

Helping Hands

Winter 2003



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Picking Up The Pieces

Finding Hope in the Puzzle

By Cathi Lammert

In the beginning days, weeks and months of my grief, I searched and ached for signs of hope. How could I survive the hurt of losing such a precious child, our sweet Christopher?

My husband was scared also by the depths of his own hurt as well as being really worried about me. I remember saying very clearly to him, "I will never smile again" and meaning it!

Yet there was a resilience within me that wanted to have that spark back and to feel a sense of hope. Within me there was a pull towards hope engendered by the fear of not recovering and an underlying belief that I or we would be happy again.

You may feel this pull within yourself too. This inner struggle is due to being so vulnerable.

Your life is comparable to a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle that has been scattered. As each piece is picked up it is examined and re-examined through a belief system that has been unbelievably challenged. I know

ours was! I asked myself deep questions that I had never explored before. Who am I? Is this the faith or spiritual path I want to be on? Am I still Christopher's mom? What kind of parent do I want to be in the future?

"Yet there was a resilience within me that wanted to have that spark back and to feel a sense of hope."

What are my priorities with family and work? What kind of marriage do I want for my future? The loss of Christopher made me put who we were and who we would become under the microscope.

If you are searching and asking these questions, take heart for they are signs of hope. This is the beginning of picking up the puzzle pieces.

Address the questions; feel the ache and fears with each one. Allow your feelings to surface. Write them in a journal.

Here is a journal entry that I wrote four months after Christopher's death.
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Do's and Don'ts

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coffee, or had alcohol in the first few weeks when I didn't know I was pregnant. I hate myself for any minute that I had reservations about this baby. Being unsure of my pregnancy isn't the same as wanting my child to die - I never would have chosen for this to happen.

Do say, "I am so sorry." That's enough. You don't need to be eloquent. Say it and mean it and it will matter.

Do say, "You're going to be wonderful parents some day," or "You're wonderful parents and that baby was lucky to have you." We both need to hear that.

Do say, "I have lighted a candle for your baby," or "I have said a prayer for your baby."

Do send flowers or a kind note - every one I receive makes me feel as though my baby was loved.

Don't resent it if I don't respond.

Don't call more than once and don't be angry if the machine is on and I don't return your call. If we're close friends and I am not responding to your attempts to help me, please don't resent that, either. Help me by not needing anything from me for a while.

If you're my boss or my co-worker:

Do recognize that I have suffered a death in my family - not a medical condition.

Do recognize that in addition to the physical aftereffects I may experience, I'm going to be grieving for quite some time. Please treat me as you would any person who has endured the tragic death of a loved one - I need time and space.

Please don't bring your baby or toddler into the workplace. If your niece is pregnant, or your daughter just had a baby, please don't share that with me right now. It's not that I can't be happy for anyone else, it's that every smiling, cooing baby, every glowing new mother makes me ache so deep in my heart I can barely stand it.

I may look okay to you, but there's a good chance that I'm still crying every day. It may be weeks before I can go a whole hour without thinking about it. You'll know when I'm ready - I'll be the one to say, "Did your daughter have her baby?" or, "How is that precious little boy of yours? I haven't seen him around the office in a while."

Above all, please remember that this is the worst thing that ever happened to me. The word "miscarriage" is small and easy. But my baby's death is monolithic and awful. It's going to take me a while to figure out how to live with it. Bear with me.

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
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**HAND of Santa Clara,
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Counties, Central Valley**
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Mark your 2004 calendar

Parenting Subsequent Children

Parents come and share your experiences of parenting a new child after a loss. Children welcome. Please bring a few cookies to share, beverages provided. Sunday Jan. 11, 2004, 3:30 – 5 p.m. Laureola Park, San Carlos - rain cancels. Please RSVP to Emily Mockett, emockett@hotmail.com

Volunteer Training

HAND parents and supporters interested in facilitating meetings, providing phone support or in some other volunteer capacity. 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. Jan. 24 and 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. Jan. 25 at Sequoia Health and Wellness Center 702 Marshall Ave.,

Redwood City. RSVP cchartnett@aol.com or call (650) 367-6993.

