

LAMENTATIONS

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There Is No Way Out, Only A Way Forward.

Michael Hollings

"Is there no relief from this wound?" We wonder. "Is there nowhere I can go to turn aside, to get away?"

What we would like to do, often, is to go back. Go back before the accident. Go back before the illness.

But that world no longer exists. Our grief experience is a watershed and it has cut us off forever from that world which now seems so simple and almost idyllic (though we know better) - the life we knew with our loved one, the life Before This Happened.

Still we keep trying, remembering, wishing until the thought pattern is established in our brain: this is your world now; this is what your life is like.

Convinced, bit by bit, we begin to go forward - into a new sense of time and relationships, including a new relationship with the one who has died, and a new relationship with ourselves.

Our other available choice is to stand still, and we may try it for a while. But we know we will turn to stone if we let that happen. No, we must keep moving, and in the only direction that is open to us - forward. Forward into new land, into unknown adventure, unknown territory.

I stand at the threshold of new life. What will I do? I can stand still. Or I can go forward. Those are my choice.

Grief Grafts

Fathers Day

The third Sunday in June is the day that's traditionally set aside to honor our fathers. I used to associate the Fathers Day celebrations with family gatherings, backyard cookouts, and tacky gifts. I view Fathers Day differently now.

Eight years ago my husband was inducted into a special group of fathers. He's in the company of men from all walks of life, some wealthy and famous, others poor and unknown. It's a designation he would have given his life to avoid if it had been possible, as would my own father who is among this same group of men. These are the dads who have outlived one of their children.

If you pass one of these men on the street, you won't be able to single them out. They don't look or walk or talk any differently than others. But if you were to pause a moment and look a little closer, you

might recognize what my daughter has identified as “The Look.” If you look into their souls, you’ll see the wound that will always be there. Look into their eyes and you’ll see darkness where once there was a proud twinkle. If you catch them unaware, you might see a spasm of pain tightening their faces in unguarded moments. You’re less likely to see on their faces the tears that fall so freely from the hearts of their wives, parents, or other children. For these men have often been called upon to summon unknown reserves of strength in the face of their most gruesome nightmare, to hold together and console other family members.

They aren’t as likely to share their grief with you as their wives might be. They’ll often hide their pain, for most men are reluctant to cry in public, but their sorrow walks silently along with them nevertheless. It’s been nearly half a century since the little boy who was my brother lived and died, yet my father’s eyes still cloud up and there’s a tell-tale catch in his voice when Kevin’s name is mentioned.

A several years ago I had the privilege of meeting Tommy Lasorda, the former manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers. Mr. Lasorda also has “The Look.” He too has buried a son, and he shared this story with me. Once when he was being interviewed, the topic of his son’s death came up, and Mr. Lasorda told me that this is what he said to the interviewer: “If I could have had a conversation with God before my son’s birth and God had said to me, ‘I’ll give you a son for 32 years, and he’ll brighten your days, but you can only have him for that long, and then you’ll live with the pain of his death for the rest of your life. Do you want this child?’” He then put his arm around my shoulder and said in that gruff East Coast voice of his: “I’d have said ‘Give me the 32 years.’” With that he gave me a hug and said, “You thank God for the gift of those eighteen years.”

To all the dads whose Father’s Day celebrations will be forever incomplete, may the advice of Mr. Lasorda give you comfort. Whether you enjoyed the gift of your child’s presence for an hour or for many decades, it will not have been long enough. But the love that you shared will endure and bless you until your children one day welcome you Home.

Ann Dawson, author of **A Season of Grief: A Comforting Companion For Difficult Days.**

Ann wrote this book after the death of her son, Andy. This book is a remarkable collection of quotations, personal reflections, and prayers intended for those who find themselves in their own “season of grief.”

You can contact Ann at anndwsn@aol.com

Barbara Egenes’ daughter, Linda (10-10-54), died of Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, 12-22-99.

