

Passing Thoughts



THE NEWSLETTER OF COMPASSION IN ACTION
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CIA's Oprah Debut

BY CINDY TESSMER

The journey began with surprise tickets to attend the April 2, 1998 live tape of the Oprah Show. Anita Davis, her mother, grandmother and a friend happened to be members of the audience invited to fill Oprah's Y2K time capsule. All audience members were asked to write a goal for the year 2000 and place their goals in a locked time capsule. Having completed *Compassion in Action's* 20-hour intensive training 3 weeks prior, Anita knew without hesitation what her goal was. She would help *Compassion in Action* establish a chapter in Chicago. At the end of the show, Oprah invited her entire audience back in 20 months for her Y2K follow up show.

Months flew by. Anita and other Chicago area volunteers worked unceasingly to make

CIA: Chicago a reality. When Oprah's producers eventually called to check whether Anita achieved her goal, she answered, "YES!" The producer said, "Great! I need your picture on my desk in the morning." Five days later, a producer called to say, "thank you, but your story wasn't selected to be in the show. You'll just be in the audience." A week later, only 36 hours before the scheduled December 1st taping of the follow up show, the producer called again saying, "we want to include you and *Compassion in Action* on the show. We'll have a camera crew at your house tomorrow morning...oh, and we'd like footage of you visiting a patient too."

Mentally pushing aside a mixture of obstacles, Anita cleaned the house, set up babysitters for the children, decorated for

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A Message from the Chairman

BY DANNION BRINKLEY

The New Year is here and so are we! We have great plans for growing *Compassion in Action* in the 21st century. I would like, once again, to thank every one of you for your kind thoughts and your commitment, all of which have contributed to the success of *Compassion in Action*. I'm so proud of the outstanding service we are providing to people of America and especially for the veterans. I believe that our volunteer contribution to end-of-life care creates a safer and more loving space for the people we serve. Thanks to your commitment, we stand together to promote the importance of physical, emotional and spiritual support for those facing death. With each life that we touch we are one step closer to transforming the healthcare system in some small way. And let me assure you, we are making a difference!

As this new year begins, I humbly ask three things of each of you. First, continue to expand your skills as caregivers, increase your knowledge of the healthcare systems, and become more vocal in advocating the rights of the dying. Second, please take the

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Top: Oprah opens her year 2000 time capsule that included Anita Davis' wishes for a CIA: Chicago Chapter. Middle: Anita Davis in the audience of the Oprah show. Bottom: A hospice friend visits with CIA volunteers Anita Davis and Nancy Molidar.

COMPASSION IN ACTION: *The Twilight Brigade*

Through worldwide education and mobilization of trained volunteers, *Compassion in Action* provides a loving presence for those approaching death, thereby helping ensure that *no one need die alone.*

From the President's Desk

BY RONNIE KAYE, CIA NATIONAL PRESIDENT



We have started off this year with a wonderful new addition to the *Compassion in Action* family. I am pleased to welcome Cynthia L. Tessmer, MPA, as our Executive Director. Cindy comes to us with a master's degree in public administration and 15 years of nonprofit management experience, at both the local and national level. What a perfect person to guide our next growth spurt!

As the organization continues to develop, I am constantly reminded of the important work we do at the bedside. Stories reach us from individual volunteers, from the patients we serve, and from their family members. Last week, a friend who knows about my involvement with *Compassion in Action* sent an e-mail message with the Starfish Story. She said it reminded her so much of CIA and the work we do. The story is a simple one:

A man is walking on the beach. He sees another man bend down, straighten, and then throw something into the ocean. He repeats the same thing again and again. It turns out that he is picking up starfish left on the shore when the tide went out, then tossing them back into the water so they would survive. The first man comments that there are too many starfish, so his gesture won't make any difference at all. As he throws another starfish back into the ocean, he said, "It made a difference to that one."

The need for our service to the dying is enormous. People today live very complicated lives and have many commitments. Please be assured that even an hour of your time matters. With every patient served, and with each family comforted, we make a difference.



A Message from the Chairman

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steps necessary to become masters of cyberspace. The internet offers us a way of connecting with loved ones that transcends all geographical limits. It gives us access to vast sources of information that will allow us to better help the dying and their families. Finally, share the passion of this mission with your friends and make every effort to actively recruit them for service. May your commitment to the Twilight Brigade and your service to others herald volunteerism as the guiding light of the future.

I love you.



CIA Board Member Cheryl Birch explains the importance of CIA's mission at a Business Affairs Luncheon fundraiser.



