
LAMENTATIONS

Issue 103

middle

August, 2006

I saw a great commercial the other day and it really made an impact on me. It was a commercial for life insurance- Met Life. The commercial said that **IF** is in the middle of **life**. It hit me like a thunder bolt. We all, from the time of our child's death, have said "If I had done this or that" "if....." until we finally realize there will never be any answers to our "IFs" because we can't change what has happened. Even though these two letters are in the center of our life we need to try our best to make them small letters rather than capital letters. We do continue to have life and it is so important for each of us to try our best to make the rest of our life count and be a testimony to our children in every way possible. I have found that the more I do for others, the less time I have to grieve and the more I can concentrate on what Young Jim's life meant and means to me now.

It has been 15 years since his death and I do love life and have left the capital letter "F" behind me and have put the capital letter "I" back in my **life**. I choose to live life. I know what many of you are thinking...Dinah must have taken the "F" out, because what she is saying is a "lie," but I promise you, life does get better, especially when you put the capital "I" in it.

I would love to hear your opinions on what I have written. Have you added yourself to "life?" If so, how? If not, besides having your child back (and each of us would be glad to give our life for that to happen), what would it take to put you back into life and make the "i" in your life a capital letter? Can I help you in anyway to make your "i" a capital I in your life?

Hope to hear from you.

Grief Grafts

Bill & Trish Barton's son, Michael (12-5-63), was killed in a logging accident, 4-3-96.

Trish shares what I call a "gift" from our children:

My husband had an encounter with a brand new fawn this morning! It followed his truck to church and when Billy got out of his truck the fawn was at his feet! Almost seems like a sign to me! Michael had a wild life biology degree! And it is almost Father's Day – the first Father's Day after Michael died we saw a doe and fawn on the way to church. This is the tenth year since Michael's death.

I hope you and your husband are well and my prayer is that Jim will be blessed this Father's Day. So many beautiful tributes to Jim!

Trish – 1 Corinthians 13

Michael's symbols are a duck in flight, an elk bugling, fish jumping, a horse running, and Michael the Archangel.

Lorraine Miscik's daughter, Renee (8-5-62), died, 12-21-00.

Renee was born with Down's syndrome. She had two holes in her heart and a defective valve repaired at the age of 3. She started school at age 4 and did very very well, for her problems. She was the most lovable person you would ever want to meet. During her growing up years, she took horseback riding lessons, belonged to a special Girl Scout Troop and went to summer camp every year. She took piano lessons and guitar lessons. She was in many piano recitals, of course at a lower level, but nonetheless, she just loved it. She also was in a Girl Scout Cooking class. She loved to make things. She was great at making different kinds of sandwiches for herself to take to work. She went everyday to Goodwill Industries, where she did many different kinds of jobs.

She dearly loved her sister and was awaiting her arrival for the Christmas holidays, but she dropped dead in the middle of the night, the night before Jeannine's arrival... We do not know the exact cause, but does it really matter? She was gone. We will never be the same again. Her sister still has such a hard time over Renee's death. As the saying goes, it gets easier, it never gets easy.

Renee's symbol is a guitar.

Carl & Barbi Kinne's son, Joe Frank (10-30-77), completed suicide, 7-17-01.

This was sent by Barbi Kinne, it is amazing, I hope you will take this journey: www.ispokewithmychild.com

Also read about Katherine's Law, <http://www.katherineslaw.org/> In Florida, a parent can obtain a birth certificate for their stillborn child. I hope you will look at this and ask if your state has this law, if not, let that be your project for our stillborn children.

Joe Frank's symbol is "I Love You" hand sign for the deaf.

Hamp & Saralyn Smith's son, Robbie (9-8-83), died as a result of brain seizures, 3-15-00.

I hope you will visit Robbie's website: <http://robbiesmith.com> Read about his three miracles, his hobbies, and his life. And read the beautiful poems Saralyn has written. This is one of them:

Cherished Memories

*Oh, happy days when you were here,
And every day was so much fun!*

*It never once occurred to me
That you would have to leave us, son.*

*Whenever I am sad or blue,
I stretch across the wall of time
To find you still within my heart,
With all our memories sublime.*

*No longer can I touch your hair,
No longer see you face to face,
But with the treasures in my heart,
I can your memory embrace.*

*And time is not your master now,
For you can any age assume---
The lanky youth you had become,
Or baby fair, with heaven's bloom.*

*I see you racing down the hill,
Or fast asleep in Daddy's chair;
Whatever age or form you take,
You always seem so wondrous fair!*

*My precious babe with golden curls,
My stalwart son with blazing smile---
No matter what you are today
Will surely my sad heart beguile.*

*So, come and cheer my weary self;
Come and lift my downcast heart.
You are my own, my precious son,
And I have loved you from the start.*

*So, from my cherished memories,
You run and walk and smile once more,
To keep me company here below
Till we unite at Heaven's door.*

*Written with love for my beloved son, Robbie
Robert Hampton Smith, September 8, 1983 ~ March 15, 2000*

Copyright 2005 by Saralyn M. Smith

Robbie's symbol is a train.

