

# Passing Thoughts



The Newsletter of Compassion In Action

Volume 5, Issue 1, Summer 2002

## Letter from the Chairman

**H**ello. I trust this message finds you and your family safe and healthy. Compassion in Action is a community based, faith based, nonprofit volunteer organization. We serve at the bedside of both civilians and veterans, as they and their families [our mothers, fathers, family, and friends] face death.

I know you haven't received a newsletter since the summer of 2000 and now it's the summer of 2002. Allow me to bring you up to date. Under the circumstances, I had to put Compassion in Action's limited resources where I thought they could best be used and that was first to train as many volunteers as we could to be at the bedsides of those who are dying. To date, we have trained more than 4400 volunteers, who logged over 27,000 hours in 2000. In 2001, over

36,000 hours were logged. As we stand halfway through 2002, I can report that we are at a record-breaking number of volunteer hours and the need grows greater and greater every day. Again, I am amazed at how great our country truly is -- *when called to serve, we serve.* [What I love about The Twilight Brigade is all the different reasons each has chosen to serve through this organization.]

We are currently reconstructing The Twilight Brigade website, adding spirit, support and access to tools and information to better serve you so that you can better serve humankind in their time of need.

How to stay in touch with me is, write CIANatl@aol.com, or to keep up with me personally, go to [www.Lightstreamers.com](http://www.Lightstreamers.com), until the Twilight Brigade site is up and running.

I don't want to use up any more space...let the stories of the people in the field speak for themselves.

In closing, the world of health care is in need of reform...both civilian and veteran. The integration of complementary and conventional medical models is what has to happen. This must be brought to the forefront. It is more cost effective, spiritually focused, family-oriented medical methodology. This integration would result in the most effective healing modality.

Please help us make this possible with your prayers, love, time, **and most importantly, your financial support.** Stay tuned to the website and newsletter for current events dealing with caregiver and care giving issues.

What is the secret of The Twilight



Brigade? The secret of its success...its heart and soul... **"No one need die alone."** As our motto means, "As you give, so shall you receive." When your or any one of your family's time comes, you are guaranteed NOT to be alone! **THAT'S OUR PROMISE!**

With Purpose,

Dannon H. Brinkley



**COMPASSION  
IN  
ACTION**  
*The Twilight Brigade*

### MISSION STATEMENT

Compassion in Action is committed to raising society's consciousness about the needs of the dying through community and professional education, advocacy and service to the terminally ill and their loved ones so that no one need die alone.

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# Pillars of Remembrance...

BY CAROL DeCUFFA, NEW YORK CHAPTER

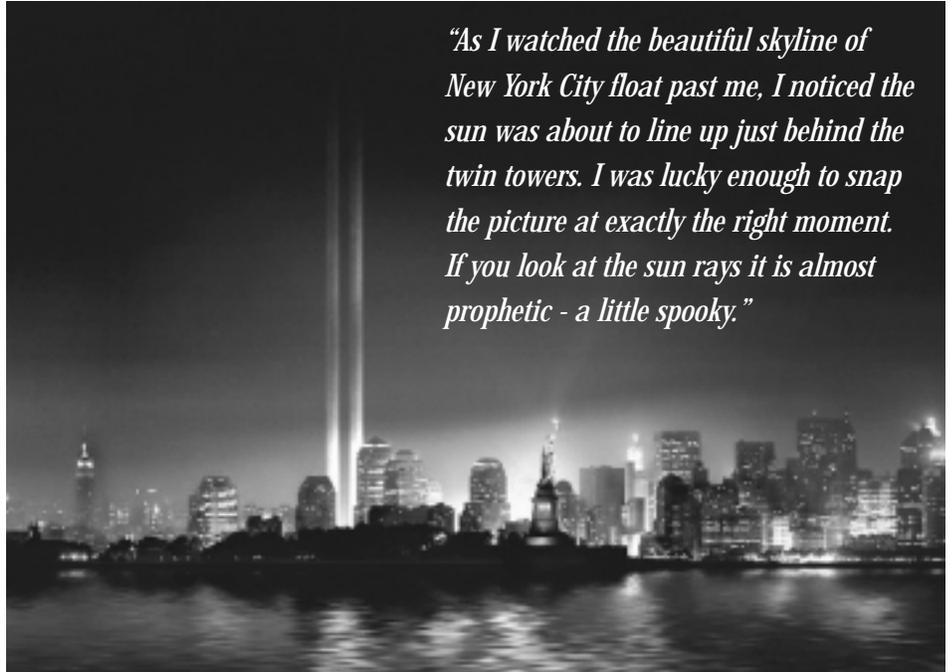
I drove over the Whitestone Bridge at 9 a.m. on that fateful day and watched as smoke streamed out of the WTC. I listened in disbelief to the commentators on the radio as the events unfolded. I thought to myself, like those watching from the lifeboats of the Titanic must have thought, "Now there is something you don't see everyday," not realizing that within a short time they would be gone and this date Sept. 11 would be written in the books as the most memorable in modern history.

