

LAMENTATIONS

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S.U.C.C.E.S.S

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August is a month that students are either beginning school for the first time or returning to school for further education. Several of you have shared the concerns you have for your surviving children and their grief. Since we have lost our only child, I cannot give any first-hand experience, but I can share some of the information I have read. I hope this information will be of benefit to you and your family as you "further your education" through your individual grief.

Harriet Sarnoff Schiff, in her book **The Bereaved Parent**, makes the following statement: *One of the most difficult roles for a mother or father when a child dies is to continue being a parent to surviving offspring. Parenthood now becomes walking and talking and listening and hearing someone else at a time when it takes everything just to think or function for yourself.*

Unfortunately, many surviving children suffer because their parents are unable to fulfill this responsibility and the effects of the parent's inability to help and guide the child can be lifelong. In talking with surviving siblings, Ms. Schiff found that many felt that they had received very little comfort from their parents.

Remember that your children are suffering just as you. Because they may not understand grief as you, they also fear the intensity of their grief.

Children often express their grief through anger. This anger is often directed at parents, relatives, teachers, and even God. They are angry at their sibling for dying, they are angry at their parents for making the dead child "perfect," they are angry at their parents and teachers for comparing them to their dead sibling, and they are angry at God for the terrible thing that has happened to their family.

Ms. Schiff stresses: *At the time a child dies, surviving children must become the uppermost concern, almost beyond a parent's own grief. It requires an enormous strength to deal with others' hurts at such a time, but it is important not to allow a living child to feel alone. The need for your individual attention is great. Do not allow a breakdown of discipline in your home. Discipline and order mean security to a child. Do not condemn children for laughing and playing during the early stages of grief. Do not turn your normal good-bad child into a saint just because he/she is dead. No one can compete with a ghost—especially one who no longer possesses any bad qualities. Living children may react opposite to all the "goodness" that they feel their dead sibling possessed, in order to gain attention from their parents, teachers, etc.*

In the book, **Parental Loss of a Child**, edited by Theresa Rando, it states that children are sometimes at a disadvantage in their grief because people try to protect them from the reality of death.

There are several factors that influence a child's reaction to the loss of a sibling. These include:

1. The child's understanding of death. Remember that a child who does not appear to be grieving should not be viewed as uncaring; he/she may simply be unable to fully comprehend the death of a sibling. Permit them to ask questions and offer only as much information as they seem to understand.
2. The child's personality and age group.
3. The child's relationship to the deceased child. It has been found that older children feel more guilt over their wishes that the younger child would disappear, while younger children felt more of a burden to replace the lost child.
4. The cause of the sibling's death. Children who lose siblings through illness need to have a clear understanding of the causes of the disease, and surviving children need to be assured that they are in good health themselves.

After a child has been given a clear and direct explanation for the death that has occurred, it is always a good idea to ask the child to explain what he/she has been told, to be sure that he/she understands. This will give you an opportunity to correct any misinterpretations or confusions the child may have.

C. Schultz, wrote an article in the magazine, **Critical Care Update**, entitled, *Grieving Children*. He offers the following suggestions when talking with a child about a death:

1. *Get on eye level. Do not talk down to a child either physically or mentally.*
2. *Always touch. A person can deal with a problem more readily when they are touched. If the message is too difficult to deal with, touch alone can convey caring and support.*
3. *Let the child know what to expect.*
4. *Give the child meaningful tasks to perform. Perhaps they would like to put a memory book together.*

Janice Lord's book, **No Time For Good-byes, Coping with Sorrow, anger and injustice after a tragic death**, adds to this list:

