



Sharing Parents

Volume 28, Issue 4 February 2009

* Helping Bereaved Families for 27 Years

Sharing Parents is a Sacramento based non-profit organization devoted to supporting parents who have experienced the loss of a baby from the time of conception through early infancy.

Our Purpose is to provide a safe environment where grieving parents with similar experiences can come together and share their feelings about the loss and the love of their babies. Our meetings are also a place where parents express the love they had for their baby in their compassion for others, where they can give and receive emotional support by sharing common experiences and learn about the natural grief process while working through and resolving their loss.

We Offer a variety of meetings and support services that are designed to help parents throughout the different stages of their grief. There is never a fee to attend our meetings.

Our Meeting Place

Mercy Women's Center
650 Howe Ave
Ste #530
Sacramento, CA 95825

Our Mailing Address and Phone Number

Sharing Parents
P.O. Box 19538
Sacramento, CA 95819-0538
(916) 424-5150

Upcoming Meetings

February 8, 2009	7-9pm	Grieving as a Couple
March 8, 2009	7-9pm	Exploring Grief/Father's Group Discussion
April 5, 2009	7-9pm	Video

Subsequent Pregnancy Meetings:

February 23, 2009	7-9pm
March 23, 2009	7-9pm
April 27, 2009	7-9 pm

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2009 Sharing Parents Volunteers

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Vice-President

Kelly Joppa

Secretary

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Short Term Grief Coordinator

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Armando Omega

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Mia Omega

From the Editor

I recently attended the monthly volunteer meeting for Sharing Parents. It was my first meeting, since my wife Mia usually attends. There is one thing for sure; The core group of volunteers make every effort to give you and your loved ones the best opportunity to heal from your loss. We aren't perfect, but we care with all of our hearts.

There is a group here, not to speed you through, but to help you through the healing process. Our programs try to cover all aspects of grieving and healing. From what I have seen first hand, your volunteers are striving to make continued improvements and are tirelessly trying to find ways to serve the fellow parents.

Thank you as always for letting me serve you as the Newsletter Editor. I hope that, just as the programs you attend with Sharing Parents, the newsletter can serve as an instrument in your healing from your loss.

Have You Survived?

What does it mean to have survived the holidays? What does it mean to be alive, when *living* is so hard.

I am considering this question with honesty. I don't know what it means to have survived another Thanksgiving, Christmas or Halloween without my baby girl. What does it mean to have experienced, again, all of these events knowing that my family is missing someone. What is another year's end without my daughter in my arms. Agony washes over me. I weep.

I am here. I am alive. I am broken. Have I survived?

The spirit of giving and compassion are before us during Christmas. Yet grief is an inherently selfish process. This is the paradox I feel this time of year. I feel tremendous compassion for others, I burn with a passion to do more for people, to give, to help, to love, to leave my world a little better than I came into it. And I ache with a desire to close myself away from everyone. I want to be alone and feel. I want to be within myself and my own grief. I need to feel the pain of my loss without consideration for anyone else. Is that surviving?

Have you survived?

Written by Noël Lehman

Remembering Our Babies With Love

Anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays are difficult times for us. We remember with love....

February

Faith Annalyse Alvarez
Meagan Rene Barstone
William Evan Beebe
Baby Berger
Faith Ann Blakely
Cameron Michael-Lee Burdick
Joshua David Cardoza
Weston Cruz
Colin Devey
Baby Dressen
Baby Espinoza
Baby Espinoza
Baby Feuerstraeter
Andrew Gallagher
Claire Gibson
Baby Herkins
Zachary Herkins
Saffi Hernandez-Christe
Jolie Hurtt
Ericson Kelley
Baby Legrand
Kaylee Ann Lindberg
Marissa Marina Lopez
Pedro Jose Lopez
Baby Lowell
Sophia Mamola
Zachary Orbus
Chancellor Aris Patton
Baby Pethel
Isabella Lopez Rye
Madison Nicole Souza
Emily Diane Stiltz
Sophia Tolin
Joaquin Victor Torrence
Sean Latham

