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# LAMENTATIONS

Issue 83

M.I.D.D.L.E.

September- October 2003

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Dear Fellow Travelers,

What a wonderful conference we had this past May!! From the Candle-lighting Service on Friday night, the workshops, Maria Housden (keynote speaker) to the closing concert by Cindy Bullens on Saturday; I was truly blessed and uplifted and I hope those of you who attended were also. Next year's conference will be June 4-5-2004.

## **Good News – Bad News**

### **Bad News -**

Bill Rogers is working hard on the stained glass windows we were to dedicate at J.I.M.'s Conference next year. Because he is such a perfectionist, and because he feels that each window is as important as the one he is making in his granddaughter, Jessica's memory, he will not be able to complete ALL of them by next year. And if you are like I am, I don't want Young Jim's window to be one of the ones whose window will not be completed for the dedication, so we have decided to dedicate it the following year – 2005. By then the large stained-glass window will be completely finished and in place. If we had done it this next year, all of the windows would not have been finished and so it could not have been installed. 2005 will be a glorious celebration for all of our angels! We cannot thank Bill Rogers enough for developing this gigantic project... he is a true angel who is doing a great ministry in memory of his Jessica. I hope each of you know what a huge time-consuming project this is, and will encourage and pray for him.

### **Good News –**

Luther and Rosemary Smith are giving a Christmas Box Angel in memory of their sons, Drew and Jeremiah, and it will be dedicated next year (2004) and----- Richard Paul Evans, the author of *The Christmas Box* and many other books, will be here to dedicate the angel and will be our keynote speaker. I hope you will read this book as well as others he has written, and bring them for him to sign, or they will be for sale at the conference. Our children are not only being remembered, but they continue to challenge and encourage us. Because of them, great things are happening in their memories.

We will need to raise the money for a marble podium on which this beautiful angel will stand. If you would like to see a picture of this exquisite statue, you can log on to [www.christmasboxangel.com](http://www.christmasboxangel.com) and you will not only see her, but the website tells you where others are located. We are so excited about another way our children will be remembered. The angel will have a permanent home in the Carloftis Garden behind the President's Home at Cumberland College.

This latest newsletter has been long in coming, and will be long in reading, but it is full of wonderful children. As you read about each family, I hope you will pray for each family and each loss. We need each other's support and love. Be sure to visit the different websites we have listed under "Fellow traveler websites."

Please continue to send your poems, your thoughts, your joys, and your sorrows. We are always interested in hearing ways you are remembering your child(ren).

Stay in touch and make your plans now for June 4-5, 2004!

Love from a fellow traveler,

Dinah

**J.I.M. Picnic**

*WOW, what a weekend, is the best I can do. I met lots of Children of the Dome, who are keeping Jeffrey & Courtney company.*

*We gathered together, cause Dinah said so. Her friend Rosemary you know won't take a no. Their sons Jeremiah, Drew and Jim II are cheering them on.*

*Teresa is a dark haired angel. Tracy is a feather who flies in the air. Justin is a turtle and Daddy's Little Man.*

*Paul has a Mom who is a hoot. She heals through laughter and smiles to boot.*

*Trevor I knew, but it was great visiting again. "Hang Up and Drive." is Jessica's Dad. Jacob is a dragon fly and Mom is Pam. Grandpa Lawson is doing a great thing, making pictures for parents who had none to keep.*

*Cindy Bullens entertained us all. Silver Wings we know thru her songs. Martha visited her daughter Diana as, Cindy sang with a smile on her face like a new morning sun.*

*Roger went to West Point. He now leads God's Army. "I Brake For Butterflies" (a bumper sticker) in your memory.*

*The weekend went too fast. full of tears, laughter and healing. If you get a chance, you must stop and see all the bricks in our kids, memory.*

*My Thanks To You, For Sharing Your Child*

*Now My Angel, Butterfly and Flag must fly!*

*Written by: Kathi Mullens*

*In Loving memory of son Jeffrey Arnold and Granddaughter Courtney Arnold --- June 4, 2002*

*"Words simply cannot express the feelings that were brought to surface at J.I.M.'s Picnic. We cried, we laughed (we actually laughed), we felt God, we felt our children and we felt loved and we loved back." - Charlotte Martin*

*"Thank you for all the planning you do for the J.I.M. celebration. You help so many parents throughout the year and particularly at this very special weekend in May. Your son will always be remembered - your work and constant effort make the "rest of us" know and love him too." - - - - Mickey Hodson*

*"What a great conference you had for all of us "different" people. My group benefited so much and they were sorry more of the Lexington Compassionate Friends didn't come. The workshops were great, Maria Housdon was wonderful, as was Dave Robbins and Cindy Bullens." - Becky LaVey*

*"I had the best time of my life since my son's death. I can't wait 'til next year." - Pam Heitzman*

*"Your kindness has been appreciated. Carl's symbol is a dragon. He collected dragons and we continue to add to his collection and place them in his room." -- Jack & Mary King*

## **GRIEF GRAFTS**

**John and Keila Thomas lost both of their son's, Taran (7-5-70), was hit by an automobile 10-1-88, and Evan (12-5-85), who was killed in an automobile accident 7-15-02.**

*We want you to know how very grateful we are for J.I.M.'s Conference and all the effort and resources you put forth to make this happen. Even though we were emotionally exhausted after the conference, we believe the experience of just being with so many other bereaved parents was healing for us. The sessions were so helpful. The session for "dads only" was especially helpful for John. He speaks of it quite often. Thank you for this gift you give to all of us who have lost children.*

**Taran's symbol is a baseball and Evan's symbol is a basketball.**

**Andrew John (2-12-67), son of Andy and Elaine Starinchak, was hit and killed by a car while riding his bicycle 8-1-98.**

*Every single detail seemed to be anticipated, from the scenic and serene setting of the conference (not to mention a truly beautiful college campus) to the ease in registering, the great coffee, fruit and rolls, the delicious box lunch (loved the corn and chicken) to the keynote speaker, the theme "Red Mary Janes." Rosemary's workshop on "Masks", the Cumberland Inn; all of it was superbly well done and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We go to the National Conference, this will be our fourth and as great as they are; a smaller conference like J.I.M.'s affords us a greater opportunity to meet people. And I have made some friends last weekend whom I know will support me and I them.*

**Andrew's symbols are a turtle and butterfly.**

**Christopher Michael (2-12-82), son of Guy and Deborah Jackson, was killed in an auto accident 12-15-02.**

*Guy and I want to thank you for inviting us to J.I.M.'s Conference. It was a wonderful weekend. We didn't realize there was so many parents grieving just like us. We gained inner strength from talking to other parents and listening to the speakers. Our journey (that we don't want to take) is just beginning. We cannot imagine a future without our son Michael. Our goal is to take advantage of every opportunity to honor Michael's memory. We also hope to help other grieving parents in the future. We are so thankful for people like you and Rosemary that are reaching out to help other grieving parents. At this time we have a hard time getting through each day. We continue to question daily, even though we know in our hearts we'll never know the answers. You gave us hope! We'll see you next year.*

**Michael's symbols are a shining star, wrestler, football, heart and helping hands.**

**Michelle (1-7-85), daughter of Brian and Mary Wood, completed suicide 4-23-02.**

*I have been putting off this letter, because I never told my Michelle's story all at once, just bits and pieces at a time. I guess I should start at the beginning. Michelle was born on January 7, 1985. It was one of the happiest days in my life. I already had two beautiful boys and now a daughter too.*

*Michelle was a people person right away, as soon as she could walk she walked right out that door, and we were trying to find her constantly for the next 17 years. Michelle made friends many, many people throughout her life, and had more best friends than anyone I knew. She didn't care how much money you had, or how you looked, she always found someone's heart and soul.*

*Michelle was also very compassionate, very loving to animals. Sometimes I wonder if Michelle invited some of the strays around.*

*Michelle loved being around family too; she never missed a picnic, reunion, or a funeral. Michelle was always laughing and constantly singing, she had the voice of an Angel. Sometimes I can still hear her singing. Michelle was more full of life than anyone I knew.*

*I was six months pregnant, taking an afternoon nap, as I hadn't been feeling well. I was 41 years old and this pregnancy was a difficult one. Everything seemed normal. Michelle laughing, and singing at the computer. I awoke from my nap, ate, and went to use the restroom. I happened to see a note on Michelle's bed. I never go and snoop in Michelle's room, but this note drew me to it. It read, "Mom and Dad I'm sorry, Love is too hard for me, I love you. Love Michelle"*

