



Helping Hands

Fall 2011

The Dark and the Light

By **Linda Harrison**
HAND of the Peninsula

It was just 32 days after the longest day of 2006 when my son, Miles, was born. And then left us. Outside the hospital, San Franciscans experienced some of the hottest temperatures on record. Inside my hospital room, I looked for the warmth and light that would tell me that I was still alive.

As the days grew shorter, the darkness grew in my soul. My mind closed in with pain, insomnia, and guilt. My body was paralyzed by depression. As the holiday season approached, the reminders of other people's good fortune were everywhere: Shopping in the mall, going to the grocery store, and especially, letters filling up my mailbox. When I came home from the office, the dusky, cloudy sky, brightened by other people's Christmas lights, made the world seem even colder and lonelier than ever before.

Then December 21 came. The longest night of the year. The turning of the season. A slow shift from darkness and despair to the light. Maybe even to hope and new beginnings. On December 21, I looked inside myself.

In many religions and cultures, the winter solstice represents a time of peace and forgiveness. It was hard to find peace without the little baby who should have been there with me. And forgiveness was past my reach when my responsibility as a mother weighed so heavily in my memories of my son's death.

The winter solstice is also a time of giving. But material things seem so trivial compared to the gift of life that was taken from me.

But finally, the winter solstice represents a time of transition. And with every day came some little bit of change. Somehow, I found the strength to survive; and just going through the motions in that darkest time allowed a small piece of me to be reborn with hope.

Epilogue

On January 17, 2007, I conceived twin boys who have given me more joy than I ever dreamed possible. And in a piece of my heart, I will carry the darkness of winter forever.

In January 2009, I went through HAND of the Peninsula's volunteer training so that I could give the gifts that I thought would honor my son's life: the gifts of survival and hope for other bereaved parents.

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HAND of the Peninsula
Annual Service Of Remembrance

Huddart Park's Miwok Shelter in Woodside

11 a.m. until 1 p.m.
SUNDAY October 9, 2011

All parents, family and friends are invited to join us to remember our babies.

Infants' names, dates, poems and short stories submitted by October 2 to

fandl@muenn.net

will be included in the printed program and read at the service along with personal readings, music and reflections.

Breakfast beverages and snacks will be served and wildflower seeds to scatter will be provided.

To volunteer and for any other information, please call (650) 367-6993 or email info@HANDsupport.org

**Direction to Huddart Park
(parking is \$5 and NO DOGS allowed)**

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.

Helping After Neonatal Death

Chapters:

HAND of the Peninsula

HAND of Santa Cruz

HAND of San Francisco

P.O. Box 3693

Redwood City, CA 94064

(650) 579-0350 crisis line

(650) 367-6993 office

<http://www.HANDsupport.org>

Helping After Neonatal Death

Santa Clara and Alameda Counties,
and part of the Central Valley

P.O. Box 341

Los Gatos, CA 95031-0341

(888) 908-HAND (4263)

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Helping Hands

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HAND moms find comfort in friendship

The Fall of 2008 was a busy time for HAND of the Peninsula as many parents were attending grief meetings regularly. Some of these parents got to know each other as they returned over the weeks and months, witnessing each others' journey. Parents are encouraged to contact each other outside of the meetings and many did, forging lifelong friendships. Here are the stories of five moms who met during that time.

Ellen Kelly Daley

My husband, Tim, and I came to HAND on October 1, 2008, just 12 days after the birth and death of our son Seamus. Thus that night began a journey of healing, support, comfort and camaraderie that continues today.

I can't recall who exactly was at that first meeting or the ones following, but soon it became apparent that there was a certain core group of us that would show up for meetings. We exchanged emails and before we knew it, a deep bond had formed. These women - Penny, Lisa, Kara and Cassandra, were my "go-to" friends . . . those I would go to when I was having a bad day or couldn't face showing up at my best friend's baby shower. They knew exactly how I was feeling and were always ready to lend an ear or share tears with me.

As 2009 progressed, our conversations turned to our desires to conceive again, and hope against hope that our babies would be born healthy. As we slowly learned of each others' subsequent pregnancies ~ first Kara's, then mine, Lisa's, Cassandra's and Penny's ~ all we could do

is again support each other through our fears and anxieties, praying that history would not repeat itself for any of us.

