
LAMENTATIONS

Issue 108

middle

January, 2007

Well, you survived the holidays...now what? You may have thought to yourself, I made it through the holidays and now, where is my present? Surely I deserve something after braving these days and weeks. But instead, I still have that empty feeling, and the days are so dreary in January. It is cold and not enough sun light. We need something that will keep us going until spring arrives with new growth and warmth. What is that something?

January is also a month that represents a new beginning. You ask, "How can we have a new beginning when my grief is such a burden?" January can be a new start, another chance to try to do it better, to do it more or less often, to evaluate, to make resolutions, to remember, to reflect, to become a stronger person.

How do we do this? We begin by trying to find **hope**; hope in each day that we have. Each day is a new day, so if you can't find hope one day, maybe you can the day following.

After Young Jim's death, for a long time, all I could think of was his death. I kept reminding myself of all that I had lost and would never have again. But as I kept rehearsing this drama, I finally realized, that was a slow process, that the accident was fading from my memory and it was being replaced with memories of Young Jim's laughter, his beautiful smile with his intense blue eyes sparkling, and so I replaced his *death* days with *life* days. I began to realize that our son lived...not just that he died. His life made my days so happy and I want to remember those *life* days, those days that made me a mother and my husband a father. I want to remember him as alive, he is alive, just not here on earth, and I will see him alive again. I encourage you to replace those *death* days with *life* days. And tell me how you are doing it. When we share with each other, we help each other, and that is what we need to do for each other. You help me each time you share, and I hope I help you each time I share.

Grief Grafts

Gam and Becky Greer have lost all their children in death. Their son, Stephen (3-27-77) died from Leukemia, 11-17-79. January 16, 1995, their oldest son, Buzzy (1-14-72) killed his younger brother, Todd (11-29-80) and younger sister, Kami (8-7-84) and then shot himself.

Through the years, Becky has been my greatest inspiration. If any of you attended the last J.I.M.'s Conference, and were at her workshop, "Where is God," you know what I am saying. She is an amazing woman, a woman of God.

Becky wrote the following:

"When the blooms die, plant it outside Mom! That's what the lady at the florist said to do and it will come back next year," exclaimed my 9-year-old daughter, Kami, as she proudly presented me with a beautiful potted stargazer lily for Mother's Day in 1994. I told Kami I didn't believe the lily would come back. "But Mom, the lady said it would!" When the blooms faded and died, Kami kept reminding me to plant the lily outside and I kept putting her off by saying I just didn't believe the lily would come back. Kami remained persistent and insistent until I finally relented and together we went outside to plant the lily in the backyard. Winter came and the lily died. Kami and two of her brothers also died that winter. My world became totally dark.

The following spring when the lily sprouted and grew to produce 27 fragrant pink blooms, I became filled with inexpressible joy. Joy in my darkness! How could that be? Without my children, I believed I could never feel joy or happiness again. What a beautiful gift! Kami, an innocent child, had no trouble believing that the lily would live again. Jesus said we are to have the faith of a child. God can resurrect even those things which we believe can't be resurrected. I did not believe the lily could survive the darkness of winter and I did not believe that I could survive the darkness of my grief and suffering after losing all 4 of my children. God was working on the lily in the darkness of the earth and He was working on me in the darkness of my grief. I just didn't know it. Just because we don't always experience God's presence doesn't mean He isn't there. God has not

promised that bad things will not happen to us, but He has promised that He will never leave us. He has kept His promise to me and I am thankful. Because I believe His promises are true, I know that my children will be with me always Praise God!

“You are blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.” Matthew 5:4

THE MESSAGE



This is the actual picture of Kami’s stargazer lily. Her lily continues to blossom each year. At the bottom of the picture is written this scripture:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Matthew 5:4 NIV

Stephen’s symbol is an apple, Buzzy’s symbol is a guitar, Todd’s symbol is a U.K. basketball and Kami’s symbol is a horse.

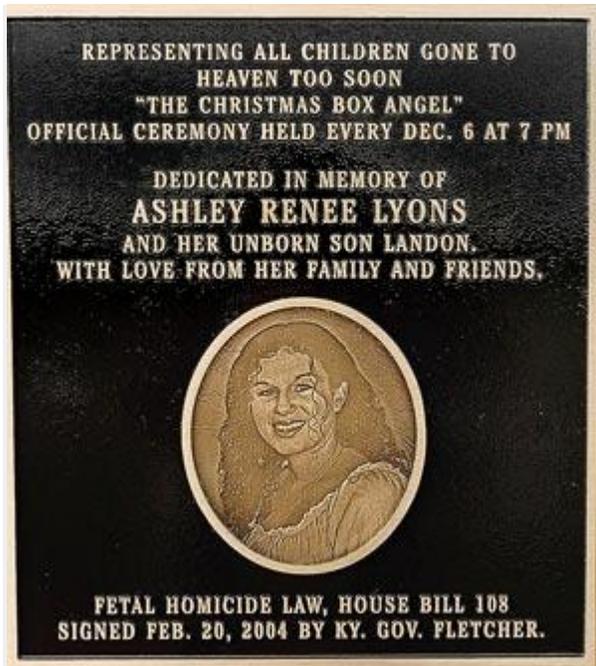
Buford & Carol Lyons’ daughter, Ashley (7-21-85) and unborn grandson, Landon, were murdered, 1-7-04.