*Later I found out Michelle had gone onto her boyfriend's email and found he cheated on her; didn't love her or something to that nature.*

*I ran outside thinking I could reason with her; I found her hanging in my garage. I screamed her name three times, called 911 and tried to resuscitate her. I tried in vain until the paramedics arrived and took over. I will never forget the paramedic saying I'm going to have to call it. There was my daughter, dead, from a broken heart.*

*I, of course, was already in complete shock and babbling about what to do. I had to call her Dad at work and her brothers and grandmas. Oh my God the phone wouldn't stop ringing. People calling me screaming and crying, I finally changed my phone number, I couldn't handle it anymore. I will never forget the looks on people's faces, the tears and the screams when they heard the news. My baby girl really was dead. I have truly seen the "Pit of Hell."*

*I talked to Michelle's boyfriend and told him I didn't blame him. I had to, I don't know why but maybe because as a parent I blame myself only. I told him I expected him to be at the funeral. He sat in the front row right in front of the casket. Poor boy, he was a mess. He is so sorry.*

*Then there's the funeral planning to drive through town crying; going to pick a casket for my daughter, I'm still numb doing this, "casket" I think, "No I don't want a casket for my daughter." I have to find her something to be buried in, we go to eat, I choke on my food, I can't eat. I'm 6 months pregnant, I have to eat. Already thinking this baby will too, I'm thinking everybody I love can die so easily, and they probably will. I remember holding my baby, and whispering "hold on tight, Mommy's not going to be here for a while." Then I wondered if I could really ever love this baby after losing my daughter. I didn't feel like I could ever love anything again. Everything I loved would just die. I was numb.*

*The funeral was beautiful, I tried not to cry too loud, but later found out my sobs were heard by all. I will never live through this I think, I can't. I won't. My sweet baby girl dead in a casket. I then just told myself I would just stop eating after the baby was born.*

*Then I could just lie down and die. I just wanted to die. There were 600 people at Michelle's funeral, 600 people came to see the girl who thought no one cared. We received so many flowers, cards, and visitors I was overwhelmed. I really just wanted to be left alone now. My oldest son never left my side unless someone else was there with me. I really thought I was on suicide watch, but later when I told him he didn't need to constantly be by my side, he just looked at me and said, "This is where I want to be." I dried all of the flowers from the funeral and also kept the hundreds of roses that Michelle had kept and had dried herself over the years; Roses from her boyfriends. She wanted to make swags and wreaths out of them.*

*Three months after Michelle's death, Brandon was born. I remember yelling to Michelle in the car on the way to the hospital, "You were supposed to be here for this, I need you." Just then a song came on the radio, telling me I would be all right, I just need some time. I knew it was from Michelle. I needed someone to lift my back when I was giving birth,*

*Michelle's job again. I felt someone lift me and I looked behind me to see who it was and no one was there. Again I felt Michelle's presence, and I believe she was there for the birth of brother. By the way, this baby was delivered and smiled twice. No crying. He was truly an angel. At the Hospital that first night I pushed the baby to the other side of the room, I was so scared to get attached and hurt again, I was so sure he would just die. I woke up in the middle of the night and called in the nurse and asked her if she would check my baby, "Is he breathing?" I asked. I thought he was dead. I brought Brandon home and fell in love right away with him, but still scared to death to love him.*

*I have a great support system, family and friends, Michelle's friends. I joined a support group for Parents of suicide for a while; I did quit the group, but made a lifelong friend from there. Sally has been strength and support for me. She also lost her precious son to suicide. We talk and cry, and pull each other out of the pit. The bereavement package I received from Children of the Dome (Rosemary Smith) also has helped me more than you know. My husband, Michelle's brothers and I have created a memorial garden for Michelle. It's full of flowers, angels, pinwheels, etc. I water it mostly with my tears; it's a beautiful garden. Many of Michelle's friends and family add to this garden on a regular basis. I have made numerous websites for Michelle, and made potpourri out of all her flowers. I made all of her family and friends memory albums full of Michelle's pictures. I have been going through Michelle's things for over a year now, and I seem to know who to give what when, the time comes.*

*Michelle's first year anniversary just passed. Her Grandmother Phelps bought me a helium tank to blow up balloons. I bagged Michelle's potpourri, tagged her picture to it, and played the song on the tape in the bereavement package. I think it's called "If only you Love." Some of Michelle's friends came and most of her family. There was a lot of laughter, and tears, but very healing for me. We all wrote notes to Michelle and hung them on the balloons that day. People brought things for her garden, cards and even flowers for the family.*

*I was hurt by two family members who didn't come to Michelle's Heaven date. They were the two people that I just knew out of everyone would be there. I will have to find a way to try to understand and forgive them. I know they love Michelle, I just don't understand. I think that's when I realized no one loves Michelle as much as I. I probably needed to realize this, but it hurts.*

Mary shares some of the poems she has written since Michelle's passing;

### ***From Heaven***

*I'm writing you from Heaven. There are some things you need to know.  
The day I died and left you. I really thought I had to go.  
You see my heart was broken. I thought beyond repair.  
I thought nobody loved me, I thought nobody cared.  
Now that I know better. The decision I made was wrong.  
I hurt the people I loved the most. I wish that I could have been strong.*

*To end my life was done in haste, without a second thought.  
I didn't stop to think about you. Now I'm thinking about you a lot.  
You taught me all about God's love, and Mom you are so right.  
The day I fell into his arms. I know was your longest night.  
Now I've passed that broken heart, onto those I love the most.  
But this really is a better place. I'm keeping company with the Holy Ghost*

*Mary Woody 2003*

### ***Butterfly***

*A butterfly came to me today and landed upon my knee.  
His wings were heavy from the rain; I knew you had sent him to me.  
Only an Angel such as you would care about these things.  
So I dried him with my breath and sat him on some leaves.  
As I sat there watching him soaking in the Sun.  
I thought how great it must be to fly; it looks like so much fun.  
My Angel now you have your wings. Don't let my tears weigh them down.  
I know someday I will see you again, until then keep sending the butterflies around.*

*Mary K. Woody.....2003*

**Michelle's symbol is a cross with a butterfly.**

**Ricky (4-12-77), son of Richard and Stephanie Sheehon, completed suicide 5-8-01.**

*Thank you so much for your note. I had to take out your family picture when you said it was the 12th anniversary of Jim's death. I appreciate your saying it gets easier, because year 2 for me was hell. I believe I had been in denial for the first year pretending he was just living away from home. Well, I guess that is true in a way. I do believe he is in heaven looking down on us and hoping that we live our lives to the fullest in spite of his not being physically here. Ricky was very special, very energetic and always smiling. His energy made me nuts when he was young, but he was an extremely productive adult. He was a Port Authority Police Officer, as well as a union steam fitter and did very well.*

*All of the notes and cards helped to make a difficult time a little easier. Your note said Ricky will never be forgotten and that is our mission; to live, love & laugh again surrounded by Ricky's spirit. We talk of him always and encourage our friends and family to as well. In fact, for Christmas this year I thought I would ask the family to write me a "Ricky story" and then put them all together to share with future generations.*

**We have chosen a symbol for Ricky, it is a 'sun with an R in the middle'. Quite ironically, a sun was on the front of your card, so in some way I think Rick had a hand in that.**

**Steve (10-20-69), son of Meton and Joan Dotson, died in his sleep 6-7-91.**

*Thank you for all the correspondence you have sent me. You are special. Our son Steve died June 7, 1991 in his sleep. He was 21 years old. Autopsy showed his heart was in the condition of a 40 year old man, his arteries were clogged. His heart stopped. He was a very special son. I have a daughter 40, and two other sons ages 37 and 31.*

*Steve's birthday is October 20, 1969. He would have been 34 this coming October. I thank you for your interest. I know you lost a son too. I hate the word "lost" but I use it out of habit. They are not "lost" because we know where they are, which is in Heaven waiting on us. My strong faith is what has gotten me through this. The first 3 years were a very hard time for me, then I finally let him go and put him in a special place in my heart and he will always be there no matter where I am. We never get over this, but we just have to learn to live without them and go on with life. I am so thankful for "precious memories." We can't stay focused on the tragedy, but we focus on the precious time we had our boys.*