Well, do you believe in miracles? I certainly do! 2010 was a most miraculous year for this group of HAND friends. Our prayers had been answered as we were each blessed with a beautiful, healthy baby/babies:

Top row, left to right: Kara Juneau and daughter Aliza Harrington, born January 25; Lisa Morse with twins Miriam and Lydia Kurtic, born June 3; Ellen Kelly Daley and daughter Patricia (Patsy) Daley, born March 28; *Sitting left to right:* Penny Crespo with son Lucas, born October 29 and Cassandra with baby Issac Nelson, born August 31.



Just as we were able to share each others' pain and give support during our darkest days, we now are able to celebrate together the joys of our subsequent children. Indeed, there is life after death. This picture is a testament to the wonderful work of HAND of the Peninsula.

May all HAND parents be as lucky as us. Thank you HAND and thank you Lisa, Penny, Kara and Cassandra for being my lifeline

to healing and giving me the courage to hope and believe in a brighter tomorrow. Finally, I especially want to remember our children who will forever remain in our hearts and minds: **Angelica Juneau Harrington, Margueax Nelson, Pedro and Archer Kurtic, Sean Crespo and Seamus Daley.** May you rest in peace.

Penny Crespo

Three years ago on August 13, at 38 weeks, we lost our son,

Friendship *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: (650) 367-6993

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

Dates: Sept. 7 and 21
Oct. 5 and 19
Nov. 2 and 16
Dec. 7 and 21

Location: Follow signs to Palm Room at Mills Health and Wellness 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. 21
Oct. 19
Nov. 16
Dec. 21

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

HAND of San Francisco

Support meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Contact: Chris Lehr, LCSW, (415) 282-7330.

Time: 6:30-8:30 P.M.

Dates: Sept. 7 and 21
Oct. 5 and 19
Nov. 2 and 16
Dec. 7 and 21

Location: Davies Campus of CPMC, Castro at Duboce, Support Services Conference Room, Level B

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 Wednesday of the month at Mills Health and Wellness Center, 100 S. San Mateo Dr., in San Mateo. Contact: (650) 367-6993.

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

Dates: Sept. 14
Oct. 12
Nov. 9
Dec. 14

HAND of Santa Cruz

Subsequent pregnancy meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month. Contact: Kristie Shulman (831) 438-4513

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

Dates: Sept. 7
Oct. 5
Nov. 2
Dec. 7

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

Births

Birdie Ruth French — June 26, to Elizabeth Longstreth and Adam French

Kaya Virginia Berdy Lizarzaburu — July 28, to Sara Berdy and Mike Lizarzaburu

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.

Santa Cruz Mothers of Twins Club

Wai Yan Lam, in memory of Laeticia Mei Bossuwe on your 7th birthday

Beth and Mark Wolly, in memory of Ryan Wolly

Claudia Beck, in memory of Bryce Nicholson

Emily Mockett and Phil Hutcherson, in memory of Julia Mockett Hutcherson, on the 9th anniversary of her lifetime

Amy Traverso and Scott Kirsner, in memory of Eva Traverso Kirsner

Twila Forbes, in memory of Cosmo Forbes

Cristin and David Romo, in loving memory of Nicholas David Romo, our beloved first son

Kristie and Mark Wise, in memory of Griffin Wise

Friendship *continued from page 3*

Sean, just days away from his birth. His two older sisters were anxiously and happily awaiting their baby brother's arrival. Saddened and in shock, I asked myself, "How will I explain to my daughters, both under 5 years old, that their baby brother will never come home?" I wasn't sure how I would function but had to keep pushing forward, for myself and for my family. The pain of losing a baby is indescribable. Two weeks after our loss, I felt the need for additional support and didn't know where to turn to. I repeatedly kept asking myself, how will I get through this? Through the doors of many HAND meetings, my grieving husband, Jay, and I found friendship, comfort, and support.

At HAND, we were welcomed by kind, understanding facilitators and a room full of parents with similar losses; some within several weeks or months of Sean's passing. Personally, at the time, I felt comfort knowing these parents could understand the emotion and pain Jay and I were going through. While every person brought their own experience, we all shared similar grief and emotions. Attending monthly meetings, I realized I wasn't the only person feeling a certain way. There was also comfort seeing familiar faces consistently those first few months. A group of us bonded and provided support and advice outside HAND. Despite how we all met, we formed lasting friendships through HAND – especially through this difficult time in our lives. I'm thankful to have met many wonderful people and formed lasting friendships. Though we shared pain of infant loss, miraculously, two years later, we all shared the precious births of our children.

