

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

NOVEMBER 2007

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

- | | |
|-------|--|
| Nov 1 | General Sharing |
| Dec 6 | General Sharing & Loss by Suicide
Collection of gifts for First Step (see page 4) |
| Dec 9 | World Wide Candle Lighting
(see page 4) |

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.** Donations are also accepted at meetings. We are most grateful for your support.

**PLEASE MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO:
TCF VALLEY FORGE CHAPTER
SEND TO: RECORD KEEPER, FRANK GOMEZ
PLEASE SEND ALL OTHER CHAPTER MAIL
TO CHAPTER CO-LEADERS
ANN RAPOPORT or RHONDA GOMEZ**



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compassionatefriends.org

NEW FRIENDS

We welcome our newly bereaved friends. We are sorry for the cause that brings you. We have all been in the depths of despair, and know that it is difficult to share our pain and personal feelings. We hope you will attend three or four meetings before evaluating the benefit of our group to you. We offer confidentiality, unconditional love, compassion and understanding to all of you.

OCTOBER REFRESHMENTS

Anyone wishing to donate refreshments (cheese & crackers, fruit, cakes, cookies, etc.) in memory of loved ones, please call **Ann Rapoport or Rhonda Gomez(484)919-0820**, or you may sign the **refreshment chart** located on the refreshment table. Beverages are provided by the chapter.

LOVE GIFTS

We wish you a very meaningful Thanksgiving.

CONCERNS

Irene Sutton recently had heart surgery and is recovering from post-op complications. We send her our love and good wishes for a rapid & complete recovery. Irene & Fred joined the Valley Forge Chapter in 1990, shortly after the death of their son, Jim. The Suttons have always been very supportive of both the Valley Forge Chapter and National TCF. They served many years on the set-up/clean-up committee, steering committee, and Irene has always prepared newsletters for bulk mailing.

Marvin Bordetsky, editor of the Bustleton Chapter newsletter, has been hospitalized for 2 1/2 months, with a blood infection. He returned home this week, after spending some time in rehab. Marv designed the logos and theme for both the 2005 and 2007 E. PA Regional Conferences. Marv & his wife Wilma have contributed much to our conference committees. They join TCF after the death of their daughter, Maureen Bordetsky Cook in 1999. They are very active in the Bustleton Chapter. We are glad to know you are home, Marv, even though you have a long recovery road ahead of you. We wish you a complete recovery.

We wish to thank all those who have sent prayers, gifts, emails, condolences, phone calls, and memorial gifts for The Compassionate Friends to Marie & Ken Hofmockel and family on the death of their grandson, **Steven Harry Schneibolk** 5/7/86 - 10/2/07, son of **Pamela Hofmockel Schneibolk**.

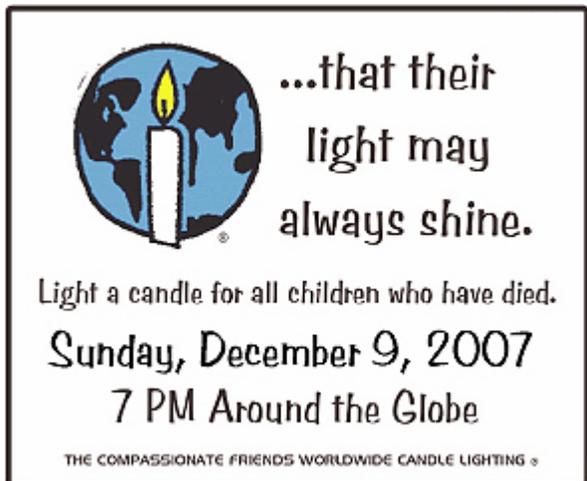
Memorial gifts sent to The Compassionate Friends in memory of Steven