Debbie Garber's son, Justin Ratliff (6-14-81), died in an auto accident, 12-13-01.

Debbie is editor of Miami Valley (OH) TCF.

Greetings Dinah,

You may not know this about me, but I am addicted to National Public Radio, especially the in-depth personal stories shared during the morning programming. Below is my impression of a story I heard a few months ago that I included in our TCF newsletter. It is amazing as I branch out from my grief to learn about others, how brave the bereaved are in telling their stories. We risk being judged, or being subjected to unpleasant reactions at times of great vulnerability. Yet we must risk to receive comfort, often from surprising sources. I wanted to share this with you along with an attached picture of Justin. Thanks for providing a place for healing.

~ Peace and Blessings, Debbie

The other morning I woke to a story on National Public Radio of a woman remembering her brother who died of AIDS 20 years ago. Her shaking voice shared a difficult story of loss. She remembered desperately needing to share her story, yet she remained silent, fearing thoughtless responses like, "this is God's way" or other quick and careless statements that cut and separate us from others.

The story goes on that while shopping for a sympathy card she noticed a young man at the counter. As she approached him she whispered, "My brother died of AIDS." As he came around the counter he embraced her and said "you don't have to whisper." She tearfully recalled her feelings of the moment, "I did not know him but I knew I loved him."

Now I am choked with remembering the surreal feelings of isolation and disconnect that accompany death. Moments like this transport me back with full sensory clarity to the smell, sight, and sound present at the time I

heard the news. Instantly, back to a crystallized moment that defines my every breath and action forever. My son Justin died in a car accident December 13th, 2001 and at times it feels like yesterday.

As I reflect on this woman's story it seems complicated by judgment. Maybe all grief is complicated. Although my situation was different, as I am sure each situation is, it struck a familiar cord. We, the bereaved share a deep and soulful pain that casts prism-shadows over our days. Some darker, some lighter, yet forever present. We may feel on the fringes of life, as others resume normal activities; often we are left bewildered, wondering how to move into the future. Leaving the static of everyday life behind to ponder deeper meanings of pain and suffering. Asking the questions; How do I invest in life again? What's it all about?

Like the woman in this story, healing begins with an understanding heart. My grief journey has taken me to the Compassionate Friends and Lamentations where I have found many understanding hearts. Being in the presence of those who have shared this deep and soulful pain eases my feelings of isolation, no longer on the fringe, but re-entering the mainstream as our children are introduced, stories are told and the motion of rebuilding broken lives begins. We are strangers coming together to share one of the most profound experiences of our lives. We find our voice, and we don't have to whisper.

Linda is Debbie's sister:

Linda received a liver transplant three years ago. She was fine for about 9-10 months and contracted a virus that attacked the bile ducts of the new liver. The rejection seems to be under control, yet the complications have become serious. We have been dealing with this since February 2002, Justin died December 2001. I stay strong for my parents, they have been her constant caregiver and are glad to be able to care for her, but the stress has taken its toll on them. She is my only sister, but she is their child and we know what that feels like. Thank you for your prayers, we just take one day at a time and continue to be grateful for each day. Gratitude eases the stress. I will be sending healing thought and prayers to your brother-in-law. Sometimes all we can do is trust for the highest and best outcome, and remember this existence is temporary, the best is yet to come.

Blessing and Peace,

Debbie sent me this card on Young Jim's birthday:

*Thinking of you Dinah...
Your words of healing...
Your great kindness...
Young Jim must be so proud to call you Mother.*

*Wishing you peace, abundance, and love ten-fold
This day and always.*

You are a treasure to so many travelers!

*Blessings,
Debbie Garber ~ Justin's mom*

Justin's symbols are a deer and a rainbow.

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

This is a great way to have others remember our children:

Dinah,

Thank you for the card remembering Steve. I made a Memorial Card for Steve and sent it to all our family and friends. His picture was on the front. Thanks again for you caring about my son.

Joan had another great idea:

It made me feel good to know that people would be putting it on their refrigerator and thinking about him. Back a few years ago I also had ball point pens made up with his birth date and death date and his name on them and had "in Loving memory of our son." I gave them to cashiers in Wal-mart and other places I shopped, when I wrote a check and had the opportunity to share with them what God had done for me in the loss. I also gave the man he worked for some to give out to people that he had come in contact with and knew who he was. I also gave them to friends and family and people at our church. I keep trying to come up with something to keep

his memory alive. I would love to hear things others have done to remember their children.

I asked Joan how Steve passed:

Steve died in his sleep. When autopsy was done it showed he had a severe heart disease. His heart was in the shape of a 50 year old man. It just stopped while he was sleeping. He was a picture of health and we had no idea anything was wrong with his heart. He had no problems to indicate anything was wrong. He was 21 years old.