Barbara shared another great loss in her life:

Thank you so much for sharing your letter from a fellow classmate of Young Jim’s. I always marvel at the surprises that God has for us. They come from the most unexpected places and people, but what heart-felt gifts they are.

Unfortunately I lost my beloved husband, Stan, on December 13, 2004. He and our beloved daughter, Linda, share a gravesite.

Please keep Barbara in your prayers.

Linda's symbol is dragonfly.

Rosemary Hartsig's son, John (10-28-61), drowned, 5-3-99.

Rosemary shared her Mother's Day experience:

I wanted to write and thank you for all the cards you have sent me every year on John's anniversary dates, 10-28-61 to 5-3-99. I have enjoyed going to the web-site you have in your Jim's memory, LAMENTATIONS. You have put so much of your time, love and energy into all of this, and I appreciate it so very much.

I bought a brick in John's name and his symbol is Roses. I have such a great devotion to our saint, St. Therese, The Little Flower, and I have received so many signs since John's death. I also bought Rosemary Smith's book the minute it came out. She sounds like such a lovely lady. (And she is)

I also wanted to write a little something about Mother's Day. I enjoyed reading others' suggestions and what they did on Mother's Day. I can really relate to all of them. Mother's Day is very painful for me also and in fact, on Mother's Day of 1999, we were conducting a ground search that afternoon for Johnny as he had been missing for awhile, and a few days later we found him drowned in a drainage ditch on hospital grounds.

Mother's Day this year was the 6th year. I went up north to visit my long-time girlfriend of 50 years. She, too, lost an adult son before I did, in a tragic, horrible accident, her first born, like John, the love-of-her life. We have been visiting since college years and we spent the day just being quiet, cooking, reading, relaxing and visiting, lighting a candle in our boys' memory. I can relate to others, who don't remember our children, especially in our immediate family and believe me, it hurts when they are never mentioned or a card sent to say they are thinking of me. It is like they have forgotten my son or that he ever existed. So I continue to pray for strength as we all go on with our lives, however, the pain doesn't get any better for me anyway...it just goes deeper and becomes manageable.

Again, I thank you so much for all the time and love you have put into this web-site. What a tremendous effort.

*Big Hugs and with Love,
Rosemary*

John's symbol is roses.

Debbie Baker's daughter, Tammy Smith (3-29-81), was murdered, 1-30-03.

Debbie has requested that you sign this petition if you agree. I hope you will.

The only way we can make changes is to make ourselves heard, PLEASE take a few minutes to look at this petition and consider signing it and sending it to others....

<http://www.petitiononline.com/4dawson/>

Thanks so much.... Debbie, Angel Tammy's Mom

My petition number is 719.....

Tammy's symbols are a rose and a dolphin.

Vince and Judy Hoffman's son, Tony (9-16-81), drowned, 5-26-00.

Judy wrote the following:

First I would very much like to thank you for the lovely note that you sent to us on the anniversary of Tony's death. I am sure you have heard this before, but it is so important for all of us as parents that our children are not forgotten. I really look forward to the mail from you. It was also very special when you said that the picture of Tony reminds you of Matt Damon. I have had other people tell me the same thing. When he was younger it was the boy who played Doogie Houser.

Thanks again for your loving support. You are a very dedicated and loving person.

Judy Hoffman

Tony's symbol is a white snow owl.

Sherron Twitchell's son, Rick Stepp (6-2-62), died in an auto accident, 6-7-92.

Sherron shared her loss:

Good morning, dear friend – Your card came right on schedule again this year, the only

person reaching out to me, remembering this day with me. As you asked, I'm sharing with you some of my favorite photos – Christmas 1963 (18 months old), school photo 1972 (10 years old), me and my beautiful son, October 1986 (44 and 24). I look at those pictures and I can recall clearly exactly what he was like in those moments, what life was like for us as a family. I'm 63 now, and Rick would have turned 43 five days ago. I wonder what he would look like today. Still slender? Worrying about a receding hairline? I think of the daughter-in-law I wish I had. And his children. Hearing their laughter. Seeing them grow and develop. Being their Nana. I'd love to hear Rick bragging or even grouching about his car, his job, his health, the lawnmower, vacation plans, the kids' activities. All that never happened and never will be. I miss it all. A part of me is gone and yet the memory lives in a secret place in my soul. My days are filled with busy-ness – meaningless work, chores, projects, friends, strangers, my sweet husband, my cats. So little time. Too much to do. There is an empty place inside me, created when my son, and the hope and promise of my life with him, left this earthly plane. Some days, I just don't care about anything.

