

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

December 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

- Dec 5 General Sharing - Parental & Siblings**
- Dec 8 World Wide Candle Lighting (see page 3)
Collection of gifts for First Step (see page 2)**
- Jan 2 General Sharing & Death by Suicide
Parental & Siblings**
- Fall 2015 Eastern PA Regional Conference**

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

Patti Wall son, **Stephen** (26)

REFRESHMENTS

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.

Diana Clark in memory of my grandson, **Alex** on his birthday Oct. 16th.

Marilyn Toole in memory of my son, **Ted Toole** on his birthday Nov 3rd.

LOVE GIFTS

Freda & Jack Gross in memory of our precious daughter, **Linda Joy Gross** on her birthday Dec 28th & her anniversary Feb 25th.

Ray Posluszny in memory of my son, **Alex Posluszny**.

Joan & Sheldon Plam in memory of our beloved son, **Michael Tobiah Plam** on his 19th anniversary.

Esperanza & Libardo Toro in loving memory of our daughter, **Maria Eugenia Toro** on her birthday Nov 3rd.

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 5th meeting & December 8th 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.

NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL

The newsletter is 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



COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING

SPEAKER: Dr. Yvonne Kaye

Dr. Yvonne Kaye is an international speaker with a wide range of subjects, including post traumatic stress disorder and bereavement, specializing in the death of children. She is a certified Thanatologist, veteran radio talk show host, author, and Interfaith Minister, believing in the power of the human spirit. She is a strong advocate of humor and spirituality, a Spiritual Coach and her philosophy is "Laughter is the

miracle healer". Dr. Kaye received the prestigious Matty Muir Award 2005 for work with victims of crime. She has given much support for many years to TCF. Dr. Kaye has often been a Keynote speaker at Regional, National and International TCF Conferences. She has been a long time friend of the Valley Forge Chapter.

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7:00 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the 17th annual Worldwide Candle Lighting, a gift to the bereavement community from The Compassionate Friends, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. Started in the United States in 1997 as a small internet observance, but has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world of the remembrance. Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten.

The Compassionate Friends and allied organizations are joined by local bereavement groups, churches, funeral homes, hospitals, hospices, children's gardens, schools, cemeteries, and community centers. Services have ranged in size from just a few people to nearly a thousand. Every year you are invited to post a message in the Remembrance Book which will be available, during the event, at TCF's national website (www.compassionatefriends.org).

The Valley Forge Chapter of The Compassionate Friends will hold a candle lighting remembrance service on December 8th at 2 PM at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in the Fellowship Hall. (same place as our monthly sharing secessions are held). 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 also urge you to light a candle in your home at 7PM. 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.

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 BIRTHDAYS

Chris Aiello, brother *Louis* 12/24
Lori Bartholomew, brother *Matthew* 12/17
Eleanor Brennan, grandson *Jonathan Masiak* 12/20
Ben Breskman, son *Brian* 12/11
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
Justine Ellinger, daughter *Keira Ellinger* 12/11
Bob & Dena Filipone, daughter *Denise* 12/13
Bonnie Gardner, daughter *Michelle* 12/16
Sherry Goldberg, son *Neal* 12/14
Suze Goldberg, uncle *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
Maurice & Ruth Onraet, son *Thomas* 12/19
Betty Jane Peters - Neilson, son *Martin A Peters* 12/8
Maureen & David Rich, daughter *Mallory Kirby Rich* 12/4
Thelma Rosen, brother *David Beeler* 12/24
Pat & Glen Smith, son *Chris* 12/30

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS continued

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 Tomarelli, son *Daniel Robert Tomarelli* 12/19
Jackie Ward, grandson *Anthony* 12/1
Laura & Leo Weishew, brother *Steven McGowan* 12/28
Pat Zimmerman, daughter *Gabrielle* 12/25

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Nina Ansel, daughter *Jenny* - 12/21
Stephanie Bailey, brother *Matthew* - 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
Lee & Patricia Grossman, daughter *Rachel Leah* - 12/5
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
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 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
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
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
Bonnie Russo, son *Matthew* - 12/10
Beth Schad, son *Gage* - 12/27
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
Lisa M. Spinks, brother *Robert* - 12/9
Ronda Stansbery, daughter *Susan Anne Stansbery Stamman* - 12/22
Fred Sutton, mother *Pearl Collins* - 12/19

A MOMENT OF HELP

After I lost my son Nino to a drowning accident, a young scientist walked into my office at Denver University. He was always extremely detached in his interactions with people, so I was not surprised that he asked almost casually whether I was feeling better.

