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Helping Hands

Winter 2005

Two dads reflect on passage of time

By Frank Em
HAND of the Peninsula

I first learned about HAND the way most of us have, and I'd call it "the hard way": by losing a precious child at a very early age. About 18 years ago, our son, Ian, was born apparently healthy, but died 10 days later.

In the weeks and months of that year, my son's life and death consumed a lot of my life, even though I tried hard

not to let that happen. I resisted by busying myself with my work and other distractions. The enormity of what had happened was so awful that any awareness, however contrived, seemed preferable to living with the anguish I feel when I'm immersed in what happened.

After a few months, I

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By Thomas Torresson
HAND of the Peninsula

My son, Shawn, is 2 1/2 now. It's been 4 years since the death of my first son, Dylan. It's funny the things that make me think of Dylan: watching a 4-year-old playing, hearing a particular song, being asked by my 5-year-old daughter, Sydney, "Do you still miss Dylan?" or seeing the box with his ashes in it.

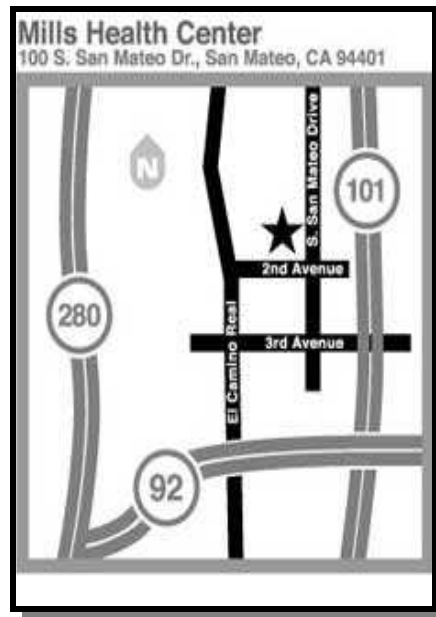
My life is full. I am blessed with a loving wife and 2 great (healthy) children. Still, I am shocked that I can feel so much pain when I think back on losing Dylan. We have pictures of him being held by me and my wife in the hospital. I can see them clearly in my mind...but cannot bring myself to look at them.

Does it get easier? Yes. Does it ever go away? I don't know yet, but probably not. It still hurts, but it's bearable... and there is so much else in the world to be thankful for that it helps me sometimes to step back and look at my blessings. And I have to trust that everything happens for a reason.

HAND of the Peninsula

New meeting place found in San Mateo

Thanks to the diligent efforts of HAND past President Jill Nelson, and the graciousness of the Mills Health Center and Care Manager Mary Moray, HAND of the Peninsula will begin meeting as of December, 2005, in the Ellsworth Room at the Mills Health Center located in downtown San Mateo. Mills Health Center offers outpatient services and is affiliated with Peninsula Medical Center in Burlingame.



Mills Health Center is accessible by both Hwy 101 and Hwy 92. The address is 100 South San Mateo Drive, San Mateo, near 2nd Avenue. The Ellsworth Room is right off the front lobby and grief meetings will continue to be held at 7:30 p.m. on the first and third Wednesdays of the month. Subsequent pregnancy meetings will continue to be held on an as-needed, RSVP basis.

“Mills is providing space for our two library cabinets so we will once again be able to make our lending library available to parents!” Jill Nelson explained. “This should also make things a little easier in terms of storing some basic meeting supplies.”

HAND of the Peninsula most recently held bimonthly grief and monthly subsequent pregnancy meetings in the rooftop room of Sequoia Hospital. This was a temporary meeting place after Sequoia Health and Wellness Services, which generously housed HAND of the Peninsula for several years, moved in June, 2005, from the 702 Marshall Street site in Redwood City.

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
<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

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**Submission deadline for
next issue:**

FEB. 15, 2006

Dads *continued from page 1*

stopped going to HAND meetings because it didn't fit into the way I wanted to deal with my emotions. We had other children to care for, I had a career, we had a house and a mortgage to pay off.

By contrast, the solace my wife found at HAND meetings helped her and was like a rock for maintaining her sanity. She wasn't

“The enormity of what had happened was so awful that any awareness, however contrived, seemed preferable to living with the anguish I feel.”

able to sidestep the facts as deftly as I was. She felt depressed and hopeless, alternately crying and withdrawing into herself. The differences in our grieving process opened a rift between us which has been hard to repair, though both of us actively work on our relationship, and remain committed to each other.

It wasn't until many years later that other crises in my life forced me to look again at the fact of my son's life and death and the damage I'd done to my life and my family's life as I struggled to keep that pain out of my consciousness. It is by no means fair to say that his death wrecked my life. It was one more source of stress, and the way I tried to cope with that stress caused most of the damage.

It's been difficult to re-connect with my wife and family. One step I've taken as part of "returning" to my life is to attend a HAND meeting with my wife. She's remained involved with HAND and with other volunteer organizations. Joining her at a grief meeting was the most meaningful way I could think of to have a common spiritual experience with her.

As we walked toward the meeting room, I felt a confidence in myself that I don't remem-

ber having 18 years ago. I think this comes of having more understanding of my own feelings and knowing more clearly what to expect of myself and my emotions.

