



# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

## JUNE 2015

### 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

**Jun 5 General Sharing**

**July 2 General Sharing**

**July 10-12 TCF National Conference, Dallas, TX**  
See page 3

**Oct 9-11 2015 E. PA Regional Conference**  
See page 3 for information

**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 MEMBERS**

**Laureen Cole**, brother **Chris** (23)

**Theresa (Terri) Cole**, son **Chris** (23)

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**REFRESHMENTS**

**TCF-VF Chapter** in loving memory of all our children & siblings.

**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.

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**LOVE GIFTS**

**Mary Lou Harrison** in loving memory of my son, **L. ♥Scott♥Harrison** on his anniversary 6/12. How I love and miss you.

**Barbara Jacobs** in loving memory of my daughter, **Pamela Faye** (55) & for the enews.

**Karen Lapera** in loving memory of my son **Michael** on his anniversary 11/26.

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**TCF Facebook**

Join 22,000 people who are sharing their grief journey at The Compassionate Friends Facebook page. The page is designed to be informative and supportive. Check out the question or quote of the day. You can find the page by going to TCF's website home page at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) and clicking on the Facebook icon. Or you can go to Facebook and do a search for "The Compassionate Friends/USA." Join us and contribute to the conversation.

**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](mailto:fgomez@hybridpoplars.com)**

**THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA REGIONAL CONFERENCE**

As you know a Regional Conference is being planned for October 9-11, 2015 at the Radisson Hotel in King of Prussia, PA.

We hope you will take the opportunity to share the conference weekend with us. It will be an indescribable experience with bereaved families who have "been there", and know the depth of the pain. There are no strangers, or social barriers, everyone becomes an instant friend. We share our emotional feelings with one another.

There will be seasoned bereaved families, who have proven life can be meaningful once more. They have learned to love, laugh, and live again, and know the love and memories of our children and siblings have not diminished.

If you are interested in serving on the planning committee, please join us at the next planning meeting scheduled for June 14, 2015. This, and all planning meetings, will be held at the Radisson Hotel, King of Prussia, PA in the lower level.

**38th NATIONAL CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM**

Is available by mail from:  
PO Box 3693, Oak Brook, IL, 60522-3696  
or call:  
877-969-0010 or FAX 630-990-0246

On line registration available at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

**The Compassionate Friends National Conference 2015**



**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.**

**JUNE BIRTHDAYS**

Gary & Phyllis Adler, son *Matthew* 6/15  
Emily L. Alm, son *Bryan W. Alm* 6/3  
Julie Beasley, son *Aaron* 6/4  
Lisa Bellopede, son *Johnny* 6/24  
Lisa Bledy, sister *Danielle Bledy* 6/2  
Jeff & Donna Brown, son *Kenneth Bernstuel* 6/2  
Maureen Butler, son *Terence* 6/7  
Suzanne Carcarey, son *Eddie* 6/22  
Tom & Irene Cornely son *Tom* 6/29  
Rose Marie Cote, son *Mark J. Cote* 6/3  
Jamie (Germaine) Cote Weaver, brother *Mark Cote* 6/3  
Barbara Cotteta, granddaughter *Denise* 6/11  
Helen Deery, son *Ronald J. Deery, Jr.* 6/2  
Susan Dehlinger, daughter *Amy M. Dehlinger* 6/21  
Susan Dillman, daughter *Heather Lynne Dillman* 6/4  
Shirley & Herb Druker, daughter *Heidi* 6/11  
Colleen and Dan Fledderman, daughter *Amy* 6/2  
Denise & Edward Frazier, son *Akhir* 6/3  
Carolyn & Allen Gephart, son *Joseph Malec* 6/11  
Craig & Kathleen Gerland, daughter *Alexis* 6/20  
Linda & Steven Gilbert, daughter *Pamela Gilbert* 6/28  
Thomas & Anne Glenn, daughter *Lauren Glenn* 6/10  
Herb & Karen Grant, son *Shaun* 6/13  
Robert & Kathleen Grossi, son *James Michael Grossi* 6/30  
Brittany Hackman, brother *Brian* 6/3  
B Brooke Hackman, son *Brian* 6/3  
Ronald J. & Margaret Halas, daughter *Desiree A. Halas* 6/2  
Jack & Dee Heil, daughter *Susan Lynn Dina* 6/4  
Nancy Lee & Jerry Hess, son *Jerry R.L. Hess* 6/30  
Mark & Vicki Hoffman, son *Eric Daniel Hoffman* 6/4  
Tammy & Allen Howard, daughter *Brianna Nicole Howard* 6/9  
Carl and Dorothy Johnson-Speight, son *Khaaliq Jabbar Johnson* 6/26  
Janet & Dave Keller, son *Joseph E. Keller* 6/1  
Teresa & Bill Lattanze, son *William Noel Lattanze* 6/10  
Susan Leonard, grandson *Nathan* 6/3

