

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

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

MAY 2012

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

May 3 General Sharing & Death by Suicide
Jun 7 General Sharing
July 20-22, 2012 34th TCF National Conference &
5th International Gathering, Cost Mesa, CA
(see page 3)

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**



Valley Forge Chapter

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APRIL REFRESHMENTS

Nina Berstein in memory of my son, **Andrew** and all the children and siblings.
Linda DiPasquale in memory of my son, **Tommy** on his birthday 4/26 and his anniversary in March.

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

Barbara Purtell-Frank in loving memory of my son, **Michael John Keller Purtell** 5/28. Happy Birthday, my angel. Always in my heart.

**SIBLING
SHARING SESSIONS**

Some TCF-Valley Forge Chapter members have expressed a desire for Sibling Sharing Sessions. Many sibling aspects of grief are different than parental grief. TCF has found it very beneficial for siblings to share their concerns with one another.

This group will be open for ages of those in high school and older. The meeting would be held on the same evening as the parents, but in a separate room. All conversations will be confidential. There will need to be a facilitator at the meetings.

We need your participation to make this opportunity available in our chapter. Please fill out the form below and return to Rhonda Gomez, 12 Brook Circle, Glenmoore, PA 19343, phone 484-919-0820, or email: sugar@tcfvalleyforge.org.

I am interested in attending meetings. _____
name age

I am interested in facilitating meetings. _____
(age 18 or older to facilitate) address

_____ city & state

_____ phone email

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**

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 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.

TCF 2012 National/International Conference Costa Mesa, California

Site of 35th TCF/USA National Conference; 5th International Gathering!

The combined conference will be held July 20-22, 2012 in Costa Mesa, California.

A final lineup of popular keynote speakers is as follows:

Lois Duncan, a bereaved parent, and a prolific and award winning author of 48 books.

Kathy Eldon, a bereaved parent, journalist, author, producer, and activist.

Darcie Sims, a bereaved parent, always popular international keynote speaker, a certified grief management specialist. Co-founder of Grief, Inc. Darcie is a well known and respected author and speaker.

The Reverend Canon Simon Stephens, founder of The Compassionate Friends worldwide and bereaved sibling, will travel from his home in Moscow to share his thoughts with the large International and U.S. crowd that is expected to gather.

More than 100 workshops will be held on most topics related to grief after the death of a child. Special excursions are being planned for Wed, July 18 through Mon, July 23.

Hotel Reservations Now being Accepted!

You can now make reservations for the conference host hotel. To reserve your room online, please go to Online Reservations or reservations directly to the hotel at 714-540-7000. Room charge is \$129 per night plus 11% tax. Complimentary shuttles will run every 20 minutes between the hotel and John Wayne Airport (SNA). On-site parking for conference guests is \$7 per night or Valet \$25.00 per night.

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.