Memory Books

Bring your own album, any photos, things that remind you of when you were pregnant, a lock of hair, hospital bands, cards people gave you, poems, special paper, stickers, ultrasound pictures, and anything else you would like to use in your baby's memory book.

There are special albums available through mail-order that are for remembering a baby who has died. Please bring any specialty papers, acid-free paper, stickers, pens, and adhesives you need for your album. Wednesday, March 24,

7:30 p.m. at Sequoia Health and Wellness Center, 702 Marshall Ave., Redwood City. Contact Kellie Bliss, (510) 792-8421 or teakellie@comcast.net

Adoption Night

Hear from other HAND parents who have adopted children. Wednesday April 28, 6:30 p.m. Sequoia Health and Wellness Center, 702 Marshall Ave., Redwood City. RSVP cchartnett@aol.com or call 367-6993.

Human Race

Collect pledges from friends, family and coworkers and walk or run a 5K or 10K course with other HAND parents. 8:30 a.m. Saturday, May 9, 2004, Coyote Point County Park.

Puzzle *continued from page 1*

topher's death. It was one of my first signs of hope. This was written shortly after we met a family whose baby died six months before ours:

Tincture of Time

One more drop, ten more tears, helping us ease, lessening fears

Four beautiful friends we've met during this time of hardship

Together we've struggled and loved without stiff upper lips

None of our individual griefs are measured by hourglasses

We help each other by listening, knowing we'll make it as time passes.

It is hard some days to believe that time will ease the pain in this process, but I can attest that it will.

As you gently replace the puzzle pieces, reflect on your growth. Always look back and notice how far you have come; it is too hard to look at how far you need to go. Give yourself credit for the tiny or major steps you have taken - getting out of bed, taking care of routine chores, returning to work.

Some days or weeks you will put a number of pieces

back together and some days a piece or two may fall out and you will have to start over.

Eventually your puzzle will come together, it may have a new pattern, a new look, a new "normal" but it will be you.

There may be a tiny piece missing but that piece will be filled with an eternal love. That piece will be heart-shaped in honor of your precious baby.

May the love you feel for your baby bring you everlasting peace and hope.

This article appeared in the July/August, 2000 (Volume 9/Issue 4) edition of Sharing, the bereaved parent newsletter of The National SHARE Office.

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: Celia Hartnett (650) 367-6993.

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

Dates: Dec. 3 and 17
Jan. 7, and 21, 2004
Feb. 4 and 18
March 3 and 17

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: Dec. 17
Jan. 21, 2004
Feb. 18
March 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 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: Dec. 10
Jan. 14
Feb. 11
March 10

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

Shawn Micheal Torresson — July 6, 2003 to Jennifer and Tom and big sister Sydney

Kieran Thomas Chong Elrod Sept. 30, 2003 to Su-Mien Chong and Kyle Elrod

Inservices

Oct. 23, 2003 — Nursing Mothers Counsel of San Mateo County.

Jill Nelson, presenter, Kristen Steadman, sharing parent.

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.

Nicole DeNuccio, in honor of Emily Corpos and the Human Race
Gary Rogers, in honor of Carly Rogers
Caryn Goldman, in memory of Sasha
Letitia and Richard Alfonsi

Jill Nelson and Joseph Twicken, in memory of Talia Elise Nelson Twicken
Yvonne Nava, in memory of Danielle Nava
Carol and Craig Martin
Kristie and Michael Shulman, in memory of Daniel Shulman

Laura and Joe Razo, in memory of Adriana Victoria Razo
Terrie and David Fuehrer
Deborah Robinson
Mar and Matthew Hershenson

Bethany and Edward Hannon, in memory of John Edward, Chris and Marilyn
G. Gloria Gillogley
Anne Graham, R.N., in honor of HAND of the Peninsula volunteers

Marty Ryhanych and Anthony Mueller, in memory of Troy Mueller
Jonathan Parmer, M.D.
Jane and Mitchell Zimmerman, in honor of HAND
Pamela and Robert Robbins, in memory of Billy Robbins

Joe and Paula Osorio, in memory of Vera Ferrigno
Jacquelyn Martin, in memory of Baby Camila deAndrade
Stephanie Allen, in memory of Alexander Allen
Daniel and Sharon Bowman, in memory of Baby Boy Kizner

Donations *continued on page 6*

Grieving parents

Mothers compile list of do's and don'ts

When women experience the loss of a child, one of the first things they discover they have in common is a list of things they wish no one had ever said to them. The lists tend to be remarkably similar. The comments are rarely malicious - just misguided attempts to soothe.

