

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

MAY 2013

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.



Valley Forge Chapter

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Meeting Schedule

and other TCF Events of interest

- May 2** General Sharing & Death by Suicide
Sibling Sharing, ages high school & older
- June 6** General Sharing
Sibling Sharing, ages high school & older
- Jul 5-7, 2013** TCF National Conference
Sheraton Boston Hotel, Boston, MA
- July 11** General Sharing (see page 3)
Parental & Siblings

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**

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 MEMBERS

Branda Hoffmaster son **Connor** (19)

REFRESHMENTS

Diana Clark in honor of my grandson, **Alexander** on his anniversary April 5th.

Refreshments may be donated in memory of loved ones, please call **Rhonda (484) 919-0820**, or you may sign the refreshment chart located on the refreshment table.

LOVE GIFTS

Benjamin Cohen, in loving memory of my daughter, **Donna Lynne Cohen** (34).

Anton & Maureen DeMaioribus, in loving memory of our daughter,
Ann DeMaioribus on her birthday May 17th.

Marco & Patricia Giubilato, in loving memory of our daughter,
Robin Biubilato Zarelli on her birthday March 18th.

Frank Harms, in loving memory of my son, **Tyler** on his birthday May 20th.

Marie & Ken Hofmockel, in loving memory of our grandson,
Steven Schneibolk on his birthday May 7th.

William & Marilyn Hudson, in loving memory of our son,
Robert Hudson, on his birthday & anniversary May 11th.

Barbara Purtell-Frank, in memory of my son, **Michael John Keller Purtell** on his birthday May 28th. Always on my mind, forever in my heart.

Irene & Fred Sutton, in loving memory of our son,
Jim Sutton, on his anniversary April 16th.

TCF Facebook

Join 22,000 people who are sharing their grief journey at The Compassionate Friends Facebook page. The page is designed to be informative and supportive. Check out the question or quote of the day. You can find the page by going to TCF's website home page at www.compassionatefriends.org and clicking on the Facebook icon. Or you can go to Facebook and do a search for "The Compassionate Friends/USA." Join us and contribute to the conversation.

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.

We send our love and compassion to the family of **Joan Kellett**. Joan's grandson, **Keith James Mastronardo** (age 25) passed away on March 19th. Keith attended our local Upper Merion High School, where he graduated in 2006. Keith is the son of **Dennis & Shannon Mastronardo**, and is survived by three brothers, DJ, Kyle and Daniel. Joan joined the TCF Valley Forge Chapter after the death of her son, **Daniel Thomas Kellett** in 1990.

CHAPTER LIBRARY BOOKS

The TCF National Conferences offer a book store for grief related subjects. This is to make books available to bereaved families and helps to raise funds for TCF.

Often times bereaved families want to give a memorial in memory of a loved one but can't decide what to dedicate.

If you wish to purchase a memorial book for the Valley Forge Chapter library, you may send your donation, of any amount, to Rhonda Gomez. Please indicate your choice of book title, subject, or have Rhonda choose an appropriate book. There will be a memorial placard, with your and your loved ones name placed inside the cover.

DATE CHANGE FOR JULY MEETING

The July monthly meeting has been changed to the second Thursday, July 11th because the first Thursday falls on a holiday and the TCF National Conference is that weekend.

**The Compassionate Friends
36th National Conference**



**For further information
www.compassionatefriends.org**

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Dr. Heidi Horsley, Dr. Gloria Horsley, Tina Chery, Ken Druck, and Bill Hancock

Hotel Reservations Now being Accepted!

To reserve your room online, please go to Online Reservations or reservations directly to the hotel at 617-236-2000. Room charge is \$129 per night plus 14.45% tax. The hotel is about 3 miles from the airport. Ultimate Shuttle (888-487-4379) is available around the clock for \$14. If you wish to spend additional time touring the area, the reduced room rate is available days before and after the conference. On-site parking for conference guests is \$39 per night or Valet \$46.00 per night. The driving time from Philadelphia is approximately 5 hrs.

