

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

DECEMBER 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

- Dec 1 General Sharing**
Collection of Gifts for First Step (see pg 3)
- Dec 11 Worldwide Candle Lighting (see pg 3)**
Collection of Gifts for First Step (see pg 3)
- Jan 5 General Sharing & Death by Suicide**
- July 20-22, 2012 34th TCF National Conference & 5th International Gathering, Cost Mesa, CA**

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

Janet Cozzone, daughter *Jesika* (19)

Denis Asselin, son *Nathaniel* (24)

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.

NOVEMBER REFRESHMENTS

Marie Paulsen, in honor of my grandson *Jerry* (14)

Nina Bernstein, in honor of my son *Andrew* on his birthday in October.

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

Helen Deery, in loving memory of my son *Ronald Deery*
on his anniversary December 20th.

Gloria & Jerry Koval, in loving memory of our son
Steven Koval for the holiday, Love, Mom & Dad.

Anthony & Laurene & Carol Quercetti, in loving memory of our
daughter & sister *Christine "Tina" Quercetti* on her
anniversary November 7th. You will always be our shining star.

Esperanza & Libardo Toro, in loving memory of our daughter
Maria on her anniversary November 3rd.

Merrily & F. Harry Spiess, in loving memory of our son
F. Ryan Spiess on his anniversary November 29th.

RESPONSE FEATURE ON VALLEY FORGE WEBSITE

The Valley Forge website (www.tcfvalleyforge.org) has a feature for you to leave comments and suggestions that you would like to see in the Chapter Program. Please voice your opinions on how the Chapter is being conducted, and ways we might improve the program. The chapter belongs to all of us, please support it.

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS 14th WORLD WIDE CANDLE LIGHTING



Held annually the second Sunday in December, this year December 11th, 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 and siblings 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.

GUEST SPEAKER - JOE PURIFICO

Joe & Marti's twenty year old son, Jeffrey, died January 2003 in an auto accident. They have been members of the Valley Forge Chapter since February 2003.

VOCALIST: STEPHANIE SCOGNA

The Valley Forge Chapter of The Compassionate Friends will hold a remembrance service on December 11th at 2 PM, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in the Fellowship Hall. (same place as our monthly sharing secessions are held). We also urge you to light a candle in your home at 7PM.

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 & siblings who have died, but will never be forgotten. Let us ensure that their light may always shine.

GIFTS FOR UNDER PRIVILEGED CHILDREN

FIRST STEP is a program of Chester County for under privileged/handicapped children. For many years our Chapter has collected gifts for them. We will do so again this year, at our December 1st meeting & December 11th at the World Wide Candle Lighting Service (Children's Memorial Day) Program. The children are between the ages of 2 and 6. Both clothing and toys are welcome gifts. It is very rewarding to remember your child, by showing love to these children. Please wrap your gift with a tag that states suggested age and sex. You may sign it, "from your friend", or your child or sibling's name. This may be the only gift the child will receive. We appreciate your participation in this worthy cause.

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.

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.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Chris Aiello, brother **Louis (Lou)** 12/24
Lori Bartholomew, brother **Matthew** 12/17
Eleanor Brennan, grandson **Jonathan Masiak** 12/20
Ben Breskman, son **Brian** 12/11
Jennifer Catanese, son **Andrew** 12/7
Libby Cavallaro, sister **Theresa** 12/29
Benjamin E. Cohen, daughter **Donna Lynne Cohen** 12/9
Anita Conway, son **Daniel** 12/9
Jean & Bill Cotter, son **Patrick Cotter** 12/20
Bobbie Coyle, son **Whitney Coyle** 12/23
Janet Cozzone, daughter **Jesika** 12/5
Adriene & Peter De Moerloose, daughter **Olivia** 12/30
Tom & Marge Del Rosario, son **Dominic** 12/14
Antoinette & John DiDonato, son **Kenneth (Kenny)** 12/15
Robert Dilbeck, son **Daniel Dilbeck** 12/20
Joseph & Patsy Dooley, son **Peter J. Dooley** 12/22
Ed & Sue Duffy, son **Peter** 12/12
Justine Ellinger, daughter **Keira Ellinger** 12/11
Bob & Dena Filipone, daughter **Denise** 12/13
June & Tsuneo Fujita, daughter **Sharon Kimi Fujita** 12/29
Bonnie Gardner, daughter **Michelle** 12/16
Sherry Goldberg, son **Neal** 12/14
Susan Goldberg, brother **Neal** 12/14
Soph & Lige Grahn Jr, son **Richard Grahn** 12/7
Jack & Freda Gross, daughter **Linda Joy Gross** 12/28
Judy Kahl, son **Mark** 12/11
Joan Kellett, son **Daniel Thomas Kellett** 12/7
Wendy Kuhn, brother **David** 12/19
Teresa & Bill Lattanze, daughter **Jodi Noell Lattanze** 12/19
Kevin & Nancy McKelvey, son **Michael** 12/4
Pat Miller, son **Nathan** 12/2
Fran & Kathy Moran, daughter **Denise Nicole Moran** 12/31
Ann Murray, son **Brian Rapoport** 12/2
Bonnie Nimerfroh, son **David** 12/19
Betty Jane Peters - Neilson, son **Martin A Peters** 12/8
Maureen & David Rich, daughter **Mallory Kirby Rich** 12/4

