



# Helping Hands

Summer 2015

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## Journey Towards Father's Day

By **Kelly D. Farley**  
GrievingDads

It's that time of year again, a time for renewal. It's time to say goodbye to the dark, gray, cold days of winter and hello to spring. In late February/early March I start to search desperately for the first signs of hope; hope that spring is right around the corner. The first winter Crocus to peak through the ground or spotting the first Robin after a long winter is a welcoming sign that winter is leaving ever so slowly. By the end of March, the days become a little longer and a little brighter, bringing with it new growth and color. I love the smell of spring in the air, the beautiful spring flowers, fresh cut grass and the sound of a spring thunderstorm washing away the winter gray.

However, for me, the excitement of spring turns to uneasy anticipation in April as I face a series of dates I don't really want to deal with. The days of naively enjoying the spring are gone, they have been gone since the spring of 2004. Can't I just enjoy the spring for what it is? Unfortunately, the answer to that question is "no".

With the arrival of April comes Easter and the reminders that my daughter Katie and my son Noah are not here. No Easter dress for my sweet Katie and no smiles on Noah's face as he finds the Easter eggs hidden around the yard. I was never fortunate enough to have experienced these events with my children before they died, but they do play out in my head as to the "what if" and "what should have been." I keep most of these thoughts to myself and don't really say much about them to anyone else. I don't want to upset my wife by saying them out loud, even though I am sure she is thinking the same things I am during this time.

Late April brings Katie's original due date. This year would have been her fifth birthday. As we do every year on her due date, we order a cake, sing her Happy Birthday and blow out the candles. Then we head to the park to release balloons and watch them until they disappear. Some would think this is a sad and depressing way to remember your child's birthday. But for me, it isn't, it's my way to let her know that I love her and I miss her and look forward to the day of holding her in my arms.

I am sure that many of the people that know my wife and I think we should just move on, to let her go, but I really don't take much stock in what they think because it wouldn't be fair of me to ask them to understand. How could they unless they themselves have lost a child?

The month of May brings another uneasy day, Mother's Day. Though I still go through the motions of calling my mom to wish her well, I have been given the burden of watching my wife's

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face turn to sorrow as this day approaches. It's just another reminder that she doesn't have a living child to call her mommy. She never got to experience the love and hugs of a living child, only the heartbreaking feeling of being a mom to two beautiful babies that have died. As her husband, I want to take away her pain and replace it with all of the joys of motherhood, but that's not possible.

The first couple of years after the losses, my wife didn't even want to acknowledge that it was Mother's Day. I wasn't sure if I should get her a card or not. In my mind she is a mother to two beautiful children, but I also understand her pain and realization that she is the mother of two beautiful children that have died. I remember the first year that she had hinted that it would be ok for others to celebrate Mother's Day with her. On top of buying her a gift to memorialize Katie and Noah, I wanted to get her a Mother's Day card. I remember standing in the aisle of the local Hallmark store looking for a Mother's Day card for mothers that have lost a child. Certainly we can't be the only parents that have lost a child, so why isn't there a card that acknowledges these parents. When I told the lady behind the counter that I was looking for a Mother's Day card for my wife that has lost two children, she paused, absorbed what I just said and replied, "I am so sorry for your losses." It took me off guard since most people either act like you didn't just say that or they acknowledge the pain of the mother, not so much the dad.

It's finally June and the last difficult month for a while. Once I get past Father's Day, I'll be in the clear until the Holiday Season starts again in November. Early June brings the day we lost our sweet baby Noah. It has been five years since we lost Noah and the day of his death is permanently burned into my memory. I know it's a wound that has healed with time, but it left a scar that remains forever. We spent his Birthday together and just like Katie's, filled with cake, songs, smiles, tears and balloons.

The day that Noah died was the day that I realized I was a father. A father that didn't try to run from or deny the pain I had festering inside of me since the loss of Katie. With Katie I tried to bury the pain by keeping my mind occupied with work and anything else that would distract me from what I was feeling inside. I responded like most men are expected to respond. You put your head down and keep moving. But I found out that doesn't work for very long. The day that Noah died was the day I realized I needed to deal with two losses. The one I had been trying to avoid for the last 18 months and the one that was right there in front of me that day in early June 2006.

