



The Compassionate Friends NEWSLETTER

Manhattan Newsletter

SPRING 2016 Vol. XXVIII No. 2

GOING THE DISTANCE

I think I get it now. I'm not certain, but I think that as I approach the ten year mark, I have figured out how to navigate the lay-of-the-land so to speak. What was alien territory and so terrifying almost ten years ago has become familiar and much less frightening.

I remember the early days vividly. It's interesting, that it comforts me to know I *can* remember the early days. I was afraid back then, that I might forget the pain – and even while I begged and prayed for it to subside – I knew I wanted it, in some strange way to continue. The pain, the despair was a palpable “something” I could almost touch. It was an unbelievable reality I could wrap myself around while I tried to come to grips with the fact I would never have my son to wrap my arms around again. My fear back then, of forgetting the reality of him alive has been replaced by my acknowledgement of the reality that he is in another place.

Now I am no longer fearful. I *know* the pain is not only Not forgotten, it is never far away.

Another Spring is here. Always a difficult season, I now know what to expect. I know that Mother's Day and Father's day are embedded (new buzz word) in the season. I don't anticipate the day with great anxiety anymore. I *know* that no one will celebrate with me. I am no longer “angry” (much) that I am an ‘outsider’ at that party - no longer entertaining a tiny thought that

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MOTHER'S DAY

Mother's Day... a time set aside to honor each mother's role in her child's life... is often dreaded by bereaved parents. This holiday, like Father's Day, is dedicated strictly to us, as parents. Other holidays differ from this one. That difference which was once so meaningful to us as parents, is now a poignant reminder of all that once was and will never be again.

Bereaved mothers often approach this holiday with much anxiety. Yet, the holiday itself is generally not as difficult as the ramp-up to it. There are television specials, movies, commercials, signs in stores and advertising everywhere we look...all of which remind us that our children are no longer with us. This is a very difficult time for many bereaved mothers - difficult but not insurmountable.

During the month before the second Mother's Day without my son, I realized that it was my perspective that was the problem. I understood that the world was going to continue to spin, the commercialism would build and the reminders would increase until the holiday arrived. I could either ignore the advertisements through my

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TELEPHONE FRIENDS - When you're having the kind of day that you feel only another bereaved parent or sibling can understand, we are willing to listen and share with you. Don't hesitate to call our Manhattan Chapter phone for meeting information (212) 217-9647. However, if you need to speak with someone please call one of the following volunteers: Jacquie Mitchell (eves) (347) 414-1780jacquienytcf@verizon.net .

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THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MEETINGS are always the second and fourth Tuesday of each month.
Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church,
55th and 5th Avenue. Enter at 7 West 55th street.
We start PROMPTLY at 7:00PM.

The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. We are a group of bereaved parents who are seeking support in our grief or are able to give it. Among us, your religion, your race, your politics, your job or social standing are not important. We care about your grief –the tragedy that each of us has shared– and how we can grow through it, not back to the person we were but to the person we can become.

HOPE

By **Debbie Rambis**

Hope, at one point in our grief journey, represented nothing more than another one of those frightening, foul, four letter words. How could I have any hope when my child died! How dare someone talk to me about hope or anything positive for that matter? Didn't everyone know the world had changed! It was a very dark side of grief but one I had to travel through and maybe you did too.

At the first few meetings we facilitated, not knowing any better, all we did was share our grief story and listen to the grief story of others. We realized pretty quickly that sharing just grief stories allowed us to empathize and get to know each other better, but it didn't leave any of us in any better place than when we came to the meeting. In fact, we had even started issuing warnings about how you might feel worse after a meeting. Yikes! Who, especially those already miserable with grief, wants to come to something that makes them feel worse!

We knew it was important to tell our story, but learned it was much more important to tell of the story of living, regardless how short the life. Soon, we were finding hope in just having the ability to talk about our children's lives, not just of their death. We talked about them when they were alive, so why would it be different now! It became easier to talk about Tony.

There were fewer tears as we were now talking about happy times when he was alive. We began to really get to know the depth and breadth of everyone else's loved one, as if we had known him or her when they were living. A new season was upon us and came with all the colors and hope of spring. Hope of a new normal had reached us. It had reached us through the help of The Compassionate Friends meetings, not of sharing "the event", but of talking about our feelings and our loved one. The meetings were not meant to be entertainment but rather of hope for providing opportunities to talk about us and about them. We read books together and discussed how it applied to our lives. We did a Wizard of Oz theme and talked about the trip through the forest of grief. We read Dr. Seuss's, *Oh the Places You'll Go*, and how the "You'll come down from the Lurch with an unpleasant bump. And the chances are, then, that you'll be in a slump."

