



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

AUGUST 2016

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

Aug 4 General Sharing

Sep 1 General Sharing

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**

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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.

INSIDE VALLEY FORGE CHAPTER

NEW PEOPLE

Anthony & Marsha Schrader, daughter *Krista* (27)

REFRESHMENTS

Ellen & James Burbano in memory of our son, *Eric* on his second anniversary.
Rhonda & Frank Gomez in memory of our son, *Frankie* on his thirteenth anniversary.
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.

LOVE GIFTS

Lee & Patricia Grossman, in loving memory of our daughter, *Rachel Leah* (32).
Marie & Kit Poulson (grandparents), **Chris Poulson** (uncle), & **Corrine Warfel** (mother) in loving memory of our Angel, *Jerry August Warfel* (14) on his birthday, August 12th.
Jerry was a joy in our lives, we remember him with our love, tears, and hope.
Marie & Ken Hofmockel, in loving memory of our son, *Douglas Alan Hofmockel* (16) on his birthday August 27th. Remembering Douglas for all the love he gave to those around him.

NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL

We are asking if possible , would you please receive your newsletter by email.

We do not want to remove anyone from our newsletter mailing list who is benefiting from receiving it. We hope it is a help to you while going through your grief, giving you better understanding of your feelings, and letting you know **"We need not walk alone"**.

A newsletter helps to keep our TCF family informed of local and national events.

We consider this an important function of our program.

We are asking if you have email, would you consider receiving your newsletter in email format. You will receive your copy earlier if you opt to receive it by email. If you chose to use the email method of receiving your newsletter, you will have the option to switch back to the old method. If you wish to receive the newsletter by email please contact: **Frank Gomez**
fgomez@hybridpoplars.com

OUR CHILDREN & SIBLINGS LOVED, SADLY MISSED AND REMEMBERED

Each month some of us must face those special, but difficult days of birthdays and anniversaries. This month we ask your thoughts and prayers for the parents/siblings/relatives of the following children:

**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.**

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

Marilynn Anton, cousin/godmother *Douglas Hofmockel* 8/27
Denis Nicholson, Asselin & Judy, son *Nathaniel* 8/21
Rob and Janet Beiswenger, son *Jared* 8/17
Dorothy & Jack Bert, son *Matthias* 8/16
Jovanna & Joseph Bevilacqua, son *Donato "Danny" Bevilacqua* 8/20
Richard & Jo Bewley, son *Kevin Bewley* 8/24
Thomas & Janet Cleary, son *Ryan* 8/21
Joane Cooper, son *Ben* 8/2
Evelyn M. Corrado, son *John A. Corrado* 8/5
Allison Crowder, daughter *Amber* 8/8
Dorothy & G. Robert Daily, Sr., son *David* 8/26
Lisa & David Dibello, son *Joey* 8/14
Jim and Patty Duffy, son *Michael Duffy* 8/8
Nancy & David Dykty, brother *Jim Sutton* 8/7
Tom & Irene Edmunds, son *Kyle Derek Edmunds* 8/1
Ron & Sue Gamza, daughter & grandson *Rachel & Troy* 8/22
Rita Gibbons, son *Paul Gibbons* 8/13
Mary Lou Harrison, son *Lance* ♥*Scott* ♥*Harrison* 8/4
Beatrice K Hildebrandt, son *John R. Hildebrandt* 8/26
Marie & Ken Hofmockel, son *Douglas Hofmockel* 8/27
Jan & Dan Jackson, son *John Jackson* 8/18
Michael & Betsy Jarrett, son *Michael Jarrett* 8/13
Vern & Joyce Kaiser, son *Michael* 8/4
Joan Kingslake, daughter *Ann Kingslake Woods* 8/3
Sue Lawlor, son *Jim* 8/24
Sherri Leco, daughter *Sommer Leigh Leco* 8/4
Kathleen & John Leeper, son *Shaun Michael Leeper* 8/17
Janet Leflar, son *Scott* 8/11
John & Nancy Logue, daughter *Heather Logue* 8/16
Timothy & Maxine Lurowist, daughter *Kristine* 8/24
Mary Mac Farland, son *Marc* 8/4
Bonnie MacDonald, son *R. Scott Geddes* 8/30
Anna E Marchese, son *Matthew Paul Marchese* 8/28
Diane Mazzagatti, son *John Pirocchi, Jr.* 8/3
Sue McMaster, cousin *Patty* 8/30
Joanne Michini, son *Alfred J. Michini, II* 8/2
Alexandra Milas, daughter *Nicole Penelope Wiseley* 8/23
Andrew Miller, daughter *Perri* 8/21
Kathleen Mitchel, daughter *Danielle* 8/21

