

Helping Hands

Helping After Neonatal Death

Spring 2000

From tragedy to support

New HAND chapter is born

By Randy Helm
Modesto HAND chapter

On Friday, June 11, 1999, my wife, Shonna, went in for her regularly scheduled prenatal appointment. Our son Nathan was due that day, but if he did not come naturally, Shonna was scheduled to be induced the following Monday. To our dismay, the doctor could not find Nathan's heartbeat.

Shonna was immediately admitted to Washington Hospital in Fremont, to induce labor and deliver Nathan. But, we had so many questions. What happened? What were we to do? What would life be like without Nathan? Why us?

Our doctor and the hospital staff were very helpful. They asked us if we would like to speak to someone who had been through the loss of a child. We said yes, but we were skeptical. We thought they would send us a "Pollyanna" type who would tell us that they had been through it, it was no big deal and we would get over it.

Instead, Heidi Olson, coordinator of Alameda HAND, visited us at the hospital. Heidi is soft spoken, warm and very compassionate. I met Heidi in the waiting room with our doctor and our family.

I don't think Heidi realizes how important those first minutes with her were. All I remember are the tears in her eyes and how she honestly told me she was so sorry.

"I don't think Heidi realizes how important those first minutes with her were. All I remember are the tears in her eyes and how she honestly told me she was so sorry."

As I am sure all of you know, there is an instant bond between those of us who have lost a child, but Heidi was the first one I experienced it with. I don't think I would have been able to walk down the hallway to the delivery room if it wasn't for Heidi. She had her arm around me the whole time.

Heidi went in to meet my wife. The minute Heidi began to talk, Shonna found solace in her voice. She asked Shonna to tell our story. Then Heidi told hers. Shonna said she just focused on Heidi's voice the whole time. It really helped to know that Heidi went on living after her son had died and it gave us hope that we could too, someday.

The materials she left for us also helped. She offered to come back for Nathan's delivery and she did return. Also present were a minister from the Episcopal Church and our favorite delivery nurse, who had also experienced infant loss.

When Nathan was delivered, they treated him just as special as if he were living. It gave us the strength and courage to see him and hold him and make memories with him. They also took pictures for us. Without their presence next to us in the delivery room, we may never have taken the time to be with Nathan. Without their support, we would have many regrets.

Our home is in Modesto, which does not have a HAND chapter. So Heidi directed us to a support group in Pleasanton. Through that support group, we learned that the Central Valley was lacking in support for parents of infant loss. Also through that support group, we met Becca Coleman who was a co-facilitator.

We talked about our experience with HAND and the support we received in the hospital. Becca mentioned her desire to do similar things here. We thought Becca would be perfect for HAND

New *Continued on page 7*

A Letter from Central Valley HAND

Hello from the new Central Valley Chapter of HAND. I am Becca Coleman and I'm excited to be the area coordinator for this new chapter. I have long dreamed of having quality services for bereaved parents in Stockton, Modesto, Manteca, Tracy and the surrounding areas. I look forward to helping HAND blossom into an invaluable organization in the Central Valley.

I personally suffered the loss of one of my twin boys in 1997 and since then have been involved in pregnancy and infant loss support groups both as an attendee and a facilitator. I have seen the great need for a quality support group but I've also seen the need for many other services that are not currently available in this area. It is my dream to change that and with HAND and the many moms and dads I have met who are equally committed to serving the community, we are making it happen!

I recently learned of the HAND organization through a wonderful couple, Randy and Shonna Helm, whom I met at a support group. Although they live in the Central Valley, they suffered the loss of their son while at a hospital in Fremont with a HAND volunteer at their side. As I listened to them speak of their loss and the positive experience they had with HAND, I realized that this organization could offer the type of services that I have long aspired for the Central Valley.