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS continued

Thelma Rosen, brother **David Beeler** 12/24
E. Pearl & Ernest Smith, son **Tony** 12/23
Eileen Smith, son **Craig** 12/17
John & Rose Stanley, daughter **Susan Stanley** 12/4
Ronda Stansbery, daughter **Susan Anne Stansbery Stamman** 12/22
Edward & Mary Stimson, son **Keith Stimson** 12/29
Priscilla Thoroughgood, daughter **Kendra Enochs** 12/5
Judy & Bert Tomarelli, son **Daniel Robert Tomarelli** 12/19
Jackie Ward, grandson **Anthony** 12/1
Laura & Leo Weishew, brother **Steven McGowan** 12/28
Pat Zimmerman, son daughter **Gabrielle** 12/25

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Nina Ansel, daughter **Jenny** - 12/21
Carole Bailey, son **Matthew J. Bailey** - 12/21
Richard & Jo Bewley, son **Kevin Bewley** - 12/29
Lisa Bledy, sister **Danielle Bledy** - 12/4
David Bonga, daughter **Amanda** - 12/31
Catherine Chan, son **Chanlan Lee** - 12/19
Tracy & Mike Collins, daughter **Krystal Chuck** - 12/5
Martin & Mary Conway, son **Neal** - 12/10
Carole and Kevin Creighton, son **Ryan Kent Creighton** - 12/6
Reno & Bonnie Crescimone, son **Jonathan** - 12/21
Bill & Donna Deasey, daughter **Michelle Deasey** - 12/19
Helen Deery, son **Ronald J. Deery, Jr.** - 12/20
Susan Dehlinger, daughter **Amy M Dehlinger** - 12/7
Antoinette & John DiDonato, son **Kenneth (Kenny)** - 12/5
Maureen & Jim Fleagle, son **Brian** - 12/11
Michelle Hillstrom, daughter **Jen** - 12/20
Anthony & Carol Iacobucci, son **Anthony Iacobucci** - 12/13
Enid M. Irizarry, daughter **Lisette M. Molina** - 12/25
Carl and Dorothy Johnson-Speight, daughter **Carlana Speight** - 12/13
son **Khaaliq Jabbar Johnson** - 12/6
Millie Jones, grandson **Shawn Dian** - 12/23
Russell L. Kinder, daughter **Susanna B. Kinder** - 12/27
Joan Kingslake, daughter **Ann Kingslake Woods** - 12/31
Al & Sue Koenig, daughter **Emily Grace Koenig** - 12/11

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES continued

Howard & Stacy Koller, daughter **Kaitlin** - 12/18
Teresa & Bill Lattanze, son **William Noel Lattanze** - 12/25
Barb & Larry Lauchle, son **Gray** - 12/18
Timothy & Maxine Lurowist, daughter **Kristine** - 12/24
Barbara McClenahan, son **David McClenahan** - 12/12
George & Barbara McClory, daughter **Susan** - 12/25
Norine & William McDevitt, Jr, son **Sean Francis McDevitt** - 12/6/
Joanne F Michini, son **Alfred J. Michini, II** - 12/14
Alfred J. Michini, son **Alfred J. Michini, II** - 12/14
Alexandra Milas, brother **Nicholas Stathes** - 12/19
Gerald & Margaret Milice, son **Gerald Milice** - 12/11
Paul & Jackie Mimless, daughter **Stephanie** - 12/3
Audrey Morasco, son **Christopher Morasco** - 12/27
Emil Nunez, son **Oliver Nunez** - 12/24
Carol & Dennis O'Connor, brother **Jack Coladonato** - 12/3
Roy Redman, daughter **Linda Inez Redman** - 12/16
Tony & Toni Riccardi, son **David Riccardi** - 12/1
Elise Rice, son **Raymond Anthony Rice** - 12/9
Margaret & Robert Rooney, daughter **Sharon Rooney** - 12/8
Bonnie Russo, son **Matthew** - 12/10
Melissa Schnitzler, brother **Richard "Jon" Masso** - 12/21
Abigail Schwartz, mother **Barbra** - 12/26
Art & Carol Silverman, daughter **Cheryl Beth Silverman** - 12/16
Mike & Beverly Smith, son **Ryan** - 12/11
Judy & Jim Snyder, son **David Snyder** - 12/13
Linda Spinks, son **Robert** - 12/9
Lisa M Spinks, brother **Robert** - 12/9
Ronda Stansbery, daughter **Susan Anne Stansbery Stamman** - 12/22
Fred & Irene Sutton, mother(Fred) **Pearl Collins** - 12/19/02

