



# Helping Hands

Winter 2006

## Why I volunteer

By Kristie Shulman

*HAND of Santa Cruz County*

On December 1, 1995, my husband and I experienced the worst tragedy of our lives when our first child, Daniel, was stillborn due to an umbilical cord accident.

The loss of our son was a devastating and life-changing event for both of us. Neither of us had ever experienced such profound grief, and at times it seemed we would never recover.

We initially received a lot of support from family and friends, but after a short time, it seemed that people expected us to be “over it” and were obviously uncomfortable when the subject came up.

My husband handled his grief in his own quiet way, but I really needed to share my story with others who “got it.” The local HAND chapter provided a forum where I could share my grief with a small group of others who had had similar experiences.

HAND was there for me through many months of grieving, as well as four

subsequent pregnancies, two of which ended in miscarriage. I don’t know how I would have gotten through those difficult years without the support of my friends at HAND.

The understanding and growth that came from my own experience instilled in me the desire to help others who’ve had such a loss. Participation in HAND has become a cornerstone of my life.

I now volunteer my time by providing

telephone support to bereaved parents, facilitating support meetings, and serving on HAND of the Peninsula’s Board of Directors.

***“...helping others through my involvement in HAND has become one of the most personally rewarding and enriching aspects of my life.”***

I am sometimes asked why, after nearly 11 years, I continue to be involved in HAND. Some have even questioned whether it is “healthy” to put myself in the position of rehashing such a traumatic experience and to be in the presence of others who are in the throws of grief.

True, it is heart wrenching at times and I am often brought to tears when others share their stories. It is not easy.

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## **Volunteer** *continued from page 1*

But I feel a need to do this work, to help others in the position I was once in and, through my own healing, to give them hope.

I am now a busy mom, working part-time and running around with two kids, but I always look forward to coming to HAND meetings, to take a breath, reflect, and put things in perspective. Most importantly, it is a way for me to honor the memory of the little boy who made me a mother.

Eleven years ago, I could not have imagined that anything positive would come from my tragedy. But helping others through my involvement in HAND has become one of the most personally rewarding and enriching aspects of my life.

I encourage anyone who might be interested in volunteering with HAND to attend the one-day volunteer training session in January 2007. Helping others through peer support is what this organization is all about.

*Kristie Shulman coordinates HAND of Santa Cruz County*

## **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**

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# Mom honors sons with gift of support

**By Elham Heydari**

*HAND of the Peninsula*

This October marked my little baby boy, Neema's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

October is also national Infant Death and Pregnancy Loss month, a time when HAND of the Peninsula holds its annual service of remembrance at Huddart Park in Woodside.

This year I saw one of the grieving fathers that I got to know when I volunteered for HAND of the Peninsula. He came over to me as he was leaving and said something that meant the world to me.

He said that he wanted to share with me how much I meant to him because I was there for them during the time they went to the HAND meetings. His wife and he had just suffered the loss of their baby. He said that he wanted to thank me for what I had done.

This made my day. I never knew my sharing had such effect in people's lives. In fact, I can only think back and remember how much my Dearest Celia, Leslie and Laura meant to me when I was counting days to go to the HAND meetings. However, I never thought I would mean just as much to other couples.

When we lost Neema, I thought I could never get up again. I thought the feelings of grief would never lessen. I wanted to die and be with him... When I found the beautiful friends at HAND of the Peninsula, I found out

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*I had to tell other grieving parents that time will help! I had to tell others that they are not alone. I wanted to listen...*

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that I wasn't alone. I realized what I was feeling was normal and with the shoulders of the volunteers who are also HAND parents and had suffered a loss, I got through it. I was able to smile again.

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*Every time I showed up to facilitate a meeting, I felt the presence of Neema. I knew he was there watching me honor him. I knew he was proud of Mommy.*

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After about just over a year, I thought I had to honor my dearest little baby, Neema, and give back to HAND of the Peninsula. I had to tell other grieving

parents that time will help! I had to tell others that they are not alone. I wanted to listen...

