



December 2007

The Family Link

A guest house serving families visiting loved ones with life-threatening illnesses

New Challenges, and New Outreach

As The Family Link makes plans for its 23rd year of hospitality in 2008, the laughter and tears of the past year blend into a wonderful montage of diverse, determined people, visiting in San Francisco to do what they needed to do at the time of a loved one's critical illness or injury, facing their crises with inner strength that few of them knew they possessed.

Thousands of out-of-town guests have found refuge at The Family Link's home on Castro Street, and our rented apartments on Baker Street before that. Recent guests have come from across the U.S. and from the United Kingdom. A few stayed only one night, sometimes because the person they had rushed here to visit had died before they arrived. Others are with us for weeks, sometimes months. One mother made over 30 visits from Kentucky to support and care for her son.

Our "Heads in Beds" census showed a total of about 2,000 guest-nights per year, with occupancy fluctuating from full with a waiting list to disappointingly sparse. To keep the needle tilted toward "full" the Board of Directors has surveyed the city's sixteen hospitals and hospices and established a plan that ensures a board member or volunteer will work personally with staff at each facility, regularly making sure that social workers, nurses and chaplains remember we're available to their patients' visiting families.

The people who provide patient care have always been our largest source of guest referrals. Even before our formal founding as a nonprofit agency in 1985, nurses on the AIDS ward at San Francisco General Hospital called with tales of family members summoned to a patient's bedside who were sleeping on sofas in lounges for lack of a place they could afford to stay.

In our third decade, we're much better known among the city's health professionals. Our goal now is to make sure every new staff member who deals with patient issues knows who we are and what we do. We expect this outreach to result in more "full" days—with more lights on, mouths to be fed, sheets to be washed and operating costs in general.

So we are also taking steps to expand our local donor base beyond the faithful friends here and across the country who have been our mainstay. News stories about The Family Link have brought some recognition over the years but not much added financial support. In 2008 we'll ap-

proach new potential contributors, confident that more San Franciscans—who recognize a good thing when they see it—will have us on their philanthropic radar.

Meanwhile, our guests inspire and gratify us. Several who stayed with us in our early years continue to send what they can, like clockwork. In the past, some who couldn't afford even our modest \$30 per night suggested donation returned home and raised funds for us among their families and friends. An Irish family, Thomas and Margaret Walshe, carried on that tradition this year. In memory of their son, Edmund, they sent nearly \$1,200 from his U.K. memorial in lieu of flowers and instead of sending Christmas cards. The Walshe's other sons are active in San Francisco's Irish community.

We couldn't function without volunteers, who help with everything from cooking and shopping to fundraising. Guests frequently find Janis Berwitt in the kitchen, providing a sympathetic ear as well as practical tips (The secret to her renowned cookies? Half the chocolate chips the package calls for!). At the Castro Street Fair, a fundraiser where more helpers translate to more income, over two dozen volunteers happily contributed at least four hours of their time. One recruited his sister, his niece and her friend, his goddaughter and her brother, and even his busy handyman.

Our volunteers are accustomed to helping bereaved guests and occasionally attending funerals. So helping a family with a hospital wedding was a first this past year. At The Family Link, every day brings new challenges and new hope.



"You have made this week a very blessed one for Dan & I. We have spent many beautiful hours with my beloved brother, Paul. We have rested easy and restored our strength under your roof. Thank you so much for being 'our family, away from home'."
...Love, Jean & Danny, & Paul



A hospital wedding. The story is on page 2.



A Happy Wedding Day

Judy and Stan have cared for foster children on their ranch in Northern California for many years. In July 2007 Stan was hospitalized at the Veterans Hospital in San Francisco. His condition was serious and the prognosis was not good. So Judy came to be near him. Since then her world has been turned upside-down. Like so many others who find themselves in such a position, the reality of her husband's condition, the financial cost of an extended period away from home, and leaving responsibilities of running the ranch and caring for the foster children to others, makes this an emotional time.

