

Helping Hands

Pain, Support and Hope

Grieving Fathers' Experiences Helping with Subsequent Pregnancies

By Andrew Nielsen

Stanford Community Writing Program

When an infant passes away and the coming of another baby is expected, it can be an apprehensive time for the both the mother and father. Fears from the previous pregnancy linger, and each milestone during the process can bring back painful memories of the past. Although much emphasis is placed on helping the mother deal with the anxiety and anticipation that comes with carrying and awaiting another baby, the father's perspective is often overlooked or neglected.

"There's no formula. There's no cookbook recipe that you can follow to make someone better. You deal with it as best as you can."

Joe's daughter Talia died in 1999

In her book "Pregnancy After a Loss," Carol Cirulli Lanham writes how after the loss of a baby, the focus continues to stay on the mother. Doctors, relatives, friends, coworkers, neighbors, store clerks will want to know how she is doing. In many ways, their concern is well placed. No one will feel the pain over the loss quite as intensely. But fathers have

feelings, too, even though they may not always show them. Although men may show their grief differently than women, the male experience of losing a child and preparing for another one is nevertheless unique, relevant and substantial.

Joe, a father who is also involved in the software and managing data from NASA missions, has worked on the Mars Global Surveyor, the Magellan mission to Venus, and the Galileo mission to Jupiter, and his group has proposed to participate in a future mission to Pluto. When he and his wife Jill lost their first child Talia to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome in March of 1999, Joe explains, "it is the most unexpected thing, you just don't think you're going to get a phone call to come to the hospital if there's a problem."

Richard is a high-tech executive who works out of south San Jose designing supply chains. After he and wife Christy had three miscarriages including twins, Christy contacted HAND of the Peninsula. Richard remembers how the first time around, "it hits you like a truck. You don't know what to do."

Couples *continued on page 3*

HAND of the Peninsula

Serving as a board member

One very important way HAND parents and supporters can assist our organization is by serving on the board. Experience on other boards is always helpful but certainly not a requirement.

What HAND of the Peninsula needs are team players dedicated to ensuring that this unique organization continues its mission of supporting grieving parents, their friends and family members.

HAND's board meets in the evenings at the Sequoia Health and Wellness Center in Redwood City, every other month, usually during the fourth Wednesday of the month. Although the challenges facing HAND are numerous and varied, the primary focus is maintaining the current level of service.

This means making sure trained volunteers are available to facilitate two to three meetings a month and ensuring adequate funding to pay for HAND's minimal expenses. This includes supporting the organization financially and ensuring the money is spent wisely.

Currently HAND's board needs members with legal, fundraising and management experience. But anyone, whether they have lost a child or not, who values HAND and is dedicated to seeing it continue its work, is welcomed. To learn more contact Jill Nelson, a current board member serving on the nomination committee, by calling the HAND's office at (650) 367-6993 or email jilln@sonic.net. In the meantime, drop in on our meetings. They are never dull.

Helping After Neonatal Death

Chapters:

HAND of the Peninsula
P.O. Box 3693
Redwood City, CA 94064
(650) 692-6655 crisis line
(650) 367-6993 office
Web site: <http://www.handsupport.org>

HAND of Santa Cruz Co.
P.O. Box 3693
Redwood City, CA 94064
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Helping Hands

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HAND of the Peninsula

Service of Remembrance

Huddart Park in Woodside

10 a.m. Saturday, September 28, 2002

Parents, relatives and friends are invited to join others to remember their babies. All infants names submitted before September 21 will be read at the service, along with readings, music and reflections. Breakfast beverages and snacks will be provided. To submit babies' names and birthdays and for other information, please contact Judi in the HAND office (650) 367-6993. If you are interested in helping plan the service, please contact Joan Stone at (650) 348-4149. Huddart Park parking is \$4.

From 280 or 101, take Woodside Road exit. Drive 1.5 miles past 280 intersection to Kings Mountain Road, turn right. Drive 2.3 miles to park entrance on right. Ranger will direct you to Miwok shelter area.

October is National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month

Couples *continued from page 1*

Richard explains that even though still difficult, adjusting became easier later on, because "you know what the worst is, and the worst comes, and you deal with it."

Michael is an account manager working in the electronics industry. He and his wife Christine lost twins Edgar and Christian at thirty two weeks in July 1999, and contacted HAND of the Peninsula shortly thereafter.

"Before approaching HAND, I felt very isolated," he explains. "Then I realized that there are many others out there

with similar or worse circumstances."

