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# LAMENTATIONS

Issue 84

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

2004

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Since I sent the letter two weeks ago, there has been another change in my life. Regina is no longer with me and I am on my own. Those of you who know her, understand what a great loss it is to me and all of us. I depended on her for so many things; and especially learning new programs and helping me keep everything current. I am now on my own so you will need to bear with me...Please pray for me this next year as I work on J.I.M.'s Conference.

As we look to 2004, may you be encouraged to reach out to others who have just lost a child. You know how vital it is to talk with another parent who has experienced this same loss. As you read the following **Grief Grafts**, may you embrace these parents and their children. We are fellow travelers and we need each other. Where there is a website, I hope you will visit it and leave an e-mail for the parents. We all need to know that our children are being remembered. I encourage you to visit the websites of all those listed under Fellow Travelers' Websites. (And I encourage you to visit Young Jim's page also)

**Merry Christmas to all our angels!!!!!!**

## Grief Grafts

**Shane (5-18-83), son of Leisha Akers, was killed in an auto accident 2-27-01.**

**In the September 20th edition of the Messenger-Inquirer, Karen Owen published the following story about Leisha entitled 'It's not supposed to happen':**

*Leisha Akers isn't sure why she started associating lighthouses with her son, Shane. "He was just a light," Akers said recently, looking across her living room toward a photograph of her 17-year-old. "His smile was just beautiful."*

*Shane died in a car accident in 2001.*

*Now his bedroom is decorated in lighthouses.*

*"He's safely home. He's in a good place. Maybe that's why the lighthouse was so comforting to me," his mother said recently.*

*Leisha Akers later found out many parents who have lost children to death adopt some object - butterflies, rainbows, dogs or other things - to symbolize their lost loved one.*

*She is a member of the Owensboro Bereaved Parents Support Group. Several members attended a conference for bereaved parents earlier this year in Williamsburg and were inspired to try something here on a smaller scale Sept. 27.*

*As many as 400 people came to the Williamsburg event from as far away as Michigan, New York and Florida. The conference featured authors who write about grief and other speakers who know how those people feel.*

*That's the thing about losing a child. No one, except those who have been there, bereaved parents say, know how they feel.*

*"It is worse than you ever imagined," Akers said.*

*"Not that we try to compare grief, because grief is grief," said Bob Robey, bereavement coordinator at Hospice and Palliative Care of the Ohio Valley, which sponsors the support group.*

*However, "If you are a mother who has lost a 17 year-old daughter in a car crash and a person who has just lost a 75 year-old parent, it's hard for that person to relate to you," Robey said.*

*Everyone knows that they will lose their parents someday. Everyone knows death will eventually separate spouses. But no one expects to someday stand over the grave of their child, Robey said. "It's not supposed to happen."*

*Regardless of the offspring's age, whether he was stillborn or 50 years old, "This child is your past, present and future sometimes," Robey said. "It just touches every aspect of your life."*

*The loss and the grief affect the survivors' work, home life, marriage, other children and social life, Akers said. "We've basically had to rebuild our lives, because Shane was a part of everything we did."*

*Spouses may go through the cycles of grief at different speeds. They have to be patient with themselves and each other. When her husband Steve is having a good day, "I might be having a bad day, and vice versa," Akers said.*

*Her other son, Jacob, now 15, doesn't talk about his brother's death much, she said. "He doesn't like to upset me." But she knows he grieves, too.*

*Sometimes well-meaning people say or do the wrong things. "They don't truly understand, and I don't want them to," Akers said.*

*"People say, 'Get back in your routine.'" I can't get back in my routine. My routine included my son every breathing moment I had."*

*"You have to put on this mask every day and go to work and act like nothing is bothering you," she said. Sometimes a grieving parent even has to do that around her own family.*

*Akers said she has found invaluable support in the bereaved parents support group, which meets the third Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Hospice office at 723 Harvard Drive.*

*Many of the regulars get together regularly to socialize as well, she said.*

*Outsiders often want to "fix" the grief, or rush the hurting parent through it. Grief just has to be lived, she and Robey said. There is no definite time when everyone should be "all better."*

**Shane's symbol is a lighthouse**

**William II (9-30-65), son of Barbara Barth, died as a result of AIDS 9-11-94. William wrote this poem on Valentine's Day in a diary, before his death.**

*When you're running on the beach or dancing in the sun, remember my face and we shall be one.*

*I was born to bring joy and laughter; not tears; you may cry a little but surrender the fear.*

*I will be surrounded by the angels above, they are beautiful, but not the only ones I love.*

*I wanted to see my family grow, this I will see that you should know.*

*I will live in you all not in a dream, an inspiring angel this is my call.*

*I never gained in material wealth, oh the treasures I had, I gave of myself.*

*I felt love my whole life through, now feel mine believe this true.*

William August Barth II

**William's symbol is blackbirds.**

**Bo Upton (11-11-83), son of Sherry Carrender & Harold Upton, was murdered 2-1-02. Sherry shares a Memory article she wrote for his 20th birthday.**

*Bo, it was 20 years ago today that you came to us through birth. Here is one of my daily struggles as I face life without you here on earth.*

*I work at a hospital and "How many children do you have?" seems to be the daily question that I face. I answer, "One and he is with God in Heaven." Then I get a warm embrace. Then they ask, "How did he go?" And I tell the dreadful story: "he was murdered" and oh, how reality hits me and hurts me so.*

*Then they ask, "Did they put the ones behind bars who took his life?" And I sadly say, "no," and tell them how our politicians say, "our youth is our future," but our youth feel unprotected and now live in fear instead. And I tell them; he was only 18, with such a bright future ahead.*