American Legion representatives enjoy a moment with CIA National volunteers after presenting commendations from several American Legion districts on Veteran's Day, 1999.

CIA's Oprah Debut *Continued from page 1*

Christmas, and emotionally prepared herself for the interview.

The crew arrived early the next morning, right on schedule. In 3 1/2 hours the filming was over, leaving Anita to worry, "What did I say? Did I represent CIA well? What if I just blew *Compassion in Action's* big chance for national recognition?"

On January 11, 2000, the world saw the Oprah broadcast featuring Anita's Y2K accomplishment...CIA: Chicago on the verge of becoming official. We watched Anita proudly explaining *Compassion in Action's* important service to the dying and knew we were on the map!

Anita Davis' contributions to CIA: Chicago are evident. Her spirit and determination opened a door for *Compassion in Action* locally and nationally. She is a testament to what one individual can do. Thank you, Anita, for your service to *Compassion in Action* and to the dying. ■

In Memorium

Compassion in Action celebrates the lives and announces the recent passing of two American heroes, Admiral Elmo Zumwald, Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant General Leonard Chapman, United States Marine Corps.



Leslie Steffman and Karin Nemri of Hartford, CT enjoy a laugh at CIA's National Administrative Conference in November, 1999.



CIA Atlanta volunteers share a light-hearted moment with the real Patch Adams after all the books are signed at his February 1999 lecture.



CIA Volunteer Tom Bodnar and his fiancée, CIA National Trainer Dove Rule (at CIA's National Administrative Conference in November, 1999), prove that hearts can find each other through service.



Fergus takes a break from his walk across the United States and receives one of our Chairman Dannion Brinkley's famous bear-hugs!



Two fans at the Denver Whole Life Expo enjoy a few moments with CIA volunteers Petra Cox (Oklahoma City, OK), CIA National Chairman Dannion Brinkley (Aiken, SC), CIA National web-dude Dave Richards (Denver, CO), and CIA National scheduling coordinator Mel Minitor (Warrenville, SC).



Dannion at the Phoenix Whole Life Expo (October, 1999) with Xi Gong Master Hong Liu and co-author Paul Perry.

CIA across the USA

Passion for *Compassion in Action's* mission is catching fire throughout the United States. Volunteers in communities across the country touched many lives and accomplished many goals in the recent months. Thanks to the tireless work of our volunteers, here's a sampling of our successes:

Three individuals were recently certified as local CIA trainers: Lynda L. Douglas of Naperville, IL, Steve Sarian of San Diego, CA and Dan Zarlengo of Seattle, WA. Congratulations!

Five cities successfully completed the chapter start up process and are on the verge of chapterhood: **Austin TX, Chicago IL, Hartford CT, Seattle WA, and Spokane WA.**

Atlanta, GA volunteers organized their sixth intensive training and regularly offer continuing education sessions for CIA graduates.

In **Austin**, Kim Hasselmark and addi-

tional Texas volunteers organized two successful weekend training sessions, are serving patients in three hospice facilities, and have submitted CIA's intensive training curriculum for approval as palliative care continuing education (C.E.U.'s) to the Texas Nursing Association.

Chicago volunteers, CIA's star achievers, hosted 9 weekend intensive training sessions in 1999, educating over 250 individuals.

Cleveland, OH — The volunteer coordinator at Mount Carmel Hospice reports that some of her best volunteers are CIA-trained volunteers.

In **Columbus, OH**, Dannion Brinkley's recruitment efforts during three Ohio appearances generated inquiries from Ohio University's Osteopathic Medical School.

The local VA volunteer coordinator attended **Dayton, OH's** first weekend

intensive training and is enthusiastically supporting *Compassion in Action* by providing the use of office and telephone facilities.

Thanks to the grassroots efforts of Leslie Steffman and other volunteers in **Hartford, CT**, a new CIA chapter mobilized in record time.

Iowa, one of *Compassion in Action's* newest locations, will host their second weekend intensive training February 25th through 27th.

Los Angeles, CA received a \$4,000.00 grant from the Entertainment Industry Foundation, enabling CIA volunteers to serve residents at the Motion Picture Country Home.

Oklahoma City, OK reports that the volunteer coordinator at a local VA Medical Center is eager to invite CIA volunteers in to serve dying veterans.