We now have another Christmas Box Angel in Kentucky. The following article was written by Beth Musgrave for the Herald-Leader, December 11, 2006.

Garden Created for Children Who've Died

By Beth Musgrave

HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER



Frank Anderson/Staff

A plaque on the Christmas Box Angel in Scott County Park remembers Ashley Lyons, who was five months pregnant when killed by a former boyfriend in a nearby parking lot in 2004. Her parents, Buford and Carol, helped raise the money for the memorial.

The 4-foot-3-inch angel stands with arms outstretched, looking down from a hill in a Scott County park.

At her back is a brightly colored jungle gym, to her left is a series of ball fields. And to the angel's right is a parking lot where on Jan. 7, 2004, 18-year-old Ashley Lyons, five months pregnant with her first child, was fatally shot by a former boyfriend who is now serving a life sentence.

Buford Lyons, Ashley's father, comes to Brooking Park and to that parking lot most mornings before work to say a prayer for Ashley and her unborn son.

Now, he and others who have lost a child -- to accident, illness or murder -- will have a common place to remember and mourn.

Yesterday, the Lyons family dedicated a Christmas Box Angel, a memorial for all children who die before their parents. The bronze statue sits in the Angel Memorial Garden -- an almost three-year labor of love for the Lyons family.

The angel is surrounded by the sounds of children who play in the park, but it is less than 300 yards from where Ashley died, an ideal location, Ashley's family said yesterday.

The Georgetown Christmas Box Angel is one of more than 50 similar angels that have been dedicated across the country, and it's the second in Kentucky.

The idea for the Christmas Box Angel came from the novel The Christmas Box, a best seller written by Richard Paul Evans. In the book, a woman mourns the loss of her child at the foot of an angel statue.

After hearing from bereaved parents who read the book, Evans commissioned the first Christmas Box Angel in 1994.

Carol Lyons, Ashley's mother, first heard about the Christmas Box Angel several years ago during the dedication of an angel at Cumberland College.

Since then, the Lyons family -- with the help of hundreds of volunteers -- have raised money for their own statue and for the Angel Memorial Garden. The statue alone costs more than \$12,000, said Doug Lawrence, Ashley's maternal grandfather.

Ashley's love of horses and animals is represented in the design of the garden.

Inside the garden is a horseshoe-shaped brick pathway, where parents and families of children who have died have purchased bricks in their memory. There are bricks for Ashley, infants who died before their first birthdays, an 8-year-old daughter and a 34-year-old son.

"It will never be full closure for us," Buford Lyons said of the dedication of the statue. "No matter what we put here, we'll never get them back."

After Ashley's death, the Lyons family heard from parents across the country who had lost their own children. Their help and support was key to helping the family in those months after Ashley's death, Carol Lyons said. Now they hope that other parents will use the park as a place to mourn and remember.

"You know you're not alone," Buford Lyons said.

Reach Beth Musgrave at (859) 231-3205; 1-800-950-6397, Ext. 3205; or bmusgrave@herald-leader.com.

Ashley & Landon's symbols are a mare and foal.

Charlotte Martin's son, Keith (1-16-71) died in a drowning accident, 2-21-97.

Charlotte needs our help:

I sincerely appreciate your trying to help me. Right now my biggest worry is this: Is the video truly helpful as far as individuals watching it. I believe that it is as far as getting churches and outreach programs to recognize the need for good bereavement ministries. I just cannot seem to get much feedback about the video. I know that I've given away over 120 copies and asked for feedback. Only a handful of people have gotten back with me and they've all said that it is "very good," "quite good," "excellent" and "fantastic." But I can't help but worry that perhaps the other 115 people did not like it.

I'm pretty sure that no one would want to contact me to say "I didn't like it." One woman at a church did tell me that she thought there would be a lot more information about how to help. I have always heard that people forget 95% of everything they hear, so I concentrated more on trying to make an impact about the most important things than packing in a lot of information that people would simply forget.

