
LAMENTATIONS

Issue 117

middle

February, 2008

My goal for 2008:

I've always discovered happiness when I'm helping others. My goal is to become more involved with organ donation – and my commitment to donor families. I also want to become a certified grief counselor. Thanks Dinah for all you do. I love you.

Sandy Hickey

(Sandy's son Paul's organs were donated when he passed, and Sandy has also donated one of her kidneys to a man in her church. This is truly giving of yourself to others.)

In the early days of my grief, a tear would well up in my eyes, a lump would form in my throat, but you would not know—I would hide it, and I am strong.

In the middle days of my grief, I would look ahead and see that wall that I had attempted to go around as an ever-present reminder of a wall yet unscaled. Yet I did not attempt to scale it for the strong will survive—and I am strong.

In the later days of my grief, I learned to climb over that wall step by step—remembering, crying, grieving, and the tears flowed steadily as I painstakingly went over. The way was long, but I did make it—for I am strong.

Near the resolution of my grief, a tear will well up in my eyes, a lump will form in my throat, but I will let that tear fall—and you will see it.

Through it you will see that I still hurt and I care—for I am strong.

--Terry Jago, TCF Regina, Canada

If you're feeling low, don't despair, the sun has a sinking spell every night, but it comes back up every morning.

--Anonymous

Grief Grafts

Wanda Williams' son, Jesse (9-22-85), died from an accidental oxycotin overdose, 4-3-07.

Wanda is a fellow traveler who lost her only child:

Dinah,

I am sorry that it takes me so long to reply these days. I have been reading a lot about your son Jim what a wonderful young man, I am so very sorry. What a caring young man to think of others rather than himself that night. I think all of the love that you give through your work is incredible and I know that your son must be very proud that his mother has chosen to give back even in the hardest time in her life. You inspire me to get up everyday and keep going especially during this past month as you know it is so hard. I read your story about the angel wings and laughed so hard I cried. Your son must have a great sense of humor for that to happen.

Jesse's birthday was 9/22/85, his angle date 4/3/07, I would be honored to have him listed with the birth and angel dates. He was my only child. He really could brighten up any room and made those around him feel special and loved. He also had a very dark sad side that I was very aware of and tried to help him with. He was very depressed and unfortunately tried to self medicate with RX drugs and alcohol. Ultimately he died from an oxycotin overdose. It was accidental; he was visiting my parents and my mom tried to do CPR when she found him. She struggles so badly with the guilt of what if I went to wake him earlier, what if, what if. You know how that goes.

I would choose a man fishing, because that is where he found peace, when he was fishing, as his symbol. I would also choose a butterfly and coin since those are some of the signs we have received since his death. I have printed and read so much from other parents' stories and my heart really truly aches for all of them. The heart break I feel from losing my son is so

awful I just cannot imagine how those who have lost more than one child can handle it.

I have read about the wonderful work that you and Rosemary have done. I thank God everyday for people like you who have reached out to those of us who are new on the journey. I do not want to be a fellow traveler but I do not have a choice and I want to thank you for all of your help. I purchased Children of the Dome and it was a beautiful book. The Dome is so lovely that I know my son is with all of the others who have gone before us and it is beautiful there.

*Sending you a wish for a peaceful holiday season
Wanda Williams*

Dinah,

You can put Jesse's chosen father's name on the web site. It is Dan Marshall. Jesse's biological father did not want anything to do with him when he started having issues in his life. His biological father is a pastor of a church and I guess he didn't want Jesse to bring shame to him. Jesse decided to "adopt a chosen father" that is how he introduced my partner Dan to everyone. Dan stood by Jesse and never gave up on him, Jesse treasured him for that.

The coin story is about a very special aunt of Jesse's who tried to ease the pain of losing Jesse and started to drink on the month anniversary of his death she went to a local grocery store that gives different colored coins that have a value when you make a purchase at that store. Jesse and she went to the store many times and Jesse would always get coins, but she would not. She walked to her car after not getting a coin that day and saw a red one (a high value coin) on the ground near her car. She picked it up and said, "Well Jesse I guess you must have sent me this coin." When she got to our other sister's house she took the coin out to show her and noticed that it was not a coin from the store but an AA coin for one month sober. She hasn't drank since (I was cleaning Jesse's room on Monday of this week and found his one month sober coin! He earned that coin and we knew he had it, we just didn't know where it was).

The butterfly came to me one day near a tree planted in Jesse's memory. It flew into my face which startled me but then it flew to the tree and marker, then back to me and around my shoulders. My mom also had many butterflies and she actually picked one up. We celebrated Jesses 22n't birthday doing things he would have liked. We had the party near my sister's and her husband's pond, had a camp fire and all slept out in tents.

In the morning we were all gathered near the fire and I looked over at my twin sister and there next to her leg was a butterfly not moving. We all thought it was dead. I guess it was cold because when it was picked up off of the log, it began to move its wings. We like to think of these as signs that Jesse has arrived in a place where his pain is gone. You can include my email in January's newsletter and edit where need be. I write very poorly right now.

Thank you again for your thoughts and prayers. I am not putting up a Christmas tree. I do like the idea of one in Jesse's memory, but this year we are going to CT to be with family and there we will be doing the lighting of candles with the prayer that you had in one of your newsletters. I think for this year it will help to remind all of us that in the end there is hope.

Many thanks to you,

Wanda

Jesse's symbols are a man fishing, a butterfly and coins.

Woody & Donna Herndon's son, Roger (6-25-70), died in an airplane crash, 8-2-91.

Donna had an article published in Guideposts' Angels on Earth magazine and it inspired an article in The Paducah Sun, written by Leigh Landini Wright llandini@paducahsun.com Features Editor, The Paducah Sun:

Among those on my Christmas card list is one of my former student friends from Murray State days. We have remained close through the years. She called Wednesday sounding pretty desperate. She is a writer with the Paducah Sun. She had just gotten my card with a copy of the article and was in dire need of a story for the front page for Friday's Faith and Family section of the paper.