Men may grieve differently than women, and it is important to realize that there is no set pattern under which this process happens," Joe says "There's no formula. There's no cookbook recipe that you can follow to make someone better. You deal with it as best as you can. You can't say 'I wish I was over this,' or 'I wish I could function better'. Everybody's going to grieve differently and move at a different pace."

In Richard's experience, he explained that a long process to get through the shock of losing a child is a gradual process. It

took Michael eighteen months after he and his wife lost their twins to start dealing with his grief. He remembers, "there have been many stages" and that he used "a combination of HAND support, a very close relationship with his wife, homeopathy and talking with friends."

Because of differences in hormones and actual biological closeness to the baby, men and women may have different "ups and downs" during the process of losing a baby and preparing for a new one, Joe explains. "I can't fully appreciate it, but carrying a baby for nine month

Fathers *continued on page 5*

Support Meetings

Support meetings are informal gatherings where parents can receive and give support by sharing common experiences as we work through and resolve our loss. We cordially invite you to attend.

Meetings may start out with a topic of discussion, but everyone is free to bring up any questions or aspects of their loss which may concern them.

Attending your first meeting does take courage, but parents who attend find a comforting network of support, encouragement, friendship and understanding.

Nothing is required of you. There are no dues or fees. You need not speak one word. Even if you no longer need the meetings for yourself, come and share your experiences with someone who has recently suffered a loss.

HAND of the Peninsula

Support meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Contact: Celia Hartnett (650) 367-6993

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: Sept. 4 and 18
Oct. 2 and 16
Nov. 6 and 20
Dec. 4 and 18
Jan. 1 and 15, 2003

Location: Sequoia Health and Wellness Services, 702 Marshall St., Redwood City.

HAND of Santa Cruz Co.

Support meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Contact: Kristie Shulman (831) 438-4513.

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: Sept. 18
Oct. 16
Nov. 20
Dec. 18
Jan. 15, 2003

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

Pregnancy Support Meetings

Parents who are pregnant again after a loss have special emotional and psychological needs. Pregnancy Support Group meetings address the concerns of bereaved parents who have started or are thinking about starting another pregnancy. Fathers are especially encouraged to attend.

HAND of the Peninsula holds subsequent pregnancy support meetings on the second Wednesdays of the month.

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: Sept. 11
Oct. 9
Nov. 13
Dec. 11
Jan. 8, 2003

Call (650) 367-6993 for more information.

HAND of Santa Cruz's subsequent pregnancy meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month.

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: Sept. 4
Oct. 2
Nov. 6
Dec. 4
Jan. 1, 2003

Call ((831) 438-4513 for more information.

Births

ADAM ERSKINE, July 5, 2002, to Shoneen and John Erskine

Donations

Our warmest thanks to those who have sent donations to HAND of the Peninsula. It is through your support that HAND is able to grow and help others.

Just Give in memory of Matthew Collopy

Pepsico Foundation Matching Gifts, in memory of Matthew Collopy

Mary and Dave Avelar, in memory of our son, Joseph Avelar
Wanda Amundson, in memory of my grandson's first birthday, Joseph 'Joey' Thomas Avelar,
Theresa and Richard Peterson, in memory of Joey Avelar
Sandy and Jim Allendorf, in memory of our grandson, Joey Avelar, on the first anniversary of his death

Caryn Goldman, in memory of Sasha

The Reddy Family, in honor of the birth of Gemma McCluney
Elizabeth McCluney, in honor of her granddaughter Gemma Jeanmarie and Jim Zoland

Brigid and Oscar Lombardi
Kathy and Jim Potts and Family, in honor of Kevin Flanagan, who was born and died on 4/1/01, and his loving parents, Katey and Matt, whose strength and courage continue to inspire us

Jill Morgan and Doug Keare, in memory of our son, Steven Bradford Keare
Rebecca Lombardo, in memory of Monica Marie Lombardo's 23rd birthday on Jan. 29, 2002