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS continued

John B. & Lillian Neff, son *Patrick Neff* 8/30
Sharon Ott, daughter *Amber* 8/12
Joan Palumbo, son *Michael* 8/4
Marie Poulsen, grandson *Jerry August Warfel* 8/12
Chris Poulsen, nephew *Jerry* 8/12
Sharyn & Joe Pozzuolo, son *Joey Brad Pozzuolo* 8/26
Joe & Marti Purifico, son *Jeffrey* 8/3
Elise Rice, son *Raymond Anthony Rice* 8/29
Bonnie Rosen, son *Troy* 8/30
Becky Rotkowski, brother *Brian* 8/17
Beverly & Joe Rush, daughter *Kelsey* 8/27
Marie Schmeltzer, son *Sam "Sonny" Schmeltzer* 8/22
Pamela Schneibolk, brother *Douglas Hofmockel* 8/27
Harry & Carol Schultz, son *Brian Andrew Schultz* 8/23
Janet & Jonathan Schultz, brother *Marc Ernest Stein* 8/17
Susan Snyder, son *Brian* 8/24
Lorraine Spear, daughter *Kimberly Jean Spear* 8/15
Susan & Ron Spencer, son *Rob* 8/21
Elaine & Joe Stillwell, daughter *Margaret Mary O'Connor* 8/23
Karen & Alan Stoner, daughter *Holly Patricia Stoner* 8/11
Fred & Irene Sutton, son *Jim Sutton* 8/7
Tracey Sutton-Vitabile, brother *Jim Sutton* 8/7
Pety Suy & Matthew Kuchler, son *Ethan* 8/22
Hellmut Theil, son *Hellmut Theil, Jr.* 8/2
Thomas & Sara Thiermann, daughter *Heather Bruce Thiermann* 8/26
Akhil & Judy Tripathi, son *Sunil* 8/29
Tina Ulshafer, son *Jimmy* 8/22
Pat Villante, daughter *Patty* 8/30
Andy & Peg Yanoviak, daughter *Elizabeth "Betsy" Hershman* 8/6

AUGUST ANNIVERSARIES

Emily L. Alm, son *Bryan W. Alm* - 8/23
Chip Arena, son *Nick* - 8/1
Lisa Bellopede, son *Johnny* - 8/12
Dorothy & Jack Bert, son *Matthias* - 8/29
Tom & Kathy Biggar, granddaughter *Ava Nobles* - 8/28
Adam Blasucci, brother *Danny* - 8/1
Joe & Maryann Bucci, son *Dante* - 8/13
Joann & Gary Chavez, son *Christopher Dale Chavez* - 8/4
Mary & John Chelius, son *John J. Chelius, Jr.* - 8/24
Wendy Coleman, daughter *Gabrielle* - 8/18
Liz & Scott Conaghan, brother *Jan* - 8/27
Joane Cooper, son *Ben* - 8/2
Jean & Bill Cotter, son *Patrick Cotter* - 8/11
Carol Curtiss, grandson *Kurt* - 8/20
Dorothy & G. Robert Daily, Sr., son *G. Robert Daily, Jr.* - 8/10