*Then they ask, "What kind of person was he?" and I proudly say, "such a good friend to those in need, loved his family, was ambitious and had a passion for baseball, was a left-handed pitcher," and as I wipe the tears, tell them how he wanted this to be his life's career.*

*Well, let's face it. They wouldn't know Bo's personality if I didn't tell them about some of the mischievous things he did (that he was so well noted for) and as I tell those stories about Bo I can't help but laugh and smile and then cry some more.*

*Then I tell them of HIS laughter and HIS smiles that I miss. And as I think about all of the things that I've just said, I realize how good God is and I kneel on my knees and bow my head. I thank God for giving me my son, Bo, and for the 18 years I had him here with me. Bo, I miss hearing the words, Mama, but for now: Shine like a star, fly as high as you can and it won't be long 'til I see you and hear those words again.*

*On this lonely road of memories of the past, and hope for justice, and faith that we will see you again, we wish you a happy 20th birthday in heaven. Love You, Mom and Dad*

**Bo's symbol is a baseball player.**

**Nick (1-24-91), son of Russell and Melissa Stevens, died as a result of a home accident 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 we heard was 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 equip 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 ever had to 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 life 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 skateboar., Although the skateboarding he did not have time to master, he would have. He loved to go up on the attic of his grandparents' house and go through all the boxes of his father's and uncles' toys. He would pack a wagon and tow it behind his bike 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 for 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, we "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.*

*Thank you Dinah, for giving me the chance to talk tonight.*

*Thinking of you and all those families tonight who have lost,*

*Missy Stevens*

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

**Jessica Bryl (1-19-77), daughter of Dan and Betty, was killed in an auto accident 4-3-00. Dan shares a poem he wrote for the 2003 candle lighting. He has put it on a special paper with the poem written in the middle of the candle.**

***In Our Hearts***

*A candle we light, as we softly speak your name,  
Memories rush upon us, as the wick begins to flame.  
Saying your name, brings both a smile and a tear,  
Knowing it not possible, but wishing you were here.  
Thinking of the days we had with you, oh so not enough,  
Wondering what would have been is so very tough.  
Gathered here tonight, are parents and siblings too,  
To ease the pain of our loss, and honor the memory of you!  
You will never be forgotten, in our hearts you forever live,  
One day the love we have for you, God willing we will give.  
But until we meet face to face, please stay close to us each day,  
Hopefully we'll feel your presence, to guide us along our way.*

*~ Candle Lighting 2003*

*~By Dan Bryl*

**Jessica's symbol is an open book, cherished teddies and an angel.**

**Jackie Searl lost both of her sons, Alex (4-6-61), who died as a result of arrhythmia 4-3-00 and Dan (10-13-65), who died as a result of an inoperable brain tumor 6-7-96.**

*I would love for you to share in the newsletter. This is such a wonderful way to continue on with their spirit and love to others that are traveling. Just this morning, on the news, the eleven-year fire fighter that was killed yesterday, his wife and children as well as his fellow fire fighters have become travelers. I want to find the mailing address to his captain and send one of Charlie Walton's books, When There Are No Words to these individuals in order to let them know others are in this with them.*

*I thank you for what you are doing and I also use Charlie's book, When There Are No Words. My youngest, Alex, passed in 1996, 30 years of age, with heart arrhythmia, and I*

*just by chance while searching in the library, found his book. Of the many that I tried to find some answers from, this was by far, the most down to earth and best. I would read and reread, and pass copies to friends and strangers in order to offer support. Then on Christmas 1999, my other son, Dan, 38 years old, was five plus cancer free and was having headaches, and was diagnosed with six inoperable brain tumors. He passed in April 2000, three weeks after his 39th birthday. I again went back to the Charlie's book as well as Conversations At Midnight, which is also very good. I continue to purchase copies of his book and send them off to those that I don't know anything about this journey, in the hope that they will understand that they are not alone; we are all in this life together. I do this in the loving memory of my only two children, Dan & Alex.*

*Alex loved to fish and Dan had his captain's license for intercostals boating. On Alex's marker are a deer and a fish for his love of hunting and fishing. On Dan's marker is a dog for his "buddy" and a wooden ship. His nickname is "Woody" for his great love of refinishing wooden boats. He owned and restored several. He wrote his funeral service, selected his music and designed his marker. He lived four months from date of being diagnosed with his tumors and did his living will and then hospice at home. He was a young man far ahead of his time. Alex left us with a precious granddaughter named Skylar. She lives in Allen, TX, will be 12, November 9th, she was four when he passed and she does remember him. She was the love of his sweet life. He always wanted to be a father. She fishes, plays all the sports, is president of her school and wants to be first woman president and wants to attend Harvard. Naturally, she takes after her grandmother Jackie.*

*Just last evening, in a little town outside of Atlanta, two 15-year-old girls were riding home with their friend who is 16 and had an accident. They were killed and the driver is in critical condition in the hospital. I contacted their counselor at school and Fed-Exed a copy to her and I hope to obtain the home addresses of the girls' parents to send it to them. Please keep these people in your prayers. I look forward to receiving your newsletter.*

**Elaine Stillwell's children, Peggy (8-23-66) died 8-2-86, and Denis (2-4-65) died 8-6-86 from an auto accident.**

Elaine is announcing her new book release:

**Fellow Traveler, Elaine Stillwell**, announces the December release of her new book, "The death of a child; Reflections for grieving parents" Chicago: ACTA Publications, 800-397-2282. (Available after December 15, \$9.95, 160 pages.)