Spring is a time of change. Maybe, if you are not already trying new meeting ideas, it is time for that change. Watch for and share ideas on the Chapter Facebook page or browse topics found on the Leadership website. Whatever your source, remember all of us can have hope that the memory of our child will remain alive with our Compassionate Friends.

KEEP THE DOOR TO HER LIFE OPEN. ~Edith Fogg

I know many of us know people who, out of grief, hardly ever mention again the name of a loved one who has died? As though the mere speaking the name will bring the rush of grief back in unendurable strength. And as though to avoid the name is some how to avoid the grief.

This device doesn't work.

When my daughter died, her great-grandmother, who had

also endured the loss of an adolescent child, wrote to us, "Keep the door to her life open." I think we would have done it anyway - spoken of her, with decreasing heaviness as the time passed, but it helped to have this dear woman's wisdom right then.

Though the loved one has died, the memory, the sense of the person's presence, has not - not the possibility, after a while, of

taking continuing joy not only in the reminiscences from the past, but in the extension of the person's spirit into our ongoing lives.

Into the nebulous, ongoing mystery of life I welcome, as if through an open door, the continuing spirit of the one I have loved.

~**Marsha Hickman**,
from *Healing After Loss*

Siblings - *We are the surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends. We are brought together by the deaths of our brothers and sisters. Open your hearts to us, but have patience with us. Sometimes we will need the support of our friends. At other times we need our families to be there. Sometimes we must walk alone, taking our memories with us, continuing to become the individuals we want to be. We cannot be our dead brother or sister, however a special part of them lives on with us. When our brothers and sisters died, our lives changed. We are living a life very different from what we envisioned, and we feel the responsibility to be strong even when we feel weak. Yet we can go on because we understand better than many others the value of family and the precious gift of life. Our goal is not to be the forgotten mourners that we sometimes are, but to walk together to face our tomorrows as surviving siblings of The Compassionate Friends©*

If you told me I'd be in group therapy someday, I would have laughed at you. Before Russell died, it wasn't even a possibility. Me? Talking about my feelings in a group setting like that? Never. Well, life has a way of presenting cruel ironies sometimes, because I honestly don't know how I'd be doing if it weren't for the supportive environment that TCF provides. I remember reading early on a list of stupid things people say. It was comforting to know that it wasn't just the people in my life who didn't know what to say. It's kind of funny even to think that some people are so confounded and uncomfortable with what to say that they end up saying something stupid and uninformed just to say ANYthing. I can't remember the entire list that I came across, but I have come up with my own top 3 most insensitive and/or ignorant statements that I've been confronted with in the last 4 years:

1. "I know EXACTLY how you feel, my grandmother/goldfish friend of a friend just died."
2. "That's awful, how is your mother taking it?"
3. "Ya know, it's probably about time that you put that behind you and get on with your life."

While all three of these statements anger me, I know that the people who say these things to me mean well, but just have

no idea how they make me feel by imposing these ideas on me. At the very least, I know that they are more uncomfortable than I am in dealing with how I feel. People who apologize for bringing up the subject of Russell, or even just of siblings in general do so because it makes them uncomfortable. Personally, I feel like he's on my mind all the time. I don't really need an excuse to start talking about him. I know some people don't know how to respond when you tell them that you lost your brother. They'd rather not have brought it up. They apologize as if it's upsetting for me to talk about. The thing is, it's upsetting PERIOD. Upsetting to think about, upsetting to talk about, but even more upsetting to be alone in dealing with the feelings.

This is why I am grateful for the forum that Compassionate Friends provides. There is no explanation needed, and no awkward dancing around the subject. If only the rest of the world understood that I don't need them to analyze it, or figure it out for me. All I really need is someone who wants to listen to what I have to say.