**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.**

MAY BIRTHDAYS

Donald Barber, son *Steven W. Barber* 5/19
Laura Bedrossian, son *Teddy* 5/9
Stephen & Barbara Billings, daughter *Laura Elizabeth Billings* 5/22
Bruce & Barb Campbell, son *Greg* 5/30
Loreta & Ken Cericola, son *Anthony Cericola* 5/3
Mary & John Chelius, son *John J. Chelius, Jr.* 5/2
Joanne & Tom Christman, son *Kyle R. O'Neill* 5/23
Anton & Maureen DeMaioribus, daughter *Ann DeMaioribus* 5/17
Vanessa Diaz, friend's child *Samir* 5/16
Danielle Evelyn, son *Samir* 5/16
Carol Graber, son *Bobby* 5/17
Judi Griffith, son *Steve* 5/27
Samuel & Mary Lou Hardman, son *Samuel J.* 5/19
Robin Hayman, son *Bradley Hayman* 5/11
Marie & Ken Hofmockel, grandson *Steven Schneibolk* 5/7
William & Marilyn Hudson, son *Robert Hudson* 5/11
Brad Ingerman, son *Justin* 5/18
Jean Jones, grandson *Bobby* 5/7
Loretta Kline, son *Keith Edward Kline* 5/11
Susan Lipson, nephew *Justin Ingerman* 5/18
Maryellen & James Madden, daughter *Anne Marie Madden* 5/18
Jo Makowski, sister *Pamela Makowski Goresh* 5/1
Anne McClenachan, brother *Andy McClenachan* 5/30
Michael & Maria McFadden, daughter *Rachel McFadden* 5/14
Willard & Patricia McLain, son *Gary J. McLain* 5/5
Mike & Jen Meluskey, daughter *Carolyn Meluskey* 5/13
Cheryl Mezzaroba, son *Lon Mezzaroba* 5/18
Leonard & Thelma Miller, son *Lowell Bruce Miller* 5/14
Ann Murray, son *Jonathan Rapoport* 5/17
Elsie Oreski, son *Gregory T. Oreski* 5/22
Betty & Richard Owens, Sr., son *Richard H. Owens, Jr.* 5/12
Sam & Palma Panichello, son *Joseph Panichello* 5/21
Lyla T. Poulson, brother *Joe* 5/18
Barbara Purtell-Frank, son *Michael John Keller Purtell* 5/28
Thomas & Jeri "Bubbles" Reinert, father (Bubbles) *Albert Volpe* 5/4

MAY BIRTHDAYS continued

Pamela Schneibolk, son *Steven* 5/7
Janet & Jonathan Schultz, friend *Scott Alan Rosenthal* 5/26
Ann Sherwood, son *David Foster Sherwood* 5/3
Priscilla Shober, son *Jeffrey R. Shober* 5/27
Margaret & Matthew Strickler, son *Timothy Strickler* 5/4
Hans & Margaret Van Naerssen, son *Eric* 5/21
Ann VanLandingham, daughter-in-law *Rita VanLandingham* 5/17
Lauretta Wagner, daughter *Traci Wagner* 5/23
Patricia White, daughter *Diane Patricia White* 5/1
Donna White, sister *Diane White* 5/1
Muriel Wilson, son *John F. Shaffer* 5/12
Joan & Ed Young, son *Jed Young* 5/18

MAY ANNIVERSARIES

Madeleine Adler, son *J. Peter Adler* - 5/30
Donald Barber, son *Steven W. Barber* - 5/30
Rob and Janet Beiswenger, son *Jared* - 5/18
Gloria Bello, son *Joseph* - 5/21
Ben Breskman, son *Brian* - 5/26
Martha & Albert Caesar, son *Daniel Mark Caesar* - 5/13
Jennifer Catanese, son *Andrew* - 5/17
Rose Marie Cote, husband *Paul Cote* - 5/27/08
Jamie (Germaine) Cote Weaver, father *Paul* - 5/27
Franklin & Patricia Cox, daughter *Christen Fox* - 5/26
Jane Cox, son *Bill* - 5/24
Bud Cunnane, son *Patrick* - 5/2
Justine Ellinger, daughter *Keira Ellinger* - 5/7
Charlie & Jill Fick, son *Michael Sternberg* - 5/14
Colleen and Dan Fledderman, daughter *Amy* - 5/25
William & Marilyn Hudson, son *Robert Hudson* - 5/11
Janine Johnston, daughter *Ashley Sankus* - 5/16
Joan Kingslake, son-in-law *Guy Thornton Woods* - 5/6
Loretta Kline, son Keith *Edward Kline* - 5/20
Dan Logan, daughter *Joanie* - 5/28
John & Nancy Logue, daughter *Kaitlyn Logue* - 5/3
Tom & Charmaine Malik, son *Danny Malik* - 5/12
Michelle & Chris Mazzio, son *Brendan Mazzio* - 5/20
Robert McCullough, daughter *Caroline Patricia McCullough* - 5/27
Marian Melchiorre, grandson *John* - 5/11
Mike & Jen Meluskey, daughter *Carolyn Meluskey* - 5/22

SHARED THOUGHTS ON THE LOVE THAT MAKES US PARENTS

For many, the month of May can be a very traumatic time. The warm days and the beauty of spring is expected to renew us, but often our depression lingers or deepens, for we are not ready to move on with the season. Many of us feel we are not finished mothering our child when they die. Mother’s Day magnifies the fact that we can never complete that unfinished privilege, and can not find a place for our unfinished love.

