



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

JUNE 2017

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 Founders Hall, Valley Forge and Henderson RDs, King of Prussia, PA. For information please call Rhonda at 484-919-0820.

Meeting Schedule and other TCF Events of interest

- June 1 General Sharing
- July 6 General Sharing
- July 28-30 40th TCF National Conference
"Rays of Sunshine, Oceans of Hope"
Orlando, Florida.
Hotel reservation see page 2
- Sept 16 Butterfly Release (see page 2)

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

We welcome our newly bereaved friends, sorry for the cause that brings you. We have all been in the depths of despair, and offer unconditional love and understanding to all of you. It sometimes takes several meetings to feel the full benefit of group sharing.

Cindy Brickley, son *Timothy* (29)
Sally Cahill, grandson *Timothy* (29)
Joanne DeVito, grandson *Domenico* (2 weeks)
Melissa Greco, daughter *Gabrielle* (22)
Susan Yarnall, son *Jesse* (24)

REFRESHMENTS

Dave White in memory of my son, *Randy*
TCF-VF Chapter in memory of all the *children*.

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

Noreen & William McDevitt in memory of our son, *Sean*. (given through United Way of the Capital Region)
Ed & Sue Duffy in loving memory of our son, *Peter*. "Loved in life and in death", **Mom & Dad Dave White** to be used for refreshments in memory of my son, *Randy*

This publication of the **TCF Valley Forge Chapter Newsletter** is funded by the **Steven Schneibolk Memorial Fund**.

BUTTERFLY RELEASE

The Valley Forge Chapter will have a butterfly release on Saturday, September 16, 2017 at 3 PM at the Gazebo behind the Upper Merion Township building, which is caddy corner to the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. The cost of the butterflies will be determine in the near future and ordering information will be published in the June TCF-VF newsletter.

PLEASE SAVE THIS DATE ON YOUR CALENDARS

TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE HOTEL REGISTRATION

Conference Hotel Registration should be made directly to the Hotel.

Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek
14100 Bonnet Creek Resort Lane
Orlando, Florida 32821
Phone: 1-407-597-3600

At this point the only rooms available in the TCF reserved block for the conference are two queens or king size beds. The Discounted Compassionate Friends price is \$145 plus 12% tax for either of these choices. You must make them aware that you are a TCF Attendee to get the reduced price.

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
Adam Blasucci, brother *Danny* 6/8
Lisa Bledy, sister *Danielle Bledy* 6/2
Jeff & Donna Brown, son *Kenneth Bernstiel* 6/2
Maureen Butler, son *Terence* 6/7
Suzanne Carcarey, son *Eddie* 6/22
Becky & Frank Clark, daughter *Lisa* 6/22
Rose Marie Cote, son *Mark J. Cote* 6/3
Barbara Cotteta, granddaughter *Denise* 6/11
Tina & Mike Cusamano, daughter *Amanda Angelucci* 6/15
Carol Dawidziuk, daughter *Rachel* 6/2/
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
Herman & Lily Eason, son/stepson *Peter Montijo* 6/1
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
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 & Dorthy 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
Greg & Anita Lewicki, son *Eric Stephen Lewicki* 6/1
Stacy Ludy, granddaughter *Anastasia* 6/6
Carl & Josie Malitsky, daughter *Cynthia Malitsky* 6/27
Elaine Marino, daughter in law *Lisa Marino* 6/1
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
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
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, niece *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
Dave White, son *Randy* 6/28
Lynn Winton, daughter *Natalie* 6/29
Laurie Wyche, son Jameson *Wyche* 6/27

JUNE ANNIVERSARIES

Chris Aiello, brother *Louis* - 6/16
Jim & Michelle Angelini, son *Danny* - 6/25
Shirley & Lex Bono, son *Greg* - 6/13

JUNE ANNIVERSARIES CONTINUED

Robyn Buseman, daughter *Maya Buseman-Williams* - 6/28
Chris Carlton, brother *Eric* - 6/17
Hazel Corbin, daughter *Dayle C. Rutledge* - 6/18
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
Debbie Helman, son *Adam* - 6/28
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
Andie Lunkenheimer, brother *Brennan* - 6/15
Sharon Mallozzi, son *Anthony* - 6/5
Betty Manzi, grandson *Ronnie T. Seal, Jr.* - 6/2
Elaine Marino, granddaughter *Kaitlyn Rose Boyer* - 6/22
Sue McMaster, cousin *Patty* - 6/16
Cameron & 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

JUNE ANNIVERSARIES CONTINUED

- 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
 - Elise Rice, husband *James W. Rice, Sr.* - 6/27
 - Carl Rudegeair, son *Adam* - 6/28
 - Lisa and John Russo, son *Casey* - 6/23
 - Frank & Kay Shinnners , son *Erik Shinnners* - 6/24
 - 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 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
 - Jamie Cote Weaver, brother *Mark J. Cote* 6/3
 - Sandra & Harry Wolfheimer, daughter *Ann Marie Wolfheimer* - 6/19
-

HOW TO HELP ME GRIEVE

Be there for me:

I feel alone, in pain.
I need a friend.