*Love, hugs and kisses back to you,
Charlotte*

Dear Dinah,

You asked me to tell you about my videos "The Compassion of Jesus Christ" and "Ever How Long It Takes." My new website www.helpthebereaved.com tells a little bit about them. I hope to be finished with another video titled "Grieve with Those who are Grieving," soon. Then I plan to begin filming "My Story - - by Charlotte Martin." I have other videos planned and periodically work on each one of them. Of course, God will have to make a way in order for me to produce those.

I will never forget talking to you before your 2004 J.I.M.'s Picnic and Conference. I told you that I was going to produce a video to teach others how to help the bereaved. You were ever so gracious, as always, and extended an invitation for me to bring my equipment to the conference and perhaps do some filming there. I didn't tell you that I had saved money for the hotel room, but I didn't have enough money for gasoline to get to the conference. A few days prior to the conference I attended a church picnic and a total stranger started talking to me - - I certainly did not mention any need for money - - but he pulled out a \$50.00 bill and said that God told him to give it to me. It caught me so off guard that I cried. I said "Now I can go to J.I.M.'s picnic." He turned around and showed me that his t-shirt said

"This is how ye shall know my disciples - - by their compassion and love for one another." It is his voice in the video behind the little church scene.

There were other things that I did not tell you. I didn't tell you that I was too embarrassed to bring my dilapidated camcorder to the conference. I also didn't tell you that I had no more idea about how to make a video than I had of how to make an atomic bomb. Even if I had known someone who could help me produce the video, I had no money to pay for help. I knew of no one anyway.

Two years later - - on March 23, 2006, I first showed my video to 33 bereaved parents in a TCF group and it received a standing ovation. Then Bob Robey told everyone there that when I interviewed him for the video, that he just went along with me and pretended that he believed that I was capable of making a video. He elaborated on our filming session and told about me propping my camcorder up on books and using cushions to muffle the squeaking sound that it made. However, he told the group, that he was willing to go just so far in going along with me and that he refused to use the script that I had prepared for him. (You can see it laying on my lap in the video).

It was only after I had filmed everyone that it really hit me that I had no idea what to do next. I did what I suppose any other sane person would do in the same situation- - I made one telephone call to a total stranger who lived three hours away and asked if he would help me even though I had no money to pay him. While that may not work for everyone else, it worked for me. I cannot stress enough that ignorance is bliss.

Because of the unbelievably generous amount of time, effort and dedication given to help those grieving by this "total stranger" and his family, who have become dear friends, I finally began to believe that others do care about our pain and suffering.

Others care when they see a person who is choking, and if they have learned to do the simple Heimlich Maneuver, they may be able to save that person's life. The suggestions offered in my video as to how others can help the bereaved are even simpler than the Heimlich Maneuver, but are equally as important.

Since I've begun showing the video, we are making greatly needed changes in our community. Churches are starting up good bereavement teams. They are letting me teach church members more about helping the bereaved (like what NOT to say) -- that is not in my video. I do not pretend to know everything about helping everyone who is bereaved and I tell pastors that up front. Their response has been "Then just teach us what you know."

I am currently organizing a round-table discussion about whether our community has adequate services to help the bereaved. This discussion will include three pastors, a funeral home director, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a counselor, a TCF facilitator and me.

I believe that anyone who lives in a community that does not provide adequate services for the bereaved can use my video as a tool in getting others to listen. Most importantly, others start talking to us after seeing the video. I know that it has opened doors that have remained closed to me for the past ten years. My hope is that good bereavement teams start popping up everywhere. Churches in our community have been showing my video during their regular services. Sometimes pastors ask the congregation to plan to stay 30 minutes longer for a question/answer time. Questions that are asked of me can be answered by any bereaved parent the same way that I answer them. I answer to the best of my knowledge and ability. If I do not know the answer, I readily admit that I do not know. Just remember - - we are the people from whom grief experts learn.

Recently a total stranger came to our house selling something. I gave her a copy of my video. I truly never dreamed that I would hear from her again. A few weeks later she returned to our home and said that she showed the video to her pastor. He was so impressed with what I am trying to do that he sent a check to help me with the expense of copying the video. He also sent word that they would make my next two videos - - music and all.

As long as I believe that there is a great need for help, support and greater understanding for the bereaved, I will keep making videos - - as long as God keeps sending total strangers my way. Dinah, you asked if I created my own website. No - - it has taken me the past two months to learn to send and read my e-mail. A total stranger set it up. He said that someone from the Catholic Diocese of Owensboro had seen my video and told him to do whatever I needed and send them the bill.

My mom taught me to be wary of total strangers, but I've begun to wonder who they are, why they're there and who might have sent them. The saying "Dream it, Believe it, Think it and Do it" for me would have read "Dream it, Believe it, Think it and Let Total Strangers Do The Work."