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

There are many ongoing positions available for dedicated volunteers who are willing to devote monthly time to fulfilling the needs of our chapter. Members accepting these positions are urged to attend the quarterly Steering Committee Meetings.

Librarian - Keep track of new books & books on loan.

Publicity - Send monthly notices of sharing meetings dates and special events information to local newspapers, radio, and web sites (Upper Merion Community Bulletin Board).

Recording Secretary - Record the minutes of the Steering Committee meetings, which meets quarterly.

SHARED THOUGHTS ON LOOKING FOR YOUR GIFT

Newly bereaved families often face the holidays with fear and trepidation. Just the fact, holidays continue to go on, can cause outrage. Our sadness is monumental, and causes our bodies to resist moving on. We need to be gentle with ourselves; we are going through an emotional rehabilitation. Holidays often renew our grief, even if we are a distance from fresh grief.

We need to selectively choose what traditions are important to our family. If we over commit, we set our selves up for a let down when we cannot meet our goals. If you have some traditions that are very important and you are not physically up to doing them, you will find friends and extended family will feel honored if you ask for their help. Most people want to help you get through the holidays, but don't know what to do. Give them the opportunity to feel they are helpful in your healing.

Grieving cannot be put on the shelf until the holidays are over. We need to take time to feel our grief, and express our sadness. We also need to take time to try and put a bit of normality in our lives. We must remember it is not disrespectful to laugh. I'm sure our loved one would want us to surround ourselves with caring people who can help us through the holidays. A caring supportive person is one who encourages us to be the best we can be, not one who expects us to be as we used to be.

Our healing will eventually cause our pain to move out and make room for our loved ones memories. We learn to make a new life for ourselves. Holidays get better and we learn how to live again.

We tend to think of life's richest moments as being the joyous, fun filled, carefree days prior to losing our children and siblings. But, as I search for the most meaningful things that have given me strength and a real appreciation for life, they certainly do include the pain, overcoming my despair, losing my son, grandson, and 6 siblings. We cherish the friendships that doesn't always demand a smiling face, and those with the warm touch that says, "share your pain, let me be a part of your grief, don't worry about making us uneasy with tears, we have all been there". Much healing can take place through sharing as we learn to be very honest and courageous with our feelings, which helps us to find hope. Hope helps to restore our love for life, and gives us the strength to survive.

This holiday we will all miss our loved ones, who are no longer with us. Though it has been through much pain, you probably have never been so close to your child or sibling, or shared such a large part of your life with them. We hope the memories that ache with pain, can also bring you thoughts of love. For those of us who are further removed from our early grief, who can look back and appreciate the strength for our struggle, the compassion from seeing other's pain, wanting to become functional human beings again so we can contribute to making a better world, are gifts our children and siblings have given to us for our survival. These gifts are greater than any fancy bow tied box can contain. Look for your gifts and cherish them.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel* , TCF Valley Forge, PA

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

A BROTHER'S DEATH

Barbara Lazear Ascher's brother, Bobby, died of AIDS at the age 31. Following is an excerpt of a beautifully written sensitive article describing the author's struggle with grief. "A Brother's Death" was originally printed in the New York Times Magazine.

When we first learned of Bobby's illness, it seemed incomprehensible that this could be happening to our baby brother. My sister and I began a journey into paralysis. There were days when it seemed we had to concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other if we were to walk at all. If we traveled more than a couple of blocks, we were exhausted for the rest of the day.

We were hungry, we weren't hungry. We made chocolate chip cookies and chocolate brownies and didn't eat them. We opened and closed the refrigerator door, looking for something that might cushion the pain, fill the chasm that was opening from within.

Now I realize that this was the beginning of grief which starts in the stomach, yawning like the gaping mouth in Munch's painting. "The Scream." But what did we know of grief? We were young, our beloved had not yet died. I began to understand that grieving is like walking. The urge is there, but you need a guiding hand; you need someone to teach you how.

