

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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

DECEMBER 2010

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

- Dec 2** General Sharing
Collection of Gifts for First Step (see page 3)
- Dec 12** 14th World Wide Candle Lighting (see page 3)
Collection of Gifts for First Step (see page 3)
- Jan 6** General Sharing & Death by Suicide
- July 15-17, 2011** 34th National Conference

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: RECORD KEEPER, DIANA CLARK
PLEASE SEND ALL OTHER CHAPTER MAIL
TO CHAPTER LEADER
RHONDA GOMEZ**



Valley Forge Chapter

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VOLUNTEER NEEDED FOR CO-LEADER

If you have resolved some of your grief, and feel capable of helping other bereaved families, it can be very healing to reach out to others in pain. The Chapter is looking for a volunteer to accept the position of Co-Leader with Rhonda. If interested, please contact Rhonda Gomez. Her contact information is on the front page of this newsletter.

NEW FRIENDS

Herb & Karen Grant sons *Ryan* (12) & *Shaun* (29)
Terry & Susan Weikel daughter *Jennifer*(32)
Nancy Willis son *Alex* (19)

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.

NOVEMBER REFRESHMENTS

Frank Gomez in memory of all children and siblings.
Marie & Ken Hofmockel in memory of all children of TCF members.

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

Myer Bobrow, in loving memory of *Steven Schneibolk* (21)
Carl & Cathy Helwig, in honor of son *Michael* (24)
Joyce, Vernon, & Michael Kaiser, in memory of son & brother *Brian's* birthday 11/9.
Fred & Irene Sutton in loving memory of our son *Jim* (21)

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

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS 14th WORLD WIDE CANDLE LIGHTING



Held annually the second Sunday in December, this year December 13th, 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 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 12th at 2 PM, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in the Sanctuary. (same church 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 who have died, but will never be forgotten. Let us ensure that their light may always shine.

SPEAKER

Reverend Phil Cherry has served as a minister in New York, Maine and Pennsylvania. He has been serving as a Hospice Chaplain for the past 15 years (two years in Crozer, and thirteen years in West Chester County).

Reverend Cherry is a very caring, calming, and compassionate chaplain. He helps grieving families with their spiritual needs after the loss of a loved one, and stays in contact with the grieving family for a year.

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 2nd meeting & December 12th 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.

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: **Additions or corrections to this list should be given to the editors, Marie & Ken Hofmockel.**

We will no longer list the birth and death years of deceased persons in our newsletter. We have concerns this information could be misused, and result in an adversity for the families.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Chris Aiello, brother *Louis (lou)* 12/24
Tai & Karen Bahn, daughter *Michelle Bahn* 12/15
Lori Bartholomew, brother *Matthew* 12/17
Eleanor Brennan, grandson *Jonathan Masiak* 12/20
Ben Breskman, son *Brian* 12/11
Debie & Stephen Carr, daughter *Dana Carr* 12/14
Jennifer Catanese, son *Andrew* 12/7
Libby Cavallaro, sister *Theresa* 12/29
Benjamin E. Cohen, daughter *Donna Lynne Cohen* 12/9
Anita Conway, son *Daniel* 12/9
Jean & Bill Cotter, son *Patrick Cotter* 12/20
Bobbie Coyle, son *Whitney Coyle* 12/23
Antoinette & John DiDonato, son *Kenneth (Kenny)* 12/15
Robert Dilbeck, son *Daniel Dilbeck* 12/20
Maura & Chuck Dombroski, son *Paul Dombroski* 12/2
Joseph & Patsy Dooley, son *Peter J. Dooley* 12/22
Ed & Sue Duffy, son *Peter* 12/12
June & Tsuneo Fujita, daughter *Sharon Kimi Fujita* 12/29
Sherry Goldberg, son *Neal* 12/14
Susan Goldberg, brother *Neal* 12/14
Sofie & Lige Grahn Jr, son *Richard Grahn* 12/7
Jack & Freda Gross, daughter *Linda Joy Gross* 12/28
Christine Hertzog, son *Nicholas* 12/13
Joan Kellett, son *Daniel Thomas Kellett* 12/7
Wendy Kuhn, brother *David* 12/19
Teresa & Bill Lattanze, daughter *Jodi Noell Lattanze* 12/19
Lorice McDonald, son *Oral* 12/11
Pat Miller, son *Nathan* 12/2
Fran & Kathy Moran, daughter *Denise Nicole Moran* 12/31
Ann Murray, son *Brian Rapoport* 12/2
George W. Nase, son *Brian D. Nase* 12/16
Betty Jane Peters- Neilson son *Martin A Peters* 12/8
Bonnie Nimerfroh, son *David* 12/19
Joseph O'Neil, daughter *Beverley A. Schlotterer* 12/23
Pamela Reese, daughter *Laura Ann Peskoff* 12/20

