

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

APRIL 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

Apr 4 - General Sharing

- Loss by Suicide, Sharing

PLEASE NOTE WEDNESDAY (see page 2)

May 3 - General Sharing

Sept 28-30 - E. 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 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

Barbara & Jeff Norris, son *Greg* 9/21/79 - 4/1/05

Lisa Foos, son *Curtis* 3/14/87 - 8/12/06

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.

REFRESHMENTS

Ann Rapoport, in memory of *Jonathan* 5/17/77 - 6/15/77

and *Brian* 12/2/83 - 3/9/01

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.

CHANGE OF APRIL MEETING NIGHT

We will meet **Wednesday** evening April 4, 2007 due to Maundy Thursday religious holiday.

The parking lot will be filled with church members attending the service on Thursday.

This change applies to the April meeting only.

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

**To those of you who are celebrating a holiday this month
We hope you find it very meaningful and comforting.**

Our thanks and appreciation to:

Alliance Bank, Springfield, Pennsylvania

For funding this issue of our newsletter

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 “MEMORIES of GRIEF”

Our son, Douglas, died 25 years ago on February 7th. Time does not erase the memory of those early years when my pain was so intense. Although never feeling suicidal, I began each day with a prayer that the world would end, so there would never be another bereaved parent. I did not want anyone to experience the degree of agony I was enduring. Never once did I regret having Doug, the joy he brought was greater than the death. As I look back, that was a foolish wish. Had the world ended, all those beautiful subsequent children would never have been. I was looking for a quick fix to my pain.

Frequently, we get caught up in hurrying our recovery. Our pain is so intense, we feel we can't endure one more day. Once the natural order has been violated, a deluge of fears overcomes us. It is very normal to be out of control in such an abnormal situation. It is important to recognize our grief, for much of it can be resolved through expressing ourselves. When talking to other bereaved parents and siblings, we realize our feelings are very natural reactions.

There are many books on grief that can offer a sense of direction. There are also many guidelines that warn of pitfalls. These are great tools to aid in our healing. But I feel nothing is as comforting as another bereaved person saying, “I know”. If you have been there, you fully understand. The love you receive is unconditional and this type of support is what sustains us.

If we devote time to grief work, and deal with our problems as they arise, it helps to clear our hearts and minds so we can make room for the new situations that we must handle. If we shelve our feelings, we soon have such an insurmountable load, that we can't deal with any of it. We must always take one day at a time, and face it little by little. Some days we may have such little strength that we not only did not gain ground, but we have slipped back. Don't run away from your grief, meeting it head on helps to gain a better foothold.

Slowly, we begin to heal, the happy memories often bring smiles rather than pain. Our sorrow softens, and the death becomes less important. The lives of our loved ones become more important, and we appreciate the beauty and happiness our loved ones gave to us. We can not expect to return to the way we were. Life will be different as we deal with the memories of grief, but it is a far cry from dealing with fresh grief. We will always regret the death, but doing our grief work helps the scar we carry to become tolerable.

My vacations are different, but enjoyable. I look forward to each new day, and enjoy being creative. I look forward to family gatherings, and feel life can be good again. Believe me when I tell you I dreaded each of these in my early grief. I could not even feel complete joy when my first granddaughter was born. I just couldn't feel anything. There wasn't any “complete joy” to be had. This particular grandchild has brought me so much joy in subsequent years, and now I know it was my grief that denied me these pleasures.

I wish for you that your grief will turn to memories of grief, and happiness will fill your lives again.

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

DEDICATED TO MY SWEET AND GENTLE DAUGHTER, HEATHER
From her Mom

How can two dates mean so much to me, and yet so little to those who pass by? June 4, 1981, the happiest day of my life when my child was born ... then "the dash" that will never be long enough. Her time with us shorter was than we ever knew it would be. Then January 19, 2002 ... the worst day of my life ... the day that changed who I am, forever. The fullness and hope that June 4th held; the emptiness and despair that was January 19th; a short 20 years later. A heartblink in time. I walk the Earth, existing, smiling, cheery to those around me, but inside I continue to grieve, to mourn, and to die more each day ... until I am with you in some other form. I love you so.

Heather Dillman - TCF, Valley Forge Chapter.

AN ANGEL WITHIN MY HEART

On March 18th of this year, it has been eight years since my son, Damon, has passed away. Since the snow is now falling once again, it makes every year seem just as hard as the last.

I have tried to hold back the tears that come to my eyes, but being brave is not an option.