I went to speak with a wise and trusted minister at my church who warned that there were bad times ahead. The death of a sibling, he said, grievous in itself, is also a startling reminder of our own mortality. I suppose it's not dissimilar to the time in youth when we first learned of our origins and began to understand, if they made me, then they can make another. After that we became the nervous sentinels of our territory. When a sibling dies, the absolute certainty of death replaces the cherished illusion that maybe we'll be the exceptions. When a sibling dies, death tugs at our own shirttails. There's no unclasping its persistent grip. "You too," it says. "Yes, even you."

When you are new to grief, you learn that there's no second-guessing it. It will have its way with you. Don't be fooled by the statistics you read: Widows have one bad year; orphans three. Grief doesn't read schedules.

One morning three weeks after Bobby died, I arose feeling happy and energetic. Well, now, I thought, I guess we've taken care of that. Wrong. The next morning I was awakened by a wail I thought was coming from the storm outside until I realized it was coming from me.

Grief will fool you with its disguises. Some days you insist that you're fine, you're just angry at a friend who said the wrong thing. One day I wept into the lettuce and peaches at our local market when an acquaintance approached to scold me for my stand in an old battle. Of course, we both assumed that she was responsible for my tears.

You learn that you can cry and stop and laugh and even follow a taxi driver's commands to "Have a nice day," and then cry again. You learn that there is no such thing as crying forever. Three months ago I was certain that I would never be happy again. I was wrong.

Grief is like the wind. When it's blowing hard, you adjust your sails and run before it. It blows too hard, you stay in the harbor, close the hatches and don't take calls. When it's gentle, you go sailing, have a picnic, take a swim.

You go wherever it takes you. There are no bulwarks to withstand it. Should you erect one, it will eventually tire of the game and blow the walls in.

We cannot know another's grief, as deeply personal as love and pain. I cannot measure my own against the sorrow of my brother's friends who must wonder every day which among them will be next. I shy away from the magnitude of my brother's own grief when, upon being diagnosed, he heard the final click of a door as it closed on possibility.

A friend of mine said of her son when he died at 30, "He was just beginning to look out at the world and make maps." So was my brother. And then there was no place to go.

Barbara Lazear Ascher, NY, NY

THE HOLIDAY SEASON:

Getting through the holidays can be a difficult task for bereaved parents. We as bereaved parents need to handle the holidays in a way that we feel is best for ourselves and our families. There are many things that bereaved parents can do to help ease the pain of the holiday season. Below are some suggestions that we thought may be helpful for you:

1. PLAN to be with people you enjoy.
2. VISIT the cemetery and take a Christmas tree to the grave. Decorate it with popcorn or food for the birds.
3. DO SOMETHING for someone else. Give a gift or make a donation in memory of your child. This can help to keep their memory alive.
4. INCLUDE YOUR CHILD IN CONVERSATIONS -- once others realize that you are comfortable talking about your child,

they can relate stories that will add to your memories of him or her.

5. DON'T BE AFRAID TO MAKE CHANGES It really can make things less painful. Change the time you open packages, or when the holiday meal is served.
6. KEEP IN MIND THE FEELINGS of our other children and family members. Let your needs be known to others and try to understand their needs as well.
7. MOST IMPORTANT, it is pointless to pretend that everything is the same as it was. As you accept your loss, give yourself the necessary time for grieving during the holidays.
8. TAKE ONE DAY AT A TIME. Be realistic, and realize that we all need to set limits to do those things which are meaningful to ourselves and our families.

Author Unknown

A LETTER TO MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Thank you for not expecting too much from me this holiday season. It will be our first Christmas without our child and I have all I can do coping with the "spirit" of the holiday on the radio, TV, in the newspapers and stores. We do not feel joyous and trying to pretend this Christmas is going to be like the last will be impossible because we are missing one.

Our family traditions will be too painful for us to continue this year. Please understand this and maybe some Christmas in the future we will have these traditions again.

Please allow me to talk about my child, if I feel a need. Don't be uncomfortable with my tears. My heart is breaking and the tears are a way of letting out my sadness.

I plan to do something special in memory of my child. Please recognize my need to do this in order to keep our memories alive. My fear is not that I'll forget, but that you will.

Please don't criticize me if I do something that you don't think is normal. I'm a different person now and it may take a long time before this different person reaches an acceptance of my child's death.

As I survive the stages of grief, I will need your patience and support, especially during these holiday times and the "special" days throughout the year.

Thank you for not expecting too much from me this holiday season.

Love, A bereaved parent, Madison, WI

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 Hofmockel