Angels on Earth is published by Guideposts, but is not the Guideposts magazine you send your nephews! My mother gave me my first subscription to Angels on Earth, and I have continued to get it ever since. It comes bimonthly, unlike my monthly Guideposts which I also get. I received a \$100 honorarium for the article. The day after I got my check, a Penney's

ad came that advertised a big 50% off jewelry sale. Included in the photos was a little gold angel with five small diamonds. It was described as a Journey Pendant, with diamonds of increasing size. I went to check it out. They only had one in stock, but it had a defective clasp. The manager waited on me! It's the only time I have ever seen the man in the store! He sold me the pendant for \$99.95, and told me to take it to the local jeweler and Penney's would pay to have a new clasp put on it, which they did! This was further evidence that my guardian angels are on the job! My journey with the angels is now documented by my sweet little necklace.

Headline: Holiday tree is year-round blessing

Story Body: BY LEIGH

LANDINI WRIGHT

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MURRAY, Ky. — When Donna Herndon looks at her 7 1/2-foot lighted Christmas tree, every ornament tells a story.

In the fall of 1997 as Herndon's husband, Woody, battled through chemotherapy, she put her tree up as usual. But with the stress of caring for Woody after the holidays, she never quite got around to taking down the angel ornament-laden tree. Woody told her he wouldn't mind if she kept the tree up year-round because that way she'd get a month back in her life. He reasoned that it took her two weeks to put up the tree and two weeks to take it down, so why not just leave it?

Ten years later, the tree was featured in the July/August issue of Angels on Earth magazine, a publication from Guideposts. Herndon replied to the magazine's request for readers to submit a handmade angel ornament for the magazine's office tree. "I didn't have time to make one, so I picked up a handmade one at Angels Attic (thrift shop) and sent it in to go on the tree," she said. "I mentioned my angel tree and how many I had collected."

When a magazine writer called and indicated her editors wanted a picture, Herndon replied that the tree was still up, even though it was well past Christmas. Husband Woody snapped the pictures and submitted to the magazine.

Herndon estimates she has 1,200 to 1,300 lights on her tree with 1,032 angel-themed ornaments. Some are handmade; others are gifts.

"I guess I have developed a real appreciation for the fact that I believe with all my heart that God sends angels to help us," she said. "Woody said at one point that he thought my guardian angels did shift work. I don't think that the ornaments have any magical and spiritual qualities, but they remind me of the things that God has done for us."

Herndon began collecting angel ornaments as a newlywed nearly 45 years ago, but the intensity level rose in 1970 after the birth of her son Roger, when the Herndons were stationed in Berlin. Her tree now boasts angel ornaments from 41 countries.

One of her angel ornaments, dressed in a West Point cadet uniform, reminds her of Roger, who was a cadet at the time of his death in 1991. Her favorite ornament is a sterling silver angel given to her by Roger when he was in high school. The ornament doubles as a pendant so she wears it often to family events. "That's just my way of getting him there in spirit," she said.

Her ornaments also provided comfort through the trials of life. "They remind me of how much people care for us," she said. "Some nights when he (Woody) was so sick, I would just turn on the tree lights and look at it, be comforted and know that those people were praying for us."

Leigh Landini Wright

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This article was in the Murray Ledger & Times:

By TOM BERRY

Staff Writer

Everyone has ornaments on their Christmas tree that they see as special. Some become family heirlooms that are passed from generation to generation bringing back memories of those that won't be spending the holiday season with the family this year. Some of the unique designs are bought in stores, some are purchased in unique places while on vacation or are produced by businesses that no longer exist.

Then there are the most treasured ones; those that were given or actually produced by a family member or other special person that we want to remember at Christmastime year after year.

Jennifer Riley's Christmas tree is filled with a lot of those. Dozens of uniquely-designed ornaments that you won't see anywhere else were made by her grandmother, Dorcas Butler, and her aunt over a period of 50 to 60 years. The designs include everything from a snowflake to a mouse, but all definitely say Christmas.

“They hand-made all of these and if you look at them you will see that each (needlework) pin can contain up to about 10 beads or pearls or sequins or whatever on there,” Riley said. “They started either with styrofoam or just a regular satin ornament and they put these little, bitty, tiny beads on straight pins. There are stars and mice and presents and balls and snowflakes and just about everything.”

When Riley and her husband, Roy, first got married, they would visit Butler at her Lewisburg, Tenn., home and bring back some of the ornaments. They now have an entire tree dedicated to just the heirloom ornaments and memory of her grandmother.

“This is actually only half of them,” she said. “There are about two tree-toppers of them so when my sister-in-law and I inherited them, we divided them between us,” she said. “I admired their tree so much that now I have one of my own and I just love this — the sentimental side of me loves that my granny stuck every one of these pins and made all of these ornaments.”

Thelma Jones understands Riley’s sentiment. Her favorite ornament is an angel she made from the lace of her aunt’s wedding gown.

“She died when she was 100 years old and my mother got the material from her,” Jones said. “She gave it to my mother and my mother kept it until 1975. My mother died then and I made this from the material at that time.”

She made two other similar angels that were given away as gifts to family or friends. Jones, who has made angels for many others over the years, now displays her special angel either on or under a small Christmas tree she places in the front window of her home each holiday season.

“Ever since, I’ve had nothing but angels on my Christmas tree,” she said. “This one has been on my Christmas tree ever since.”

An ornament that you have spent a lot of hours on and made yourself can also be very special. Norma Paschall, a member of the Murray Woman’s Club, recently created a needlepoint ornament by hand that she hopes will become a family heirloom hanging on the family Christmas tree for years to come.

