

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

Inside Valley Forge

Meetings are on the first Thursday of every month, at 7:45 PM (ending at 9:30 PM) We meet at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Founders Hall, Valley Forge Road and Henderson Rds., King of Prussia, PA

For info call Rhonda @ (484) 919-0820

Meeting Schedule and other

TCF Events of Interest

General Sharing December 5th, 2019

General Sharing January 2nd, 2020

Candle Lighting Service

December 8th 2PM at the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Founders Hall in King of Prussia.



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 editor.

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 the 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 the 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.

Please make all checks Payable to:

TCF VALLEY FORGE CHAPTER

Send to Rhonda Gomez

December 2019

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Compassionatefriends.org

TCF Mission Statement

When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild and helps others better assist the grieving family.

NEW FRIENDS

Mary Leshem her son **Michael (21)**

Kimberly Tonetti her son **(12)**

Melisa Toland her son **Connor (17)**

We welcome our newly bereaved friends, sorry for the cause that brings you. We all have been in the depths of despair, and offer unconditional love and understanding to all of you, it sometimes takes several meetings to feel the full benefit of group sharing. We offer confidentiality, unconditional love and understanding to all of you.

REMEMBRANCE

Mary Rose—Her husband, Donald, October 7, 2019 past away to join their daughter Marjorie Rose-Cotteta

LOVE GIFTS

Catherine Dardozzi In memory of my dear son, **James Dardozzi 3/7**

Eileen and John Kostic In memory of our son, **John E. Kostic 4/29**

Robert & Sigrid Snow In memory of our two sons, **Barry 4/28 and Kevin 11/26**

CANDLE LIGHTING REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

The Valley Forge Chapter of the Compassionate Friends will hold a candle lighting remembrance service on December 8th at 2PM at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Founders Hall (same place as our monthly meetings sharing sessions are held). We also urge you to light a candle in your home at 7PM. We hope you will take this opportunity to join us remembering our children and siblings who have died, but will never be forgotten. Let us ensure that their light may always shine.

GUEST SPEAKER—FRED MOUNTJOY

Fred and his Wife Marilyn, lost twin daughters, Barilyn and Maralin shortly after their birth in 1961, a third daughter, Marian, died in 1996 at the age of 33. there was no TCF in 1961. Fred and Marilyn attended local TCF meetings shortly after Marian's death. They were co-facilitators in their group.

Fred was employed in public education at the high school level for 37 years. During that time he taught US History and psychology, was a high school guidance counselor , and an administrator. Fred was also employed as an addiction counselor at a local medical center for 25 years, He also holds certification in individual family and grief counseling.

Fred is well known to many Compassionate Friends who attend TCF Conferences. He served s a speaker and Workshop Presenter at the Eastern PA Regional Conference in 2005.

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 8th Candle Lighting service. The children are between 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 add 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 of this worthy cause.

THE DASH

I read of a man who stood to speak
At the funeral of a friend
He referred to the dates on her tombstone
From the beginning to the end.

He noted that first came the date of her birth
And spoke the following date with tears,
But he said what matters most of all
Was the dash between those years.

For the dash represents all the time
That he spent alive on earth.
And now only those who loved him
Know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own;
The cars, the house. the cash,
What matters is how we live and love
And how we live our dash.

So think about this long and hard,
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left,
That can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough
To consider what's true and real
And always try to understand
The way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger,
And show appreciation more
And love the people in our lives
Like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect,
And more often wear a smile
Remembering that this special dash
Might only last a little while.

So when your eulogy is being read
With your life's actions to rehash
Would you be proud of the things they say
About how you spent your dash?

Linda Ellis

LIKE THE BUTTERFLY

It fluttered there, above my head,

Weightless in the soft breeze.

I reached up my hand,

it lit upon my finger

Waving glistening wings gently,

Looked at me for timeless moments.

I smiled, reaching deep, and

finding all those cherished memories.

As it flitted off through the sunlit morn,

I knew we had said hello, once more.

