

# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

## MAY 2007

### Inside Valley Forge

All 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 Roads, 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

May 3 - General Sharing

June 7 - General Sharing  
- Loss by Suicide

July 19-22 - 30th National Conf. -- See page 3 & 10

Sept 28-30 - E. PA Regional Conference -- See page 10

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**



### Valley Forge Chapter

#### Chapter Co-Leader

Ann Rapoport  
14 Lakewood Drive  
Media, PA 19063  
email: libbyann47@yahoo.com  
(484)919-0820 cellphone

#### Chapter Co-Leader

Rhonda Gomez  
12 Brook Circle  
Glenmoore, PA 19343  
(484)919-0820 cell phone  
email: sugar@hybridpoplars.com

#### Record Keeper

Frank Gomez  
12 Brook Circle  
Glenmoore, PA 19343  
email: fgomez@hybridpoplars.com

#### Webmaster

Frank Gomez  
www.tcfvalleyforge.org

#### Newsletter Editors

Marie & Ken Hofmockel  
340 Allendale Road  
King of Prussia, PA 19406  
(610)337-1907  
email: kenhofmockel@comcast.net

#### E.PA Regional Coordinators

Marie & Ken Hofmockel  
(see info above)

#### National Headquarters

P.O. Box 3696  
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696  
Toll Free: (877)969-0010  
www.compassionatefriends.org  
email: national.office@  
compassionatefriends.org

**NEW FRIENDS**

**Bill & Patti Whitehead**, daughter *Maria* 7/4/81 - 11/1/06

**Roxanne Kamilatos**, daughter *Dina* 4/29/64 - 6/30/06

**Allison Crowder**, daughter *Amber* 8/8/04 - 2/21/07

**Betty & Dick Miller**, son *Raymond "Jim"* 9/1/48 - 7/26/06

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 that 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.

---

**APRIL REFRESHMENTS**

**Nina Bernstein**, in memory of my son, *Andrew Voluck* 10/12/84 - 2/9/05

**Mary Jane & Tom Poore**, in memory of our son, *Bradley* 4/26/74 - 3/19/94.

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**

**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



**TRAILS OF TEARS  
TO HEALING HEARTS**

The Compassionate Friends  
3070 Piedmont, Okemaw  
July 20 - 22, 2007 • Okemaw, OK



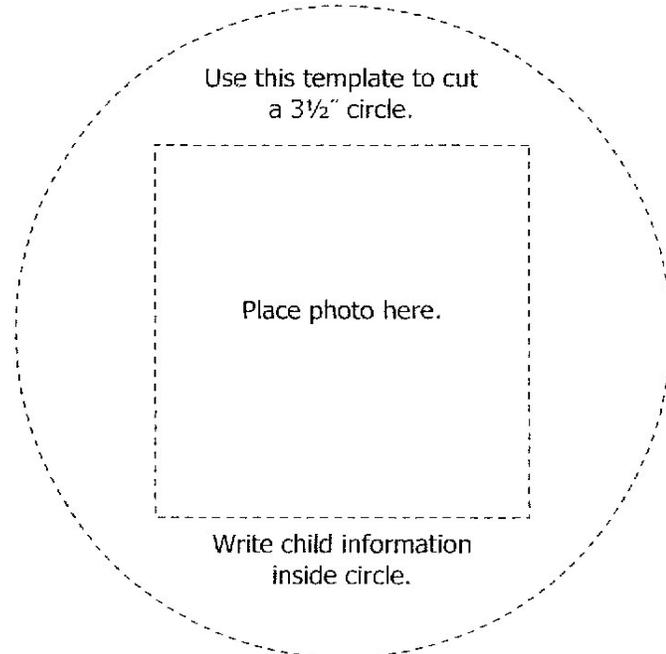
**THE  
COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS**

The Oklahoma chapters of The Compassionate Friends are pleased to announce the "Dream Catcher" program in conjunction with the 30<sup>th</sup> TCF National Conference to be held in Oklahoma City, OK at the Cox Convention Center. The conference committee plans to decorate the registration area, memory boards, and hospitality room with hundreds of Dream Catchers featuring our beloved TCF children. **You have the opportunity to sponsor a Dream Catcher in memory of your child, grandchild, sibling, or loved one whether or not you attend the conference!!**

Using the template to the right, cut out a 3½ inch circle from cardstock in the color of your choice and paste a photo (color or B/W) on the circle. Also, print the child's name and birth and death dates on the circle. Place the circle in an envelope with protective cardboard before sending. Your circle will be attached to an actual Dream Catcher and placed on display. A minimum donation of \$10 in U. S. funds will sponsor a Dream Catcher. For an additional \$5, we will return your Dream Catcher after the conference. Complete the form below and mail to the address listed.