Intellectually, I know I make my own reality. I am responsible for my happiness, my success, my mental and physical health. I acknowledge all I have and for which I am grateful. I offer up prayers of thanks every day. I see ribbons of rainbow in the clouds or sprinkled around the room from a prismatic crystal hanging in the window and I smile to myself and say Rick's name aloud. I tell him how much I love and miss him. I thank him for watching over me. I say that I would not have missed him for all the world.

I believe you know just how I feel because of your loss of your beautiful son. And so, I send you a big hug and my heart-felt thanks for your caring. I wish you well. I wish you all the best.

Young Jim will never be forgotten. Your service honors his memory. Bless you, dear lady.

Sherron,

DON'T TELL ME

Sherron Westerfield Twitchell

Tell me about your diet, new recipes, your headaches.

Tell me about your computer problems, your sick cat.

Tell me about your new dress with shoes to match.

But don't tell me about your grandchildren.

Tell me what your preacher said on Sunday.

Fill me in on your vacation plans.

Show me photos of your flower bed,

But enough already about your grandchildren.

I've seen their photos a million times.

I've heard they excel in all they do.

I sit quietly nodding and smiling

As you describe their antics in great detail.
You don't realize that every adventure, every talent,
Every snapshot of your darlings
Reminds me that I have no grandbabies to dote on and
Twists the knife that is forever lodged in my heart.
You have forgotten that my son is dead
And with his death the promise of grandchildren
Vanished from my future
Leaving a deep, dark emptiness nothing else can fill.

I see beautiful babies everywhere I go, but not one belongs to me.

I watch curly-headed girls dancing and laughing and wish one would run into my waiting arms.
I'd dearly love to bake cookies for a freckle-faced little boy and read old familiar stories to
him.

I wish my refrigerator was covered with crayon drawings.

So, dear friend, forgive me if I change the subject.
Let's talk about the books we are reading, or menopause,
Or the men in our lives, or the movies we want to see.

I treasure your friendship and our time together.
Just don't tell me any more about your grandchildren.

6.12.05

Rick's symbols are a rainbow and Pink Panther.

Meton and Joan Dotson's son, Steven (10-20-69), died from a heart attack, 6-7-91.

Joan reminds us all how important that we remember each other's children.

Dinah,

I just wanted to thank you for keeping in touch with me. You and my sister are the only ones that remembered Steven's death date. It means so much to me. It has been 14 years, but yet it seems like yesterday that he went to heaven. The yellow Camero sticker is so neat, thanks again. I love the poem by Henry Scott Holland, that is a precious way to describe death. You have been so faithful to keep in touch, our hearts are entwined because of our precious sons that have gone on before us and they are waiting on us.

*Love in Christ,
Joan Dotson*

Marge Semons' son, Robert, III (2-9-67), was murdered, 7-29-00.

Dinah,

Your Jim will always be in my heart and when I think of Robert I do think of you and your Jim. One of Robert's classmates called me over the weekend--she wanted his phone number--well I sat there and froze when I heard the voice message--I did call her and suggested we go for coffee -so I can tell her about Robert's death and told her she will need a hug--with the help of Rosemary's book and your prayer and your friendship of mothers and fathers who have lost children I am able to reach out to others when I tell them and see their pain and care about them--so this tells me I am doing better----we will never get over this—never, never but I see now I can help others and care about their pain. But in the beginning I had so much pain I couldn't reach out to others--I need to give her lots of hugs. She was his dear friend in high school and I know she is in terrible pain. Thank you, Dinah, in reaching out to me and helping me thru this terrible pain and now into helping others and feeling their pain with mine--you are an angel God has sent.