Every time I showed up to facilitate at a meeting, I felt the presence of Neema.

I knew he was there watching me honor him. I knew he was proud of Mommy.

We are now going through the grief of our second baby boy's loss. But I know in my heart that it is my only goal in the near future to start a new support group in my area to honor Neema and his little brother, Ideen.

I think giving back is the most rewarding feeling to honor our babies. Everybody says: "Everything happens for a reason."

I had been looking for "The Reason" for so long. I think I just found it. This reason may not be comforting for me, but at least I think I had to go through this to be able to be there for others. I strongly encourage the brave HAND parents to give back to HAND of the Peninsula and be there for future grieving parents.

*In loving memory of our two little angels, Neema Shams Heydari, Oct. 26-Nov. 03, 2001 and Ideen Alex Heydari, July 25, 2005*

# 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: Jill Ludwig (650) 367-6993.

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

**Dates:** Dec. 6 and 20  
Jan. 3 and 17, 2007  
Feb. 7 and 21  
March 7 and 21  
April 4 and 18

**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:** Dec. 20  
Jan. 17, 2007  
Feb. 21  
March 21  
April 18

**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 an as needed basis. 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. 13  
Jan. 10, 2007  
Feb. 14  
March 14  
April 11

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

## HAND of Santa Cruz

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

# Births

**Raina Evangeline Adler Sawyer** — Dec. 10, 2005, to Carrie Adler and Peter Sawyer

**Ahna Christina Louie** — April 3, 2006, to Fraser and Christina Louie

**Brian Ping Casey** — Aug. 24, 2006, to Joe and Gigi Casey

**William Ian Conklin McCluney** — Oct. 5, 2006, to Christy Conklin and Richard McCluney

# Inservice

**Nov. 7, 2006** — Reproductive Science Center of San Ramon: Anjali Shah, presenter and Elham Heydari, sharing parent

**Nov. 8, 2006** — Mills Health Center radiologist and ultrasound technicians: Jill Nelson, presenter

**Nov. 14, 2006** — Peninsula Medical Center Family Birth Center nurses and students: Jill Nelson, presenter, Laurie London, sharing parent and Joan Stone, sharing parent

# 'I need to be there for other parents'

**By Krystal Romero**

*HAND of the Peninsula*

After my son, Josiah, passed, we were sent to have our very last meeting with our social worker and she handed us what seemed to be a goodbye and good luck package full of articles, books, and pamphlets about neonatal loss. One of the brochures happened to be the HAND of the Peninsula brochure.

When I got home, I couldn't think about joining a support group, I was just too sad. My husband was out of work during this time, so we were able to comfort each other through our loss. I didn't want to talk to anyone, even though I couldn't stop the phone from ringing and the messages from piling up. I just didn't have the energy to repeat what happened over and over.

I kept picking up the brochure for HAND, but just couldn't get enough strength or courage to go. My husband, family, church, and friends were all instrumental in helping me to cope, because they also lost a piece of their future too. My son's

godmother would never see him again, my mother's first grandchild was now gone, we would never see my son sing "this little light of mine" with the tiny tot choir at church.

I did feel that the support of my family and their willingness to keep my son's memory alive helped me get through it all. So, before I could come to HAND ... I was pregnant again.

*My son's contribution to this world had to live on through me! I liked the new me and I wanted parents who had a loss to know that their children had forever changed their lives and others around them!*

It happened so fast and I wasn't quite sure I was ready to have another baby, but we were happy yet anxious about the pregnancy. Although I was coping with my loss and it was seven months after my son's death, I definitively felt like I needed to be there for other parents.

My experience was not something I felt like I could

forget about and move on with my life. My son's contribution to this world had to live on through me! I liked the new me that my son made me to be and I wanted parents who had a loss to know that their children had forever changed their lives and others around them!

During all of life's trauma, I had dropped out of graduate school, but I was still receiving the department emails. One email mentioned that HAND was holding facilitator trainings. So, I signed up!