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS continued

Maureen & David Rich, daughter *Mallory Kirby Rich* 12/4
Morris Romano, daughter *Diane Romano Donovan* 12/16
Thelma Rosen, brother *David Beeler* 12/24
Eileen Smith, son *Craig* 12/17
John & Rose Stanley, daughter *Susan Stanley* 12/4
Ronda Stansbery, daughter *Susan Anne Stansbery Stamman* 12/22
Edward & Mary Stimson, son *Keith Stimson* 12/29
Priscilla Thoroughgood, daughter *Kendra Enochs* 12/5
Judy & Bert Tomarelli, son *Daniel Robert Tomarelli* 12/19
Marie Torrey, sister *Trudy* 12/12
Jackie Ward, grandson *Anthony* 12/1
Laura & Leo Weishew, brother *Steven McGowan* 12/28

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Nina Ansel, daughter *Jenny* - 12/21
Carole & Henry Bailey, son *Matthew J. Bailey* - 12/21
Richard & Jo Bewley, son *Kevin Bewley* - 12/29
Lisa Bledy, sister *Danielle Bledy* - 12/4/
Cecile Buonocore, son *John Buonocore, III* - 12/27
Catherine Chan, son *Chanlan Lee* - 12/19
Irene Collins, son *Artie Zeigler* - 12/24
Martin & Mary Conway, son *Neal* - 12/10
Nina Coppolella, daughter *Nina Marie Tumolo* - 12/11
Carole and Kevin Creighton, son *Ryan Kent Creighton* - 12/6
Reno & Bonnie Crescimone, son *Jonathan* - 12/21
Bill & Donna Deasey, daughter *Michelle Deasey* - 12/19
Bob & Madeline Deery, brother *Ronald J. Deery* - 12/20
Helen Deery, son *Ronald J. Deery, Jr.* - 12/20
Susan Dehlinger, daughter *Amy M Dehlinger* - 12/7
Antoinette & John DiDonato, son *Kenneth (Kenny)* - 12/5
Barbara Frederick, son *Michael J. Frederick* - 12/14
John Gething, son *Adam Gething* - 12/7
Beverly & Marty Halvorsen, Jr., son *Erik M. Halvorsen* - 12/24
Michelle Hillstrom, daughter *Jen* - 12/20
Anthony & Carol Iacobucci, son *Anthony Iacobucci* - 12/13
Enid M. Irizarry, daughter *Lisette M. Molina* - 12/25
Carl & Dorothy Johnson-Speight, daughter *Carlana Speight* - 12/13
son *Khaaliq Jabbar Johnson* - 12/6
Millie Jones, grandson *Shawn Dian* - 12/23
Edward & Janet Kellenbenz, daughter *Cynthia* 12/13
Russell L. Kinder, daughter *Susanna B. Kinder* - 12/27
Joan Kingslake, daughter *Ann Kingslake Woods* - 12/31
Al & Sue Koenig, daughter *Emily Grace Koenig* - 12/11

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES continued

Howard & Stacy Koller, daughter *Kaitlin* - 12/18
Teresa & Bill Lattanze, son *William Noel Lattanze* - 12/25
Barb & Larry Lauchle, son *Gray* - 12/18/
Eleanor Lee, son *Tom* - 12/4
Timothy & Maxine Lurowist, daughter *Kristine* - 12/24
Norine & William McDevitt, Jr., son *Sean Francis McDevitt* - 12/6
Joanne F Michini, son *Alfred J. Michini*, - 12/14
Alfred J. Michini, son *Alfred J. Michini, II* - 12/14/
Alexandra Milas, brother *Nicholas Stathes* - 12/19
Gerald & Margaret Milice, son *Gerald Milice* - 12/11
Paul & Jackie Mimless, daughter *Stephanie* 3/20/1985 - 12/3
Audrey Morasco, son *Christopher Morasco* - 12/27
Philip & Patricia Newton, son *Seth Newton* - 12/27
Dorothy Noel, son *Stephen Schark* - 12/10
Emil Nunez, son *Oliver Nunez* - 12/24
Carol & Dennis O'Connor, brother *Jack Coladonato* - 12/3
Marianne & William O'Connor, daughter *Kelly Ann O'Connor* - 12/27
Peggy Orner, daughter *Debra* - 12/19
Roy Redman, daughter *Linda Inez Redman* - 12/16
Tony & Toni Riccardi, son *David Riccardi* - 12/1
Elise Rice, son *Raymond Anthony Rice* - 12/9
Margaret & Robert Rooney, daughter *Sharon Rooney* - 12/8
Toby & Herb Rosenberg, daughter *Dina Rosenberg* - 12/9
Bonnie Russo, son *Matthew* - 12/10
Melissa Schnitzler, brother *Richard Jon'Masso* - 12/21
Abigail Schwartz, mother *Barbra* - 12/26
Dorothy Shepherd, son *Keith* - 12/10
Art & Carol Silverman, daughter *Cheryl Beth Silverman* - 12/16
Holly Silverthorne, son *Spencer Silverthorne* - 12/16
Mike & Beverly Smith, son *Ryan* - 12/11
Judy & Jim Snyder, son *David Snyder* - 12/13
Lisa M Spinks, brother *Robert* - 12/9
Linda Spinks, son *Robert* - 12/9
Karen & John Sprouse, son *John James* - 12/30
Ronda Stansbery, daughter *Susan Anne Stansbery Stamman* - 12/22
Fred Sutton, mother *Pearl Collins* - 12/19/02
Emanuel and Claudia Utti, stepson *Richard Jon'Masso* - 12/21
Beth Wagner, son *Ryan* - 12/17
Shirley Weir, daughter *Lee Ann Weir Beckmann* - 12/16
daughter *Susan Weir-Grays* - 12/22
Christine & Raymond Welker, nephew *Mark Ayer* - 12/22