Oftentimes I think as I look at the pictures of the WTC of how huge they truly were and say to myself, "Wow that is amazing that something as small as a plane..." And as I write that, I am thinking "as small as a plane???" - you wouldn't usually say the words plane and small in the same sentence when describing a 747. Well, I guess Einstein was right: everything is relative. So here it is two "small planes" took down the amazing twin towers. Maybe as a New Yorker and always seeing them I didn't take the time to realize their true immensity...not saying that I didn't notice how cool it was to stand down at the bottom of the buildings and push my head back as far as I could as I said to my children "Look at the size of those things!!!" I remember the child-like wonder I felt as I thought of how man could build such towering towers. And now I am reflecting on how man could also take them down within a couple of hours, disappearing forever from our sight.

I grew up here in the Bronx seeing them just about every day. I moved to a place called City Island where I could look out my kitchen window and see

the city every night with those two tall beacons of light. Once my children were born, I took them to Manhattan as often as I could to see as many of the seductive sites of this wondrous city, if

for no other reason than to say "We were there." Sitting here, I can easily bring my mind to being in the lobby of the WTC, waiting in line in anticipation with many others - people of every



*"As I watched the beautiful skyline of New York City float past me, I noticed the sun was about to line up just behind the twin towers. I was lucky enough to snap the picture at exactly the right moment. If you look at the sun rays it is almost prophetic - a little spooky."*

This picture was taken by a lady returning on a cruise this past summer (July 28, 2001). It is a sunrise over lower Manhattan.

possible nationality you could think of, moving into the elevator and stepping out into the corridor as I walked with my children to the windows that reached from ceiling to floor. We stepped on the radiator vents where we were engulfed by fear and amazement. The windows seemed non-existent, giving a sense of complete vulnerability so high up in the sky. As we made our way up to the roof, I felt as if I had walked into a surreal setting as I experienced the breathtaking view of the city below us and the rivers glistening with beads of sunlight all around us. Everywhere I looked there was nothing in the way to block me from seeing as far as the eye could see. "No need for a camera," I often say. The true camera is the one in

your mind, snapping pictures, catching moments that a photo often misses in the time it takes to reload the film.

So as I write this, the WTC is not gone. It is right here alive in my mind. I don't have to travel to Manhattan to see the lights that represent what once stood so majestically watching over the city that never sleeps. I sit here at my computer in a little town telling you my thoughts, and I am already there with the wind caressing my face as I stand on the rooftop with the pool of faces as we, if only for a moment, share the pull to go to the edge at the top of the world.

As I glance at the picture of the WTC with the sun prophetically streaming

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# From One We Served

**M**y name is Gene Mask. I'm a former U.S. Marine and Viet Nam veteran.

In August 1996 I was diagnosed with HepC. After a biopsy was completed I was told my condition was terminal without a transplant.