I am so pleased to announce our services which include a pregnancy and infant loss support group which meets on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Sunday of the month, phone support for bereaved parents, hospital visitation during the time of loss, in-service and training for volunteers and medical staff, distribution of the HAND newsletter and more. I'd like to give my heartfelt thanks to my current volunteer staff of nine people and I welcome new volunteers to help with some of the various duties needed to make HAND work for bereaved parents. We're looking for volunteers that are able to do anything from making baby blankets to fundraising. You can volunteer as much or as little of your time as you want and I assure you, you will be making a positive impact on a grieving parent. Please contact me for services, questions or to volunteer.

Becca Coleman
(209) 823-5503

or
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Helping After Neonatal Death

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Helping Hands

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next issue:**

MARCH 1, 2000

A Tale of Twins

Vincent and Merleissa

By Joanne Regalia

My husband Mike and I started trying to have children right after we married in 1991. But after four years of work-ups, IUI's and investing a lot of emotions, heartache and money, we finally decided to try in-vitro fertilization. With the doctor's help and God's blessing, we were successful. After three months of bed rest and home monitoring, we gave birth to a beautiful little boy at 33 weeks gestation. He was 5 pounds, 3 oz. and healthy.

In August 1997, we tried another IVF procedure with great fear it was not going to work as I was now two years older. When the doctor showed us two heartbeats, we were shocked, happy and scared. For some reason, during those first few months I worried and cried a lot wondering where we would put the twins, as we only have a two-bedroom house, and how we were going to pay for childcare? I wish now that I would have enjoyed those few months I got with my children instead of worrying over such unimportant stuff. Christmas was coming and physically I was tired but pushing myself to make sure my 2-year-old would enjoy the holiday season.

I had asked the doctor to write down the sex of our twins during the amnio, because that evening we were going out to dinner and we wanted to make it special. I had always wanted and prayed for a boy and a girl. That night my dream came true. We were both happy, we cried together in the restaurant. Around the 19th week, I started spotting dark blood. My doctor had me come in on December 22. I remember her looking at me and saying, "You're here for the duration." Mike and I just looked at each other and started to shake. I still had five months to go! My cervix was less than one centimeter thick and my doctor ordered an emergency cerclage.

I stayed in the hospital for four weeks. On my back. No bathroom privileges. I did well, no contractions and my babies were thriving. Whenever I would feel down, my favorite nurse would say to me, "This time spent is only the blink of an eye in one's lifetime," She insisted I could make it. Unfortunately, life doesn't always work out the way we plan. On Wednesday, January 21, I went into active labor. They gave me magnesium sulfate to stop the contractions. It was horrible. Once you get the initial dose and get adjusted to the medicine, it's like being on morphine. Then they gave me terbutaline, which made my heart race. The labor pains would subside but just for a short time.

Those few days I was praying and recruiting my friends and family to pray also. I believe that all things are possible through God. But in the same thought, the pain was so bad that I would say, "God, if you're going to take my babies then just do it, please don't make me go through all this for nothing."

Twins *continued on page 7*

Grief

by Cindy Rollins Spangler

My grief comes in waves

*Washing over me with such
strength*

That I am scarcely able to stand.

Then it recedes,

And I am calm once again.

Sad, yet strong and able to go on.

The tide of my grief continues,

Flowing and ebbing

Hour by hour, day by day.

They say I will one day feel better.

In my head, I know this.

But in my heart, I cry.

In loving memory of my son

John-John

Feb. 13 - July 29, 1998

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 Santa Clara County

Support meetings are held on the first and third Thursdays of the month.

Time: 7:30- 9:30 PM

Dates: Feb. 3 and 17
March 2 and 16
April 6 and 20
May 4 and 18

Facilitators: Nadine, Sherri, Carmen, Ellen, and Susan.

Location: Our Savior's Church, downstairs library, 1224 N. Winchester Ave., Santa Clara (between Pruneridge and Scott), Santa Clara. Call (408) 732-3228 for information.

HAND of the Peninsula

Support meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of the month.

Time: 7:30-9:30 PM

Contact: Celia Hartnett

Location: Sequoia Health and Wellness Services, 702 Marshall St., Redwood City. Call (650) 367-6993 for information.