*Joan shares something that she had written a few years ago.*

*"Precious Son," by Joan Dotson*

*It has been 9 years and 10 months since our precious son went to sleep and instead of waking up on this earth, he woke up in heaven. It seems like yesterday that I heard his voice and saw his beautiful, smiling face. I miss him so much, even though I have three more children, no one can take his place. He will always live in my heart in the precious memories he left behind. You never think about your child dying before you do, but that seems to happen a lot these days. Steve was 21 years old and a picture of health. He had no visible health problems. His autopsy revealed that he had a severe heart disease. His heart arteries were clogged with cholesterol. His heart stopped beating while sleeping at 2 A.M. on June 7, 1991. Our whole world turned upside down on that morning, and only our strong faith in Christ has helped us to survive and to learn to live our life without Steve. LIFE does go on... One of my worst fears is that he will be forgotten. He did live and was a precious son, brother, uncle and friend. If I have one wish, it is "Please don't forget Steven Leslie Dotson."*

*Steve was such a precious son, as I know your son was. I have 2 more precious sons, Mike (31) and Jeffrey (37). Also, a precious daughter (40) and 3 grandchildren. Steve was restoring a 1968 Camero when he died. It was his pride and joy and he wanted to paint it yellow.*

**Matthew (6-22-80), son of Charles & Janice Davidson died in an auto accident 5-26-02.**

*He was killed in a car accident in which the driver of the car was under the influence and hit a tree then the car caught on fire. We called him Matt, he was killed on impact and pinned in the car when and it burst into flames.*

*We all miss him very much. He was also the uncle of AJ Rose, my daughter's son. Thank you so very much for your concern and your support. My family really appreciates all of it.*

**We have also chosen a stuffed teddy bear as his symbol. Because, that is what he was; a big teddy bear and he was always smiling. He had a very big & soft heart, and was very loved by all!**

**Bridget (03-29-84), daughter of Larry and Gail Hendrix died in an auto accident 11-16-02.**

*My pain and loss are more sometimes than I can bear, and yet I feel guilty because I still have two beautiful, wonderful children and so many, such as yourself, lost the only child they had. I read in the book, Children of the Dome, of families who lost every child they had. I grieve for each of you out of my already broken heart. It makes your contact of me and the hand of comfort you have extended so much more special.*

*I would be glad to share my child with you. I am not sure if you would like her life story, or just some things that would help you to know her. I know everyone's child is precious, and that no matter how many children you have, each one holds a unique place all their own inside your heart. Therefore, it is hard to know where to begin and what words to use to convey who Bridget was and why she was so loved by everyone.*

*Bridget was born on the morning of March 29, 1984. She was my second daughter, her older sister, Natasha, was six years old, and for five of those years we had been trying to have Bridget (although at the time we didn't know it was Bridget we were waiting on). I had been pregnant and miscarried during that time, and then, less than two years later, God gave me Bridget. She weighed nine pounds and one ounce, and because of being so big, her body was placed under extreme stress during the birthing process so that she almost died. She was completely black and not breathing at all. The silence that fills a delivery room in place of the cry that should have been there is so strange. I begged them frantically to let me have my baby, but it was a long time before they could do so. I was crying so hard, my tears were where my baby's should have been.*

*At the end of a time period that seemed like forever, they brought her to me. She looked directly into my face with intelligent blue eyes that never wavered. As long as I held her, she never looked away from my face (I talked to her the whole time trying to make her feel safe and secure) and she never cried. She had Pneumonia and an unexplained pocket of fluid outside her lungs. The following day, she was flown in a helicopter to UK's Neonatal Unit where she stayed for 20 days. Her condition was Chylothorax, which essentially meant there was a tear in a fat-carrying tube in her chest, which caused everything she ate to go into her lungs. She was on a special formula without fat for six months until the tube could mend. At eight months old she began to thrive, and became the fattest, sweetest toddler.*

*Bridget's favorite thing in the world (besides Natasha) was other babies. Although all children love babies, there was something more in Bridget's heart. No matter where she was, if she saw a baby she made a beeline to its side and gently patted its face or hands. When she was two and a half, our son, Riley Larry Lee, was born and she now had her very own baby. She was the kindest, most caring big sister. Whatever I was doing - - feeding, changing, bathing him - - she helped me just as an adult would have, and when I put him down to sleep, she quietly slipped out of the room until he awakened again. She was never jealous or resentful of the time I spent with him. In the early mornings, Riley needed to be held, so I would sit in the rocker with Riley in one arm and Bridget in the other, and we would rock and watch television, or I would sing to them. Those mornings are among the most precious moments of time I have ever been blessed to have.*

*As they grew, Bridget and Riley were inseparable. They played together constantly, with no arguments or altercations. Most of the time, Bridget had her arm around his neck, holding him close to her side. Natasha loved them dearly, but being six years older she was generally at school or with her friends so did not get to spend as much time with them as she had when Bridget was a baby.*

*Throughout elementary and middle school, Bridget's quiet, easy-going nature and kindness to others made her a favorite among teachers and classmates alike. Most years, she received the citizenship award in her classroom. She never studied for her classes, but always made A's. She was very comfortable with who she was and never changed to fit in with a group or be like her peers.*

*When she was ten years old, Bridget was baptized, taking that crucial, pivotal step into Christianity. She loved going to worship and listening to sermons and singing. Every summer (except one) from the age of eight to seventeen, she went to a Christian camp in Knoxville (except one summer she went to one in South Carolina). She faithfully attended revivals, lectureships, VBS, and regular worship.*

*Bridget's big heart had room for many wonderful friends. No group was left out - - she was friends with the athletes and cheerleaders, the preps and scholars, the poor and outcast. Many a night, her friends came to stay (we always wanted our kids with us so we opened our home to all the friends for their gatherings) and the neighbor boys would come over and spend the majority of the night talking, playing music, and hanging out.*

*Sometimes she would gather with what we termed "the Coon Creek Gang" and go four-wheeling or converge at one house or the other for fun and food.*

*As much as she loved being with her friends, she loved her family more. If my mom and/or sisters were here for a visit, she would stay at home; always sitting at my feet or Mom's shoulder, and just being with us. Seldom did she join any conversation. She just sat there, comfortable and happy to be with us. She never missed a family gathering!*

*This love for family began at home. She was Larry's baby. Only a week before her accident, we laughingly discussed how she was Daddy's little girl and, as such, he took up for her in every situation. On the other hand, our discussion continued, Riley was a Mommy's boy and I was his advocate no matter the circumstances. She wrinkled her nose and laughed with that crooked little grin on her face. One instance we discussed was when we all sat around the living room watching television. If Bridget decided to go sit with Larry in his easy chair, Larry would make Riley get up so Bridget could sit with him, and I would gather Riley to me on the couch.*

*Although this was true, Bridget was my best friend. She came in from school, dates, outings with friends, work, or wherever, and curl up beside me on the couch or bed (I have a debilitating back condition which, at times, keeps me in bed and always limits my activities) and told me all about what had happened while she was out. We discussed friends, boys, or just life. I substitute teach at the high school (on my better days physically), and even there we were more friends than mom and daughter. She would come sit with me in my room, or just stop by to talk for a while or see if I was doing okay. I became known at school as Bridget's Mom. I cherished that title, although now I am Riley's Mom, which is equally wonderful. She was very protective of me and tried to make sure I did not do anything to hurt my back. She was my chauffeur, taking me almost everywhere I went, providing another opportunity for our frank discussions. She would take me to Riley's football games or baseball games (we had special permission to park down on the field - - the high school sits on a hill and the parking is on the hill also) and get me settled in the car so I could see everything. She would keep checking on me and when I began hurting too badly to stay, she gladly took me home, sometimes returning to watch the rest of the game, sometimes staying and talking to me at home. Bridget was never embarrassed to have me near. Even when she was on the phone with friends (boys and girls alike), she was still sitting with me and including me in her conversations.*

*Natasha, as a big sister, was over-protective of Bridget, always making her give account of every minute spent away from home and every friend. We had a little role reversal going on - - I was her friend, Natasha was her Mom. For the most part, Bridget patiently accepted this and tried to make Natasha happy. As for Riley, she was so proud of him. She went to ninety percent of his ball games (baseball, basketball, football), and took him to ball practice, waited patiently for him, and then brought him home (all of Riley's teammates were in love with her). At home, they played and teased with each other in a very genial manner. I remember so many times that the three of us sat around the living room doing homework. Each would be working on our own assignments, but we would talk and laugh, almost in that "slap-happy" fashion as we helped each other and tried to*