Being a mother and having a child pass away was and is difficult.

It feels like my heart was taken away from me. I know I shouldn't feel this way.

However, I am so thankful for the friends that surround me here at Manor Care Nursing Home.

A good friend of mine, Katie, comes to see me.

She came in at 2:30 a.m. to help me through the death of my son, Damon.

I am so grateful to have her as a friend.

I knew that I would be unable to attend the funeral,
so a pastor friend performed a little service for Damon.

It took a lot of grieving to get over my son's death.

My son Damon is my angel and he will always be close to my heart.

May God Bless and protect my son, Damon.

Help me to envision my son walking and being happy forevermore.

In memory of my son Damon, 11/21/79 - 3/18/99

Linda Weaver - TCF Valley Forge Chapter

ADJUSTED

"It's been several years since you died,"
 They say, "Surely, you must have adjusted by
 now."
 Yes, I am adjusted - -
 Adjusted to feeling pain
 And sadness and grief
 And guilt and loss.
 Adjusted to hurting and unexpected tears.
 Adjusted to seeing people made uncomfortable
 upon
 Hearing me say, "My son died."
 Adjusted to losing my best friend because
 I'm not always "up."
 Adjusted to people acting as if grief is contagious
 And TCF meetings are "morbid."
 Adjusted? Oh, yes, to many things.
 Knowing I won't hear his voice, but listening for it
 still.
 Knowing I won't see him drive his Toronado.
 But staring at every one I see.
 Adjusted to feeling empty on his birthday
 And wishing for just one more time with him.
 Adjusted: As life goes on - -
 To realizing I cannot expect everyone I meet
 To wear a bandage - - just because
 I am still bleeding...

Shirley Blakely Curle
 TCF, Central AR

SITTING HERE

To sit here and not think of you is impossible.
 To sit here and not be able to touch you is unbearable.
 To sit here and not be able to hear your voice is torture.
 To sit here and not be able to watch you play outside with
 your brother is pure agony.
 To sit here and watch your daddy and brother play to-
 gether and see that certain look in their eyes that says,
 "We wish you were here," makes my heart ache.
 But to be able to sit here and remember your smile, your
 touch, hearing your voice, thinking of times you did play
 outside with your brother, and thinking of the times I'd
 kneel beside your bed as you slept and cry a tear because I
 love you so, are pure heaven.
 Because no one can ever take my memories away. To sit
 here and be with you in my heart is truly a wonderful time
 in my day.
 To sit here...

Nancy Barrs – Salina, CA - TCF

I WILL NOT FORGET

I will not forget you.
 Boy with hazel eyes.
 I will see you shining
 In every new sunrise.

I will not forget
 Your grin with dimples deep.
 I'll hold you in my dreams
 While in my deepest sleep.

I will not forget
 Your laughter or your smile.
 You'll be right beside me
 And walk my every mile.

I will not forget you
 Child with golden hair.
 I will feel your presence
 You are every where.

I will not forget you
 Sweet memories make me glad.
 I will not forget you
 Not all the love we had.

No, I will not forget you
 Your spirit fills my soul.
 I will not forget my son
 Your memory keeps me whole.

Jacqueline Brown Peace Valley TCF, New Britain, PA

My pain helps me live with my loss

The morning our 20-year old daughter Lee took sick with her last illness, I was trying to write a letter of sympathy to a friend, wondering if it would make any difference.

Five days later, I knew. It made a difference.

I discovered it was better to reach out than turn away, to say the wrong thing than say nothing.

But in living through losing Lee, I also discovered I had something to say to others who suffered the loss of someone they loved.

Pain is better than forgetting.

It has been almost 18 years since she died, but Lee is still with us. The pain has not so much lessened, as it has become familiar, like the pain that continues in the leg that has been amputated. Her death is part of us.

I steel myself pretty well for the expected moments of pain. Her birthday in March, her death day in August, Thanksgiving, Christmas, even, these days, listening to an Albinoni oboe concerto knowing it is not she practicing in the next room.

But there is no protection from the blindside hit. Lee waves from a passing car. She appears ahead of me on a street in Siena, wearing a backpack; I rush to catch up with her but she turns a corner and is gone.

She stands in the shadows, just outside the living room. I hear her counsel when I have a problem and pay attention. At the concert I sit beside her in the center of the orchestra.

It is not all tears. We laugh at the same old jokes - and some new ones. Every submarine sandwich, I eat, I share with Lee. It was her favorite.