Leslie Langford, Sibling TCF North Platte NE

10 RULES FOR SELF HEALING

- 1 Tell friends to call you often. Explain that after the first couple of months you'll need their calls.
- 2 Tell your friends to make a specific date with you; none of this "we must get together for lunch". Remind them that you're bound to have "down" times and their patience would be appreciated.
3. Tell them to please feel free to talk about the person that has died -- and don't avoid that person's name.
- 4.. It's important for friends to understand that you may appear to be "doing so well" but on the inside you still hurt. Grief is painful, it's tricky and it's exhausting
5. Ask your friends to care but not to pity you.
6. Make plain that friends and relatives can still treat you as a person who is still in command and can think for yourself
7. Tell your friends that it's all right to express their caring. It's OK for them to cry; crying together is better than avoiding the pain.
8. Let your friends know too, that it's all right to say nothing. A squeeze or a hug are often more important than words.
9. Let people know that they can invite you to socialize, but that you might decline.
10. Ask your friends to go for walks with you. You and your friends can "walk off" feelings. Walks promote conversation and help fight depression.

Ruth Jean Loewinsohn

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

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.

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
Marbeth Blocklinger - grandson - **Parker** - 12/13
Catherine Chan - son - **Chanlan Lee** - 12/19
Becky & Frank Clark - son - **Pat** - 12/4
Tracy & Mike Collins - daughter - **Krystal Chuck** - 12/5
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
Karen Donaldson - daughter - **Willow Ann** - 12/28
Maureen & Jim Fleagle - son - **Brian** - 12/11
Lee & Patricia Grossman - daughter - **Rachel Leah** - 12/5
Giuliana Hilend - son - **Patrick Andrew Hilend** - 12/10
Michelle Hillstrom - daughter - **Jen** - 12/20
Enid M. Irizarry - daughter - **Lisette M. Molina** - 12/25
Carl and Dorothy Johnson-Speight - daughter - **Carlena Speight** - 12/13
Millie Jones - grandson - **Shawn Dian** - 12/23
Joan Kingslake - daughter - **Ann Kingslake Woods** - 12/31
Al & Sue Koenig - daughter - **Emily Grace Koenig** - 12/11
Howard & Stacy Koller - daughter - **Kaitlin** - 12/18
Teresa & Bill Lattanze - son - **William** - 12/25
Barb & Larry Lauchle - son - **Gray** - 12/18
Tracy Lukens - son - **Parker** - 12/13
Timothy & Maxine Lurowist - daughter - **Kristine** - 12/24
Alfred J. & Joan Michini - son - **Alfred J. Michini, II *** - 12/14
Alexandra Milas - daughter - **Nicole Penelope Wiseley** - 11/5
Gerald & Margaret Milice - son - **Gerald Milice** - 12/11



DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES CONT'D

Greg and Mary Miller - son - **David** - 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

Daune Ring - daughter - **Chloe** - 12/29

Margaret & Robert Rooney - daughter - **Sharon Rooney** - 12/8

Beth Schad - son - **Gage** - 12/27

Art & Carol Silverman - daughter - **Cheryl Beth Silverman** - 12/16

Mike & Beverly Smith - son - **Ryan** - 12/11

Karl Snepp - wife - **Sue** - 12/2

Lisa M Spinks - brother - **Robert** - 12/9

Catherine & Gerry St. John - - **Gerry** - 12/23

Ronda Stansbery - daughter - **Susan Anne Stansbery Stamman** - 12/22

Fred & Irene Sutton - Fred's mother - **Pearl Collins** - 12/19

Frank Yanni - son - **David Yanni** - 2/10

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Lori Bartholomew - brother - **Matthew** - 12/17