- **Jordon Ferber**,
TCF Manhattan Chapter
Sibling Page Editor

Jordon Ferber is the brother of **Russell Ferber**, 12/31/80 – 7/6/02. He is our Sibling Leader and welcomes your input. If you have read something or written something you would like to share, you can email Jordan at BeatnikNudnik@yahoo.com

As long as I can
I will look at this world
For both of us.
As long as I can
I will laugh with the birds,
I will sing with the flowers,
I will pray to the stars,
For both of us.
As long as I can
I will remember
How many things
On this earth were your joy.
And I will live
As well as you
Would want me to live
As long as I can.

Sashcha, "For Both of Us" Wintersun

"Any disaster you can survive is an improvement in your character, your stature . . ." - Nietzsche

DID YOU KNOW?

Other bereaved siblings include:

- Mia Hamm, star of the US Women's Soccer, and who has scored more goals than any other professional soccer player worldwide, lost her brother when he was 28.
- Comedian Lewis Black, correspondent on The Daily Show on Comedy Central lost his brother Ron to cancer.
- Thomas A. Moore, the pre-eminent NYC medical malpractice lawyer lost his brother Brendan to suicide. Mr. Moore's Bereavement helps him identify with clients who are often parents of deceased or incapacitated children.



“MESSAGES FROM GEORGIE”

In eight months now since you've been gone
My life has changed beyond words, son.
At first I felt I wished to die,
The pain so fierce, my life was done.

My morning, p.m. tears did blind,
My way was lost, I could not find,
To join you, son, was in my thoughts,
My days and nights had found me lost.

Lo' and behold my hand did write
Poetic thoughts from day till night,
My memories of what I knew
Of love we shared, how I love you.

My thoughts did flow, and I do hope
Some came from you to help me cope
With overwhelming grief, my son
Of missing you, since you've been gone.

Your words to me ring in my ears,
Flashbacks, last days, begin the tears.
I cry for me because you're gone.
I can't help or save you, my son.

But messages you send to me
They say you're by my side always,
You're with me everywhere I go,
And tears fall less, because I know

Your messages, they say to me,
Recall your words so recently:
“I ruined my life...not much to live”
“But you've yet yours...so much to give.”

“I'll do my best to carry on,
Because I know you're close to me.”
Your words to me ring loud and true,
They say to me, “Ma, I love you.”

WHAT IS LEFT?

When a child dies, you ask, among other questions, what is left? A beautiful, sensitive, intelligent son has chosen to end his life. What can be left after such a crushing blow? Others will point out that you have a spouse, other children or grandchildren, perhaps relatives and friends. They are all left. Perhaps you have a career that is left. And yet how meaningless all of those are to a bereaved parent to one who is suffering the most devastating loss of all. So you continue to search for what it is that is left.

You read books on bereavement, scarcely remembering what you have read; you attend meetings, talk with others who have suffered a loss like yours. If you are fortunate, you have one or two good friends who, while they cannot fully understand, are there to love and listen. Perhaps there is a therapist who guides you in your search for an answer. But for a long while everything you read or hear has little meaning, and certainly cannot provide the answer to your question. Or can it? Does all that you have read and heard and experienced finally come together and answer the question of what is left? For me it does. The answer was 13 months in coming, but how clear it seems now. I am left. That's it! I am left and I have been left with the love of Scott. It is a new love, it is different, more intense, it is undemanding, it need not be reciprocated, there are no strings attached. I love this love of Scott's. It warms me and comforts me. It is a wonderful love, but I cannot keep it. It would be wrong to do so; this love is too precious to keep to myself.

I am left with love to spare and love to share. It will never run out. He will always be with me to replenish it. I have found my answer! I am left to share Scott's love with you.

- Billy Stevens, TCF, Baltimore, MD

SPRING IS FOR THE BIRDS

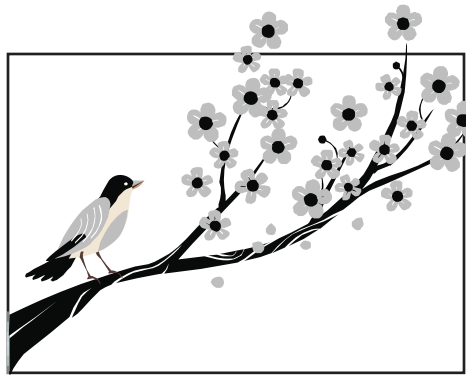
I sat at the kitchen table, looking out at the dazzling spring day. It was the kind of breathtakingly beautiful day that brings a lump to your throat and a song to your lips. Spring was my favorite time of year, but I couldn't have been more miserable. Only five months before, the joy had fled from my life when my precious son Blake died.