During the next three and a half years I was evaluated and placed on a liver transplant waiting list. I was in and out of hospitals for different symptoms. In May 2000 I was hospitalized for the entire month. It was there I met Victor from Compassion in Action: the Twilight Brigade, and he came to visit me. Each time Victor left, my spirits were lifted and I had something to look forward to. My family lives three thousand miles away, in Washington, D.C., and could not come to California.

I was able to leave the hospital on June 3, but my challenges were far from over. I was readmitted on June 5 with rapidly declining liver function numbers, and total shutdown of my liver was imminent. My friends from C.I.A. came in equally increasing numbers. Varda and Theresa were at my bedside daily. David, Marsha and Norm came to see me 2 or 3 times a week. They continued to inspire me and give me



hope by showing me there is love and compassion and reasons for living.

Sometime around the end of June and the beginning of July, I went into liver failure and kidney failure, with a pulse of 187, and slipped into an encephalopathic coma for several days. I came to the conclusion that I was going to die and signed the 'Do Not Resuscitate' orders.

Yet C.I.A. did not quit. They added Cindy and Hope to their growing army. They were not afraid, or at least didn't show that death was near. Varda and Theresa stood by me and maybe actually became me by reading to me and laughing and joking. They gave me that thread of hope to hold onto. If I were

to have died, then I would have been happy because I was surrounded by love and kindness, but needless to say, their compassion and love did not go unanswered.

I was airlifted to Portland VA Medical Center on the 12th of July and received a transplant there. C.I.A. in Portland joined the growing number of people behind me. During my recovery everyone served encouragement through visits, cards and telephone calls.

I would like to say that without these loving people, I would not be on this earth today.

I would also like to repeat what the doctors said: "Gene, we're good but not that good."

I believe that I am proof that a monetary value cannot be put on the things that my friends from C.I.A. do in life and death situations.

Thank you for your time.

**Gene P. Mask,**

Viet Nam Veteran

*[Note: Gene became a C.I.A. volunteer January 2001 in Los Angeles. Ed.]*

*Reprinted with permission from the Portland, Oregon, Forming Chapter newsletter.*

## It Was...

BY MARION BLANEY, FARMINGTON, NM

**C**ompassion in action. It was love in action. It was healing in action. It was a life-changing experience for those who attended. Tears were shed and hugs were abundant as we learned and shared more about ourselves, about each other, about that great mystery called "death."

Our guides on this journey were Steve

Sarian, a Buddhist priest, and Carol Comte, his partner and helper. With a sensitivity born of their own loving compassion, they guided us through learning such practical basics as confidentiality, learning to be non-judging, loving listeners and recognizing and then consequently working on our own issues regarding death.

One of the underlying themes throughout this federally accredited

20-hour workshop was that when we sit with a terminally ill patient, or interact with their family, we must be in the NOW of their feelings, their pain, their fears. Each of us have our own agendas; yet, for the time when we are with the dying person and their family, putting our own issues aside will allow us to focus unconditionally on the needs of those we are there to help.

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# Do You Believe in Miracles?

BY ANDREA BENSON, LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

I would like to share a miracle with you. In March 2001, after a three-and-a-half-year battle for his life, my 34-year-old son Shane was told he had about two months to live. He is my only child. My mother had passed away in '83; my father in '93; and my aunt, the only person who lived here with me in California, died six months after my son. My sister, who lives in Indiana, has just been diagnosed terminally ill with lung cancer. This is all of my personal family. I have lost 10 aunts and uncles. All of my grandparents. Several cousins and as many friends. I am no stranger to sorrow or tragedy. But when I was told my son had a rare form of brain cancer that goes to his spinal cord, my world as I knew it stopped.

For a month, I didn't tell my son. I hoped for a miracle.

Well, I got my miracle. I didn't recognize it at first, because I didn't see it for what it was, until later on.

I work for myself, so I decided I would work for four hours in the morning, then go to the hospital to spend the rest of the day with Shane. I would shave him, brush his teeth, and feed him lunch and dinner, just do anything I could to make him happy and comfortable.