When I thought I was dying of a heart attack, Lee stood - in the blue jumper she had made - waiting at the end of a brightly lit tunnel, smiling.

But, I often say in a letter of sympathy, people will want you to get over it, snap out of it, buck up, forget. Of course we have to get on with life, to find salvation in routine that suddenly seems trivial, to fulfill our responsibilities to the living. But not to forget.

It is far better to remember, to mourn! To weep, to rage, than to allow the one who is gone to disappear.

In a way, I welcome the pain. I hurt; I remember.

So, I say in my sympathy letter, they should learn to accept the pain, even in a way welcome it, by comparing it to the terror of forgetting.

And as an elder of the tribe who has experienced loss, I write for them to remember in their own way, to mourn in their own way, to do what would be appropriate for the person who has gone and, more important, to do what needs to be done for the living.

The night Lee died we went to a musical in which her sister was appearing in the chorus. Lee would have wanted that, no matter if others approved.

We chose cremation because it was what we thought she would have wanted and it was, we discovered, what each of us wanted for ourselves. We paid no attention to the relative who said, "I don't know how you could burn her up."

We did what we had to do.

We could not handle a formal funeral, bringing the family from afar, after her quick dying, so we had a private service at the graveside.

I wept - frequently - and Minnie Mae did not. No guilt, no public measuring of pain. I dream of Lee and Minnie Mae does not. That does not mean that one of us mourns more deeply than the other. No guilt. No keeping score.

We love in our own way; we grieve in our own way.

And in this terrible loss we have found strength. When we are tested by other events, we have a measure of our ability to survive.

And we are also reminded that life is fragile.

In my letters reaching out I tell others what Lee's passing taught us: to listen to each other and to ourselves, to live the gift of life with caring and celebration. Today. Right now.

By Donald M. Murray



SPRING

It's spring again
That time of year
The flowers bloom
But you're not here
The children go outside
Laughing and they play
But I'm too sad so
I sit inside all day
I miss you more
Than words can say
Physically, emotionally
Each and every way
It's almost summer time
And school will be done
But you won't be
Here to share the fun
And now it's time to end
And I will say good-bye
I close this poem
With hope and a sigh.

Frances Santoleri

TCF - Valley Forge, PA

written for her sister, **Katie** 6/5/81-8/14/92

WHERE DOES THE SISTER COME IN?

My brother was killed
He was murdered for no reason at all
My pain is so sharp, so close.
But **THEY** think I shouldn't
be suffering as much ...

As much as his wife,
who grieves for her love
and her future.

As much as his son,
who will never know his daddy.
As much as his parents,
who have lost their only son,
their first born, their child.

I have lost my closest friend, the man I
admired most in my world: the person I
spent most of my free time with - only
for the company; the person I played
Yahtzee with until 2 a.m., knowing
I'd beat him soon: the boy I grew up
with and followed around constantly; the
love that only a brother and a sister can
know; the respect he had for me; the talks
and the personal jokes.

I have lost my brother.

It hurts just as much.

Bridgette Huard

A SISTER'S LOVE

First, there's the fear,
followed by disbelief.
Then there's the tears,
followed by the grief.
Could it really be true
that they say she may die?
The pain is so deep seated
why her, Father, why?

Time can never change the hurt,
and the tears, they never dry.
Things can never be the same,
A child should never die.
She did though, on a summer day,
one I won't forget.

I loved that girl, oh, so much,
now memories are all that's left.

Is it fair to live on without you, girl?
I think that's what you'd like,
The house has an empty feeling,
your room is dark, day and night.
I won't forget you, don't you fear,
you'll always have a place in my heart.
My love for you lives on.

Looking back through
the book of my life,
YOU are in my favorite part!

Helene Ann Marie Naselli
TCF - Rockville Centre, NY

HOPE

I am here to offer you hope
How can I give this to people who come here
with no hope?