Dates: Feb. 2 and 16
March 1 and 15
April 5 and 19
May 3 and 17

HAND of Santa Cruz County

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

Time: 7:30-9:30 PM

Facilitators: Kristie Shulman
(831) 438-4513

Kelly Passanisi Tartala
(831) 662-0263

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

Dates: Feb. 16
March 15
April 19
May 17

HAND of So. Alameda County

Meetings are currently being held on the first and third Wednesday of each month.

Time : 7-9 PM

Dates: Feb. 2 and 16
March 1 and 15
April 5 and 19
May 3 and 17

Location: Washington Hospital, West 2500 Mowry Ave., Health Education Library, first floor. For more information call (800) 963-7070 and ask for "HAND."

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 Santa Clara County

Pregnancy support meetings are held the second Thursday of the month on an RSVP basis. If you wish to attend, please contact Gina (408) 868-9605 or Kathy (408) 848-1716.

Time: 7:30-9:30 PM

Location: Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 12770 Saratoga Ave., Saratoga, conference room off of sanctuary.

Dates: Feb. 10
March 9
April 13
May 11

HAND of the Peninsula

Subsequent pregnancy support meetings are on the second Wednesday of every month at 7:30 p.m.. Anyone wishing to attend a subsequent pregnancy meeting may call Celia Hartnett at (650) 367-6993.

HAND of So. Alameda County

Subsequent pregnancy support meetings are being held as needed. Anyone wishing to attend a subsequent pregnancy meeting may call (800) 963-7070 or (925) 373-4114 and ask for "HAND."

Time: 7-9 PM

Location:: Prince of Peace Church, 12770 Saratoga Ave., Saratoga, conference room off of sanctuary.

Donations

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

Mary Schorr, in memory of our son, who would be 22 years old on Oct. 4

Kathryn and Richard Breaux, in honor of Emily Corpos

Sherrie and Melvin Friedman

Maryann Hansen, in memory of Brian Hansen

Ada and Robert Lai, in memory of our son, Matthew, on his 12th birthday

Becky, Victor and Veronica Lombardo, in memory of my daughter and our sister, Monica Marie, who would be 21 years old on Jan. 2

Phyllis and John Van Hagen, we will always remember Sarah Louise Cook Mills' sweet smile

Jackie Willson, in memory of Mary Kate Holsinger

Darrell and Kara Carlyle, in memory of Christopher Zane

James and Kirsten Chan, in memory of Arby and Karolina

Kathy Olson, in memory of Dana Kelly Olson

Betsy and Scott Rutherford, in memory of Debra Nicole and Brandon Cole

Les and Megan Middleton, in memory of Emily

Tricia and Michael Albritton, Joann and Larry Caban, Lynn

and Richard Cassar, Monica and Francis Keffer, Jane and Paul Folena, Cristina Macaspac, Sheryl and Paul Maruskin, in memory of Jason Michael Oliver

Kimberlee Brix-Grounds, Melinda and John Geiger, Erin Ito, Cynthia and Amanda Harrington, Symantec Corporation, in memory of Michael Ryan Geiger

Kathy and Bob Campbell, in memory of Hope Campbell

Continuing thanks to Sequoia Health and Wellness and INNW for their support

Betty Wong, in memory of my unborn baby boy who would have been a year old in December

Irene Lustgarten in memory of my niece, Talia Elise Nelson Twicken.

Fundraising Events

Thanks to those who participated in Santa Clara HAND's fundraising events:

Valley Fair event: Antone and Marianne Bullock, Karen D. Carroll, Laurie Chan, Miyuki Davison, Purvi Dholia, Robert Freiss, Ted Hanson, Billy Hartwig, John Hay, Keiko Ichiki, Irene F Liu, Doug and Sherry Miller, Maria Monzon, Becky Mota, Pam Myers, Julie Neal, Jemmie Obuchowski, Brian Stein, and Lenna Williamson.