Sewn in red, green and other traditional holiday colors, the tasseled, cylindrical shaped ornament is very unique. “It’s a needlepoint ornament,” Paschall said. “I did spend hours and hours constructing it.”

The ornament was a product of her membership in the local EGA, she said.

“The program chairman had provided me with instructions for this particular ornament, which is called ‘Garland Twist,’” she said. “The

pattern is composed of various types of tiny needlepoint stitches with threads of red, green, white and metallic.”

Completely hand-made, construction includes hand-sewn tiny beads, hanger, small bows, and tassel trailing from the bottom. “Since construction of this unique ornament required many intermittent hours over several months for me, hopefully it will become a family heirloom enjoyed for years to come,” she said.

Sometimes ornaments can actually be all the same with each one unique at the same time. Donna Herndon has hundreds of very special ornaments on her tree — all angels.

Angels collected over a period of 40 years, angels purchased in most U.S. states and many foreign countries, angels both large and small, angels that represent bee keepers, firefighters, police officers and other professions, ethnic angels representing Eskimos, Africans, Russians, Indians and just about every race, color and creed, angels that play harps and guitars or horns and flutes, angels carrying everything from sling shots to flash lights, angels made of Olive wood from Bethlehem, Israel or synthetic hair from Bangladesh or made from an authentic cotton ball, with leaves for wings.

Everything and everywhere possible on the tree it’s angels, more angels and even more angels.

“I’ve counted 1,030, but I know I missed counting some,” Herndon said while pointing out some of her unique collection. “I bought some or people have made them for me or given them to me. A lot of people know that I collect angel ornaments so I get a lot of them that way,”

The Herndon “Angel Tree” (as it is known) stays up year-round.

“It would probably take too much time to take it down, so I just leave it up,” she said.

However, her favorite angel is the one her son, Roger, bought for her when he was in middle school; a simple sterling silver angel holding a wreath.

“Of course it’s my favorite because he gave it to me, but it is a nice one,” she said.

She has some special “angel” ornaments that include the photos of all her grandchildren — from their first Christmas to their last since 1989.

Unique doesn’t adequately describe Johnny McDougal’s special Christmas ornament creations without adding the words artistic and original. McDougal’s ornaments are hand-painted and crafted from such common fodder as gourds, pistachio nuts, acorns, walnuts and other materials that look as natural hanging on a tree as they do covered in holiday spirit.

“They’re made from just natural materials and I doctor them up a little bit,” he said, holding a winking Santa Claus-faced nut in his hand.

He wood burns some of the designs for the facial features and paints the rest with acrylic paint. He sells the items locally under the trade name “McGourd Creations.”

“I do this as a hobby and a small business and I have about 85 or 90 pieces out at Rare Earth Nursery and Gift Shop,” he said. “They are all different and original.”

Roger’s symbol is a monarch butterfly.

Leslie Franco’s daughter, Heather (11-2-86), died from Acute Pancreatitis, 12-29-2000.

Leslie wrote these poems to Heather:

To My Daughter...

*The depth of sorrow I cannot tell,
the loss of one I loved so well.
And while she sleeps in a peaceful sleep,
her memory shall I always keep.
In my heart you liveth still,
I dream of you nightly,
you seem so real.
But when I awake and realize it's just a dream,
the nightmare starts over and I silently scream,
Oh how I miss you!
Your smile lit up my life,
Oh how I miss you!
Love Mommy*

your beautiful heavenly wings and fly Doodles, just fly. Go

***Waiting For Angelic Wings Something I wrote for my Sweet Baby
Heather,...***

Waiting For Angelic Wings

Heather Baby I always knew you were an angel in waiting. Once your custom wings were complete God called you up to receive them. So take your beautiful heavenly wings and fly Doodles, just fly. Go anywhere and everywhere. You are no longer bound by earthly ties. Have fun and see it all! Just promise me that you will be there waiting for me when it's my turn for wings. Then together once again we can fly anywhere and everywhere. Only this time without the confines of earthly boundaries; and this time, my baby, we will not be separated ever again. I love you my sweet Baby

*Heather.
With Love,
Mom*

Please visit Heather's website: <http://www.freewebs.com/doodles>

Heather's symbols are butterflies (blues, blacks, purples) and an angel frog.

David & Tina Tomlinson's son, Zack (8-2-99), died from an accidental gunshot wound, 7-16-06.

I am a hospice social worker and grief counselor. I have been with Pennyroyal Hospice in Hopkinsville, KY for 3 yrs (since before Zack died). I do this job for God, because he called me to do it.

I reach out to people who have lost young children. I especially reach out to those who have lost young children due to an accidental gunshot wound. If you know of anyone, please let me know. Also, I am writing a Christian book for parents who have lost their child instantly (they didn't get to say goodbye).

www.zack-tomlinson.memory-of.com

My husband and I are the children's program directors for the Christian Law Enforcement Summit held at Ridgecrest, NC in October of each year. We teach the Eddie Eagle Gun Safe Program as part of our curriculum to children of police officers that attend that summit.

Zack did not pull the trigger on the weapon. He knocked it off of our dresser; causing it to discharge. It never should have been there, but was for our protection. Instead of protecting our family, it shattered it. I don't want one more child to die because of an unlocked weapon. Nobody ever thinks it will happen to them; but it can, and it may.

Zack's symbol is smiley faces.

Ali Isabell's son, Randy Reed Hecox (1-7-69), died from suicide, 7-23-99.