All at once, a ridiculous verse from my childhood popped into my head:

Spring is sprung,
The grass is riz,
I wonder where
The flowers is.

Like the poet, I wondered where the flowers were. Oh, they were there all right – but not for me. It seemed that the whole world had burst into bloom around me, but grief-stricken as I was, the glory of the awakening earth only brought me pain. I studiously ignored the startling greenness of the trees. I averted my eyes from the bushes laden with bright azalea blooms. I considered each new bud, each tiny sprout a personal affront. Where was my renewal? Where was my hope? How could I celebrate spring while winter still raged in my heart?

I continued to gaze out the window, knowing that I had plenty to do but not having the energy to move. Suddenly a saucy, fat robin hopped on to the deck. “Just what I need” I thought bitterly. “Another sign of spring”. At last I was motivated to drag myself over to the sink and tackle the mountain of dishes.



The bird as back the next day. "SHOO", I growled through the glass. "Go back where you came from!" Ignoring me, he hopped cheerfully across the yard to peck the earth in search of an especially delectable bug. He was so perky it made me sick.

That night, heavy rains brought a cold front, and the temperature dipped into the 40's. The next morning he was there, chipper as ever. "Dumb bird", I hissed. "Don't you know how cold it is?" The realization that I was talking to a bird made

me question my sanity --- once again. The robin came back the next day, and the next. The following day however, he didn't return. I was torn between feeling sad that he was gone and being embarrassed that I had been looking for him. The next morning he reappeared, bringing with him two cousins, and uncle, a wife and his wife's good-for-nothing brother Earl. "Now you're ganging up on me!" I shouted, as memories of an old movie drifted through my addled brain.

At that moment, I experienced an unfamiliar contorting of my face. It was a smile. As a little of the heaviness lifted from my heart, I realized that though I couldn't delight in the season as I usually did, there would be other springs. Beauty and joy would some day return to my life, and surely as the first timid shoots emerge from the frozen earth. As for those pesky robins, there was just one thing left to do. I went to the pantry to get some bread to feed my friends.

Patricia Dyson, TCF,
Beaumont, TX

MY SILENT COMPANION

I see you in my dreams--
Laughing happily, free from sorrow
And safe from life's misfortune.
The joy that lights your eyes fills me with
comfort,
And I know that every step I make,
You also take.
Guiding me down life's path,
through obstacles in my way--
You are my silent companion.
When God took you back--it changed
our lives,
And our perspective.
We now see the vibrant glow
That lives in every one of His creations,
And that reminds us of you.
I hear your laugh in the crashing surf
and feel warmed by your hugs in the
soaking sun.
You are everywhere--
You are my silent companion.
Though I want to reach out to you
And hold you tightly in my sorrow,
I know you can feel my tears on your
shoulder
As you surround me in your soul.
You sprinkle my life with tokens and
treasures,
Reminders and reassurances of how
much you love me.
I know you'll live inside my heart
And walk with me until I can join you--
Forever as my silent companion.

~Jennifer Forrest
TCF, Orange Coast, CA

DO YOU KNOW?

Do you know what I've learned?
The deepest, truest healing
offered by The Compassionate Friends
comes not in the first few years, but later?

Do you know
just when you think
there is no more to gain
by coming to meetings,
something you will say or do
will help another,
then they will help another...
and exponentially,
through your opened heart,
there can flow riches,
gifts beyond imagining?

Do you know
TCF's truest alchemy
lies not in what we can get
but what we can give?

That by turning grief's dark energy
and inner absorption outwards
towards the hope of helping others
we can regain a sense of purpose,
honor our beloved children,
and take them with us as we do?

All this...
if only you stay on - or come back -
to help those more newly bereaved,
sharing your own unique path through
grief
and learning, along with others,
what you do not know you know.