**JUNE BIRTHDAYS continued**

Greg & Anita Lewicki, son *Eric Stephen Lewicki* 6/1  
Carl & Josie Malitsky, daughter *Cynthia Malitsky* 6/27  
Elaine Marino, 'daughter in law' *Lisa Marino* 6/1  
Barbara McClenahan, son *David McClenahan* 6/28  
Norine & William McDevitt, Jr, son *Sean Francis McDevitt* 6/29  
Barbara Meisenhelder, daughter *Renee Meisenhelder* 6/20  
Kathleen Mitchel, son *Steven* 6/25  
John & Mary Ann Murphy, son *Thomas Patrick Murphy* 6/16  
George & Estelle Null, daughter *Kathleen "Kathy" Null* 6/18  
Thomas & Demetra Patukas, son *George Thomas Patukas* 6/12  
Michele Paul, sister *Desiree Halas* 6/2  
Kathy & Jim Petrokubi, son *Andrew* 6/20  
Tony & Laurene Quercetti, daughter *Christine L. Quercetti* 6/5  
Marge Randolph, son *Doug Fixter* 6/19  
Ron & Sandy Ruth, son *Brian David Ruth* 6/15  
Beth Schad, son *Gage* 6/5  
Donna & Eric Schaertl, son *Jared M. Schaertl* 6/14  
Suzanne Schoenhut, son *Joe* 6/29  
Anna Schwarz, son *Jerrold Schwarz* 6/11  
Ann Sherwood, daughter *Martha Sherwood Fransway* 6/8  
Matthew Silverman, sister *Avery Silverman* 6/23  
Howard & Margorie Silverman, daughter *Avery Silverman* 6/23  
Sheila & Jim Smith, son *Seth Richter* 6/10  
Karl & Sue Snepp, son *Dave Snepp* 6/28  
Carole Solomon, niece *Avery Silverman* 6/23  
Philip & Ilene Spector, neice *Avery Silverman* 6/23  
Gerard & Jane Thimm, son *Gary Thimm* 6/18  
Allan Thomas, son *Tommy Odins* 6/22  
Mary Walker, daughter *Susan* 6/28  
Alice Weaver, daughter *Kristen* 6/7  
Kevin Welde, brother *John Welde* 6/6  
Laurie Wyche, son *Jameson Wyche* 6/27

**JUNE ANNIVERSARIES**

Chris Aiello, brother *Louis (Lou)* - 6/16  
Jim & Michelle Angelini, son *Danny* - 6/25  
Shirley & Lex Bono, son *Greg* - 6/13/  
Robyn Buseman, daughter *Maya Buseman-Williams* - 6/28  
Chris Carlton, brother *Eric* - 6/17  
Hazel Corbin, daughter *Dayle C Rutledge* - 6/18