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.**

MAY BIRTHDAYS

Donald Barber, son *Steven W. Barber* 5/19
Laura Bedrossian, son *Teddy* 5/9
Stephen & Barbara Billings, daughter *Laura Elizabeth Billings* 5/22
Shirley & Lex Bono, son *Greg* 5/19
Bruce & Barb Campbell, son *Greg* 5/30
Loreta & Ken Cericola, son *Anthony Cericola* 5/3
Mary & John Chelius, son *John J. Chelius, Jr.* 5/2
Joanne & Tom Christman, son *Kyle R. O'Neill* 5/23
Anton & Maureen DeMaioribus, daughter *Ann DeMaioribus* 5/17
Vanessa Diaz, friend's child *Samir* 5/16
Danielle Evelyn, son *Samir* 5/16
Carol Graber, son *Bobby* 5/17
Judi Griffith, son *Steve* 5/27
Samuel & Mary Lou Hardman, son *Samuel J.* 5/19
Frank Harms, son *Tyler* 5/20
Robin Hayman, son *Bradley Hayman* 5/11
Marie & Ken Hofmockel, grandson *Steven Schneibolk* 5/7
William & Marilyn Hudson, son *Robert Hudson* 5/11
Brad Ingerman, son *Justin* 5/18
Jean Jones, grandson *Bobby* 5/7
Loretta Kline, son *Keith Edward Kline* 5/11
Susan Lipson, nephew *Justin Ingerman* 5/18
Maryellen & James Madden, daughter *Anne Marie Madden* 5/18
Anne McClenachan, brother *Andy McClenachan* 5/30
Michael & Maria McFadden, daughter *Rachel McFadden* 5/14
Willard & Patricia McLain, son *Gary J. McLain* 5/5
Mike & Jen Meluskey, daughter *Carolyn Meluskey* 5/13
Mike Meluskey, daughter *Carolyn Rose Meluskey* 5/13
Cheryl Mezzaroba, son *Lon Mezzaroba* 5/18
Leonard & Thelma Miller, son *Lowell Bruce Miller* 5/14
Ann Murray, son *Jonathan Rapoport* 5/17
Elsie Oreski, son *Gregory T. Oreski* 5/22
Betty & Richard Owens, Sr., son *Richard H. Owens, Jr.* 5/12
Sam & Palma Panichello, son *Joseph Panichello* 5/21
Barbara Purtell-Frank, son *Michael John Keller Purtell* 5/28
Jeri Reinert, father *Albert Volpe* 5/4

MAY BIRTHDAYS continued

Pamela Schneibolk, son *Steven* 5/7
Janet & Jonathan Schultz, friend *Scott Alan Rosenthal* 5/26
Ann Sherwood, son *David Foster Sherwood* 5/3
Priscilla Shober, son *Jeffrey R. Shober* 5/27
Melissa Smith, daughter *Ava* 5/18
Margaret & Matthew Strickler, son *Timothy Strickler* 5/4
Suzanne Teleha, son *Peter Teleha* 5/20
Hans & Margaret van Naerssen, son *Eric* 5/21
Ann VanLandingham, daughter-in-law *Rita VanLandingham* 5/17
Lauretta Wagner, daughter *Traci Wagner* 5/23
Patricia White, daughter *Diane Patricia White* 5/1
Donna White, sister *Diane White* 5/1
Muriel Wilson, son *John F. Shaffer* 5/12
Joan & Ed Young, son *Jed Young* 5/18

MAY ANNIVERSARIES

Madeleine Adler, son *J. Peter Adler* - 5/30
Donald Barber, son *Steven W. Barber* - 5/30
Rob and Janet Beiswenger, son *Jared* - 5/18
Gloria Bello, son *Joseph* - 5/21
Ben Breskman, son *Brian* - 5/26
Martha & Albert Caesar, son *Daniel Mark Caesar* - 5/13
Joane Cooper, daughter *Katy* - 5/21
Patrick & Elizabeth Cortlessa, daughter *Crystal L. Cortlessa* - 5/4
Rose Marie Cote, husband *Paul Cote* - 5/27
Jamie (Germaine) Cote Weaver, father *Paul* - 5/27
Franklin & Patricia Cox, daughter *Christen Fox* - 5/26
Jane Cox, son *Bill* - 5/24
Bud Cunnane, son *Patrick* - 5/2
Janie Ebersole, daughter *Ashley Sankus* - 5/16
Justine Ellinger, daughter *Keira Ellinger* - 5/7
Charlie & Jill Fick, son *Michael Sternberg* - 5/14
Colleen and Dan Fledderman, daughter *Amy* - 5/25
William & Marilyn Hudson, son-in-law *Guy Thornton Woods* - 5/6/97
Loretta Kline, son *Keith Edward Kline* - 5/20
Dan Logan, daughter *Joanie* - 5/28
John & Nancy Logue, daughter *Kaitlyn Logue* - 5/3

