

LAMENTATIONS

Issue 41

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

February, 1996

Have you survived the Blizzard of 1996? What a way to start the new year! Didn't this snow storm remind you of our grief? (But doesn't everything remind us of our grief?)

Some of you who lost your loved one to a fatal illness had a "warning" of this impending storm. Others of us were taken by surprise, but the blizzard (our grief) contained the same amount of snow fall.

A **blizzard** is defined as *an overwhelming rush or deluge*. The blizzard of our grief came so fast and with such ferociousness that we are immobilized by it in the beginning. We have no snow equipment to "clear" those streets of mourning, so it accumulates until we are "snowed in" with our grief.

At times we venture out to test the depth and the temperature, but often it is too deep to trudge through and the reality is too cold for us to stay very long. So we retreat to our house of "denial." We can either stay in hibernation in that "house" of denial until the weight of it crashes in on us, or we can accept that the blizzard is here and has to be dealt with.

We can wrap ourselves in the "scarf" of love and support of people who understand this blizzard of grief and chance going out in it, even if it is just for short times.



Shoveling snow is also a reminder that in order to clear a path through your grief you have to work at it and through it.

We eventually realize that, even though the snow is devastating, it is also beautiful. Each snowflake is unique, as are our loved ones, and maybe you will venture out in the next snow and make a snow angel. It will not only help you, but will also remind passersby that an angel resides in your home.



This blizzard is a reminder that our grief will also dissipate as will the snow. I am now looking out the window and the sun is shining, the temperature is rising and the snow is melting. In the beginning, the snow was beautiful, but now it is dirty as it is melting, just as our grief is progressing. But the water (our tears) from the melting snow will also be the catalyst for plants to grow in the spring.

We will never be the same because this "storm" of grief is so devastating, but we will eventually see the "spring" of our **S.U.C.C.E.S.S.** Since we have survived the Blizzard of 1996, may it remind us that we will also survive our grief. I hope you will feel that you are creating a "home" for your grief and you will be comfortable living in it until we can "move" **to acceptance**.



This Valentine's Day (February 14), I challenge you to work on your marriage and/or relationship with others you love. In the booklet, *Hope for Bereaved*, the authors suggest:

- ♥ Don't expect your loved ones to be a tower of strength when they are also experiencing grief
- ♥ Be sensitive to your loved one's personality style. They will approach grief with the same personality habits as they approach life.
- ♥ Seek the help of a counselor if depression, grief or problems in your relationship are getting out of hand.
- ♥ Do not overlook or ignore anger causing situations. It is like adding fuel to a fire. Eventually there is an explosion. Deal with things as they occur.
- ♥ Be gentle with yourself and your loved ones.
- ♥ Do not blame yourself or your loved ones for what they were powerless to prevent.
- ♥ Realize that you are not alone. We grieving parents have each other.
- ♥ Read about grief, especially the books written for bereaved parents.
- ♥ Remember, there is no timetable. Everyone goes through grief differently, even parents of the same child.
- ♥ Be sensitive to the needs and wishes or your spouse as well as yourself. Sometimes it is important to compromise.
- ♥ Keep the lines of communication open.
- ♥ Value your marriage. You have lost enough.
- ♥ Hold on to **HOPE**. With time, work and support, you will survive. It will never be the same, but you can learn to find joy and laughter in your life and enjoy the people in your life. Make this special day happy!



Grief Grafts

Stephanie, the 21-year-old daughter of Mary Kate Gach, was stalked and murdered 10-9-92. Mary Kate expressed what she is dealing with at this time:

My anger came late-- It came two years later. Last October 10, the day after the 3rd anniversary of her death, the first routine appeals hearing was held, so I traveled to Montgomery to attend The Alabama Court of Appeals upheld or affirmed the lower court sentence, so the monster who killed Stephanie is still under a sentence of death (Aren't we all?)

That was the first of many such appeals that will take place over the next several years.

Later in October a second murder trial took place for the murder of another of his victims. Next year there will be a trial for the murder of a third victim. I will be there for that, as I must be present for each and every proceeding. I must be there to honor Stephanie and be certain justice is delivered

The majority of people live in a fantasy world of "Happy ever after" and they seem to think I'm ready to rejoin them (because, after all, it has been three years and aren't I over that yet?) I've never been good at pretending.

My support to others consists mainly of telling them I'm here to listen, to cry with them, to just be with them. (Isn't this what we all want?)



Stephanie's symbol is a brown rabbit.

Carole Hallam's son, Scott, died from AIDS, 5-4-93. Carole shared:

Once again another year has passed and we have survived. I was walking on the beach alone this past summer and snapped this picture. (Carole made a Christmas card from a beautiful picture of a sunrise) Not being a photographer, I was very proud of the results as it signified what we have all learned "The sun will come up tomorrow."