Joan Dotson

Steve's symbol is a yellow 1968 Camera.

Darraugh Butler's son, Brandon (10-21-84), was murdered, 4-11-03.

Dinah, it has been 3 years and two months and I am still grieving my son Brandon. I don't cry as much but I still have moments of loss. I was so blessed in that God was merciful and Brandon delivered a grandson to me two days before he was murdered. So I do thank God for giving me a piece of Brandon because He didn't have to do that. Yet, I am still tormented by how he died and why. He did not know the youth that shot him and had no idea that it was an act of revenge for something his oldest brother had done. The boy approached Brandon as he and his girlfriend were going to her apartment and asked him if Charles was his brother. He responded yes, and I am sure he did so proudly although he and his much older brother did not see each other often. The boy asked him for his number, saying that he was a good friend needing to get in touch and while Brandon was reaching in his pocket to retrieve his cell phone he was shot six times.

Brandon was my rock, my David. I raised him from the time he was three years old as a single mom. His dad and I had divorced and he was a deadbeat dad so I managed both roles. I went back to school and found a great job and made a good life for us. He knew me inside out and we shared a very special bond. Brandon was the only child at home as his two older brothers lived with my first husband. I was not planning on remarrying but wanted a little girl. So, we adopted my daughter Mary together, going

through the classes together, convincing everyone concerned that we would provide a good home for a little sister. We were blessed with Mary when she was 3 weeks old and Brandon was 11 at the time. He gave her the middle name of Nicole. Brandon was an "old soul" and was charismatic and a ham. His intelligence was way above anyone in the family, including mine. He was extraordinary and his greatness was magical. I yearn for his tenderness, the laughter he brought to me when no one else could. I used to sing songs at his request - at home - going to the mall - traveling to Myrtle Beach. He would join in providing a comical touch and he would coach me. I miss the antics, the surprises, the little poems, the sincere interest in my well being and my happiness. I miss going to Blockbuster Video and not having him around to tell me not to check out a particular movie because I had already seen it. His memory and recall were outstanding. He had accepted Christ and that along with his son Damoni are the comforts that I have. I have some of his clothes tied up in a black hefty trash bag and they still have his scent. I only open the bag for a few seconds and I take in his smell, a smell so recognizably him. I get anxious anticipating that the smell might go away some day.

Dinah, I still want Brandon back in my life. I have memories, but I want my son back. I am so, so not into accepting it. I look for him in my dreams and I look for him in Damoni. My soul is vexed. He was taken away from me and I am lost. I go through the motions for the sake of others, but I don't feel the joy that I used to have no matter how I try. I asked him to send me signs of his presence or spirit in the form of Cardinals and he has done just that on very specific occasions. On Damoni's birthday last year there were 2 sitting on both sides of the end of the road where I live. People used to humor me (the very few that I have told) but several times when I have shared that he does this, a Cardinal would appear outside on the fence or in the yard nearby.

I have had Damoni since he was 6 months old. He was 1 pound 11 ounces and was in Neonatal ICU for almost 5 months and he beat the odds. God's grace and mercy made flesh. Thanks for listening and thanks for the wonderful work you are doing.

*God bless and keep you,
Darraugh Butler, Brandon's mom*

Brandon's symbol is a Cardinal.

Dick & Jean Sand's son, Michael (3-17-81), was killed, riding in an auto with a drunk driver, 2-19-01.

Dinah,

Thank you so much for the nice note for our Michael. He has been a wonderful angel. Today, Father's day, he has been gone 12 years and I am sure he is looking down on his dad, his brother, sister and myself. We still have good days and bad days, but all in all, we have been very blessed. Wish Jim HAPPY FATHER'S DAY.

Michael's symbols are a star, an angel, a Stetson hat and cowboy boots.

Cathie McCormick's son, Mark, died from cancer twenty years ago.

Cathie wrote:

I do a GriefShare support at our church and feel his life is going on as I walk with others through the loss of a loved one - which include various types of loss.

I have a word picture I wrote called the Broken Vase and an article that I've had published in a couple places call Seasons of Grief where I describe my grief journey.

Holland & Constance Corbitt's daughter, Sarah (1-12-85), died from leukemia, 6-22-02.

Dinah,

Thank you for thinking of my Sarah. We made candles and ate ice cream with sprinkles (she loved doing both) we just moved 2 weeks ago up

to the north Georgia mountains and we released the balloons here. Pretty. Then I cried. Seems like 4 years have been so-o-o-o long here. I hate all this. HATE I will go thru this all my life,

Thanks,

Hugs Constance

Sarah's symbol is an eagle.

Conrad & Anita Jenkins' son, Nolan (5-22-88), died in an auto accident, 5-19-06.