Entertainment Book sales: Tracy DeDore, Gina Glenn, Lydia Halcin, Alberta Holt, Catherine Keleshian, Robert Korn, Oscar Lombardi, Jan and Richard Martinez, Carmen Parrish, Mark Pollans, James Privat, Rita Robinson, Annette Roman, Gary and Janice Smith, Ethelita Wallace and Jim Zoland.

Susan and Harry Carpenter, in memory of First Twins Carpenter

Karen and John Carroll, in memory of Justina Maxime

Cherian Borchers
Rose Andrea Cook
Paula-Jo Husack, LMFT

Dana C. DiVerde, in memory of baby girl DiVerde

Karen and Gregory Hansen, in memory of Christopher Ryan Hansen

Donna and Daniel Kavanaugh, in memory of Kristy Lynn Kavanaugh

Rachel Luna-Victoria and Teresa Ulrich, in memory of Savannah Holmes-Starks

Nina and Torsten Borchers, in memory of Tara Maria

Deanna and Steven Bernsen, in memory of Joshua Bernsen
Continued on Page 6

Births

Michelle Elizabeth, March 8, 1999, to Cassandra and Michael Wood and big sister Allyson and big brother Jordan.

Nicholas Sathea, April 7, 1999, in Cambodia, adopted by his new parents Suzanne Koch and Andy Fenselau on Aug. 20, 1999.

Dylan Rollins Spangler, Oct. 19, 1999, to Cindy, Bob and Mikki Spangler

Anne Melville Martin, Nov. 12, 1999, to Craig and Carol Martin.

Donations *continued from Page 5*

Mike Smith, in memory of Lynn and Samuel Smith

Patty Leeper, donated "The Lessons of Love" to HAND's Library.

Karen and Gary Rogers, in memory of Carly Ann Rogers

Susan and Lawrence Pon, in memory of Lerelei Leigh and Erin Colleen Hief-Pon

Catherine Coolin, in memory of Gregory Hartnett

Ladawn and William Wilde Barbara Elordi, M.A.

Janella And Harry Thodos, in memory of our daughter, Elizabeth Thodos

Jill Morgan and Douglas Keare, in memory of Steven Bradford Keare

Denise and Miles Bresee, in memory of Emma Gabrielle Bresee

Anonymous, in honor of Celia Hartnett

Cynthia Spangler, in memory of my son, John-John Rollings Spangler

Charane Rocha, in memory of Taylor Ann Rocha

Robin and David Costa, in memory of our son, Alec Robert Costa

Grace and Todd Moeller, in memory of Isabelle Grace Moeller

Mary and Bill Schorr, in memory of Daniel Patrick Schorr

Peggy and Ronald Shapera MD
Gloria Gillogley
Merry Astor

Mark Hollar, in memory of William Adam Hollar

Rob and Anna Strong, in memory of our son Andrew

Stephanie and Tom Couch, in memory of Austin William Couch

Denise and Jeffrey Goldman, in memory of Jason Goldman

Florence King, in memory of Katherine Rogers King

Kristina and Michael Shulman, in memory of Daniel Shulman

Maureen and Jerry McMillan
Irene Kennedy
Cynthia and Patrick Wilson

Stephen J. Buchner, M.D., in honor of HAND volunteers

Molly and Joseph Zimmerer, in memory of Michael Joseph Kuzman Zimmerer

Patty Leeper and Craig Ball, in memory of Abigail Leeper Ball
Rachel Kindt and Gregory Marcus

Karen and Kim Schoknecht, in memory of our son Adam Schoknecht

Leslie Muennemann, in honor of our newsletter printer PJ Hawkins

Kathleen and Victor Parrette, in memory of Malorie Anne Parrette

Jill Nelson and Joe Twicken, in memory of Talia Elise Nelson Twicken and Isabelle Grace Moeller on their first birthdays

Dori Ives, in memory of Grant Ives

On Your Marks — Human Race May 13

It's not too early to begin planning for one of HAND's more pleasurable fund-raising activities.