The cost of hotel accommodations near the hospital became prohibitive, and a VA social worker referred Judy to The Family Link. She came to us feeling lonely, frightened, uncertain and depressed about the future. As 2008 approaches, Stan's condition is critical and Judy spends most of the day at the hospital.

Amid uncertainty, Judy's daily visit to the hospital has been taking its toll. Some days are good. Others are not. At The Family Link, unlike a hotel, she meets others undergoing the same ordeal, and gains the strength to carry on—and the realization that she is not alone at this time. No one can take away her personal anxiety about her husband, but she feels surrounded and supported by others.

When Judy comes home to the house, the day's stress can be lessened. In turn, of course, she gives strength to others. When guests talk about loved ones, it isn't all sadness and tears—there is also much joy and many happy memories to recall. Always there is humor here.

Stan and Judy have two grown children of their own—a son, Jason, and a daughter, Jennifer. Jennifer's boyfriend, Michael, is in the military and Stan's wishes were to see his daughter get married, his son complete his doctorate, and everything be taken care of for his wife, before anything happened to him.

So, in September, Jennifer and Michael decided to have their wedding at the hospital. Plans for the special day went into high gear. Michael was given a 72 hour pass. Pascale Evers, one of The Family Link's volunteers, made the wedding cake. Another volunteer, Jason Forman—a professional photographer—took the wedding photographs. Michael's family came from San Jose, and a couple of Jennifer's friends completed the wedding party.

Everyone met in a grassy area outside the hospital, overlooking the Pacific Ocean—except Stan, who was in isolation and couldn't participate in the ceremony. New son-in-law Michael,



all 6 feet 4 inches, was resplendent in his uniform and the bride, of course, looked beautiful. The family then donned gear to protect Stan and visited him in his room.

A reception was held in a restaurant overlooking the Pacific. And there another unexpected gesture was made: a stranger, seeing Michael in uniform, picked up Michael's tab. Michael returned to his unit on the last day of his pass, for posting to his second tour of duty in Iraq. He had also served a tour in Afghanistan.

Stan was a very joyful father, knowing that his daughter was happily married. And Judy was grateful that everything had been made possible—for her, a pocketful of miracles happened that day.



Here for the Holidays

Bernard Jervis, a longtime, long-distance volunteer, returned to San Francisco in mid-November 2007 to help us produce this newsletter and generally help around the house at our busiest time of the year. Shortly before leaving his home in New Zealand, Bernard had celebrated his 70th birthday. Earlier in the year he was awarded his doctorate in Social Anthropology, culminating four years of hard work that had included sojourns for research in Bosnia. So 2007 was quite an eventful year for Bernard. When he arrived, our volunteer Pascale Evers (above) created a birthday cake for him, enabling our board members to join in celebrating his milestones.

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Thoughts from Sister Ruth Family Link Program Director

The writing of another newsletter always brings back memories of guests who have stayed during the year—and also of people who have stayed with us over the past 22 years. This November an envelope arrived and I looked at the return address and thought, “Oh, I know who they are!”

Once in a while I have to think long and hard to remember someone who came to us in the 1980s. But this was a donation from an unforgettable family who had stayed with us back then. The ‘In memory of’ section of the return envelope read simply, “Laura and Mikey.” My eyes teared up as I thought of baby Mikey, who spent only a few days on this earth before joining his mother Laura in death.

His daddy and maternal grandmother returned home to continue being a family of choice. We stay in touch by e-mail, and are always glad to hear that they are doing well—especially grandmother Ellie, who was recovering nicely from a kidney transplant around Thanksgiving.

This newsletter is an important means of fundraising, but it is also a way for us to stay in touch with those of you who have spent time as a guest at The Family Link. I enjoy hearing from all of you.