On the sad days when there is not enough energy to help ourselves, it is normal to want to stay where we are in our grief. It takes more strength than we have to move on. Our grief can become so overwhelming that we have to fight to get through the day. Sometimes no progress is felt in our grief, but it can be a tremendous accomplishment just to survive. Each day of survival helps us to recovery. Often we expect too much of ourselves. Grieving parents are very fragile, confused, and vulnerable to slipping while climbing out of the pit of grief. Even reversals show progress when we can get back to where we were before the slip.

It takes a lot of grief before our days can have more good hours than bad. But it does come. Most of us cannot even imagine that progress in our early grief. Eventually, we can make peace with our loss and our painful memories become warm treasures. Even though we always think of our child daily, it is with thankfulness that they were a part of our lives.

The only real joy comes from having known our child. Our grief becomes so overwhelming, it crowds out the joy, and deteriorates us to the level of feeling we can never enjoy life again. It is necessary for all of us to go through stages of grief. Once we have finished our grief work (which is much more than a few months), the memories of those we love become superior to the death, or cause of death. And, we except that the real joy was having them in our lives, knowing them, and the mark they left on us.

When our child was born or adopted, we became a parent, that relationship cannot be revoked. We are still their mother and father. Often those who lose only, or all children, struggle with their parental title. We are their parents, and they will always be our children. Love is what makes this bond, and that did not diminish because they died. We still have the pride and joy of being their parent, as long as the love remains, and we know that is forever.

God Bless,
Marie Hofmockel, TCF Valley Forge, PA

I WILL NOT FORGET

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jacqueline Brown, Peace Valley TCF, New Britain, PA

SECOND AVENUE

FOR BEN

Who would have expected that your life as we knew it
Would come to an end in a blizzard, in New York City,
On a Second Avenue sidewalk?

Did the snow somehow cushion you when you collapsed?
Did it give you comfort in some way,
as in the softness of a mother's arms?

Did it protect you from the hard, cold pavement beneath it,
Or even the harshness of the sudden blow
That come on Second Avenue?

I would like to believe the snow was falling
To make your death somehow purer, whiter and softer
The way I would have wanted it to be.

And wasn't it fitting that your life should cease there
In the state where you began your journey
Twenty-one years before?

Second Avenue, a blizzard -
How appropriate an end for such a fine young man
In the prime of his life,
Who loved both the snow, and the excitement of the city
To which you traveled for the weekend.

Again and again, I will wonder . . .
If there, in that split second before your sweet face touched
The soft warmth of the snow,
Did you silently call out -- "Mom"?

Remembering **Shaun**
With love always, *Kathleen Leeper*
TCF - Valley Forge, PA Chapter

.....
"How does one become a butterfly?" she asked pensively.
"You must want to fly so much that you are willing to
give up being a caterpillar". "You mean to die?" asked
Yellow.

"Yes and no," he answered. "What looks like you will
die, but what's really you will live."
Trina Paulus - from "Hope for the Flowers"

My boy had a smile
from ear to ear,
Unfortunately my boy
he had no fear.
He wondered he wandered
he wandered too much.
And now all I can do is to
long for his touch.

My boy had a smile
it was one of gold
Unfortunately my boy
did not do as told.
He wandered, he wandered
he oft wondered why
And now all I can do is
to sit here and cry.

What would have happened
if we'd been home that day.
What would have happened
if we'd just gone away.
What would have happened
had he sooner been found.
What would have happened
would my boy have not
drowned?

My boy had a smile
on which the sun shone.
Unfortunately my boy
will never be grown.
He wondered, he wandered
he wandered apart.
And now all I can do is
hold him in my heart.