This year, Celia Hartnett, former president of HAND of the Peninsula, is proposing combining the fundraiser with a long time favorite of HAND families, a Walk of Remembrance followed by a family picnic in the Coyote Point Park next to the San Francisco Bay.

"This is a painless way for HAND families to raise the money our organization needs to survive," Celia pointed out. It is also an opportunity for longtime members to see each other and catch up on life.

HAND receives a generous percentage of all the money walkers raise from pledges.

The route is along well paved paths in scenic Coyote Point Park. Once completed, walkers receive a complimentary t-shirt and free beverages and other treats from sponsors.

Pledge forms will soon be available and may be obtained by calling Judi in the HAND office, 702 Marshall St., Redwood City, (650) 367-6993.

Special Thanks

Karen Carroll, treasurer for HAND of Santa Clara County, retired from the Board after her term expired on December 31.

She has made a number of highly valued contributions as treasurer, including establishing good financial controls, computerizing our books and updating our tax filings. Though in retirement, Karen will still be volunteering her time. Thanks for a job well done!

Twins *Continued from page 3*

It's hard to write this now as it hurts. I'd do it all again just to see my Merleissa and Vince one more time.

On Saturday, January 24, at 23 weeks, my babies were born. At 9:53 a.m. Merleissa was born and cried for a moment. I can still hear her. She sounded like a kitten. She was just under one pound. Mike said she looked like me. Vincent came at 10:04 a.m. and he was quiet, just like his dad. He was one pound and looked like his big brother, Angelo. We held our babies and sang to them a song I sing to their brother. My father and in-laws were there too. They held each one and kissed them. We had them baptized in my arms.

My babies' spirits left while I was holding them in my arms. First Merleissa left and then Vincent. At that time I think I was numb, because as soon as I knew they had passed I gave them to the nurse. And that was the last time I saw them.

Now I wish I had held them longer and looked at them each closely. I have pictures the nurse took. I look at these frequently. We buried our babies close to my mom. I know she's watching them for me until I'm with them again.

I think of my babies every day. It's weird but I feel I have an ongoing relationship with them. I suppose I always will. When people ask how many children we have, I usually just say one. Sometimes, when I'm up to it I tell my story. I want people to understand my twins were real, alive and perfect, just too small for this lifetime. Sadness and joy come in waves. People tell me to be happy and satisfied that I have my Angelo. God knows I am! I thank Him every day for all my children. But, people who have not had to bury their children don't really understand the intense pain and loss we truly feel.

New *continued from page 1*

and perfect to coordinate a chapter. So, one day in December last year, a short six months after Nathan's death, Shonna talked to Heidi, Heidi talked to Becca and HAND of Central Valley was born.

For more information call (209) 823-5503

To my little brother whom I will never know

"Vincent"

by Sara Galvez

*I was at cheerleading practice
when I found out you entered this world,
but little did I know
what was wrong with you.*

*I could care less what you looked like.
I saw you at the hospital, and as soon
as my eyes laid upon your little body,
I would have done anything to take your place.*

*Everybody really misses you.
We'll never know what you could have become.
Now you're just a memory
of a day-old baby*

*Who should have never died
and who should be here with his family.
But now you're in a better
place watching over all of us.*

*Well little brother,
take care of all of us
and rest in peace
forever and eternity.*

*Ya always,
Your big sis,
Sara*

**Submitted by Vincent's Loving Parents
Carmen and Ken Banuelos.**

Art and Grief — A Special Class for HAND

An Art Class for Non-Artists

7:30 – 9:30 PM

Tuesdays, Feb 8 - Mar 28, 2000

Palo Alto (call for specifics)

\$20 materials fee covers all supplies. Instruction is free.

Please call Anna* at (415) 929-9006 to sign up or to ask any questions

~ Space is limited! ~

*Anna Conklin, a Masters degree student at the California College of Arts and Crafts, is offering the class as part of her own healing (the loss of her first niece).