Dear Dinah,

I received your note today in the mail and was very anxious to look at the web site to get more information. I would like to add my son Nolan to the Birth and Angel Dates. Nolan was born on May 22nd, 1988 and he went to be with God on May 19th, 2006 which was just 3 days before his 18th birthday. I'm so glad to talk about my son because he was such a wonderful young man. His friends have told me stories that reaffirm what a kind, gentle, funny, and caring young man he was. Nolan was an outstanding lacrosse player and he just loved the game. He had been playing lacrosse since he was in the 6th grade and was getting ready for the playoffs before the accident. His team had just won the district championship and Nolan was so proud of his team. I received a note from a parent of a player on the team we played in the district championship game. It was such a touching note. She said that her son played defense on the opposing team and was really down on himself after losing the game. Her son told her that after the game that #17 (Nolan) had come over to him to personally tell him what a great game he had played. These two teams were bitter rivals and my son took the time to make sure that this player knew how well he had played. When the opposing player heard about what happened to Nolan, he was devastated. We receive a note that the boy wanted to make a donation in Nolan's name because of the genuine sportsmanship that #17 had shown him that afternoon.

Nolan was always talking to everyone at school, he wanted to make sure that no one was ever left out of things. He told me several times how sad it was that there were students who had to eat lunch by themselves.

Nolan made sure that the younger players on the team didn't get left out. One of the parents of a ninth grade player sent a note telling how much Nolan would stay after practice to help the younger players with their game. I always would ask him why he was so late coming home from practice and he would just say that the coach made them run.

I cannot write down everything about my son. But Nolan always made everyone laugh and he would always tell us "I'll handle it" when we would nag him about getting things done. Nolan was supposed to attend Christopher Newport University in the fall and play lacrosse. His older sister, Macie, was his best friend. His dad, Conrad, was someone he looked up to. I was not only his mom, but his confidant. We would spend many nights sitting on the couch and just talking...sometimes we'd laugh and sometimes we'd cry.

He was one of my students this past year and was in my class the morning of the accident. We sat and talked for the longest time that morning. I reminded him to make sure he turned in his community service sheet. He just smiled at me and said, "Don't worry mom, I'll handle it." Those words will never leave my heart.

There have been two very special signs that Nolan is still with me in spirit. One is a dime. These dimes have been showing up in the most unusual places since the accident. You see, Nolan loved to spend and make money. He was all about the money. He said that when he was rich he was going to make sure that people would have food and a place to live. The other sign that Nolan is with me is a black hawk. It always shows up when I'm at the cemetery and it always shows up when I speak his name and ask him to come by.

*I can go on and on about Nolan. This is just a small glimpse into his life. Thank you for the note.
I look forward to hearing from you.*

Another note from Anita:

I read a letter today from a lacrosse player from Colligate High School in Richmond. Nolan's team played Colligate about 10 days before the accident. The young player described how #17 (Nolan) had demonstrated such sportsmanship during the game that he would never forget it. He said that he looks forward to the day that he can tell his own son how #17 had shoved him down during the game. He said that he got up ready to fight with Nolan. But Nolan turned around and said "Hey man, I didn't mean to push you....my bad." This attitude impressed this Colligate

player so much. I was in tears when I read the letter. My son was very competitive in sports...I think it comes from me being a coach. But he seemed to reach out a hand when it was called for.

The black hawk and the dime are the two symbols that let me know that Nolan is watching over me. The very next day after the funeral, I went up to the gravesite by myself and sat down. I asked him how he was doing. I looked up and there was this black hawk soaring around in the sky. That hawk shows up every time I'm at the gravesite, but it also shows up when I'm driving around thinking about him. About 1 week after the accident, I was able to go to the crash site. I walked over the field where his car had crashed. The owner of the property was out there picking up some things. He said that they had gone over the field several times. As I was leaving to go to my car, the man called my name. He walked over and handed me a dime. He said he had found it out in the field. The dime was bright and shiny as if it just showed up. The field was very muddy so that dime should have had mud on it.

Since then, I have had a shiny dime show up in the most unusual places. I was telling my friend about this dime showing up. She just recently told me that she has had the same thing happen to her. After she vacuumed her bedroom and got into bed, she got up to go to the bathroom. We had just talked on the phone moments earlier. Anyway, she looked down on the floor between her bed and the bathroom and there was a dime on the floor. It was clean as a whistle. There have other instances with the dime. My friend's sister lives in California and has a step-son who is seriously ill. I spoke to my son and asked him to be an angel to this family and this boy who was ill. My friend had told her sister about the dime story and two days later the sister called and said that dimes had shown up in her stepson's bed. It gave me such a good feeling inside.

Thanks again.

Anita

Nolan's symbols are a black hawk and a dime.

Doreen Kempinger-Tremper's son, Tyler (10-7-88) died in a bicycle accident, 6-16-03.

Hi Dinah

I received your card for Tyler's heaven date. Thank you so much! This year has really played with my head. You see Tyler passed away the day before Father's day and this year it fell before so I felt it the weeks coming up and then this past weekend. I guess our minds try to cushion the pain.