**JUNE ANNIVERSARIES CONTINUED**

Tom & Irene Cornely, son *Daniel J. Cornely* - 6/24  
Evelyn M. Corrado, son *John A. Corrado* - 6/9  
Alex Crisanti, Jr., son *John Crisanti* - 6/3  
Joanne De Felice, son *Joseph* - 6/27  
Jim & Ruth Fairley, son *David Fairley* - 6/27  
Bill & Karen Flavin, son *Chad Flavin* - 6/18  
Carol Fritz, daughter *Kate Pawlowski* - 6/6/  
Marco & Patricia Giubilato, daughter *Robin Giubilato Zarelli* - 6/9  
Joe & Katie Glinski, son *Joey* - 6/21  
Sandra Greenly, son *Michael Greenly* - 6/28  
Kristen Hallman, brother *Joey* - 6/21  
Samuel & Mary Lou Hardman, son *Samuel J.* - 6/28  
Mary Lou Harrison, son *Lance ♥ Scott ♥ Harrison* - 6/12  
Robin Hayman, son *Bradley Hayman* - 6/21  
Jack & Dee Heil, daughter *Susan Lynn Dina* - 6/8  
Gail & Calvert G. Hess, Jr., son *Calvert G. Hess, III* - 6/18  
Jan & Dan Jackson, son *John Jackson* - 6/27  
Lesley Jones, son *Christopher* - 6/10/  
Luann Kalamon, son *Adam Michael* - 6/23  
Roxanne Kamilatos, daughter *Dina* - 6/30  
Wendy Kuhn, brother *David* - 6/6  
Teresa & Bill Lattanze, daughter *Jodi Noell Lattanze* - 6/14  
Susan Leonard, grandson *Nathan* - 6/3  
Sharon Mallozzi, son *Anthony* - 6/5  
Betty Manzi, grandson *Ronnie T. Seal, Jr.* - 6/2  
Elaine Marino, granddaughter *Kaitlyn Rose Boyer* - 6/22/04  
Sue McMaster, cousin *Patty* - 6/16  
Cameron and Sandra Meikle, daughter *Laura* - 6/13  
Kathleen Mitchel, son *Steven* - 6/29  
David & Donna Morrell, son *Matthew Morrell* - 6/27  
John & Mary Ann Murphy, daughter *Maureen Murphy* - 6/11  
son *Brian Michael Murphy* - 6/23  
Ann Murray, son *Jonathan Rapoport* - 6/15  
Bonnie Nimerfroh, son *David* - 6/6  
Maurice & Ruth Onraet, son *Thomas* - 6/29  
Deborah Osting, son *Christopher Daniel Osting* - 6/10  
Sharon Ott, daughter *Amber* - 6/8  
Sam & Palma Panichello, son *Joseph Panichello* - 6/7  
Linda & Andrew Peoples, Jr., son *Brian A. Peoples* - 6/27  
Raymond & Marguerite Posluszny, son *Alex Posluszny* - 6/16  
Margaret Rodalewicz, son *Shane Wooley* - 6/12  
Lisa and John Russo, son *Casey* - 6/23

**Barbara Smisko**, daughter *Linda* - 6/30  
**Janemarie Smith**, daughter *Beth Jovanovic* - 6/13  
**Karen & Alan Stoner**, daughter *Holly Patricia Stoner* - 6/13  
**Chris & Larry Teal**, son *Wade Teal* - 6/16  
**Allan Frank and Kay Shinnors**, son *Erik Shinnors* - 6/24  
**Thomas**, son *Tommy Odins* - 6/22  
**Priscilla Thoroughgood**, daughter *Kendra Enochs* - 6/17  
**Ann VanLandingham**, son *Eric VanLandingham* - 6/19  
**Pat Villante**, daughter *Laura* - 6/16  
**Jackie Ward**, grandson *Anthony* - 6/16  
**Alice Weaver**, daughter *Kristen* - 1/6  
**Sandra & Harry Wolfheimer**, daughter *Ann Marie Wolfheimer* - 6/19

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**ONE HAND ON THE STARS**

How do we count the lives she touched,  
The light she shed for years?  
How do we see the difference she made  
When we're looking through our tears?  
How do we know the things that are  
That never should have been  
Without her valiant heart that dared  
To fight, and fight again?  
How do we know what flowers will bloom  
From seeds of yesterday,  
What songs are sung and dreams begun  
Because she passed this way?  
How do we measure the shining place  
That time can never pale  
In all the hearts that cheered her on  
And willed her to prevail?  
How did her spirit soar beyond  
The suffering and the scars  
To live with one hand clutching hope  
And the other on the stars?  
We may not know what she left behind  
On the difficult path she trod...  
But we know this much: her life's brief touch  
Was from the hand of God.

