THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

NOVEMBER 2011

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.

Meeting Schedule and other TCF Events of interest

Please Mark Your Calendar

Nov 3 **General Sharing & Death by Suicide**

Dec 1 **General Sharing**
Collection of Gifts for First Step (see pg 3)

Dec 11 **Worldwide Candle Lighting (see pg 4)**
Collection of Gifts for First Step (see pg 3)

July 20-22, 2012 34th TCF National Conference & 5th International Gathering, Cost Mesa, CA

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

Valley Forge Chapter

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NEW FRIENDS

Carol Fritz, daughter ***Kate Pawlowski*** (29)
Jan Cox, son ***Bill*** (44)
Marie Poulsen, grandson ***Jerry*** (14)

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

OCTOBER REFRESHMENTS

Carol & Henry Bailey, in honor of our son ***Matthew's*** birthday
Barbara Jordan, in honor of the ***Butterfly Release***

Anyone wishing to donate refreshments (cheese & crackers, fruit, cakes, cookies, etc.) in memory of loved ones, please call **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

Martha & Al Caesar, to honor our son ***Dan*** on his 40th birthday
Joyce, Vern & Michael Kaiser, in memory of our son & brother ***Brian*** on his birthday Nov. 9th
Joanne & Thomas Lennen, in memory of our son ***Scott*** on his 48th birthday
Always in our thoughts, forever in our hearts. Miss and love you always. Mom & Dad
Rachel & Jacob Himmelstein, in memory of our son ***Benjamin*** on his anniversary 9/19
Betty Miller, in loving memory of my husband ***Dick***, son ***Jim Miller***, and ***Susan*** (daughter of Mary Walker)

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.

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 1st meeting & December 11th at the 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.

Suicide Facilitators Needed

In the early years of the TCF-Valley Forge Chapter, we recognized the need for dedicated sharing sessions for families whose children died by suicide. Because they deal with an additional aspect of grief, we offer this opportunity every other month.

We are in need of additional facilitators for these sharing sessions. Rhonda & Frank are very conscientious leaders. It is very helpful when the chapter leaders know well in advance that this position will be filled.

We hope you will give this beneficial need some consideration. If you have lost a loved one by suicide and have progressed in your grief enough to reach out to others, please contact Rhonda by phone or email. (contact information on page one)

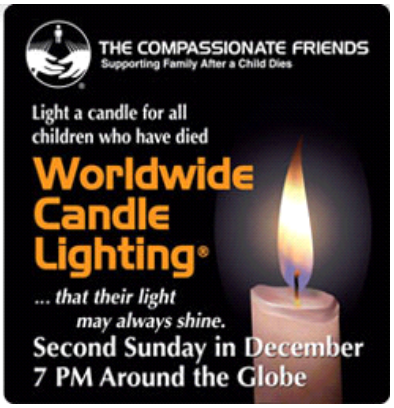
Volunteers Needed

There are many ongoing positions available for dedicated volunteers who are willing to devote monthly time to fulfilling the needs of our chapter. Members accepting these positions are urged to attend the quarterly Steering Committee Meetings.

Greeter - Welcome new friends and visitors monthly as they enter.
Librarian - Keep track of new books & books on loan.
Publicity - Send monthly notices of sharing meetings dates and special events information to local newspapers, radio, and web sites (Upper Merion Community Bulletin Board).
Recording Secretary - Record the minutes of the Steering Committee meetings, which meets quarterly.

We wish all of you a very meaningful Thanksgiving.

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS 14th WORLD WIDE CANDLE LIGHTING



Held annually the second Sunday in December, this year December 11th, The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe as they light candles for one hour to honor and remember children and siblings who have died at any age from any cause. As candles are lit at 7 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor children in a way that transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious, and political boundaries.

The Valley Forge Chapter of The Compassionate Friends will hold a remembrance service on December 11th at 2 PM, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in the Fellowship Hall. (same place as our monthly sharing secessions are held). We also urge you to light a candle in your home at 7PM.

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 & siblings who have died, but will never be forgotten. Let us ensure that their light may always shine.

STRANGE WORDS WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

I am always amazed at the instant empathy we each feel as new member come to their first meeting. We have the strangest welcome for these parents: "We are sorry you have to be here.

In other organizations the questions are probing: "Where did you go to school, where do you work, where do you live?" All designed to "size up" the newcomer, put him or her in the proper perspective of a neatly ordered world. For us this information is meaningless. We know the world isn't neat and orderly; we discovered that when we lost our children. We care about you, the newly bereaved parent, whose life was tossed into a cosmic blender when your child died. We care because we are you. We have been here a while, in this purgatory of pain. We have learned to live our lives in a different way, to place value on understanding and hope, the intangibles of the purest meanings of life. We have learned to value each other, to reach out and talk, to wait patiently during the silences needed to form thoughts. We listen intently as you quietly say your child's name, tell your child's story, speak of your heartbreak.