May others show you the compassion of Jesus Christ.

Charlotte Martin

Dear Dinah,

I was so glad to hear from you - - and just in the nick of time. I was having one of my "worst moments that I've had in a while." It was one of

those "fight or flight" feelings -- and I had no one to fight with and nowhere to go.

Frankly, I had no idea that it would be so discouraging trying to figure out how to get the video in the hands of those who might like to have it. I guess I thought that if I had a website that people would just be able to find it. I've discovered that it doesn't work that way.

For now, I'll just keep trudging along, and trying to learn as I go. Hope you can get caught up soon on what you need to do - - and then rest a while and enjoy being caught up. I don't anticipate being caught up again until spring. That will only be because when everyone else is putting away their winter clothing and getting their spring clothing out - - I won't have gotten around to putting my spring clothes away for the winter - - so in effect I will be ahead of everyone else.

*Love back to you,
Charlotte*

I went to the church where we're going to film my video "Grieve with those who are Grieving" last week. They have an all-female band (one lady plays the saxophone), and their music is beautiful. They agreed to play the music for this video. I think it may make it faster in getting the finished product.

*Love
Charlotte Martin*

Keith's symbol is karate.

Ron & Marie Faller's son, Christopher (5-7-90) died after receiving piggyback heart transplants, 3-24-98.

Maria has updated Christopher's Christmas pages and you are going to love them, especially the second one. Be sure to look at the stockings at the bottom.

<http://www.geocities.com/legobeaver2/chrisxmas.html>

and

<http://www.geocities.com/legobeaver/christmas2.html>

Christopher's symbols are legos and beavers.

Joe & Debbie Kitchen's son, Chad (4-2-74) died from a gunshot wound to the head (they don't know who did it), 12-5-99.

Joe and Debbie reaffirm what I think, that our children know each other and bring us together so we may comfort each other:

Dinah,

I hope you have a peaceful Christmas. You are such a wonderful person and God has blessed me to have you in my life. You will never know the comfort that comes from your emails and cards. I know in my heart that Jim and Chad know each other and brought us together. Please take care and have a Happy New Year, too.

Love,

Joe & Debbie Kitchen

Chad's symbol is a guitar.

Dave & Kathie Carrigan's daughter, Chrissie (11-14-86) died from passive hanging after suffering from depression, disassociate identity disorder & anorexia, 12-6-01.

Kathie shared her ups and downs:

Dinah,

Thank you for remembering my angel on her special days.

The past year has had many ups and downs. The ups have been my 3-year-old grandson, Petey. The little guy has gone through 2 open-heart surgeries

The down side, I am now on oxygen 24/7. Been told I have COPD.

Pray all is well with you and yours.

Hugs,

Kathie

Chrissie's symbols are a butterfly, angel, buffalo, Dalmatian, & Tigger.

Shirley Baer's daughter, Laurie (10-31-76) died during corrective heart surgery, 12-4-92.

Laurie, my only child, died at 16 years of age during "corrective" heart surgery in Boston on December 4, 1992. She was born with a heart defect, pulmonary stenosis, two right sided lungs, a single ventricle, and a single AV valve. There was no surgery that could be done to divide her ventricle into two. We were not told that a surgery was available for her condition by her doctor until June of 1990, that if we "had asked four years earlier" it could have been done in Galveston. By the time we were finally referred to Boston two years later, the procedure "wasn't right" for her. But, according to them, she didn't need this procedure because "she had two ventricles, not one" which we had been told for 16 years. They could close the wall in the ventricle, makes two valves out of the one, and she would be "as good as new," that she would be "running the malls in two weeks," and they gave us a drawing of exactly what her heart looked like and what they would do.

The next day, after four hours in surgery, the nurse came and told us all the repairs had gone well, that they were closing her up and preparing to take her to PICU. We were so happy! Then one hour later she came and told us that they were having problems, that they had to go back in and replace the valve that they had split into two. Then one hour later she came to tell us the surgeon was worried, so it was time for us to worry. Thirty minutes later the surgeon came and told us she was stable, that they had shocked her heart 26 times to get it into rhythm and they were sending her to PICU. Then he told us her heart was REALLY BAD (the night before he told

us it WASN'T THAT BAD), that he had to remove an obstruction in her ventricle (which he didn't tell us about the night before, or draw on the diagram of the surgery he did for us). When we asked him if he knew about it after the catheterization and when he was discussing the surgery with us, he said he did, but when we asked why he didn't tell us about it, he just got up and said "surgery had to be done sometime," then left. Five minutes later an intern came in and told us that she had had another episode of arrhythmia and died (she had a six year history of arrhythmia and was taking medications for it, but the surgeon insisted that she didn't have a rhythm problem and that it would not be a problem during surgery). I don't have to tell you how we felt. All I could say was "I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do."