Virginia & Elwin Abplanalp
Nancy N. Althouse
Mary & Arnold Auger
Bethany & Bob Boccella
Joseph & Carolyn Bogue
Marvin & Wilma Bordetsky
Cecile H. Buonocore
Lisa M. Cohen
Adele Feldman
Terry Hill & Larry Griffin
Donald & Irma Hofmockel

James & Diane Hofmockel
Larry & B.J. Hofmockel
Instant Hardware Delivery Co.
Lillian & Brian Levine
Douglas & Patricia Lyday
Carl & Josephine Malitsky
Suzanne McClenachan
Sheldon & Joan Plam
Arlene Priest
Elaine & Joe Stillwell
Irene & Fred Sutton

The only cure for grief is to grieve.
Emotions in grief are as different as snowflakes or fingerprints.
Each person mourns in a different way.
There is no timetable for recovery

Rabbi Earl Grollman



The Worldwide Candle Lighting

In loving memory of all children who are no longer with us. The Compassionate Friends extends an invitation for you, your family, and friends to join tens of thousands of persons around the globe for the tenth annual Worldwide Candle Lighting.

On Sunday December 9, 2007, hundreds of Community Candle Lighting Ceremonies will be held in public places. Thousands more will be held informally in homes. The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting is held every year on the Second Sunday in December at 7 PM local time for one hour in each time zone around the globe, a 24 hour Remembrance of all children who have died.

The Valley Forge Chapter of The Compassionate Friends will hold a Remembrance Service on December 9th at 2 PM, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in the fellowship hall (same place our monthly sharing secessions are held).

We also urge you to light a candle in your home at 7 PM. We chose 2 PM for our local service so that it would be available to everyone, including those who do not drive at night. We hope you will take this opportunity to join us in remembering our children who have died, but will never be forgotten. Let us ensure that their light may always shine.

GIFTS FOR FIRST STEP

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, you may bring your gifts to our December 6th monthly meeting, or at the Remembrance Service on December 9th. The children are between the ages of 2 and 6. Both clothing and toys are welcome gifts. Please do not wrap gifts. It is very rewarding to remember your child, by showing love to these children. 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.

NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL

The newsletter will be available by email to those who wish to receive it in this form. You will receive the newsletter earlier if you opt to receive the newsletter by email. If you chose to use the email method of receiving your newsletter, and later decide you want to receive it by postal service, you will have the option to switch back to the old method. If you wish to receive the newsletter by email please contact: Frank Gomez fgomez@hybridpoplars.com

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:

SHARED THOUGHTS ON CELEBRATING THANKSGIVING WHILE GRIEVING

For many of us, fall means the time of year to be in awe of all the beautiful colors of nature, and to give thanks for our many blessings. When our child or sibling dies, our eyes still see nature's beauty, but our hearts are in too much pain to feel, appreciate, or enjoy anything. The Thanksgiving holiday seems almost unacceptable to many newly bereaved. It is very difficult to give thanks, when one of our greatest blessings has been taken from us, and the gut-wrenching pain is with us every moment.

We now know how precious the gift of life is. We are more appreciative of our surviving family, and find the dreaded anticipation of not having our whole family together for our traditional Thanksgiving adds to our grief. This is not a time to shelter others from our pain. Not being honest can give false messages, and confuses others who want to help us. Friends and extended family members frequently think they know what is always best for us. Their advice may only be best for them, by easing their pain and pretending you are capable of handling more than you can.

It is important to include immediate family members in your holiday planning. Don't try to read their minds. You are showing respect and acknowledging their pain by getting their input. They, too, have apprehensions of up coming holidays, and need to have open verbal communication.

If you plan to be with friends or extended family, it may be wise to give advance notice that you may not be able to "keep it together". If you plan to have people in, try to let others help you prepare the dinner. You may want to deviate from traditions. Only you can decide what is best for you. Ask friends to accept your decision. We kept all our traditions, but that may not be best for you. We still had our surviving children at home, and it seemed important to hold to our seasonal celebrations.