*It is probably too incredible to suggest that this book will set the standard for this new millennium as THE friend for bereaved parents, but it certainly stands apart as a remarkable treasure of insights, information, spiritual reflections and an empathetic*

*presence through stories that say (as it did to this bereaved parent), "This [book] is my friend. At last someone who understands."*

*Stillwell grieves the death of her two oldest children, 21 and 19, in a car accident. Her story gives her permission to share her SELF and her faith (the latter very gently through scripture without clobbering you) so that a grieving parent (from any child loss) will find compassion, clarity and comfort.*

*The information is wrapped in story. Jump in anywhere. Let the book be your guide. Let your grief be your guide. There is room for both. The content brings us into our sorrow, finding connections to our oft-wounded spiritual centeredness, and hope realized through process and time. It is so well written that you will go back to the book, starting everywhere and anywhere, and find the place (or point) where you will receive comfort.*

*Special issues covered include: enduring sudden death, living through extended illness, surviving suicide, dealing with murder or accidental killing, braving deaths from war and terrorism, cherishing special days and events, tending to the forgotten mourners, and helpful ways (of your choosing) to receive that special love that enables you to move forward (music, meditation, nature, hobbies, physical activity and the healing power of pets).*

*The book, well, the story, wraps up in a verbal singing of our song. The psalmist frequently mourns the impossibility of singing any song when the melody of the heart has left a person. The book will bring you back to the story and the song that not even death can take away.*

*The Rev. Dr. Richard B. Gilbert  
For Resources Hotline  
November 4, 2003*

*The Death of a Child: Book Review by Joni Woelfel (author of Meditations for Survivors of Suicide)*

*Elaine Stillwell's compelling new book, The Death of a Child, is destined to become a classic in the field of bereavement. Comprehensive, educational, compassionate and written through the experience of losing her own two oldest children, Peggy and Denis, Stillwell's book resonates with wisdom and comfort. For the newly bereaved, it offers a guiding presence through "excruciating pain, horrendous shock and unquenchable grief." Stillwell's professionalism and years of dedication to reaching out and supporting bereaved parents across the country serves as a firm foundation that carries a message of hope from beginning to end. Fluid in the ways and language of grief, Stillwell writes with expressive honesty, referring to grief feeling like "being crushed in a vise" and having an energy level that seems to be grasping for air. However, her authentic portrayal of the unbearable journey is more than equally matched by her confidence in faith, God's care and what must be done to rebuild new lives. Throughout the pages she uses her unique gifts of caring and warmth to offer hope and peace for the heart. Sharing her ideas to cope and survive, she suggests three solid reasons to get out of bed in morning: "(1)*

*keeping my children from being erased from people's minds, (2) doing everything I could to make them proud of me, and (3) not wasting that special love I had for them..."*

*Readers will find The Death of A Child intimate, warm, conversational, expansive, universal in its appeal, and one of the most thorough books available today for parents who have lost a child. It also serves as an excellent resource for those who minister to the bereaved.*

### **A Christmas 2003 greeting from the Stillwell Retirement Estate:**

*Dear Friends, Didn't I just write this letter? Where did the year go? It was a busy one and an exciting one. Each day, I just say, "Lord, what's next?" I couldn't even dream of all the opportunities, experiences and loving people that continue to fill our lives, making each day richer than the day before.*

*A big event which is so exciting for us is the imminent release of my latest book, The Death of a Child, a 160 page paperback published by ACTA publications, Chicago - a dream come true for me - due to be available Dec. 15th - a real Christmas present for me. ACTA actually asked me to write the book (if they liked my outline and first chapter - which they did). They have three other books: The Death of a Parent, The Death of a Wife and The Death of a Husband which are very popular, but people kept asking for a book about losing a child. So I had no choice about the title - but I was thrilled to share everything I have learned on my 17-year journey. The words just flowed out of my fingers - compliments of the Holy Spirit - as I sat at my computer. This book is not an autobiography but the pages are filled with my Peggy and Denis and lots of wonderful parents I have met along the way and offers much practical, down-to-earth strategies for coping and surviving. I think it will open many doors for grieving families who need to be pointed in the right direction. I was blessed having two wonderful editors. It has been a mind-boggling experience for me. My heart is full to know so many people will be helped through the story of my children and that they will never forget Peggy and Denis. Just like my other books, videos, and speaker stipends, all the royalties will go directly to the Peggy and Denis Scholarship at the University of Dayton. It is such a great way to keep the fund ever growing at the college Peggy loved so much.*

*I had knee surgery in January - a torn meniscus. I didn't even know I had a meniscus, in fact two of them! I was glad to get rid of the cane and the pain which had plagued me through the Christmas holidays last year. It was ambulatory surgery, in and out in a few hours, thank God. I wanted to be in good shape for the diocesan Bereavement Conference I was chairing in March (Rosemary Smith was one of the facilitators at the conference). I had to be able to walk and be on my feet all day for that! The timing went well.*

*Can you believe I'm in my fifth year as Bereavement Coordinator for the Diocese of Rockville Centre - busy planning, organizing, teaching courses and programs for the bereaved and parish bereavement ministers, in addition to answering inquiries and referring the bereaved to helpful support groups? Our March Bereavement Conference welcomed 450 persons who came to attend the 20 outstanding workshops we offered and*

*to enjoy the conference bookstore - of all my favorite books. Books were my lifelines. One sad note - my former boss, Dr. Patrick Del Zoppo, who invited me to be diocesan Bereavement Coordinator, died suddenly in June - a real loss to the national bereavement field.*