Yes, this is a different kind of welcome. But it is the most deeply sincere welcome we ever receive. We are kindred souls, you and I. Each of us lives in the "after death" world of losing our child. Each of us has learned gradually that the hope we have attained has made life better, lessened the pain, moderated the isolation, tears, emotional devastation and pure mayhem that once overtook us. Each of us has learned this slowly, in our own time and in our own way.

Each month new parents who have suffered the most horrific loss that a human can endure are welcomed into our group. We reach out, we listen with our heart and we remember.

Annette Mennen Baldwin, In memory of my son, ***Todd Mennen,*** TCF, Katy, TX.

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.

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.

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Gloria Bello, son ***Joseph*** 11/24
Jackie & Steve Brown, son ***Doug Brown*** 11/28
Catherine Chan, son ***Chanlan Lee*** 11/27
Lisa Connolly, daughter ***Elyce Pindjak*** 11/14
Tom & Irene Cornely, daughter ***Colleen*** 11/1
Franklin & Patricia Cox, daughter ***Christen Fox*** 11/2
Antoinette & John DiDonato, son ***John Jr*** 11/24
JoAnne Forman, son ***H. Scott Hartman, Jr***. 11/21
Sharon & Francis Gailey, daughter ***Danielle Marie Gailey*** 11/7
Angela Giannantonio, son ***Anthony*** 11/11
Charlotte and Michael Gormish, brother ***Douglas Moyer*** 11/9
Anthony & Carol Iacobucci, son ***Anthony Iacobucci*** 11/28
Enid M. Irizarry, daughter ***Lisette M. Molina*** 11/16
Vern & Joyce Kaiser, son ***Brian*** 11/9
Luann Kalamon, son ***Adam Michael*** 11/12
Sandi Kensicki, sister ***Rose*** 11/7
John & Eileen Kostic, son ***John E*** 11/29
Joanne & Thomas Lennen, son ***Scott C. Lennen*** 11/14
Dan Logan, daughter ***Joanie*** 11/15
Marie MacCaughern, daughter ***Theresa Peazzoni*** 11/7
Joan Morefield, son ***Robert*** 11/25
Anthony & Mary Morrell, son ***Andrew Michael Morrell*** 11/28
David & Donna Morrell, son ***Matthew Morrell*** 11/9
Fred & Marilyn Mountjoy, daughter ***Marian Mountjoy*** 11/11
Betsy Oakes, son ***Bruce Schaeffer*** 11/19
Carol & Dennis O'Connor, son ***Michael O'Connor*** 11/21
Patricia Peraino, brother ***Anthony*** 11/11
Robert & Barbara Pontician, son ***Rob Pontician*** 11/28
Roy Redman, daughter ***Carol*** 11/20
Ilene & Sy Rockower, daughter ***Amy Rockower*** 11/22
Andrea Rohloff, son ***Jim*** 11/14
Melissa Schnitzler, brother ***Richard "Jon" Masso*** 11/7
Priscilla Shober, son ***Gregory Shober*** 11/7
Edie Smith, son ***John Seddon "Sed" Wilson*** 11/15
Shuchi & Peter Stanger, sister ***Urvi Thanawala*** 11/2
Elai**ne & Tim Thomas**, son ***Seth Peterson*** 11/21
Weldon & Marie Tyson, son ***Ronald C. Stewart*** 11/12

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS continued

Harry& Lynne Urian, son ***Mike*** 11/14
Linda Weaver, son ***Damon Weaver*** 11/21
Paul & Marcia Woodruff, son ***Danny Woodruff*** 11/23

NOVEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Nancy Althouse, daughter ***Donna Lee Althouse*** - 11/4
Victoria Bayle, husband ***Robert D Bayle II*** - 11/9
Julie Beasley, son ***Aaron*** - 11/5
Stephen & Barbara Billings, daughter ***Laura Elizabeth Billings*** - 11/26
Scott & Gail Campbell, daughter ***Chelsea*** - 11/4
Joyce Caperilla, daughter ***Jennifer*** - 11/22
Libby Cavallaro, sister ***Theresa*** - 11/19
Loreta & Ken Cericola, son ***Anthony Cericola*** - 11/10
Thomas & Janet Cleary, son ***Ryan*** - 11/14
Benjamin E. Cohen, daughter ***Donna Lynne Cohen*** - 11/22
Anita Conway, son ***Daniel*** - 11/29
Julie & Joe Fabrizio, brother ***John Russel Bryant*** - 11/9
Rochena & Pat Fatale, son ***Mark Longan*** - 11/15
Abigail Figueroa, son ***Jose C Figueroa*** - 11/11
JoAnne Forman, son ***H Scott Hartman, Jr.*** - 11/12
Sharon & Francis Gailey, son ***Francis E. Gailey***, - 11/24
Linda & Steven Gilbert, daughter ***Pamela Gilbert*** - 11/6
Laura Giordano, son ***Peter*** - 11/7
Elizabeth Haney, son ***Christian*** - 11/28
Othell & William Heaney, son ***Roger Heaney*** - 11/22/
Nora & Peter Heiss, daughter ***Kathleen Heiss McCaughan*** - 11/23
daughter ***Noreen Schmucker*** - 11/27
Carl & Catherine Helwig, son ***Michael Helwig*** - 11/24
Danielle Hemmench Ricci, boyfriend ***Ryan*** - 11/14
Jacob & Rachel Himmelstein, son ***Benjamin Himmelstein*** - 11/19
Cynthia Hornyak, daughter ***Meredith*** - 11/27
Vern & Joyce Kaiser, son ***Brian*** - 11/2
John & Eileen Kostic, son ***John E*** - 11/18
Ed & Linda Lincul, son ***Matthew*** - 11/27
Jennifer & Michael Magee, sister ***Jacqueline Ann Rogers*** - 11/7
Alexandra Milas, daughter ***Nicole Penelope Wiseley*** - 11/5/
Pat Miller, son ***Nathan*** - 11/8
Leonard & Thelma Miller, sister ***Geraldine Weiner*** - 11/13
Audrey Morasco, husband ***John J. Morasco*** - 11/19
Rose & Mike Orlando, son ***Michael*** - 11/21
Sheldon&Joan Plam, son ***Michael Tobiah Plam*** - 11/7
Tony & Laurene Quercetti, daughter ***Christine L. Quercetti*** - 11/7
Penny Reck, daughter ***Mary*** - 11/3

NOVEMBER ANNIVERSARIES continued

Ruth Richardson, grandson ***Nicholas Richardson*** - 11/14
Gina & Brian Richardson, son ***Nicholas Richardson*** - 11/14
Jacqueline Rider, son ***Josua Rider*** - 11/25
Skipp & Kathy Robinson, daughter ***Carrie Robinson*** - 11/16
Mike & Diane Rogers, daughter ***Jacqueline Ann Rogers*** - 11/7
Donald & Mary Rose, daughter ***Marjorie Rose-Cotteta*** - 11/24
Priscilla Shober, son ***Gregory Shober*** - 11/3
Cathy Siciliano, son ***Anthony*** - 11/24
Barry & Sigrid Snow, son ***Kevin Snow*** - 11/26
Jen & Alex Soutos, daughter ***Alexi*** - 11/22
Harry & Merrily Spiess, son ***F. Ryan Spiess*** - 11/29
Esperanza & Libardo Toro, daughter ***Maria Eugenia Toro*** - 11/3
Mary Walker, daughter ***Susan*** - 11/19
Dorothy Washington, daughter ***Michele Washington*** - 11/26
Linda Weaver, daughter ***Krista "Binky" Weaver*** - 11/4
Bill & Patti Whitehead, daughter ***Maria*** - 11/1
Pat Zimmerman, son ***Bernard Zimmerman*** - 11/13

I AM STILL NEAR

Death has taken me from this world,
and though we are apart, I am still near.
All that we meant to each other remains true,
in trust and faith, have no fear.

Keep me always close to your heart!
For I leave with you what no one can steal,
the tender, love-filled moments we shared,
as well as the challenging times
that brought us closer together.

When you are in need,
speak to me, call my name.
I will come to you with wisdom and light,
to fill your soul with peace,
and to guide you in the pathways that
lead to life forever with our Loving God.

I also offer you this sacred promise:
when I am home in God's embrace,
whenever you call on me,
I will still be present to you,
for neither death nor grave can break the
bonds of love that we on earth once knew.

Oblate Missions
Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate

Submitted by ***Rose Cote***

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, 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

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A SOLITARY JOURNEY

I miss you a little,
I guess you could say,
A little too much,
A little too often,
A little more every day.