Tom & Kathy Biggar - granddaughter - **Ava Nobles** - 12/13

Eleanor Brennan - grandson - **Jonathan Masiak** - 12/20

Ben & Cathy Breskman - son - **Brian** - 12/11

Libby Cavallaro - sister - **Theresa** - 12/29

Becky & Frank Clark - son - **Pat** - 12/16

Jean & Bill Cotter - son - **Patrick Cotter** - 12/20

Bobbie Coyle - son - **Whitney Coyle** - 12/23

Adriene & Peter De Moerloose - daughter - **Olivia** - 12/30

Tom & Marge Del Rosario - son - **Dominic** - 12/14

Antoinette & John DiDonato - son - **Kenneth (Kenny)** - 12/15

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

Bonnie Gardner - daughter - **Michelle** - 12/16

Suze Goldberg - Uncle - **Neal** - 12/14



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS CONT'D

Jack & Freda Gross - daughter - **Linda Joy Gross** - 12/28
Ginger Jarrett - daughter - **Adrienne** - 12/5
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
Frank & Laura Lincicome - son - **Daniel** - 12/22
Sue, Dave, Dan, and Lauren McCarthy - son and brother - **Brian McCarthy** - 12/25
Kevin & Nancy McKelvey - son - **Michael** - 12/4
Fran & Kathy Moran - daughter - **Denise Nicole Moran** - 12/31
Ann Murray - son - **Brian Rapoport** - 12/2
Bonnie Nimerfroh - son - **David** - 12/19
Jenn Nobles - daughter - **Ava Ruth Marie** - 12/13
Maurice & Ruth Onraet - son - **Thomas** - 12/19
Betty Jane Peters - Neilson - son - **Walter** - 12/8
Maureen & David Rich - daughter - **Mallory Kirby Rich** - 12/4
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
Luanne Stetler - grandson - **Jordyn** - 12/25
Edward & Mary Stimson - son - **Keith Stimson** - 12/29
Morgan E Taylor - sister - **Devan** - 12/25
Brooke Test - sister - **Devan** - 12/15
Judy Tomarelli - son - **Daniel Robert Tomarelli** - 12/19
Jackie Ward - grandson - **Anthony** - 12/1
Laura & Leo Weishev - brother - **Steven McGowan** - 12/28
John & cecia Zisk - son - **Jacob** - 12/13

To My Brother

*Wherever we look,
 You are there.
 You are the light
 On the water.*

*You are the blossom
 On the tree.
 You are a thought,
 And you are a feeling.
 Wherever we are, You are.*

Martha DubinskyTCF, Chappaqua, NY

The following article was included in the Compassionate Friends December newsletter.

We are passing along a message from a fellow Compassionate Friend:

Grieving Fathers-Portraits Of Love And Gratitude

I lost my son/soul mate - Gianni Manganelli - at the age of twenty-three. I witnessed the perfection of his first breath, first crawl, first steps, the day he discovered his own shadow. His seven year-old soul that wrote: "Words and letters are idea nets that catch poems." This grief is unimaginable, shattering. Belief systems challenged, the empirical explored - the spiritual and the scientific. The very foundation of life itself. The most profound questions mankind has asked, from the time of Paleolithic cave drawings to the now merging of science and spirituality. Who are we? Why are we?

Where's our biblical Joseph? What happened to Joseph? Mary was at the foot of the cross. Her grief is largely explored, engrained in the Judeo-Christian consciousness. We know about her but where is Joseph? What do we know about his grief? His loss?

It has been said that in grief, mothers ask for help. Fathers ask for a map. The death of our child is the most life-altering and transforming of events - yet, almost completely absent is the particular exploration of Fatherly grief in film, television, educational tools, or photographic exploration.

Fathers fix things. How do we fix the death of our child? How do we fix ourselves?

What is Grieving Fathers? A multi-platform project; film, museum exhibition/book, interactive, web experience.

1. A compelling and aesthetic documentary film, both in theatrical and television venues of Fathers - from all walks of life - the poet, professor, scientist, musician, construction worker, artist, athlete, executive or farmer.
2. A photo-journalistic exploration - in environmental portraits - of the Fathers, to be exhibited in fine art photo galleries (with accompanying photo book and text).

3. An interactive, educational digital platform to grow, expand and deepen this experience and conversation.
4. ALL to be distributed world-wide - focusing on the Father's grief and loss. To invite and to impact an audience into this renaissance of the masculine. A family of man.
5. When I saw my own son in death, I had only TWO thoughts. It was as though every thought I ever had was suddenly erased. Only two remained: "Gio, I love you. Thank you for the most beautiful twenty-three years of my life."
6. Grief is not only about loss and tears. It is also a reminder of how love and gratitude are re-birthed in the hearts and minds of all of us, who continue on our own life's journey. Welcome to our story. We Fathers - who art here.

BIO for Robert Manganelli

Robert's current screenplay: Strong Deaf is under option by Dan Angel (<https://m.imdb.com/name/nm0029445/>).

As writer/director, Robert's: Man In The Maze, was in pre-pre production with two-time Academy Award winner, Alexander Payne as Producer, when his son Gianni suddenly passed away. This experience transformed Robert and all projects came to a stop. Most everything came to a stop.

Eventually, Robert would return to: Man In The Maze and is currently executing a ground-floor rewrite. A rewrite that reflects the profound love between he and Gio and the changes that have manifest in his life.

In that spirit, Robert is currently crafting and is in pre-production on a new venture called: Grieving Fathers: Portraits Of Love And Gratitude. The project is a multi-platform effort that includes a documentary film, fine art photo-exhibit (environmental portraits of Fathers), with accompanying Picture Book w/text, and a web-

based interactive experience.