This makes the child you are remembering a very real part of the 2007 conference. Additional family members and friends are also invited to sponsor a Dream Catcher.

If you're interested in attending the 2007 conference and seeing your special and unique Dream Catcher, call 877-969-0010 or visit the national website at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) for continuous updates of conference plans.



Mail your Dream Catcher circle to:  
**TCF 2007 NATIONAL CONFERENCE**  
**Attention: DREAM CATCHER**  
P.O. Box 386  
Piedmont, OK 73078

Name of Child \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_ DOD \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor's name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my Dream Catcher circle with minimum \$10 donation per circle \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like my Dream Catcher returned to me after the conference—

I have enclosed an additional \$5 for shipping & handling per Dream Catcher \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Allow 6-8 week for delivery.

Total amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

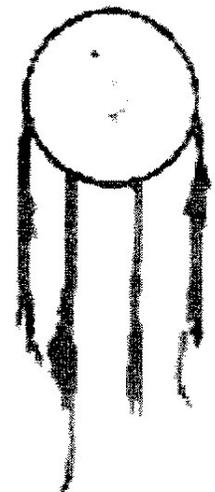
**Submit an individual form for each Dream Catcher**

Make check payable to: TCF 2007 National Conference (Visa, MC, or Discover accepted)

Name on card \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Expires \_\_\_\_\_

Amount \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (required) \_\_\_\_\_



Legendary  
Sioux Indian  
Dream Catcher  
"Web of Life"

**Dream Catcher circle must be received by July 6, 2007. Thanks for your support!**

**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:



---

**NOT GUILT, REGRET**

One of our basic responsibilities as parents is to keep our children from harm. So, when anything happens to them, we feel guilty whether we could realistically have done anything or not. When the ultimate tragedy occurs, we are devastated. How could we let it happen? Why didn't we stop it? If we have compounded our guilt with any degree of human error of commission or omission, we are beyond devastation. Even words, either of anger or left unspoken, haunt us.

Guilt implies intent. If we intended to harm our child, we can feel guilty of that. If we never intended harm to ever, ever come to our child, the correct name for our emotion is regret. The crushing pain is still there, but regret is softer, gentler, less judgmental, and easier to forgive and to heal. It is also more accurate. If that name doesn't feel strong enough for our feelings, it will in time. Let it float there and try it now and then. Not guilt - we feel regret.

*Kitty Sanders*, Nashville, TN  
Survivors of Suicide Group

**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 at Compassionate Friends know you will heal and will feel joy again, never as soon as you would like, but it will come. Even though that is difficult to believe now, you can tell your surviving families that bereaved parents and siblings before you tell how grief does soften and feelings will return. Our living children need to be assured we and they will be better in time. You will be better. We wish you peace and hope.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel* , 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*

***WHEN TOMORROW STARTS WITHOUT ME***

When tomorrow starts without me,  
and I'm not there to see;  
If the sun should rise and find your eyes,  
all filled with tears for me;  
I wish so much you wouldn't cry,  
the way you did today,  
while thinking of the many things,  
we didn't get to say.

I know how much you love me,  
as much as I love you,  
and each time that you think of me,  
I know you'll miss me too;  
But when tomorrow starts without me,  
please try to understand,  
that an Angel came and called my name,  
and took me by the hand,  
and said my place was ready,  
in heaven far above,  
and that I'd have to leave behind,  
all those I dearly love.

But as I turned to walk away,  
a tear fell from my eye,  
for all my life, I'd always thought,  
I didn't want to die.  
I had so much to live for,  
so much yet to do,  
it seemed almost impossible,  
that I was leaving you.

I thought of all the yesterdays,  
the good ones and the bad,  
I thought of all the love we shared,  
and all the fun we had.

If I could relive yesterday,  
just even for awhile,  
I'd say goodbye and kiss you  
and maybe see you smile.

But then I fully realized,  
that this could never be,  
for emptiness and memories,  
would take the place of me.