People whose hope dies with their children
Look at us -- we who have come here before you
Just as those who came before us
They set the example -- and led the way
They said to us, as we say to you
"We are no different than you"
We have no special abilities -- no magical powers
We too are in pain and vulnerable

There was a time when we listened
And never believed we could do
What we now know we are capable of doing
We said to ourselves -- if they can do it, we can try
For we don't want to live like this forever

So we took one day at a time
We dug in with our fingertips
We pulled ourselves up each day
We endured the pain and the disbelief and
All the other things that come with this legacy of death
We survived (survival is the first goal)
We held onto what we did have
Each other -- family - friends
Surprisingly we persevered

Somehow -- almost unnoticed at first
We were able to reach out to others
We were able to say and do
What we never thought we would again
We had become believers

The pain is not gone
We truly are forever changed and different people
Our world is different not -- our children live
in other ways
But something happened with time and hard work --
And our "Friends"

We can now laugh, feel happiness even occasional joy
We now know that pain can wound us --
but not destroy us
We have experienced trial and error
Gained more knowledge of ourselves as bereaved parents
We now have expectations of pain -- but also
Expectations of happiness
For us this is not a contradiction -- it is a reality

We have come to a place
Where we can rise each day and face the pain
Knowing that we can look ahead with
anticipation
for the good things to come

THAT - IS HOPE

We have turned a corner
On the most difficult journey of our lives
There are still many obstacles ahead
But we now know we cannot only survive
We can endure and overcome as well
We have paid a terrible price
But we are stronger and wiser than we have
ever been

And most of all - WE HAVE EACH OTHER

We know that there are those of you
Who cannot relate to these words
(We too could not relate when we were
where you are now)
We ask you to say -- "If they can do it,
we can try"

What we offer you is Our hope
As the days turn into weeks
and the weeks into months
and the months into years
Our hope will become yours as well -- that
Someday you will echo these words
and pass them onto others

**WE ARE HERE FOR YOU
AND TOGETHER WE WILL GO ON**

Survival + Hard Work = **HOPE**

Moe Beres, TCF Babylon NY

"I believe that man will not merely endure; he
will prevail. He is immortal, not because he
alone among creatures has an inexhaustible
voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable
of compassion and sacrifice and endurance,"

William Faulkner,
from his Nobel Prize for Literature Address,
December 10, 1950, Stockholm, Sweden

THANK YOU REV. SIMON STEPHENS AND TCF FOR:

(Rev. Simon Stephens is the founder of The Compassionate Friends)

- TENDER**
- (1) **HOPE** - when I believed in **none anywhere**.
 - (2) **REASSURANCE** - I'm **not** "crazy"! Confusion, displacement, preoccupation, forgetfulness, timelessness, panic, my journeys into **HELL** - all part of "normal" parental grieving. OK to feel **and** express feeling, or remain silent.
 - (3) **ENERGY** - An infusion via newsletters, a note or phone call when I'm exhausted, depleted, flat, not able and not caring to function.
 - (4) **UNDERSTANDING** - my bitterness and rage, there by miraculously reducing both.
 - (5) **CONTINUING GENTLE REMINDER** - to accept that most despairing of facts - **MY CHILD DIED!**
 - (6) **WATCHFULNESS** - Strive not to get stuck in denial, anger, etc. My child would not want this for me.
 - (7) **RESPIRE** - a release of tension from desperately "holding myself together".
 - (8) **COMPASSION** - " I know your pain". TCF members truly do.
- COMFORTING**
- (9) **FORGIVENESS OF SELF** - for real and imagined commissions and omissions as I'm forced to review my life, accept my humanity.
 - (10) **LOVE** - doesn't die. My significant others do not replace my child but do expand my caring.
 - (11) **SELF ESTEEM** - Slow rebuilding of a DESTROYED SELF. I will be worthwhile again and able to help others someday.
 - (12) **AWARENESS** - **I AM BLESSED** - My child lived and we loved.
 - (13) **FAITH** - My child, and your child, is in another dimension in **PEACE** and **LOVE**.
- FRIENDSHIP**
- (14) **SHARING** - I'm not alone. In my stark despair, others reach out or will reach out. Grief is very personal, but others are in a parallel lane.
 - (15) **ENCOURAGEMENT** - I'll fall back but I'll move forward again.
 - (16) **PATIENCE** - First with myself, then with others; only **TIME, TIME, TIME** can dull this agony.
 - (17) **REFUTES** - my desire for and attempts at isolation.
 - (18) **ACCEPTANCE** - I'm a **DIFFERENT SELF FOREVER** -the death of my child was the death of so much of me.
 - (19) **HUMOR** - can again be part of me despite the underlying devastation, the never ending awareness of this most searing, irreplaceable loss. My child smiles with me.
 - (20) **THANK YOU** - **TCF LEADERS** for giving so much of yourselves, for all your work behind the scenes.

written (1985) by *Ellen Bruno* / Valley Forge, PA TCF
 dedicated to her son *J.B.* who died at the age
 of 29 of a massive heart attack 9/15/84