

Grandparents' grief

A double-edged sword

By Bev Bressler

The loss of our grandson, Caleb Joseph Souers, is as fresh today as when he was born still July 3, 1998. I am beginning to realize the loss will always be with us, as his grandparents, but the pain doesn't cut as deeply as it did.

Days after his birth and death, I didn't see how the pain would ever ease up, even though caring people said it would. We had never experienced anything like this; Caleb, the son of our daughter Tricia and her husband Tim, is their first child. We were making all the usual mistakes by trying so desperately to make the pain better for her and, in fact, only added to the pain, though we didn't mean to do so.

We owe a debt of gratitude to a local support group. They held a "grandparents' meeting" and, thank the Lord, we felt the need to attend. I poured out my grief and learned that even though we wanted our daughter to be happy again, to be "her old self," Tricia had already come a far way. We also learned that our daughter was "normal" for that time in her life and even though it

had been a while since Caleb's death, she still was hurting badly. Things just didn't seem like they were ever going to be normal again.

It didn't help that we were saying all the wrong things like, "Pour yourself into your work, it will help"; "Life goes on"; "You'll have other children one day." Heaven help me, if only I could take those words back. Our daughter heard these phrases at her workplace and from many well-meaning people, but like them, we thought these words would help. Trust me, they didn't then and don't now. They only hurt more.

I've learned that the only words of comfort to be shared are, "I'm so sorry for your loss," along with a loving, warm hug. Let them know you are there for them. I wanted my daughter to be back to her normal self; I feared that she would never be the same. The best advice that helped this grandma was given to me when I was told that my daughter would never be the same because she was a new mom who had lost her son and had to deal with her pain every day. But she was still the sweet person I'd always known. I

took these words to heart, "Your pain is that of a double-edged sword, it's cutting you both ways with the loss of your grandson and the pain of your daughter."

The double-edged sword... how powerful these words are! They explain the depth of our pain. Giving up our grandson and watching, day by day, the pain that our daughter was living with was an experience we had never had before. The helpless feeling of not being able to say or do anything that really eased her pain was killing us.

Tricia and Tim attended the monthly support meetings where she was able to talk and receive the love and support we couldn't give. That hurt a little, to think as her parents, we couldn't give her what she needed. But, it's true, we couldn't. The old saying that you don't know how a person feels unless you walk in their shoes is so true. How could we know how she felt? I had never lost a child, and unless you have, you have no idea of the pain. At least there is comfort in the thought that I never said those empty words, "I know how you feel."

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25th anniversary bbq, picnic honors founders, volunteers

About 80 adults and children enjoyed hamburgers and hot dogs, chased bubbles and made colorful handprints on Saturday, May 31 at Huddart Park in Woodside.

The event celebrated HAND of the Peninsula's founding by Emily Corpus and Celia Hartnett, who were both thanked by the Board and other volunteers with flowers donated by Tom and Jennifer Kavanaugh of White Oak Flower Shoppe in San Carlos. A colorful ceramic pin featuring a handprint was given to those who have volunteered between 2000 and 2008:

Kathleen Addison
Tish Alfonsi
Stephanie Allen
Chris Anderson-Fawcett
Kevin Asher
Donna Marie Baldwin
Peter Benson
Laura Bevington
Kellie Bliss
Diana Bujtor
Charlene Canger
Christy Conklin
Emily Corpus
Palash Desai
Carol Dirk
Shoneen Erskine
Cathleen Findley
Twila Forbes
Kim Genereux
Caryn Goldman
Gina Guidi
Shirley Guidi
Celia Hartnett
Laura Hawkins
Eileen Healy
Catherine Hoff

Gary Hoff
Jessica Hope
Jennifer Hoppe
Jack Jensen
Lisa Jones
Hargita Kaplan
John Kochergin
Katya Kochergin
Wanda Lee
Laurie London
Christina Louie
Kelly Luckey
Jill Ludwig
Melisse Lusin
Michael Lydon
George Mason
Laurie McLucas
Anna McQuinn
Emily Mockett
Mary-Ann Molloy
Frank Muennemann
Leslie Muennemann
Jill Nelson
Jasmine Obando
Erin Osai
Paula Osorio
Julie Raithel
Elham Raoufian
Christine Reeve
Krystal Romero
Juliana Scalise
Anjali Shah
Gail Shak
Ron Shapera
Kristie Shulman
Stacey Soong
Nina Squillante
Kristin Steadman
Joan Stone
Marilyn Swarts
Joe Twicken
Marie Violet
Jacqueline Wilsson

Helping After Neonatal Death

Chapters:

HAND of the Peninsula
P.O. Box 3693
Redwood City, CA 94064
650 579-0350 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

Editor: Leslie Muennemann
leslie@muenn.net

Contributors: *Bev Bressler*
Rachel Steigleder

Printing: P.J. Hawkins
lt11@sbcglobal.net

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My daughter heard that often. She felt compelled to reply with “thank you,” but inside all she wanted to do was scream, “No you don’t know how I feel, have you lost a child?”