This is Randy's story:

Randy Reed Hecox

Randy was born in the middle of winter on January 7th 1969, right before my 21st birthday on January 20th. He was born in Naperville, Illinois, and he was my sweet breakfast baby I always said. 8:29 a.m. He weighed 7 lbs 2 ozs., 22 inches long. No wonder he kicked me so much and hard he had no room in there. He had the longest fingers I have ever seen. I just knew he would play something some day when he grew up. Fast forward now a few years. We moved back to my home area of Kansas and Missouri area. Randy, like his brothers and sister, loved the farm. Randy was always my tender hearted and gentle child, cared so much about his baby Donna as he called his sister.

Whatever he had she had to have as well. Well, way too fast he grew up and became a man. He joined the service right out of high school to make a life for his new wife and child. He and his family never dreamed a war was in the making. Well, he went from Germany to the war called Desert Storm on the front lines. He came back to Germany for his last year and then home for good. He came home a changed man. He left a boy and came home a man; one that was troubled. I won't go into it all as my story would be too long. I asked him to please talk to me about the war and he said, "NO mom I don't want to talk and you don't want to hear about it." My son was so hurt, so sick and I never saw it coming at all. He loved to dance, work on his race car and do model cars and play his red drums. He grew to be 6 foot 2 and slim. As his niece said, he always smelled good; her uncle Randy did. He was moving back to Missouri from Texas and I was to pick him up to take him to the airport that day. To make a terrible story short, he had PTSD. I found my son gone from me forever. I was blindsided. I never had any idea my sweet baby son was hurting so badly. I did not know I would have to carry that guilt the rest of my life. Why, why didn't I know my son was sick and not well? He died July 23, 1999. To this day I have never been back to that town where I found him. He lies beside his grandpa now. I was pregnant with Randy when my dad died at 57 with a major heart attack while mowing grass in his yard. I am sure they know each other now. Randy leaves a son behind that looks just like him and even talks like him. Todd is his name.

*There is more to the story but this is long enough for all to read.
Thank you Dinah for all your help and cards over the last years.
You care so much for us all. You earned your sweet halo dear
friend and a cyber hug to you. Ali aka Alice Hecox-Isabell
Ps. I wrote this in green for Randy's green eyes.*

Randy's symbol is an eagle.

**Mark & Soni Offutt's son, Jeffrey Collins (1-10-75), died in an
auto accident, 7-5-93.**

Soni tells how they celebrated Jeffrey's birthday:

*Thanks for the note. On Jeffrey's 18th birthday I had my family over
and cooked lasagna. Jeffrey didn't want a regular birthday cake, he wanted
me to fix a pineapple upside down cake, so every year on Jeffrey's birthday I
have my family over and we have Lasagna and pineapple upside down cake.
I miss him so much.*

*We got picture albums out this year and his cousins really enjoyed
looking at the old pictures. He was the first baby of the year in Bourbon
County that year so there was a picture of Jeffrey and me in the paper.
Some of them had never seen that. They thought it was funny. We had a
good night.*

Look forward to seeing you at the conference this year.

Thanks for everything you do!

Love,

Soni

Jeffrey's symbol is an angel with a golf club.

**Frank & Beth Russell's son, Casey (1-13-84), was killed in a
train accident, 6-20-94.**

This is the Russell's story:

Casey was born a few minutes after midnight on Friday 13th. The nurse thought we would be upset by the fact it was Friday the 13th, but Casey's mom was born on a Friday the 13th, so we thought it was a great thing. He was our third child and we were thrilled to have him. It took us five long years to have a child and we were so happy to now have our third healthy and beautiful child. Casey grew up in a good neighborhood where the children played up and down the streets. He was a happy child and most loving. Teachers would tell about his constant hugs and his wonderful smile. One of the things Casey loved to do was go with his dad and brother hunting, and that explains the background of his page. On Fathers Day, 1994, he had his good friend and former neighbor, Adam, spend the night with him. Adam was 11 and he and Casey both played baseball at our little league park. On Monday, they got up and watched some TV, but it was a beautiful day and they got restless. Casey asked his mother if they could go over to the school and play on the newly renovated playground. The boys went to the playground, but somehow decided to explore and ended up on a railroad trestle over a creek. As they looked down over the creek a freight train with 82 cars came around the curve. The boys had no escape route and were trapped. We had a double funeral with a tremendous turnout and quite a tribute to two fine young men that were well-liked in the community. They are laid to rest in adjoining plots and are forever in our hearts.

Some of her suggested support pages would be:

[Crisis, Grief, and Healing: Men and Women \(Tom Golden LCSW\)](#)

[ZOOM](#)

[Bereavement Research Network](#)

[Grief and Loss Links](#)

[Bereavement Resources](#)

[Parmeter Family Home Page](#)

[APART's Home Page](#)

[Serenity Welcome Homepage](#)

[Heavenly Playground](#)

Casey's symbol is a heart with BRAVE in the middle.

Joe & Jackie Beams' son, Aaron (8-26-91), and daughter, Carrie (3-31-84) were killed in an auto accident, 2-26-02.

Here is something I fixed for us grieving parents. Please pass it along to other parents like us <http://jackiesangels2.bravehost.com>

Jackie

www.jackiesangels.blogspot.com
<http://jackiesangels2.bravehost.com>

Aaron's symbols are a teddy bear, tractor, baseball, hunting & fishing, angel and a rose. Carrie's symbols are a smiley face, nurse, frog and an angel.

Herchel & Shirley Mincks' son, Loyde (12/26/59), was murdered, 04/05/02.

Shirley has found a wonderful way to help others:

Thank you so very much for your letter, how beautiful it is.