March

Elizabeth Adame
Kyle Benjamine Avila
Lisa Jeline Benson
Joy Kathleen Bik
Kellan Alexander Bik
Steven Kent Brown
Gracie Cahill
Amelia Aitchison-Cooksy
Jordan William Davidson
Lindsay Rose Denier
Babies Feuerstraeter
Baby Fraser
Avery Graham
Baby Hall
Ayiah Cherie Ricelle Harris
Madison Kristine Joppa
Baby Kaplan
Matthew Love
Emily Loreen Meyer
Megan Oliva
Dylan Pena
Elijah James Dominique Rankin
Kaylee Rubitski
Morgan Joan Shaw-Hoshovsky
Baby Belle Simmons
Baby Szillinsky
Kylee Valle
Tyler Vassion
Arbor Warzecha
Aria Wermund
Baby Winings
Rose Zeier

April

Mia Faith Avery
Adam Joseph Bik
Hayley Maureen Bik
Margaret Bressler
Midori Anne Briel
Elizabeth Anne Collie
Baby Davis
Baby Denny
Colin Frederick Foley
Baby Fosco
Kaitlyn Nicole Hart
Dalyn Holt
Christopher Imbriano
Hannah Lawrence
Tessa Elizabeth Lockart Ralston
Samuel James McCoy
Baby Ocel
Alejanda Sepulveda
Parys Gavin S. Stokes
Evan Vargas
Richard Warzecha
Reagan Ellis Westrup
Grace Woodman
Rose Zeier
Mark Brittian, Jr.



Losing a Baby & the Marital Relationship

As you know, the death of your baby hurts more than you could even imagine. The loss of a baby also can have a tremendous impact on a marriage. In some cases, the impact can be so severe as to destroy a marriage or make a continuing marriage feel joyless and empty.

During a study, Laura Smart and I did in which we spoke with 27 married couples who lost a baby in pregnancy or infancy, we talked with these couples about their loss and its effects on their marital relationship. Our goal was to give these couples the opportunity to share, through us, their knowledge and wisdom with other bereaved couples. Since that time, I have continued to speak with other bereaved parents who had experienced similar losses and they have brought up, again and again, certain points.

I would like to speak for them in saying the following:

Remember that each of you has experienced a loss that is unique to you. In a sense, you have not even lost the same baby, because the meaning of your baby, the relationship you had with the baby, in your mind and your heart, is different. Each of you has lost someone and something specific to you: your hopes and dreams you had for your child, the special relationship you had with your baby, perhaps even the belief that it is safe to love. Because of this, each of you must cope with your own grief while you are also coping with what may seem to be erratic, crazy, or cold behavior on the part of your partner.

Many partners now recognize that couples grieve incongruently, that is, that they grieve at a different pace, in a different style from each other and this can lead to a sense of being incongruent with each other. It has struck me that recognizing that they grieve incongruently does not mean the same thing as accepting (feeling) that they will grieve differently. As one mother told me, "I know we grieve differently, but it hurts when he doesn't grieve like me". Acceptance is deeper and far more difficult to do. Ultimately, to regain closeness in a marriage, it is necessary to move through recognition to acceptance of these differences.

