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ness Services

Helping Hands

Fall 2006

Honoring Julia on her due date

By Cherie Golant
HAND of the Peninsula

Julia Golant Gutierrez was stillborn on June 14, 2003, at 35 weeks gestation due to a cord accident. To avoid spending their daughter's due date at home, the bereaved couple traveled to Yosemite National Park to honor her brief life and death in a place of beauty and healing. This is from her mother's journal.

Yesterday Daddy and I went hiking in Yosemite National Park. We walked from the lodge to Mirror Lake on the stock trail, then we walked past the lake to Snow Creek.

I've been to Mirror Lake more times than I can count. The first time I was so young I don't remember it, but there are photos of me wading naked in the lake. This was a good hike for us to take because it was mostly familiar, with only a little bit that I hadn't seen, as the thought of doing anything remotely difficult or challenging was intolerable to me and made me feel panicky.

As we were walking the 1.5 miles from the lake to Snow Creek, I started to feel very sad and started to cry. Being in Yosemite this time, I have felt so small -- and the pain inside me is so big. I started to cry, watching the treetops sway in the wind, the granite walls of the valley framed against the bright blue sky.

"Why?" I cried to the trees, sobbing as I walked. The trees didn't answer me, only the wind.

I was crying when I reached the bridge over Snow Creek, where Daddy was waiting for me, having walked ahead on the trail. Daddy put his arm around me and asked me if I wanted to make your memorial here by the river.

"Why?" I cried into his chest.

"Because we loved her, and we still love her," he said, misunderstanding me. "Why did our baby have to die? Why couldn't she be here with us so we could love her?"

Julia *continued on page 5*

HAND of the Peninsula

Volunteers needed for working Board

Ever wondered how you could give back to HAND?

Like other non-profit organizations, HAND is required to have a Board of Directors. New members are nominated and elected every October to serve for the year beginning in January.

HAND's Board is in need of new members whether HAND parents, friends or relatives, ready to roll up their sleeves and help HAND of the Peninsula continue to provide support to San Francisco Bay Area families, a feat it has accomplished uninterrupted for the past 25 years.

Board members, along with other volunteers, serve on committees that oversee all activities of the organization. These activities include training new volunteers to facilitate grief and subsequent pregnancy meetings and to offer phone support, distribution of HAND literature, maintenance of the lending library and website, fundraising, newsletter publishing, presentation of inservices to health care providers and community groups, organization of special events and office administration.

It is often a sign of healing when a HAND parent feels the need to give something back by supporting other grieving parents. That is the hallmark of HAND of the Peninsula's success. Without volunteers, HAND would no longer exist. If you or someone you know are interested in serving on the Board, volunteering in another capacity, or have any questions please e-mail info@HANDsupport.org or call (650) 367-6993.

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
<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, 2006

How the death of a baby changes you forever

By Ann Douglas

During those intensely painful days after my daughter Laura was stillborn five years ago, I remember feeling that I was at a crossroads in my life -- that two separate paths lay before me: I could either let this tragedy destroy my life and break my spirit or I could find a way to make something positive come out of my daughter's death.

Fortunately for me, I inherited the stubborn gene from my parents. Giving up on life really wasn't a viable option for me. So, by default, I gravitated toward the second alternative: finding a way to make something good come out of this most searing of losses.

While I would never have wished this on myself -- the death of a baby is too big a price to pay for any personal growth. I have been forever changed by the experience of losing Laura. In many ways, I'm a better person than I was before that fateful day five years ago when a tiny piece of my heart was broken.

For one thing, I'm more compassionate. I feel an immediate bond with any parent who has experienced the death of a baby as well as anyone else who is grieving the death of someone significant in their life, be it a spouse, a parent, or a close friend.

My volunteer work with grieving parents and the articles and books I've written on miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant death have allowed me

to make a difference in the lives of other parents who've experienced the tragedy of losing a much-wanted baby. That means a lot to me.

I'd say I'm more aware of what it feels like to be really connected to someone heart-to-heart and soul-to-soul. I have a very special friend whose baby died shortly after mine did. The two of us spent a lot of time together in the weeks that followed, sharing our grief about the babies who would never come home. We don't see each other as often these days. We're both insanely busy with work and family. But each time we meet for lunch, it's like we've never been apart. That speaks to

“I could either let this tragedy destroy my life or I could find a way to make something positive come out of my daughter's death.”

the powerful bond that we developed during the most nightmarish time of our lives.

Another perk: I'm less of a control freak. After all, I've learned the hard way that some things are out of my control and some things can't be fixed, no matter how desperately I want to put the pieces back together again. As a card-carrying Type A, it's been healthy for me to learn to let go of things, well, at least a little!

Along the same vein, I've come to terms with my

fear of death. Being forced to deal with the death of my child has forced me to confront my own mortality. As a result, I'm more at peace with the knowledge that life doesn't last forever--and more inclined to make the most of today.

I've also learned how to put things in perspective. A leaky ceiling, a missed deadline, a squabble with my husband, or a minor fender bender no longer qualify as a crisis for me. I now save the "crisis" label for the real life-and-death situations.