Marge

Robert's symbol is a butterfly.

Steve & Irene Bacher's son, Brandon (9-14-88), died from a congenital heart defect, 3-24-04.

Steve sent the following information about how he set up a website for Brandon.

Here is the web site that anyone can use for setting up a memorial for a loved one. It is free for 2 weeks then they ask for a \$55 one-time payment to keep the site on-line forever. They also will donate 10% of the fee to a charity of your choice from the list they supply.

<http://www.memory-of.com>

This is the one I set up for Brandon:

<http://brandon-bacher.memory-of.com/about.aspx>

Again, thank you for all you have done. It was a fantastic weekend.

Sincerely,
Steve Bacher

Phones: 937-298-9324 (H), 937-445-4394 (W)

Email: Steve@Bacherhome.com (H), Steve.Bacher@Daytonrcs.com (W)

Irene's: Irene@Bacherhome.com

Brandon's symbols are a ladybug and a rose.

Jan Ulrich's son, Nathan Eisert (5-27-82), completed suicide, 6-8-02.

Jan was on the panel at the Conference and also facilitated a workshop about suicide. She wrote:

Dinah - thank you for all that you have done. It is so evident that you and the conference have impacted so many people's lives. I suspect that unknowingly you have saved lives over the past 14 years. My prayers are with you as you enter this new stage in your own life.

Peace,

Jan Ulrich momma of Nathan Eisert 5/27/82-6/8/02

"Tell Them Momma, A Life's Too Much To Lose"

www.tellthemmomma.com

Wille and Ella Prater's daughter, Merri Kathryn (6-4-78), died as a result of an auto accident, 4-3-96.

Ella expressed Merri Kathryn's influence on her life:

Greetings from this mother's heart to yours. Words are never adequate to express the multitude of emotions experienced when I invoke emotional replay of those earliest days after Merri Kathryn's death, but a large part of the memory of my most intense grief is wrapped in the comfort and encouragement I received from you and Rosemary. I can never offer sufficient thanksgiving for your ministry of sharing with all of us the strength and promise that life can continue--will continue--after the death of a child. The two of you have personally traveled the road of sorrow that leads to the burial of a child; you have willingly traveled that same road countless times in all of your efforts to ease the suffering of other parents. Your names, your voices--separate and jointly--have been such positive forces in

my journey with grief. I thank you for allowing your broken hearts to be used as instruments of solace and healing.

My heart will be filled with prayers for you and all who gather at this final J.I.M.'S Conference. It is Merri Kathryn's birthday, and it is a good day! I will join with many others in witnessing the marriage of one of her dear friends. Later, the KCC Class of 2005 will have their commencement service. The graduating class has told me they are forever linked with Merri Kathryn through her birthday, so I assume that means we will attend yet another graduation ceremony! Nine years after her death, my daughter still places demands on me!! Motherhood cuts through all divides. The child dies; the love lives forever.

Merri Kathryn's symbol is a Merri Angel.

Becky Frank's daughter, Krissy (10-28-79) died in an auto accident 6-06-97.

Becky sent a picture of Krissy and wrote:

Once again my heart was warmed when I received your card remembering Krissy's heaven day. You don't realize it, but your cards have meant so very much to me. You are truly an angel sent to so many.

Yes, it was June 6, 1997, that forever changed my life – the day the world lost a beautiful, caring, loving 17-year-old girl. How I wish the entire world had known her.

I am including a picture of Krissy, and I am thrilled that you asked for it! I wish all of God's blessings for you, you are truly doing His will.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Krissy's symbols are an angel, butterfly, and a penny.

Barbara Kinne's son, Joe Frank Banks (10-30-77), completed suicide, 7-17-01.

They call it an "anniversary." I cannot. This is my day of remembrance.