Kara Juneau

The HAND of the Peninsula meeting that I remember most was one that I was almost too tired to attend. Too tired to get in the car, too tired to leave my living daughter and sleepy husband, too tired to travel through the drizzling rain to a small room in San Mateo where I would roll up my sleeves and get busy with some much needed grief work. My attendance at HAND had become sporadic as my grief lost the raw red pallor of acute pain, turning like a leaf into a brittle, tattered gray. That night I needed a familiar face, a knowing nod, an understanding of the unspoken. That night I needed HAND.

The room was crowded. Chairs were pushed to the walls. I wondered how we could fit so much pain in one room. Taking turns, we each unwrapped the blankets of grief from around the babies that should have been nestled in our arms, but instead lay in our broken hearts. Gingerly, we would lift the covers and show each other the faces of our angels.

Lisa, Ellen, Cassandra, Penny, and I had done this before and we continue to do it to this day; we gather together and unswaddle the angels that curl up inside us. We remind each other that our lost babies are real, that they shape us, and teach us, and make us whole. We talk about how they brought our families together. And we cry. We cry knowing that those babies gave us so much more than we were able to give them.

Lisa Morse

We didn't want to go to that first HAND of the Peninsula meeting. I mean we really didn't want to go. We didn't want to be mourning our twin sons instead of caring for them, we didn't want to publicize our grief, we didn't want to sit with strangers and try not to cry. But we showed up, shaking inside with the anger and the grief and the fear of it all. I looked at the floor and tried not to cry. We sat in silence, across from strangers, and wondered what would happen next.

And then Jake started to talk. He just opened up and offered his thoughts and feelings about how his grief had changed shape that week. And I felt my husband take a breath, and I listened to him listen, and I heard myself described as Jake described his wife Cassandra's grief, and I felt my husband understand my grief better. What a gift.

Cassie and Jake, Kara and Dan were a few months ahead of us on the grieving path. They listened to our thoughts, saw our hearts and understood where we were. We listened to their advice, felt seen and heard, and listened to where they were with eager ears as a view into our future.

Ellen and Tim, Penny and Jay had their losses a few months after ours. We listened to where they were and offered our own words of understanding, compassion and advice, and we felt how far we'd travelled. In giving, we received.

Lifelong friendships were forged among these five families. We pulled each other along, understanding the things no one else can understand, laughing at things no one else dare laugh at. Even when we stopped attending the HAND meetings, and instead became facilitators and board members, we still made time to get together, to remember our darling lost children and to compare notes on where our grief was currently living. More solace; more laughter.

And then the year of miracles, when each of us became pregnant again and each of us carried babies to successful births. Support along the way, shouts of triumph at each journey successfully completed. Our living children play together, know each other,

Friendship *continued on page 6*

Friendship *continued from page 5*

celebrate holidays and birthdays together. Who knows what conversations they will have in the future about the roles their lost siblings played in their lives. What a gift.

Cassandra

I felt an enormous sense of gratitude and joy as we were having our pictures taken together. It has been a three year journey from the time of our loss of Margaux. The experience of her loss still rests firmly in the shadows as I move about my day. On happy days such as this, the joy is often still coupled with that hint of sadness. I have gotten used to the extreme, simultaneous feeling of juxtaposed emotions that come during such occasions. But the magnitude of sadness has dissipated as time moves on.

I often think about how far I have come through this grieving process and how I owe so much to HAND of the Peninsula. These men and women helped me get a grasp on life again simply by speaking their truths and listening to mine. The supportive friends I found at HAND helped give me the courage to attempt and navigate through another pregnancy. The experience of going through the subsequent pregnancy and birth of my son, Isaac, was challenging, frightening, and yet healing and strengthening at the same time. Opening myself up to HAND was the greatest gift that I allowed myself and my family to receive. It is on special occasions like this one that in just being with these HAND parents, allows me to feel like I am honoring the memory of my baby, Margaux. It makes it feel okay to move forward in life again.