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# Helping Hands

Winter 2015

## **Coping With Grief During the Holidays**

By Erika Goyer, mom to Carrick handtohold.org

"What we have once enjoyed and deeply loved we can never lose, for all that we love deeply becomes a part of us." — Helen Keller

The holidays can be an especially difficult time for parents who have lost their children. So many holiday routines and activities revolve around the gathering of family and friends. Yet, bereaved parents may not feel up for celebrating as usual or embracing holiday traditions that they have in the past. Instead of feeling a sense of loss over what the holidays were supposed to be, we can take this as an opportunity to recreate what they will be for our families from now on. The following are tips for enjoying your holidays in the face of grief:

#### Simplify

Don't expect to do everything you have in the past. Pick and choose what you're up for. This will give you the chance to think about which traditions hold real meaning for you and which you have simply observed because of habit or other people's expectations.

Communicate with your family and friends. They will understand if you need to "take a break" from past expectations. Let them know what your plans are and what you might need from them in return.

#### Honor Your Family

You had hopes and expectation for what the holidays would be like, and now things have changed. Acknowledge that loss.

Many holiday traditions, like gift giving, hold special significance for parents and children. It can be hard to think of yourself as a parent when your child has died. Be sure to remember the many gifts you gave your little one while they were with you -- and the gifts they gave to you.

#### Make Room for Your Feelings

Slow down and allow yourself time to think about and remember your baby.

Talk about your child. Let other people know how you want your child to be talked about and remembered by showing them with your words and actions.

#### Create New Traditions

Holidays mark special milestones in a family's life. Think about how you will remember the life of your child in your family's history and traditions.

Change the focus of your celebration. Revisit why you celebrate a particular holiday and what its significance is in your life. This can give traditions and rituals a renewed depth of meaning.

#### Be Generous with Others

Do things that help you feel connected. Spend time with the people you love. Nurture those relationships. Give of your time, talents, and skills. Sharing can lift spirits and ease burdens.

#### Be Generous with Yourself

Expect that you will feel sad sometimes. Or angry. Or alone. These are all appropriate feelings. Don't think of them as being counter-productive. What they really are is an acknowledgement of the intense love you hold for your child.

Allow yourself to be happy. There is nothing selfish about celebrating or feeling joy. The capacity for joy is what connects us to each other. It's what the holidays are all about.

Erika Goyer is the mother of three boys and a family support navigator with Hand to Hold. Her oldest son Carrick Michael was born at 27 weeks gestation and weighed 1 pound, 14 ounces. Carrick died soon after his birth in 1990, due to complications of prematurity. Erika went on to have two more high-risk pregnancies and two healthy sons, one of whom has developmental delays.

# **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

Helping After Neonatal Death Santa Clara and Alameda Counties, and part of the Central Valley P.O. Box 341 Los Gatos, CA 95031-0341 (888) 908-HAND (4263) www.handonline.org