~ Genesse Bourdeau Gentry
from "Catching the Light"

LIFE'S TAPESTRY

It's said a splendid tapestry depicts Life's "grand design."
Immense in its complexity, the threads all intertwine...
to form a pattern illustrating with explicit weave
the reason why our children die, and why we're left to grieve.
I've heard it called the "Master Plan," and there are those who say
each thread's the story of a life, from birth to dying day,
no death occurs that is not planned; some greater purpose served.
And some draw comfort from belief that fate cannot be swerved.
If destiny holds all the cards then nothing would be changed,
we would not alter tragedy, for death was prearranged.
I do not know if I believe that fate decreed the day
my life lost its illusions, disenchantment came to stay.
But I do know the path I'm on is one that's far less clear...
I stumble through this darkness praying light will reappear.
Yet in my soul her light lives on; my love for her remains
with innocence she healed my heart and broke thru life's chains.
My daughter showed me how to trust, her needs taught me to fight,
she planted seeds of caring about others and their plight.
If the tapestry depicts the life of all who walk the earth.
The master weaver added my child's thread, and knew her worth.
Her life, her death, my agony, are pushing me to find
the reason for her years with me, and why I'm left behind.
I understand my path will stay in darkness 'til I see
the means by which I'll utilize the gifts she gave to me.
If I can find a way to share the caring I now feel
it will honor her dear memory, and help my heart to heal.

Sally Migliaccio "In loving memory of Tracey"
TCF Babylon, NY

someone might remember and send me a card. I'm not disappointed anymore because I've become familiar with that reality too. Though I will always be Peter's Mom, Hallmark hasn't tapped into the telepathic market yet.

I've stopped trying to teach the world what it's like. I thought early on in my journey, that I could somehow show the uninitiated a little glimpse of the territory by writing what I was feeling. But I recognize now that the uninitiated aren't supposed to know. The fates are saving them for themselves. When you arrive in this place you must be a "virgin" griever. No amount of warnings or fears can prepare you for this journey.

It's been almost ten years. Impossible, but still true. When you quantify it, in addition to the more than 3650 days it includes those heavy duty survival days - ten birthdays, ten anniversary days, ten Thanksgivings, ten Mother's Days, ten Father's Days, ten Springs, ten Summers, ten Christmases and 560 candles - just for Peter.

In all this time, in my quest for understanding, I've come to know hundreds and hundreds of newly bereaved and not so newly bereaved parents. For me, that's been the most helpful learning experience of all. I've learned that we all start off the same way. We arrive here dazed, confused and disbelieving. We all think we may or even

want to die. But we really only want to be with our kids again. Those of us who are fortunate enough to find a support system like TCF, ultimately discover we are in a graduate survival program for the grieving. But it's years and years before we recognize that.

Time and my own desperate struggle to survive has paid off. Peter is more totally a part of me now than he might ever have been without my hard won understanding of the territory. He is an ever-present fixture in my consciousness, attached to every thought, every perception, every emotion, every feeling, every sensibility. He is my constant companion - motivating me, encouraging me, comforting me - waiting for me. I'm glad I stayed the course and didn't drop out. I'm ready for my degree. I've learned, from those who were here before me, and especially from those who came after me, what it takes to survive. You've all taught me well and I'm still learning. I'm so grateful to those who share my journey.

Peter's got it all figured out. I'm getting there and now I know someday I'll have it all figured out too.

Marie Levine
2003

REFLECTIONS OF A MOTHER'S DAY DENIED

On this, my first Mother's Day, I asked myself, do I have the right to celebrate Mother's Day? Have I truly been a mother this past year? The answer is yes.

Each day I have cared for my child as every mother does, except differently. In every way possible I have mothered him.

I have mothered him with every tear shed; through the agony of longing to hold him. I have rocked him in my heart if not in my arms. I have

kissed his little cheeks in my mind if not with my lips. Smelled his sweetness with my hopes if not my nose. Felt his skin with my memory, if not my hands. Tickled him with my wishes, if not with my fingers.

Am I a mother? I truly am. My physical mothering has been limited to lovingly tending his grave. But I am a mother all the same.

~ **Michelle Parrish**, *Columbia*
TCF Chapter, Baltimore, MD

superb channel surfing skills or I could watch them and torture myself. Passing up print ads was simple... I scanned right through them in the newspaper, and I put the mailings in the trash without comment. Each time I said no to these reminders, I became a little stronger.

As the week before Mother's Day crawled to a close, I thought I had it aced. Then came Mother's Day. My husband gave me a card and a gift. That was it. The gift and card were lovely and sweet. My husband cried. I cried. Then we settled down and read the Sunday paper. We had both agreed that we would stop protracting the self-torture, and live in the moment. Since I was keeping Mother's Day in my heart, the celebrations and thoughts and sales projections of others mattered not. I keep Mother's Day as I choose.

