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Helping Hands

Summer 2004

The Waves

By **Emily Mockett**
HAND of the Peninsula

We headed north to Canada after Julia died; we just had to keep moving north.

With the hypnotic change of scenery at 70 mph up the I-5 corridor past Shasta, past Portland, past Seattle, I thought grief would be challenged to keep up. But it had hitched a ride in the front seat.

My husband had taken the car seat out of the car before we left. I hadn't wanted to remove it yet, but we needed the room. Our chaotic disorganized packing for an unknown destination of indeterminate duration left no form of efficiency or compactness.

Julia was dead and she didn't need the car seat. The cold reality of that was my introduction to the dark, frigid and barren landscape I would have to make my own way through. My big toes were in the icy surf, and I would have to swim the Pacific.

At a B&B in Oregon, a kind innkeeper heard our story. We were on a "healing journey" and we told her about Julia. This

graying mother of four, grandmother actually, listened earnestly as the tears welled up almost immediately. She too had lost a baby boy to a fever in Africa, years before, she confided.

Comforting as it was to know I wasn't the first mother in the history of time to lose a child, I was also stunned to see the pain of her loss residing right there just under the surface fifty years later. Here I was only one week after my life changed forever, realizing the sadness was my possession and I would have to learn to walk with it.

In the weeks and months that followed, I could say I was feeling better only in the sense that I was getting used to feeling so badly. It was no longer such a surreal contrast to my life lived up to the birth of Julia. I was accepting my suffering and it was growing familiar.

I told Julia, "You do not suffer, you have found your way, and someday I will find my way, but for now Julia, I suffer, I suffer the greatest sadness born from the greatest love I will always have for you." I bathed in my suffering.

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Donations

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Lloyd Steadman and Patricia Murphy, in memory of Craig Willem Steadman on his 8th birthday, May 22 from his Mom and Dad brother Peter and sister Juliet

Cherie Golant and Ron Gutierrez, in honor of Emma Steadman.

Rob and Anna Strong
Anonymous donor
Santa Cruz Mother of Twins Club
Su-Mien Chong and Kyle Elrod

Joe and Gigi Casey, in memory of Timothy Hoang Casey's 1st birthday April 1, 2004

Alison and Larry Brown, in memory of James Philip Brown
Diana Spangler-Crawford, in honor of Celia Hartnett

Gerald and Carolyn Ann Dybsetter, in memory of Emily Ann Dybsetter on her 6th birthday

Sylvia Zerbato, in memory of Baby Stevie David Garcia

Twila Forbes, in memory of Cosmos Forbes
Susan Pon, in memory of Lorelei and Erin Hief-Pon

Chaplain Yael Gott, in honor of Elaine Miliman

Marty Ryhanych and Anthony Mueller, in memory of Troy Mueller

Darrell and Kara Carlyle, in memory of Christopher Zane Carlyle

Christy Conklin and Richard McCluney

Pam Hoffman, in memory of Garrett Hoffman
Anna E. Heffron, in memory of my beloved daughter Michal who died 25 years ago

Human Race Donations

In memory of Edgar and Christian Reeve:

Cassandra Gilbert
Sara Ghaith and Don Marlais
Kim Graf
Adrienne Pierce
Philippa Graham
Claire Holland
Becky Butler
John Radcliffe
Nassef Nakhla
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Lynn and Dave Gilbert
Ed Felts and Claude Baudoin
Erika Pretell
Melissa May
Delphine Coffin and Sylvain Doreau
Frances Butler
Mog and Pete Harding

In memory of Samantha Chong Elrod:

Jennifer and Hal Elrod
Maureen O'Connor

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

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Helping Hands

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The Wholehearted Journey

Retreat for parents grieving infant, pregnancy loss

A special retreat dedicated to soothing and nourishing the heart, body and soul of women, couples and any of their family and friends whose lives have been touched by pregnancy or newborn loss will be held Sept. 24-26, 2004, in Woodside.

The weekend will offer support and assistance in honoring your baby and yourself, integrating memories of your baby, finding ways to renew happiness and vitality in your life. It is a safe and peaceful space away from home and your daily routine.

Grief process and recovery workshops will be offered by mental health professionals working in perinatal loss and bereavement.

Other features include serene indoor and outdoor spaces for private reflection, massage treatments, yoga, meditation and hiking trails.

Accommodations are in a magnificent, tranquil lodge, part of a sanctuary resort nestled amongst majestic redwood tress in the hills of Woodside. Meals are included.