Finally, I'm better able to celebrate the wonder in everyday life. Rather than looking forward to that magical day when my mortgage is paid off, I reach my goal weight, and I have a book or two on the bestseller list (hey, a girl can dream, can't she?), I'm more inclined to delight in what's happening in the here and now: to savour the joy I feel when my youngest child, Ian, hugs my leg and says, "I really love you, Mom" and to enjoy the way my heart lifts when the telephone rings and there's a special friend on the other end of the line.

These are just a few of the gifts that Laura gave to me during her brief journey through my life. These gifts are her legacy to me.

*Ann Douglas is the author of numerous books, including **Trying Again: A Guide to Pregnancy After Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Loss**. She is the mother of four children, ages 5 through 14, and can be contacted via her web site www.having-a-baby.com.*

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 losses. 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 losses 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 Wednesdays of the month. Contact: Jill Ludwig (650) 367-6993.

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

Dates: Sept. 6 and 20
Oct. 4 and 18
Nov. 1 and 15
Dec. 6 and 20

Location: Ellsworth Room at Mills Health Center, 100 S. San Mateo Dr., San Mateo

HAND of Santa Cruz

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. 20
Oct. 18
Nov. 15
Dec. 20

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

Pregnancy Support Meeting

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 Wednesday of the month on an as needed basis. 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. 13
Oct. 11
Nov. 8
Dec. 13

Location: Ellsworth Room at Mills Health Center, 100 S. San Mateo Dr., San Mateo

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.

Donations

Anu and Peter Minocha, in memory of Kavin

Celia and Donald Hartnett, in honor of HAND of the Peninsula's fabulous Board of Directors

Anna and Rob Strong

Jane Zimmerman, LCSW

Jerilyn and Thomas Corso

Arthur Schneiderman, in memory of Natalie Guidi

Marlene and Anthony Panacci, in memory of Thelma Rogers

Nancy Faulstich

Todd Lund
Microsoft Giving Campaign, matching gift donation

Cherie Golant and Ronald Gutierrez, in loving memory of our daughter, Julia Golant Gutierrez on her 3rd birthday, June 14, 2006

Kellie and David Bliss, in memory of Rose Tamikka Bliss who would be five years old this year

Cathy and Steve Humrich, in loving memory of Cole Paganucci

Kathleen and Jeffrey Phelan, Jennifer and Scott Cole, in memory of Hayden Bump Seikel

Human Race 2006
Irene Lustgarten
Emily and John Corpos
Jane Corpos
Orsolya Corpos

Julia *continued from page 1*

"We do love her," he said "that's why it hurts so much."

We cried together on the bridge for a time. Then we climbed down on the rocks beside the river. Daddy collected sticks to spell your name. I picked the tree, a white alder, not far from the river.

Between the tree and the river was a rock that had a natural bowl shape to it. We wrote your name with sticks and rocks. I placed all the things I had brought for your altar: the photos from the hospital, a sweet pea flower from my garden, a tea light candle from your shower, the mama bear pin Daddy had given me for my first Mother's Day, when I was pregnant with you. I brought a lock of my hair tied in a red ribbon as an offering.

Daddy and I cried at your altar. Daddy lit the candle and I said the *kaddish* (Jewish mourner's prayer) silently.

After a while I took the piece of my hair in the ribbon and walked over the stones to where the river was moving briskly. I squatted down and prayed for my next baby to be healthy and for my family to be somehow repaired.

I kissed the offering and set it in the river. I watched it float downstream a little then it disappeared under the water. Then I scooped the water up and put it in my hair. One sweet drop entered my mouth.

Cherie Golant lives in San Francisco with her husband Ron Gutierrez and subsequent daughter Rose, born just 11 months after Julia's stillbirth. She runs a subsequent pregnancy support group for bereaved parents at California Pacific Medical Center.

Tear Soup: A recipe for healing after loss

By Pat Schwiebert & Chuck DeKlyen

Helpful ingredients to consider

- * a pot full of tears
- * one heart willing to be broken open
- * a dash of bitters
- * a bunch of good friends
- * many handfuls of comfort food
- * a lot of patience
- * buckets of water to replace the tears
- * plenty of exercise
- * a variety of helpful reading material
- * enough self care
- * season with memories
- * optional; one good therapist and/or support group

Directions:

Choose the size pot that fits your loss. It's ok to increase the pot size if you miscalculated. Combine ingredients. Set temperature for a moderate heat. Cooking times will vary depending on the ingredients needed. Strong flavors mellow over time. Stir often. Cook no longer than you need to.

Suggestions

- * be creative
- * trust your instincts
- * cry when you want to, laugh when you can
- * freeze some to use as a starter for next time
- * write your own soup making in a journal so you won't forget

Serves One

From Griefwatch.com TEAR SOUP is a full-color story-book for children of all ages, co-authored by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen and illustrated by Taylor Bills.

HAND of the Peninsula

Invites you to our annual
SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE

Huddart Park's Miwok Shelter in Woodside

10 a.m. Saturday, October 14, 2006

All parents, relatives and friends are invited to join others to remember their babies. Infants' names submitted before October 10 will be read at the service, along with personal readings, music and reflections.

Breakfast beverages and snacks will be served and wild-flower seeds to scatter will be provided. To submit babies' names and birthdates, to volunteer and for any other information, please email info@HANDsupport.org or call (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.