*Another added thrill this year came when Andrea Gambill, Editor-in-Chief of a new quarterly magazine for the bereaved, Grief Digest, (and former Editor of Bereavement Magazine), invited me to be a Contributing Editor for the magazine (that means my own two page column in each issue, plus a page of advertising for my books and materials). I was honored to be a writer in the same magazine with all the big names like Doug Manning, Darcie Sims, Alan Wolfelt, and Earl Grollman - the authors that I read for the past 17 years learning how to survive. I had to pinch myself to believe it. My heart is overwhelmed. And Joe just keeps encouraging me - "Go for it!" So now my articles go clear across the United States four times a year and that is very exciting for me.*

*Joe and I are still Chapter Leaders of The Compassionate Friends of Rockville Centre, which just celebrated its 16th birthday. Our group keeps growing and bonding - beautiful families who find friendship and understanding within our monthly meetings at Molloy College. When we founded this group in 1987, little did we know how many years this group would exist. We run 50-60 people at a meeting each month. I Co-facilitate with another group at Molloy College, the Guardian Angel Prenatal Support Group with my dear friend, Martha Weiss, (my adopted daughter), for the parents who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant death - and we ran 20-30 at each meeting. There's a lot of grief out there, but we have been able to offer hope and encouragement to these families. They are lovely young couples. They feel like my children and have added a loving dimension to my life.*

*The person in my office who was in charge of the Divorced and Separated programs left in July and guess who they gave that job to (since there is a freeze on hiring)? Having been part of that group over 20 years ago, I am actually happy to help by getting them organized and planning uplifting and informative programs for them. I got a wonderful committee together and we are planning a diocesan conference in March, offering 23 workshops for the separated and divorced. Actually many of the workshops are ideal for the widowed too. So I am wearing two hats now in my part time 24/7 church jobs. I do most of my work out of my home, which is perfect for me, even though I have a beautiful office all to myself at the Pastoral Center. I like the freedom of coming and going when I please - a senior citizen bonus!*

Elaine's email address is [Elaine Stillwell](#)

**Peggy's and Denis' symbol is an angel.**

**Sarah Elizabeth (1-12-85), daughter of Holland and Constance Corbitt, died as the result of Hodgkin's Lymphoma after a 5 year remission 6-22-02.**

*Sarah was born January 12, 1985, she went home to the Lord on June 22, 2002. She was 17 1/2. Just got her driver's license and tried to drive. The holding of the steering wheel made her chest hurt, that's where the cancer was. She was DX with Hodgkin's Lymphoma at the age of 10. It then went into remission for 5 years, then the horrible beast came back. She fought with strength from the Lord and in the process found the Lord and took Him as her personal Savior. She is Home and I know she is singing with the Angels. I pray The Lord continues to hold you and your family in His arms of comfort.*

*If you have a moment, I'd like to share both of her web sites:*

*<http://www.spreadingsmiles.com/memquilts/sarahcorbitt/sarahcorbitt.htm>*

*<http://www.our.homewithgod.com/angelsec/index.html>*

*I put a short story of her endurance and journey there. She touched so many lives. I am still getting feedback from people close and new on how my daughter inspires them in this and that. Or how they have changed something in their lives due to meeting Sarah. I do believe the good Lord had plans for her to touch our hearts. I never stopped and thought about this until I lost her, yet I didn't lose her, because I know where she is, she is very much alive, just in a different realm, and that our children are loaned to us for how ever long He has planned. It is up to us to take care of the possible and He takes care of the impossible. I just never thought about children that way.*

*My husband's name is Holland. We have been married for 25 years. I was divorcing him back in 2001. The day he received the papers, I had gone to Christian counseling and went home to pray, and in prayer I was told that the healing of my marriage is part of Sarah's healing. I had to ponder about that for some time. I knew what I had to do. It would be HARD because I was about to have to undo everything I had done in the past 6 months, and cancel plans on leaving for Texas. But I did it, and Holland and I bonded back and there was so much love in our home. It was good for Sarah.*

*We had gone out to see Sarah Friday night at 9:30 PM. We listened to her tell us about camp, for about an hour. We kissed her and said a prayer. We asked the Lord to heal her, to give her a complete body, to make her whole again, to give her peace and to take the cancer out of her. Nine hours later she went home. She was on her way to the rest room, and she felt dizzy and fainted. She had an aneurysm and left us. It all took less than 5 min. It had been cloudy that morning and drizzling some. The clouds parted and a beam of sunlight hit her chest and face. Then the clouds closed up. We believe that was when the angels helped her up and took her away. What else could it have been? I can't think of anything else.*

*How are we coping? One day at a time. It is on an uphill path though. I can tell the Lord is with us for strength. The first year was TOUGH. But then you know that. You lost 2 sons. I can't fathom that much pain. How are you? Luther and Rosemary Smith lost 2*

son;, that is beyond my understanding. Please know that I feel pain for you, and I am so sorry for your loss.

*My oldest daughter Morgan is 7 months expecting. For some reason I feel that Sarah knows this little spirit in this fetus of hers.*

*I hope that the "connection" we have as a family has not and will not be broken. I'd like to know that she still knows us and looks forward to us again. There is so much the living do not know.*

*Constance, Sarah's mom 4 ever 17*

**Shelley Beasley (11-18-79), daughter of Peggy Swain, died as the result of an accidental gunshot 9-28-98.**

*Thank you so much for the card remembering Shelley's memorial day. Your thoughtfulness and kindness is very much appreciated. I wish we did not have to know each other in the way that we do. The pain and grief seem to be never ending.*

*On the afternoon of September 28, 1998, Shelley waved good-bye in the driveway and called, "I love you Mom." Minutes later, she was taken from me. On her way to a movie, she stopped at her older brother's house. She was sitting on his couch watching the Cosby show when some other young people arrived. He decided to put away his gun that had been left on the table by the door.*