MAY ANNIVERSARIES continued

Tom & Charmaine Malik, son *Danny Malik* - 5/12
Michelle & Chris Mazzio, son *Brendan Mazzio* - 5/20
Robert McCullough, daughter *Caroline Patricia McCullough* - 5/27
Marian Melchiorre, grandson *John* - 5/11
Mike & Jen Meluskey, daughter *Carolyn Meluskey* - 5/22
Mary O'Halloran, brother *Thomas M. O'Halloran* - 5/28
Winnie & James O'Halloran, son *Thomas M. O'Halloran* - 5/28
Anna Packer, daughter *Anna M. Packer* - 5/22
Mary & Salvatore Perna, grandson *Nathan A. Bieber* - 5/19
Lyla T. Poulson, daughter *Kimberly Poulson* - 5/21
Sharyn & Joe Pozzuolo, son *Joey Brad Pozzuolo* - 5/19
Christine and Richard Purkiss, son *Adam Clark* - 5/7
Joan & Earl Reigel, daughter *Melissa Reigel* - 5/4
Lynn & Stephen Scartozzi, daughter *Christine Marie Scartozzi* - 5/28
Janet & Jonathan Schultz, friend *Christopher Harvey* - 5/6
Linda Sciarra, son *John Anthony* - 5/10
Cathy Seehuetter, daughter *Nina Seehuetter* - 5/11
E. Pearl & Ernest Smith, son *Tony* - 5/5
Helen Smith, son *Bob Smith* - 5/15
Andy & Alexandra Smith, son *Charlie* - 5/30
Karl & Sue Snepp, son *Dave Snepp* - 5/31
John & Rose Stanley, daughter *Susan Stanley* - 5/29
Robert & Nancy Thompson, friend *J. Peter Adler* - 5/30
Mek Wagner, daughter *Paige* - 5/13
Deb Walter, son *Evan* - 5/10
Terry & Susan Weikel, daughter *Jennifer* - 5/11

MAY I GRIEVE?

In the daytime, I walk and work, and all;
But at home, in the evening, I stumble and fall.
The office says, "Function, smile and get control."
But at home I can grieve to cleanse my soul.
Must I be two people for the rest of my life?
If I could be just one person for more than one day,
My freedom to grieve would help light the way.

But society tells me not to be sad,
They say, "She's at peace now
and you should be glad."
When grieving the loss of a child is perceived,
How much easier it is for we the bereaved.

Susanne Demars
TCE, Hingham, MA

SHARED THOUGHTS ON MOTHER'S DAY

Mother's Day is that special day that our children can make us feel what a good job we have done in rearing them. As they express love, feelings, and appreciation, we know we have given them the right ingredients for living. I still have a box of those beautiful homemade cards from construction paper, flowers, lace, over decorated and many saturated with perfume. I cherish them so. The simplicity, innocence, love, crooked and reversed letters in their message can still bring tears. How fortunate we are to have had children. Many never know the bliss a child can bring.

Many times our beautiful holidays become difficult. Instead of looking forward to them with excitement, and enjoying the anticipation of their coming, we dread and fear those special days. Frequently, our anticipation can cause more pain than the day itself, as we reminisce and say "remember when", it also brings to mind that there will be no more added memories of that person.

Losing our children or siblings, makes us realize the importance memories play in the role of getting through our grief. We cherish memories. They are far more valuable than all the tangible things we have from our children or siblings. In our early grief they are very bitter sweet, for even good memories are painful. But now that many years have passed, I find them very peaceful, and value them. We will always wish there were more, but we gather those we have, and hold them close.