*work. I am sure it took us much longer than it should have to write the poems and do exercises we had, but I would not change a moment of that time.*

*Bridget's junior year was very rough. A few days before her sixteenth birthday her boyfriend broke up with her. They had been together for one year and she deeply loved him - - not a schoolgirl crush, not puppy love, for Bridget was incapable of shallow or false feelings. Her love, not only for him, but also for all friends and family, was profound and complete. She suffered so greatly when he left her that she could not eat or sleep. She cried almost constantly. Everyone at school knew because she cried there, too. At night, I lay and held her while she cried herself to sleep. It was a very difficult and trying time, but she got through it. Finally, eighteen months after the break-up she reached the point where she could speak to him again. Gradually they worked from speaking to each other to talking and being in the same group of friends, and eventually became good friends with each other again. Their relationship grew to something more than friends that are hard to define. It was obvious they loved each other, but had found a happy place almost greater than it had been before because now it was wrapped in a fun, flirtatious, comfortable, contented atmosphere.*

*Besides her love, kindness, patience, generous spirit, and easy-going nature, Bridget was fun! We teasingly said she was a true blonde because she said and did the most stupid things. She was very smart, having graduated with honors and being a member of the National Honor Society, Future Business Leaders of America, Teen Leaders, HOSA (A Health Organization), and a Governor's scholar. However, she had no common sense. A few of these "Bridgetisms" follows:*

- 1. Looking for canned biscuits in the canned food aisle at the market.*
- 2. Pulling up into the yard, our family in Bridget's car, after church one Sunday, and she suddenly gasped and said, "Where is my car?" when she did not see it sitting there with the others. It dawned on her that we were in it and she sheepishly said, "Never mind."*
- 3. Laughing "historically" instead of "hysterically" over a funny situation.*
- 4. Events happened "Beforewards" as well as afterwards in Bridget's vocabulary.*
- 5. She read a literature story about "whiches," got prescriptions filled at the Medicine "Shop-ee," and liked to attend worship at "Mountain Zion" (Mt. Zion).*
- 6. One evening, my purse was left in the middle of the black-topped area outside our home, and the following morning I asked her if she had seen it, after having looked everywhere for it. "Yes," she calmly answered, "it is outside on the blacktop beside one of the cars." It never entered her mind that she should have picked it up and brought it into the house.*
- 7. Following a coal truck, and then when it pulled to the side of the road to let the string of cars behind it go by, she pulled over behind it. After a few seconds, she realized what*

*she had done, and remarked, "Well, I don't know why I am sitting here." Of course, this was followed with much laughter.*

*I told you the story of her beginning because to us it seems now to have a meaning. When you grieve you look for meaning everywhere, and by faith you believe there is meaning somewhere. Natasha said, "Mom, Bridget was never meant for this world; she was too good. But we prayed so hard for her that God blessed us with eighteen wonderful years." I think she may be right. Or maybe she was meant to be here to teach us all about love and kindness and joy, and when she had finished the course set for her, God took her on.*

*Whatever the reason, on a rainy, foggy November afternoon, Bridget showered, blow-dried her beautiful, blond hair (which at the time she wore flipped out on her shoulders), dressed (but put on no make-up because she only wore make-up for formal occasions like the prom), got in her car, and headed out to work - - babysitting the Sparks children - - but she never reached her destination. Three minutes from our house, she hit a slick area in a curve where oil from coal trucks had combined with the rain to make a very slick road. She began to slide, and skidded into the other lane in which a loaded school bus was approaching. He hit her on the passenger side. She was wearing her seat belt and was within the speed limit, but she was still fatally injured.*

*My husband and I were in Lexington for a doctor's appointment, three hours away. The terror of the phone call we received on our cell phone cannot be uttered. I have relived those three hours countless times in my mind. She was still alive, but not really. She crashed several times on the way to the hospital, and at least three more times at the hospital. They put her on a respirator and kept resuscitating her, trying to keep her alive until we could get to her. They flew her in a helicopter to the UT Trauma Center. We were halfway home at that point, so we just went on to UT and were there before the helicopter arrived with her. She had surgery to repair her lungs, and they continued to keep her alive until they could stabilize her enough to do a CAT scan and see what brain activity there may be.*

*It was the next day, November 16, when they told us there was absolutely no brain activity and there was nothing they could do for her. At that point, we sat by her bed for several hours knowing what had to be done - - we had to have them take her off the respirator. She had been stabilized all that morning, but while we were trying to make our decision, she began crashing again, over and over. I don't know what time it was, but finally God gave us the courage to let her go. He provided a wonderful nurse to take care of Bridget, a nurse who had lost a teen-age son in a car accident. She was the greatest help and comfort in those hours and I knew I could put Bridget in her care. She was so gentle with her and even cried herself when she unhooked the respirator. Bridget died immediately. I think she actually died immediately on impact in the wreck. I think her body only remained until we could accept God's strength and courage to let her go. Officially, however, she passed on the 16th.*

*We live in a small, rural community six miles from town. Town is a small place called Hyden, with a population of about 500 people. In this little town of ours, there were over*

2,000 people who came to pay tribute and honor to Bridget at the Visitation, and as many were there the following day at her funeral. At Visitation, there was a steady line of people, which extended to the backside of the parking lot. Most stood in line two hours before they reached Bridget and my husband and myself, who sat directly by her side the whole time. The following day, it took three hours for the people to pay their last respects after the funeral service had ended. I tell you all this so you may know how special she had to be to have touched so many lives. These were not casual acquaintances either.

They were dear friends and loved ones. Young and old, rich and poor, they came with tears pouring down their faces. Some were friends of Natasha or Riley, some were friends of Larry, and myself but most were her friends. Even though she had graduated from high school that May (2002), they closed school for her funeral, which was a wonderful tribute. To know her was to love her because of the love and joy that emanated from her.

At her funeral, one of the preachers said that Galatians 5:22-23 described her perfectly, and it so does (as she would say): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, . . ." Another preacher called her the "Whatever Girl" because whatever happened was fine with her.

A simple story that illustrates her character happened on the day of her junior prom. She had just gotten out of the shower and began the process of getting ready and the electricity went off. Here she was with partially wet hair and no way to dry or fix it. Natasha stressed for two hours trying to fix it for her, but Bridget sat calmly and never said a word. At last, when Natasha had it looking good in a simple "up-do," Bridget said, "It looks good; I like it." And that was it. No panic or worry, no tears or storms, no frustration or aggravation. She was fine and went off to the prom smiling and happy.

Another time, she was being inducted into the National Honor's Society and I put her patch on the backside of the sash instead of the front. When we discovered the mistake, I panicked but she only laughed. She was just going to turn the sash around and wear it backwards so the patch would be in the right place. I couldn't let her do that so I rushed to my sister's house, sewed the patch in the right place, and drove back to the school as fast as I could. She was standing in line, talking and laughing with her friends without one thought for her sash. I put it on her just in time for them to march into the ceremony.

For the football homecoming her junior year, she couldn't find an outfit to wear. We went shopping several times, but nothing suited her. She wasn't a frills person so she was looking for something casual but dressy and elegant. After about the third shopping trip I asked, "Sis, what are you going to do?" She shrugged her shoulders and said; "I'll find something in my closet. I'll just put on a sweater with a pair of my pants." She didn't have to though; on the day of homecoming, one of Natasha's friends sent her an outfit and it was perfect.