Donations continued on page 5

Donations *continued on page 5*

Microsoft Matching Gifts in memory of Mateo Caro
Seth Linden
Twila and Paul Forbes, in memory of Cosmo Forbes
Carol and Fernando Vega in memory of Ruthie Vega
Gloria Gillogley
James Suk Chan
Jean Nunes
Jeanmarie and Jim Zoland
Robert Conklin, in honor of Christy Conklin and Richard McCluney
Carla Altizer and Rod Pasion
Kellie Bliss, in memory of our precious babies, Rose Tamikka Bliss and Landen Michael Bliss
Janine and Daniel Taysom, in memory of Renee and Lisa
Thomas Corso
Faye Shindell
Carol Marie and Fernando Vega, in memory of Ruthie Vega
Carolyn and Bill Wilson, in memory of our daughter, Amanda, on her 7th birthday
Women in Focus Medical Group, in honor of Hetal Sheth
Mark Hollar, in memory of William Adam Hollar
Celia and Don Hartnett, in memory of Lucio Bernabe, a remarkable man
Lisa and Richard Jones, Sharon and John Rayner, in memory of David Jones
Wanda Lee and Kenneth Allen, in memory of David Allen
Donna Marie and Edward Baldwin
Char and George Rocha, in memory of Taylor Ann Rocha
Carolyn and Gerald Dybsetter, in memory of Emily Ann Dybsetter
Maria and Miguel Sandoval, in memory of Lionel R. Sandoval
Robin and David Costa, in memory of our son Alec Robert Costa
Deborah Robinson, in memory of Sean Patrick Robinson
Jennifer and Stanley Clogston, in memory of Jessica Clogston

HAND Library donations

Kellie Bliss, a book titled *"I'll Hold You in Heaven"* by Jack Hayford and two CDs *"Wrap Myself in a Rainbow"* and *"Light a Candle*

and Songs of Remembrance", both by Paul Alexander.

Celia Hartnett donated a book titled *"There Is No Death"* in memory of Nico Maselli and *"Ovulation Method of Birth Regulation"*.

Human Race Donations

In honor of Lori Reddy, Jones Mortuary
In honor of Wanda Lee, Victoria Velkoff, Judith Marley

In honor of Joe Twicken, Sara and Paul Schrauben

In honor of Kellie Bliss and her babies Rose Tamikka and Landen Michael Bliss, Grandma Bhakti Banning, Aunt Brenda, Uncle Jim and Cousin Wrixom McIlvaine, Cousins Debbi, Brent, Carson and Evan Holdenried, Eileen Baustian
Leslie Janke

eScrip Donations

HAND of the Peninsula has received \$1,573.80 in the past 12 months from supporters signed up with the eScrip program. To learn more about this effortless method for you, your family and friends to remember your baby and support HAND of the Peninsula, call the HAND office 367-6993 or online at <http://www.escrip.com> HAND's ID number is **141808774**. A heartfelt thank you to those of you currently signed up and especially to new members Su-Mien Chong, Joan Stone, Christine Reeve, Elham Heydari, Jeanne Hamel and Twila Forbes.

Emily Corpos, Cathleen Findley, Suzanne Gallie, Lori Goldman Reddy, Celia Hartnett, Tracy Hieber, Laurie McLucas, Edith Muennemann, Leslie and Frank Muennemann, Shirley Nelson, Maureen O'Connor, Julie Raithel, Ron Shapera, Kristina Shulman, Joe Twicken and Jill Nelson, Judi Weidenfeld, Jackie Willson.

Safeway has recently mailed new club cards that are preloaded to take an additional 5% off purchases if you use it. However, this card is not automatically linked to eScrip. You **MUST** call Safeway's toll-free number in order to link your new card to your old card and to eScrip. The number to call is: 1-877-SAFEWAY.

and going through a delivery and then having a newborn, it's really hard on a woman. It's hard physically and then there's hormones and other emotional things."

Richard said that his experience differed from his wife's in that "it's very real to her, and, then to you it's very real but it's one step removed. There's a whole physical component that you don't have as a man. You're not pregnant, you don't (physically) lose the baby, your wife has got hormones doing crazy things, it's very physical. Therefore, because of this, it is important for the man to support his partner during these times."

Pat Schwiebert, R.N. and Paul Kirk, M.D., authors of "Still to be Born," offer advice for men in helping their wives: "You just hold her tenderly during these times, allow her to express herself without feeling she will be put down and if she is talking about some reasonably valid concerns, help her follow up on them. Go to the doctor with her. Be as supportive as you can be. Remind yourself that there will also be good days to share. Make sure you get your needs met too."

Reflecting on his and his wife's experience, Joe says, "I thought that our ups and downs didn't coincide, which was probably good. When I was feeling really down, Jill really picked me up. When she was feeling really down, I really tried to pick her up."

To reciprocate support is essential, as relationships can either go one of two ways during this time: becoming stronger, or allowing the hardships to break it up. In Joe's experience, after losing his daughter Talia, he and his wife had two pregnancies that resulted in miscarriages. But, in sticking through the difficulties together, Joe feels that his relationship with his wife Jill

has become stronger than ever. "In fact, only two things can happen when you lose a baby like we did," he explains. "Either your relationship becomes stronger and you become closer, because you're going through this incredibly difficult period together, or your relationship becomes so strained that it might be hard to keep it together. We had a sense from each other that we wanted to just make it through together. As a result, if you can make it through that, you can make it through anything. I have that feeling now, that short of losing another baby, I can't see that there's anything that we would have to go through that would be that hard."