Mother's day will be especially hard for those families who do not have surviving children. I would never attempt to say I know how they feel, because I'm sure I don't know the depth of their despair of not having living children. Our hearts go out to them for this additional pain they must bear. To those we extend our love and caring. For the more fortunate families, it is important to share Mother's Day with our surviving children, and not deny them the same happiness and joy we gave to our deceased child. We are so all consumed with grief, that it takes time before we can value what we have left. Our living children need to know they are as loved as the ones we have lost. We know this, but sometimes we forget to tell them how grateful we are to have them. It is very human to channel all our energy to the one that is not here. Our surviving children need to know they bring us much to live for.

Sometimes it is difficult to find joy in anything when newly bereaved. We, the more seasoned members of Compassionate Friends know this will change, we can feel joy again. It will be different, as our priorities have changed. This does not take place as soon as we would like, but it will come. Even though that is difficult to believe now, longer bereaved parents and siblings tell how grief does soften and feelings will return. Our living children need to be assured, we and they will change in time. We wish you peace and hope.

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

Our sorrows and wounds
are healed only when
we touch them with compassion.

Author unknown

We are all mothers in our own right. Though the world
may see us as childless. In our hearts and souls and
lives, we ARE and always will be mothers.

Pittsburgh, PA TCF

MOTHER'S LOVE

Thinking of the child you love,
On a bright day in Spring,
As you look at the clouds all fluffy white
Brings a joy that your heart can sing.

All the magic gone away
Because the child isn't about,
Seeing the future through new eyes,
Brings a sadness, there is no doubt.

But the sharing you had in your child's dream,
And the thought of all his charms,
Makes you feel this young one,
Is once again held in your arms.

Thinking of the child you love,
Can make music fill the air.
The memory of a soft face so dear,
Spreads sunshine everywhere!

Thinking of the child you love,
You know your life is more worthwhile.
All the hours you spent in his care,
Reaches your lips in a wondrous smile.

And then you can stop and think,
Thank God and say a prayer,
That He sent you this child to love,
And put him in your care.

Thinking of the child you love,
With memories of things past,
Gives you joy and brings the tears
For a love you know will always last,
Beyond horizons and through the years.

Jean Stajcar - Central Iowa TCF
"For all mothers who have lost a child."

MOTHER'S DAY

Our day... a very special day. A day that is set aside especially to honor all Mothers.

Mother... a beautiful word. What other word could you use to best describe giving birth to, nursing, loving and caring for a tiny helpless human being? A gift of life to treasure. But weren't we taught that once you give a gift to someone, you should never take it back? What went wrong? Mine was taken away from me. Does that mean that I wasn't worthy to be a Mother, that I was failing, that I didn't appreciate the gift? The gift was too precious to be given for keeps. It was only loaned to me for a short while. Even in my sorrow, I feel special, for I know the true meaning of the word Mother. I have reached the ultimate, from the joy of birth to the sorrow of death. I belong to a special group who truly know the meaning of the word Mother.

Would I have not accepted the gift if I had known the terrible loss I would feel by having it taken away from me?...No... I would still hold out my hands and accept such a precious gift, for to love and to cherish, even for a short while, is worth every tear.

This is Mother's Day, I'll shed my tears but let them be as soft summer rain...a rain that nourishes the earth, tears that heal and cleanse my heart.

Vera Babb
TCF / St. Louis, MO

SIBLINGS DISCOVER HOPE AND HEALING ATTENDING A TCF CONFERENCE

In many areas of the country there aren't any siblings groups available. At the Compassionate Friends conferences, siblings can share and help each other cope with the unique grief of losing a brother or sister. Since attending his first TCF national conference in Philadelphia in 1997, Daniel Yoffee considers each conference to be the vacation he would have taken with Alan, his twin brother, a Philadelphia resident, who died of AIDS in June of 1992.