Share my sorrow:

Speak from your heart.
I have to talk about my feelings.

Let me grieve:

Listen to me, I need to cry.
We all grieve in our own way
and in a different time frame.

Keep the memory alive:

It is always on my mind.
I have so many memories.

I need your help:

Help me, call me, pray for me.
Do whatever you can.

Don't desert me:

Don't desert me after the 1st or 2nd week.
I need you especially on holidays.

Take care of yourself:

I need to depend on you.

Help me to heal:

Involve me, listen to me months later.
I need your interest and invitations.

Be my friend:

Don't be afraid of me or my grief.
It's okay to cry.
Lastly, please don't criticize until you've
walked in my shoes.

Instead: Pray for me.

Vivian Sagert

TCF, Minitonas, Manitoba, Canada

SHARED THOUGHTS ON MEN ALSO NEED SUPPORT

Men tend to be less verbal about their agony of losing a child or sibling, which results in the misunderstanding that they feel less pain. The Valley Forge Chapter is very fortunate to have men who attend meeting and speak of their loss. It helps to erase the myth that men are emotionally stronger, which has put unrealistic expectations on them, and prevented their reaching out for support. The depth of grief is not proportionate to a gender. It is unfair to assume a father's parental attachment is less than a mother's. When society expects more of men than they are capable, it lowers their self-esteem, and can make them feel they are not meeting their obligation. No one should ever feel obligated to be a pillar of strength for another family member. Each has the ultimate load they can bear. It helps to share our grief, when we can do so without putting expectations on another.

Father's Day is a tough day for our men. They need the same love and compassion, we mothers do on Mother's Day. We tend to measure our parental worth on these special days. We often come up short, for we bereaved parents tend to lay every possible guilt our imagination can conjure up on ourselves. If we can not find a realistic failure, we can always feel guilty for breathing while our child is dead. I consider a big turning point in my grief when I could say "I did the best I could do, and that is good enough". If our children were as great as we say they were (and we know they were), I'll bet some of those traits were nurtured by the parents. We need to take some credit for the good things in their life. We wish all our father's the best day you can possibly have this Father's Day, and hope you feel pride in being a father to your child.

June can also be a tough month at graduation time. Any school related event stirs up emotions for most of us. For many years, I found June to be the toughest month of all. Our son Doug was a sophomore in high school when he died, each year I relived the "he would have been". For some it is elementary or high school, others it is college, regardless of the stage of life our child or sibling was in when they left us, our grief seems to intensify at the next anticipated hurdle they would have achieved. We mourn the loss of our future dreams, as well as the physical loss of our child or sibling.

Our grief will take more time and energy than those around us could ever imagine. The lack of understanding our grief, can cause us to feel detached from family and friends. It is vital to our well being to find someone to share our grief with. Other bereaved parents and siblings have many of the same grief symptoms, know the depth of despair, and our need for help. More seasoned bereaved families can help us get through our bad days by showing us there is light at the end of the tunnel, and how we can become stronger than we ever expected to be.

God Bless, *Marie Hofmockel*, TCF Valley Forge

**Times when just one person is missing-
the whole world seems so empty.**
author unknown

LIFE CAN BE GOOD AGAIN

For nearly sixteen years, his voice has been silent. It is a span now nearly equal to the time it was heard. Never did I anticipate life without the sounds that marked his presence. Learning to survive that silence once seemed an impossible task, one so overwhelming I could find no hope or expectation of ever finding life once more.

He was our son, our only child. The tempo of his growing measured the cadence, the beat, for our own living. His passing left an existence without any value that I could immediately perceive. Ultimately, I came to recognize that I was wrong.

Life still had meaning, but it had fallen to me to find it, just as it had been in the years before his coming. Indeed, even as it had been throughout the time of his living, life still demanded my active participation, my own commitment to give it purpose and resolve.

Hindsight affords an ease in stating this realization that did not exist while struggling in the depths of bereavement. The steps taken to finally seize life again seem logical and ordered while intellectualizing the process but I know that this is much easier to write than it was to experience.

I confess, with both sorrow and gladness, that I can no longer summon the full measure of those savage feelings and the unremitting pain that engulfed me in those early years. Working through them was the most demanding challenge of my life, enacting tolls in physical health perhaps even greater than the long-term effects on mind and emotion.

Today, however, I can reflect with gratitude upon a decade of mastery over the sadness. Control of my thoughts returned to me and I know freedom from the utter devastation of those early years.