- * *Children may find it easier than parents to discard personal possessions of the deceased. They may also find it easier to "put their grief aside" and find normalcy in school or play. Remember that your deceased child's, friends may be pleased to be given something that belonged to your child.*
- * *During the early days of grieving, it is helpful for grieving children to have a personal "ally" to provide stability and understanding. This person calms the anxious child and relieves the parents of total responsibility.*
- * *Share your grief with your surviving children. but do not depend on them to take care of you in your grieving. Understand that adolescent children may not want to grieve with you.*
- * *Talk with surviving brothers and sisters both about pleasant memories of the child who has died as well as unpleasant memories. This will help them to understand that the child who died was not perfect.*
- * *Don't ask surviving siblings to "be strong" for you or for anyone else. That is too great a burden to carry.*
- * *Try not to feel threatened if adolescent siblings seek out other adults or peers for support. That is normal for their development level.*

Dr. Catherine Sanders suggested in her book, **How to Survive the Loss of a Child**, that guilt seems to be the major negative emotion in sibling bereavement. The surviving children often feel that they should have been the one to die, or that they were responsible for the death. At some point, they may have said to their sibling, "I wish you were dead," or "If I don't see you again, it will be too soon." This is why it is so important to encourage your children to voice their thoughts and fears. We, as grieving parents, have all wished that we could have taken our child's place in death. Share your feelings and fears with your children too.

Dr. Sanders offers these suggestions:

- * *Be open, honest, and gentle in describing the death. Only offer details that the children can absorb. Don't overload*
- * *Have family powwows on a weekly basis or more often. Give each child a chance to talk.*
- * *Give each child the opportunity to participate in devising meaningful family rituals.*
- * *Check with each child to see if he or she is feeling guilt. Offer reassurance.*
- * *Don't be afraid to let your child see you cry. They need to know that crying is a natural response.*
- * *Be there for your children. They will need your affection and security now more than ever.*

Mark Scrivani wrote, **Helping Your Child Through Grief**. He also has many helpful suggestions.

1. Use basic words like "die" and "dead" to convey the message.
2. Be sensitive to the age and level of understanding. Don't offer information beyond the child's comprehension, as it will only confuse matters.
3. Read or have your child read children's books relating to death.

4. Play with the child (e.g. dolls, drawing, imagining) in ways that will allow the child to express his/her feelings.
5. Watch for T.V. programs that might help your child's understanding.
6. Talk about God with your child. Pray with your child.
7. Accept help from others to watch your children and talk with them--but remember, you are the most important person to your child!
8. Discuss and have the child recognize changes in routine due to the death.
9. Plan something (e.g. a vacation) to which you and your child can look forward.
10. This is perhaps the most important of all--please do not be disappointed or angry if your child does not understand or appreciate death! They are going through a learning experience and discovery, give them time.

Candy Lightner, the founder of **MADD**, wrote a book with Nancy Hathaway entitled, **Giving Sorrow Words**. The authors explained that even though the initial grief reactions, including behavioral changes, tend to become less after a year or so, children can only work through their grief a little at a time. Adults often totally immerse themselves in their grieving, however, children may grieve "intermittently" and many times "invisibly" Their grief may return and be different as they struggle through new developmental stages. "The process of identifying with and thinking about the deceased undergoes many shifts throughout the course of a lifetime. "

Because we perceive our children as being innocent and vulnerable, we tend to think that our surviving children will be forever marred by a sibling's death. However, it has been found that most children will be able to successfully grieve the loss of a sibling. It is vital that children are supported in their grief and that we, as parents give them "permission" and time to grieve. When we share our feelings openly, then

our children will see that it is okay for them to share their grief, anger and loss.

Dr. Sanders stated "Family members trying to survive after the death of a child must truly pull together and remain open to each other. The gaping wound left by the child will be a raw and painful reminder that life isn't perfect. We have only this moment in time to count on. What becomes increasingly true is the need to focus on the blessings that are there in the remaining family unit. Nothing can ever replace the dead child. Grief teaches the importance of living one day at a time and recognizing that we are not in control of most things."

In Recovering From the Loss of a Child, *Words of comfort and hope from parents who have survived their grief,* Katherine Donnelly described her grief and her family's grief after the death of her 16-year-old son. She shared that a great fear of surviving children is that of being left alone. Children are afraid that their parents or other siblings may also die. The best way to alleviate those fears of a child are for parents, teachers, and friends to continually reassure the child that you will be there for them and they can share their thoughts and fears with you.