Even though it is difficult to count blessings, we need to communicate with our feelings. Family, friends, and relationships are always at the top of our list of things to be thankful for. Next came material things, which now seem so trivial, and not even worth enumerating. "Things" don't belong on the same page anymore. Most of us have learned a new meaning about life. What a waste it would be if we endured all this pain and agony, and did not become a more caring person. We also have a new understanding of the word "Compassion", and have learned to reach out to those who need us.

We should not minimize our pain. It often prevents us from counting our blessings, and that is very normal during our early grief. The intense pain blocks out everything. We should feel no guilt for having normal human reactions. Allow yourselves to grieve and cry, it is very healing.

There are no shortcuts to get through our grief. But, it will get softer, and tolerable, and we learn how to handle the holidays. I could not believe this in my fresh grief. I have healed more than I ever thought possible. All memories were so painful. One of the things I am most thankful for is that I can now remember beautiful times with Doug, without having intense pain. I feel and hope you will also have this blessing one day. God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel*, TCF Valley Forge

“O Death ... where is thy sting?”

Is it here? Yet? Has it come finally?
Pricking and prodding me,
Even puncturing my skin
Stabbing the surface
 To get through to pain
 To reach that part of the Heart
 Which feels True pain.

Everything still seems so
 “On the surface”, Sympathy cards, notes ... and flowers
 Words of condolence, well-meant
 Come pouring forth
 Flooding in, well appreciated
But ... somehow Meaningless, just ... Words.
 Sympathy, Sorrow, Peace ... Prayers.

It is too Deep, the hurt that's hiding
 Still inside, Hard to share
 To speak about, aloud
 Only in whispers
Too many phone calls, mouthing sounds
 In my ear, surface words superficial Suspended, in midair
Meaning ... nothing.

What are we waiting for? Wherein lies the full meaning?
 The real understanding of what has happened.
What brings the final “ending”? The Closure, they talk about
 The ability to share the Sadness
 With others ... with friends and family
 Who seek solace and need help, just as we do.

This shadow is still here, hovering over us, and ... yet
 Where is the “sting”?
 The pang of Sorrow
Perhaps it is still here with us now, and maybe always will be.
 Maybe no more than a dull ache, ... waiting to be confronted
 Like a distant wave, seen afar off, comes rolling in, curling towards us
Mounting higher and higher until it is on top of us, ... and then breaks
 As we are drawn under, and momentarily submerged,
 Gasping for air, engulfed, and gulping
 Until just as suddenly, the wave disperses and spreads, harmlessly all around us
Dissolving in meaningless watery nothingness, once again and ...again

But when death comes suddenly - taking us by surprise - hitting us with momentum,
 Drowning us for an instant, in too big a wave
 Too much to undertake, to tolerate, to understand ... leaving us breathless
We finally feel the sting, we know the pang, we seek the final outcome.
We swallow the oncoming waves of death.

Showing us when calamity hits hard ... violently
We must learn to meet it head on
Learning to dive right into the oncoming Wave
 To swim through it, coming up on the other side
Or - ride the Wave, rolling with it all the way to shore
 Feeling every pain
 But reaching safety, at last, on sandy beaches.
And perhaps finally finding the peace we're looking for.

MY FIRST FIVE YEARS AS AN ONLY CHILD

I've been without my brother for five years. I guess the hard part is over now. Sometimes I think I've aged thirty years in the past five. In a strange way, these past five years have been the best and worst years of my life. I've accomplished the many things of a typical young adult – learning to drive, graduating from high school, going to college, and starting a career. Every one of my accomplishments have been clouded by the fact that my brother George is not here to share each milestone and is not achieving any more milestones for himself. He was cheated of so many things. He will never graduate, get married, have children, or travel. He will never grow old, and I will never have a brother to grow old with. I'll never have nieces and nephews. The sibling relationship, usually the longest relationship of one's life, has been cut short for us. In these five years, although I've learned to accept that he's not coming back, the difficult part is dealing with it day by day.