He was in ICU. I rushed in as usual, and sitting next to his bed was a young woman. The first thing I always did was to look him over, check his IV and monitors. Then the questions started. How did he sleep? Did he eat a good breakfast? How is he feeling? Was he in pain? Had he gone to the bathroom? Was he hungry? What did he want for lunch? I was so happy he still had a good appetite. I would go down to the food booths in the VA and get him anything he wanted. Ice cream, candy,

cookies, I didn't care what. I just wanted him to eat. I thought, when I go back "she" would be gone. She wasn't. To tell the truth, I resented her being there when I was trying to be such a good mother. I went about feeding Shane and fussing over him. She continued to talk to him. Finally, she left. Now I could go about the business of taking care of my son.

Over the course of the month he was in ICU, three different women at times were with him. He said there also was a "biker dude" who came in later in the day or evening. He wanted me to meet him because I ride a motorcycle too. Shane thought we would like each other, because he really liked him. Shane said they were all volunteers from Compassion in Action. In the many hours I spent in the corridors of the ICU, I had noticed on the bulletin board the flier about C.I.A. I remembered it said they were there so "no one should die alone." I thought this was just for the terminally ill person. Little did I know I had just acquired four "Angels" to help Shane and me through the agonizing months to come. I didn't know what I would have done without them. With their gifts of love, caring and selfless acts of kindness, they saved my sanity and my soul from being lost. They helped me keep a grip on my emotions by helping with the hospital side of things. By helping me, they made it easier to help Shane in a more constructive way. I had my miracle.

My son's miracle was four strangers who came to help and love him in his last days, and he loved each of them. I know he did because he shared parts of himself with them. He would never do that unless he felt safe.

There was Varda, who gave his voice a vehicle for his last words to the world.

Therese who, with another unbelievable miracle, granted his last wish. Quincy became his last love. She sang to him and gave his spirit wings. Finally, James who became the big brother he always wanted. They were all miracles that were sent to us when we thought all was lost and we were alone.

Shane and I wanted to speak for all of the men and women at the VA who are unable to say it themselves.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts to all of the angels of Compassion in Action. Your gifts of kindness are truly needed by our friends in the VA, and especially, our angels: Varda, Theresa, Quincy and James. I pray that your kindness and love will be returned ten-fold.

My heart is yours forever. ♥

## Bay Area News

Great news from San Jose/Bay Area Chapter: Linda Douglas from the very successful Chicago chapter has relocated to San Jose, California. Her wisdom and years of experience will be a real asset to the team over there. The San Jose CIA Chapter has both Mid-Peninsula Pathways Hospice and The Laguna Honda Hospital working directly with volunteers in San Francisco now as well.

Just released is Robert Perala's new book *The Divine Architect: The Art of Living and Beyond*. Foreword is by Dannion Brinkley and contains a section on CIA, hospice volunteering and life end-care information to help those understand our relationship with those in the dying process. Visit him and the San Jose chapter online at [www.united-light.com](http://www.united-light.com). Robert Perala ♥

IT WAS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Steve and Carol taught us tools for effective listening by using such techniques as clarifying, reflecting feelings, simply being silent, and the use of open-ended questions. The art of giving feedback was explained and demonstrated, followed by practicing these techniques between ourselves under Steve's skilled supervision.

Steve noted the difference between "healing" and "curing." Curing is usually thought of as a physical cure. This, of course, will not be experienced by a person with a terminal illness.

Healing, on the other hand, can be experienced by everyone; for it is of the mind and the spirit. This could involve such healing experiences as meeting and overcoming fears, having feelings validated, or perhaps a reconciliation between the dying person and a loved one.

Self-care was an important aspect of Steve's presentation. From a video about universal precautions to recognizing the symptoms of burn-out, the necessity of taking care of ourselves and honoring our own needs was emphasized. We were cautioned to bear in mind that if the caregiver is "running on empty," she/he will have nothing left to give to others.