Perhaps your family would like to work together on making some type of memory book or memorial. The following are suggestions which I have copied from the newsletter, **Alive Alone**, which is a newsletter for parents who have lost an only child, or all their children.

1. Prepare a photograph album and have copies made for each member of the family. Take time to share memories with each other.
2. Create a wreath or shadow box decorated with mementos of your

child's life. Let each person select something special to put in it.

3. If your loved one wrote stories or poems, have these printed and bound for family and friends. Make tapes of them singing or playing an instrument.
4. Jewelry can be created using the child's birthstone. Locketts can be worn with pictures enclosed. Charms can be engraved with names and dates.
5. Order personalized license plates with the name of the child.
6. Send family and friends packets of flower seeds (Forget-Me-Nots?) to be planted on the anniversary of your child's birth or death.
7. Decorate the church with flowers on your child's birthday, anniversary of death or holidays.
8. Transfer photos, footprints, ultrasound pictures, etc. to a shirt with fabric transfer medium and copy of the object. Or paint your own shirt with stick figure drawings and your child's name and dates.
9. Keep a journal of your experience. Someday you might want to collect some of your writings and bound them into a booklet to give to family and friends.
10. Donate time or money to support groups. Clothes and child care items may be donated to outreach programs or crisis centers. Adopt a family; provide a meal or child's gift. Is there a local Ronald McDonald House you can help make happy???
11. Create a quilt using pieces of your child's clothing, with panels signifying events that were meaningful and special interests of the child.
12. Release a balloon tied with 'love notes.' Scatter rose petals into the sea.
13. Decorate a room at your church or a children's hospital. Buy hymn books, medical equipment or toys.
14. Volunteer with senior citizens, very sick children, or special-needs children. Make a wish come true.

15. Start a bank account for the extended family to donate money into for flowers and upkeep of family graves for years in the future.

16. Keep precious items in a decorated memory box, trunk or book created for this purpose. Include toys, bulletins, letters, blankets, clothes, photos, cards, poems, journals. Photos of the mother while pregnant or an ultrasound picture can be very special.

17. Write about your child for a newsletter on special days.

18. Continue to sign the child's name on family cards. If not comfortable with that, use a special 'symbol' a sticker or drawing for your child (angel, dove, rainbow, heart, flower.)

Other books that may be of benefit to you and your children:

Am I Still A Sister? - Alicia Sims.

Children Are Not Paper Dolls- Erin Levy

For Those Who Live - Kathy LaTour

Losing Someone You Love; When A Brother or Sister Dies - Elizabeth Richter

Recovering From The Loss Of A Sibling - Katherine Donnelly

I would like to encourage those of you who still have children at home, to give them an extra hug today and tell them how special they are to you and how thankful you are that you have them. You are truly blessed. Take pictures and plan special times together, because life is precious. I would love to have a picture of your family.



Grief Grafts

Lisa, the 14-year-old daughter of Darrell and Shirley Grisham, died from an explosion with 3 other teenagers, 7-2-93. Lisa's sister, Jennifer, wrote this poem:

MY SISTER

She was just a child. She had so much to live for and so much to look forward to.

Just barely out of Junior High. She had gotten her diploma just four days before. She had four years of high school and the rest of her life to live.

But the Lord took her away from us to be with Him.

I don't know why and I don't know if I'll ever know.

But one thing I do know is that He'll take good care of her.

Lord! It was so sudden. No warning! No anything!

I didn't even get to say "I love you" or "Good-bye."

It hurts so much and so bad. It feels like my chest is caving in.

I know you had a reason, but why her?

My only sister. My baby sister.

She was loved by everybody and she is and always will be loved and missed very much.

Especially by me!

I will always love and remember her. And someday I'll see her again.

Love, Sis

Lisa's symbols are a rainbow and a horse.