I went to see her in the O.R. after she died--it was awful! They had her all wrapped up in a white sheet like a mummy. I almost fainted, my knees gave out. I went to her, held her in my arms and cried that I didn't know they were going to do that to her, then took the rubber band out of her long brown hair and put it in my wallet. Then we were asked to leave the hospital. We told them we would like to stay in the lobby for a while because her body couldn't be sent home until Sunday and we didn't want to be far away from her until we left the next morning. They told us it was against hospital policy for us to stay in the lobby. The nurse escorted my husband up to where our things were, stopped to pick me up on the third floor, called a taxi and walked us out the front door!

It wasn't bad enough that we took her 1500 miles away from home to the "best" doctors, but to have her die away from home like that was devastating. If they had only told us everything the night before when we gave our consent, that the risk was probably much higher than we would have taken at that time, we probably would have taken her home for Christmas and let her have her first real tree, then brought her back in a couple of months. They just decided to take her life and ruin our lives by making the decision for us! We talked to many lawyers after this, but they all agreed that we could never get another doctor to testify against this surgeon because he was so well known. One lawyer had tried before for another client. Another lawyer we called told us the name of the surgeon before we could even finish our story!

Laurie had just passed her driver's test and was waiting for her license. It didn't come until after she died. It was waiting for us in the mail when we got home. We put it in her coffin with her. She never got to see it. She was all excited about being in Boston because we heard on the radio that it was going to snow. It didn't snow until after she died, while we were

waiting in the airport all night long until our flight the next day. She never got to ride "first class" in an airplane. We rode in "first class" because I was crying so much the stewardess put us up there in an unused seat. Laurie came home in the cargo hold of the plane.

The happiest day of my life was when the nurse brought her into my room after she was born. I couldn't believe I had such a beautiful baby girl, something I had always wanted since I was a very little girl, someone to be with me always, to love and love me. Then the saddest day at six weeks when we were told of her heart defect. Then happy again in June of 1990 when we were told she could be helped. Then ecstatic on December 3, 1992 when we were told that her heart wasn't as bad as we had always been told, that they could not only help her, but make it function like mine or yours.

My life ending the next day when she died.

For a long time after she died, I couldn't even look at her picture. I felt so guilty for what I had done to her. I couldn't even go to the cemetery until a week after she was buried. For years after I was told of her heart condition I had nightmares of seeing her in a coffin. So my best friend and my boss viewed her body and took the clothes and things to put in it for me. They said that she looked "beautiful". I regret not having them cut some of her long hair for me to keep forever. We had a closed casket funeral.

On her grave marker, we have Jesus with children and pets on the left side, and on the right side the last verse of the poem that was used at her funeral - I don't know who wrote it but it went like this:

"Her golden heart stopped spirit beating.

A determined was at rest

God broke our hearts to prove to us

He only takes the best."

Shirley wrote this poem:

My Angel My Life

Laurie, my angel, my life, my only child.

You will never know how much I love you and miss you.

We started as one and resulted in two, or did we?

For we were always together till the very end.

You were the love of my life, my reason for being.

You were always sweet and gentle.

Even as I carried you in my womb, you never hurt me.

*Sometimes I had to look down to make sure you were still there.
Others complained about how much their baby kicked and hurt them.
All you ever gave me was a gentle touch, a loving embrace.*

*And when it came time for you to arrive, you were early.
Even the labor wasn't hard, for you came in about three hours.
Your doctor barely arrived at the hospital in time.
And I'll never forget the first time I saw you.
I couldn't understand how I ever deserved such a beautiful precious baby.*

*And as you arrived early, you also departed much too soon.
All of your hopes and dreams were never accomplished
While you were here with us on this earth.
I know that in Heaven you are everything you ever wanted to be
And that you completed your education with Jesus.*

*And as you entered Heaven's gates, Jesus must have greeted you
With open loving arms and said "Welcome, my child, you have come to
Complete your life with me in Heaven. For your years on earth
Were not always easy, but here in Paradise you will feel no more
Pain, shed no more tears, and soon you will be with your loving
Parents again - until the end of time."*

Written by Shirley Baer, May 31, 2000

Shirley hopes you will visit Laurie's website and read the different pages: <http://lauriebaer.com>

Laurie's symbol is a Unicorn.

Joe & Elaine Stillwell's daughter, Peggy (8-23-66) died in an auto accident, 8-2-86. Their son, Denis (2-4-65) died in the same accident, 8-6-86.