Mitch Wexler
for his son, **Benjamin Wexler**
10/8/93 - 8/11/97
TCF - Valley Forge, PA Chapter

MY RESPONSE TO MY BROTHER'S DEATH

Two things happened to me on January 11, 1992. I lost my brother to death and I lost my parents to grief. My dad, the one who seemed to always have the answers to my questions, the "rock" in the family whose job it was to fix everything, completely lost it. The fear, anger, and shock in his eyes when told that my brother had died are engraved in my memory. Falling limp in my mother's and my arms in the emergency room of UCLA Medical Center was the first time I had ever seen my parents lose control. At that moment our roles switched.

"I'll take them," I said to the nurse with the bag labeled "EDLER." The bag held the personal belongings of my brother. I quietly took them and put them in my car. For the next three months, I seemed to make many of the decisions. I was not the courageous leader rising up to the occasion; I was the least common denominator. My parents, although they tried, could not help me. They were trying to deal with tremendous grief themselves.

For this reason, I put off dealing with Mark's death for many months. I cried and I felt sad but, never addressed my grief. My friends were concerned and asked how I was doing but, unless you have been there, no one really wants to hear the true answers. My brother was the only other person who was a combination of my mom and dad. My friends could not relate to my brother's death nor would I want them to. I would never wish this experience upon anyone. But, this left me alone to deal with it and I chose to put it off.

After three months, I met a gentleman at a family retreat with a group my dad was a part of. This guy, Kevin, lost his brother to suicide about nine months earlier. He was further along in his "coping" than I was. I could talk to him about Mark, mention Mark's name and share stories without making the whole room uncomfortable. I saw in him someone who was dealing with his grief and it gave me hope. There's a certain vocabulary that you acquire after suffering a loss that no book, no story, and no amount of explaining can do justice to. I don't talk about certain things with my friends. I do not have the time or the energy to explain (or try and explain) the many feelings I am having. Kevin understood. He had the vocabulary. This was the first step in healing. I came to grips with the reality of my new life. Different than the one before but there was no going back. At this point I went on autopilot. I remember many of the events of the three years following Mark's death. My girlfriend and I broke up. My parents moved to a new house. I went through the many firsts but just kept moving forward. However, I was not depressed. My lows were not very low, but, my highs were not very high.

I became involved with The Compassionate Friends Sibling Division, in my third year. I did it half out of responsibility to my parents and half out of the knowledge that if I were running the meeting, then I would be in control of how much sharing I needed to put into it. It was kind of a control thing. To my surprise the meetings have become so beneficial to my healing that I am surprised at myself. By sharing with others, I feel that I help them and in turn myself. Many feelings, thoughts and emotions that I thought were just with me, I found were universal with others. After three years I began to come "out of the valley" I can only say that by looking back. Hindsight has allowed me to see the role of being strong for our family because I felt that was best. Many others I have talked to have mentioned a similar reaction. Your parents are barely able to deal with their own grief. The last thing you want to do is bring more pain on them, so, you don't share with your parents.

In July 1996 at The Compassionate Friends National Conference, many parents walked up to me and asked "How do I know if my son (daughter) is dealing with this? I am concerned since they do not tell me anything." "You don't know," I answered, "and neither do I." But, unless you see something obviously dangerous, they are dealing with it in their own way at their own speed and you may not be a part of their grieving."

Now I have a different outlook on life. It is precious. I feel that in my new life I am closer to my parents. Each one of us has to live our lives one third better in my brother's memory. I value my friends and time more. I can handle stress much better. I have become a better person by helping others. I like the new person I have become. But, I would trade it all in a second to have my brother back.

Rick Edler TCF South Bay/LA, CA

(Rick's 18 year old brother, Mark, his only sibling, accidentally fell from a wall at UCLA where he was attending school. Rick was 4 years older than his brother.)

STRENGTH

In the early days of my grief,
 A tear would well up in my eyes,
 A lump would form in my throat,
 But you would not know - I would hide it.
 For the strong do not cry...
 And I am strong.

In the middle days of my grief,
 I would look ahead and see that wall
 That I had attempted to go around,
 As an ever-present reminder of a wall yet not
 scaled.
 Yet I did not attempt to scale it,
 For the strong will survive...
 And I am strong.