Kristy Mueller says that after her big brother Keith was murdered while in the line of duty as an Oakland, CA Police Officer she had to make one of the most important choices of her life. "My brother's death had now changed my life forever and I had to choose which path I was going to allow my life to take, a path that would make me bitter or a path that would make me better." One of the most powerful influences she had, in choosing a healthier approach towards her brother's death, was the 1996 Compassionate Friends National Conference in Long Beach, CA. "It was almost a year after Keith's death and I was reluctant at first to want to attend. What good would it do to sit around with other people who were having as hard a time as I was, wouldn't that just make me more depressed? How wrong I was - that weekend helped to turn my grief around and guide me down the road to healing. The conference was filled with other young people and they were going through the same struggles as me, and they had the same questions as me, and they were frustrated with their parents and surviving siblings just like me. There were people there who were further along in this thing called grief and they had some good ideas, and gave me hope that my raw pain would not always feel that way. There were different workshops that helped me to talk, learn and deal with all kinds of issues, from fears of my own or other loved ones deaths, to dealing with parents and trying to better understand what they were going through. The conference also really helped me to realize that we all grieve differently and that no one way was the right way. That realization helped to bring my sister and me closer as we were grieving in the exact opposite way. They provided so many fun opportunities as well, where we could just relax and laugh, something that is very hard to do in front of friends who don't understand what we have been through."

Kathleen Hendrickson's sister Karen, who died of cancer, was a volunteer in the Peace Corps, teaching in Kenya, Africa. Kathleen attended her first TCF National conference in 2001. "The highlight of the conference for me was attending my first workshop for siblings. When I walked into that room, I finally experienced the bond and understanding that I can share only with another sibling. I find support attending our local TCF meetings and feel comfortable and welcome, but there is something about being surrounded by other siblings that is powerful for me, and I still feel chills when I think about it - even now, a year later! I will always cherish the time I spent interacting with that very special group of siblings."

Lisa Clara says she comes to conferences out of love for her brother Matthew. "I think my purpose is to give other siblings permission and encouragement to speak their hearts and gain some insight into our shared experience and pain. In attending conference, I can be a voice for siblings, especially those who have survived their sibling's death by suicide. From this I have helped and been helped."

Because life is very different than what we envisioned a Compassionate Friends conference helps us to go on by sharing and learning from those further down the road.

Daniel Yoffee,
former TCF Board of Directors Sibling Representative

WE'RE ALIKE, YOU AND I

We're alike, you and I.

We've never met. Our faces would be those of strangers if we met. We would barely perceive the other's presence if we passed on our walk through the mists. We're unknown to each other until the terrible words have been spoken:

"MY CHILD DIED."

We're alike, you and I.

We measure time in seconds and eternities. We try to go forward to yesterday... Tomorrows are for whole people, and we are incomplete now – the tears, after a time, turn inward to become invisible to all, save you and me. Our souls are rumped from wrestling with demons and doubts and unanswerable prayers.

"GIVE ME BACK MY CHILD"

We're alike, you and I.

The tears that run down your face are my tears and the wound in your soul is my pain, too. We need time, but time is our enemy, for it carries us farther and farther from our lost child. And we cry out:

"HELP ME."

We're alike, you and I.

And we need each other. Don't turn away, but give me your hand and for a time we can cease to be strangers and become what we truly are, a family closer than blood, united by a bond that was forced upon us – but a bond that can make us stronger, still wounded, to be sure, but stronger for our sorrows are shared.

"WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE"

Judy Dickey, TCF Greenwood, IN

P-L-E-A-S-E

PLEASE, don't ask me if I'm over it yet. I'll never be over it.

PLEASE, don't tell me she is in a better place. She isn't here.

PLEASE, don't say at least she isn't suffering. I haven't come to terms with why she had to suffer at all.

PLEASE, don't tell me you know how I feel, unless you have lost a child.

PLEASE, don't tell me to get on with my life. I'm still here, you'll notice.

PLEASE, don't ask me if I feel better. Bereavement isn't a condition that clears up.

PLEASE, don't tell me God never makes a mistake. You mean He did this on purpose?

PLEASE, don't tell me at least you had her for 28 years. What year would you choose for your daughter to die?

PLEASE, don't tell me God never gives you more than you can bear. Who decides how much another person can bear?