*As he was walking past the doorway of the room where Shelley was sitting, his gun discharged. In an instant she was "gone" and our lives were changed forever. Shane never got the chance to say, "I'm sorry," and I never got the chance to say, "Good-bye."*

*It still amazes me that we managed to survive the last 5 years. Many, many prayers have gone up for my son and me. I have come to realize that prayer is the only thing that anyone can do to help. The rest is up to us.*

*Thank you for remembering us on each year that passes. It means more than I can say...  
Peggy Swain (Shelley's Mom forever)*

*Please visit Shelley's memorial websites at:  
<http://www.ShelleyBeasley.com>*

**Shelley's symbols are a cat, an artist's pallett and an electric guitar**

**Franky Rigsby (8-10-76, son of Phyllis Rigsby, died from an enlarged heart, 4-18-02**

In an e-mail from Phyllis, she described her first year. Doesn't it sound familiar?:

*It's been a while since I talked with you. Last Christmas was a sincere nightmare for me, but I made it through, ignoring all phone calls, all visitors, no tree, no gifts; just tears. But it seems this year is the worst. I guess the first year, we just walk around in an empty shell, doing only what really needs to be done and the second year, reality strikes us to our knees when we finally realize that our children are gone from our lives. And somewhere in the middle of our terrible heartache, we have to start a whole new life over without them. I haven't begun that journey yet, but I know God will help find that path for me; a place of solitude where I can learn to live again and not spend the rest of my life in the past.*

*Franky was my only child. He died from an enlarged heart at a friend's house where I found him the next afternoon. He loved hummingbirds. He always wondered how they could just stop in mid-air and stay there for so long without falling to the ground, so the hummingbird is his symbol.*

**Jacob Hutcheson (11-10-85), son of Larry & Karen Cantrell, died from an accidental shooting 10-25-02.**

In a Christmas e-mail, Karen shared her thoughts about the difference between this Christmas and last Christmas:

*Thank you for the update. I am pleased to tell you we have our reservations and are already looking forward to attending the conference in June.*

*This is our second holiday season without Jacob in the flesh :) we continue to receive "signs" that tell us he is "okay"...I think that is one thing that has helped us through our journey in grief...of course our many new friends we have made who are also bereaved parents have been a major source of help. The past year has been a real "education" in life to say the least. We recently adopted a stretch of highway in our area in honor of our son and think it will not only help the environment but ourselves in healing as well. Our Jacob is missed every day all day long as I am sure your Jim is too, however I am thankful the intense pain is somewhat softer than this time last year.*

*Thank you so much for your tireless efforts in helping others. You and Rosemary have been a tremendous help to others more than you will ever know. Looking forward to June.*

**Jacob's symbol is a 4-wheeler.**

**Aaron (6-12-78), son of Michael & Glenna Todovich, he chose to leave this world 11-14-03.**

The following article was written by Jeremy Johnson for the *Louisville Eccentric Observer* about Aaron:

**Remembering Aaron David Todovich**

On Nov. 14, Louisville lost one of its most compelling and distinct voices. Aaron Todovich was one of those musicians who just killed you to watch play. Always experimental and stuffed full of a seemingly endless outpouring of songs, he was truly an innovator.

Aaron started his musical career in a band called Chains of My Own, which later morphed into Month of Sundays. The team of Aaron on guitar and singer Jim James (who later would form the band My Morning Jacket) was a truly spicy pairing. Songwriting duties were shared between the two, but Aaron's exotic and distinctive guitar lines always cut through the mix, often turning an average pop song into a vibrant soundscape. In Month of Sundays, he honed his songwriting skills and melodic sense. Still, Aaron realized that he had more to say and eventually he bowed out of the band to front The Helgeson Story.

The Helgeson Story was Aaron's chance to finally share the constant flow of feeling and emotion in his head. His atmospheric guitar lines and brassy tenor provided the ideal backdrop to his abstract and thoughtful lyrics. Whether singing about a life-altering dream or relations at home, it was always easy to connect with what he was saying. His charismatic persona commanded you to hang on his every word and believe everything he had to say.

No matter how close you felt to him at any time, in one second he could turn inward, both in life and on-stage. At practice, working with him could be the most exhilarating musical experience — or the most maddening. There were frenzied moments where it felt like together we could convey everything we'd ever hoped to express, and moments where he would shut himself off with us waiting for him to sort out whatever was going on in his head. In the end, however, the music was always a positive, life-affirming entity that embraced all of the strange, remarkable, distressed and hilarious aspects of his character.

The important thing to never forget about Aaron is that, within all the gravity of his music and persona, was a strange joy and sense of astonishment about all of life's gifts. Aaron was funny. His unusual sense of humor always lent a smile. If you knew Aaron, he had a nickname for you and you one for him. If you were friends he always shared an inside joke with you. It was this ability to treat all people as crucial individuals that left you feeling like you meant something. A conversation with Aaron could revitalize your feelings about yourself in a time of self-doubt.

Aaron was never as generous with himself as he was with others, and this was true to the end of his days. The insecurities and impossible standards to which he held himself always haunted him, and after The Helgeson Story, they kept him from sharing some of the most vital and innovative music he ever wrote with a wider audience. His last few performances were achingly beautiful, raw and inspiring, but only a lucky few were able to witness.

As his inner turmoil grew, he performed less and less, and he chose to leave this world on Nov. 14, 2003.

Most importantly, Aaron was human. He was blessed with an amazing voice and the ability to write spectacular music, but even he had his bad nights on stage. What made him miraculous was that even on an off night, whether it was vocal difficulties or guitar problems, he always managed to convey everything he wanted to say, and you could see, hear and feel that he meant and believed in every word he sang and every note he played.