David and Cindy Jo Greevers' 9-year-old daughter, Michelle, died 11-5-93. Michelle's sister, Melissa, wrote these poems:

A TRIBUTE POEM FOR MY SISTER MICHELLE MARIE

Michelle is a person of love . . .

Michelle is a gift from above . . .

*She was born on this earth nine years ago,
And God took her with no pain,
No tears, sweet and mellow.
She died when she was hit by a car,
But I could hear her voice from afar. . .
She was saying, "Don't cry, don't be sad,
Please be happy for me, for now I'm glad'
I'm living in a place of gold with pearly gates
And cloud, with big rainbows!
I am happy and you should be too.
God loves me and God loves you ! "*

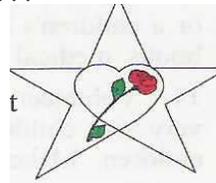
TRAPPED

*It's like being in a large box.
There is no light, no sound, no clocks.
All there is, is the constant sound of your mind thinking of the day it happens.
Something new that opens a large pit in your heart...
You don't know why, or how it starts.
All you are is trapped.
Trapped between the worlds of life and death, almost like being stabbed.
It scares me sometimes, but I always rely on God.
I am a pea and God is my Pod. . .*

WHAT THE ANGEL SAID

*One beautiful fall day a young, harmless angel said. . .
"Come with me and walk my way, sing with me like the echo of the rain.
Look at me, Do you see pain? NO, I am an angel, one from your dream. I help you when you scream. I know what you feel--when you feel it. I know what you say--when you say it. Come now child, It is time, time to see what you dream. . . "
And so sweet Michelle went with the angel.
To see her life long dream. . .
God with all of His team. . .*

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



Libby, the 48-year-old daughter of Ezra and Mildred Godby, died 6-27-94 of a massive heart attack. Gerald, their son, died on 11-5-92. Prior to Libby's death, she wrote this poem to her sister, Nancy, whose daughter had been killed in an automobile accident, 5-24-92.

TO MY SWEET SIS

*Don't ever start the day without the Lord on your mind.
For the world is in an anger and is so blind.
Let your love be your sunshine,
For the Lord will surely say, "You're mine."
A prayer a day is all you need to say,
For He truly knows you love Him now and always.
Die today, live tomorrow.
With God, you will have no sorrow.
Bless this poem, Dear Lord,
For it is truly from my heart.*

Amen

With all my love,
Your Sis, Libby



Libby's symbols are wild flowers.

Cary, the 18-year-old son of Gary and Nancy Bilderback, was killed in an automobile accident, 1-13-89. The family celebrates 8-13 as Cary's "un-birthday" since that was the day they adopted him. A wonderful friend of Cary's wrote this poem:

IN MEMORY OF CARY KYLE BILDERBACK

*It's been six years now
Since you left this world
But it seems like yesterday to me
I know you're in a better place
Where we all someday hope to be.*

*I remember in the slimmer
We would work in the field
From sun up to sun down
Then we would spend the evenings
Just riding around town.*

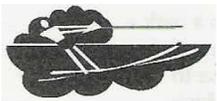
*We argued about our birthdays
That was always fun to do
You sometimes got angry
Because I was one day older than you.*

*But you always kept your head up
Positive as one could be
Always smiling and enjoying life
As everyone could always see.*

*As hard as it is for me
I must say these things to you
Getting over the pain of losing a best
friend
Has not been an easy thing to do.*

*If by God's will
We meet again someday
We can continue our friendship, when
we left off
I have so much more I way to say.*

*I love you Cary
Happy Birthday
Kenneth Richardson*



Cary's symbol
is water skis.

