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Helping Hands

Fall 2004

Another baby? Maybe. . .

By Sherokee Ilse

“Dear Lord, please bless this pregnancy and baby. Help us to do all that we can to keep him or her healthy. Please, please, please, let this baby live!”

Such a prayer was standard fare during the long months of my pregnancy following two losses including a miscarriage (I named her Marama) and a full term stillbirth (Brennan). I knew that the future of this next baby was in God’s hands since I had done nearly everything right in the two previous pregnancies, what could I possibly do differently this time?

This pregnancy was the world’s longest, I am convinced, and each day was a tremendous milestone when I woke up to find I was still pregnant. Thankfully, our son Kellan David was born three weeks early (whew! – spared three weeks of anxiety), and he was healthy.

The anxiety and fear before, and during, a subsequent pregnancy after one or more losses is intense for most people I have met. Once a bubble has been burst, we feel vulnerable to any of life’s disastrous possibilities.

The naïve, blissful days are long gone. Life’s stark realities remind us that anything bad can happen to us at any time. This is frightening to say the least.

Before my husband, David, and I learned we were pregnant with our third baby, and hopefully the first to actually live, we struggled with whether we had the strength

“It was the deep desire we held in our hearts to include children in our family that pushed us to take the risk again.”

Sherokee Ilse

to try again or not. What if we had a third loss? How would we cope? How badly did we want children?

It was the deep desire we held in our hearts to include children in our family that pushed us to take the risk again. We disagreed on the timing; we worried about our sanity; we wondered if we would tell anyone for fear they too would be hurt again. Nonetheless, we finally did get pregnant and realized that the joy was also coupled with fear and worry.

While I cannot recount many of the details of that pregnancy here, I can say that daily prayer, stabs at optimism and quite a bit of denial (of my fears, of my worries and even on some days that I was pregnant) helped us

Maybe? *continued on page 5*

HAND of the Peninsula

Help Wanted

Many HAND of the Peninsula parents have found that along the way, as they gain some distance from their loss, they feel ready to offer a hand to others. This may be in the form of phone support for newly bereaved parents, facilitating grief and subsequent pregnancy meetings or behind the scenes helping HAND of the Peninsula continue its mission. At this time, we have an urgent need for people with the following skills:

- * Web Graphics Designer
- * Newsletter Graphics Designer
- * Newsletter Contributors
- * Sharing Parents for Inservice presentations before healthcare professionals and community groups.
- * Buddy Program

Please contact Melisse Lusin Holtz at 650-654-6589 or melisse@gene.com to discuss volunteer opportunities.

What is the Buddy Program?

Since I came to HAND in 2001, I've talked with many HAND parents about the concept of a HAND "Buddy Program". The idea would be to pair newly bereaved HAND parents with a "seasoned" HAND parent who would be available for in person, phone or e-mail grief support. Newly bereaved parents need a lot of support and could benefit immensely from peer one-on-one support.

If you're interested in helping to build the buddy program as a volunteer, please contact Melisse Lusin Holtz at 650-654-6589 or melisse@gene.com. If we can get enough volunteers, HAND will be able to offer the Buddy Program as a new service to the recently bereaved.

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
(650) 367-6993 office
(831) 438-4513

**HAND of Santa Clara,
Contra Costa, Alameda
Counties, Central Valley**
1-888-908-HAND

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Helping Hands

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Submission deadline for next issue:

NOV. 15, 2004

HAND of the Peninsula

Invites you to our annual
SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE
Huddart Park's Miwok Shelter in Woodside

10 a.m. Saturday, October 16, 2004

All parents, relatives and friends are invited to join others to remember their babies. Infants' names submitted before October 12 will be read at the service, along with any personal readings and reflections submitted.

Breakfast beverages and snacks will be served and wildflower seeds to scatter will be provided. To submit babies' names and birthdates, readings and reflections, and for other information, please contact Christine Reeve at info@handsupport.org or leave a message at (650) 367-6993.

Huddart Park parking is \$5.

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

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: Melisse Lusin (650) 367-6993

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

Dates: Sept. 1 and 15
Oct. 6 and 20
Nov. 3 and 17
Dec. 1 and 15

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

HAND of Santa Cruz

Support meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Contact: Kristie Shul-

man (831) 438-4513.

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

Dates Sept. 15
Oct. 20
Nov. 17
Dec. 15

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 as needed. Please call the HAND office (650) 367-6993 if you plan to attend or need more information

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

Dates: Sept. 8
Oct. 13
Nov. 10
Dec 8

HAND of Santa Cruz

HAND of Santa Cruz' subsequent pregnancy meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month. Please call (831) 438-4513 for more information.

Births

Rose Golant Gutierrez — May 19, 2004, to Cherie Golant and Ron Gutierrez

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.