I would like to let you know what I am doing now with my spare time. I have gone to work at Mount Moriah Funeral Home. The reason I am saying this is because of the way it came about. When Loyde was killed I had a friend that worked at the Funeral Home, so my daughter-in-law and I called her to help us to make arrangements for they had not contemplated needing funeral services that soon. On Monday evening we had Loyde's visitation at the Funeral Home, the times were 5:30 to 8:00. When the evening was over it was 12:00 and many, many people had come thru the line, waiting as long as 2 hours in the rain. All of that to say the director remembered us. I was in the building one time when Loyde's vase was missing, but did not see the director. One of the ladies that was a receptionist (there are three so only 3 days are worked at the front desk by any one person 4 days once in awhile and every third weekend) became ill and couldn't work any more. Matt the director asked my friend if she thought I would be interested. I was and now I work where Loyde is out in the back

yard. I feel God dropped this job in my lap and I have been able to help some persons that have lost children. They do not realize we lost a child, but I feel I can have compassion they need at the time when it is so hard for them to realize they will ever make it thru these days. I usually get to see them a couple of times, so many elders lose their spouses. That too has been an area I feel I can help by being kind and talking with them before the directors sit down with them for arrangements.

I hope you know how wonderful you make us feel by remembering us. God has given you such a rewarding task. I hope we can reward you by letting you know how much we care for you and Jim. I never thought a tragedy could give us so many e-mail friends and a place to meet others. Thank you again for your love and concern for each one of us.

*Looking toward being at your conference again.
Herchel and Shirley Mincks*

Our Granddaughter, Amber, is leaving for the Army next Tuesday the 29th and I am not handling this very well. She is 23 and knows what she wants and it is all ok, I feel I am losing again but I know that is not true. How can life be AOK but yet hurt so bad on the inside?

Loyde's symbol is an eagle.

Rich & Melody's son, Brian (12-18-96), died from being hit by a car, 10-31-99.

Melody has changed her Christmas observances through the years:

I wish I'd read something like this in the early years. Now it seems passé. I sometimes light a special candle, but I do it just for myself. To the rest of our family, it seems like an intrusion into their happy day.

In those first years I came up with my own ways to include Brian in Christmas. Christmas was not something I could just write off or forget. It was the very reason I could hope to be reunited with my son. Besides, we had three young girls. I'll never forget walking down the boy-toy aisle at Farm and Fleet to get to the girl-toy aisle. It was excruciating. Never again would I be shopping for a son. (Three years later, at age 44, I was surprised

to become pregnant again, only to lose that baby—my last chance to be a mother again.) We were, however, accustomed to choosing a child from “Project Angel Tree” at our church. This is a project of Prison Fellowship. You buy two gifts—a toy and a clothing item—for the child of an incarcerated parent. That year I chose a little boy Brian’s age. That way I felt like I could still shop for my son. We had the privilege of delivering the gifts personally to “our” child. I remember the boy was so little that he said “Good-bye, Daddy!” to my husband as we were leaving.

Our first Christmas without Brian, I found myself on Christmas Eve wrapping the last few gifts, and suddenly occurred to me—I still could give Brian the little Fontanini Nativity set I had planned to give him (so he wouldn’t play with my hand-made ceramic one.) So at 4:00 PM on Christmas Eve, I went out and bought the set and took it to the cemetery. There I saw a man searching the headstones for a name. I was able to guide him to the right place—his own mother’s grave, which was still unmarked. It was right next to Brian’s! I was so glad for the timing of that moment.

The first few years we always took a votive candle to the grave on the four Advent Sundays. Some years I would take out Brian’s little Christmas tree, or a wreath on a stand.

Our first Christmas without Brian, I could not stand to see one fewer stocking hanging up. I asked the girls if we could just skip the stockings, but they were so disappointed. So I put up Brian’s stocking and told everyone they could put in little notes to him or gifts to charity in his name. That seemed to help that year, but the next year it seemed to upset our girls so I didn’t do it the third year.

Now I find myself on Christmas wishing there were a way to honor my son without hurting the other people I love.

Melody

This is a letter she wrote to a friend:

Someone said that we are mourning, but not so much for what our child has missed, because what they have now is so much better. I really doubt that our departed children miss the life they might have had—but, as mothers, we mourn the joys we never got to experience with that child, and never will. I have had to remind myself that there are some agonies of mothering a boy that I have missed, too--for which I’m grateful—but, in a way, I even miss that. It makes me realize the gift motherhood is—even the bad times are somehow worth it.

I am happy I've been able to distance myself from the heavy darkness that overwhelms and steals the joy from our lives, but the author reminds me that we need to be able to visit it once in awhile without fear. I'm sure that you have had to stay close to this depth of grief in order to relate to the women who you counsel and offer comfort to. For awhile I was just glad to be able to break free from that death-grip. I didn't want to go "back there" for fear I'd be trapped in it again. But now I realize that I have to visit it once in awhile just to stay real. As much as we need to accentuate the positive, the dark side is real, too. We can't always avoid it or we are in denial of the whole truth. People can tell when we are not being authentic.

This made me think of Jesus-- an excellent model of grief. He wasn't a negative person, but He was a realist. The Bible calls Him "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." It shows in the scriptures. He wept openly on several occasions. It is likely that he lost his earthly father as a teenager, since we don't see Joseph after Jesus' bar mitzvah at age twelve. Even though He was all about doing His heavenly Father's will, when the time came, He desperately wanted to avoid the Cross and all that entailed. He begged the Father to let Him avoid it. He struggled with accepting that this was the Father's will, to the point of sweating blood. If it was hard for Jesus—Who is God Himself--how hard should it be for us? Yes, this is really hard. But the Bible also says—"...for the joy set before him [He] endured the cross..." (Hebrews 12:2)

As human beings, I think we are out of balance if we don't experience the lowest lows as well as the highest heights in life. It can be a dizzying ride, but one bit of hope we can cling to is this: as low as we've been, that's how high we can be.