It took me a while to fully grasp the concept of being a father to a child that has died. It's tough to accept that I will not be getting any hugs or kisses from my babies on Fathers Day. There are times where I feel like I have been cheated because I know that I will never experience the "traditional" role of fatherhood. I've lost the experience of being their daddy, someone to hold and protect them when they are scared and someone to spend time with and share my life with. I know that there will be no first steps or words, no dance recitals, no bike rides without training wheels, no playing catch, no

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## Helping After Neonatal Death

### Chapters:

**HAND of the Peninsula**

**HAND of Santa Cruz**

**HAND of San Francisco**

**P.O. Box 3693  
Redwood City, CA 94064  
(650) 579-0350 crisis line  
(650) 367-6993 office  
[www.HANDsupport.org](http://www.HANDsupport.org)**

**Helping After Neonatal Death  
Santa Clara and Alameda Counties,  
and part of the Central Valley  
P.O. Box 341  
Los Gatos, CA 95031-0341  
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### Helping Hands

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## Coping with Fathers' Day *After miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death*

By Elizabeth Czukas  
*Miscarriage/Pregnancy Loss Expert*

There are plenty of emotional stumbling blocks you'll encounter as you work through the difficult times after you've lost a baby to miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death, or any other pregnancy loss. One day you can be coping well, feeling like life might actually go back to "normal." The next day, you might have a well-meaning friend who hasn't heard the news ask how far along your partner is in her pregnancy and the loss will be fresh again.

One event you might not have prepared for is Fathers' Day. Starting in May, stores tend to fill up with gift ideas for Dad, cards, and endless reminders of the approaching date. So how do you deal?

### **If You're the Private Type . . .**

Feel free to ignore the holiday. Just remember that your friends and family may not be on the same page, so be straight with those close to you that you'd rather just let the day pass. Focus on the dads in your life, like your own father, your brothers, or brothers-in-law.

Make plans for the holiday to do something you enjoy. A trip to the ballpark, or doing a project in the yard you've been meaning to tackle might be just the distraction you need. Just be mentally prepared that the day might be hard on you, or your partner, and give yourself a break if you need some time to grieve.

### **If You're More Publicly Oriented . . .**

Have a special meal with your partner and other family members. Share your thoughts about and experiences with your baby. If you've joined a support group, organize an event for the members. Anything from an informal backyard barbecue to a more dedicated remembrance event like a walk and balloon release or wildflower seed scattering, could be therapeutic for everyone. Choose a Father's Day card and write a message to your baby. After all, it's your baby who made you a father, right?

Volunteer in your baby's name. Serve a meal at a soup kitchen, help out an animal shelter, or spend some time building a house for a family in need. No matter how you decide to spend your time, helping others can really give you a sense of purpose.

### **If You Have Other Children . . .**

No matter how fresh your grief may feel, remember your kids might be coping differently. They might need the chance to recognize Father's Day like they usually do. Be sensitive to their needs, but don't be afraid to be honest with them if you get emotional.

Get the kids involved if you decide to volunteer for the day, or with any activity you plan for the day. This could be a great time for the whole family to get into a special activity to honor your baby's memory. Plant a tree, visit your baby's grave at the cemetery, or fly a special kite that reminds you of your baby.

Your partner might be feeling stressed by the holiday, too. Keep communicating with each other, and do the best you can to support each other on this and every day.

# 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:** (650) 367-6993

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

**Dates:** June 3 and 17  
July 1 and 15  
Aug. 5 and 19  
Sept. 2 and 16

**Location:** Follow signs to Palm Room at Mills Health and Wellness 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.

**Date:** June 17  
July 15  
Aug. 19  
Sept. 16

**Location:** Congregational Church of Soquel (831) 438-4513

## HAND of San Francisco

Meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of the month.

**Contact:** (415) 282-7330

**Time:** 6:30-8:30 P.M.

**Dates:** June 3 and 17  
July 1 and 15  
Aug. 5 and 19  
Sept. 2 and 16

**Location:** Davies Campus of CPMC, Castro at Duboce 6 blocks north of Market St. Enter the North Tower lobby, follow the HAND signs from the Info Desk to our meeting room.