During the second evening, Steve presented a video that featured the dying process and the deaths of three individuals: an elderly man, a young woman, and a child. This was stark reality, not something from a printed page. It brought

tears to the eyes of all who were there. There are no words to describe the impact of seeing the compassionate actions of dedicated caregivers, the pain of a son who could not let his mother go, and the unconditional love of a father who tenderly and tirelessly cared for his dying small son. Sunday afternoon a surprise guest was hosted. Leah Null, the volunteer coordinator from North West New Mexico Hospice/ Transitions Programs, spoke to us about the many ways available to serve our local hospice. Besides sitting with patients in order to give family members a respite from caring for their loved one, for those who would prefer to help in other ways, volunteers are needed to run errands, collect and arrange donated flowers from local florists, do shopping, or in your own kitchen, bake meals to be given to families who are already overwhelmed with accepting their loved one's diagnosis, the rigors of chemotherapy, doctor visits, and new routines, etc...

As the workshop drew to a close on Sunday evening, Steve gifted us with one last exercise. We stood facing each other in a moving line gazing one-on-one into each others' eyes until all had shared. This experience embraced an undefended openness that touched our deepest and most vulnerable selves. It exemplified unquestioned trust and the loving, unconditional Oneness that had blessed us all from the very beginning of the workshop.



Steve Sarian, trainer, San Diego

Steve and Carole shared their compassion, their love and their expertise with our Fellowship, both in the workshop and in Steve's talk at our Sunday Service. They presented us with special gifts that were at once both tangible and intangible. Thank you, Steve and Carol. All that you so freely shared with us will surely be integrated into our lives as tools of compassionate healing for ourselves and for others. We will remember both the givers and the gifts with loving gratitude.

Our loving gratitude also goes out to Dannon, the founder of Compassion in Action, for he served as our inspiration to learn about hospice work. Without him this workshop would not have been possible. ♥

*Reprinted with permission from the Eagle's Nest newsletter, Farmington, NM.*

PILLARS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

through the towers, one can easily see the mimicking of the explosions of the hit of the planes that would fill our vision only a handful of weeks later. I shift my gaze downward and see the presence of a purple essence on the building in between that I have come to call the purple lady, who I know was waiting with open arms for all the souls that left this world on Sept. 11, 2001 as they arrived home.

When I see the new pictures with the spotlights disappearing into the sky, I see the faithful father in the Empire State Building keeping vigil, and I think to myself, "Oh, the stories he could tell about all the people, places and things he has seen come and go throughout his history...so much to tell...so much to teach..." And in the panoramic view I see mother Liberty standing by the sea and imagine a tear rolling down her cheek as she and he mourn the loss of

their children, the twins. Because you see, although New Yorkers may seem cold as stone, hard to embrace and quite dysfunctional at times, we, like death, get a bad rap. After all, it takes a lot of heart to be the greeters at the shores of the tired, the weary and the poor, but we keep on keeping on. Today there are new lights that stand side by side, silently shining as pillars of remembrance of the transient nature of our being and our need for one another. ♥

# A Moment In Time

BY DR. MICHAEL CRAIG, ATLANTA CHAPTER

I had one of those “moments” lately -- you know the kind where you step back from yourself a little bit and notice that life is not what you thought it is.

My 80-year-old stepfather was in the hospital recently for the second time. The first was for a cancer lump, and the most recent involved a near heart attack. I had taken time from my busy life to drive the five hours to Tennessee to help out my sister and to be with him and my mom, who has been recovering from a stroke herself. None of this had bothered me in the past; it's just part of my role as the son to offer support in their time of need. I nonetheless considered it an inconvenience, albeit a necessary one.

When we first stepped in to see Stepdad Roy Monday morning, his eyes lit up like those of a child who just found a friend in a sea of strangers. He then did something unusual for Roy -he held our hands, wept, and told us how

much he loved each one of us. I suddenly developed a lump in my throat and realized why I was there.