My relationship with George ended just when we started to become friends. The childish fights and other annoyances of having a big brother were changed to real conversations and to having an occasional ally. I'm angry about all of the things that we've missed and all of the things that will never be, and I guess I always will be. Five years heals a lot of wounds, but the hurt will always be there, no matter how many years pass. In these past five years, I've been forced to grow up too fast. I've been forced into a new outlook on life. I've felt lonely and alone. I now realize that I will never be the same person as before. That person is locked away and is gone forever. Maybe I'm a better person now because of what I've been through. Five years ago I never thought I'd survive, but I'm still here dealing with it every day. I don't know what the next five years will bring, but at least I've made it this far.

Kristina Steiner

TCF – Staten Island, NY

**Questions/Answers from
Bereaved Siblings**

Why am I so mad at my sister for dying? She left me alone. I know it wasn't her fault, but I feel so guilty for being angry.

At some time everyone is angry at the person who dies. Anger does not mean you loved them less, it means the loss is so great that you want the terrible pain to end.

I have terrible nightmares. Sometimes I dream I am dying. I can't tell anyone because they will think I am crazy. Am I?

Some grieving people experience intense dreams. Dreams serve as a healthy outlet for the intense feelings during the day. As time goes on and you deal with your feelings, your dreams will become less frightening.

Suddenly my parents expect me to parent them. I just can't handle it.

This is truly one of the most unfair positions your grief puts you in. Try to share these feelings with your parents. Hopefully you will be better able to understand one another.

*This Healing Journey
An Anthology for
Bereaved Siblings*

**Cry when you want to:
Laugh when you can.**

A BEREAVED GRANDPARENT

I am powerless. I am helpless. I am frustrated. I sit here with her and cry with her. She cries for her daughter, and I cry for mine. I can't help her. I can't reach inside and mend her broken heart. I must watch her suffer day after day and see her desolate.

I listen to her tell me over and over how she misses Emily, how she wants her back. I can't bring Emily back for her. I can't even buy her a better Emily than she had, like I could buy her a better toy when she was a child.

I can't kiss the hurt and make it go away. I can't even kiss a small part of it away. There's no Band-Aid large enough to cover her bleeding heart.

There was a time I could listen to her talk about a fickle boyfriend and tell her it would be okay, and know in my heart that in two weeks she wouldn't even think of him. Can I tell her it'll be okay in two years when I know it will never be okay, that she will carry this pain of "what might have been" in her deepest heart for the rest of her life?

I see this young woman, my child, who was once carefree and fun loving and bubbling with life,

slumped in a chair with her eyes full of agony. Where is my power now? Where is my mother's bag of tricks that will make it all better?

Why can't I join in the aloneness of her grief? As tight as my arms wrap around her, I can't reach that aloneness. Where are the magic words that will give comfort? What chapter in Dr. Spock tells me how to do this? He has told me everything else I needed to know. Where are the answers? I should have them. I am her mother.

What can I give her to make her better? A cold wet wash cloth will ease that swelling of her crying eyes, but it won't stop the reason for her tears. What treat will bring joy back to her? What prize will bring that "happy child" smile back again?

I know that someday she'll find happiness again. That her life will have meaning again. I can hold out hope for her someday, but what about now? This hour? This day?

I can give her my love and prayers and my care and my concern. I would give her my life. But even that won't help.

Margaret Gerner

MY BUDDY DAMON AND ME

My buddy Damon is not here anymore,
but I do care and love him very much.

He is always in my heart, mind and soul
for that is how I feel about my buddy Damon.

Damon was always a very courageous person
for what he had to endure, living with illnesses
for many, many years until his last bit of breath.

He loved to run away from us, so we had to run to catch him.
God helped us to be calm, so we could deal with the stress of his pain.

My buddy Damon was very much loved by his family and
friends and he was an apple of my delight.

My buddy Damon always hugged me and called me
Mommy Linda, which touched me very dearly.