Selected to Robert Redford's, Sundance Directors Lab (6 chosen from more than 3,000) to develop: *Seeing in the Dark* (After Image 2001), which starred John Mellencamp, Billy Burke (*Twilight*), Louise Fletcher (Oscar win -*One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*) and Terrylene (Natural Born Killers). Mirimax picked up: *After Image* at the Sundance Film Festival and distributed the film world wide.

An MFA-UCLA Film School graduate, Robert wrote

and directed: *Beyond Ourselves* and his thesis: *Listen Carefully*. The ladder screened at numerous film festivals, including: Sundance, Berlin, AFI, Haifa Israel, Porto Portugal, Cork Ireland, CINE Golden Eagle (Academy Award qualifier), Critics Choice/Peoples Choice-Tokyo, The Chris Award (Columbus). Silver-Chicago International and *Premiere of Festival* - Bombay, India. Spotlight Award-UCLA Alumni. Nominee-Paramount Pictures Fellowship.

Bio goes on for another 2 pages.

LONELINESS AND HOW TO OVERCOME IT

Why are there times when a bereaved parent feels lonely, even though surrounded by loving people, and people the bereaved parent loves? Loneliness is the outgrowth of separation from one who has given meaning to life. Yes, other relationships offer meaning, but it is normal for the searing pain from the loss of one's child to supersede the pleasure from other experiences. Part of yourself had been invested in another person. When that person has died, in a sense, you are lonely for a part of yourself that has been destroyed. At times you look around you and think that no one else is experiencing the pain you are feeling; that no one else's world has been shattered. *This self-centeredness is a natural part of the grief process. Do not deny it, but DO NOT HOLD ON TO IT AS A WAY OF LIFE.* Give yourself permission to accept help from others and then to reach out and help others. Although your child is not here to give continuity to your life, by having lived and having given purpose to your life, your child can be the bridge of your continuity with life as a thinking, loving and active person.

Ruth Eiseman TC

YOU AND YOUR GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Do what is right for you during the holidays. Well-meaning friends and family may try to prescribe to you what you should do during the holiday season, or more specifically, on the holiday itself. Discuss your plans with a trusted friend who won't judge the decisions you make about how and with whom you will spend your time. As you become aware of your needs, share them with your friends and family.

Include in your conversation the name of the person who has died. If others sense you are able to talk about your loved one, it may help them recognize your need to remember the joy of having loved the person who was an important part of your life.

Be with people you find supportive and comforting. Identify those people around you who understand that holiday times heighten your feeling of loss and who will allow you to talk about your experience.

Embrace your treasure of memories. Perhaps one

of the best legacies that exists after the death of a loved one is memories. Holidays always stimulate us to think of times past. If your memories bring laughter, let yourself smile; if your memories bring sadness, let yourself cry.

Be tolerant of your inability to function at optimum level. Your feelings of loss will probably leave you feeling fatigued and your energy level will naturally slow down – respect what your body and mind are telling you as you work to lower your expectations of operating at high levels of efficiency.

Do plan ahead. Decide what family traditions you want to maintain and what new ones you may want to start. Knowing how you will structure your time tends to help you anticipate schedules rather than just letting things happen.

From: "You and Your Grief During Holiday Season"

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

A SIBLING SPEAKS OUT

What happens to the children when a Brother or sister dies?

In some ways it is a very different experience from that which parents go through, while in others it is very much the same. Part of the reason for the difference is that the child who has died has a unique relationship with each family member. Part of the reason for the similarity is that all have suffered a loss.

One of the strongest desires expressed by siblings is that they are much more likely to want to return to a normal routine. They want to return to school fairly quickly and to go out with their friends. They want their parents to stop crying, not because they don't care but because they do care and want to see the hurt stop. Just because a child wants to go to a movie doesn't mean he isn't grieving. I think that children are much less exposed to socially "appropriate" behavior after someone has died and may do things that do not fit into an "appropriate" role.

Another strong feeling I see is that of guilt. As much as parents know about their children, there are some things they will never know. A child's private thoughts, or an exchange between children, may never come to the parents attention. The source of child's guilt is frequently the result of an argument, a hastily shouted "drop dead," or a similar fleeting thought. These incidents come back to haunt children, as though one such incident had something to do with the death.