There are other such stories that show the fruits of the spirit manifested in her life, but I probably have already told you much more than you wanted. I hope you will enjoy getting to know our precious daughter through this letter, and I hope I have conveyed her accurately to you. I want to thank you again for caring about my pain and loss, and I will

*pray for you in your loss of an only child. Larry and I always said the wreck could have been worse because Riley was with her so much of the time that he could have been with her that day, and we could have easily lost both of them. Even though I question and have no understanding as to why this had to happen, I still know I am blessed with my other two children and in many other ways as well. It doesn't change the fact, however, that Bridget is gone and that place in my life and heart is forever empty.*

*With love in the tragic bond we share,*

*Gail Hendrix*

*I am trying to choose a symbol for Bridget as you said. I don't want to copy anyone else's, but one that I like is the same as many others - - a butterfly. I love the caterpillar turning into the butterfly with the saying "what the caterpillar calls death, God calls a butterfly."*

*Before I ever received your packet, I was trying to come up with something for her tombstone. There is a place between the dates for a small etching. I could not think of anything to use because Bridget was the "whatever" girl, therefore, she seemed to like everyone and everything equally. There was nothing she really had a favorite in, except she loved silver jewelry and she had a lot of silver dolphins. I will chose between the two and then write to you or e-mail you again.*

**Jared (2-11-81), son of Joseph and Lynne Chrzanowskis, died as a result of heart arrhythmia 4-9-00. Lynne shares a poem written by Jared's brother, Derek Chrzanowskis;**

*Going on three years. Throughout, there've been fears of not having a brother to help me switch gears.*

*From high school to college, a change that comes soon. Who's gonna be there to help get me in tune?*

*From college to manhood, Graduation day's gone. You weren't in your seat on the campus main lawn.*

*From manhood to married, finding new love through others. But it's never the same as the love between brothers.*

*From married to children, complications arise. My kids have no uncle to wipe tears from their eyes.*

*From children to midlife, we're all getting older. Why can't you be here? I could have used your shoulders.*

*From midlife to retirement, all crises have passed. We should be out golfing, instead of breathing your last.*

*From retired to aged, my bones have grown weak. I search for your presence when things have gone bleak.*

*From aged to my deathbed, I am feeling your spirit. With death comes your life, so why should I fear it?*

*From death to eternity, I knew I was right. There's nothing more perfect, than when brothers finally unite.*

*Derek Chrzanowski*

**Jared's symbol is an angel.**

**Chris (3-16-79), son of Kristi Dalske, completed suicide 10-29-01.**

*Thank you so much for the packet of newsletters. I am looking forward to reading it all. I will treasure it all. It helps me to read about others.*

*I'll tell you about my Chris. He was awesome. A people-person. Very outgoing. Didn't seem to have a care in the world. He was 6' - 185 lbs. A big teddy bear. The laughter in our house. He has an older sister Megan, a younger brother Justin, and a younger sister Donna. They are all close and hurting so much. Chris was so full of life. October 29, 2001, he took his own life. A shock to everyone who knew him. A tremendous loss to all. We know we will never know the reasons, but the questions are still there.*

*Please visit Chris' website*

*[http://www.sunshinepreventionctr.org/christopher\\_andrew\\_dalske.htm](http://www.sunshinepreventionctr.org/christopher_andrew_dalske.htm)*

**Ryan (2-24-84), son of Betty Sargent, died in an automobile accident 11-11-02.**

*Ryan Lamont Sargent was born February 24, 1984. He is survived by his mother Betty Delorse Sargent, father Jerry Futrell, one brother Brian Sargent, and two sisters, Adonica Ward and Amanda Sargent. He leaves two nieces, De'Aja Lewis and Ja'naea Sargent; one nephew, Stephon Ward, as well as three grandparents and a host of aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends. Ryan passed away November 11, 2002, following an automobile accident.*

*An honor roll student, Ryan graduated from Phoebus High School in Hampton, Virginia, where he was active on the High School Wrestling Team. Recipient of the Most Valuable Player award, he was the Captain of his Wrestling Team and lettered in varsity wrestling while in high school. Ryan was an active member of Phillipi Baptist Church in Hampton, Virginia, where he served as an usher.*

*In August 2002, Ryan began his college career at Cumberland College, Williamsburg, Kentucky. He was active on the Cumberland College Wrestling Team and was enrolled in the first year of the ROTC program. His future plans included a career in Criminal Justice.*

Ryan's Favorite Bible Verse: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16*

**Ryan's symbol is a cross.**

**Billy (6-23-81), son of Bill & Teal Snapp, died from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning 2-25-96. Teal shares their seasonal family letter in Dec. 02:**

*As usual, we write about the year's highlights and lowlights. The lowlights of 2002 were few and only one was truly significant: Kerry, Bill's younger brother, had a reoccurrence of squamous cell carcinoma. He had surgery last November for a small lesion in his mouth. All seemed well, but this summer he developed an aggressive, unusual, and large tumor in his throat. He has undergone a difficult regimen of 35 radiation treatments, many of them two times per day, plus chemotherapy. Now we wait and hope that modern medicine has worked its miracles, as it has for some of our wonderful friends. Other lowlights are mundane or minor. Bill's EEOC lawsuit continues to consume far too much time. Teal's bowling average continues to drop toward 150. We missed the University of Illinois' Homecoming this year (because of the lawsuit) for the first time in 38 years for Bill and 33, for Teal. At home we survived ants by the millions, termites by the thousands, computer viruses by the hundreds, shoppers by the dozens (at the neighborhood garage sale Teal organizes,) fifth year of Georgia's drought, three kittens that resist "education," one burst polybutylene water main and one broken furnace.*

*Our most significant highlight is the same as our lowlight. Kerry has kept a great attitude throughout his treatment and there is a reason to be optimistic that his treatment has been successful.*

*A much-appreciated highlight was the special effort of friends at the Illinois' Homecoming to include us via telephone during dinner at Italian Patio and throughout the game as Illinois defeated Indiana (Not surprisingly, the game was not available on local television in Atlanta.)*

*We took three short trips this year: our usual, high school-nostalgia/decorate the cemeteries trip over Memorial Day to Illinois; a trip for a friend's surprise 50th birthday party in Boulder, a visit with my brother in Golden, and dinner with friends from Littleton; and my cousin Mary Ann's son's wedding near Syracuse, NY. Both Boulder and Syracuse have been added to the list of possible retirement venues.*

*As we approach the 2002 holiday season we realize that we've lived in Atlanta for nearly 10 years. We have developed some Southern tendencies, but have not totally surrendered our Northern roots. On one hand, we try to avoid driving on snow and ice; on the other hand, we don't rush to the grocery store for a month's supply of TP and milk just because a weatherman says it "might" snow tomorrow. While at the grocery store, we still use a*

*"grocery cart," not a "buggy." When we buy soft drinks, we will likely call them "pop" or "soda" instead of using "coke" as a generic term.*

*We do find ourselves saying "hey" rather than "hi." A "large" object is likely to be referred to as a "big ole" whatever. We have dropped "you guys" as a second person plural and substituted the occasional use of "you all." However, we have definitely not moved to the use of "you all" as the second person singular, with "all you all" being the second person plural. We have abandoned boots, down-jackets, and earmuffs. We do not have old cars up on cinder blocks in the yard, and there aren't three hound dogs living under our front porch.*

**Billy's symbol is a bowling pin.**

**Moriah Lydon (6-4-85), daughter of John and Julie, died 9-12-02. Julie shares a poem Moriah wrote:**

*Moriah - means "God is my teacher"*

*I don't want to go to the Olympics.  
I don't want to be the best in the country.  
I don't want medals, ribbons and trophies.  
I don't want fame or attention.*

*I just want to know that I used every ounce in my body to finish the race with great joy  
and pride.*

*They may push me down; I'll get right back up.  
They may call me names; I'll just ignore them.  
They tell me I can't; I'll prove them wrong.  
They may not believe in me, I'll just push harder.*

*They may say I am not strong enough; I'll use every ounce of my energy.  
And when I win my victory, they might say, "Wow! You really did have it in you."*

*Written by: Moriah Lydon*

**Lauren (8-24-98), daughter of Saul and Michelle Katz, died after pneumonia complications 5-5-02.**

*Saul and I both thank you for being here today. Without the love and support you have given us, getting through this past year would have been impossible.*

*To start, I'd like to explain the significance of the doll that's engraved on Lauren's footstone. This is the doll you would always see with Lauren. She had it with her during the day and she would hold onto it when she went to sleep. And now, we have given it to*

*Jennifer. My Dad would also always call Lauren his "Little Doll." So, this has great meaning to us.*

*Unfortunately, many people never really had a chance to know Lauren. Despite her limitations and disabilities, she was a child who was able to know great love and in her own special way gave so much more back.*

*Lauren had some really bad days. These were the days when your heart would reach out to her because there was nothing you could do to help her. But her good days I would call "great days" or "breakthroughs." These were the days you could sit with Lauren and just be with a little girl that would smile and you absolutely knew she was responding to you in her own special way. They were days you wished could last forever.*