It was impossible to see him perform without being affected emotionally. His music brims with humanity.

You may contact the writer at <http://www.jeremy@yourblackstar.com>

**Aaron was a very gifted musician, he played the saxophone, piano and especially the guitar and had a beautiful voice.**

**Carrie Ann (3-31-84) and Aaron (8-26-91), son and daughter of Joe and Jackie Beams, died in an automobile accident 2-26-02.**

Jackie tells us about Carrie and Aaron:

*Carrie and Aaron left this world and went home Febuary 26, 2002. They where on their way to school. Carrie was a SR. in High School, she had alot to give in this life she going to be a RN. She worked at a nursing home she had compassion for the elderly. I told her to do that kind of work because she cared so much, and she did. She was in FFA for 4 years. She won alot of awards.*

*But the biggest award she got was when she got saved at the age of 12. She loved her brother even if they did fight some but what sisters and brothers do. Carrie was wittnessing at school. She did care for people even if some did make her mad.*

*Aaron was in the fourth grade. He was getting ready to go to 4-H camp. I was worried about how he would do there. He was getting ready to do a 4- H project, but never got finished. He loved to play ball. Farming was his thing too. He had to go where ever his Daddy went. He was good at hunting. What boys aren't that live in the country? I always called him my teddy bear. Boy do I miss those hugs! He gave himself at school and*

*shared his supplies when a child needed some. We even went out and bought some extra for him to give to another child.*

*I want to share something with you . This morning as I was getting ready, I went to Aaron's room to get a shirt. I stopped and looked at Aaron's clothes. Aaron has this 2 foot Power Ranger setting on his little scooter. It started to talk and did it twice. It was Aaron coming to pay a visit. I thank God for those little visits; it helps. And there was an angel in the sky this morning from the east. That was Carrie. There were blue rays of light from the openings.*

*please visit our web sight:*

[http://friendslove.tripod.com/carrie\\_aaron.html](http://friendslove.tripod.com/carrie_aaron.html)

**Carrie's symbols are frogs, cats, an angel, a rose and a nurse. Aaron's symbols are a tractor, a teddy bear, hunting, a baseball, an angel and a rose**

**Patty Gregory's son, Justin Dickson (1-23-82), was killed in an auto accident, 4-7-00.**

I received the following email from Patty:

*I lost my son, Justin Michael Dickson, April 7, 2000 in a car accident. Just like Jim, Justin was my only child. Justin was my life. Justin was my best friend....When I went to the store I only bought food that Justin liked. My whole world was totally wrapped around my Justin, as I imagine you and Jim. I just wanted to take the time out this holiday season to say "THANK YOU." Sometimes a letter from you and a little gift was all that kept me holding my head up. It is so wonderful to know you are kind enough to remember all of our children....I feel like I knew Jim. I imagined him to be a lot like my Justin. Very special, even from birth. Something was there to tell us these two very special young men, but weren't meant to be here long...It is amazing how one life can touch so many....I love you, Jim, and your husband for giving me the hope and courage to keep on keeping on. Have a very blessed holiday season. See you this summer June 4th &5th.*

*Love Patty Gregory*

**Justin's symbol is a car.**

**Rachel (10-4-76), the daughter of Debra McCalla, was killed in an automobile accident, 4-19-00.**

Debbie sent this e-mail:

*I would like to share with you what I made last night. Upon my daughter Rachel's students when they graduate high school. I am going to give them this award I made along with \$100.00 to each of her students when they graduate high school. If I die before they graduate I have in my will for my sister to do it for me.*

(It is a Certificate of Recognition and a picture of Rachel's Fourth Grade class at Gallatin County Schools. It will have each student's name on it and be signed by Debbie with Rachel's website printed under the signature. I'm sure these children will never forget Rachel.)

*When I see a bird I think of Rachel. I have always felt the need to set your child free to be themselves. It was hard for Rachel & me to be ourselves with her dad. He always wanted us to be what he wanted instead of who we really are. A beautiful red bird or a dove would be our symbol. There is a scholarship fund that Rachel's friend Bev made in memroy of Rachel.*

Rachel's website is:

<http://www.geocities.com/rachelmccalla/>

**Alice Isabell's son, Randy Hecox (1-7-69), completed suicide, 7-23-99.**

Alice has remembered Randy in such a wonderful way. She had Randy's name engraved on the Wall Of Honor where they used to live in Missouri, because he had been in Desert Storm. She said:

*It makes me know how real he was and that he did live and people will see that he did. I also have a clean up a section of the road four times a year, and I have a sign up in memory of Randy. I donate books to the library. We have a teddy bear give-away for the MET and Fire Deptment here in town as well, so I do keep myself busy as I must.*

Randy's website is:

<http://members.tripod.com/friendslove/randy2.html>

**Randy's symbols are a rainbow, a remote control car, a unicorn, and drums.**

**Dusty Abner (11-23-81), son of Pat, was killed by a train 3-21-02.**

In a letter from Pat, she shares how she her life has changed since Dusty's death:

*I was glad to get your card remembering my son, Dusty. He died 21 months ago. I am doing much better this winter than last year.*

*The greatest gift my son left me was a grandson. He will be 17 months old December 10; Dusty Wayne, Jr., named after his dad lives in Ohio, about 50 miles away from me. I see him about every 2 months. He looks just like his dad, except his hair is lighter. His dad will live on through me and I'll tell Dusty about his dad.*

*I took over as chapter leader of The Compassionate Friends (in Bowling Green) a few months ago. Bowling Green just lost another child, age 20, December 5th in a MVA. This same young man almost died 3 years before in a fireman's training accident which another young kid did die 3 years ago. Bowling Green has had a lot of children to die in the last 2 years.*