AUGUST ANNIVERSARIES CONTINUED

Kimberly De Simone, daughter *Lacey* - 8/13
Antoinette & John DiDonato, son *John Jr.* - 8/17
Scott & Charlene Fazekas, son *Eric Scott Fazekas* - 8/13
Richard & Martha Fenoglio, daughter *Judith Fenoglio Daw* - 8/6
Mary Field, daughter *Lindsay Field* - 8/19
daughter *Karolin Field* - 8/13
Lisa Foos, son *Curtis* - 8/12
Denise & Edward Frazier, son *Akhir* - 8/25
Molly Gehring, son *Daniel* - 8/26
Angela Giannantonio, son *Anthony* - 8/2
Stephanie Grier, son *John "JD" Grier* - 8/17
Tim & Rosemarie Griffiths, son Timothy Griffiths - 8/17
Tom & Judy Hahn, daughter *Erica Hilley* - 8/23
Janet Higgins, son *Nicholas* - 8/1
Joan Jagers, son *John Costello* - 8/18
Lori Joseph, son *Andy* - 8/29
Janet & Dave Keller, son *Joseph E. Keller* - 8/21
brother *Thomas A. Keller* - 8/10
Greg & Anita Lewicki, son *Eric Stephen Lewicki* - 8/20
John & Nancy Logue, daughter *Heather Logue* - 8/23
Kathleen & Hugh Martin, Jr., son *Colin John "C.J." Martin* - 8/16
Jeff and Kathy McCarron, daughter *Sarah* - 8/14
Robert & Marjorie Meckley, son *Douglas Meckley* - 8/16
Kathleen Mitchel, daughter *Danielle* - 8/21
Joanne Morasco, son *Robert* - 8/6
Jenn Nobles, daughter *Ava Ruth Marie* - 8/28
Carol & Dennis O'Connor, son *Michael O'Connor* - 8/23
Patricia Peraino, brother *Anthony* - 8/2
Susan Pollock, son *Brendan Rosko* - 8/17
Marge Randolph, husband *Bob Fixter* - 8/18
Thomas & Jeri "Bubbles" Reinert, mother *Theresa Volpe* - 8/23
Thelma Rosen, son *Thomas Grisafi* - 8/24
Susan & John Rutland, son *Justin Rutland* - 8/30
Carol Sannella, son *David Sannella* - 8/31
Rosemarie Scott-Griffiths, stepson *Timothy F. Griffiths* - 8/17
Marie Shippen, son *Michael Morgan* - 8/29
Robert & Nell Shoemaker, daughter *Brynn Shoemaker* - 8/9
Edie Smith, son *John Seddon "Sed" Wilson* - 8/20
Linda Sposato, daughter *Bernadette Funaro* - 8/24
Elaine & Joe Stillwell, son *Denis E. O'Connor, III* - 8/6
Walter & Irene Stolarczyk, daughter *Barbara Stolarczyk* - 8/10
Juan & Casey Terrero, son *Jalen* - 8/31
Judy Tomarelli, son *Daniel Robert Tomarelli* - 8/10
Jack, Bobbie and Ross Trotter, daughter/sister *Megan* - 8/26
Steven Tucker, son *Patrick Ryan* - 8/18
Kevin Welde, brother *John Welde* - 8/14
Carolyn & Tom Yuhas, son *Eric Whitelock* - 8/17

Before the death of a child, in an intact marriage both contribute to a mutually satisfying relationship. The following are areas of sharing before the death and where lack of sharing occurs afterwards.

Before, in family activities, couples shared what happened during the day, etc. After the death, they may have an initial sharing regarding the funeral and everything relating to the child, but not to them as a couple. Emotional support was a balancing act before the death. Often there is no emotional support afterwards, because each is so wrapped up in individual grief. People in grief become introspective - a typical thought is how am I going to go on? Before the death there was mutual concern for each other's well-being; afterwards the concern is turned inward. While before the death there was interest in each other's work, hobbies, and activities, afterwards nothing has meaning.

Males deal with grief differently from females because they are expected to be strong emotionally, to not show emotion, to not cry after the funeral. Society does not allow males to show anger over the death. As providers, men go back to work soon after and are away from where the memories are. They do not have as much time to think about what happened. As protectors, they may be feeling guilt. "Have I failed to protect my child in some way?" Also, there may be a feeling of wanting to protect the spouse by not being too emotional, by being "strong."

Men are more self-sufficient, especially in the emotional area. Men are not likely to share very well; this hurts their ability to grieve. Men hurt as much as women do, but usually do not show it until something triggers it. A man may talk about many things like sports and politics, but rarely is there someone with whom he can share his feelings. Men escape to the job, to outside activities. It is hard to find someone with whom to share feelings. Men do not usually recognize that it is all right to feel depressed.

Society says it is all right for a woman to cry and to talk about the loss. Women usually have a network with other women, although some of those making up the network may drop the woman because of not being able to face what has happened. Women set the tone for the family. When in grief, her responses set the tone for the family atmosphere and can be devastating. Because women are the primary child-caring persons, the mother may be the one feeling guilty because she had responsibility for the child's everyday care. Women are given more prescriptions for tranquilizers than men because of doctors' attitudes.