"You just hold her tenderly during these times, allow her to express herself without feeling she will be put down..." "Still to be Born," by Pat Schwiebert, R.N. and Paul Kirk, M.D.

We've already done it once. I think we could probably deal with anything right now."

Michael believes that his relationship with his wife has become better through his experience with the loss of their twin babies as well, and that "it does go one way or the other. We managed to help each other through huge lows and self doubt. We now feel very lucky."

For Richard, his relationship with his wife Christy has become much stronger. "That's one important thing about this whole thing: you've been through something incredibly traumatic together. It's kind of a make or break thing. It is powerful enough to break the relationship, but if you make it through, by definition you have a stronger relationship." Acknowledging the pain, offering support and maintaining hope are three very important things, and the father's role in facilitating these three things is crucial in helping with subsequent pregnancies. It is a position that should be taken seriously, and in assuming it,

Subsequent *continued on page 7*

Subsequent *continued from page 6*

men can provide much needed support in difficult times. When the time is right, however, a couple may decide to try to have another child. Richard believes that if you're physically and emotionally able to try again, it's great to be able to try. An organization like HAND of the Peninsula. can be helpful in that it can guide couples through subsequent pregnancies, helping find the right medical help and best practitioner for specific conditions or circumstances.

Richard explains, "the good thing about an organization like HAND is we wouldn't have been successful had it not been for it. I'm not sure we'd still be together without the doctors HAND referred us to, we wouldn't have been successful this time. They were able to say, 'Hey guys, these are the specialists you need to go to who can help you through this. They're the ones that will make it successful.' "

For Michael, preparing himself and his wife for another pregnancy seemed hard initially, but soon became the only option. "We were in our mid-thirties, and therefore had some time pressure. However one of the first prerequisites was to first allow myself to face my feelings rather than bury them." To get through the different stages is important, and taking them one by one can be beneficial for both the husband and the wife.

Mostly it was just preparing mentally for what seemed like a series of hurdles, Joe remembers. "We wanted to get past the first

trimester because that is the most likely time for miscarriages to occur and we had already had a couple of them. Then we wanted to get through the amniocentesis with positive results, and then we wanted to get through the last trimester and have a healthy baby."

Although the memory of babies who pass away should always appropriately be kept, it is often possible to have successful subsequent pregnancies even if one has experienced a previous loss or series of losses. Michael and his wife Christine, now have two children, Emily is two and Alexander is four months old. "I love the look of trust and expectation in the eyes of my children, he says. "They are helping me to regain my emotional balance and establish a better work and life balance." Joe and his wife Jill now have a five-month-old baby girl, Lea. "She's just the sweetest little girl," Joe

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Michael lost twins in 1999

confesses. "I've reduced my time at Stanford from fulltime to three-quarters time, and I'm working at home four days a week. So I'm Dr. Mom."

Richard and his wife Christy have recently had a daughter named Gemma who is now three-months-old. "It teaches you what's important," Richard explains. "You go home and it's 3 a.m. and Gemma's screaming, you change her diaper, you're happy to change it. The alternative is you wouldn't be able to change it and get awakened, and you'd be worrying about work or something stupid like that. The joy is that it's what's important in life, you now have the ability to enjoy that, whereas before you didn't and you had something taken away from you."

I asked the three fathers I interviewed if they

Positive *continued on page 8*

Positive *continued from page 7*

possibly had any advice for other fathers who have lost a baby before and may be expecting another into the family. Michael advises that one “stay focused on the fact that you have faith in your wife to have a live baby. She needs someone to believe in her.”

“Remember how important the anniversary date of the previous loss was, the previous due date was,” Richard advises. “Not everyone heals at the same rate. You’ve got to remember that your partner might be looking at something completely different from the way you’re looking at it. Try to be very empathetic to your partner’s position.”

Joe urges couples to educate themselves well enough to do the right things: go to your doctor, find out what you should be doing, get the ultrasounds and all of those things. In

addition to this, Joe explained that keeping a good attitude about the whole situation is important. “Keep as positive as you can,” he recommends “There are so many different issues and every case is different. There’s no reason to believe that things won’t go well. They may have gone badly in the past, but you can still try to be positive and believe that everything will be fine.”

Richard, Joe, and Michael are wonderful fathers to their children, and the memories of those lost will always be special to them. Perhaps one day, they will tell their kids about the family members they never knew. They can tell them that they would have been great brothers and sisters. For the meantime, however, these three fathers are doing the best that they can, making the moments with their families count, while continuing to keep the memories of those lost alive.