*I have tried so had to turn my son's tragedy into something good. I try to educate others about a railroad track and train is no place to play. (Dusty was going to show a friend how he could hop a train, but didn't see a train coming on the track next to it and was killed by the second train).*

*I am very lucky to have a daughter, who has given me 2 grandchildren. Cody is 7 and Brooke is 5.*

**Dusty's symbol is a Camaro.**

**Andrew (12-10-96), son of Doris Hooker, died 1-9-01.**

Doris sent this poem:

*Jesus Has a Rocking Chair  
(Song played at Andrew's funeral)  
Many hopeful moms and dads  
Try to have a child of their own  
Some will never get the chance  
Others do and see them grown  
And there are those who are expecting  
That precious baby soon  
But then it's gone before it ever leaves  
The safety of it's mamma's womb*

*Jesus has a rocking chair  
And He holds that precious baby  
With oh, such tender care  
He takes the place of mom and dad  
He's the greatest parent a child could have*

*Don't worry about the children there  
Jesus has a rocking chair*

*There are those who have a boy or girl  
A lovely gift of God  
But then sickness or a tragedy  
Takes them from their parent's arms  
Mammas wish for days gone by  
Daddies long for that lost child  
But the children are not lost  
When you know where they are*

*She was eighteen and unmarried  
Expecting her little one  
But in her time of confusion  
She took the life of her son  
Since then Jesus forgave her  
And took all her shame away  
Still she cries missing her baby  
But she hears the angels say*

*Jesus has a rocking chair  
And He holds that precious baby  
With oh, such tender care  
He takes the place of mom and dad  
He's the greatest parent a child could have  
Don't worry about the children there  
Jesus has a rocking chair*

*The night before he passed, He had the flu. Andrew asked me to write on his hand (like his grandpa always did). On one hand I drew a Heart and told him this means Mommy will ALWAYS love you I drew a cross on the other hand and said this means Jesus will always take care of you. He died the next day with the Cross and Heart still on his hands... ( I asked for them never be removed)*

Please visit Andrew's website: <http://home.insightbb.com/~cdmaa/>

**Andrew's symbol has to be a cross with a heart in the middle.**

**George and Ronnie Pazolt's son, Gary (9-29-81), completed suicide 12-14-97.**

Ronnie has written a book, [A Mother's Lament: Understanding the Pain of Suicide](#), to help herself and others understand suicide. On the sixth anniversary of his death, the family sent this poem:

### **Christmas From Heaven**

Six years ago was when I left  
And came to my heavenly home,  
But I am still close beside you  
So please continue to be strong.

You don't have to be perfect  
All of the time,  
God forgives you the slip  
If you continue the climb.

Keep trying each moment  
To stay in God's grace,  
Sending my love to all  
From this heavenly place.

Christmas Blessings

Gary From Heaven (And the Pazolts)

For more information about Ronnie's book, you may contact her:

<http://ourangel97@aol.com>

**Gary's symbols are Spawn Comic Books and angels.**

Bob Browning is one of my favorite pastors and I wanted to share one of his recent sermons with you:

*"Ever Thought About Changing Your Name?"*

*Ruth 1:3-5, 8-9a, 16-22; 4:13-15*

*Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor*

*Smoke Rise Baptist Church*

*Stone Mountain, Georgia*

*September 28, 2003*

*Have you ever thought about changing your name? Perhaps as a child you may have scribbled a few options on a piece of paper, but most adults don't give it much thought.*

*During biblical times, though, it was not that uncommon.*

*Do you remember the time Jesus looked at Simon and said, "I tell you that you are Peter*

*and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it" Matthew 16:18. What was Paul's name prior to his conversion? It was Saul. Traumatic experiences led to name changes in scripture and Naomi was another good example of that happening.*

*After Naomi returned to her home in Bethlehem from a ten year absence due to a drought, she told her welcoming neighbors not to call her Naomi, which meant "sweet" but Mara, which meant "bitter." Why would she make this request? What happened to her while she was away from home in Moab?*

*Naomi lost some things very dear to her, her husband, two sons and the security that accompanied them. These family members died leaving her lonely and helpless. She had no way to provide for herself and her two daughters-in-law. Her only hope of survival was to return home and reconnect with family in Bethlehem.*

*Before leaving Moab, she encouraged both daughters-in-law to return to their families where they would be taken care of, too. Orpah accepted her offer, ever so reluctantly. Ruth refused to leave Naomi. Instead, she uttered some of the most endearing words of love and affection that had ever been heard, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me" Ruth 1:16-17.*

*So, Naomi returned to Bethlehem with shattered dreams, a broken heart and a new name. "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty" Ruth 1:20-21.*

*Empty. We don't like that word, do we? There is nothing pleasant about it. I struggle to think of a time when it is positive.*

*An empty gas tank. An empty bank account. An empty cupboard. An empty stomach. An empty plate. An empty house. An empty pocket. An empty mind. An empty feeling. They're all bad. They all make us wince.*

*Naomi left Bethlehem full and returned empty. How sad.*

*When was the last time you felt like this? After the loss of your mate? After your bankruptcy? After your divorce? After your last CAT scan? After your heart attack? After your last child went away to school? After you lost your job? After your parents died? This was the last time I felt that way. After my mother died, I felt so empty. There was just something uncomfortable about having neither parent in this world with me any longer. I did not want to decorate for the holidays, celebrate birthdays or get excited over snowfalls. I felt empty. Hollow. I had nothing to give or at least no desire to offer it. I wonder if this is how Naomi felt? Must have been. You don't change your name from Sweet to Bitter without a lot of thought.*