Tyler's symbol is a turtle.

Bob & Anne Sowder's son, Sam (2-6-66) died in an auto accident, 6-9-01.

An article written by Shane Morgan for the News Journal told of how the family has given back to the community after Sam's death:

New equipment which will help students of aviation mechanics at Somerset Technical College access information has been donated to the technical college in memory of a former student, Sam Sowder.

The items consist of computer equipment, a special microfilm scanner and a printer. The equipment, which will reportedly be of great help to the students, will enable rapid research of aeronautical manuals.

"Aeronautics paid off for him," says Bob Sowder, Sam's father. The senior Sowder, who resides in Pulaski, says his son was killed in a car accident last year in Austin, Texas. Sam was residing in Texas where his career had directed him.

Bob Sowder says many people were offering gestures of kindness after Sam's death and the family decided to ask those wishing to make such gestures to channel it into a fund. The fund would be used to help the aviation program at STC in some way. It was ultimately decided to purchase the microfilm scanning and computer equipment.

Sowder says directing the fund to the technical college was appropriate due to the great benefit Sam had derived from the program.

Bob Sowder says Sam first went to Cookville, TN to a newly built regional airport after he graduated the aeronautics program at STC. He later went to San Antonio, TX, to take a job with an aeronautics company. He made another career related move by taking work in Kansas with Lear Jets, but ultimately settled in Texas.

Bob Sowder says his son had a lot of opportunities open up to him as a result of the STC training, and because of the fact that Sam graduated in a top-honor position in his graduating class.

Sowder says his son was mechanically inclined at a very early age. He recounts when Sam as a child used a plastic play screwdriver his grandfather, who was a mechanic, gave him to take apart his own crib.

Young Sam may have become interested in aircraft mechanics in part because of something an aviation student from Los Angeles once told him. The student had said that STC's aeronautics program, which covers everything from hot-air balloons to complicated jets, was ranked among the best in the entire country along with a school in LA.

Bob Sowder jokes that the mechanical inclination skipped a generation. His father was a mechanic, and his son Sam was an aircraft mechanic. But he had no such turn, preferring to put his energies into the ministry and mental health counseling.

A plaque honoring Sam hangs near the computer and other equipment donated to the students of aviation mechanics at STC.

Sam's symbol is a cloud.

Ralph & Dana Coomer's son, Ralphie (7-24-74) died in an auto accident, 6-11-94.

I received this note from Dana:

Dinah,

Thank you for remembering my Ralphie. It's been 12 years, sometimes it seems like it was yesterday. The pain is still so bad sometimes, but there are days God gives me peace and I have hope knowing I will see Ralphie again.

This morning I had a really hard cry. Just had to let it all out, and I feel better. Today is harder than yesterday (Ralphie's angel date).

Honey, you all are in my prayers. I've always prayed for your grief, for God to bless you as you have blessed so many people. You and Rosemary are one of the reasons I'm still here. God used you both to give me hope to go on, when I didn't even want to.

Your newsletters for years, helped me to be here today. I used to look so forward to them, and I have been able to keep in touch with some of the parents by cards and letters. Thanks to the newsletters, I'm friends with a lot of them, even some I have never gotten to meet.

Love,

Dana (always Ralphie)

Ralphie's symbols are praying hands and an eagle.

Barbara Bisculca's son, Steven (6-4-78) died in a motorcycle accident, 6-7-98.

Barbara shares other tragedies in her life:

Dinah,

Thank you for thinking of me and remembering my son, Steven. It's been eight long years without him and you know just how I feel.

I have more sad news. My husband committed suicide in August, on my birthday. He was 52 and was always depressed since we lost Steven.

My other son was electrocuted at work on May 1st and is addicted to pain medication and has over-dosed several times. He's 26 and can't seem to get his life in order.

I take one day at a time.

Steven's symbol is a race car or anything fast.

Edith Epperson's son, Richie (11-10-72) died in an auto accident, 6-8-04.

Edith has started a grief group for parents who have lost children. The group meets at David's Steak House in Corbin, Ky., on the 18th of every month at 6:00 pm. For further information you can contact Edith by telephone at 606-304-1660, or by email at richiesmom23@aol.com She hopes that any of you who live any where near the Corbin area will attend and celebrate the lives of our children.

Richie's symbol is 2 baseball bats crossing each other with a baseball under the bats & #23 on ball.

David & Cindy Jo Greever's daughter, Michelle (8-24-84) died from being hit by a bus, 11-5-93.

As I reflect upon the last few days before our nine-year-old daughter Michelle parted suddenly on a beautiful Autumn morning while trying to board her school bus, I find myself being so convicted and comforted of God's promise of eternal life...following are some of the "signs" that Michelle perhaps knew her time was near.