But how have couples done this? If the couples with whom I've spoken were here, they might advise the following:

- *Appreciate that what you are going through is a sometimes slow process.
- *Spend more time together and when you do, if you are able, share your thoughts and feelings with your partner and be open to your partner doing the same. As one mother said of her husband, "I needed to talk. He listened to me even when he wasn't listening." As one father said, "Talk, just talk. It doesn't matter what you say. Just talk."
- *Try to carve out some time for you and your partner to spend alone. This may be a vacation, an evening when you unplug the phone, or a date to go bowling or to the movies. You need to reclaim your sense of "coupleness".
- *Recognize that, just as you need time together, you need time apart. At times, we need to be alone with our thoughts without the company of others, even those we love.
- *A shared focus helps. It can be common goals or common values. Goals set together. Goals set by one partner and forced on the other divide the couple. Religious or spiritual beliefs also are helpful, if they are shared by the couple. As with goals, if they are not shared, they can act to divide.
- *Just because someone grieves differently from you does not mean that he/she does not care about the baby or is grieving "too much". Men often are seen as cold and uncaring because their grief often is contained and not emotional. Women are seen as grieving excessively and carrying on because they are more expressive. Both forms of grief have their place. You are different people and will grieve differently.
- *Be sensitive to each other's needs. Do little things for each other. Help each other to feel loved.
- *Move towards a positive view of each other and your relationship. One couple described themselves initially as out-of-synch because "When he was up, I was down and when I was up, he was down. It was so hard. We were never in the same place." Later, they came to see that they could use these differences and described themselves in this way, "When he was down, I could pull him up and when I was down he could pull me up. We helped each other."
- *When you are judging how well you and your partner are doing, allow yourself to fail sometimes. You will not always be understanding. You will not always do things absolutely the right way. "Tell them to cut themselves some slack. We don't always do it right, but we keep trying." was the advice from one father.
- *The process of making life meaningful is a slow and painful one. You may have a long way to go but you have also come a long way. Remember that other parents have lost their baby and they have survived. Remember that once you have become a parent, even though your child may not live in this world, he or she lives in your hearts.

Written by: Kathleen R. Gilbert, Ph.D.

Reprinted from Brief Encounters Vol 10 Issue 3



Sharing Parents Walk Together For Healthy Babies

The March of Dimes March for Babies event is coming to Sacramento on April 25, 2009. The money that is raised from this event by the March of Dimes, will support programs in your community that help moms have healthy, full term pregnancies. When you walk, you give hope to the families of babies born too soon or sick. It also funds research to find answers to the serious problems that threaten our babies. This Walk has been around since 1970 and have raised an incredible \$1.8 billion to benefit all babies.

The Sharing Parents will be putting together a group of walkers for this event, as we have in years passed. In the past, parents, friends and family have all participated and last year there were "Team T-Shirts" for the Sharing Parents. The participation is NOT limited to Sharing Parents volunteers, so you and your family are more than welcome to join the group of walkers. The Walk serves a trio of purposes for our club. We are always trying to raise awareness of our club and the such clubs as the March of Dimes, since we are so closely linked. We also utilized this opportunity to raise funds for both organizations; a portion of your donation will go to the March of Dimes and a portion will go to Sharing Parents and its programs. The Walk also serves as a fellowship for parents and a way to honor those babies we have lost.

If you would like to participate in the Walk please, contact us in one of three ways. You can call us at (916) 424-5150 and leave your information so we can get back to you to get the number of walkers and shirt sizes. You can email us at sharingparents@yahoo.com. You can also let the facilitator know of your interest if you attend a meeting. We would enjoy your participation at this event.

**April 25, 2009
State Capitol
1301 10th Street
Sacramento, CA 95816**

Registration begins (if not signed up with Sharing Parents): 7:30am

Walk Begins: 9 am

Walk Distance: 6 miles

For more information, you can also go to www.marchforbabies.org

Sharing Parents Newsletter will be Going Green!

In order to serve our fellow parents with more convenience and to save some trees as well, we will be transitioning our quarterly newsletter to an e-newsletter. In our database, we have a limited number of email addresses, so please send us your email address as soon as possible to complete our database.

We hope to make the transition complete in the first quarter of 2010. You will then be able to reference our newsletters online at any time.

You can email your e-address to
sharingparents@yahoo.com

Rebecca Lee Hussey

In loving memory of Rebecca Lee Hussey

DOB/DOD 10/14/06

Donor: The Hussey Family

Merry Christmas Rebecca Lee.