We did tell our daughter that we love her so very much and we were feeling her pain. Not having lost a child, we realized that we didn’t really know her pain. But the pain we were feeling was tearing us apart. Giving up a grandson was like giving up my own child.

Even though Caleb was born still, we held him for hours. We studied his little face, trying to forever engrave this in our hearts. It was going to have to last us the rest of our lifetimes. We watched our daughter Tricia and her husband Tim holding their son, loving him so much and wanting so desperately for him to open his eyes. My daughter told me later that when she looked at Caleb, she prayed for her son to stay. We took many pictures we have a small album of them now and from time to time I open the book and look at Caleb. Of course, we can’t keep the tears from flowing as we wish for him to be back with us and think of all the things that we are missing as his grandparents, like the joy of watching him grow.

We are thankful to have our daughter close to us. She and I have a special bond and do lots of mother-daughter things. This gives us time to talk about Caleb. In the beginning it wasn’t

easy; I was afraid of causing her more pain by bringing up his memory at all. One day we were driving along and she was telling me how upset she was that her coworkers never asked how she was feeling or doing. They acted like nothing had ever happened, that she never had a child. She felt like they didn’t care. I told her that perhaps they were like me. No one wanted to make her sad or make her pain worse.

Ever so softly, she said to me, “Mom, it hurts more when you don’t say anything.” Out of the mouths of babes, as the Lord has said, and she is my baby no matter how old she gets. My daughter herself taught me the greatest lesson in dealing with the loss of our grandson. Talk about him. Most of all, let the parents your son or daughter talk about their baby all they want and as often as they feel the need. This and time are the only true factors that eventually ease the pain of loss for them and us.

The first year without Caleb was the hardest; with every holiday, we felt the emptiness and watched our daughter face them without her child. She would see other expectant mothers and feel sad. She was glad for them, but sad it wasn’t to be for her. She would see little ones at the age her son would have been and said, “I miss him so much, Mom.” At times, we hug each other and cry even to this day and if we hear the song “Baby of Mine” or “Angel,” which we have come to think of as Caleb’s songs, we’ll cry every time.

Don’t we wish there were some words that really could make the pain easier? There are none. Time, they say, will make the pain easier. We ask, “How much time?” That isn’t easy to answer. For each one, this is as different as each person is. Only God knows how long it will take for each of us. Take the time to grieve for your child or grandchild and take one day at a time.

Our daughter and her husband now have a beautiful little girl, Caitlin. We wondered if our daughter’s arms would forever be empty. Our prayers were heard. We look at our new granddaughter and can see how beautiful she is. Since brothers and sisters favor each other, I think we will see a part of Caleb in her as she grows. However, she is definitely her own sweet little person that is truly a miracle and gift from God.

If your daughter or daughter-in-law asks, “Am I a Mom? I didn’t get to keep my baby,” tell her, “Yes you are and will always be a Mom. You just didn’t get to practice yet.” When people ask me how many grandchildren I have, I say, “Six, three granddaughters and three grandsons. One grandson is our Angel in Heaven.” And you know what? This statement has let many say, “I’m so sorry.” When I thank them, they begin telling me they too have lost a grandchild. Then we begin to talk and share tears. We feel better somehow that we have this bond of loss and it eases the pain for all of us for a while.

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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. Call 650 367-6993 or email info@handsupport.org for more information.

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

Dates: June 4 and 18
July 2 and 16
Aug. 6 and 20
Sept. 3 and 17

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: June 18
July 16
Aug 20

Sept. 17

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 Wednesday 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 11
July 9
Aug. 13
Sept. 10

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

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

Births

Damian Kochergin — April 2, to John and Katya Kochergin

Helen Rajani Wilson — April 25 to Meg Wilson

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 Talia Nelson Twicken
Jill Nelson, Oracle Matching Gifts Program

Joan Leighton, in honor of Allyson Fisch

Todd Lund, Microsoft Giving Campaign

Carlen and Jennifer Hoppe, Juniper Networks Company Matching Gifts Program

Joanne and Michael Regalia, in honor of their daughter and son
Maureen O'Connor, in memory of her granddaughter