Life goes on and death comes to all. The fact that it will someday come to ME, however, has suddenly become a blinding reality and no longer a vague intellectual exercise. In that brief moment in Lakeway Regional Hospital in Morristown, Tennessee, life paid me a visit in a way it has probably paid thousands of guests there since the day it opened. In that brief moment, I felt connected in a very natural way to all of them, as I did after my own near-fatal car accident four years ago.

Next week I will go back to being practical, whimsical and superficial. That's what we do when the thought of death comes. We put our minds on something else. Not this time, however; I'm committing this moment to e-paper in case I have an urge in the future to make light of someone's loss, or to ignore a cry for help. While I can't save all the orphans in Afghanistan, I can spend real time with my family. And all

the ones who truly matter to me.

Corny? You betcha. I remember as a kid listening to all my old relatives (which at the time was 99% of them!) telling me about their fears of getting old and dying. Yeah, yeah, just die and let me go play. Kids don't deal with death much -- not part of their scene. That's where my “moment” occurred: when I saw my little kid watching my old man tell him about the way life and death really is. The duality of the situation was startling...like seeing yourself come out of a door you are just entering!

Old age? Not quite. I'm 49; probably have a little more tread left on this tire. But I feel I've aged another 10 years in the past two. The little kid in me is still thumbing his nose at death. The Old Gentleman is waiting, though, and I know it. Scared? A little bit. Mostly I'm scared of the pain and limitation that comes with old age, assuming I make it that far. Meanwhile I've got things to do. Like noticing those lumps in my throat more often. ♥

# Chicago CIA Chapter Celebrates Anniversary

BY KEITH JACHIM, CHICAGO CHAPTER

Last March, Chicago celebrated the fourth anniversary of the first Compassion-in-Action training held in our area. And in that same month, we conducted our 30th local training! We have now trained over 600 people during these past four years. That means we're averaging 150 trainees in 7 to 8 trainings per year. We feel those are quite impressive stats for an organization that five years ago did not exist.

Today, I am truly blessed and honored to be a trainer and serve as president of the Chicago Chapter of Compassion-in-Action. For those struggling to establish a chapter in their area-KEEP THE FAITH!! Chicago clearly has had the advantage of a large population base, but I don't believe we would be here if we didn't have the faith. I want to thank each and every one on my awesomely fabulous team in Chicago-you are

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# Cherokee Meditation

BY PETER HILL, PHOENIX CHAPTER

We thought they would last forever - those old ones who taught us, bent us, sweetened our lives. We thought our questions would always go to them, and answers would return in familiar voices. Too many times we did not appreciate their humor; their words chided us with lessons. Our differences were great, we thought. Our



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# Inspiration and Interest Spark CIA Members

BY MARTI COBLENTZ, COLUMBUS/DAYTON CHAPTER

Ohio is slowly but surely branching out and becoming stronger and stronger. Our training at the VA in Cleveland is comprised of all veterans. Veterans helping veterans, what could be better! Both retired men and women from our armed services are anxious to get started and what an inspiration this is going to be.

Interest in visiting the Dayton VA is also increasing. We love our monthly treks to visit the veterans there. Dayton is a very special historical site for the VA. It is one of the Soldiers Homes instituted by

Abraham Lincoln right after the Civil War to unite the North and South by caring for veterans from both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. At first was called the Soldiers Home but later became known as the Dayton VA Medical Center. As we drive through the gates, we can sense the flavor from the past as we view the old, old buildings and progress through time admiring the changes in the architecture of the buildings and grounds. The appreciation that we receive from the hospice staff and patients give us all a boost in self-esteem. We look forward to continued success in the Columbus/Dayton Chapter. ♥

CHICAGO CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

“THE BEST”. Heartfelt thanks go out to those at the National Office and my CIA friends around the country. Compassion-in-Action would not be the same without each “angel” at the bedside. I love you all deeply. ♥