Portland, OR volunteers hosted their

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DON'T FORGET VETS... by Cheryl Birch

When *Compassion in Action* began in May 1997, Chairman Dannion Brinkley had only one request. As a retired United States Marine, he asked "Don't forget the vets." From the moment *Compassion in Action* volunteers visited the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center and discovered most patients did not receive visits from family or friends, we were committed to dying veterans.

The need for *Compassion in Action's* services is critical. Nationwide, over 32,000 World War II Veterans die every month. By late 2000, the number will increase to 40,000 deaths per month and continue at that rate for five years. To



The national VA Voluntary Services Conference held in Richmond, VA, in May 1999, helped promote our program to VA Volunteer Coordinators throughout the Country.

address this serious and escalating situation, the Veterans Administration held an end-of-life care summit in May 1998. Only 25 civilian representatives were invited and *Compassion in Action* was there.

In May 1999, thanks to the success of *CIA's* growing reputation, National VA Voluntary Services (VAVS) invited *Compassion in Action* to their conference in Richmond, VA, to present our model of service to terminally ill veterans. Our presentation received the highest marks on record.

On October 19, 1999, Dannion Brinkley testified before the House Committee on Government Reform. The hearing explored end-of-life care issues and, in that context, Representatives requested that Brinkley address the plight of American veterans. He outlined the problems and cited *Compassion in Action* as one working solution.

Today, *CIA* volunteers serve at VA Medical Centers in twelve cities across



Receiving Valentines delivered by CIA volunteers in February 1999 brightened the smiles on the faces of many veterans.

the United States; including Seattle, Chicago, San Diego, Dayton, Spokane, Atlanta, Baltimore, Palo Alto, Los Angeles, Long Beach and the new facility recently established in Sacramento. In Los Angeles alone, *Compassion in Action* volunteers served over 270 terminally ill veterans in the last 18 months.

Our work has not gone unnoticed. On Veteran's Day, seven districts of the American Legion presented Dannion Brinkley and *Compassion in Action* with commendations for their efforts on behalf of terminally ill veterans.

Thanks to the generous support of Philip P. Thomas, CEO of the Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare System, and his staff, *Compassion in Action's* national headquarters and local Los Angeles service volunteers are housed on the West Los Angeles VA Campus. In addition, groundbreaking focus group discussions involving VA medical staff and *CIA* volunteers were held in January. The goal was to identify key issues and solutions optimizing care for terminally ill veterans.

In Sacramento, CA *Compassion in Action* Executive Committee Chair, Lyn Guyon, designed a successful in-service workshop for selected medical staff. Administrators and officials were so impressed she's been invited back to offer the session to other staff members.

Small yet powerful describes the *CIA* volunteer group active in the Spokane, WA VA facility. Under the guidance of Ronnie Mound, Executive Committee Chair, the Spokane VA bears impressive evidence of *Compassion in Action's* loving touch.

Recently trained *CIA* volunteer Carol DeCuffa proved that one individual can

make a profound difference. Chaplain Greg Lyttle at the Bronx, NY VA Medical Center was so impressed with her dedication that he is sponsoring a weekend intensive training in March, which is approved for C.E.U. credit. Eight New York metropolitan VA Centers have been invited to participate. A record crowd is expected to attend.

Thanks to the cooperative efforts of administrators and committed *CIA* volunteers at the Cleveland, OH VA, the quality of care provided to dying veterans recently rose to a new level. A new area within the facility has been dedicated exclusively to serving terminally ill veterans.



CIA volunteer Tom Bodnar and his dad serenade Hawaiian vet Thomas Tassel with "Mele Kalikimaka" on Christmas Day, 1999.

Sharon Clark, head of voluntary services at the Boise, ID VA Center, recently contacted the *CIA* national office and requested a training session for their volunteers.

In his Veteran's Day address to staff members, patients, and the public at the West Los Angeles VA, Dannion Brinkley said, "World War II veterans never deserted this great country in our time of need and we must not desert them now!" We are proud to say *Compassion in Action* continues to honor our Chairman's call to service. ■



CIA Chairman Dannion Brinkley spends some time at the Spokane VA with a vet in June, 1999.

Francis Vorland... A Special Kind of Hero

BY GEORGE HIGGINSON AND CINDY TESSMER



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARTINE TOMCZYK

Francis Vorland

Army veteran, Francis “Frank” Vorland is a resident at the SunBridge Care Center in Southern California. *Compassion in Action* volunteers first met Frank in May 1999 when he was hospitalized at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center. For some time, Frank appeared to be on death’s doorstep. During his entire hospitalization, CIA volunteers visited him regularly. Thanks to his medical treatment, the loving attention of volunteers, and his strong will to live, he was eventually discharged to SunBridge where CIA volunteers continued to watch over his well being and provide loving support.