Four years ago on a sunny July 17, Adam, my youngest son, threw his fishing poles into the back of his truck. He would finish his work in the hay field and then head to the pond and fish till dark. "Come go with me." He said to his brother Joe Frank. "Nah, you go ahead. I got things to do. It's my day off." Frank jokingly replied to Adam.

As Adam loaded hay bales onto the wagon, Joe Frank loaded one single shell into his brother's gun. All alone in our home, he went into his room and sat down on his bed. He placed the shotgun against his chest and ended our lives.

Today, again, part of me will die. I will cradle his work boots and kiss the tear streaked picture of him. I will wail and moan as I fall to the floor like a wounded animal, mourning for my child. I call out his name just to hear the sound of it. "Don't you know I love you?" I will scream out to him. "Why didn't you know that I needed you?" I ask into the air. I do not know why he chose to end his life. A great burden of guilt will always linger over me. What didn't I do? What could I have done? Why didn't he know that he meant everything to me? Did I let him slip away, could I have prevented this? I will walk in the valley of the shadow of death all the rest of my days.

I pray for peace, for comfort, and strength. I have found hope, been blessed with joy. I have been given what some shall never find. I know real love. Through horrific loss, I have gained knowledge and compassion. I have been left his unused years. I have to make them count.

"Mom, when I grow up, I want to be a hero." He told me as a child. I couldn't save him, but it is possible that his death will direct me to save someone else's son or daughter. Maybe he will be that hero that he hoped to someday be.

Today, for me and for Joe Frank, will you take the time to let someone know you care. Smile at someone who is sad. Comfort those that hurt. Encourage those who think they are failing. Talk to the lonely. Listen to the one that thinks they are unimportant. A tender touch can be felt all the way to the heart.

"Let not my loss be in vain."

*As you send your e-mails to and fro
Would you forward this in memory of my Joe.*

Joe's symbol is "I love you" in sign language.

Leann Butler's son, Scott (3-10-78), died from AT, 7-16-04.

Dinah - I have been putting off writing to you to tell you what being at the conference in June meant to me. It's difficult to express myself, so bear with me. First let me say thank you. Thank you for giving so much to so many people. Thank you for the time you spent, the memories you shared and the encouragement you gave. Secondly, I pray for guidance in

doing something worthwhile in my life for my son such as you have done. At this point, I don't know what, but maybe it will come to me. I have worked in conjunction with Kentucky Physical Therapy to set up a scholarship fund in Scott's memory and will continue to help raise funds for that. Thirdly, thank you for letting me know, through meeting and talking with others, that I am not by myself. I talked to parents who lost children 10-12 years back (at this point, I can't even see beyond a day). Being with those people and seeing them live on in spite of their heartache and grief, made me realize that I am not the only one - I am not crazy in thinking that I want to die and that my life is meaningless, I am not crazy in losing my faith in God, I am not crazy because I forget where I am sometimes. I just have to take each day and go with it. In other words, being a part of the conference, being a part of a group of people who were kind, understanding and compassionate was inspiring and uplifting. I came away different somehow and I appreciate that so much. My attitude is getting a little better, however, the longing and the loneliness needs work. I saw people who were angry, sad, lonely, in denial, much as I am so I know that I'm not the only one. Anyway, thank you from the bottom of my heart - thank you for providing the opportunity to speak to others about my wonderful son and remember him at such a special time. Thank you for the time shared and the memories made. Most of all, thank you for the card you sent me remembering Scott on July 16th.

Scott's symbol is an eagle.

Connie Spencer's daughter, Nicole (1-27-84), died 2-29-04.

Nicole's family would like for you to visit her website:

<http://myangelnicoleky.tripod.com>

**Chuck & Jan Lehman's son, Bryan (4-18-75), died from a motorcycle accident,
7-25-95.**

Jan's comments from attending J.I.M.'s Conference:

Thank you so much for the wonderful J.I.M.'s Conference, 2005. Thank you for providing a safe haven to come together sharing my son, Bryan, while getting to know other families and their loved ones-gone too soon.