There are a few more concerns that may develop. One is how to take over for the dead child--for exam-

ple, the household chores that were always done by him or her, but that now have to be done by someone else. Related to this concern is a situation in which a child always shared a particular activity simply because the sibling did it too. After the death, the surviving sibling may feel compelled to continue the activity, because to give it up would be to take away a reminder of the dead sibling. Another concern is that whatever happened to the brother or sister may happen to the survivor. This is particularly acute if the sibling who died was older. As the child approaches the age of the sibling when he or she died, a feeling of anxiety may develop. Many children realize this fear to be groundless, but find themselves wondering if they will survive. Consequently, birthdays are often occasions with unexpressed conflicts.

Children also share some of their parents' feelings: the loneliness, the looking for comfort, the feeling that no one else really knows what they're going through. They also share unanswerable questions

"If I could have. . . ?" and "What if...?"

A child's life is changed forever when a brother or sister dies. If I could advise parents, it would be to say, "Children do not grieve the same way as parents do because of different relationships. Keeping these differences in perspective will help you understand why children sometimes do the things they do. It helps to consider a child's point of view when you are hurting so much.

During such an emotionally draining time as grieving, don't leave anything to chance; don't assume anything. Making sure you and your children are aware of each other's feelings will mean less confusion, less tension, more sharing, and more growing together as a family."

Julie Peterson TCF, Pawtucket, RI

IMPORTANT

If you are receiving two newsletters, the email version and the printed newsletter, please let me know so I can stop one of them. frank@tcfvalleyforge.org

SHARED THOUGHTS ON THE HOLIDAYS

This time of year that we have always faced with joy and excitement, frequently turns to fear for those facing their first Christmas, Chanukah, or whatever your choice of holiday is (or perhaps your second year, that still seems like the first). The tinsel, holly, music, and joy around us seem overwhelming.

Remember, we are grieving people, and are very limited to what we can give. To reduce pressure on ourselves, it helps to be realistic and don't over commit. Failing to follow through adds to our depression and lowers our self-esteem.

It is important to take time out to grieve and express our emotions, which can relieve a lot of stress. We have a right to mourn even though those around us are celebrating a joyous occasion, and those around us have a right to be joyous. When analyzing our depression over the holidays, we have to admit we are feeling so low because of missing those wonderful times, which we too, enjoyed. For now, it may be necessary to separate ourselves from the celebration, and concentrate on the greatest gift we have ever given our child, grandchild, or sibling, the gift of love. That gift can still be given to our loved one. For those of us who have a religious belief, it may be a time to reflect on our faith.

Shopping for family and friends sometimes creates a feeling of guilt, because we cannot buy for the missing family member. It helped me to begin by treating myself to seven new ceramic Christmas balls with each child's name and birthdate. I did not put Doug's death date on his, for it is his life I want to remember. I also bought a wreath for my front door, that I planned to take to the cemetery the week before Christmas. This made me feel that I could bring part of his home to him. Each year I purchase a new decoration for our home in his remembrance. I don't announce it to anyone, but I know why it's there. These things help to give the feeling that he is not left out. This may not be good for everyone. You may want to find "your special remembrance" project to get you through.

It is important for us to discuss plans with other family members in our home. Firstly, to know what they need to get themselves through, and secondly, for you not to bear all the stress of decision making. Be flexible, there is no right or wrong rules, you can run away, or stay at home. Some stay at home and make changes. Others stay at home with no changes, and face it head on. (This was the best for me, because I have six surviving children) Sometimes well meaning non-bereaved individuals want us to lay our grief aside during the holidays. They don't understand our need to grieve. It is very appropriate to say, "I have to do this holiday my way, for I think this is best for me".

In my early stages of grief, I felt there would never be another happy holiday. The pain softens, and though it is different, I look forward to and enjoy holidays. I cannot expect you to believe this can happen to you, for I did not believe others before me. We must remember, even though our holiday is not good, it may be the best we can have, given the situation we are in. No matter where we spend our holiday our deceased loved one's memories will be with us. May you find hope to believe your holidays can be good again.

God Bless,

Marie Hofmockel, TCF Valley Forge



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***A bereavement organization
For parents, siblings and families
We offer friendship, love and understanding
We talk, we listen, we share, we care.***



The Compassionate Friends Credo

We need not walk alone. We are the Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope. The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes but our love for them unites us. Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds and relationships. We are young and we are old, some of us are far along in our grief but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength. While some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression; while others radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of the Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone, we are the Compassionate Friends.