The Lord Himself actually gave me this hope in some visions the night Brian died. (And I'm not a visionary; never have been, before or since.) These got me through the horrible nights and days that followed. The first vision was this: I saw a huge, dark, heavy, writhing ball—the only way I can describe it. It was slowly descending upon me and was starting to crush my chest. (I was to feel that "ball" crushing, and choking me on many future mornings as I awakened.) But, at the same time, a gigantic ball of brilliant light began to rise, as if from an abyss. As though on an invisible, cosmic set of scales (like the old-fashioned scales carved into the Supreme Court building,) the dark ball continued to descend, and the ball of light continued to rise, slowly, until they eventually stopped and suspended, perfectly balanced—each at equal height with the other. This told me that each ball was the same weight and size as the other. I instantly knew what it

meant—the glory would be equal to the suffering that had to be endured—and each would be great.

Then I saw an enormous, dark, black cloud. But it had a brilliant “silver lining” that almost blinded me. That picture was easy to interpret.

I also saw the Lord’s face. I’ll never forget it. It was in the hospital. His expression was sad, sympathetic and somehow very comforting. When I looked into His eyes, I had the most intense sense of peace “that passed all understanding.” Verses from scripture I’d long forgotten came back to me, word for word, only now I understood what they meant. For days afterward whenever I would start to feel the choking waves wash over me, I would in my mind’s eye look into Jesus’ eyes, and the peace would engulf me instead.

Well, this is more than I usually write. If you think this would help anybody you have my permission to share it.

Merry Christmas!

Love,

Melody, Brian’s mommy

Brian’s symbol is a horse.

**Betsy Crum’s son, Gary (1-11-67), died from spinal cancer,
1-14-91**

Betsy share how she celebrated Gary’s birthday:

Dear Dinah,

Thank you for writing on Gary's birthday. I have been over to his fiancé’s house and we went out to the cemetery and put flowers on Gary's grave today. I did enjoy being with her today and her talking about some of the good times she and Gary had together. We were both very sad but at least we had him with us for a little while. I appreciate your letters very much and I do plan on making a page for Gary.

Sincerely,

Betsy "Gary's Mom"

Gary's symbol is a white dove.

**Evelyn McCullah's son, Greg (1-29), died in an auto accident,
1-11-02.**

Evelyn, like so many of us, has difficulty writing about Greg:

Dear Dinah,

I have, for so long, meant to write to you and express my appreciation to you for your tireless crusade to help mothers who have lost children. First, please allow me to apologize for not showing my appreciation sooner. The cards you send never fail to remind me that there are people who care about Greg and those who help me keep his memory alive. I am reminded that you too lost a beautiful son.

I remember the things you said to me just after Greg's accident. You told me that everything now would be "before and after Greg's death." You also told me that I would go through many emotions and stages of grief. I don't remember very much for some time "after" but I do remember the things you said to me and those things comfort me as do the cards you send. You asked me to write about Greg and I did write for a while, but I couldn't stop crying and I was afraid that if I went further that I would never stop crying. I get so afraid that if I let myself sink too deep in the grief, I won't be able to get back. I try to stay strong for my family but sometimes I have to fake it because I'm not. I admire your strength and determination.

Thank you. May God bless you. I hope I will be able to repay your kindness someday.

*Evelyn,
Greg's Mom*

Evelyn has gone through what all of us have about regrets, etc.:

This is the sixth anniversary of Greg's death and I believe I am finally finding some comfort in remembering the wonderful life that we had with him. So much of these six years has been shadowed by darkness, grief and regret. I believe that I have gone over every regret, each time I couldn't give

him what he wanted, each time I raised my voice to him, etc., at least a million times. When I tried to write about him, I felt I was writing about what I didn't do that I should have done. I am writing now about him and his life. Thank you.

Evelyn

Greg's symbol is a pair of shades (sunglasses).

Charles & Kay Walton's sons, Don (12-6-64), and Tim (6-4-67) died from carbon monoxide, 12-15-86.

Charlie has written two books:

THE FINAL GIFT

by

Charlie Walton

(Some Things I Have Learned) Atlanta, TCF

Finally, I want to tell you something that I have begun to realize as the years have passed since the night that Tim and Don and Don's best friend, Bryan died. I have realized that by their deaths and the deep permanent scar it left in my life they gave me a gift of immeasurable value.

The final gift bestowed by any loved one who is torn from your grasp is a clear and unforgettable awareness of what is permanent...and what is temporary. My second book, which is called Packing for the Big Trip, was written because, conversations I had with people about the first book made it so crystal clear that the reason we are so completely blind-sided by death is that we live in a "death-denying society," a society where the death rate is 100 percent but where no one wants to mention it.

I wrote in Packing for the Big Trip, "Every person who dies gives a priceless gift to those who stay behind. The gift is awareness of death and its manifold implications for our lives. Death awareness is about living. It brings the maturity we need to live our lives with wisdom and joy - to stop crying at the thought of eventual death...and start living with the daily enthusiasm of those who are packing for the big trip."

Maybe you are still so close to your child's death that you are not ready to see that there could ever be anything good to come from it. That's fine. Maybe you are still wishing you could wring that kid's neck for leaving you here with all this pain. That's fine too. But maybe, you are beginning to realize

that you have new eyes for the upside down values of our culture that your "death awareness" has given you greater "life wisdom," that your child's death has given you a gift of life.

Well, I could go on for a while but I was told years ago by a speech teacher that "the ear cannot hear what the seat cannot endure,"

So let me encourage you to:

One, recognize that you are stuck with this pain but that the depth of your pain represents the extent of your tribute to the one that left you.

Two, understand that people just naturally say a lot of dumb stuff when they are trying to help and try to be patient and hear what they mean instead of what they say.

Three, understand that you need to tell and re-tell your story a lot more times than you can expect family and friends to hear it so be grateful for your Compassionate Friends

Four, give writing a try. It can really help to get some of that confusion out of your mind and onto paper where you can deal with it.