And when I thought of worldly things,  
I might miss come tomorrow,  
I thought of you, and when I did,  
my heart was filled with sorrow.

But when I walked through heaven's gates,  
I felt so much at home.  
When God looked down and smiled at me,  
from His great golden throne,

He said, "This is eternity,  
and all I've promised you".  
Today for life on earth is past,  
but here it starts anew.  
I promise no tomorrow,  
but today will always last,  
and since each day's the same day,  
there's no longing for the past.

But you have been so faithful,  
so trusting and so true.  
Though there were times you did some things,  
you knew you shouldn't do.  
But you have been forgiven  
and now at last you're free.  
So won't you take my hand  
and share my life with me?

So when tomorrow starts without me,  
don't think we're far apart,  
for every time you think of me,  
I'm right here, in your heart.

written by ***David M. Romano***

submitted by ***Susan Dillman***, TCF Valley Forge, PA  
in loving memory of my daughter ***Heather Dillman*** 6/4/1981 - 1/19/2002, who  
is forever loved and forever missed. I love you the world and back. Love, Mom

## **What Siblings Think About**

At a local chapter meeting, the brothers and sisters explored their feeling about a number of issues. Those siblings were kind enough to record their feelings on paper with others

### **I would like my parents to know....**

That I am OK and would like to talk to them about my brother or sister whenever they feel like it  
That I hurt too and loved my brother/sister.  
That my love for my sibling will never go away.  
How special my parents are and how proud I am of their love.  
It's all right if they want to talk to me. I will listen and be sad with them  
That they are not at fault.  
That it's OK to cry together and that I'm there for them.  
That I'll never forget my sibling, the good times and the hard ones.

### **I would like my father to know....**

It helps to talk.  
That if anything happened to him, I would feel the same way.  
He is not alone and I want to laugh and cry with him again.  
That his child knew that he loved him/her.  
That it's OK to talk about my brother/sister when I am around.  
I do cry, not a lot, but I do cry.

### **I would like my mother to know....**

I love her.  
It's OK to cry and I am there for her to talk to  
That I will always love her.  
She has been my example of giving love.  
That my sibling is at peace with God  
It's OK to talk about the past.  
I cry. I knew my sibling in a different way. I think about those times and smile through the tears.

### **I would like my dead brother/sister to know....**

We miss you.  
That I love you and miss you and need you in my life.  
That we are well, sharing all we have, and waiting to be with you again.  
It's sad around here, but we remember you.  
That we all love and miss you very, very much

That your life won't be forgotten.

That I try to be like you. I am in many ways.

One thing I'd like to say is that I go into your room for the memories.

### **The hardest part of losing my brother/sister is....**

Having such a hole in our family.

Believing it actually happened and that I'll never see or talk to him/her again.

I will never have a sibling to talk to.

Not being able to look into your eyes, hug you and laugh with you

That I never told you personally that I loved you - it was always assumed.

Losing my best friend.

Not having you there to complain at me for the things I do.

### **I like to remember my sister/brother by....**

Looking at pictures.

Thinking of you when you would goof off with my children.

Going to the grave.

Playing my music loud, singing like you and laughing I listen to your favorite albums.

Talking about him and looking at his truck in the driveway.

### **I regret.....**

Nothing

All the arguments we had and not having the chance to say good-bye.

Fighting with my brother/sister.

Not hearing your music play and the telephone busy.

Not sharing enough time with you.

Not telling you how much I loved you.

Not yelling at or hugging you one more time.

Not knowing when you were going to die.

Hugging you because you were the "big brother/sister."

Not spending time with you.

Being a massive pest.

**The Sibling Group TCF, Lehigh Valley, PA**

**30TH NATIONAL TCF CONFERENCE 2007**

The 2007 TCF National Conference will be held at the Cox Convention Center in Downtown Oklahoma City, OK. Reservations for hotel rooms at both Renaissance & Courtyard by Marriott can be made by calling 1-800-859-6877. The Conference Schedule & Registration Forms are too lengthy to include in our newsletters. We have listed some of the Conference highlights below. Please see page 3 for additional information.

To obtain Conference Registration Forms contact the National Office. All contact information is listed on page 1 of this newsletter. You may download the forms from the National website, this is the fastest way to obtain forms, or email the National Office requesting Conference Registration Forms. If you are not computer literate, call the toll-free number.