Michelle memorized Bible scripture for six years at Awana, a worldwide youth program held at churches across the globe! One Awana night, just two days before Michelle parted, Michelle had John 10:28-29 signed off in her Awana book as the last two verses she memorized.

Ironically, Michelle and I had talked extensively over these last verses we memorized together about eternal life in the last few days of Michelle's earthly life. Michelle told me she knew that when Jesus came back we would get new bodies, she knew that death wasn't permanent because it was just "our shell that perished for now." Michelle explained that if she were to die before me to "look for the brightest star and she would be shining and smiling down on me," and that she "would never leave me," that she would "love me always and we would never have to say good-bye!"

It never will be good-bye for life is eternal as John 10:28-29 states: "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither can any man pluck them out of my Father's hand, the Father who gave them to me is greater than all, and no one shall snatch them out of His hands." Michelle and I memorized these verses together, and it would be her last before she parted.

Little did we know then that two nights later she would be declared brain dead, dying but giving new life and sight to others through organ and cornea donation. Little did we know, but God knew, and He was preparing us unbeknownst to us. Not only did God prepare us that night, but He prepared us in other ways in the weeks and days that precipitated this tragedy and in many ways, he prepared us all of Michelle's nine years of life

as the conversations we had when another child died were how "God takes little children too." Michelle always had a serene wiser than her years attitude about life and about death. Death never frightened or worried Michelle.

Ten days before Michelle died, she had walked in on her older sister Melissa to find her forlorn at her bedroom window. Michelle asked Melissa what was wrong. Melissa replied that she never wanted to die and was afraid of death. Michelle gave her a big hug and said, "Masissa, you don't have to be afraid to die, I'm not because Jesus will be with me, we aren't alone when we die, Jesus takes us in His arms!"

Michelle nicknamed her older sibling Melissa "Masissa" because it stood for mom and sister! Michelle was very devoted to her sister and family and always had a way of comforting each of us when we were down.

There was all of Michelle's Halloween candy, she had more than ever for what was to be her last Halloween...she gave her daddy all his favorites, mama hers, brother Michael his and said she didn't need it anymore....the first morning of school after Halloween, Michelle brought the rest of her candy for her friends...

Then there was the last picture Michelle gave to me that she drew with her last letter to me. Michelle gave me this the week before she parted. The picture of a little winged girl standing on a smiling crescent moon. The picture speaks for itself... There is a cross, stars and a sun above the little girl with wings and a vapory trail leading to a staircase above her. Next to it are the words: "Love you, Rove you, Wove you! Have sweet dreams mommy, I just love you so much!" I have named this piece appropriately "The Stairway to Heaven." I also have had completely sweet dreams since Michelle parted...

Michelle and I shared silly bird talk ever since the time we went to the pet shop and a large bird greeted us with "relo!" Our silly bird talk was to be the last words we spoke that morning when Michelle left for school, never to return into my arms again in this life...."Love you, Rove you, Wove you." And these same words were in her Stairway to Heaven drawing to me....It was never good-bye.

When Michelle died, her Fourth Grade Teacher cleaned out her desk at school and kindly brought us her things. One particular assignment that truly stood out was to write a book and draw about the "Best Trip" ever taken by the student. In 1991 our family went on a 5300 mile trip all along the California coast, down to Mexico and back home to Washington State. Michelle wrote about this trip but on the cover she drew a picture of a truck by a Dead End sign and the caption coming from the truck was "OH NO!"

This was the scene of her death, complete with the road crew's bulldozers that were actually working there at that time. I have always believed Michelle wrote about her best trip ever on earth and then drew her best trip ever to Heaven... it was yet to come and only days later...

These are only a few signs, there were many, many more. This has held such great significance and meaning to me, even more so as time goes by, because I am convinced none of this preparation was coincidental or accidental. I believe God was preparing us unbeknownst to us. I believe God wants this to be my testimony to share with others. It is my hope to comfort others through these experiences and to help lighten others' grief and bring their hearts hope. Hope that life truly does go on and we never have to say good-bye and that we will be together for all time!

It has been nine years now since Michelle parted and I still hurt and miss Michelle more than ever, but I will always be her mother and she will always be my daughter. It is like I once told a friend who didn't understand, "If you were deaf, blind and without touch, would you still love your daughter (who is alive)? Just because I can't see, touch or hear Michelle I still love her just the same!" To me this is the best way I can describe my love and undying devotion for Michelle. I will always love her. We will be in each other's arms for eternity, one sweet day as we were on earth and it is never goodbye just as Michelle and I spoke at length over her last verses in John 10:28-29!!!

In Loving Memory of Michelle's 22nd Birthday

Michelle's symbols are a star with a heart and flower inside.

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

This is truly sisterly love:

Dinah,

How are you? I thought about you on the 20th of May (Young Jim's angel date)... Hope all is well with you. I am recovering from kidney transplant surgery. I received a kidney from my sister. This has been a struggle, along with all of the other struggles brought on by this life...