In the months after my son died, "down" emotional phases would happen to me unexpectedly, and I would burst into tears. That had really made me feel awful. I still have emotions much like everyone has, and there are times when they make me cry. The emotions are different now, though no less powerful and, perhaps just as important, my attitude toward emotions in general has shifted.

Seeing other parents at the grief meeting whose loss was much more recent and raw brought a different set of emotions forward in me. I want to tell them as much as I can about what to expect of themselves and their

“Through these newly bereaved parents, I reconnect and re-experience my feelings of long ago, finding alongside that grief deep empathy for the agony they're experiencing.”

spouses. I tell them how my wife and I went in different directions with our grief. I hope that despite the searing pain they feel now, they'll be able to remember something and that it will help them get through that pain.

Through these newly bereaved parents, I reconnect and re-experience my feelings of long ago, finding alongside that grief deep empathy for the agony they're experiencing. I tell them as much as I know, that their pain won't stay the way it is forever. My pain has never entirely gone away, but it has changed into something else, something I feel confident I can live with. Something that, in a way that's hard to explain, I want to live with, out of love for my lost son, Ian.

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 losses. 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 losses 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 Wednesdays of the month. Contact: Melisse Lusin (650) 367-6993.

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

Dates: Dec. 7 and 21
Jan. 4 and 18, 2006
Feb. 1 and 15
Mar. 1 and 15
Apr. 5 and 19

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 Shul-

man (831) 438-4513.

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

Dates: Dec. 21
Jan. 18, 2006
Feb. 15
Mar. 15
Apr. 19

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

Pregnancy Support Meeting

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 on 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. 14
Jan. 11, 2006
Feb. 8
Mar. 8
Apr. 12

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

HAND of Santa Cruz

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

Alison May Wu — August 15, 2005, to Gilbert Wu, Stacey Soong and big sister Samantha

Laila Rose Marie Obando — August 18, 2005, to Jasmine and Francisco Obando

Donations

Anna and Rob Strong

Laura and Ken Bevington

Twila Forbes, in memory of Cosmo Forbes

Stacey Soong and Gilbert Wu, in memory of Daniel Wu

Saran and Andrew Pomianowski, in memory of Baby Pomianowski 05/19/05, and Baby Pomianowski 08/28/05

Michele and Mark Hollar, in memory of William Adam Hollar

Sun Microsystems Foundation, matching gift by **Suzanne Gallie**

Yvonne and Ken Nava, in memory of Danielle Nava on her 10th birthday

Jerilyn and Thomas Corso, in memory of Nicholas Corso, with special thanks to all at HAND, especially Celia Hartnett: I still remember Celia's comfort after all these years

Cherie Golant and Ronald Gutierrez, in memory of Julia Golant Gutierrez

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

Shirley and David Guidi, in memory of Natalie's 4th birthday.



Dear HAND of the Peninsula:

My prenatal counselor at Kaiser asked me to share this resource with you in the hopes that it would help other grieving parents.

I sent the artist, Dana Klein, a picture of my stillborn son, Gavin Alexander, and got the attached pencil portrait for a very reasonable price. Seeing what my child would look like if he were sleeping and having a picture to show others has been a tremendous comfort to me.

You can view the artist's website at:

<http://www.portraitsbydana.com>

Best Regards,

Carol Huang
HAND of the Peninsula

A eulogy for Josiah

By Kelly Vaughn

HAND of the Peninsula

Our beloved son, Josiah Royce Zhu-li, was stillborn on May 4, 2005, 10:45 p.m., at El Camino Hospital in Mountain View. Except for the omphalocele that exhausted his little heart, he was complete in his formation. He was one pound and five ounces, and twelve inches long. From his slender narrow feet to legs and arms to even his long eyelashes, Josiah looked very much like his father, Dennis.

Josiah was our firstborn child after a long time of recovery from a previous miscarriage five years ago. We were looking forward to chasing him around fountains, playing catch with him, helping him with schoolwork, raising him into a man who will follow Jesus. We hoped that the meaning of his name "The Lord will heal," would fulfill our immediate wishes to heal his omphalocele. Instead, the Lord healed Josiah by bringing him to heaven where there is no suffering. In reflection, Josiah's name reflects the Lord's healing in us: for as much as we are in deep sorrow, we have come to a place of thankfulness and dependence on the Almighty like never before.

Josiah's Chinese name, Zhu-li, means "The Lord's gift". For the short time he was with us, Josiah has and will always be the Lord's gift to us. We look forward to seeing his sweet little face once again in eternity.

**Parenting after a loss
support group to meet**

At the home of
John and Shoneen Erskine
3-5 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 22, 2006
58 Chilton Ave.
San Carlos, CA 94070
Call (650) 591-7610 or e-mail
shoneen2002@yahoo.com to RSVP

***Helping Hands newsletter
delivered via email***

Annually HAND of the Peninsula spends about \$700 on postage alone to mail the Helping Hands newsletter. It is now possible to email either a link to the newsletter on our website or a pdf of each quarterly issue. If you would like to receive an electronic version of the newsletter instead of a paper copy, please email your request to info@handsupport.org