In the later days of my grief,
 I learned to climb over that wall step by step,
 Remembering, crying, grieving,
 And the tears flowed steadily as I painstakingly
 went.
 For the way was long, but I did make it...
 For I am strong.

Near the resolution of my grief,
 A tear will well up in my eyes,
 A lump will form in my throat,
 But I will let that tear fall
 And I care...
 For I am strong.

Terry Jayo, Regina, Canada

DON'T TELL ME

Don't tell me that you understand,
 Don't tell me that you know.
 Don't tell me that I will survive,
 How I will surely grow.

Don't tell me this is just a test,
 That I am only blessed,
 That I am chosen for this task,
 Apart from all the rest.

Don't come at me with answers
 That can only come from me.
 Don't tell me how my grief will pass,
 That I will soon be free.

Don't stand in pious judgment
 Of the bonds I must untie.
 Don't tell me how to suffer,
 Don't tell me how to cry.

My life is filled with selfishness,
 My pain is all I see,
 But I need you, I need your love,
 Unconditionally.

Accept me in my ups and down,
 I need someone to share.
 Just hold my hand and let me cry,
 And say, "My friend, I care."

Joanena Hendel

TCF-South Dade (Miami), FL

*Look at yourself in the mirror.
 Say to yourself "It is hard to lose a child."
 Say to yourself "It is reasonable to hurt."
 Say to yourself "Healing takes time."
 BE GOOD TO YOURSELF*

Sascha Wagner

*Grief cannot be conquered
 Like an enemy
 Grief can only be changed
 From pain
 To hope
 From hope
 To deeper life*

Sascha Wagner

THERE IS NO BETTER FRIEND

For over 40 years, I have had the best friend you could ever have. When I told my best friend that I was fat, she never said, "I just lost three pounds without even trying."

When we went to a sock hop together in college and she was offered a ride home, she never ditched me.

When I gave myself a home permanent and left it on too long, she was the only one to sit with me in the bathroom until it grew out.

When I told my best friend my husband gave me two snow tires for our anniversary, she never said, "You should be happy he remembered."

When I was pregnant and my stomach looked like a tray on a car door in a drive-in, she never said, "There's a glow about a pregnant woman."

When I had a miscarriage and everyone else in the world said, "There will be other babies." She cried with me over the one I lost.

When she told me she was staying home for the summer, I wouldn't have dreamed of sending her a card from Spain telling her what a great time I was having.

When her mixer broke down, I never asked her if she had sent in the warranty card so she'd be covered.

When I moved 3,000 miles away, she never once told me what I was doing to her.

When her mother died, I never said, "She had a rich, full life and she was in her 70's."

When I argued with my husband and begged her advice, she kept her mouth shut. She just listened.

When we couldn't get a sitter and had to bring the kids along to her house for dinner, she never fell apart.

When I left my first auto graphing party and no one showed up, she never once suggested, "They probably didn't see the ad."

When her political candidate lost and mine won, I never said, "Ha, ha, I told you so."

Every time we got together, neither of us had to say, "I'm glad to see you."

Recently, my best friend lost her child. He was her youngest and was in his 20's. I listened to her. I cried with her. I felt pain that I had never known I could feel before. But not once did I say to her, "I know how you feel."

Erma Bombeck

HUGS

It's wondrous what a hug can do.
A hug can cheer you when you're blue
A hug can say, "I love you so."
Or, "Gee, I hate to see you go."

A hug is, "Welcome back again!"
And, "Great to see you," or
"Where have you been?"
A hug can soothe a small child's pain
And bring a rainbow after the rain.

The hug! There's just no doubt about it.
We scarcely could survive without it.
A hug delights and warms and charms,
It must be why God gave us arms.

Hugs are great for father and mother,
Sweet for sisters, swell for brothers,
And chances are some favorite aunts
Love them more than potted plants.

Kittens crave them, Puppies love them,
Heads of state are not above them.
A hug can break the language barrier,
And make the dullest day seem merrier.

No need to fret about the store of them,
The more you give,
The more there are of them.
So stretch those arms with out delay
And give someone a hug today.

Dean Walley