This list was compiled as a way of helping other people understand pregnancy loss. While generated by mothers for mothers, it may also apply similarly to the fathers who have endured this loss.

When trying to help a woman who has lost a baby, the best rule of thumb is a matter of manners: Don't offer your personal opinion of her life, her choices, her prospects for children. No woman is looking to poll her acquaintances for their opinions on why it happened or how she should cope.

Don't say, "It's God's will." Even if we are members of the same congregation, unless you are a cleric and I am seeking your spiritual counseling, please don't presume to tell me what God wants for me. Besides, many terrible things are God's will, that doesn't make them less terrible.

Don't say, "It was for the best - there was probably something wrong with your baby." The fact that something was wrong with the baby is what is making me so sad. My poor baby never had a chance. Please don't try to comfort me by pointing that out.

Don't say, "You can always have another one." This baby was never disposable. If I had been given the choice between losing this child or stabbing my eye out with a fork, I would have said, "Where's the fork?" I would have died for this baby, just as you would die for your children.

Don't say, "Be grateful for the children you have." If your mother died in a terrible wreck and you grieved, would that make you less grateful to have your father?

Don't say, "Thank God you lost the baby before you really loved it." I loved my son or daughter. Whether I lost the baby after two weeks of pregnancy or just after birth, I loved him or her.

Don't say, "Isn't it time you got over this and moved on?" It's not something I enjoy, being grief-stricken. I wish it had never happened. But it did and it's a part of me forever. The grief will ease on its own timeline, not mine - or yours.

Don't say, "Now you have an angel watching over you." I didn't want her to be my angel. I wanted her to bury me in my old age.

Don't say, "I understand how you feel." Unless you've lost a child, you really don't understand how I feel. And even if you have lost a child, everyone experiences grief differently.

Don't tell me horror stories of your neighbor or cousin or mother who had it worse.

The last thing I need to hear right now is that it is possible to have this happen six times, or that I could carry until two days before my due-date and labor 20 hours for a dead baby. These stories frighten and horrify me and leave me up at night weeping in despair. Even if they have a happy ending, do not share these stories with me.

Don't pretend it didn't happen and don't change the subject when I bring it up. If I say, "Before the baby died ..." or "when I was pregnant ..." don't get scared. If I'm talking about my loss, it means I want to. Let me. Pretending it didn't happen will only make me feel utterly alone.

Don't say, "It's not your fault." It may not have been my fault, but I feel it was my responsibility and I failed. The fact that I never stood a chance of succeeding only makes me feel worse. This tiny little being depended upon me to bring him safely into the world and I couldn't do it. I was supposed to care for him for a lifetime, but I couldn't even give him a childhood. I am so angry at my body you just can't imagine.

Don't say, "Well, you weren't too sure about this baby, anyway." I already feel so guilty about ever having complained about morning sickness, or a child I wasn't prepared for, or another mouth to feed that we couldn't afford. I already fear that this baby died because I didn't take the vitamins, or drank too much

Do's and Don'ts
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Donations *continued from page 4*

Mark and Michele Hollar, in memory of William Adam Hollar

Anonymous

Twila and Paul Forbes, in memory of Cosmos Forbes

Shoneen and John Erskine, in memory of Jessica Luck Erskine

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

Daniel and Margaret Seligson

Christine and Michael Reeve, in loving memory of Edgar and Christian Reeve

Elham Heydari, in memory of Neema Shams Heydari

Christina Ann Rivas-Louie and Fraser Louie, in memory of Baby Louie the first

Shirley and David Guidi, in memory of our granddaughter, Natalie Marie Guidi