*There was a time when my Dad was taking Lauren for one of her daily walks through St. Mary's and he stopped for a moment to speak to someone. The person first said "Hello" to Lauren and then continued speaking with my Dad. Lauren remained very quiet, but after a couple of minutes into the conversation, out of nowhere she started screeching very loudly, almost in this annoyed tone like it really disturbed her that she was being ignored. Of course, she really couldn't understand but Lauren definitely had her ways of making sure her needs were known.*

*There was another day when I called Lauren's unit one afternoon to check on her, like I usually would. Marguerite, who sat at the desk in her unit, told me Lauren was sitting right next to her and asked if I wanted to talk to her, so of course I did. All of a sudden Lauren started squeeling in such happiness, without a shadow of a doubt I knew she recognized the sound of my voice and was actually responding to it. It was absolutely amazing.*

*And last, I'd like to share with you the impact that Lauren had on Jennifer. It was a weekend we had taken Lauren to my parents' to stay overnight. Jennifer was almost 2 and it was really the first time she got to be alone with Lauren. The next day, Lauren was lying on the couch. Jennifer walked in and was very hesitant to go near Lauren but slowly she did. As time went by, all Jennifer wanted to do was stay by Lauren's side and talk to her because she was really responding with such excitement to Jennifer's voice. Even though Jennifer was not quite 2, she somehow understood that Lauren was her sister, and the bond was definitely there. That was an amazing day. To this day Jennifer still speaks about Lauren, asks us questions and recognizes her in pictures. She knows her sister is in Heaven.*

*People would always say to me about Lauren that she had "the face of an angel" and now she is one.*

*Lauren taught me a lot of lessons, but the most important was the meaning of unconditional love. It was a blessing and an honor to be her mother for the short time she was here, and, if she's listening, "We will always be your Mommy and Daddy." She has also brought some very special people into my life.*

*I'd like to end by thanking all of you who ever loved Lauren, those who cared for her and took the time to think or ask about her, because that was the greatest gift you could have given to her. But most of all, I'd like to thank my Mom and Dad because I truly believe that if it wasn't for them; Lauren would not have lived as long as she did. Thank you.*

*I somehow managed to read this in front of 25 family and friends. It's amazing the strength you somehow get that pulls you through anything. I have no idea what has gotten me through this far.*

**Lauren's symbol is a doll.**

**Eric (7-25-79), son of Steve and Barbara Perrin, died 8-6-01.**

*I recently received a box containing "Lamentations" literature. I was so pleased to receive it and thank you so much for your thoughtfulness. I read a few pages every morning.*

*Yes, I too am a Fellow Traveler. After I lost my 22-year-old son, who was my soul mate, I never thought I could face the next day. My heart has been ripped to shreds, with the pain searing through and through. I loved him so much. How could a mother be expected to go on after she has put so much of her thoughts, her love, her care and her heart into a child and then have that child be abruptly taken away? It's all so unbelievable.*

*It was two years in August that my Eric took a bodybuilding drug that took his life away. My friends and the support group, Compassionate Friends of Rockville Centre, led by an angel, Elaine Stillwell, gave me strength to face the next day. I am very fortunate that I have a job I love so much, I teach, and get great warmth and satisfaction from it. I have another son, Eric's older brother, Ken. He got out of the world Trade Center by two minutes. This was 5 weeks after losing his brother, whom he adored. I want to go on for him and my dear husband.*

*Life will never be the same, my goals are different. One of my goals is to honor the memory of my Eric in every way I can. I am making a quilt in his memory. In the middle of each of the 16 squares will be a picture on fabric of a phase of Eric's life, and what a life it was, it gives me such a joy. I have a need to keep Eric's memory alive, so I make sure to speak of Him and include Him in whatever I am doing.*

*My husband does not deal with his grief in the same way. He does not want to go to a group and finds it difficult to see pictures and go to the cemetery. I have learned to respect his needs. He is a wonderful husband.*

*I was so saddened to hear your story. My heart reaches out to you in losing your dear son, Young Jim. I hope that perhaps, He and my Eric have met. You are an amazing woman. The Lamentations articles are filled with love and care.*

**Christopher (9-6-82), son of Ken and Karen Arno, died as a result of ewings sarcoma cancer 6-9-02. Karen shares with us a poem written by a friend of Chris':**

*There is a new star in heaven tonight  
Chris was brought to share his light  
He looks down on us at night  
With a light so bright, we'll have to look away we remember him, a friend so dear  
He sparkles down on us to share his thoughts on how he feels today  
Loved from birth to eternity  
Happiness now that he has left pain to go to a perfect place  
So one night, real soon,  
Look up at the stars so bright  
Find the one that shines from Chris' light  
Give him a big bright smile and say  
Hey Chris, we miss you today  
----A Dear Friend of Chris----*

**Chris' symbol is a blue jay.**

**Keith (1-16-71), son of Charlotte Martin, drowned 2-21-97. Charlotte shares an article that appeared in her local paper entitled; *Grieving mother turns to gardening***

Wednesday July 3, 2002

*Charlotte Martin started gardening to help her cope with life after the death of her son Keith in 1997. "I hardly left the house for three years," she said.*

*She discovered a green and yellow nonflowering plant growing in her backyard about three years ago. "I've taken it to all the nurseries, and they don't know what it is," she said.*

*She's also driven around town looking at yards to see if anyone has plants like hers and has found none.*

*Through splitting and transplanting she now has 300 of the mystery plants in her yard. Martin has been active in a support group for parents who have lost children and would like to share these plants with anyone who has lost a child to death. To contact Charlotte you may call: (270) 684-5642.*

Charlotte shares more insight she has found out about her plant;

*I got one call at 7:00AM July 3, 2002, and Leslie Jobe told me she had one of these plants that she had brought from New Mexico. She lived 15-20 miles away, but I took one there to make sure it was the same. It was. It is a sedum called, "Live Forever."*

*I walked around my yard every morning for years after reading my Bible, praying for God to comfort me and every bereaved parent by letting us know our children are living forever in Heaven. I would ask Him to give us a very real dream and let us see our children in Heaven. Then, I would tell God that He knew best how to let us know, so to use His way. This was His way.*

*We have searched this city and surrounding towns over for years and have not found this. I have never bought a plant.*

*In the process of transplanting, I soon found 12 marbles that matched 12 cross pendants my sister gave me. The stones that are in the 12-foot wall around Heaven. The 100th marble was a perfect solid white one. I have found over 300 now. I learned last year that the little boys who played with them died, one at 17, and the other at 33. Both mothers literally grieved themselves to death. I almost grieved myself to death. I could not eat and my weight plunged to 80 lbs. I finally began eating so I would have strength to dig in search of these marbles. I planted a plant where I dug. I finally could sleep from the exhaustion from digging. She brought these Live Forever plants and shared them with all of us at JIM's Conference 2003. The "Live Forever's" will survive over a week without being planted. I have 1,000 now. They survive inside or out. They survive in water only. They grow 2 feet, but I could fit over 500 in a shoebox.*

*I hope to devote my life to teaching others to help the bereaved. I am currently writing a book, "When Your Rope's Too Short." It is about my 6-year experience of reaching out to churches for help and running into many others doing the same. Even though people wanted to help, they did not know how. Hopefully, this book will help. Of course, it will take a miracle for me to stay focused long enough to organize the chapters.*

*If you know of anyone who feels the same as I do, that just as friends and relatives of an alcoholic need to learn how to respond, just as friends and family of a diabetic or epileptic need to learn how to help, so do friends and family of the bereaved. Please feel free and I welcome others' thoughts about this. I have stayed out of church for a year now because I've been hurt far too many times by the things people say.*

*I also would greatly appreciate getting in touch with someone who has gotten a book published. I recently got sidetracked from my book "When Your Rope's Too Short" and began a book about Heaven. I have a clear mental image of the mansion that my son, Keith, lives in. I realized a few months ago when we did a Bible study on Heaven that his mansion is empty. I wondered what good is an empty mansion. In this book I hope to visually furnish his mansion with actual things that I can find in the Bible. I may call the book,*

*"Will I have dishes in Heaven?" Some people think it's crazy to think about Heaven like that, but if it is, I have good company with Billy Graham and Joni Eveackson. Tada seems to think the same way I do.*

**Keith's symbol is karate.**

**Jay Jacobson (7-31-78), nephew of Brenda Reeves, completed suicide 3-4-02:**

*I was Jay's legal guardian and aunt. I took care of him as if he was my own, for many years. He was like a son to me and like a brother to my children. We went through so much with him...it is unbelievable. I was up with him many nights, feeling as though something bad could happen. I wish that I had been up with him that night he died. In some ways, I feel that I failed him, that I just couldn't do enough to help him or I didn't do the right things to help him.*