Elaine sent this Christmas letter:

2006 Christmas Greetings,

Well, the Christmas tree and all the decorations are up. We kept asking ourselves if we really wanted to go up to the attic for everything and then we got in the Christmas Spirit!!! I never thought we would ever get to the point of wondering whether we would put up the Christmas tree! Does this sound familiar?

It's been a busy year, but aren't they all? My entire Office of Laity and Family was terminated as of June 30th. 17 people out of jobs. A year ago they changed my time card to read Catholic Cemeteries but I stayed in my Family Ministry Office. So when everyone jumped ship, I had no choice but to report to Holy Rood Cemetery, in Westbury, where Joe said they would give me a plot and a bridge table. I gave up my private office and am now ensconced in a cubicle in the middle of the business office surrounded by very nice people who do nothing related to my work as Bereavement Coordinator. As strange as it seems, I am very happy there and all my programs are continuing with their full support. I even have a "user-friendly" website now (www.holyroodcemetery.org) which lists all the programs available for the bereaved, which has been a big help to people looking for grief support. They just have to click on the word Bereavement on the bar on top of the home page and the next page offers Support Groups Available Now. In addition to doing Facilitator Trainings and special programs, I am busy organizing our 2007 Bereavement Conference to be held on March 24 offering 20 different workshops with top-notch Presenters in the Bereavement field. I have had to cut back on my out-of-town speaking engagements – just don't have the time to deal with airports, etc., although I do miss seeing many friends at these conferences. In June, when I left the Pastoral Center in Rockville Centre, I stepped down from my other job as Coordinator for the Separated, Divorced and Singles – just could not take that ministry to the cemetery – did not think it was right. No one has replaced me and I feel frustrated that those people have been left hanging, especially since we had launched such wonderful programs for them. Hopefully, someone will step up and continue the work.

On the weekend of June 24th, my high school classmates and I celebrated our 50th reunion from St. Agnes Academic School, Rockville Centre. I chaired the event with a wonderful Committee which met all during the year to plan the many details for the 3 day weekend. 129 of us had graduated in 1956 and we were able to find 127 of our classmates, 13 of whom had died. We had the most wonderful weekend with the gala Dinner Dance at the Rockville Links on June 24th, exactly 50 years to the day we

graduated. For the grand souvenir of the event, everyone received a 255 page Reunion yearbook with all our stories and pictures of what we had been doing for the last 50 years. Many of us had spent 12 years together, attending both grammar school and high school, so we had a lot to catch up on. 145 persons attended and everyone had a great time “reconnecting.” We seemed to have all mellowed out.

For Peggy’s and Denis’ 20th anniversaries August 2nd and 6th, our family marked the special occasion on Sat., Aug. 5th with The Peggy and Denis Memorial Cocktail Party, a fund raiser for the scholarship established in their name at the University of Dayton. Through the support and love of our friends, we were able to raise \$25,000 to add to the scholarship, bringing it over the \$100,000 mark. We were surrounded with a roomful of Love as we greeted 150 friends, classmates, and scholarship recipients, who enjoyed a very special day at Kellenberg Memorial High School where they bent over backwards to make it a very successful event.

We are all feeling good, no major health crisis this year, thank God. Annie is still the busy Social Worker at Holly Patterson Nursing Home, a division of Nassau County University Hospital. She is recuperating from the renovation of two bathrooms in her home, an epic story that began in Feb. and went on forever with the contractor from hell. Christopher received his First Holy Communion in May and he and Annie flew to California in July for a nice vacation seeing the sights. They welcomed a new addition to their family in May – a little shiht-zu puppy they named Casey. Christopher is now in 3rd grade and enjoying the Gifted Program and his first year of violin. He just finished the football season and is revving up for basketball. Hard to believe, he’ll turn nine on Dec. 28th. Joe meets him at the bus every day, the highlight of his day, and takes good care of him until Annie gets home. Our puppy, Buddy, whom we should have named “Zoom” because he’s so incredibly fast, is almost two and weighs 55 pounds – a lot smaller than our beloved Max who was twice that. He has added a lot of joy to our home because of his crazy antics and loveable nature. He is Joe’s shadow. Each morning he brings his soccer ball up to our bedroom with that eager look in his eyes saying, “Wanna play soccer?” but Joe and I just sip our coffee and ignore the request as he goes bananas with his ball.