How do couples reconcile these variables? What can they do to lessen the impact? Men should take it easy regarding outside activities. Emphasis should be placed on getting into the business of grieving, even isolating oneself at times to be able to grieve. Men should find someone with whom to talk, preferably another bereaved father. Don't choose a woman because a man is too vulnerable emotionally and an unhealthy situation could develop. Men are "shaky" on accepting a group experience. If anger is what a man feels, he should express it by channeling it into something physical - be angry at something, not at a person. Daily exercise that is appropriate for the individual is another way of channeling aggression. Men should make a concerted effort to learn how to cry. Crying is a natural response; tear ducts have a natural purpose. Find a catalyst - a photo of your child, an article of clothing - anything that will make you cry. No one else need know about the crying if you go into another room. Some men find it takes much time before they feel free to cry, but once they do, it is then easier to continue to cry in private.

The woman in the bereaved couple should remember that she needs friends, especially other bereaved mothers. She should schedule time away from her job if she is a working mother, if nothing more than a flexible coffee break schedule. Non-working mothers should use a baby sitter and plan time away from the usual environment. It is vital to nurture yourself. Physical exercise helps overcome depression and anger. Ask for help if you need it. If someone says, "What can I do?" give them something to do - shop, baby sit, clean house, write notes, something that will help you; it will also be good for the volunteer.

Until a death occurs, husband and wife behavior patterns within a family are predictable; afterwards, they are different. In the new husband-wife relationships don't try too much too fast. Drop expectations; be patient with each other. Respect how the other grieves and his timetable for doing it; no two people grieve exactly the same way or at the same pace.

If one spouse does not show grief, it does not mean memories are forgotten. Spend time together even if you have to schedule it. Each spouse is a reminder of the loss; for this reason they may even avoid each other. There may be feelings of guilt for allowing yourself to feel good when your child is dead. Therefore, resume slowly and with patience. It is important to be able to say, "I am angry about what happened to our child, but it does not mean I love you any less.

*"Adapted from an article by **Bill and Barbara Schatz** - TCF, Bothell, WA*

SHARED THOUGHTS ON HEALING, BUT NEVER FORGETTING

We lost our son Douglas 34 years ago. I did not run away from anything. I met it all head-on, but all the while, feeling the intensity of the pain would last a lifetime. **I did my grief work**, I shared my grief with most anyone who wanted to listen (probably with some who did not want to listen). After a while, I noticed I did not have the need to speak of my grief, and could find healing in listening and trying to comfort other's pain. This played a big role in my becoming functional again. For the most part, my life is productive, and filled with anticipation of looking for a tomorrow.

The one thing I cannot get past is feeling the pain for the newly bereaved. Because I have "been there" their pain becomes my pain. Several years ago our steering committee decided it would be beneficial for those attending a Compassionate Friends meeting for the first time, to meet separately. Ken & I were the Chapter Leaders, and having previously talked to most of these people by phone gave me some insight on their background, therefore I seemed the logical one to facilitate this group.

This was a very good experience for me. It reiterated that we heal, but we don't forget. Perhaps, the remembering is what gives us compassion and the desire to reach out to those hurting so badly. Much of the devastation of our loss is the same for all of us, the deep depression, anger, guilt, no interest in life around us, "going over the edge", worry about losing another, crying, can't cry, marital deterioration, unable to fulfill obligations with our family and work situations. I so want to make them better **now**, teach them to love again (particularly themselves), restore their faith in their supreme being, help them sort grief from true marital problems, and tell them we have all felt like we were going over the edge, **but didn't**.

It seems so little to offer, "your feelings are normal, you will get better, and become functional again". If the newly bereaved could **truly believe** these words, then I guess that is a **lot** to offer. But I feel most of them are thinking "you don't know how deep I have fallen in the pit" and this transition could never happen to me. (This was my reaction in the early stages) Believe me, we know where the bottom is, we've been there. We can learn to smile again; we can even learn to live again, once we have let go of some of the pain. Be patient, this doesn't happen soon. If it has not been long enough for you to see progress, look at those at The Compassionate Friends meetings, who have moved ahead in their grief. They didn't love any less, they have not forgotten how intense your pain can be, and they are just in a different place in their grief. Many have stayed to help you through your loss; their very presence says its possible to survive. **They are healing, but never forgetting.**

I still need to spend quiet time with my beloved son Douglas and grandson Steven, but the intense sharp pain has softened, and does not control very being.

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

STARTING OVER AGAIN

As parents, how many times have we told our children to try, try again? “You can do it, just start over,” we’d say, be it a coloring book not kept within the lines, learning to tie shoes, school assignments, or later the other difficulties that life brings.