As we sat in the hallway and talked, Frank made it clear that he was now doing for others what *Compassion in Action* volunteers continue to do for him. “You see that man over there?” he asked, pointing to a gentleman in a wheelchair who was energetically propelling himself down the hallway. “When I first came here, all he did was lie in bed. He

wouldn’t even talk. I kept after him every day, and I never let up. Now, he goes to all his physical therapy appointments, and he has just been fitted for his artificial legs. I know I make a difference here.”

Frank engages people and carefully listens to what they have to say. If someone he meets cannot speak, he finds another way to connect. Frank loves reaching out to others. His goal is to turn fear and negativity into a smile. SunBridge staff members say Frank has become an advocate for fellow patients.

Through Frank’s efforts, love and compassion come full circle. Recently, he spoke at a *Compassion in Action* weekend intensive training testifying to the difference that loving people make in each other’s lives. He was an inspiration to all.

Today, Frank is a happy man despite his life-threatening illness. Through service, he discovered a way to lighten people’s hearts and brighten their lives. He is a very special kind of hero. ■

A Valentine for Volunteers...

Dear *Compassion in Action*,

It is with sincerest gratitude that I write this long overdue letter, to thank you for the incomparable care and love you bestowed on my husband and myself during the last months of his life. What amazed me most was your unfaltering commitment to responding to our call...whenever I called...no matter how spur of the moment that call came. You never let me down!

Every member of the team that ministered to our needs knew and understood the depth of the pain we were both suffering through, and knew what to say and how to say it so that we were inspired to face reality with courage, love and respect. Without you, I truly doubt I could have survived the horror of watching my beautiful 48-year-old husband wither before my eyes and die. Remembering right

now still brings me to my knees, makes me remember that you were there to help me learn the lessons, and to believe I could face life alone.

Words seem relatively hollow at this moment to describe what you did for us. The fact that you offered this at no cost to us still boggles my mind. There was no way that we could have afforded private care. My family is 1,500 miles away and my husband’s family had all died before he was diagnosed. I was losing it when you arrived on my doorstep! Your support sustained me in ways I can never describe.

As I recover from the financial devastation that the last two years have created, I will do everything in my power to contribute to your work. In the meantime, please accept my undying gratitude. It’s all I can offer.

All my love, K.J.

CIA Across the USA *Continued*

second intensive training session and are working hard to establish a vital, supportive community.

CIA-Sacramento successfully reached full chapter status in May 1999. Lyn Guyon, CIA certified local trainer, regularly offers in-service workshop training for healthcare professionals in Sacramento Valley VA facilities.

San Diego, CA CIA volunteers will be taking part in the San Diego Health Fair and Symposium on March 10th and 11th. Volunteer Diane Forsythe received a special commendation from San Diego Hospice staff for her service and for bringing “extra-special warmth, love, and community” to the facility on Christmas Eve.

Seattle, WA volunteers regularly visit terminally ill individuals incarcerated in area prisons.

Spokane, WA volunteers added their special loving touch to the VA’s beautiful hospice wing, helping to make that facility a wonderful model for care to dying veterans. ■



Compassion in Action

The Twilight Brigade

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Because no one need die alone.

UPCOMING EVENTS & LECTURES

February 25 – 27	Weekend Intensive Training Los Angeles, CA Weekend Intensive Training San Diego, CA Weekend Intensive Training Eastern Iowa
February 28	David Kessler Lecture Los Angeles
March 10 - 12	Weekend Intensive Training Columbus, OH
March 17 – 19	Train-the-Trainer Weekend Chicago, IL
March 24 – 26	Weekend Intensive Training New York, NY
March 27	David Kessler Lecture Pasadena, CA
April 5	David Kessler Lecture Maine
April 7 – 9	Weekend Intensive Training Phoenix, AZ
April 14 – 16	Weekend Intensive Training Chicago, IL
April 27 – 28	David Kessler Lecture Albuquerque, NM
April 30	David Kessler Lecture Pennsylvania
May 19 – 21	Weekend Intensive Training Chicago, IL
May 20	David Kessler Lecture Citrus Valley, CA
May 24	David Kessler Lecture Houston, TX



Compassion in Action

The Twilight Brigade

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For additional information about CIA and local contacts in cities across
the United States, please visit our website: www.TwilightBrigade.org

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