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#### **Helping Hands**

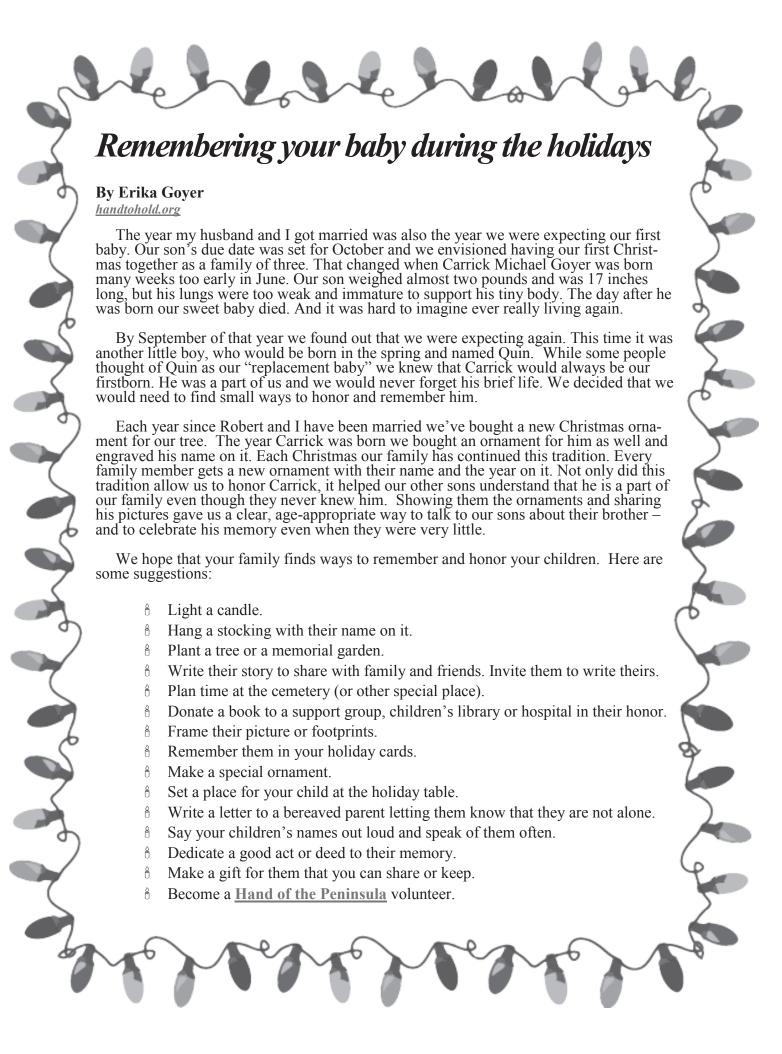
*Editor:* Leslie Muennemann

leslie@muenn.net

Contributors: Erika Goyer

handtohold.org

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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.

**Contact:** (650) 367-6993

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M. Dates: Dec. 2 and 16

> Jan. 6 and 20, 2016 Feb. 3 and 17 March 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.

Dec. 16 Date:

Jan. 20, 2016 Feb. 17 March 16

**Location:** Congregational Church

of Soquel

**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:** Dec. 2 and 16

Jan. 6 and 20, 2016 Feb. 3 and 17 March 2 and 16

**Location:** Davies Campus of CPMC, Castro at Duboce six blocks north of Market Street. 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 memory of our son Chase 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. Please RSVP if you plan to attend.

**Contact:** (650) 367-6993.

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

Dates: Dec. 9

Jan. 13, 2016 Feb. 10

March 9

#### HAND of Santa Cruz

Subsequent pregnancy meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month at the Congregational Church of Soquel. **RSVP** is appreciated. Contact: Kristie Shulman (831) 438-4513

*Time:* 7:30 P.M.

Dates: Dec. 2

Jan. 6, 2016 Feb. 3 March 2

## **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.

**Beatrice Bonn,** in honor of Emily Corpos

**Christine Elgin,** in honor of Emily and John Corpos

**Sister Pat Hunter,** in honor of

John and Emily Corpos

Laura and Francisco Jimenez, in honor of Emily and John Corpos

**Linda McFeeters**, in honor of John and Emily Corpos

**Christina Rivas-Louie** Kristie and Mark Wise

Apple Matching Gifts, matching gift for Mark Wise

Krista and Ernest Canda, in Maxwell Canda

Emily and John Corpos, in honor of Maria's 40th birthday Kathleen and Victor Parrette, in

honor of John and Emily Corpos Mary Schuyler, in honor of Emily and John Corpos' birthdays.

**Brian Slome** 

Katrina Barnett and Zimran Ahmed

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# HAND of the Peninsula's Annual Volunteer Training Saturday, January 23, 2016 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Mills Health Center, 100 South San Mateo Drive, San Mateo

HAND's annual volunteer training is for HAND parents, family and friends interested in giving back by facilitating meetings, offering peer support to parents with a recent loss, serving on our Board of Directors, helping with outreach to local hospitals and healthcare providers, fundraising and event planning, making presentations, or providing administrative support.

### The training is free and lunch will be provided.

The morning session (9-11:30 a.m.) will be a general orientation for all new volunteers. The afternoon session (12-3 p.m.) will cover peer support and facilitating meetings.

New volunteers wanting to provide peer support, facilitate meetings, or make presentations, should attend the whole training. Those interested only in non-direct support activities may just come to the morning session.

Registration is required by January 9, 2016.

For more information or to register, please email: volunteers@HANDsupport.org