child had with the school system. Particularly if the child was an honor student, involved in sports and school activities, and received much recognition for their accomplishments. While others have had bad experiences, that create a rage at the thought of how their child was mistreated, misplaced, and misunderstood, or was denied participation in a particular program, or was just plain ignored, and received no recognition for their efforts. Regardless of what category our children fell into, the beginning of the school year can stir deep emotions. It is very normal for us to wish we could return to the days when our life was simple, and our biggest decisions were what to pack for their lunches, and which piece of new clothing should they wear on the first day of school, and to share in the excitement as they headed for the bus to meet their friends.

As we experience moments of nostalgia watching other people's children return to school, our fragmented lives may feel additional emptiness. It is very painful when life goes on without our child. This is a season that makes memories very vivid, and brings home the thought that our children did not get the opportunity to complete their life, as we had planned it for them.

Most often it is best to take time to remember, and allow ourselves to hurt. Suppressing emotions does not generate healing. We need a friend who will listen and try to understand (this can be very difficult for a non-bereaved person). Giving and receiving love is very essential to life, and particularly to our healing. Our showing expressions of love to others can help a heavy heart as much as receiving it. We all need one another.

Eventually our pain does soften, and the very memories that brought us pain, can bring smiles and meaning into our lives again. Unfortunately we have to go through the bitter to become better.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel* , TCF Valley Forge

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**AS TIME PASSES**

As time passes  
And others forget  
Day by day  
I enter my lonely  
Room of memories  
And broken dreams  
And I cry.

And each day  
As I push forward  
I move a step ahead  
And then back  
But still gaining  
If even but a little.

*Mary Rapke*  
TCF, Grand Junction, CO

**A LOVE LETTER TO MY CHILDREN**

You are great kids. You have always been great kids, although I haven't always been a great mom. After your brother died, I was hardly any kind of mom at all. I was so lost in my own grief, I wasn't there for you. You were bewildered, scared, and hurt, but I couldn't seem to reach out to you beyond my own pain. I was like a day-old helium balloon drifting along, not sure whether my place was with you or with your brother.

I didn't drift for long. You grabbed my string and yanked me back! The yowls and shrieks still ring in my ears. "Mom all my underwear is dirty!" or "Mom, I'm starved!" or "Mom, he punched me!" Your brother was being cared for by his heavenly Father, but you needed your earthly mother. It was your need for me that saved my life.

I'm sorry that your brother's death robbed you of ;your childhood. While other kids fretted about what to wear or which movie to see, you wondered when the tears and sadness would ever end and if we would be a family again. If I could have shielded you from such great sorrow. I would have; but I couldn't.

Your lives were changed forever, and the future was uncertain, but you kept going. You supported and inspired me as we traveled that rocky road of grief together. You talked about your brother when no one else would say his name. You kept his picture in your rooms and proudly pointed out to friends, "This was my brother." You used his things, but gently. You reminded me of the cute, funny things he said and did. You included him in your bedtime prayers. You still do. Someday I believe you will tell your own children about your brother. Thank you for keeping his memory alive.

Because of the tragedy you experienced, you are more mature than other kids your age. You possess strength and courage beyond your years. You are resilient; little things don't get you down. Best of all, you are kind, sensitive, and compassionate to others. I adore you. You are my life.

Love , Mom

*Patricia Dyson* - TCF, Beaumont, TX

**ONE SWEET DAY**

I can't wait till that ONE SWEET DAY,  
When I see her again.  
In the streets of gold and the heavens so, so bright,  
I just can't wait till that ONE SWEET DAY.  
When I was young, she would take me everywhere,  
She would always be there.  
Till one day she was there no more,  
I just can't wait till that ONE SWEET DAY,  
When I see her again.

by *Lynn M. Fischer*, age 10  
for her sister: Lisa M. Fischer, age 23  
Valley Forge, PA

**DEALING WITH RAGE**

One of the most important ways of dealing with rage is trying to **forgive** yourself and others. Note: **forgive** contains the word **give**.

You **give** yourself the opportunity to place behind you those past agonies that diminish your strength and vigor.

You **give** yourself new energies to move on and meet new challenges.

You **give** yourself permission to live in an unfair, disappointing world.

Forgiveness offers a very powerful way to pull yourself out of the negative spiral of bitterness and hard feelings.

From "Straight Talk for Teenagers"  
by *Earl A. Grollman*

## THE GRIEF OF MENTAL ILLNESS

I know now that my daughter, Laurie was mentally ill. I did not understand the meaning of this 20 years ago when her depression and “strange” behavior preceded a suicide attempt while in college. Despite all the help we could get for her, she succeeded in completing suicide five years later, at the age of 25, in 1980.

Her psychiatrist then agreed to talk to me -- he said, with tears in his eyes, she had been a serious schizophrenic patient. For reasons of patient confidentiality, I was not privy to this information earlier. WHY couldn't I have learned about this before it was too late?