I haven’t had time to write any more books this year, but I am still a regular columnist for the national magazine, Grief Digest. Monthly I prepare a 10 page Newsletter for our Compassionate Friends Chapter (300 mailing list) and I write the lead article for our diocesan Catholic Cemeteries newsletter (30,000 mailing list), so I am never far from my computer. Joe and I are still Chapter Leaders for The Compassionate

Friends of Rockville Centre which just celebrated its 19th birthday. This year we are averaging 65-70 persons at a meeting. Our Chapter just grows and grows. My 2004 book, The Death of a Child: Reflections for Grieving Parents, (available on amazon.com), continues to sell well and touches many families. I get the nicest comments from people who have read it telling me how much it helped them. One gentleman just had two stars named for Peggy and Denis in gratitude for the book. Wow!!!

Joe and I took part in a documentary film about the loss of a child which has been in production for the last two years by our friend Rosemary Smith. She advises us that it is near completion and almost ready for its debut in March which will take place in KY. Rosemary is hoping that this labor of love will be picked up by HBO and that it will be in the running for some film awards, so you might see us on television.

*Wishing you all the blessings of Christmas,
Elaine and Joe and Buddy*

Peggy and Denis' symbol is an angel.

**Craig & Kristi Dalske's son, Chris (3-16-79) completed suicide,
10-29-01.**

Kristi shares Chris' story, *Forever Young*:

Our son, Chris, was a bouncy baby boy born on 3/16/79. He was nicknamed Bam-Bam because he was all muscle and a real bruiser. He had a normal childhood with 3 siblings and 2 sets of grandparents that doted on them all. We are a normal suburban family and all live within minutes of each other.

Chris started to have some discipline problems in middle school. To get him into special classes we had him tested and he was diagnosed with ADD and put on meds. He went to a psychologist for a while and during high school decided not to go anymore. It was a constant struggle to get him through school. The only thing that kept him going was football. He is a big boy and played very well and hard. It was his life. He loved it.

After high school he chose not to take the meds anymore and seemed like the same person. He said he felt the same not taking them. I constantly

worried about Chris. I always thought he would end up in jail. He did things his way, when he wanted, and very impulsively.

He decided to be a truck driver like his dad. He went to truck driving school and surprised himself by studying and doing very well. He landed a great union job as a driver for Budweiser. He always said he had a great job. He also started bouncing at a bar and loved it there. He danced the weekend away with lots of girls. Had a ball. This is also the time we have come to find out he started doing ecstasy which led to other drugs.

We saw no difference whatsoever at home. He was the same person as always. Always laughing, starting arguments, getting everyone all rowed up. He did sleep a lot after a weekend out. He always got up for work and did his job every day.

Looking back I had lots of talks with Chris. He always felt different than his siblings, but couldn't explain it. We joked it away. He always joked that he was adopted. I guess he felt like he didn't belong. He did question himself about things that happened to him. Like, why do things always happen to me? He seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time a lot. The night before his death, Chris woke up to watch the eagle's game. He had a little argument and blew up and stormed up to his room and trashed it. I followed him and he was in a state I had never seen before. He was not himself. He left the house and I was very frightened. I was scared for him. I thought he would get in a car accident.

I was going to call the police but he came back in an hour and I could tell he had been crying. When I see my grown kids cry I lose it. Chris was 6 foot and 285 lbs. We had a talk and he told us how much he loved his life and his job. He told us he loved us and hugged us. I told him maybe we should get some help for his rage. He said he tried therapy before and it didn't work. I truly think he felt there was no help for him. He went to bed and so did we.

The next morning, Oct. 29, 2001, I saw Chris for one minute. He was dressed for work and we said goodbye. That was the last time I saw him.

He called me at work and I still hear his voice. It was full of despair. He told me he loved me and to tell everyone he loved them. He said he couldn't go on like this anymore. 15 minutes later I got the news that he had shot himself in the mouth at a local park in his truck.

He had also called my husband and 2 of his siblings. He left messages on their cell phones. I know that haunts them to this day. He told them to have a good future. We were and are in total shock. I never would have thought Chris would do this. He was the strong one. The one everyone looked up to. The leader.

We live day to day with a hole in our hearts. It will never be filled. We have new lives now, but the memories sustain us. There is so much we miss about Chris...his shiny blue eyes, his contagious laugh and smile, his eating the middle of a cake, the sound of his truck coming home, his arguing with his sisters and brother, his poor table manners, his Bud truck in the driveway, his asking me to scratch his arms and back, his yelling at the emcee on Funniest Home Videos, his getting mad at the bitches on The Real World, his antagonizing his little sister, his gentleness with our friends' kids, his way of making everyone laugh, his way of saying whatever was on his mind, his complaining about my cooking, his way of playing with the dogs, his extravagant shopping habits, his always asking me to do his wash, his whole body spread sleeping on the sofa, his big wide feet he always complained about...I could go on forever for he is so missed.

Chris is forever young and he is our hero.