Don and Mary Jane Dietrichs' 15-year-old son, Torn, died 4-2-94 from accidental strangulation. Tom's sister, Julie, wrote the following poem:

I REMEMBER YOU, TOMMY

*I remember the day you were born
Which explains why my heart is so
torn.
We used to play together everyday
And I wish you didn't have to go away.
All of our memories we had in the past
They're all still here and will always
last.
I can only wish that you could see
Just how special you were to me.
It's really hard now that you are gone
But I have made myself go on.
I'm always wondering how you are
Wishing on every falling star
That now you have no pain
And that you have no one to blame.
I miss you with all my heart
And I wish from this life that you didn't
part
Because now I have so much pain
And my life will never be the same.*

*I try to keep my feelings deep down
inside
Because the pain I feel is too hard to
describe.*

*I want you to watch and see
Because I want you to be proud of me.
I want you to know I love you like no
other
Because you were my one and only
brother.*

Julie



Tom's symbol is a Puma.

Leon and Jerry Jonas lost two sons, Leon Jr., and Wayne, in an automobile accident. Jerry writes:

*On October 26, 1990, almost half our
family was wiped out. That night my
oldest son, Leon Jr., came home after
spending the day drinking with an un-
cle, and we told him for the first time in
his life not to drive anymore that Fri-
day night. He promised he would let
his brother drive when they went out
later to check out his car. He had just
changed transmissions and wanted to
see how it was working, plus it was Fri-
day night and like any normal, unmar-
ried young man in his late twenties, he
wanted to get out of the house.*

*My husband and I took the uncle
home because he was too drunk to
drive, then we went out to eat supper.
After supper, we started home on I-77
South, when we saw cars backed up.
We went over to the shoulder to get off
and avoid the traffic and the accident.
But, while watching the 11 p.m. news
on TV, we saw a '69 red Ford pinned
under the front of a tractor trailer and
my husband knew instantly that it was
our son's, even though over 100 par-
ents called the police thinking it was
their child's, since the news did not tell
who was killed.*

*At 2:00 in the morning, the police
came to notify us and tell us who was in
the back seat; their friend, Keith.
Wayne, my youngest son was sitting
next to his brother Leon, Jr., and Leon
was driving.*

*Saturday morning, my family and I
had to go make arrangements for both
our sons, with my daughter-in-law's
help. If I hadn't been in shock, there
would have been no way I could have*

*lived through the next two days. That
Sunday, before over 200 young and old
people came for viewing, I spent 2
hours alone with my sons.*

*One of Leon Jr.'s best friends, whom
he had lived with at one time, was sup-
posed to be a pallbearer, but I found
out he could not leave his house to
come. So I went to see him after the
viewing that night. He was in deep
shock and could not even look at me.
He knew it could have been himself in
the car.*

*He kept saying, "I don't know what to
say to you," over and over. I told him
he did not have to say anything. He
could just get up and give me a hug. It
was all I needed, to hold on to a young
man who was Leon, Jr.'s best friend
and his age.*

*On Monday, the day of the funeral,
the church was filled with young
people in shock. I felt like I was living
through the worst nightmare of my life.
The Lord had to be carrying me; that
is the only reason I made it through
the service and the burying of my only
sons that I gave life to and nurtured for
28 years (Wayne) and 29 years (Leon,
Jr.)*

*When we buried them, I felt like part
of my heart went in to the ground with
them. For parents to lose one child is
almost unbearable, but to lose your
only two sons is even worse; it almost
killed me. There were days I really
wanted to die. The pain of living with-
out my sons was almost too much.*

*A couple of months afterward, I re-
ceived the reports on my son's alcohol
level and went to see the parents of the
young man who died with my sons. I
told the mother how badly I felt about
her son's death and that I knew my
son's alcohol level was a factor. I know
it was the right thing to do, even
though it was very painful to talk to
her. I feel that in some way she may
hold me responsible for Leon, Jr.'s
drinking and driving that night, since I
haven't seen her since that day. I have
sent her several cards about our
support group.*

*When MADD reorganized more than
a year ago, I went to their first
meeting, but I was afraid to tell people
my son was a drunk driver; his alcohol
level was 20%. It still hurts deeply to
be in a gathering of mothers from
MADD whose children were killed by
a drunk driver.*

But I feel my sons want me to tell people, especially the young, what can happen when you make wrong choices in life. Leon Jr. did not have a drinking problem but was depressed that evening and made the wrong choice to drink and drive.