I could not answer his question, because I had already started to cry. "Would you rather not have had a son at all?" he wanted to know. I shook my head and cried harder.

He handed me his handkerchief and said firmly, "I suppose you need to cry yourself well." And without even a hint of emotion, he sat down facing me.

In the presence of so much detachment, I managed to recover my "composure." But the visitor took my hand and held it silently, until I began to cry again. Then he said, "Keep crying. You are not well yet."

I will not forget this encounter. It told me two things when I very much needed to hear them. First; the expression of grief is necessary. And second; after a great sorrow, we can expect - in time - to be "well" again.

Sascha Wagner

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 Hofnocker*, TCF Valley Forge, PA

TAKE THE TIME . . . TO HURT, TO CRY . . .

Wordless and worldless -- Endless and forever, grief goes on --
It takes the best -- And leaves the rest an empty shell -- Life is Hell.

David was dead four months when I wrote that in my journal. Time is my enemy. As I envisioned the future of my life, I saw only a vast expanse of desert - dry, parched, and empty.

It is now a year and a half since David's death, and I recognize that time has become my friend. Now, when I look to the future, I see hills and valleys - struggles, to be sure, but, also, moments spent at the summit. What has happened? Time is healing.

Take the time . . .

To hurt . . . The pain is great and the temptation to run away is great. But, there is no avoiding, no escaping the hard feelings. If you cover them over, they only re-surface later in a potentially more destructive way.

To cry . . . It may feel like once started, you can never stop. But you have every reason to cry, and when you have cried enough, you will stop.

To "fall apart." . . . If you have a broken leg, you would not expect yourself to function at full capacity right away. Your wound is much greater - you have a broken heart. Confusion, inability to concentrate, lethargy, imagined glimpses of your dead child are a normal part of the grieving process and do not mean that you are going crazy.

To be "selfish." . . . Mourning is an egocentric time, a time for turning inward and introspection.

To "identify" . . . and seek out resources in your environment that can help: friends, clergy, Compassionate Friends, a counselor. Talk to them.

Having done all that - having lingered in the valley of the shadow - it is time to begin the climb out.

Take the time . . .

To engage again in activities that were once pleasurable. They may hold no joy the first few times; someday they will and that will be all right.

To laugh without guilt. Savor the good moments in the day, brief though they may be. Through your child, you can re-discover the beauty of a sunset.

To care for your health. Grieving is a physio-, as well, as psycho-logical stress. Your body needs protection.

To be patient. Wanting to live again and learning to live again takes time. The path out of the other side of the valley is steep, and we all often stumble. But with time - time spent doing the work of grief - you can find the path to a world made richer by your love.

Bronna Romoff, PHD - Albany, NY, TCF

FIRST STEP

When my brother died in a car accident seven years ago, I was reminded of a 17 year-old boy I knew in high school who had lost his father suddenly. I hadn't known anyone who'd lost a parent before then, and I was curious about how he had acted at the funeral. It made quite an impression on me when I heard that he was calmly speaking with his friends and thanking them for their support. I told myself then, that if I were ever in that situation, I would also be strong.

As I stood in the kitchen seven years ago with *He didn't make it* echoing in my head, I remembered the boy whose father had died, I wanted to be brave like him, to be strong for those around me. I wanted to show everyone that I was resilient, and I wanted to deliver what everyone was telling me to deliver. All the calls and visits began or ended with someone saying, "Be strong for your parents. They need you to be strong for them now." There was also a popular song playing on every station with the lyrics "You got to be cool. You got to be calm. You got to stay together ... You got to be strong. You got to be wiser." I made it my mantra. I couldn't sleep, so I'd silently chant to myself, You've got to be strong. You've got to be strong.

At first my parents thanked me for showing strength. They were amazed that I was able to walk around and shake hands and thank people for coming to the wake. I tried to reassure everyone while my parents struggled to respond to the sympathy of friends and family members. They didn't feel capable of much conversation. I spoke at the funeral while they listened, teary-eyed, in the pew. I thought I was reaching deep, pulling out powers of resilience that had been dormant in me. I was proud of myself for putting others at ease.

At the same time, there were questions slowly rising to the surface of my consciousness.

What about you, Scott? When do you take care of yourself? What do you need? I felt guilty worrying about myself when, according to everyone around me, my parents were depending on me. Not that I ever took the time to actually discuss it with them - I just assumed I was supposed to be the unbending oak. I cried every day, but I made sure I didn't cry in front of them. I left the room if I felt tears building. I tried to push the questions into a dark, distant corner of my mind. I'd answer the phone and hear, "It must be hard for them. Please tell your parents that our prayers are with them." When I hung up, I couldn't help wondering why the callers didn't say, "It must be hard on the three of you. Our prayers are with you."