Silvia Zerbato, in memory of Baby Stevie on his 9th birthday

Irene Lustgarten, in loving memory of Talia Nelson Twicken

Twila Forbes, in memory of Cosmo

Su-Mien Chong and Kyle Elrod, in memory of Samantha Chong Elrod

Parnaz Abidi and Kasra Baigi, in memory of Hannah Ramezan-baigi

Lori and John Reid

Wai Yan Lam, in memory of Laetitia Mei Bossuwe on her 4th birthday

Courtney and Dennis Payne, Katherine and Robert Angell, Laurel Ericksen, and Susan and David Bernal, in memory of Leah Faith Davis

Robin and David Costa, and Georgia and Robert Vierra, in memory of Alec Robert Costa on his 10th birthday

Deborah Robinson, in memory of Sean Patrick Robinson

Nancy Faulstich

Anne Graham, in memory of Leonardo Charles Squillante

Ada and Robert Lai, in memory of Matthew Francis Lai

Jill Nelson and Joseph

Twicken, in honor of the Human Race 2008

A bilingual virtual community to grieve a loss

By Rachel Steigleder

Hygeia.org

In May of 1995, Dr. Michael Berman founded Hygeia Foundation, Inc.'s website offering a unique place for families to grieve. Many lack a local bereavement support group to attend. The internet gives these families a means to connect with 29,000 registered users from around the world, and to receive support from others who have suffered the loss through miscarriage, stillbirth and infant death. It is the only known website founded by an obstetrician and gynecologist. Hygeia's message boards are available in both in English and Spanish.

We have a loss message board, which is a starting place for families to post their story and gives others the opportunity to respond. Families use this board to express their sorrow and grief. They can also give support to and receive it from each other. It is truly amazing to see families who are so new to their loss helping other families who are even newer to their loss.

The second message board is for families who are either thinking about getting pregnant again or are currently pregnant after having suffered a loss. We understand the heartache and pain a family can experience when trying to conceive again after losing a baby and how emotional a subsequent pregnancy can be for a family after their baby has died. A woman who has never experienced a loss goes through pregnancy differently than a mom who has had a loss. There is a new set of emotions and concerns because of the previous loss. Hygeia understands that during this emotional time it is reassuring to have others who understand how you feel. On this board there are messages of encouragement and hope. It is reassuring to these pregnant moms to have others who understand their concerns and fears. We get excited to see when a delivery and safe arrival is posted. It gives others strength and hope.

Our message boards do not have an "official" moderator. We do have a mom on our Parent Board who is very dedicated to the website's message boards and welcomes new families and offers support.

The website has a section dedicated to poetry. Some of the poems were written by Dr. Berman, and the others were collected from families

who wanted to share them at hygeia.org. Hygeia has a resources page where we are linked to other websites that also deal with pregnancy loss and infant death. You may not find what you are looking for at Hygeia, and we believe that sharing resources is an important part of the work we do.

Hygeia is not only for bereaved parents. Dr. Berman is dedicated to the medical profession, and a portion of the website is dedicated to education. It provides articles written by medical professionals; we encourage medical professionals to come and participate in the Ephemeris Project. This is an internet-based system of self reflection, journaling, mentoring, and advocacy intended to preserve those personal values and ethics fundamental to the healthcare profession.

Hygeia Foundation, Inc., and Institute for Perinatal Loss and Bereavement hopes that families can find comfort, compassion and hope through our website. We understand the need to talk and connect with other families who have lost a baby. It is our mission to comfort those who grieve the loss of a pregnancy or newborn death.

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Losing my grandson changed my life as well. I don't see things like I did before or take things for granted. Caleb gave me more in his short time on earth than I had learned in my lifetime before him. He taught my family that loving one another is more important than anything. Funny, we thought we knew that, but we really didn't.

From one grandparent to another, if you have experienced the loss of a grandchild, know that with each passing day, you are not alone even if it sometimes feels like it. If you feel like crying, let the tears flow. They are healing tears. Stay in touch with your son or daughter as much as you did before the loss even if it's just to say, "Hi, how are you today?" Listen a lot; it's amazing how this helps your son or daughter. We all need to talk.

This article appeared in the September/October, 2001 Volume 10/Issue 5 edition of Sharing, the bereaved parent newsletter of The National SHARE Office.

Dates to Remember in 2008

Summer — *The Scrapbooking Workshop* (date to be determined) is an opportunity to gather all your precious mementos and collect them in a safe and long-lasting place. Come share your photos and ideas. Anyone interested in volunteering to run this gathering or in participating, please email info@HANDsupport.org

October 18 — This is National Infant and Pregnancy Loss Month. HAND of the Peninsula parents, family and friends gather annually at Huddart Park's Miwok Shelter in Woodside for a ***Service of Remembrance***, from 10 a.m. to noon, to share poems, readings, listen to music and scatter wildflower seeds. The event is free, however, the park charges \$5 for parking. For more information call HAND at 650 367-6993 or email info@HANDsupport.org