I can't choose a symbol for Scott because I can't choose just one or two objects as so much that surrounds me are

symbols of Scott. A new day, a sculpture, flowers, coffee, pelicans, famous architecture, not so famous architecture, red hair, loud laughter, worn-out shoes, no socks, huge phone bills, Greek mythology, Turkish people, a needy child, a homeless adult, and a red ribbon in memory of all who, like him, died of AIDS The list is endless, as being WI artist, he taught me to be aware of everything that surrounds me and to look for the beauty where most would see none.

Yes, I want him back, healthy and whole. God said, "Not this time." So with a void in my life that can never be filled, I look back with wonder at all I learned caring for Scott throughout his illness and I look forward with hope that a cure can be found soon. In the meantime, I continue to try to help, in whatever small way I can, people with AIDS and their families.

Kevin Varvel, the 17-year-old son of Joyce Hampton, died from an auto accident, 12-18-93. Joyce lamented that her pain is still overwhelming at times, and she is still having difficulty accepting Kevin's death. But I'm sure Joyce knows that we all share her loss and want to also share her grief It reminds me of the saying: A joy shared is doubled, a grief shared is halved.

Kevin's symbol is a guitar.



Janna, the 12-year-old daughter of David and Peggy Webb, died from a brain hemorrhage 7-12-93. Peggy voiced:

I am ashamed to say that there have been so many times when I have resented our loss so much that I have been that stubborn child, blaming God for my Janna's death. I have come to realize that in so doing, I effectively sever the gossamer thread which connects me with my best friend, the one who has shown me love and presented me with hope since I first accepted His love for me when I was eleven years old

As a child of impoverished farming people, there were certainly times when God was the only one to whom I could turn for help. And, now, as an adult

who has experienced what I believe to be the worst calamity which can befall, I find myself wishing that I had retained that same spirit of innocent trust in God and His ability to take care of me and my family. The wonder of it all is that He does not desert me, that He is waiting for me to finish my tantrum, and that He is the one to pat me gently on the back and tell me, "You, can do this, child. I know of what you are made: those same rocks that climbed to the sky behind your Clay County childhood home are a part of your mountain heritage. Your people have survived much, and I have faith that you, too, can endure. I'm here, Paggie." You see, my God talks to me in much the same words and tone that I would wish my own father to talk to me if he were still alive and if he were the kind of man to speak of his feelings. I am so grateful that He listens to both the angry tirades and the pleas for help, and that He always maintains His equanimity, loving me when I am least worthy.

Janna's symbols are yellow butterflies and a rainbow.



Nick, 15, was a passenger in an auto accident, and died 6-5-94. His parents are Rickey and Deb Thompson. Deb described her feelings and those of her children:

Birthdays, as well as holidays, are hard for me. I feel like something is missing, and it's Nick. I remember the part in the Wizard of Oz when Dorothy finally gets to see the Wizard and realizes there is nothing in his bag for her. That is how I feel. The Birthday Fairy and Cupid have nothing in their bags for me. Nothing can fill the void in my heart. But I know I will see Nick again and I hold on tight to that!

Each time Lamentations arrives in the mail, it hits a soft spot in my heart and it takes me a day or two sometimes to open it. I can feel the other families pain so much when they talk about their loved one. It's hard to believe that I feel so close to all the families who have lost someone and not know them. But we have one bond that ties us together. A bond that all of us would rather not have.

Last year you asked for ways that we deal with our grief. I think that just taking one day at a time is the best advice of all. Especially when we first lost Nick, I couldn't see beyond the next day. We didn't make long term plans on anything. I didn't look forward to anything. During a lot of the first year, I think I was on co-pilot and God steered me through. For the first week or so after the funeral, I would wake up in the morning and have a different hymn from Sunday School in my head. I know that God was with me. The book **When God Doesn't Make Sense** by Dr. James Dobson helped me. It is natural for us to blame ourselves for the loss of a child, even when it is out of our hands. We wonder "Why me?" or "Why didn't I do this, or that." And all the "Why me, Lord?" feelings are the devil's way of driving that wedge. I think that Nick had a lot of good to offer this old world, and I miss him desperately, but I was not promised that tragedy would not strike my family. We only have to trust in the Lord even when to do so is the hardest thing of all. He had it all planned out before Nick was ever even born. I don't know why, but when I get to Heaven to see Nick again, the "Why?" Won't matter anymore anyway.

My boys miss their big buddy so much. At school during music class, Jesse cried for Nick when they played Christmas carols. Ben, whose birthday is in December, was sad on his birthday because Nick wasn't with us. Ben has written several papers in school about Nick. I pray they are not too young to remember him when they get big. Neither of the boys or Rickey, like to see me cry over Nick. I know it hurts them when I get sad so I try to not get upset in front of them. It is hard to know how to comfort someone who is hurting so badly. I think that is why a lot of people are so uncomfortable when I talk about Nick. They just don't know how to comfort me or react to my pain when they have not experienced something so awful. But it helps so much to talk about him. It's not like he never existed.