SHARED THOUGHTS ON THE HOLIDAYS

This time of year that we have always faced with joy and excitement, frequently turns to fear for those facing their first Christmas, Chanukah, or whatever your choice of holiday is (or perhaps your second year, that still seems like the first). The tinsel, holly, music, and joy around us seem overwhelming.

Remember, we are grieving people, and are very limited to what we can give. To reduce pressure on ourselves, it helps to be realistic and don't over commit. Failing to follow through adds to our depression and lowers our self-esteem.

It is important to take time out to grieve and express our emotions, which can relieve a lot of stress. We have a right to mourn even though those around us are celebrating a joyous occasion, and those around us have a right to be joyous. When analyzing our depression over the holidays, we have to admit we are feeling so low because of missing those wonderful times, which we too, enjoyed. For now, it may be necessary to separate ourselves from the celebration, and concentrate on the greatest gift we have ever given our child, grandchild, or sibling, the gift of love. That gift can still be given to our loved one. For those of us who have a religious belief, it may be a time to reflect on our faith.

Shopping for family and friends sometimes creates a feeling of guilt, because we cannot buy for the missing family member. It helped me to begin by treating myself to seven new ceramic Christmas balls with each child's name and birthdate. I did not put Doug's death date on his, for it is his life I want to remember. I also bought a wreath for my front door, that I planned to take to the cemetery the week before Christmas. This made me feel that I could bring part of his home to him. Each year I purchase a new decoration for our home in his remembrance. I don't announce it to anyone, but I know why it's there. These things help to give the feeling that he is not left out. This may not be good for everyone. You may want to find "your special remembrance" project to get you through.

It is important for us to discuss plans with other family members in our home. Firstly, to know what they need to get themselves through, and secondly, for you not to bear all the stress of decision making. Be flexible, there is no right or wrong rules, you can run away, or stay at home. Some stay at home and make changes. Others stay at home with no changes, and face it head on. (This was the best for me, because I have six surviving children) Sometimes well meaning non-bereaved individuals want us to lay our grief aside during the holidays. They don't understand our need to grieve. It is very appropriate to say, "I have to do this holiday my way, for I think this is best for me".

In my early stages of grief, I felt there would never be another happy holiday. The pain softens, and though it is different, I look forward to and enjoy holidays. I cannot expect you to believe this can happen to you, for I did not believe others before me. We must remember, even though our holiday is not good, it may be the best we can have, given the situation we are in. No matter where we spend our holiday our deceased loved one's memories will be with us. May you find hope to believe your holidays can be good again.

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

THE GRIEF OF MENTAL ILLNESS

I know now that my daughter, Laurie was mentally ill. I did not understand the meaning of this 20 years ago when her depression and “strange” behavior preceded a suicide attempt while in college. Despite all the help we could get for her, she succeeded in completing suicide five years later, at the age of 25, in 1980.

Her psychiatrist then agreed to talk to me -- he said, with tears in his eyes, she had been a serious schizophrenic patient. For reasons of patient confidentiality, I was not privy to this information earlier. WHY couldn't I have learned about this before it was too late?

The grief I felt as a bereaved parent was compounded by the truth of her illness. There is a stigma with mental illness. Society has been slow to understand and to accept mental illness. There is grief with mental illness -- for the loss of the child that we wanted to be normal. Why did this have to happen to my child?

Was this my fault? Guilt rears its ugly head. Why didn't I see the early signs that she needed help? I felt anger -- wanting to blame others for what happened. I was frustrated -- with the professionals who could not/did not “fix it.” I was disillusioned with the public and private mental health system and its limited resources for the mentally ill and their families. Laurie fell between the cracks and is gone.

Thirteen years later I have come to terms with her suicide. I know now there are many reasons for mental illness, most of which are beyond my control. Mental illness is a disease. It can be the result of genetics, a chemical imbalance in the brain, or a nutritional deficiency/allergy -- NOT bad parenting.