Three young men are dead, their hopes and dreams of a full life died with them. Wayne had one son, and Keith had 3 children who will never have a father to be there for them and guide their young lives as they grow up. Leon Jr. will never know what it is like to hold in his arms a child he helped bring into the world or a wife to love. We will never again be able to hold our sons in our arms and tell them how much we love them.

Now, I am in MADD, Footprints (Jerry's ministry), The Compassionate Friends, Citizens Against Violent Crimes, and also help bereaved mothers hold memorial services for the birthdays and anniversaries of their children's, deaths. I know that there is a reason God didn't let me die that day my children died, and that is because He has given me a new sense of compassion for all the children, young people, and mothers whose children have died for any reason. I am more attuned and sensitive to the pain of others. I believe the compassion I now have is a gift from Leon Jr. and Wayne. I pray every night for all bereaved mothers and fathers, and for the day that we will not have to bury another child because someone made the wrong choice of drinking and driving.

Leon's and Wayne's symbols are two roses and a car.



This letter was found by a grieving mother only by accident when her son had asked that a notebook that had been left at home be brought to school. I will not reveal the family, but somehow I feel that it could have been written by any surviving sibling! To make sure she had the right notebook, she just opened the book and this is the page it was on:

SPECIAL GIFT

The individual to whom I would give the perfect gift would be to my Mom. My mom acts like she is happy sometimes out in public, but when she gets home she acts totally different. I would give her the gift of happiness. You cannot buy happiness in any store or find it anywhere. My mom has been extremely sad this last year and a half. Everyone and their mom has tried to cheer her up but nothing works. I guess only time can ease her pain and sadness. I sure do wish that time would hurry up because I hate to see her the way she is. The only thing that I have thought of yet that I can do for her is to watch. That is the worst thing for me to do. I can't stand to watch her cry and suffer. I just wish there was something I could do.

My life changed that day, as I knew that in grieving for one child, I was depriving another child of my love and happiness. The pain and emptiness that I feel will never go away, but through an English Journal (and God opening the book to the right page), I have realized that the surviving children have a double loss--their sibling as well as their parents. So I pray that God will give me both the strength and courage to show my surviving child how much I love him and that I can allow him to give me the "special Gift"!

John Turner, the triplet son of Lee and Felicia Turner, died from AIDS, 7-1-94. John's younger brother, Jed, wrote this poem in May, before he died:

THE DANCER

The Dancer,
with the brilliant blue eyes
fills the stage with
Energy and Life.
Grace defining each movement,
the activity captivating.

I have lived vicariously
through the dance of your life.
I've been to places I long to still visit,

Hawaii, New York, Paris, California
with the stories of
your travels.

Some of the best in me
has come from knowing you.
I've observed the dance of the
creator, healer, teacher,
lover, adventurer.

Your dance has wit and humor,
charm and a touch of sarcasm.
The lightness of your steps
brings smiles and easy laughter
from the audience.

Toned, muscled body
exhibiting
strength, courage,
honesty in rhythm.

Your partner danced with you
but a moment on that stage.
The passion and compassion
warmed and awed this spectator

Love has so many faces.

Your danced in a blue towel and
naked in a park -
Impulsive, gutsy.
Challenging us to examine,
To think.

Even in the dance of birth
you were full of surprises--
leaping out from behind
a rib cage;
the third dancer to appear.
An added gift to this ballet.

The show would not have been
as glorious without you.

And finally the dance of rest.
The energy fading
even with the
spark of genius still there.

BROTHER DANCER, take respite
from
your amazing performance.
Take your bow.
Cherish the deserved applause.

Sue Hutcheson since this card:

*Whenever I'm feeling
down, How do I
spell RELIEF?*

C-H-O-C-O-L-A-T-E!!

(How do you
spell it?)