Someday it will all be all right...You take care, and are in my thoughts...Much love

Patty

Justin's symbol is a car.

Russell & Angela Reddick's daughter, Holly (4-9-98) died in a drowning accident, 7-21-04.

Young Jim and Holly had a lot in common with the horses:

Dinah, thank you for sharing Jim with me. Holly went three weeks before her graduation, the kids insisted I go-- or better, said they made a special request. It was horrible to deal with, but one of the neatest things ever, would you believe those little farts honored her, boys and girls both; you had to have SEEN football players in PURPLE TOE NAIL POLISH and flip flops w/their graduation gowns, it was really something, Dinah, and something so totally Holly that, wow, I, to this day, don't know who thought of it, but it was just something that I thought only Holly would have come up with.

See? She hated shoes; they wouldn't let her go barefoot at school, so she kept flip flops in her locker and switched her Nikes for them when she got there. And purple was her favorite color, come to think of it, purple was pretty much what she always had on her toes.

The irony of your husband's speech and having to practice what you preach... Mega big hugs woman, who'd have ever thought? There is just no way to believe this CAN happen, never mind to you/me.

By the way, way cool to read about Jim doing rodeo's, Holly was a horse person from the get go. She raised and trained them, but pretty much just did what was local. We loved summers though, fun shows, 4-H fair, and trail rides, come to think, she loved drift bashing in winter just as much. She loved to be on them.

On Holly's site you can see her first pony and the filly with her is Tequilla, the last one she was working with.

I kinda quit working on her site, getting her headstone and one year anniversary, I just kinda went to pieces and couldn't do it, need to go back and change things on it. It was more therapy for me than a place to share with others about her, and her myspace is more for the kids, I need to do one for her. But you can take a peek, <http://pageforholly.tripod.com/>

*Again, thanks for sharing Jim with me.
God Bless.*

Holly's symbols are anything purple & flip flops.

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

Oh Dinah,

You are so kind--this does help me to understand death--You are so understanding; it is because you lost your son and you can understand the pain ---you have walked in my shoes --it has been six years and yesterday I tried to keep really busy but when I stopped --he was there --and he told me it was Ok--last week this beautiful butterfly came to his apple orchard while I was watering the trees--and every time I went outside there it was--it was bright yellow and black--a big one--I saw it flying all over the yard, but when I came back out to change the hose it would come by so I could see it--then a mother bird had some really cute babies beside our house and she was teaching one to fly--it came to the back steps of my patio and just sat there--then it went under the crepemyrtles beside the patio and stepped to the house--later I found the little one dead in the grass just beside the back steps--as I was leaving the house at noon the mother was flying by and I felt like I knew the pain she was feeling--so God has a way of telling us it is his birthday and also he told me the day he died it was about the same time of day--11:00am--I wanted to bring the baby bird into the house but I didn't want to upset the mother who was teaching it--the heat I am sure was the cause--but again I had to let go and let God and so strange, the little bird was gone out of the grass when I came home—I'm not sure if the mother took it to a very special place or something else got it--I do know it reminded me of Robert's death--but God does this every year around his birthday and death date. He has His special ways of telling me it is OK--the pain is still there but I don't have to scream anymore.

Love you,

Marge

I asked Marge for permission to use her email and she replied:

Oh Dinah,

If I can help any of those mothers or fathers, please print this --it was so real to me--I noticed the butterfly was flying across the road into the

neighbor's yard and when I came back out to change the water hose --there it was again--so I said, "ok this is a message from Robert, it has to be"--and the little baby bird--sitting on the patio sitting in front of me when I came out of the house--I almost picked it up and moved it, but then the mother came by and I didn't want to bother her or her babies--it did move to the back bushes by the crepemyrtles, but when I came home it was dead in the grass and I didn't pick it up -because the mother was flying around the area--I felt so sad and I told her, "I know how you must feel and I am so sorry"--strange how God works with the animals - then all of a sudden it was gone -- I don't know if she -mother came and carried it away or something got it. -- but God told us not to worry because He will take care of the birds and animals of the fields and we know for sure that He will take great care of us--I know looking back he certainly helped me, being a single mother and raising the boys alone. It hasn't been easy--but God sent me jobs not money.

Around Robert's birthday and his death date He sends me so many signs. My other son Kevin—Robert's brother--who is 13 months younger than Robert --figured out our new dog Joie--was in the makings the day Robert died—Joie's birthday is in July--and Kevin says it is July 29---when my other son Jeff bought him for me on his birthday August 18- for me--I didn't have a name and I was speaking to a gentlemen on the phone on a business call--- that day--and since he was Italian I asked if he could help me name my new dog--he said Jewseppi--or something like this can't spell it --and he said in Italian it was Jewseppi but in English it meant Joseph--well I said you just named my new dog--because my son who died, his name was Robert Joseph III--and he sent him both his brothers Jeff, the one that bought the dog for me, and Kevin, the brother that figured all this out,--said yes Robert sent this dog to us.-----nothing goes by God --just watch for all these special things and He will send them to us.