By Kristi, Mom of Chris

Chris' symbol is an angel.

Howard & Sandy Graham's son, Scott (10-24-77) took his own life, 4-28-95.

A young child is taught to remember her Uncle:

Dinah,

We have always lit a candle for Scott. Our granddaughter asked me why we do this and I explained that we do it to include her Uncle Scott in our celebration and that we won't ever forget him. I told her before I went to bed I blow it out for safety. When she had her bedtime story read and all her hugs and kisses, she asked if she could blow out Scott's candle. We went up to blow it out and she said, "Because you are so special Uncle Scott, we are putting you to bed with us." At breakfast the next morning, she asked if I would light Scott's candle because she wanted him to know that he wasn't forgotten.

We thought of your Jim (and you, too) last Sunday when we lit our green candle at 7:00. (World Wide Children's Remembrance Day)

We hope that you and Jim have a nice holiday and that you both are blessed in 2007.

Thank you for all that you do for our children.

Sandy

Scott's symbols are an F-16 and a dolphin.

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

Debbie sent me a Christmas card with pictures of alpacas and I asked her if they were her "babies:"

Hi Dinah,

Yes, they are my babies....

I started this alpaca farm about a year ago - with 2 of the Alpacas - Miss Butterscotch and Pierre, then just purchased Miss Kandi Kisses with her 7-month-old Cria (baby), which is the dark brown one.... Peppers, last month. Miss Kandi Kisses is pregnant and due in June 2007 and I believe that Miss Butterscotch is pregnant too.....

My daughter Tammy loved animals..... she had a prairie dog (Daisey), a turtle (Vinny), fish, a silver/gray cat named Smokey and Smokey had two male kittens. In October 2003 - my husband went with me to look at alpacas at this large farm about 20 miles from here..... I fell totally in love with these gentle, wonderful creatures..... BUT - with going through everything that happened to Tammy earlier that year - decided that was not time to take on such a large venture.....

Last year in September (2005), I started searching the internet about them again, by November 6th, 2005 - we were bringing Miss Butterscotch and Pierre home from just outside Columbus, Ohio.... the farm is named in Tammy's memory - Alpacas of Precious Memories Farm.

I have not regretted one moment of being involved in this business, with such gentle animals.

Take care, Debbie

I asked for permission to use her email and this was her response:

Dinah,

I would love for you to use this email in the next newsletter..... I so wish Tammy was here to join in this venture with me, she would just love these animals..... I miss her with every part of my being - it has been almost 4 years at the end of January that she first went missing - it seems like forever, then it also seems like it is just a horrible nightmare and not real. I am sure you know what I mean, sometimes I can express my feelings in words and other times - it never comes out the way I mean it... I guess that is where the saying comes in "There are no words that can truly express the loss of a child."

I hope your Christmas had soothing moments of precious memories of your son Jim..... as I found in thinking of my Tammy.

Over the last few years when I hung up her stocking along with my 24 year old son Kevin's (not married), my husbands two kids that are 10 & 11 (live with their Mom), our several cats, our dog Cheyanne, and ours - I filled all of ours, but I did not put anything in Tammy's stocking.....this year when I hung hers up, after filling all of ours..... I started crying like crazy and just could not stop - I left the room and went straight to my husband and told him that I don't care what anyone thinks - I am filling her stocking - I KNOW SHE IS NOT HERE - it hurts more to see it empty.

Later that day, a friend of Tammy's since they were little (her name is Nancy) came by with her 4 year-old son Adam..... Adam opened his present from us and his little plastic red train (he LOVES Thomas the Train & Friends) that we filled with candy (like a little stocking) and after being here for a while had finished his candy (it did not hold very much). Well..... the other kids still had their regular size stocking with candy and Adam wanted a regular stocking too.... I was happy as can be when I remembered Tammy's stocking and went and got it for him.... he just beamed when he saw it and it helped me to see that filled stocking of Tammy's being so wanted and emptied by this little boy.

Debbie

Tammy's symbols are a dolphin and a rose.

Mitch & Pat Bird's son, Michael Spooner (9-23-80) died from cancer, 9-17-01.

The Birds have moved and are excited about their new location:

Mitch got a job with Tyson as a programmer, The kids love their new school, and I will be looking in to getting a job as an artist with DaySpring cards whose world headquarters is here in Siloam. I think our life has made a good turn.

May God bless everyone this coming year,

Patricia Bird

Art & Photography



I encourage you to look at Michael's website. There are so many different things on the website. Also look at Pat's beautiful art work. She is a very talented lady.

Michael's symbols are a Christian fish with a red Nike hat.



Celebrate the new year with one piece of chocolate for each of the old years!

My email address is: dinah@ucumberland.edu

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