Each of us must work at developing coping skills. Logic is the choice for some. Setting boundaries works for others. Some parents choose to go with their emotions. The decision to celebrate a holiday and the level of the celebration is a choice unique to each parent. We cannot allow others to set our agenda. Mother's Day is the singular holiday which serves to reinforce that I am forever Todd's Mom. My child lived, loved and laughed with us, and this holiday brings beautiful memories of that time. I choose to keep those sweet memories of my son in my heart. Making that decision was one more emotional choice in my grief work. Letting go of what was, living in the moment and cherishing my child forever...all of these have helped me find an ever brightening light of hope.

~Annette Mennen Baldwin
TCF, Katy, TX

JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL SPRING DINNER



Date: **Monday June 13, 2016**
Time: **6:30PM – 9:30PM**
Cost: **\$40.00 per person**
Place: **Pasta Lovers Restaurant**
142 W 49th St, New York 10019 (Between 6th & 7th Aves)

ANY QUESTIONS: please call Jacquie Mitchell 347 414 1780
MAKE YOUR CHECK PAYABLE TO: **The Compassionate Friends**

MAIL TO: Marie Levine
370 First Avenue # 14B, New York, NY 10010

Note, reservations are **not** transferable to **non** TCF members. All attendees must be members of a TCF chapter. **Reservations are not refundable.** Amount over the cost of the dinner is tax deductible. If you are unable to attend, entire cost is tax deductible.

Space is limited. **RESERVATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY MAY 30TH. NO PAY AT THE DOOR!**

(PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)

NAME: _____ email: _____

Enclosed is my reservation for _____ persons at \$40.00 each. A check for \$ _____ is enclosed.

I wish to be a Patron @\$50 _____ or a Subscriber @ \$100 _____ IN MEMORY OF _____

I cannot attend but enclose a donation of \$ _____ IN MEMORY OF _____ DOB: _____ Anniversary Date _____

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CHAT SCHEDULE

Go to: www.compassionatefriends.org, and click on CHAT. Times are Eastern Standard Time.

EDT	9:00-10:00AM	8:00-9:00PM	9:00-10:00PM	10:00-11:00PM
MON			General Bereavement Issues & Grandparents/Stepparents	General Bereavement Issues & Men's Chat
TUE			General Bereavement Issues, Bereavement over 2 years & Pregnancy Loss/Infant Death	General Bereavement Issues & Pregnancy Loss/Infant Death
WED	Newly Bereaved		September 11 Families & Siblings	General Bereavement Issues
THU		No Surviving Children	General Bereavement Issues & Siblings	General Bereavement Issues
FRI		Suicide	Special Needs Children	General Bereavement Issues
SAT				General Bereavement & Siblings
SUN	Siblings		General Bereavement Issues & Siblings	General Bereavement Issues & Siblings

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We Need Not Walk Alone
TCF National Magazine
1 yr. subscription \$20

Deadline for Newsletter article submissions:
Fall: August 1st Spring/Summer: April 1st
Winter: February 2nd Holiday: October 1st

Mark Your Calendars!
Our next Chapter meetings are Tuesdays:

MAY 10	JUN 14	JUL 14	AUG 12	SEP 9
MAY 24	JUN 28	JUL 27	AUG 26	SEP 23

OUR COMPASSIONATE FRIENDLY NEIGHBORS

Babylon	1st Friday	(516) 795-8644	Medford	2nd Friday	(631) 738-0809
Bronx	2nd Tuesday	(914) 714-4885	Rockville Centre	2nd Friday	(516) 766-4682
Brookhaven	2nd Friday	(631) 738-0809	Rockland County	3rd Tuesday	(845) 398-9762
Broroklyn	3rd Wednesday	(917) 952-9751	Staten Island	2nd and 4th Thursday	(718) 983-0377
Flushing	3rd Friday	(718) 746-5010	Syosset (Plainview)	3rd Friday	(718) 767-0904
Manhasset	3rd Tuesday	(516) 466-2480	Twin Forks/Hamptons	3rd Friday	(631) 653-9444
Marine Park, Bklyn	3rd Friday	(718) 605-1545	White Plains	1st Thursday	(914) 381-3389
			HOT LINE		(516) 781-4173



The Compassionate Friends

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