- July 19 Professional Outreach Program, Regional Coordinators Meeting, Sibling Orientation, Chapter Leader Advanced Facilitator Training, Sharing Sessions, & Conf. Registration
- July 20 Annual Meeting, Orientation for First-time Attendees, Opening Ceremony with Speaker Elizabeth Edwards, Luncheon Banquet with Speaker Bill Hancock, 3 Workshops & , Special Native American Performance, Sharing Sessions & Conf, Registration.
- July 21 Four Workshops, Banquet/Candle Lighting Service with Speaker TCF Founder Simon Stephens. Sharing Sessions & Conference Registration.
- July 22 TCF Walk To Remember, Closing Ceremony with Speaker Bud Welch

**RESERVE THE DATE**



*From Despair ...  
A Glimmer of Hope*

**Eastern Pennsylvania  
2007 Regional Conference  
September 28, 29, 30, 2007**

The E. PA Regional Conference is well underway. We have a large volunteer committee, which is made up of TCF members from many chapters. Our area is very fortunate to have so many dedicated people. Our previous Regional Conferences have had an attendance of over 300. The registration forms will be included in the June issue of our newsletter. It is posted on the TCF National website. Registration forms may also be downloaded from the National website. The Radisson Hotel (610-337-2000)-First Ave. & Gulph Road, King of Prussia, PA 19406 is also taking reservations, it is necessary to identify yourself as a TCF member to obtain the reduced room rate. We hope you will plan a weekend of healing with many other bereaved families.

## OUR SAFETY NET

It has been observed that the social support we receive during our bereavement is the most important fact to help us cope with our loss. We generally receive this support from our natural environment – our friends, family, fellow church members, co-workers, clergy and others who occupy a place within our world. Many parents perceive their support system as strong and loving and gracious in the beginning.

For society reacts strongly to the death of a child. Yet society is so threatened by the death of a young person that it moves quickly to protect itself. Parents often feel isolated or abandoned by those who could provide solace and comfort. Many parents express the need to “be understood” but this understanding is usually unavailable. Instead, people sometimes respond from their own anxieties and their own needs, admonishing parents to “be brave,” “get on with your life,” “have another child,” or “try not to think about it.” In effect, do anything except remind us that this wretched thing can happen.

The unrealistic expectations of society and the insensitive comments made to bereaved parents can further complicate the already complicated process of mourning the loss of a child. Reminding ourselves that people don’t mean to be cruel, that they are speaking from their own fears does little to help. Society’s expectation that grief following child loss will follow the pattern of other losses is another hurtful folly. As bereaved parents, our grief is unique. The intensity and duration is different. Even if our support system doesn’t recognize these realities, bereaved mother and father must.

### WHAT HELPS?

\*Understand that the death of a child is a unique loss, that you may well require a longer time to grieve, and longer recovery period.

\*Accept the reality that “accepting the reality” is difficult because the reality is so untimely and unnatural. Yet know that accepting the fact that

your child has died is an essential part of the process.

\*Beware that each family member will grieve differently. Treasure the moments of sharing that do come, but understand that each must also grieve alone and in their own way and at their own pace.

\*Develop a clear understanding that the intense emotional pain you are feeling is normal. We often need assurance that what we are feeling is not indicative of mental illness.

\*Obtain as much explanation and understanding of the death as possible.

\*Remember that good communication and mutual support between the parents is essential. Good communication means listening and talking.

\*Recognize that few people will comprehend or understand the depth of your sorrow. No amount of explaining will help. You cannot explain parental loss to someone. That does not mean they don’t care. It simply means that the pain is such that it can be experienced but never fully explained.

\*Understand that if some of your friends stay away, it may be because they feel awkward. You may have to reach out to them.

\*Draw on your religious faith. Even if it seems fragile for the moment, understand that faith is often stronger after a deep struggle.

\*Hold onto the thought that while you will never forget, while there will always be an emptiness, the pain will dim with time. While you will never say “good-by” to your child, you will be able to say “good-by” to the worst of the pain.

\*Join a support group where grief can be shared with other bereaved parents. Give the group experience a fair chance by attending at least three meetings.

\*Memorialize the life of your child in a way that will be meaningful to you and your family.

***Sue Holtkamp, Ph.D.***

Excerpted from *When the Bough Breaks  
The Death of a Child*