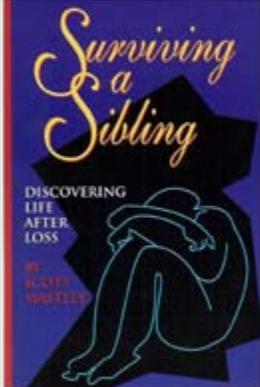
Oh that butterfly was huge and so beautiful bright yellow and black -- it came for the day to help me. After he died butterflies came to me on the patio and would stick on my head and shoulders and would fly to his truck -- hundreds of them--just to tell me, "I am sending you these mother, to hug you" --Oh that summer - six yrs ago was nothing but butterflies around my shoulders and then they went away and then ---this beautiful yellow and black one came back to tell me ----"mother I am here and I love you I am with you" ----Yes God sends us messages from our children in butterflies and birds--I can tell you over and over things He has sent to me in a special message from Robert--I couldn't put all those things together-I'm not big or wise enough but God can----so I know God is real and He loves us.

Love you
Marge

Robert's symbol is a butterfly.

Healing the Grieving Heart
With Hosts Drs. Gloria and Heidi Horsley
Thursday, August 3, 2006 at 9am Pacific (Noon Eastern)

Surviving a Sibling



Scott Mastley's older brother, **Chris**, was killed in a car accident December 5, 1994. In shock, Scott found The Compassionate Friends and after several years became the co-leader of his chapters sibling group eventually becoming Sibling Representative for the Metro Atlanta area. As a result of his loss and in honor of Chris and other bereaved siblings Scott wrote *Surviving a Sibling*, a book based on responses of hundreds of online surveys completed by bereaved parents and siblings. On this episode Scott discusses ways of discovering life after loss.

Listen to the Rebroadcasts at 9pm Pacific (Midnight Eastern). Missed the live show? Past shows are available when you are - On Demand.
For More Information on Dr. Horsley or grieving support services
Visit www.HealingTheGrievingHeart.org

Tune in to Listen
www.health.voiceamerica.com
Questions? Call: 1-866-472-5792

This show sponsored by
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
www.compassionatefriends.org



Drs. Gloria & Heidi Horsley

VoiceAmerica™ Health & Wellness

Karenetta Smith's daughter, Angie Memet (5-12-78) was killed in an explosion, 7-2-93.

Hello, my name is Karenetta Smith. I have thought of you often, thought of writing to you many times.

Thank you for the cards on the loss of my daughter. It was 13 years ago this month. I know you lost your son about the same time. I am sorry for your loss.

I know you understand when I say that after all this time other people think it should not hurt so much, but it does. I was 8 months pregnant when she was killed and I try not to let her death influence what happens with my new children. They know they had an older sister. I feel like I have to tend to the living and when they are grown, then I can finish grieving. I think they should grow up without my being overwhelmed by grief or guilt because I let her go up there the night she was killed. They never met her. So they can't grieve for her. Maybe the idea of an older sister, but not the real one.

Well. I really don't know what I am trying to say. Thank you for thinking of her. I have always been afraid when I died her memories would go with me. No one else would know of her short sweet life.

*Thank you,
Karenetta Smith*

Angie's symbols are an angel, a puppy and a shooting star.

Joe & Lynne's son, Jared (2-11-81) died, 4-9-00.

Dear Dinah,

I would like to thank you for remembering Jared's birthday and the date of his (our) loss. It has been six years, and only a few close friends say anything. I'm happy to know that he is still thought of.

Since you have also suffered the loss of a child, you understand how things are. The person I was before his death is long gone. My other children have had to live a different kind of mom. I try to be happy with each birthday, graduation and meaningful event. Still, sadness seems to hover over me. I suppose it's because of what he has missed and that the kids are living on without him.

My oldest has completed grad school, my third (also a girl) is a teacher in North Carolina, and my son is in college. Two dogs, Louis (beagle) and Bradley (yorkie) are some laughs to the family.

With the continued help from my husband and children, I'll continue on, as you will too.

I wish you the best. Thanks again

Lynne

Jared's symbol is an angel.

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

Alice Isabell was having a difficult time and I emailed her and told her to “hang in there.” Her response was: *I do by a little finger, but God goes with me and so does my Randy Pete.* I then emailed her “if she was at the end of her rope to tie a knot in it and hang on.” Her response was great: *Yep, that's what I did. Knot may slip, but I am here with my son's wings holding me up.*

Pete's symbols are a rainbow, remote control car, eagle, & drums.

That saying is better than chocolate (almost). Thanks Alice for reminding us that our children are with us and want is to not only hang on, but soar!

My email address is: dinah@ucumberland.edu

The website's address is <http://www.ucumberland.edu/lamentations/>