The grief I felt as a bereaved parent was compounded by the truth of her illness. There is a stigma with mental illness. Society has been slow to understand and to accept mental illness. There is grief with mental illness -- for the loss of the child that we wanted to be normal. Why did this have to happen to my child?

Was this my fault? Guilt rears its ugly head. Why didn't I see the early signs that she needed help? I felt anger -- wanting to blame others for what happened. I was frustrated -- with the professionals who could not/did not “fix it.” I was disillusioned with the public and private mental health system and its limited resources for the mentally ill and their families. Laurie fell between the cracks and is gone.

Thirteen years later I have come to terms with her suicide. I know now there are many reasons for mental illness, most of which are beyond my control. Mental illness is a disease. It can be the result of genetics, a chemical imbalance in the brain, or a nutritional deficiency/allergy -- NOT bad parenting.

I have learned that in grief and in loss, most people want to/need to “talk about it.” The magic of sharing feelings and experiences with others who understand (because they've been there), is a healing process. For me, The Compassionate

Friends, a national peer support organization for parents and siblings, has provided this outlet on a local and national level. I have also participated in a local chapter of The Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and have learned so much more about mental illness through sharing with others who are coping with this stigma and grief. The National Alliance for Mentally Ill slogan in 1991 was “the most shocking thing about mental illness is how little people understand it.” How true! How sad!

After Laurie's suicide, initially the most therapeutic healing for me was to publish a book of her writings, material I found expressing her thoughts, visions and frustrations from the ages of 15 to 25. This actual documentation of a mentally ill young person is poetic, loving, humorous, depressing and spiritual. Perhaps her words will help others to see and understand this disease. Her words express intuitive insights in a most articulate way, despite the message of helplessness and hopelessness. As a bereaved parent I felt a strong motivation to perpetuate the memory of Laurie in a positive way.

Public education, and acceptance of mental illness as a disease is helping to change attitudes. We are learning to be more open and honest about it. We are learning to cope and go on with our lives.

Maybe it was the mother in me, but I never thought I would lose her. Now through the grief and later understanding of this disease, I have found a new purpose in my life. Reaching out to help others caught in the quagmire of grief -- from mental illness, from suicide, from the death of a child, through support groups and writings, in turn has been a healing process for me too. I know that Laurie's 25 years on this earth have made a difference.

*Carol Katz*

TCF, Regional Coordinator, MA

**YOUR CHILD HAS DIED?"**

There was a time when all was well.  
We could laugh and usually smile.  
We talked and dreamed.  
And how we planned –  
About a future that seemed so grand.  
“But Wait!” What’s that they say?  
It cannot be! For you’ve gone away.  
In one split second death came by  
And how things changed and went awry.  
No more we laugh and we plan no more.  
No more dream –  
We just get by.  
Day by day, week by week, and  
Ever so slowly we get back on our feet.  
Friends have helped,  
The Lord has, too.  
But nothing is the same without you.  
Life goes on, or so they say.  
But what is life when your child has died?  
People think you do so well,  
But they don’t know your inner hell.  
Because you hide it so well.  
Why? Oh, Why? We’ll always ask  
And never know in this life, I guess.  
I’m sad enough and now I’ll hush,  
Put on my mask  
And try to act like all the rest.  
We go along, we do our best,  
But you all know – you can all feel,  
For you, too, have lost your child.  
And maybe, just maybe,  
We can help each other to recover,  
And maybe even begin to heal.

*Jim Burden*, TCF, South Central KY  
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Once I wanted total happiness,  
Now I will settle for a little less pain.

*Ashleigh Brilliant*

**MANAGING STRESS WITH GRIEVING**

**Early in grief:**

Make no final decisions now about anything.

1. Ask for help and guidance through daily patterns, such as childcare, meal preparations, phone calls, etc.
2. Feel whatever comes – don’t be afraid of your feelings. Talk about your child and what has happened, whenever you can.
3. Force yourself to eat properly, if you have lost your appetite. Take a vitamin (stress) supplement.
4. Move your body – exercise. Walking is the best and easiest.
5. Sleep more – when you want to. If you can’t sleep, tire yourself with exercise. At the least, rest!
6. If you can, pray.

**Later in grief:**

1. Simplify your life for the time being. Do only what must be done. Be structured and predictable.
2. Eat properly.
3. Forgive yourself over and over again – for the past, for your feelings, for anything real or imaginary.
4. Allow your family to grieve or seek help in their own ways. Be sympathetic, but do not try to solve their grief or seek help from them at this time.
5. Be honest – let people know how you are, but don’t succumb to the need to “dump” on someone else. Don’t let anyone push you to “get over it” before you are able to do so. At the same time, it is not the fault of your friends that they do not know what to say or do.
6. Continue to love your family and significant friends and find small ways to show it.
7. SURVIVE!

*Author Unknown*