Five, get regular, strenuous exercise even when you don't feel like you can walk across the room.

Six, let people help you for their benefit and yours.

Seven, watch out for "personality intensification" and give yourself time to become yourself again before you go making decisions while you are "out of your mind with grief."

And finally, recognize the abiding and valuable gift you have received from the person who went away. You have an understanding of life and its true values that you could never have had otherwise.

Let me close with the final word from When There Are No Words.

"My prayer for you is,

-that you will have peace.

-that you will have good grief.

-that you will allow your loved ones the same right to their own ways of grieving never assuming that they should want to cry when you feel like crying or talk when you feel like talking or sit and stare when you want to.

-that both your life and your death will be greatly enhanced by the perspectives that enter your life when a loved one exits your life.

-that you will become more comfortable with the realization that as my son, Don, used to tell me, "Death is just a part of living."

This is the final excerpt of Charlie Walton's talk at the conference at TCF His words to us, "death awareness" has given you greater "life wisdom", that your child's death has given you a gift of life. It takes a long time to even understand this but as I travel this journey it becomes apparent what he is saying.

To me, my children's life brought such pain and emptiness to go on seemed impossible. But here I am many years later, getting up in the morning and realizing life is a gift. I use mine now to honor and celebrate my children's lives and enjoy the legacies they left, their children.

What I forget, life is temporary and at the end of this journey will be my passage to Heaven. So with faith and strength I go forward and try to be here for you. I will listen, I will hug and cry with you.

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh but in His infinite wisdom he left us with each other bound in Love, Strength and Hope to walk together on this journey. Love, peace, hugs and much thanks to all my Heavenly Angels Family

Tom and Don's symbols are theatrical masks.

Virginia Brenton's son, Chris (1-23-87), died from a motorcycle accident, 9-23-06.

Chris has not been forgotten by his friends:

I know his father and myself will never forget, but I know that as the years go by (and I feel like this even now) that it will be less and less of a heartache to his close friends and only a distant memory ... I can just picture his friends all grown up, having a conversation with his own son who wants to get a street bike, telling his son the story of what happened to his friend so long ago ...a story that happened in his own life, used as an example to his son to make an impression ...but to me, still just as painful and devastating years down the road as it is now ...

There are days I feel like I'm the only one (other than his dad of course) who still remembers, who still thinks of him all the time ...who hasn't gotten past it ...that make any sense to you at all ...

Then 2-3 of his friends go up on the hill at the top of town and put his name up there again ...(they use white sheets) and spread them out; held down by rocks. There is a nice flat spot on the side of the hill that you can see from most points of town ...Pretty cool! They did it the day before his funeral and the day before his one year anniversary. That time it stayed in place for almost two weeks. This time they did it 2 days before his 21st birthday and it's still there, so far...

Then we had 25-30 people show up at the pizza place to remember his 21st birthday ...for the most part it was as happy of a time as it could be ... One of his long time friends is going to come out in a couple of weeks and take a look at his truck and prepare to start doing the body work on it.

It will eventually get trucked to Yreka California about 75 miles or so away. He (the friend is Chris also) has a friend that has a body shop so Chris' (friend) and his friend will pull the engine and do all the prep work and Chris' (friend's) mom has offered to pay up to \$400 for the paint work Friend Chris is gonna do the prep work and pay for all the tape and such. Sand paper and that kind of stuff ...we are hoping to have at least the paint/body work done by early August so that I can enter it in the 50's weekend cruise that Saturday night ...I told the kids the other night at the pizza place that it's gonna be entered done or not ...(as long as the engine is in it !!!) Then I wanna get everyone loaded up in the back and whoop it up in his honor ...My son Chris had just put in a NEW engine and the truck is so loud that it will set off car alarms that are parked on the street when you drive by !!!! Pretty cool ...Once the paint is done, it will only need new wheels and tires and the interior work done ...and that I can do a bit at a time ...It's a 1970 Chevy C10. He also had it lowered he was working on getting it ready for racing ...He had actually taken it to the local track and raced it ...not sure how he did ...

Anyhow, just some memories. I guess I'm in a good place right this minute I don't normally share good memories they are usually just too painful ...Bottom line is with everything his friends did this week in his memory it reminded me that I'm not the only one who thinks of him or misses him. My pain and missing him cuts a lot deeper ...how can it not ...when you're a mom.

Thanks Dinah it's so nice to hear from you again ...I have really been missing all of my friends/support ...

Love ya and many (((HUGS))) to you ...

Virginia Mom to Chris

1-23-87 - 9-23-06

Gifted to us but sent home too soon

Under construction

<http://vbrenton1.angelfire.com/Chris.html>

Chris' symbols are a truck and a motorcycle.

Robyn Nichols' son, Justin Dwight (9-6-78/7-7-00), and daughter, Malori Holmes (8-22-84/8-2-03) both died from substance abuse.

Dear Dinah,

Wanted to let you each know I have had Justin and Malori's names put on a web-site. Right now it is not complete and they have the names mixed up, but I am sure they will correct it soon. If you have any thoughts you may like to add about them or the site, you can write to that site, they like knowing people are checking in on it.

Have a gentle day,

Robyn

www.grasphelp.com go to "remember your loved one" and click on their names. You may want to check out the others too.

Justin's symbols are a sunburst face with a tear. Malori's symbols are a butterfly and mushroom.

Keith and Becky LaVey's son, Jay Crim (5-23-74) died in his sleep, 1-17-79. Daughter, Cyndy Crim-Reynolds (6-12-80) died of a rare blood disorder, 8-15-06. Son, Nate (10-21-82) died 1-20-07.