Looking back reveals essential turning points on the road to healing. Some would seem to generalize easily for anyone. Others seem to respond to personal strengths and weaknesses more particular to an individual. These points included:

* Self forgiveness for the many deficiencies found within on the endless soul journey that is our lot in the wake of our child's death.

- * Forgiveness of others, relatives, friends and associates, who are less affected than are we, who seem unable to help us in our time of deep trouble and need.
- * The accepting, at lost of the finality of our loss, and that we must gradually unleash ourselves from our former lives and structure anew.

Learn to communicate value to spouses, friends, and surviving siblings, our love for whom seems shrouded behind the totality of our grief.

Find ways to give expression to our need to somehow memorialize our child, be it through writing a book, planting trees, sustaining scholarships, or any number of ways. Our need to preserve and safeguard our child's memory is real and deserving of our attention.

A time comes for many to find new homes, jobs, and purpose. These are often part and parcel of any significant change in our lives.

Surrender to time, giving ourselves space within it to do our work. Use time to foster healing within, to enable us tomorrow with hope.

No recovery will return us to life as we knew it while our child lived. That life is forever gone and, to a certain extend, we may well have to accept that, as we perceive life today. The finest days of our lives may well be a part of our past. Somehow, we must recognize that this is not unique to surviving our child's death, but is often a portion of the human condition.

Olin is dead. As much as I would wish it otherwise, it will never be. He is not forgotten. His voice, his laughter, his joy, and his shortcomings live on in me. No day passes without thinking about him. I am grateful for his touch upon my life.

Yet, joy is again mine. Pleasure is no longer a forbidden or guilt-producing element in daily living. I live, gladly and with purpose, with Olin both behind me in time, but with me internally.

Is this not our goal, to heal, to find the strength to love both yesterday and today? Our children have been the richest part of our lives and today should reflect the grace of that love in all that we are today.

Don Hackett - TCF, Hingham, MA

CONCERNING SIBLINGS

It's been said that when a child's brother or sister dies, actually three people are lost: the sibling and both parents. The sibling also loses a friend, playmate, confidant, role model, and lifelong companion. For the parents, the loss of a child is often so traumatic that they have little left to give to the surviving children. Yet the surviving sibling has fears, needs, and anxieties that must be explored and addressed if the child is to avoid negative long term consequences. Listed here are normal feelings siblings might have concerning the loss along with some suggestions on what to do to encourage their expression.

Normal Thoughts

- * "Did I cause the death?"
- * "Will the rest of my family die?"
- * "Who will take care of me now?"
- * "I'm all alone now."
- * "Half of me died."
- * "I'm different from all the other kids."
- * "I'm not a child anymore."
- * "I feel left out."
- * "Things will never be the same again."
- * "No one cares about my grief, only about my parents grief."
- * "I can't cry because it will make my parents more upset."
- * "I feel guilty to be happy or to laugh."
- * "Why wasn't it me?"
- * "Will I die young too?"
- * "I made it happen by wishing him dead!"
- * "If I act like my sibling, maybe my parents will feel better."
- * "Maybe my parents would love me more if I died!"

Normal Feelings

- * Impatient and angry at the world.
- * Resentful over the attention the parents are getting.
- * Resentful over the attention they are not getting.
- * Fearful of having to replace the sibling.
- * Guilt for feeling relieved over the death after a long illness.
- * Guilt over all the "bad" thoughts, words, and fights with the deceased.

How To Help

- * The bereaved parents should constantly remind themselves to be sensitive to the feelings of the surviving children.
- * The parents should strive to maintain as much of a normal routine as possible for the survivors.
- * The parents should encourage grieving, openness and the expression of feelings in the children by grieving openly and expressively in front of them.
- * Reassure them that they are not going to die, too.
- * Reassure them that they are loved, wanted and okay.
- * Reassure them that they did not cause the death in any way.
- * Give lots of physical reassurance in the way of touching and hugs.
- * Contact the teacher/teachers or school counselors.
- * Ask them what and how they would like the school to be told.
- * Prepare them for questions and remarks they can expect at school.
- * Encourage them to resume their normal activities at their own pace.
- * Remember the sibling's birthday and anniversary of the death.
- * Remember the sibling at special family gatherings and functions.
- * Don't be afraid to talk about the child that died.
- * Talk about all the qualities of the child that died - positive and negative.
- * Talk about the differences between the siblings – good and bad.
- * Don't promise them a replacement sibling with talks of having another child.
- * Remember surviving siblings cannot become, or replace, the deceased – brother or sister.

TLC Group grants anyone the right to use this information without compensation so long as the copy is not used for profit or as training materials in a profit making activity such as workshops, lectures, and seminars, and so long as this paragraph is retained in its entirety.

Adapted From: *Helping Children Cope With Loss*
Buz Overbeck – Joanie Overbeck
 TLC Group, TX 1995

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 blindsides. 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

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.

William H. Schatz



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.

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...A bereavement organization
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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