Then my parents began expressing their concern for me. Sensing my isolation, they began to realize that my grief was being overlooked. They realized that they were getting all the support while I was being told to support them. They said they worried about me. They asked who was supporting me. Their empathy helped me accept and admit to my private concerns. I could only be strong for so long. I didn't want to be selfish, but I knew that my brother's death was an extraordinary circumstance. I missed him terribly, and each day I felt more exhausted. Nature was telling me something. I had to stop moving, stop reassuring, and stop acting for the sake of others. I had to admit that I didn't know how to handle grief. I had to stop being the steady, reassuring voice in our family and let the sadness come over me. I had to cry and find some time to be alone. I didn't have to learn to live with the full reality of my loss overnight, but I had to let the grief take me and begin to learn. That's when my journey, as a surviving sibling, began.

Scott Mastley - TCF, Atlanta GA

HANUKKAH

At this season of lights,
 We remember the light you brought
 into our lives:
 The light of your laughter
 The light of your wit and intelligence
 The light of your love
 May the time not be distant when the
 memory of these lights
 Will illumine our hearts and minds
 And eradicate the darkness therein.

Stephanie Hesse
 TCF Rockland Co. NY

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS

Beyond the Christmas trees, the angels and stars
 and beloved carols ... beyond the presents, the
 shopping, the baking and cooking ... beyond all of
 these sights and sounds of Christmas ... beyond all
 of these ...there is **HOPE**.

HOPE ... for the bereaved parent, even at
 Christmas, one of the most, if not the most, painful
 times of the year, there is an essence of **HOPE** .
HOPE ... it is **HOPE** that sustains us through the
 days of grief and anger and frustration and
 loneliness.

The **HOPE** is that someday the pain of the
 deaths of our children will be eased. The **HOPE** is
 that someday our smiles will be real. The **HOPE** is
 that once again we will laugh and love and cry
 completely without fear and hollowness. It is the
HOPE that some day we can remember our children
 with a tenderness merely tinged with sorrow and not
 overwhelmed with it.

So it is that for each of you, I offer **HOPE** ...
 peace, compassion, love, sympathy, understanding,
 sharing, and listening. In the sharing of our grief
 with one another and in the emotional support we
 give to one another, we receive and understand all of
 these gifts. *TCF Wabash Valley Chapter, IN*

CHRISTMAS LOVE

It is Christmas time once again
 as the snow falls from the sky.
 I hear the angels singing their songs
 yet I ask myself why?
 How can everyone be so happy
 when tears drop from my eye.
 And I ask the angels over again
 why did my brother die.
 I believe he is in a beautiful place
 and singing right along.
 For he loved the Christmas season
 and the sounds of Christmas songs.
 As I sit here listening to the angels sing
 I think I hear his voice.
 I believe that he is telling me
 to smile and rejoice.
 Now as I look to future Christmases
 there will be so very many.
 But my heart will always smile and sing
 because "I love you Denny".

Kimberly Kearns Minetola
 TCF - Valley Forge, PA

RIVER OF TEARS

Four years gone, my tears still flow
 making a river who's rapids I know.
 Tossing my heart with grief, sorrow,
 regret looking to heaven my heart
 won't forget those Tears

of Joy
 of Pride
 of Loss

Crystal Rivulets are prayers, they
 strengthen the bridge
 To the Gate of eternity on God's
 Heavenly Ridge

Rose Cote
 TCF - Valley Forge, PA

Our Wishes For You

To those of you whose pain is fresh and raw, and still have courage to come and share with us, and give us healing through your pain, we send you love and compassion.

To those of you whose pain of grief, anger, and frustration has begun to soften, we wish you hope and healing.

To those of you who have found life can be good again, and can tenderly remember your child tinged with much less sorrow, and not be overwhelmed, we wish you fond memories, and a meaningful holiday.

To those of you who are struggling in your marriage or relationship, we wish you patience and understanding to accept one another for what you can give.

To those of you who are struggling with your spirituality, we wish you peace.

To those of you who give words of comfort and hope to another in the depth of despair, we say "Thank You".

To those of you who so willingly lend a hand in doing all the chores, And those who give financial support that holds the Valley Forge Chapter together, so we can provide a safe haven for all the bereaved to come and support one another, we say "Thank You"

We send you love, hope, compassion, a hug, and wish you peace.

Marie and Ken Hofmockel