*From time to time we can all feel empty because life is full of surprises and we can lose some very precious things. I appreciated Craig Barnes' article in The Christian Century, "Homestretch." It is an article about searching for God after 9/11.*

*"In reality, we who trudge into church on Sunday mornings have always been walking on shaky ground. Our jobs, relationships and health are never as secure as we think and eventually we realize it is only a matter of time before we lose all these things."*

*Do you think Naomi intended her name change to be permanent? I do. I think she thought all her good days were behind her. She was ready to change the name on the mailbox and*

*her driver's license. It was official and permanent.*

*Can you identify with her? Have you ever felt like you could never, ever possibly laugh again? Be happy again? Love again? Dance again? Hold hands again? Dream again? Get up excited again? Decorate for the holidays? Truth be known, we have all felt this way. That's how hard shattered dreams affect our emotions. That's what feeling empty does to us.*

*So, what do you do? What did Naomi/Mara do? She went home to family and friends. She found a "soft place to fall" and she waited patiently for God to help her, even though I think she was pretty skeptical about whether He would or not.*

*Out of his emptiness, John Claypool cried, "Lord, if there is to be anymore, it is up to you." He prayed this prayer after he lost his nine-year-old daughter to leukemia and his wife and job to a divorce. There are times when all we have to offer God is our emptiness. He understands. He will never leave us empty, though. He didn't Naomi/Mara. Instead, he filled her empty arms up again with a baby, Ruth's baby. For you see, God brought Ruth and a wealthy man by the name of Boaz together. They married and Ruth bore him a son, which was like a grandson to Naomi. Now listen to the women that came to see Naomi and celebrate with her.*

*"Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth" Ruth 4:13-15.*

*By the way, do you know who Naomi's grandson was? He was Obed, the father of Jesse, and the father of David, the greatest King of Israel. Seems there was another baby born years later that was of the "house and lineage of David." His name was Jesus. Obed was his ancient ancestor. So was Naomi.*

*I wonder if Mara changed the name on her mailbox back to Naomi? I bet she did. I wonder what Naomi would say to us today if we were thinking about changing our name from Sweet to Bitter? I think she would tell us to be patient. Put our faith in God. Give Him time to work in our lives and those around us. And hold off on going to the Division of Motor Vehicles to get a new license. By the time you get through the line, anyway, God will have already started working on your new life.*

Jim and Jean Richardson whose son, Joe (11-13-51) died from Melanoma 8-4-00, and their daughter, Jan, (10-6-53) died from Leukemia, 6-9-99 sent me this information about chocolate.

### **HOLIDAY CHOCOLATE RULES**

- 1. If you have melted chocolate on your hands, you're not eating fast enough.**
- 2. Chocolate covered raisins, cherries, orange slices, and strawberries all qualify as fruit. Eat as many as you want.**
- 3. Eat a chocolate bar before each meal, and it will take the edge off your appetite.**
- 4. If you can't figure out how to get chocolates into the house without the kids noticing, eat them in the parking lot.**
- 5. If calories are an issue, store your chocolate on top of the fridge. Calories are afraid of heights, and they will jump out.**

6. Put "Eat chocolate" at the top of your list of things to do today. That way, at least you'll get one thing done.

**Joe's symbol is a fishing lure, and Jan's is a Celtic cross.**

**Margaret Downing Hale's only child, Larry Downing (2-25-76), completed suicide 3-11-95.**

Margaret sent this Christmas story, and I hope it will give you a smile:

### **Chocolate Christmas**

Twas the night before Christmas and all round my hips  
Were Fannie May candies that sneaked past my lips.  
Fudge brownies were stored in the freezer with care  
In hopes that my thighs would forget they were there.

While Mama in her girdle and I in chinstraps  
Had just settled down to sugar-borne naps.  
When out in the pantry there arose such a clatter  
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the kitchen I flew like a flash,  
Tore open the icebox then threw up the sash.  
The marshmallow-look of the new-fallen snow  
Sent thoughts of a binge to my body below.

When what to my wandering eyes should appear:  
A marzipan Santa with eight chocolate reindeer!  
That huge chunk of candy so luscious and slick  
I knew in a second that I'd wind up sick.

The sweet-coated Santa, those sugared reindeer  
I closed my eyes tightly but still I could hear;  
On Pritzker, on Stillman, on weak one, on TOPS  
A Weight Watcher dropout from sugar detox.

From the top of the scales to the top of the hall  
Now dash away pounds now dash away all.  
Dressed up in Lane Bryant from my head to nightdress  
My clothes were all bulging from too much excess.

My droll little mouth and my round little belly,  
They shook when I laughed like a bowl full of jelly.

I spoke not a word but went straight to my work  
Ate all of the candy then turned with a jerk.

And laying a finger beside my heartburn  
Gave a quick nod toward the bedroom I turned.  
I eased into bed, to the heavens I cry--  
If temptation's removed I'll get thin by and by.

And I mumbled again as I turned for the night  
In the morning I'll starve... 'til I take that first bite!

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

**Clyde Carr (8-9-82), son of Donna Carr Smith, died from Leukemia 6-27-93.**

Donna sent this e-mail request:

*I really have enjoyed going through this website. I am anxious to get back in contact with the friends that I made along the way since Clyde's death. I don't have a website, but I would like to allow my email address to be used to, once again, be in contact with fellow travelers.*

Donna's email address is: [Ddonnasmith1@aol.com](mailto:Ddonnasmith1@aol.com)

**Clyde's symbol is a Teddy bear.**

**If you are a bereaved parent and/or would like more information about Lamentations, please e-mail me:**

[dinah@cumberlandcollege.edu](mailto:dinah@cumberlandcollege.edu)