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eyes wandered to other things, our voices mingled with strange ones. And suddenly, like the vapor mists that lift and fade on sun-struck mountaintops, they were gone. We did not see them go. They slipped past the boundaries to joy and rest without limit. Now the questions hang in mid-air without voices to answer. And the differences fade like the mists, but memory persists with genuine humor, genuine love. ♥

## Chapters and Contacts



Atlanta, GA .....	Sandy Hatfield .....	angelworkshop@juno.com.....	770-277-0587
Baltimore, MD .....	Mary Powers .....	ciabaltimore@mindspring.com .....	410-248-9145
Chicago, IL .....	Keith Jachim .....	CIAChicago@mediaone.net .....	630-415-1884
Columbus, OH.....	Marti Coblentz .....	marticoblentz@hotmail.com .....	614-457-8034
Dayton, OH.....	Elaine Dalrymple .....	Laine5683@aol.com .....	937-216-5683
Hartford, CT .....	Karin Nemri .....	ciact@juno.com .....	860-243-0869
Loma Linda, CA .....	Connie Coleman .....	connie4pz@aol.com.....	909-881-4282
Long Beach, CA.....	Dove Rule .....	mahalo@webworldinc.com.....	714-827-5451
Los Angeles, CA .....	Heidi L. Beattie .....	CIALAX@aol.com .....	310-478-3711ext 44887
National Office .....	.....	cianatl@aol.com .....	310-473-1941
New York City, NY .....	Carol DeCuffa .....	Cdecuffa@aol.com .....	845-225-8808
Oklahoma City, OK .....	Petra Cox.....	Petracox45@aol.com .....	405-524-2120
Phoenix, AZ .....	Peter Hill .....	Jemeph@home.com .....	480-668-9852
Portland, OR .....	Linda Merrick .....	lmerrick@harlandfs.com .....	503-659-7463
	Jan Orr.....	janice.nauertz-orr@med.va.gov	
Sacramento, CA .....	Robin Juhasz.....	ciainsac@aol.com .....	916-989-4590
	Rexene Collier.....	rcol007@aol.com .....	530-873-0984
San Diego, CA.....	Jill Bordokoff.....	CIA_SD@yahoo.com .....	858-292-5432
San Francisco, CA .....	Kent Shew.....	kdshew@hotmail.com	
	Lynda Douglas (Union City).....	joidvev@aol.com .....	510-475-1135
Santa Fe, NM.....	Nick Miller .....	cia_santafe@mindspring.com.....	505-466-3421
San Jose, CA .....	Robert Perala .....	RPerala@unitedlight.com .....	831-430-0146
Seattle, WA.....	Kathryn Ford.....	ciakaty@aol.com .....	425-227-4118
	Ron Hays.....	rhays@connectexpress.com .....	425-688-8671
Spokane, WA .....	Ronnie Mound .....	ronniemound1@juno.com .....	509-484-1418
	LuAnn Stallcop .....	luanns@worldnet.att.net.....	509-838-8155

# Our Volunteers in Action



CIA volunteers at VA Geriatric Extended Care Ward, Oklahoma City, on June 8, 2001 (above): Petra Cox (wearing a white sleeveless blouse on the far left) Tom Tarr (kneeling back left), VA volunteer coordinator, Celia Pinkson (standing right); (inset) Petra Cox, Tom Tarr, and LaVona Carlson with two of those we serve; (far right) CIA volunteers Tom Tarr and Celia Pinkson.

Dedicated (ded i kat id) - Webster's Dictionary defines it as being devoted or faithful. These words describe Hope Faulkner's performance during the past year as she worked tirelessly on behalf of Compassion-in-Action. Her attention to detail and commitment to the goals of the organization-that no one need die alone-were her trademarks. On behalf of CIA, we wish her good health and happiness on her new journey.

All the best,



Dannion Brinkley  
Chairman of the Board



COMPASSION  
IN  
ACTION

*The Twilight Brigade*

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