PLEASE, just say you are sorry.

PLEASE, just say you remember her if you do.

PLEASE, just let me talk if I want to. And PLEASE, let me cry when I must.

Rita Moran TCF, Miami, Florida

THE LOSS OF A CHILD

The grief of parents following the death of a child is one of the most profound forms of bereavement there is.

What Is It Like to Lose a Child?

Every bereavement is unique. Even when you are two parents grieving for the same child, you will grieve differently and at a different pace. At a time when you most need each other for support and understanding, your preoccupation with your own loss may make it difficult for you to help your partner. Or you may both take on the role of protector and try to "be strong" for the other, concealing your own pain for fear of adding to the other's distress. This situation is impossible to sustain and can lead to misunderstanding, even a breakdown in communication. You may find yourself saying, "He doesn't seem to feel anything", or "I can't seem to get through to her any more". Sexual intimacy, which once gave life to the child, may now be unbearable for one or both of you.

In the early months you may feel overwhelmed, helpless, disoriented, frightened and exhausted. It is not uncommon to imagine that you see or hear the child you have lost, and while this can be comforting at the time it can also seem to confirm your fear that you are going mad. You may, perhaps, wish for death because life no longer seems worth living or in the hope that you will be reunited with your child. Many partnerships suffer after such a loss. Far from bringing parents together, a child's death can threaten the stability of even the best relationships.

The View from Outside

Family and friends may urge you to pull yourself together or they may avoid contact because they too feel helpless and afraid of inadvertently causing further hurt. They may even feel threatened - if your child can die, they worry that so too can theirs.

It is at this point that many bereaved parents, feeling abandoned, seek outside help. But to seek help is also to have to acknowledge the reality of the loss, which some people understandably try to resist, often for several months. You may function on "automatic pilot" by going through the motions of a safe and familiar routine until you feel able to experience the full anguish of your grief. Sometimes it is not until the first year has passed that bereaved parents really begin the task of grieving, although some will still try to avoid directly facing up to their loss. After the second anniversary of the death, however (or the second missed birthday, Christmas, Mother's or Father's Day), your grief may erupt violently because avoidance and denial are no longer possible. Unfortunately, by this time others may expect you to have recovered from your loss and so the help you need may not be immediately available.

But the loss of a child is lifelong. You are likely to be reminded of the child you have lost when you see children of a similar age or appearance and, as you watch other children growing up, you will be reminded of what your own child would have been like and what you are missing. In time you may find some new purpose in living, but you do not ever forget the child you have lost. That child is, and will remain, part of you.

Why Parents' Grief Is Different

When your child dies, you feel as if you have failed in your role as protector, and this sense of failure can result in strong feelings of guilt and low self-esteem. You may also become over-protective towards any surviving children. At the same time, it is possible that in the early stages of your grief you will be preoccupied with the dead child to the exclusion of your other children, if you have them. It is the dead child you want and who embodies for you all that is ideal. The effect on the remaining children, who cannot replace the dead child or compete with this "perfect angel", is likely to be profound.

If the dead child was your only child, you lose your identity as a parent, and if you lost your first child through miscarriage, or the baby was stillborn, or died soon after birth, you may feel a sense of inadequacy and failure. In a number of ways children embody parents' hopes for the future. Their death means that they will not be able to care for you in old age when the protective, caring roles are reversed.

Your child's death also deprives you of your claim to immortality. The characteristics that have made you what you are will not now be passed on to future generations.

All parents struggle to find a meaning for their loss. Your sense of what is right and fair is deeply shaken, and you seek a purpose for the death which will restore meaning to your life and the belief that your world is still basically safe - for, after all, if a child can die, anything can happen.

Trying to Understand

Anyone who may be trying to understand what it feels like to lose a child might find it helpful to remember what one bereaved mother said in reply to someone who thought she should be "over it" after two years. "Which one of your children could you do without".

Jan McLaren, Director and Senior Counselor of the Laura Centre In Leicester, a centre that has been established specifically for bereaved parents. Submitted by **Kathleen Leeper**, mother of **Shaun Leeper** 8/17/74 - 1/15/96