The bottom line, though, is that we always need money to keep going: to keep the house heated and lit; to keep everything clean and in good repair; to keep the cupboards, fridge and freezer well stocked.

We have been helped recently by the donation of furniture from our CPA, Frank Baldanzi, who was closing an apartment, and of appliances from Jim Middlehurst, who moved to Palm Springs.

Allan and Lenore Sindler made a donation to re-carpet the hallways and stairs. We have chosen a reddish color with a golden fleck called “Forty-Niners” (red and gold are the colors of our local NFL team). The carpet will be installed once some repairs and painting have been done. One of our longtime volunteers has pledged a donation to cover this needed work, taking advantage of a 2007 federal tax opportunity to contribute money directly from his IRA.

We have never sought any government funding, so for all the support that comes in from individual donors we really are grateful. We want to be able to continue to offer the hospitality and support of The Family Link to people coming to San Francisco to visit a gravely ill loved one.

And so, once again, we ask for your kindness and participation in the life and well-being of The Family Link and our guests. And we thank everyone who helps make this possible.



Visit us online

Our Website address is
www.thefamilylink.com

*“We have reached ‘the fall of life,’ 81 & 84, and we always support you. God bless all of you.”
...Mary and Frank*

With Friends Like These

Generous organizations and individuals helped us through another successful year in 2007. Our top fund-raising events were Macy’s Passport In-Store and the Castro Street Fair, which each brought us over \$3,000 thanks to the work of our volunteers. Grants came from Episcopal Charities, of which we are a Partner Agency, \$25,000; Broadway Cares, \$10,000; Trust Funds, Inc., \$6,000; Frank A. Campini Foundation, \$5,000; Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, \$5,000; the Allan P. & Lenore B. Sindler Fund/San Francisco Foundation, \$1,900; and Wells Fargo Bank, \$1,000.

Donations of \$1,000 came from our past board president Steven Byrd, Janice F. Hawkes in memory of James E. Pike, Robert Reikman, Suzanne Seay, the Church of St. John the Evangelist, and TerraServer.com. The family and friends of guests Thomas and Margaret Walshe raised \$1,181.40 for us in memory of Edmund Walshe; Robert Bowden Shepard sent \$1,500 in memory of Melissa Brown; John and Kristine Gable gave us \$3,000; an anonymous donor sent \$3,500;

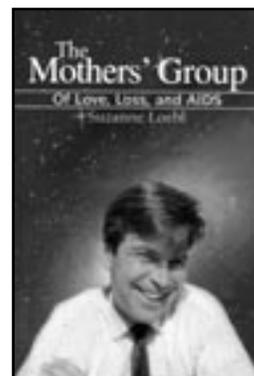
and Beth C. Newman honored the memory of Mary Corwin with a \$5,000 gift.

A major in-kind donation came from board secretary Darin Dawson, who provided \$1,900 in material improvements for our garden.

Donations Without Cost

San Franciscans continue to support us with donations of usable goods to our account (No. 15) at **Community Thrift Store**, 625 Valencia St., which totaled \$1,100 in 2007.

Friends across the nation have another method of contributing without cost, by simply registering credit, debit and ATM cards with the secure **eScrip** fund-raising network. We get 2%–10% of the purchase amount automatically, every time a card is used at hundreds of participating businesses (Safeway, Macy’s, airlines, restaurants, many more).



Suzanne Loeb, a past guest, has written a moving book about a mothers’ support group, and the journey her family embarked upon with David, their beloved son, who had AIDS. It may help others who have shared that same path. *The Mothers’ Group: Of Love, Loss, and AIDS* is available on Amazon.com, through book stores or at www.iuniverse.com.



Encounters in the Garden

by Darin Dawson

As the volunteer gardener at The Family Link, I've spent time with many guests who venture into the garden. There must be something comforting about sitting in a garden while the gardener is quietly going about horticultural tasks. Maybe it's watching someone else while they work at sweeping fallen leaves, rhythmically snipping spent flowers, tying up the errant branches of a floriferous vine or watering, that relaxes and engages visitors.