We wish you were here to celebrate with us. You are always in Our hearts,

Ellen, Steve, Kayla, Grace

To honor your child's memory, send a "Love Gift" to Sharing Parents. A love gift is a monetary donation given in honor of someone or as a memorial to a baby, relative or friend. Not only will you be memorializing your baby but you will be helping Sharing Parents which survives on donations and fundraisers. If you would like to donate a love gift to us please fill out the form on the back of the newsletter. The deadline for inclusion in the next newsletter is

April 1, 2009



A Special Thanks to Peet's Coffee

At our October Memorial event, Peet's Coffee donated the coffee for the attendees. Since then, they have made Sharing Parents one of their beneficiaries of a fund raising events during the Holidays. The fund raiser in Sharing Parent's name was held December 17-24 at the Peet's Coffee location on Laguna Blvd in Elk Grove.

The final numbers of this benefit have not been received, but word from the volunteers who attended indicate that it was a success. The proceeds from this wonderful event, will be used for providing programs and raising awareness about our organization and its' purpose.

"What was so touching to me is that the cashier consistently asked each customer if they wanted to donate (to Sharing Parents), then he proceeded to explain what Sharing Parents was.", said Deanna Lockhart, the former president of Sharing Parents. "Having someone unrelated to Sharing Parents and the work we do state its importance to others in the community was touching."

Thank you for your support Peet's Coffee!

Raising
money for
Sharing
Parents
broaden our
ability to help
those in need

A Mother's Perspective

by Noël Lehman

As a bereaved parent I am not alone in the pain created by other people's words or lack of words. I have been hurt by those who try to take away my pain, or diminish my love for and the life of, my baby. I have been hurt deeper still by those who have chosen not to speak, not to say my baby's name, to not ask about my feelings, to not acknowledge in any way the meaning and presence of my baby in my life.

As I move through time and grief my heart is less affected by society's lack of compassion. Instead, acts of thoughtlessness generate outrage and passion. What can I do to help people be more conscious? How can my experience, how can my pain, prevent more bereaved parents from more pain? I cannot take away the pain of a child's death. And I hope that my daughter's life has taught those close to me compassion. I hope to see beauty become of all this pain.

This past year has provided several experiences of pain and of beauty.

I have a dear friend, probably my closest friend. She walked with me for years in my grief. She held me when I cried. She listened. She didn't attempt to take away my memories of my daughter. She encouraged my loving her, memorializing her, and honoring her. I have leaned on her. I thought that she had become conscious by sharing this experience. One day that all changed. She called me about a pediatric oncologist who she knows. She went on to tell me how he is feeling so *uncomfortable* because two of his colleagues had each just experienced the death of their young child. She explained that he was tired of them being sad and annoyed that he would have to comfort them, after a long day of comforting families in his own practice. I was frozen on the other end of the phone. "Was this really coming from her? What on earth could be her point? Where is this going?" And it struck me, there was ignorance suspended in her voice. She agreed with his

complaints. I listened as she went on, "He has to be unfeeling to perform his job. It isn't his job to comfort grieving families, which is what social workers and psychologists are for." Wow. She said it, she actually said it. I began to explain how much compassion was needed in this world. And that this doctor had an opportunity to be someone beautiful to these families. He was capable of meeting a need every day with the families of the children he was treating. He could *become*...

It all fell on deaf ears. My heart fell into my stomach that day. She hadn't gained what I thought and hoped she had. She had left my path, dropped my hand. I had lost again. Later that night I cried for those families who too had lost a friend and a child.

My year did not end without hope or beauty. Because I have another friend, another dear friend. She is a friend who speaks my daughters name, who remembers her birthday and tells me, who honors my love for her, who knows why some days are so hard for me to live. She gives me permission to be a grieving, loving parent. She walks with me.