Best wishes to you and Jim as you travel and spread the word about Cumberland College (University of the Cumberland). It is a lovely area and an amazing school.

I look forward to seeing you when the documentary is completed.

Bryan's symbols are an eagle and a butterfly.

Randy & Jennifer Janssen's son, Kyle (6-21-85), died in an auto accident, 2-24-03.

Jennifer traveled from Oregon to attend J.I.M.'s Conference. These were her comments:

Dinah,

What a joy it was to meet you and share in J.I.M.'s Conference. The love and compassion you show for others is so amazing and I am truly honored to have been a part of it all.

I hope to return to Williamsburg one day, with my family, so they may see all you have done to honor our children gone too soon from this world.

Thank you so much, Dinah, for the love you share and for all you do to help us "Fellow Travelers" along this journey.

Peace and Blessings.

Kyle's symbol is a rainbow.

Philip & Darla Carl's daughter, Miranda Kay Kelly (1-8-85), was killed in an auto accident, 6-29-03.

Darla and her daughter, Jessica, came to J.I.M.'s Conference. Darla shared:

The conference was such a blessing. We were amazed at how much we enjoyed it. It was a time of healing for us. We treasure our pictures. Thank you so much for giving it another year.

Here is a picture of Miranda. This is one of the senior pictures. We had such a great time that day together! What a precious memory.

I just put an album together with some pictures of J.I.M.'s Conference. I'm amazed that you sent us a card and asked for a picture because when I put my album together I thought about your son and wished I had a picture of him to include in my album.

Actually, I put the book together on June 29th, the 2nd anniversary of her Heaven date. Thank you so much for your kind heart.

Miranda's symbols are a palm tree and a daisy.

Tom and Pat Regan's son, David (6-1-72), was killed in the line of duty as a New York Policeman, 5-28-00.

Pat shared this story:

Thank you for remembering David and us with the card. Your card had sailboats on it so I am sending you a sailboat story:

Shalini, our daughter-in-law, had problems near the end of her pregnancy and she had to have an immediate c-section. I was with her in the hospital. She was afraid she or the baby might die. Thank God all went well. I was very relieved when I held Matthew Alexander Regan in the hospital room and I could see both Mom and child were OK. Matt was born on March 16, 2004.

I went home from the hospital to wait for the school bus to bring Kayla and Brian, Jr. home. Brian, Sr. ran in and announced: "I want everyone to know about the baby. I don't want a stork on the front lawn. I want a boat: the SS Special Delivery" and he called and placed the order. Then Brian left to go to the store. Forty-five minutes later a black Jeep pulled up and a young man got out who looked very much like my deceased son, David. The

man opened the back of the jeep and took out the SS Special Delivery. Kayla, Brian, Jr. and I went out to watch.

Timidly I asked the young man: "What's your ethnic combination?" He smiled and said: "Italian and Polish." I am of 100 percent Polish descent and always claimed Dave looked most like me. But our friends used to tease and ask: "How did you get an Italian son with an Irish last name?"

I softly said to the young man as he placed the boat on the lawn: "I know when this order was placed. How could you get here so quickly with the boat and the cloud with all the information printed so perfectly?" The man talked all about the tools he had and the computer he used. Dave had a two-car garage filled with tools and he loved the computer.

Softly I asked you young man: "What's your name?" He replied: "Dave." Then I told him about our son. The young man said: "Your son wants you to know he's watching over this baby and he wants you all to be happy." We received a SPECIAL DELIVERY that day. We sailed into the future with more faith and the surety that we stay connected. Life doesn't end; it changes.

David's symbols are a rabbit, star, #102 (his badge number), and an Iris.

CHOCOHOLICS

UNANIMOUS

Cheaper than rehab and no meetings!

Please visit the website and let me know if you see any omissions or errors:

<http://www.cumberlandcollege.edu/lamentations/joininginmemory.html>