For registration, questions or to inquire about future retreat dates and locations, please contact Juliana Scalise, Bella Vita Pregnancy-Related Grief Support (408) 234-9909

BROKEN WATER

By Kristie Shulman

HAND of Santa Cruz County

*A river of fluid gushes from my body.
I'm deflating,
dissolving into the emptiness...
The evacuation has begun.*

*Seven long months, two to go,
and you have died inside my womb.
There must be some mistake...
It can't be over!
We haven't even met yet!*

*But when you come,
there is no cry.
My silent son, why have you left me?
I have so many plans for you,
so many dreams...
How can this tiny body, so perfect,
be so cold?*

*In an instant you are gone,
swept out with the tide,
into the great expanse,
my arms helpless to retrieve you.
And with you,
part of me leaves too.*

*I am an empty vessel,
aching to be filled up with your life,
to once again feel your kicks and turns,
and see my belly bulging with your growth.*

*I need to fill this gaping hole, this void.
My womb is vacant, my arms empty.
I long for your warm soft skin
and sweet new-baby smell
that I never knew,
and never will.*

*Even now, months later,
I sometimes think I feel your kicks,
and recall our time together...
Our private communion,
mother and child.*

Kristie Shulman wrote this in 1996 in memory of her son, Daniel Shulman, stillborn December 1, 1995

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: June 2 and 16
July 7 and 21
Aug. 4 and 18
Sept. 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 Shulman (831) 438-4513.

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

Dates: June 16
July 21
Aug. 18
Sept. 15

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

Fire causes support meeting change

HAND of the Peninsula's regular support meetings have been temporarily disrupted by a recent fire in the upper floors of the Sequoia Health and Wellness Services.

It is estimated regular meetings will resume at that location in mid June but parents are advised to call HAND at (650) 367-6993 for a recorded update and possible alternate meeting location.

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: June 9
July 14
Aug. 11
Sept. 8
Oct. 13

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, to Ron Gutierrez and Cherie Golant

'New Parents' group to meet

Please join us to share your experiences of parenting after a loss, Sunday, Aug. 15, 3:30-5 p.m. at the home of John and Shoneen Erskine, 58 Chilton Ave., San Carlos. Please e-mail or call for directions: shonen2002@yahoo.com or (650) 591-7610.

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.

Esther and Saul Twicken, in memory of our granddaughter Talia Elise Nelson Twicken

Twila J. Forbes, in memory of Cosmo Forbes

Joanne Regalia, in honor of our twins Merleissa and Vincent

Irene Lustgarten, in memory of Talia Elise Nelson Twicken. In loving memory of our cousin and niece from Maia and Irene

Patty Leeper and Craig Ball, in memory of Abigail Leeper and William Leeper Ball

David and Robin Costa, in memory of our son Alec Robert's 6th birthday, April 12, 2004

Donations *continued on page 2*

Waves *continued from page 1*

Like the waves of the ocean and the labor of birth one cannot attempt to control grief. I let the grief come. The ocean was fierce and unforgiving at first. The waves crashed down repeatedly and each time I believed I would not surface. In the moment of each chilling submersion it seemed as if the tears would never stop and my stolen breath would go unreturned. But each time I was wrong. I always surfaced.

The water left my eyes and the air always came back to my lungs. Time after time, I went under, and time after time I came up. I put up no breakwater to my crashing grief, I let it come, I experienced it, but then I let it pass through me. I did not cling to it. As a wave moves past, as a labor contraction subsides, I let go of the sadness, welcomed the calm, and rested from my grief.

My ocean of grief ever so gradually transformed. The waves came less frequently, then less violently and moved through me more swiftly. The water imperceptibly was also getting warmer. At the same time I became a better swimmer, trusting further with each survived wave that "this too shall pass." And they always did. And they still do.

The death of one's baby will always be sad, but one will not suffer forever. I believe now that the grandmother who wept cried not because she still suffers 50 years later, but because her heart

had been permanently opened years before by the suffering of her loss. Opened to experience the joys and sorrows that will come to all of us in a far more enriched and connected way.

For my life experience has changed in this way as a result of my loss of Julia. I

am humbled, more grateful and awake to the marvelous spectrum of emotion that colors each day. I will never be any less *sad* my daughter died, but I can say to Julia now that I do not *suffer*, and I am finding my way... my way through the waves.

*Julia Mockett Hutcherson
Aug. 8 - Aug. 28, 2002*

BEREAVEMENT STUDY

Parents' continuing bond with their deceased child

Researchers from the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology are conducting a study to learn about the impact of losing a child on family members. The investigators are Wendy Packman, JD, PhD and Nigel Field, PhD.

They are requesting participation from adult parents who have lost a child (under 18 years of age) in the last five years, and hope that the information that is learned will assist health practitioners in providing comprehensive care for grieving families. In this work, the researchers are collaborating with other health care providers, including Betty Davies, RN, PhD and Robin Kramer, RN from the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete questionnaires about how you are adjusting and coping with the loss of your child. Following completion of the questionnaires, a researcher will interview you at a time and place convenient to you.

The questions are designed to help the researchers better understand your experiences following the death of your child, and to hear your suggestions for how care in this area can be improved. Your individual responses will be kept completely confidential. Participation in this study will take approximately 2.5 hours.

If you are interested in participating in this study please call (650) 843-3596.