This year my living daughter and I were in this friend's wedding. There was a groomsman whose pregnant wife attended as well. She was a tiny woman with an enormous belly. I remember thinking how uncomfortable she must be dancing in heels with that baby so heavy inside her, and she still had ten weeks to go.

The post honeymoon phone call was not what I expected. The voice that greeted me was tearful and suffering. "Noël, their baby girl died." Like a knife in my stomach, I hurt for them. Please, no more. No more dead babies, no more. With sorrow dripping from each word she continued to explain this baby girls' story. She was born too early, and lived for mere hours. Her family held her and said goodbye. My friend asked me,

"What do I do? I want them to know that I am so sorry, that their daughter matters and that I won't forget her and that I know they love her and will love her, forever." Big, wet, blubbery tears poured out of my eyes. I could hardly gather myself enough to speak. When I did I said, "What you need to do my dear friend, is to get off the phone right now and write that down. What you need to do is say just that to them. Those are beautiful words. The most beautiful words." And she did.

This friend of mine is a person who has not lost, not experienced any death, or had any children. She proves that you do not have to suffer the same pain to practice compassion. Her intense sympathy is unlike any I have seen from a person without a loss. She has attained her level of feeling out of pure humanity. My compassion, my consideration of others has intensified since my daughter's death.

And hers came by choice.

She has made my world a more beautiful place. She has become...

I love you Christine. You are a beautiful person. Thank you for the hope.

These experiences this past year have both impacted me profoundly. Deep wounds now scar one of my friendships. There is still the terrific pain of living without my daughter in a world of mostly thoughtless, uncaring, inattentive people. *And* there is unimaginable beauty here. My friend Christine was never the one who I expected to become such an exquisite person to so many other families. The surprise only electrifies her.

I am left with contentment knowing that indeed my baby's life and death has touched someone, created beauty and left hope. I encourage you all to open your heart's eyes and let in the beauty that is near you. There will be certain pain, and surprising glory.

Moving On... Without Forgetting

By Eric Joppa

In the late 90's, my favorite football team was nearing the end of it's hayday. In a NFC championship game, the referees blew three calls that cost my team 17 points and a trip to the Super Bowl. The letdown and disappointment from that day has turned into a fairly ridiculous grudge and bitterness, as well as a disdain for a certain un-named team. But what do we do when our disappointment and hurt is real? What happens when we are actually hurt? When our pain is too deep to adequately express, and the work of moving beyond is seemingly too much to bare?

Some years later my incredible wife and I were overwhelmed with joy when we discovered that she was pregnant with our first child. We later found that she was a girl. We did all the things first time parents do. We talked to the belly, talked about names, constantly feeling to see if she was moving. One March morning, on her way to work, my wife was in a minor traffic accident. She was rear ended when a driver behind her was doing her make up. As a precaution, she went to the E.R. "just in case." When she arrived, they searched for a heartbeat, to no avail. After about two hours of being treated like lepers, we went for a torturously awkward ultrasound, we were sent back to our room in the E.R., where we were told that our daughter Madison had died in the womb.

William Shakespeare once wrote, *"My grief lies all within. And these external manners of lament are merely shadows to the unseen grief that swells with silence in the tortured soul."* If you are reading this, you either know first hand or you have someone close to you who knows there are no words that explain the sorrow and pain that would follow. The ensuing weeks and months seemed to crawl by as one might walk through a stagnant, deep, muddy swamp. Every day like a step that I would rather not take. This is the wasteland that every parent that suffers the loss of a child must endure, and eventually traverse.

Most often, the thought of getting through this barren place is never far from our minds. While we think of moving past the pain, we who are left with nothing but hopes and dreams we had for a child that either didn't live long, or never drew a single breath are guilt-ridden for wanting to move forward. Hurt becomes the only way we know to honor the memory our fallen children. To respect their memory is to allow the pain to remain with us; as though our lasting sorrow pays a tribute to the life they may have lived. There is no formula; no "tried and true" method of suffering less. However, through my journey I have learned that there are a few ways we, as grieving parents, can slowly move on from our torment, and still adore the memory of our children.