*Author unknown*

**MISSING GRADUATE**

Parents happy faces all around me,  
With a glow from within,  
Pomp and Circumstance is playing,  
Now the program will begin.  
The graduates are lined up,  
They are coming down the aisle,  
Some have serious faces, yet  
Some have a little smile.  
I look down the aisle,  
Hoping for your face to come into sight,  
This is your class,  
It was to be your graduation night.  
All the graduates pass by,  
But none of them are you,  
A tug of my heart tells me,  
You are not here, your death is true.  
God call you home...  
I wanted you here in such a bad way.  
Looking into your classmates' faces  
Do they recall you, missing this day?  
Memories, sweet memories,  
Now fill my mind and heart.  
There will be no golden tassel  
This day for my Sweetheart.  
The Class is oh! so happy,  
This isn't the time to be blue.  
Now I must go shake a hand  
And get a hug or two.

*Emma Valenteen*

When a child dies, it is very acceptable for a mother to fall apart, depend on any and everyone around her, and openly grieve. But, our forefathers have taught us that males are to be stoic, control their emotions, and “be strong” for the entire family. Today’s males have contributed greatly to change this image, but it still needs much improvement for men to comfortably acknowledge their pain, not grieve in isolation, be temporarily dependent while grieving, and let the world know they hurt.

The social conditioning of males has created a major obstacle. Repressing feelings and expressions causes grief to move inward, preventing dealing with their grief. One of the best ways to overcome our grief, is to express it (“overcome” meaning getting to the point of it being tolerable). Sometimes self-focus is necessary for our healing. We all need emotional support when in the turmoil of grief, and the need has nothing to do with the gender. A male’s need to be self sufficient can send out false messages and isolate him from family and friends, who want to help. It is important for wives to feel needed by their husbands. It is very difficult to grieve together, but it is necessary to acknowledge the other’s pain. When family and friends ask how other family members are doing (and fail to inquire about the father’s condition) they minimize his pain, by inferring he is not a primary griever. A father is as much a primary griever as his wife.

We bury our children, but we do not bury love or grief. We do not need to make excuses for tears, that are shed because of the tremendous loss of someone we love dearly. The grief we hide prolongs our healing. We all tend to keep more inside as time passes. This is because we know most people do not understand the longevity of grief. Perhaps, we have helped to create this image by not being honest when we are asked how we are. After much time has passed, we usually won’t admit (to those who have not lost a child) that we are still so fragile, that the tidal wave of pain can come out of nowhere. One small incident can make our grief feel fresh, and cause a raging storm within.

If we had a choice, most of us would have traded places with our deceased child. We did not have this choice, but at some point, and certainly not in our early grief, we do have a choice to make a tolerable life for ourselves. It is not easy to forgive ourselves for our human faults (both real and imaginary) that we make while rearing our children. But forgiveness certainly helps to bring victory over our despair by easing our pain, and very necessary if we are to embrace our future once again. Facing the future can bring much pain to us in our early grief, for we can barely face the day, hour, or moment. Down the road, after some healing, we have to make a commitment to building a life for ourselves. It can never be the same, and that special something is always missing. But, we need to eventually get past that gut-wrenching, all-consuming pain and make a life we can live with. We must begin with small goals that are possible to achieve. It takes a long time to understand our children’s life was greater than the death. Their living changed our lives, and left us with a lot of unfinished love. The love is immortal, and can be more alive if we get control of our own life once again, and dedicate our living to their life and not their death.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel*, TCF Valley Forge