Even in Becky LaVey's grief, she reaches out to another Becky who has lost 4 children:

Becky,

I wanted you to know how much I will be thinking of you this week. Today (Jan. 17) is Jay's 9th anniversary of his angel date and Nathan's 1st anniversary is Sunday, Jan. 20th. I know 3 of your precious children's angel date is this week too, but I couldn't remember what day. You are in my thoughts and prayers every day this week. I'll be glad when January is over.

The last time I had a conversation with Nathan was on Jay's angel date last year. He came over that night and we talked about Jay and Cyndy. When he left and was walking back to his house (he lived in my back yard), I

remembered I had forgotten to tell him I loved him. So I ran out our back door and yelled it to him. He turned around and nodded, and I couldn't hear what he said, but I assume it was "I love you too." That was it, my last words to him, and I am so thankful I ran after him.

I am again stunned I have survived this year (I was so surprised the 1st year after Jay's death). Now I know it was God's strength, not mine. He has carried me, guided me and even inspired me to witness for His truth and promises this year. Becky, as you have said, "God doesn't promise bad things won't happen to us, but He has promised he will always be with us."

*He is with me, every hour, minute and second of every day. I don't just believe this, **I know this**. I know you know this too. God is who gets me out of bed every morning, gives me his strength and inspiration to live, function, take care of myself and my grandchildren. He puts the smile on my face and the words in my mouth when I try to help and motivate children at school and at home. He is the one who gets me to church and leads me to the Compassionate Friends meetings. He is the one who gives me friends like you and Dinah Taylor and Rosemary Smith, and my many friends from The Compassionate Friends. He is the one who gave me my wonderful children. He gave them the love they gave me and the love I gave them. God is love. Love is God. What a privilege we have had, to have wonderful children we could love, even though they have gone from us too soon. But we know they are in His glorious presence, praising and giving glory to God. In paradise.*

"Because He is, our children are." Your words again. Thank you so much Becky for being such an inspiration to me and many other bereaved parents. Christ's love and peace,

Becky

<http://www.geocities.com/tcfbluegrass/JayCrim.html>

Jay's symbols are a boxer dog, fish and roses. Cyndy's symbols are a lightning bolt and angels. Nate's symbols are a right hand and a guitar.

Yolanda McAlister's son, Derrick (9-27-72) died from asthma and adverse drug reaction, 9-9-06.

Yolanda described her grief:

Dinah,

Thank you for thinking of me. I received the poem by Linda from you today. The timing was perfect, I was having an exceptionally bad morning. As I am sure you understand, those days that just seem to come upon us like a huge tidal wave of emotion that leave us in so much pain and take so much strength to overcome. People like you, Dinah, give me that extra nudge. As if reaching out a hand and saying, "Get up, you'll make it!"

*Love,
Yolanda*

Derrick's symbol is a Claddagh.

Paul & Claudia Grammatico's son, Paul (4-20-73) was killed by a drunk driver, 5-16-99.

Here is the latest article written about her in her many efforts to help others in Paul's memory.

[Click here: NewsRoom](#)

Paul's symbol is a butterfly.

Pat & Patti Ward's daughter, Tracey (10-12) died from cancer, 1-6-99.

Hi Dinah,

Thank you for your message. I had to think a little, and I am grateful to you for asking as you made me recall some things.

We moved to Valparaiso, IN about 3 years ago. I'm still finding it a little difficult, I had a hard time leaving our house where we had last been really happy.

I recall the day before we were moving, I felt pretty depressed and torn about leaving. There had been a bad thunderstorm the night before. I

was in my basement and feeling desperate, I begged Tracey to give me a sign that it was ok to leave.

Honestly, (maybe the storm had something to do with it) the TV in the basement suddenly came on, and on the screen was a big red and white bulldog.

We had bought Tracey a red/white bulldog, Alexis, when she first became ill. My father has her now as she never did get along too well with our other dogs. She seems to do better there, as she must need to be the "only" dog.

I appreciate you asking, Dinah, and making me recall more positive things. I know you've heard it before, you truly are an angel living on the earth.

I wonder how you do, Dinah, and if you still have a sense of Jim being around? (Yes, Pat, I do) If you have time to write, I would love to hear about you.

Again, thank you,

Pat

Tracey's symbol is a blue angel.

**Amjad Ghori's daughter, Aziza Yasmeeen (12-9-92)
drowned, 12-27-02.**

Dear Dinah,

You are amazing! I rec'd a card from you on Aziza's B-day (Dec 9th) and on the day she passed (Dec 27th) both of which boosted my spirits. Thanks ever so much for remembering and for caring enough to reach out. I can't believe it's been five years since she left which, in most respects is quite a bit of time and yet feels like yesterday.

I continue to muddle along but keep going. I still have the occasional relapse for a few hours but then move on to living again. I suspect this will be the case until we see our beloved children again.

Thank you again.

Much love,

Amjad

Dear Amjad,

It was so good to hear from you. I know what you mean about grieving, but then going on living. You put that very well.

I noticed that you have a foundation in Aziza's name. What is it about?

We are having J.I.M.'s Conference June 6 & 7 this year. Hope you can come.

Love from a fellow traveler,
Dinah

Dear Dinah,

Aziza's Foundation tries to make the lives of the neediest children a bit better. Please take a look at our website www.azizafoundation.org. One of the special projects we have is Aziza's Place in Phnom Penh, Cambodia where we take care of about 21 children who otherwise call the town dumpsite their home. Aziza's Place will celebrate its first anniversary on Feb 14th of this year. I was hoping to make it for the ceremony but will go a bit later in the year...probably around Easter time.

Thanks again for all your timely support. I'm very touched...

*Love,
Amjad*

This foundation is an amazing way for Amjad to remember Aziza!

Aziza's symbol is a purple butterfly.



I am sending you this box of Valentine Candy, you don't mind if I have a piece (or 2) do you?

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