Little did we think that this well meaning advice we gave out of love and concern for our children’s well being would be the words that we now must follow. Hang on. Don’t give up. Try again and start over. All this now applies to us. Had the situation been reversed we could not have wanted our children to live out the rest of their lives in pain and unable to go on. We would have wanted them to continue on, not in constant sorrow, but with hope for renewal and better days ahead. As we have said to them, they would be throwing right back to us, it is a very hard road that you must travel, but you can do it. What you wanted for me, I want for you. Do what you have to, to find your way out of the dark tunnel and when you fall, pick yourself up and start over again. You can do it. What we wanted for our children is not less than they would want for us. If we could hear them right now, they would be saying “LIVE, for life is but a moment”, “LOVE, for that is what really matters”, and go on for we shall be together again some day.

Mary Ann Lambden, TCF Gloucester County, NJ

I KNOW YOU ARE LISTENING TO ME WHEN:

- * You come quietly into my private world and let me be.
- * You really try to understand me even when I am not making sense.
- * You grasp my point even when it is against your sincere convictions.
- * You realize that the hour I took from you has left you a bit tired and drained.
- * You allow me the dignity of making my own decisions even though you think they may be wrong.
- * You do not take my problem from me but allow me to deal with it in my own way.
- * You hold back from giving me a word of “good advice”.
- * You do not offer me religious solace when you sense I am not ready for it.
- * You give me enough room to discover for myself what is really going on.
- * You accept my gift of gratitude by telling me how it makes you feel good by being helpful.

Glen Crawford, TCF, Perth, West Australia

THE END OF SUMMER

The branches dance as the gentle wind
rustles through the leaves.

I listen for your name

I do not hear it.

The birds chirp and sing
as they fly to the feeders

I listen for the melody that echoes your voice,

It is not there.

The fluffy clouds float across the sky
creating ever-changing pictures as they move.

I look for your name in the colors

I do not see it.

I sit quietly observant in this sylvan place

I hear you, I see you, I feel you

here in my heart.

Carol Silverman

TCF - Abington, PA Chapter

WRITINGS BY KEVIN HOFMOCKEL FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF HIS BROTHER, DOUGLAS

DOUG

This was my brother, taken from me
 His body now dead, his spirit set free
 His friends all mourn, life that's past
 And learn so young that life won't last
 When life must end with so few years
 It fills the heart with sorrow's tears
 He lived his life, as all men should

He took life's best, and worst the same
 And fought so hard to win the game
 But in the end, it's not the score
 Or length of play that matters more
 But love he shared before the end
 And joy he gave to each his friend.

(written one month after Doug's death)

MY BROTHER

I heard a tear fall, not a sound
 It had landed by the tree.
 I heard the boy cry in the ground
 "I close my eyes to see".
 The troubled lad, he knows not why
 He left his home so soon.
 The time has come for him to die
 And end the silent tune.
 So now I look to see his face
 And see it on the wall.
 My brother is now through the race
 And he has beat us all.
(written 2 months after Doug's death)

MEMORIES OF DOUG

I close my mind, and fight the thoughts,
 that haunt me even still.
 The winter night, the sudden crash,
 the road beside the hill.
 The tree's still there, it hurt it not,
 the screeching is long since gone.
 So why do thoughts keep turning back
 to just before that dawn?
 It still sounds clear, the thoughts and sounds,
 that brought me there that night.
 The tears that fell, and prayers we said,
 to help him with his fight.
 Time passes by, and clears my head,
 but never can it clear that night for all
 of endless time.
(written 3 months after Doug's death)

THOUGHTS OF DOUG

His spirit's here, or is it gone?
 It left a while ago.
 Sometimes I feel him by my side,
 and then I feel him go.
 He follows me and gives me strength,
 then leaves for some far place.
 And then again behind the door,
 I think I see his face.
 He stays so near, I think because,
 he left some things undone.
 Some things to see, some words to say,
 a race that wasn't run.
 But soon he'll have to leave this earth,
 and find a place on high.
 For this is not a spirit's life,
 but where a man must die.
(written 2 months after Doug's death)

IT'S TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

It's half a year, he's left us now
 it's time to say goodbye.
 His body's gone, it lives no more
 it's time to let him die.
 I've held on tight, onto his soul
 and kept him close to me.
 The time has come to let him loose
 and set his spirit free.
(written 6 months after Doug's death)

I SAID I COULD NOT DO IT...BUT I DID

Exactly 8:05 AM, Friday, July 9, 1971, was the last time I looked at my eight-year-old daughter with her eyes open. I walked beside her as they rolled her down the hall to the elevator that would take her down to the operating room for her simple, routine tonsillectomy.