John Michael Montgomery

Grief is a solitary journey. No one but you knows how great the hurt is. No one but you can know the gaping hole left in your life when someone you know has died. And no one but you can mourn the silence that was once filled with laughter and song. It is the nature of love and of death to touch every person in a totally unique way. Comfort comes from knowing that people have made the same journey. And solace comes from understanding how others have learned to sing again.

Helen Steiner Rice

IT'S NOT FAIR

It's not fair that my only sibling, my older brother, my best friend died.
But I have to survive this.

It's not fair that I won't have nieces or nephews, nor will my future children have Michael as the wonderful uncle that he would have been.
But I have to survive this.

It's not fair that he wasn't here to give me a hard time about turning 30.
But I have to survive this.

It's not fair to have to deal with such a heart wrenching blow.
But I have to survive this.

As all of us know at TCF, life sometimes isn't fair. We all have to survive the pain of losing a sibling or a child. It is not fair that we have to, but we do. It has been one year and three months since my brother died, and I have to survive this. But you know what, every day that passes and every morning that I wake up, I realize that I AM surviving this!

So will you! ***Renee Highsmith*** TCF Valley Forge Chapter
In memory of my brother, **Michael Highsmith** 1/22/66 - 6/16/97

QUESTIONS/ANSWERS FROM BEREAVED SIBLINGS

All of a sudden I burst into tears and cannot control crying.

You have the freedom to cry when you need to. Crying is a normal reaction. You may feel embarrassed, but most people will react with sympathy and wish for themselves that they could cry freely. Crying is a natural outlet to grieving.

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 died. Anger does not mean you loved them less; it means the loss is so great that you want the terrible pain to end.

I can't concentrate. I can't think and I can't remember anything. I think I am losing my mind.

You are not losing your mind, although it may feel that way. Your mind is probably overloaded. Not only do you have to go through your daily routine, but your mind is flooded with thoughts and feelings for your brother or sister. This is temporary, your memory and concentration will return over time.

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 you have during the day. As time goes on and you deal with your feelings, your dreams will become less frightening.

I feel so guilty for the way I yelled at my brother. We would fight about the silliest things. I'll never be able to tell him how sorry I am.

Brothers and sisters in every family quarrel and don't apologize after every argument. Even though you fought, you still loved your brother and he loved you.

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***

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 remaing 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.

GUIDELINES FOR GRIEVING COUPLES

Realize the death of your child will hurt more than you imagined. It will rearrange your life and world view. Your relationship with your partner will be stretched. There are some things you can do to reduce strain on your relationship.

You and your partner will grieve differently. Let go of the assumption that you "ought" to do it alike. Respectfully make room for each other's style.

Increase the amount of time you spend in each other's company. Listen to each other as much as you can. Do special little things for each other.

Realize you cannot meet all your partner's needs. You have limits. You are both overextended. Do seek appropriate outside support when you need it.

Focus on what you need. Let go of trying to get your partner to do something different about his or her own grief.

Grief takes its time and is not very predictable. Let go of trying to conform to anybody else's idea of how you ought to be doing.

Women, if you don't see "Dad" grieving in ways you recognize, stay clear of the trap of deciding this means he doesn't care about the baby (or you) very much. Ask him what he does with his sadness and sense of helplessness. Remember you both hurt. You will both feel it and show it in different ways.

Men, if your partner needs to talk about the baby and her grief more than you can absorb, encourage her to find additional places to talk. Show her you care in other ways. Keep clear of the trap of thinking you aren't doing it "right". Let go of trying to get her "through it" easier or faster.

Remember other parents have survived this much pain. Life will be meaningful again.

Keep remembering life will become meaningful again.

From "Coping with infant or Fetal Loss:
The Couple's Healing Process" By ***Gilbert and Smart***

GRIEVING IN PAIRS

How may times have people said, "Well, thank God you have each other!" How many times have you felt each other to be entirely inadequate at meeting your needs.

Alarming statistics are available telling us of the rocky road parents encounter in their marriage after the death of a child. We sometimes see in ourselves a touchiness or quickness to become irritated that wasn't there before, it always seems that my "bad" day is my wife's "good" day, or the day she wakes up crying is the day I am planning to play tennis.

Or sometimes, even more difficult, we both have a bad day and find no help from the other in pulling things back together. How can one person hold up another when he is, himself, face down in the mud?

Every person grieves differently. This is a rule that even applies within a family. And the needs of every individual are different. While you may need to talk and talk, and talk, your spouse may need some time alone to reflect inwardly.

You have both been through the worst experience of you life. And while at times you can face recovery as a team, sometime you must develop the patience to be able to wait out certain needs alone or with someone else . Realize that no matter how it is shown, your partner hurts, too.

Gerry Hunt