Ken and Laura Bevington, in memory of our three miscarriages

The Mockett-Hutcherson Family, in memory of Julia Mockett Hutcherson, everyday and especially on her birthday, August 8, 2002

Sun Microsystems Foundation Matching Gift Program
Suzanne L. Gallie, employee

Brent Gregory and Julie A Van Gelder, in memory of Little Ben

Cherie Golant and Ronald Gutierrez, in memory of Julia Golant Gutierrez on her 1st birthday

Beverly and John Hansen, Cindy Kirshner, Judy Ranieri and Marlen Lawson, Michael and Wendy Cole, in memory of Edgar and Christian Reeve

Thomas Corso

Twila and Paul Forbes, in memory of Cosmo Forbes

Thomas and Kathleen Addison, in memory of P. J. Hawkins Jr.

Inservices

April 2004 — El Camino Hospital

Aug. 16, 2004 — San Mateo County Crisis Center. Christine Reeve, facilitator, Jasmine Forcier, sharing parent.

Maybe *continued from page 1*

through. I sang to the baby and tried to be positive – buying a toy or special item about once a month in an effort to be positive. Telling my child how much I loved him or her and that, no matter what happened, they would always be in my heart, became a matter of coping.

I remember advice from a mom who had five or six pregnancy losses. Her manner of staying positive with each pregnancy was to love that baby to the fullest, bonding as deeply as she could with the hope that all would go well. However, if that baby happened to die, at least she would have no regrets; she had been fully involved and her baby knew her intense love. I really did try this as often as I could, which clearly was not every minute of every day by any means.

When Kellan came early and took a breath, we joyfully thanked God. Our miracle had arrived! Would our grief be over, we wondered? Would we be able to go on and have a normal, fairly blissful life? Would our troubles be behind us?

It wasn't long before we realized that as humans we are, and always will be, vulnerable to trials, tribulation and tragedy. David said it best when he called me from work one day to ask if I'd found his poem – writing a poem is something I had never seen him do before. His succinct poem put to words my feelings exactly.

The birth of a subsequent child cannot erase the years of infertility or the previous pregnancy or newborn losses. Those babies who might have/could have been are forever a part of our make-up, our family. We look at sunsets, priorities and other babies differently. Yes, the next babies are an answer to our prayers but they will also be a continual reminder of their brothers and sisters who are missing on Earth, only to be found in heaven and in our hearts.

Some of the things that have helped others who are contemplating or experiencing a subsequent pregnancy are:

- ◆ Find a way to vent feelings, such as keeping a journal.
- ◆ Talk with others who have suffered a loss and then had a healthy baby.
- ◆ Ask your medical team what precautions they will take and what extra tests are available. Be careful of the roller coaster that some tests can get you on. Don't just agree or demand them for the sake of doing something.
- ◆ Try to find a support group, internet buddy or a counselor; you will likely need help from others along the way.
- ◆ If you have doubts or are worried during the pregnancy at any time, call your medical care provider.
- ◆ You may feel you need to do something different this time. As irrational as this might be, feel free to make those changes if you feel more comfortable and if they are medically acceptable.
- ◆ Work on having positive and hopeful feelings, at least occasionally, even if they may not be coming naturally.

- ◆ Follow and trust your instincts. Do what you need to do, so no matter what the outcome, you will have few or no regrets.
- ◆ Remember that much is out of your control. Take control of those things you can and let go of what is out of your control.
- ◆ Have hope and faith that this pregnancy will work out. Use

My Two Sons

By David Ilse

Brennan.

My first son,

Stillborn.

My agony and loss.

A tidal wave.

Drowning.

Loving family and friends.

Sherokee.

New Life! Anxious wait...

Kellan!

New heights every day

Yet tinged,

By smiles, laughs and coos

Never drawn.

prayer as often as possible, if you find it comforting.

The above suggestions are from the booklet, "Another Baby? Maybe...Thirty Questions on Pregnancy After Loss", by Sherokee Ilse and Maribeth Wilder-Doerr. This booklet and Sherokee's most popular title, Empty Arms: Coping with Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Death, are available at www.wintergreenpress.com. Sherokee resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is an international author and speaker on pregnancy loss and bereavement, and has lived the mission of improving the lives of bereaved families since 1982. She can be reached at sherokeeilse@yahoo.com.

Volunteers' service lauded at tea party

The HAND Board of Directors sponsored the first annual "Volunteer Appreciation Tea" on Saturday, September 18, at The English Rose in San Carlos.

The event honored all the devoted volunteers who have given their time to HAND of the Peninsula in the past year. Volunteers honored included those who serve on the Board, who facilitate grief or subsequent pregnancy meetings, who provide phone support, who present inservices as speakers or sharing parents to healthcare professionals and community groups, who produce our

website and newsletters, who help organize special events and who perform general administrative duties including sending donation acknowledgement notes to HAND parents and organizing the HAND lending library.

Special gifts were given to Co-Presidents Christine Reeve and Jill Nelson to thank them for all of their hard work and service to HAND of the Peninsula this year. The event was organized by Board member Melisse Lusin Holtz who lost her eight-day-old son, Blake, to a bowel infarction in 2001.