At exactly 1:30 PM, that afternoon, I was told that she was dead. I said then, I could not live a day without her. I just could not do it.

BUT I DID

During the drive home, I said I would never be able to walk in that house without her. I said I could not do it.

BUT I DID

As I walked in that empty house, someone quickly, ran and shut her door – the door to her room, where she kept all the things she loved. The room where she played and slept. I said I could never go in there again. I said I could not do it.

BUT I DID

When they said, “Come, let’s go to the funeral, the Rosary, the Mass”, I said I could not do it.

BUT I DID

When a few weeks later, a dear friend came to my door and said, “Come let’s go out and enjoy lunch.” I said I could not do it.

BUT I DID

For months that followed, I just knew my life would never be the same, and it wasn’t. All the things I could not do, did get done. All the life I said I could not live, did get lived, differently, but I did live. Now comes today – 16 years later. I have to admit I had to look it up to be sure. Sixteen years. Palmer Ann would have been 24 years old. I had to stop and think about that, too.

I stood before her portrait today and stared a long, long time, and yes, I remembered the pain with total recall of July 9, 1971. I reach out, touching what’s left of my memory of her and I offered up a prayer of thanksgiving to God – a prayer of gratitude, for giving me such a beautiful eight years with a loving daughter, and most of all, the opportunity to be able to stand there and realize that I could not do it, but I did.

YES I DID

And each month when I come to a Compassionate Friends meeting with you, the new member, I share the pain that I know you are feeling – that hopelessness of the future. I smile quietly to myself, because inside I know a secret – you will be okay. You will touch again, love again, laugh again, and live again. After all, I said I could not do it but I did and YOU WILL TOO!

Betz Crump, TCF, Ft. Lauderdale, FL

GRATITUDE: THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

I am convinced that the real key to happiness is gratitude. I did not come upon this insight. I learned it from Dennis Prager, a wonderful and gifted man who is both author and talk show host for KNBC radio in Los Angeles. I give him all the credit. But I have thought a lot about this idea after my son, *Mark*, died seven years ago.

At first, I was offended by people who smiled or even laughed during The Compassionate Friends meetings. These were the people who seemed to have somehow re-entered the land of the living. How dare they greet each other with hugs. How dare they laugh. How dare they appear normal when their children have died. But over the last seven years. I have learned three valuable lessons:

Life goes on and we must too. Gradually the pain eases and the warm memories replace the sadness. Gradually we return to life. One day we find that it is 11:00 in the morning and we have not thought about our child yet. At first we feel guilt. But then we also realize we are going forward. We will never forget. But we decide that the loss of our child will not be the all-consuming factor in our life. We choose to enjoy friends again. We choose to go out to dinner again. We choose to laugh again. I am convinced that this is what our children would want for us. The pain does not bring our child back. It only makes us miserable without end.

Become grateful for what we have, not focused on what we have lost. I see people in our chapter meetings who have gone through “every parent’s nightmare” and want no part of life again. But, I ask that these compassionate friends also think about the ways they have been blessed, as well as hurt. In my experience, most people have more to be thankful for than they realize, health, other children, a loving family, a career they enjoy, financial security, life in a free country, a faith that works for them, a true best friend, a spouse whom they love. Nobody has it all. But compared to most of the world, we have a lot.

The life we now lead will be better than it would have been. That does not make our child’s death a good thing. It just means that our child’s life mattered, and it has changed us forever. It means that in some small way the world will be better because our child lived, and we are the ones who can make it so. We have a new sense of priorities. We don’t “sweat the small stuff.” We know what matters because we know what is irreplaceable. And we know how deeply other people hurt, because we, too, have been there. “We know how they feel.”

And when our life is different and better because our child lived, then that child is never forgotten. Each of us would do anything in the world to go back in time, but we can’t. It is up to us now to go forward, and we can.

Richard Edler,
Served on the The Compassionate Friends
National Board of Directors,
during his tenure he served as President.



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We talk, we listen, we share, we care

The Compassionate Friends Credo

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us. Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships. We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength; while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression; while others radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

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