Talking with a gardener is easy, and conversation blends seamlessly with gardening activities. Some Family Link guests tell me why they are visiting; others never mention the reason they are here. Listening to guests tell the stories of their loved ones can be an emotionally intense experience, but there is something about being in a garden that naturally provides a mellowing counterpoint to the intensity.

Perhaps guests share their stories with me because they sense that a gardener isn't going to give them advice, interject another story, provide a theoretical framework for their experience or analyze or "fix" their problems. Or is it the garden itself that nourishes this sense of trust and creates an environment in which conversation flows so freely?

Family Link guests often surprise me with their stories. The father of a man about my age, whose son sustained major head injuries in a

traffic accident, told me that his son was born in the same little Idaho town that I was and that he still lives there. When his son was released from the hospital, the father brought him to the garden to meet me, and we talked about Idaho. It turns out he and a second cousin of mine are co-workers—what a small world!

A visitor from Texas works for a landscaper, and we chatted about botany and horticulture. She never mentioned who she was visiting or why; the garden was simply a peaceful interlude from the purpose of her visit. Another woman read me the eulogy she wrote for her dying son, and although she asked for editorial advice, her composition was a perfect statement of a mother's unconditional love for her child. One guest shared her recipe for lemon jelly while admiring our lemon crop.

In The Family Link garden, guests often sit at the table, perhaps savoring a cup of coffee, writing a letter, eating a quick meal, reading the newspaper or just enjoying a short respite from the reason for their visit to San Francisco. They enjoy simple garden occurrences that we often overlook in our daily lives. Just noticing the sweet wafting fragrance of jasmine, the whirl of hummingbirds sipping nectar only a few feet away, or even the endlessly changing patterns of fog and clouds in the sky—these little things really do provide comfort and solace to our guests. The Family Link garden is a little place of calm and reflection in the bigger world.

*"So much has happened in my life since my brother passed away in 1987. I'll never forget The Family Link for providing our family with a comfy place to stay."
...Janet*



Magnus, our eight-year-old St. Bernard, died in December 2006. Two months later Sister Ruth's heart was captured by Morag, "a lovely lassie" who came to The Family Link from Washington state. Her Scottish name, like Magnus, means "great."

Key Volunteers Say Farewell, New Directors Join the Board

Two new members joined the Board of Directors in 2007, and two departed. We are fortunate to have a pair of skilled, energetic volunteers, both of whom were elected to officer positions.

We said reluctant goodbyes to long-term board member and treasurer Dennis Duca, who moved with his partner, David Peck, to Palm Springs. In addition to his financial duties, Dennis cooked, tidied the garage (over and over) and made us laugh.

Adrienne Kernan, R.N., a longtime veteran of the AIDS ward at San Francisco General Hospital and an employee of the Alameda County Public Health Department, also left the board, promising to continue to help as a volunteer.

Our new treasurer is Bob Hayn. Bob is the retired chief financial officer of a national corporation. He also was chief accountant for Golden Gate University for many years, has served as treasurer for the Golden Gate Busi-

ness Association, and did volunteer financial work for the AIDS Emergency Fund as well as fundraising activities for The Family Link.

Darin Dawson joined our board, was promptly elected secretary, and still managed to develop, improve and maintain our garden despite his busy schedule of other volunteer commitments. Darin's energy, initiative and experience have been welcome, and vital, as the board establishes and works toward our outreach goals.

Another dedicated volunteer also has moved away from San Francisco. Mike Greene kept our database current, almost since the time we moved to Castro Street. He and his dog, Becky, have retired to Napa.

Jonathan Hicks returned as our new administrative volunteer, freeing Development Director Richard Cardarelli for more outreach and grantwriting. Sister Ruth, our program director, remains our only full-time employee. Jonathan first worked with us in 1997.