Damon will be with me always and God will always be by my side.

God protect my buddy Damon from all the evil around here,
forevermore eternally.

Linda Weaver TCF Valley Forge

WHEN YOU WISH UPON A STAR

Every time that I am in a group of bereaved parents, I hear people say things like, "I wish my child hadn't died" or "I wish I had him back." That wish, unfortunately, can never come true.

The other wish I hear is, "I wish my friends (or church, or neighbors, or relatives) understood what I am going through and were more supportive." This is a wish that has some possibility of coming true if we are able to be honest and assertive with the people around us. What do we wish others understood about the loss of our child? Here is a partial list of such wishes:

1. I wish you would not be afraid to speak my child's name. My child lived and was important and I need to hear his name.
2. If I cry or get emotional if we talk about my child. I wish you knew that it isn't because you have hurt me; the fact that my child died has caused my tears. You have allowed me to cry and I thank you. Crying and emotional outbursts are healing.
3. I wish you wouldn't "kill" my child again by removing from your home his pictures, artwork, or other remembrances.
4. I will have emotional highs and lows, ups and downs. I wish you wouldn't think that if I have a good day my grief is all over, or that if I have a bad day I need psychiatric counseling.
5. I wish you knew that the death of a child is different from other losses and must be viewed separately. It is the ultimate tragedy and I wish you wouldn't compare it to your loss of a parent, a spouse, or a pet.
6. Being a bereaved parent is not contagious, so I wish you wouldn't shy away from me.
7. I wish you knew that all of the "crazy" grief reactions I am having are in fact very normal. Depression, anger, frustration, hopelessness, and the questioning of values and beliefs are to be expected following the death of a child.
8. I wish you wouldn't expect my grief to be over in six months. The first few years are going to be exceedingly traumatic for us. As with alcoholics, I will never be "cured" or a "former bereaved parent", but will forevermore be a "recovering bereaved parent".
9. I wish you understood the physical reactions to grief. I may gain weight or lose weight, sleep all the time or not at all, develop a host of illnesses and be accident prone, all of which may be related to my grief.
10. Our child's birthday, the anniversary of his death, and holidays are terrible times for us. I wish you could tell us that you are thinking about our child on these days, and if we get quiet and withdrawn, just know that we are thinking about our child and don't try to coerce us into being cheerful.
11. It is normal and good that most of us reexamine our faith, values, and beliefs after losing a child. We will question things we have been taught all our lives and hopefully come to some new understanding with our God. I wish that you would let me tangle with my religion without making me feel guilty.
12. I wish you wouldn't offer me drinks or drugs. These are just temporary crutches and the only way I can get through this grief is to experience it. I have to hurt before I can heal.
13. I wish you understood that grief changes people. I am not the same person I was the moment before my child died and I never will be that person again. If you keep waiting for me to "get back to my old self", you will stay frustrated. I am a new creature with new thoughts, dreams, aspirations, values and beliefs. Please try to get to know the new me -- maybe you'll like me still.

Instead of sitting around and waiting for our wishes to come true, we have an obligation to teach people some of the things we have learned about our grief. We can teach these lessons with great kindness, believing that people have good intentions and want to do what is right, but just don't know what to do with us.

Do you remember how Pavlov, the famous psychologist, rewarded his dogs for doing the right thing? Their behavior repeated! If a neighbor sends a plate of cookies on the day of your child's birth, tell her how much you appreciated her remembering your child. If a relative jots a note in a Christmas card and says he is thinking about you during this difficult time, write back and thank him for acknowledging your pain. If by accident a friend mentions your child's name and it makes you cry, you may not be able to thank them at the time, but you can tell them later how important it is to talk about your child. Whether one of your wishes is fulfilled by accident or through great sensitivity, reward others for what they have done for you. Chances are good that they will repeat these kindness' on other occasions and perhaps your wish of having more understanding friend and relative will come true.

Elaine Grier, Philip's Mom, Atlanta Chapter