Since, I was five months pregnant at the time, I went to a couple of HAND's subsequent pregnancy meetings. Once I gave birth to my daughter, Selah, I was ready to start helping people, so I jumped right in and I am so glad I did!

I think that it is important to not only have a place to mourn your loss, but also to celebrate the conception of your child! Nobody validates you for being a parent like HAND! That is why I continue to facilitate and support HAND of the Peninsula anyway that I can.

## Volunteer training slated

# *HAND is all about peer support*

Are you wanting to be a support to others? Are you afraid you will not know how? Consider coming to the HAND of the Peninsula volunteer training on January 27, 2007.

HAND of the Peninsula co-founders, Emily Corpus and Celia Hartnett, have scheduled a free day-long training workshop for any HAND parents, friends or relatives interested in giving back by supporting newly bereaved parents.

At the training participants will assess themselves to see if they are ready to reach out to others. Then they learn "the tools and the rules" that they will need.

Among the subjects to be covered are identifying the different stages of grief, active listening and role-playing practice. The training is required for volunteers desiring to interact directly with other HAND parents by facilitating support meetings, offering phone support or hospital bedside support.

Indirect ways of supporting HAND are also available and do not require attending

the training although all volunteers are welcome to participate. There are many behind-the-scenes jobs volunteers fill including organizing and maintaining the lending library, writing thank-you notes to donors and notes notifying parents when a donation has been made in their baby's memory and picking up telephone messages.

Volunteers are needed as board members, to write and edit the quarterly newsletter *Helping Hands*, to maintain the website, and to distribute literature and brochures to area hospitals and other healthcare facilities which come in contact with parents expecting a baby.

HAND is all about peer support, Hartnett explained. "Volunteers have been providing support to San Francisco Bay Area families for 25 years through parents like you and me.

"When I experienced the loss of my baby boy many years ago, there were some special people who stepped forward to help me get through the dark days that followed." she said.

"Their kindness is permanently etched in my heart. It takes a special person to be fully present with someone who is grieving . . . someone who understands that being able to share our emotions in a safe and supportive environment helps us heal ourselves."

"We make a LIVING by what we get, but we make a LIFE by what we give," Hartnett concluded.

"There came a point in my journey of grief where, seeing newly bereaved parents attending their first HAND meeting, I recognized the distance I had come and I felt ready to help others," said Leslie Muennemann, a HAND of the Peninsula parent who became involved in the organization in 1988, following the death of her second child, Ian.

"I consider it a tremendous accomplishment to be able to feel my sorrow along with that of other grieving parents while, at the same time, being supportive of them," she said. "It was a relief to finally be able to think about others."

**HAND of the Peninsula**  
***Volunteer Training Workshop***

**JANUARY 27, 2007**

Co-founders Emily Corpus and Celia Hartnett will conduct the day-long workshop. All HAND parents, relatives and friends are welcome to participate in this free training. Please RSVP if you are interested and to learn the times and location.

**(650) 367-6993**

**info@HANDsupport.org**

***25 Years Serving San Francisco Bay Area Families***

# 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.

**Santa Cruz Mothers of Twins Club**

**Emily and John Corpos**

**Rebecca Turner and Erik Soule**

**Jose Gonzalez**, in memory of Miles Aidan McMullen Gonzalez

**Irene Kennedy**

**Mary and William Schorr**, in loving memory of our son, Daniel Patrick Schorr

**Annette and Dan Gracia**, in memory of Natalie and Lorraine Guidi

**Linda Teagle, MD**

**Kristi and Robert Zuniga**, in memory of Mariana Teresa Zuniga

**Shirley and David Guidi**, in loving memory of Natalie

**Elham Heydari**, in memory of her sons Neema Shams and Ideen Alex Heydari

**Thomas and Jerilyn Corso**, in memory of Niki Corso

**Aruna and Hem Desai**, in memory of their precious grand daughter Amaani Shah Desai

**Elizabeth and Joseph Mandato**

**Judith Euphrat Castaillac**