# 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

Subsequent pregnancy support meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month at Mills Health and Wellness Center, 100 S. San Mateo Dr., in San Mateo.

**Contact:** (650) 367-6993.  
*Please RSVP if you plan to attend.*

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

**Dates:** June 10  
July 8  
Aug. 12  
Sept. 9

## HAND of Santa Cruz

Subsequent pregnancy meetings are held at 7:30 P.M. on the first Wednesday of each month at the Congregational Church of Soquel. **RSVP** is appreciated.  
**Contact:** Kristie Shulman

# Births

**William Kanthon Gee** --

February 2015, to Kritiya and Mark Gee

**Bodhi Rajput Shah** -- April 2015, to Suken and Nidhi Shah

**Leah Elizabeth Yuster** -- April 2015, to Josh and Deborah Yuster

**Hazel Frances Loehmann** -- April 2015, to Jeff Loehmann, Sara Johnson and big sister Grace

# 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.

**Cherie Golant and Ronald Gutierrez**, in memory of Julia Golant Gutierrez and in honor of Chris Lehr's retirement  
**Nidhi Rajput and Suken Shah**, in memory of Gudia Shah  
**Anna and Rob Strong Georgia and Robert Vierra**, in memory of their precious grandson, Alec Costa  
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**Esther and Saul Twicken**, in memory of Talia Elise Nelson Twicken

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**Funeral Poem For A Baby**

***Little Snowdrop***

**The world may never notice  
If a Snowdrop doesn't bloom,  
Or even pause to wonder  
If the petals fall too soon.  
But every life that ever forms,  
Or ever comes to be,  
Touches the world in some small way  
For all eternity.  
The little one we longed for  
Was swiftly here and gone.  
But the love that was then planted  
Is a light that still shines on.  
And though our arms are empty,  
Our hearts know what to do.  
For every beating of our hearts  
Says that we love you.**

*Author Unknown*

**Journey** *continued from page 2*

Christmas mornings, no first dates, no graduations, no college, no weddings and no grandchildren.

But I can't change any of this. I wouldn't even if I could, doing so would deny their existence. No matter how short a time I had with them, I would never give up the opportunity and privilege to be their dad. So as difficult as it is on Father's Day, I know I have been given a gift from them. A gift you can't buy in a store. They gave me the most precious gift I have ever received, the gift of a father's love for their child. A love I never understood until they came into my life.

Should I celebrate Fathers Day, should I not? Not really sure how to approach this day. But as Father's Day approaches this year, I am still trying to learn to embrace this day and embrace my role as their father. The uneasy anticipation has lifted over the last couple of years and has continued to be replaced with feelings of hope and renewal.

This year I'll spend Father's Day with my wife and my dear friend and dog, Buddy. Other than my wife, I probably won't hear well wishes for a Happy Father's Day. Most people don't know what to say or if they should say anything, so they don't. I'll spend most of my day thinking about Katie and Noah, but not with a heavy heart like some would suspect, but with a heart filled with love for my children and compassion for all of the other grieving dads that are trying to cope and survive this difficult day.

***About the Author***

*Kelly Farley, like many men, was caught up in the rat race of life when he experienced the loss of two children over an 18-month period. He lost his daughter, Katie, in 2004, and son, Noah, in 2006. During the losses and the years that followed, he felt like he was the only dad that had ever experienced such a loss. He realized that society, for the most part, doesn't feel comfortable with an openly grieving man. That realization inspired him to write his book *Grieving Dads: To the Brink and Back*. In addition to this book, Kelly maintains a blog at [www.GrievingDads.com](http://www.GrievingDads.com) and is currently pursuing his M.S. Ed. degree in counseling to continue his mission of helping others through profound life experiences. Kelly has a passion for helping people "pick up the pieces" after a profound life event. people put their life back together.*



## **Thank You!**

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***for 25 years of printing of this newsletter and***

***HAND's many other printing needs***

***in loving memory of their son, P.J.***