Talk often of your child; use their name if you gave them one.

In my line of work, I speak in public often. Many times I am asked by someone I have met if I have children. I always respond, "Yes, I have two!" I tell them about my son, who is nearing two years old and my Madison, who is no longer with us. There is always an awkward moment on the part of the person I am speaking to, however, they asked. They wanted a piece of my story. Often times, to avoid this awkward moment, we have the urge to tell an omitted story; leaving out details that others may have a hard time with or avoiding it for ourselves. We must not be ashamed of where we are and what we have endured. These tragedies are not our fault, and are a deeply woven part of the fabric of our being. You had a child that is no longer with you. Speak truth, find peace.

Keep mementos and keepsakes to remind you.

I never would have imagined that I would want to keep anything to remind me of the day we lost Madison. I also never thought I would want any pictures. All of these things sit in a box on a shelf I built in our bedroom. The shelf is dedicated to our daughter, and her memory. A weighted teddy bear, a blanket, a beanie, a card with her foot prints, and a measuring tape, used to measure her length/height. Also, there is a memorial keepsake that we designed for her funeral, and her urn. We also place there pictures of the bereavement bouquets and other condolences that we received.

When I miss Madison; when the ever present waves of emotion associated with my daughter arise, I look at these mementos. They are there for me to touch, feel and hold. Through them, I can be connected to her when I need to be. If you don't have much in the way of clothes, pictures, blankets, you can buy or make something that will remind you of them. We had some friends that lost their daughter at 5 months old after a chord accident caused fatal brain damage. They had one of her blankets made into a teddy bear as a keepsake.

When we have something to physically connect us, whether those things were hers or have become our connection since, we are able to have a way to release what is ready to pour out. Sometimes the touch of a bear, a picture or something that is written for or about them...anything; just allowing yourself to remember helps you to connect with unprocessed emotions.

Allow yourself to feel, when the waves come.

On a recent outing with our son, we were taking pictures and laughing at him and his love of slides when my beautiful wife began to tear up. This is not an uncommon occurrence as something as trivial as a commercial can stir emotion in her. When I asked her what was wrong, she replied, "Sometimes I see little girls and I think of her. There's a child missing from this playground." Often, for both of us, we see young girls the same age as our daughter and wonder if she would be that way, or talk like that, or play that way. When those moments come upon us, we let ourselves lament. We allow the emotions to come over us and we experience them.

As time has gone on, our waves have shrunk in size and subsided in their occurrence. Though the waves are not the same as in the beginning, we have always approached them in the same way...let them come. Our emotions are what make us human. Not just that, but our feelings make us...parents. We have a right to be angry. We are allowed to cry. We feel the ache of empty arms and an empty place in our photo albums. That is O.K. We cannot expect to be able to turn our backs on a scar that lies as deep as the loss of a child.

So feel. Feel every ounce that you must feel. These feelings are what make us who we are. We are parents. We are broken by tragedy. We are professionals, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers and friends. But above all of these, we are human. We were made to feel and it is counterintuitive to hide or bury these feelings. So feel.

To move on from our hurt, and remember our loss is no small task. But it is a worthwhile one.

Send to Sharing Parents, PO Box 19538

Address:

Donor Name:

Date of Death:

Date of Birth:

In Loving Memory of:

Enclose your check, attach any special message to this form, and mail to:

(Donations to Sharing Parents are tax deductible)

Please make checks payable to **Sharing Parents of Sacramento**.

A love gift is a monetary donation made to honor your child's memory.

We welcome your love gifts in support of Sharing Parents.

Sharing Parents

PO Box 19538

Sacramento, CA 95819-0538

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Sacramento, CA 95819

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Names are entered through the sign in sheets at all Sharing Parents Meetings.