*You can learn more about Jay by visiting his website, his story is there (in nicer terms and without naming people who hurt him terribly.)*

*Visit Jay's Memorial Site: <http://www.geocities.com/alidavanlieshout/>*

*Last Dec. I became the state tree coordinator for [Memory Tree of Lights](#)  
It features the news articles and pictorials of last year's event.*

*Thank you for all that you do and I hope to hear from you soon.*

**Gary & Robyn Nichols have lost two children, Justin (9-6-78), died from cardiac arrest and their daughter, Malori Holmes (8-22), died 8-2-03. Robyn writes about a friend:**

*Judy has been more like a sister to all my children, so each of their deaths has affected her the way it has all of us. You already knew of my son Justin Nichols, he died July 7, 2000. My daughter Malori Nichols Holmes died Aug 2, of 2003. It has been a real rough few weeks here. Her 19th birthday is tomorrow, August 22. She also wrote one for Justin and me.*

**" MALORI'S WORDS"**

**I KNOW YOU ARE HURT AND CRY FOR MY LOVE,  
DONT BE, FOR I AM THE STARS TWINKLING ABOVE.  
I KNOW YOU ARE SAD AND MISS MY FACE,  
DONT BE, FOR I AM IN A MUCH BETTER PLACE.**

*I KNOW YOU MISS MY LAUGHTER AND MY CHEER,  
DON'T, FOR I NO LONGER LIVE WITH CONSTANT FEAR.  
I KNOW YOU'RE THINKING OF NO OTHER, AND ME  
BUT I AM IN HEAVEN WITH MY GRANDMOTHER AND BROTHER,  
FOR I AM SAFE AND FREE FROM THE PAIN,  
SO, STOP THE TEARS THAT FALL LIKE RAIN.  
I AM BEAUTIFUL, FOR GOD GAVE ME WINGS,  
YOU OUGHT TO HEAR THE SONGS JUSTIN AND I SING.  
MY GRANDMOTHER CAME TO MEET ME AT THE LIGHT,  
SHE, JUSTIN AND I LAUGHED ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT.  
SO, THOSE OF YOU WHO MISS ME IN SOMEWAY,  
DON'T, FOR I AM IN HEAVEN CELEBRATING MY NINETEENTH BIRTHDAY.  
I KNOW YOU ARE SAD AND MUST FEEL SO ALONE,  
BUT DON'T, I AM WITH GOD....I AM HOME....*

*Judy*

*JUSTIN*

-----  
*YOU WERE JUST A BOY WHEN I HELD YOU TIGHT,  
I'D TUCK YOU IN AND KISS YOU GOOD NIGHT.  
I WATCHED OVER YOU AS IF YOU WERE MY OWN,  
I LOVED YOU AS MUCH WHEN YOU WERE GROWN.  
I TRIED TO WARN YOU TO SLOW YOUR LIFE DOWN;  
YOU WERE RUNNING WILD ALL OVER TOWN.  
I WORRIED ABOUT YOU PLENTY OF NIGHTS,  
STOOD UP FOR YOU IN SO MANY FIGHTS.  
TRIED TO PROTECT YOU AS GOOD AS I COULD,  
YOU DID, AS YOU WANTED, NOT AS YOU SHOULD.  
YOU LEFT US ALL SO VERY SAD,  
SOMETIMES I THINK OF YOU AND GET SO MAD.  
YOUR FAMILY IS LEFT WITH AN EMPTY SPACE;  
ALL THEY HAVE IS THE MEMORY OF YOUR FACE.  
MALLORY IS HAVING SUCH A HARD TIME,  
WISH I COULD TAKE AWAY HER PAIN AND MAKE IT ALL MINE.  
DESTINY IS TRYING TO KEEP IT TOGETHER,  
TRYING TO COPE AND MAKE HER LIFE BETTER.  
MISSY'S OFTEN THINKING OF YOU,  
PRAYING TO GOD TO HELP HER FAMILY MAKE IT THROUGH.  
MOM AND DAD ARE STUCK ON MEMORY LANE,  
TRYING TO KEEP FROM GOING INSANE.  
WE ALL THINK OF YOU AND MISS YOU MORE EACH DAY,  
OH, JUSTIN, I WISH YOU HAD GONE AWAY.*

*POEM FOR ROBYN*

*" I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE STAGES"*

*I CAN ONLY IMAGINE WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH,  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE YOUR HEART BREAKING IN TWO.  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE LOSS YOU MUST FEEL,  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE PRAYING FOR THIS NOT TO BE REAL.  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE SEARCHING FOR WHAT WENT WRONG,  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE CRYING TO MY KIDS FAVORITE SONG.  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE WONDERING WHERE TO TURN TO NOW,  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE PRAYING TO GOD FOR STRENGTH SOMEWAY, SOMEHOW.  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE GOD ANSWERING MY PRAYERS;  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE KNOWING MY KIDS ARE SAFE WITH THE MAN UPSTAIRS.  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE BEING ABLE TO COPE, AND MOVE FORWARD WITH LIFE,  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE AFTER LOSING TWO, STILL FEELING BLESSED TO BE A  
MOTHER AND WIFE.  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THINGS GETTING BETTER AGAIN ONE DAY,  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE KNOWING GOD WILL EASE MY PAIN SOMEHOW,  
SOMEWAY.  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE STEPS IT WILL TAKE FOR YOU TO FEEL SOMEWHAT  
BETTER;  
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE DIFFERENT STAGES TO COME, LIKE THE STAGES IN  
THIS LETTER.*

*I KNOW YOU MAY NOT FEEL LIKE THINGS WILL EVER BE BETTER, BUT I  
PROMISE YOU. WITH TIME AND ALOT OF FAITH AND LOVE IN GOD, HE WILL  
HELP YOU THROUGH THIS. ONE DAY, ONE STAGE AT A TIME. PEACE WILL  
EVENTUALLY FIND YOU AGAIN. I LOVE YOU AND THINK ABOUT YOU ALL!!!!!!!  
JUDY*

**Justin's symbol is a sunburst face with a tear.**

**Nicholas (1-24-91), son of Russell and Missy Stevens, died 6-11-99.**

*I wanted to write to you tonight about our son Nicholas who crossed over on June 11,  
1999, at just eight years old.*

*Nicholas was getting an umbrella out of the car for me on a misty Sunday afternoon on  
June 5th. We wanted to take his brother outside to get some fresh air since he was  
recovering from an ear infection. While I was getting Noah ready, Nick was outside with  
the umbrella, we don't know what happened but all we knew was we heard a cry and*

*found Nick laying in the back yard. He was not responsive and had a small blood mark above his eyelid. We rushed him to the hospital where he was medi-vac to a better-equipped medical center. We waited what seemed to be a lifetime and Nick never woke. He fought hard and we truly believe he heard every word his father and I said to him. When we were told there was nothing else that could be done, we knew it was time to say good-bye and let our son be free. That is the hardest thing we had to ever do. We pray daily we will never have to do it again. Before Nick left, we promised him we would keep his memory going forever! We told him if his heart stopped that he was letting us know that he did not want to be an organ donor, but if his brain stopped he would want us to donate his organs to help others. The doctors had said it could be days even weeks before he would pass. But we knew our Nick, he never took long to do anything and he, we knew, hated to see the family in so much pain. Nick passed the same day we told him it was ok. That was our Nick, always thinking of others.*

*Nick was an organ donor to 6 people and today 5 of those people are living a very healthy and happy life. Thank you Nick!*