I have learned that in grief and in loss, most people want to/need to “talk about it.” The magic of sharing feelings and experiences with others who understand (because they've been there), is a healing process. For me, The Compassionate

Friends, a national peer-support organization for bereaved parents and siblings, has provided this outlet on a local and national level. I have also participated in a local chapter of The Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and have learned so much more about mental illness through sharing with others who are coping with this stigma and grief. The National Alliance for Mentally Ill slogan in 1991 was “the most shocking thing about mental illness is how little people understand it.” How true! How sad!

After Laurie's suicide, initially the most therapeutic healing for me was to publish a book of her writings, material I found expressing her thoughts, visions and frustrations from the ages of 15 to 25. This actual documentation of a mentally ill young person is poetic, loving, humorous, depressing and spiritual. Perhaps her words will help others to see and understand this disease. Her words express intuitive insights in a most articulate way, despite the message of helplessness and hopelessness. As a bereaved parent I felt a strong motivation to perpetuate the memory of Laurie in a positive way.

Public education, and acceptance of mental illness as a disease is helping to change attitudes. We are learning to be more open and honest about it. We are learning to cope and go on with our lives.

Maybe it was the mother in me, but I never thought I would lose her. Now through the grief and later understanding of this disease, I have found a new purpose in my life. Reaching out to help others caught in the quagmire of grief from mental illness, from suicide, from the death of a child, through support groups and writings, in turn has been a healing process for me too. I know that Laurie's 25 years on this earth have made a difference.

Carol Katz

TCF, Regional Coordinator, MA

FIRST STEP

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scott Mastley - TCF, Atlanta GA

HERE COMES THE HOLIDAY

Here they come closer everyday. No magic wand to keep them away. As much as we'd like to go to sleep and hope when we awaken, they'd be over, nothing will stop them. The Holidays, they are inevitable.

For many, this will be a first. For others, two, maybe three years and for some of us "veterans," five, ten or more years. There are some things that may help you cope in the days ahead.

Many bereaved parents feel pressured to adhere to the traditions of years past. If you choose not to send cards, shop, bake, entertain or whatever, do not feel guilty. Take care of yourself, do only what you feel you can handle no matter how much or how little. Shop through the catalogs. Buy goodies instead of baking if you want, make calls to the people important in your life. Some people have found getting away temporarily helps. Maybe only immediate family will make you more comfortable. Light a candle for your child, fill their stocking with letters, love notes, poems, etc. Most of all, do not use the little energy you have trying to make things as they were when your child was with you. Talk about your child to your family and friends who really care.

For those of us who walked through the lonely tunnel of grief and are able to experience joy and happiness once more, reach out to those who need us so desperately. Take the hand of the newly bereaved, let them know you care. Attend a meeting and seek out that person that needs your hug. Tell them "you've got a friend." By helping others, offering that spark of hope for the future will certainly aid our own healing powers.

Our lives are changed forever, a part of us never to be completely whole again. Yet, with the passage of time, friendship and love, we find ourselves actually looking forward to tomorrow and feel the peace and hope for the future.

Lois TenEyck TCF, Minneapolis

please don't tell me
it's time to let go
this grief is a friend
a palpable presence
a feeling so real
I can almost touch it
and almost see it
it comes without warning
from somewhere or nowhere
for any odd reason
or no reason at all
I have learned to accept
this unthinkable friend
no longer my enemy
no longer hell
neither raging nor crushing
no longer a vicious malevolent beast
with vacuous eyes
threatening my very existence
this grief is a vague
gentle ache always there
a longing that gnaws
at the edge of my soul
it haunts me in stillness
of dark endless nights
and long summer days
in winters harsh cold
and in soft autumn haze
in echoes of laughter
and fragments of song
in a voice now stilled
that I hear in a dream
in a young man ambling
alone in my mind
in some other place
and some other time
this grief is a part of
my journey through life
a bewildering journey
I can't understand
and I cannot let go
this grief is my friend

Tommy's mom

Submitted by **Mike's Mom**

HANUKKAH

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

Stephanie Hesse
 TCF Rockland Co. NY

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS

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

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

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

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

Wabash Valley Chapter
TCF Terre Haute, IN

CHRISTMAS LOVE

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

Kimberly Kearns Minetola
 TCF - Valley Forge, PA

RIVER OF TEARS

Four years gone, my tears still flow
 making a river who's rapids I know.
 Tossing my heart with grief, sorrow, regret
 looking to heaven my heart won't forget
 those Tears
 of Joy
 of Pride
 of Loss
 Crystal Rivulets are prayers, they
 strengthen the bridge
 To the Gate of eternity on God's
 Heavenly Ridge

Rose Cote
 TCF - Valley Forge, PA