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### **A FATHER'S WISH**

As the day approaches, I wonder how I will react –  
Am I still a father?  
I will sit quietly, never allowing friends and family  
to see how I really feel.  
I miss my child, but I can't "break".  
I must remain strong, always be the "rock".  
I wish I could just let someone know how much I miss my little angel,  
how much I cry, and miss hearing "Dad, I love you".  
I am a father, but I wonder, will I just pretend, as usual,  
that the pain that is tearing me apart, doesn't bother me?  
Remember me, for I hurt too, on this special day, even though  
I don't let anyone see. *Author Unknown*

### 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 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.

*Author Unknown*

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### I'M MISSING YOU

I'm missing you -  
All day, ever day.  
On a bright summer morning, or  
When the moon is full.  
In the golden days of fall,  
As the storm clouds build and it's snowing  
When the willows begin to turn green -  
You are always with me,  
In my mind and in my heart.  
My brother, My Good Friend.  
I'm missing you.

*Kris Cunningham, TCF Moro, IL*

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A lot of time!  
A little space,  
A kind of quiet  
Resting place,  
Are what I need  
At times like these,  
A special spot  
Where I can grieve.

*Beth Pinion TCF - Andalusia, AL*

## HEALING A FATHER'S GRIEF

### ROLE PROBLEMS

Macho Man: "Big boys don't cry." So it begins in childhood - the suggestion that a man must always be strong, not showing softness, weakness, or tears. Reinforcing images continue within the family - father does not cry. And everywhere outside the family the boy sees what is supposed to be the desirable male - big, strong, like steel, and never crying. He sees him on television and movie screens, tough John Wayne in a hundred variations. He sees him in the advertisements and on the sports field. He sees him popular with the girls, at the school dance. By adulthood, the role is deeply into his mind.

Whatever may be said for or against this macho role, it definitely interferes with grieving. The emotions of grief are real and need to be expressed. The feelings of sadness and loss are overwhelming, but what is a strong man to do with them? What outlets are available to him? When the lump comes in the throat and moisture in the eyes, does he surrender and cry? Probably not, especially if other people are around. The conditioning interferes, the tears are checked, and attention is turned to something else.

The situation may be made worse by comments of friends, such as, "Fred, you're really handling this thing well - keep a stiff upper lip!" or "It's good to see you holding up - someone has to be strong through this whole thing!" or "George, How's your wife doing?" This is social conditioning at work - others reinforcing the role expectations for the grieving father.

### OVERCOMING ROLE PROBLEMS

Cry: Crying is the most effective, efficient way to handle the emotions of grief. Learn how to cry. If you think that you cannot, remember that you still have the same tear ducts you had as a child. They have not dried up. If there is anything worth using them for, surely this is it.

I had trouble crying. True, I cried at the hospital when I learned my son was going to die. I cried at the funeral. But I did not cry again until 18 months later. One Saturday when I was home alone, I walked past a picture of David taken on our last vacation. Overwhelming sadness hit me. I sat down and cried for half an hour. I could not believe it. After I cried, I actually felt better. Some of the tension inside had been relieved. On each of the next three weekends the same thing happened. No one knew. I was always alone. I only told my wife several months later, which shows how sensitive I still was about crying.

A helpful technique was given to me by a grief counselor (Iris Bolton). When you feel choked up, with tears in your eyes and a lump in your throat, but you cannot actually cry, pant rapidly. The short breaths make crying easier. Many bereaved fathers have used this panting exercise while deliberately recalling a memory. As in my case, a picture may do it. Some go to a particular place or find their child's favorite toy. Others use sports equipment, certain music, or something drawn or written by the child. Every father will have something meaningful that can be used as a catalyst.

Author **William H. Schatz**

**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 remaining 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. Submitted by **Kathleen Leeper**, mother of **Shaun Leeper** 8/17/74 - 1/15/96



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For parents, siblings & families  
We offer friendship, love and understanding  
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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