*Nicholas has a brother Noah who was 2 years old when he crossed over. They both had a very close bond to each other and are a lot alike in many ways. Nicholas was very proud to be a big brother and took this job very seriously and always looked out for Noah and loved to teach Noah new things. Nicholas was so full of life and loved all of it. He always smiled and always watched out for others, he definitely was a big brother to a lot of children. Nick was always taking up for someone being picked on at school, which usually landed him into trouble. For some reason, Nick felt it was his job to make sure everyone was ok anywhere he went. Everything to Nick was black and white and there was no room for the fuzzy area. If he believed in something and/or someone, he made it known. His Dad and I are so proud of him! He just was a delight to be around. There were some mornings when Noah and I just could not wait for him to get up to play, --so we would wake him up. Like Nick, he would be most welcome to this awakening. Nick touched the lives of many people just in the eight short years God blessed us with him. I remember one morning I was trying to clean the outside windows and I could not reach some of the windows. Without saying a word Nick was going to help me, he began making something; I asked him what was he making? He looked up at me and said "a ladder for you so you can reach the windows." That was just one of many times that Nick was assisting someone in need. Nicholas loved so many things, but his favorite things were: Lego's, playing with G.I. Joe figures, drawing (which he was very good at), fishing, riding his bike, roller-blading and attempting to skateboard, although the skateboarding he did not have time to master, he would have. He loved to go up to the attic of his grandparent's house and go through all the boxes of his father and uncle's toys. He would pack a wagon and tow it behind his bike full of all sorts of things, from a change of clothes to band-aides (always prepared, those band aides helped many), and paddle down the road to his grandparent's house. When he would come home, the wagon would still be full, but of different things other than what he originally took. He would love to bring home all the treasures from Nana's house. He loved to shave like his Dad and wear his father's Polo aftershave. The teachers would make comments to us about how good he always smelled. He was very neat in his appearance. He always wore blue*

*carpenter pants. Nicholas loved to play soccer. In fact, when his classmates sent get-well cards to the hospital, most drew him playing soccer with blue carpenter pants, blue eyes and a big beautiful smile. One little girl drew him as an angel. That was his nickname his Dad and I always called him "Angel." He loved me to sing "You Light Up My Life." Nick would even sing this song to his brother sometimes if he was upset. He loved to go out with his Dad on the lobster boat. He thought each trap would have a treasure, crabs, rocks and fish. Nick loved life and all its treasures! We miss him so much!*

*As you can understand, life is odd and there are so many questions and really not many answers. All we can do is pray for the day we will be together again. We do what we can on this earth to make someone else's life a little easier by doing many community efforts in Nick's memory and honor. We have developed a program at the local hospital for families who have loved ones transported to another hospital by medi-vac or other means, "Nick's Wings" volunteer group transport the loved ones to the hospital the patient is going to. We started a grieving group in our area called "MidCoast Families." We have started a scholarship in honor of Nick and have given away \$10,000 in scholarships over the past 4 years. Those are a few things we have done. We hope to do more, but those things are big goals and we are working on them as we speak.*

*I wish there were words that I could say to a family who has lost a child to make the pain ease, but there is not. Only to know there are people out there that understand the pain and are near and willing to listen makes all the difference.*

*I used to think that one parent should remain on this earth for our one child remaining and the other should go be with the one in Heaven, that way none of our children will be alone.*

*I used to wish that each day would hurry to end; it would mean I was one step closer to being with Nick.*

*I used to ask why 24/7. I used to cry 24/7.*

*I can't say that those thoughts still don't creep up on me now and again, but I feel I am in a better place now and I am stronger. I do know that one day we will be together again and I look forward to that day, but for now I am taking one day at a time and making sure my son Noah and the newest addition to our family, Cole, are happy and pray they will have the opportunity to follow their dreams some day and live life to the fullest. I pray we are given the opportunities to continue our Nick's memory.*

*I look back on our life with Nick, and we know he knew we loved him and would do anything for him. As you read, Nick gave us a lot in those short eight years and that is something we thank God for. I want to make sure that our living children feel that same kind of love Nick does.*

***I'm Free***

*Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free  
I'm following the path God laid for me.  
I took his hand when I heard him call  
I turned my back and left it all.  
I could not stay another day to laugh, to love, to work or play.  
Tasks undone must stay that way.  
I found that peace at close of day.  
If my parting has left a void, then fill it with remembered joy.  
A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss, ah, yes, these things I too will miss.  
Be not burdened with times of sorrow, I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow.  
My life's been full, I've savored much, good friends, good times, a loved one's touch.  
Perhaps my time seemed all too brief, don't lengthen it now with undue grief.  
Lift up your hearts and share with me, God wanted me now: He set me free.*

**Nick's symbol is a heart.**

**Kara Broughton (5-30-75), daughter of Mike and Joyce Dunham, was killed when she fell asleep driving 5-8-95. Joyce shares: I recently found this poem among all the cards and notes Kara had sent me through the years. It is one I do not remember seeing before, a treasured gift on this day of sadness.**

*Mom,*

*You're the best mom I know,  
You've stood beside me and loved me so.  
You always seem to be concerned,  
What's right and wrong, I have learned.  
You've helped me through those tough times that seemed to last,  
You tell me not to worry because those times will always pass.  
Your arms are always open wide,  
Where I can share my tears and pride.  
If you hadn't brought me up this way,  
I wonder where I'd be today.  
I thank you, for who you are,  
You're the greatest mom by far.  
Love ya lots, Kara*

### ***The Significance of Mother's Day***

*I don't think I really appreciated the significance of Mother's Day until I myself became one. My life would never be the same, and the death of my only child did not alter the fact that I am still a mother. I still have that intense feeling of love for my child, a love greater*

*than any I had known before. So as Mother's Day approaches, a day on which we recognize the love and pride of motherhood, I too want to be remembered as a mother.*

*--Ginny Smith TCF, Charlottesville, VA*

**Kara's symbol is a sunshine.**

**Annie (7-19-83), daughter of Paul and Anne Courtney, died in an auto accident 1-15-01. Anne shares a poem written by Annie:**

*July Baby*

*Stifling hot July day  
Watch out world I'm on my way  
Through fourteen years I have grown  
Dolls, bicycles, soccer  
Propelling to the UNKNOWN!  
Sometimes quiet, sometimes rowdy  
Oh my, I hope never dowdy  
My friends and I are close as can be  
We enjoy each other's company.  
I'm a lonely, only child  
Me spoiled? Well, only mild!  
See if you can guess me now  
My first name is a musical, wow!  
My last, well it sounds like a first  
What is a good ending for this verse?*

*By: Annie Courtney ----- 10/17/97 ----- 5th grade*

After receiving the poem written by Annie, we asked for permission from Anne to include it in the newsletter. Anne responded by saying:

*Thank you so much for your kindness. I know, you know how important it is for people to validate how precious your child is, and how deep your grief is. I would be proud to have Annie included in the newsletter.*

*Thank you for your kind remembrance of us, and Annie at her birthday time. I try regularly to honor her and her goodness by small acts of kindness to others, flowers, plants and trees for her and of course prayer.*

*Paul and I knew when she was born our lives would never be the same again. By her senior year we reflected how fun it was to be her parents, and how much we had grown, from having such a wonderful child. I'm sorry but I must send more than one picture of*

*Annie to give you the sense of her presence. Sweet, warm, loving, almost maternal to all she loved. Yet she had this impish side. She loved to make people laugh, and she loved to do funny, silly things. Her friends have told us and written to us, that no one could stay sad around Annie. If you had a problem she talked you through it, then made you laugh. We are blessed that so many of her friends and classmates shared their experiences with her through the letters they wrote us.*

*Now that she has passed on Paul and I know again we will never be the same. We begrudgingly admit we've grown, and we do have a deeper broader knowledge of many things. We see life in a much different light, and are humbled by the joy of having Annie for 17 years, and the grief of losing her. I feel she is close, and we will always be connected, she has been very nice to acknowledge our love and grief by giving us simple signs.*

**Annie's symbols are a star and rose.**

**Caleb, unborn grandchild of Rosemary Hazlett, life was taken in an auto accident. Rosemary is now on a quest for unborn children like Caleb who are not recognized as human beings before birth by several of our states. If this fetal-homicide bill passes, guilty parties would be punished for taking the lives of these unborn children.**

*Please contact your representatives to encourage them to vote for the Caleb-Haley Bill. If you would like to know more about this bill you can visit the website:*

**[www.caleb-haley.com](http://www.caleb-haley.com)**

*or contact Rosemary Hazlett @ 606-365-3909*

***If you would like to help financially support this bill contributions can be made to:***

*Caleb-Haley Bill Fund  
c/o Clay's Mill Road Baptist Church  
Attn: Pastor Jeff Fugate  
Clay's Mill Road  
Lexington -- KY 40503  
All donations will be accepted and are greatly appreciated.*

***Chocolate and Prayer***

***Is the best cure for life's **STRESS**.***

If you are a bereaved parent and would like more information about Lamentations email:

<mailto:dinah@cumberlandcollege.edu>