Over Christmas, Nick's friend from the **FFA (Future Farmers of America)** came over and brought our dinner. They are so dear to my heart. I have

never met a nicer group of kids. The **FFA** started a scholarship in Nick's memory last year. This year will be special as 1996 would have been the year Nick would have graduated. I am hoping one of his close friends from the **FFA** will receive his scholarship.

One of the best things I did during Christmas to help remember Nick and make him part of our celebration. I put a Christmas tree in his room. I decorated it with Sunflowers, his favorite baby rattles, bandannas and ornaments that his friends and our family had brought me. My niece brought me a new ornament for Nick's tree. I was surprised that she remembered, but it made me so happy. Deep down, I am afraid that people will forget, but I know there are some that loved Nick and will never forget him. Jesse made a reindeer ornament in school and put it on Nick's tree.

Another thing I do all throughout the year is sign Nick's name in a heart on all our birthdays, get well, and Christmas cards that I send to friends and family. Some people may not agree with that, but I don't care. It helps me. One mother wrote in a grief book that I read that it doesn't matter what people think of what you do. We have been hurt more than is humanly possible so what we do to let us deal with the grief may not be right for everyone, but as long as it is right for us, who cares.

In June we took balloons to Nick for his 17th birthday and I started thinking how Nick would celebrate his birthday in Heaven. While we celebrate June 15th as his earthly birthday, I wonder if Nick celebrates June 5th as his Heavenly birthday!



Nick's symbol is a sunflower

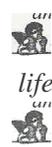
Katy West's 20-year-old son, Jeff, was killed in an automobile accident, 3-12-85. Katy is a very dear friend of mine and gave me **LOVE** stamp jewelry and wrote beside each one:



Earrings for your ears so you can always hear the soft whispers of the angels..



Necklace so you will always have an angel close to your heart.



Key Chain so an angel can travel with you on your journey through life



Label pin. An. angel can always be worn all your coat of many colors, the coat which represents the many colors and shades of life.



Refrigerator magnet. Ah! On the fridge door, as always--food! All. angel is always the "chocolate of dessert."

The sweet, sweet angels



Cherub-one, "the winged heavenly beings that support the throne of God or act as guardian spirits.



Jeff's symbol is an eagle.

Judy Byer's 17-year-old son, Jamon, was killed in an automobile accident, 10-8-93. Judy spent Christmas in the hospital due to high blood pressure. She has joined **MADD** (Mother's Against Drunk Drivers). On January 1, several of Jamon's friends went to see her. They had cupcakes and talked about Jamon and the things he and his friends had done. Judy said, "I did enjoy that day!"



Jamon's symbols are a deer and roses.

Themba, the 19-year-old son of Vivian Williams, was murdered, 11-29-94. Through Vivan's own frustrations with the court system, she continues her ministry by going to court to help other parents in dealing with the trials, etc. Vivian voiced, *God was good to me in 1995. I have peace now. I have forgiven my son's killer who is in prison.* Vivian made small black angel ornaments in memory of her son and gave to friends and family.

Themba's symbols are a sunshine and an angel.



I was again reading *The Compassionate Friends* and wanted to share it with you.

Our Credo

We need not walk alone.

*We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with understanding and with hope. Our children have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for our children unites us. Your pain becomes my pain just as your hope becomes my hope. We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races and creeds. We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that we feel helpless and see no hope. Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength; some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression; others radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of *The Compassionate Friends*, it is pain we will share just as we share with each other our love for our children. We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building that future together as we reach out to each other in love and share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.*

We need not walk alone.

We are The Compassionate Friends

John, the 47-year-old son of Lee and Felicia Turner, died 7-1-94. John's triplet brother, Joe, read the following poem at John's memorial service:

TO THOSE I LOVE

*If I should ever leave you whom I love
to go along the silent way,
grieve not,
nor speak of me with tears,
but laugh and talk of me as if
I were beside you there*

*(I'd come - I'd come,
should I but find a way!
But would not tears and grief
be barriers?)*

*And when you hear a song
or see a bird I loved,
please do not let the thought of me
be sad. . .for I am loving you
just as I always have. . .
You were so good to me!
There are so many things
I wanted still to do-
So many things to say to you...
Remember that I did not fear...
It was just leaving you
that was hard to face.
We cannot see Beyond
But this I know:
I loved you so- "'twas heaven
here with you!"*

John's symbol is a dancing stick man.

In the January 21, 1996, issue of the **Lexington Herald-Leader**, there was an article about Gam and Becky Greer who have lost all of their 4 children. Stephen, 2, died from Leukemia, 11-17-79. January 16, '95 their oldest son, Buzzy (23), shot his father, killed his younger brother, Todd (14) and his younger sister, Kami (10) and then himself. Buzzy had been a good boy but had become involved in drugs. Becky described Buzzy:

People would think to see something like this, that if he would do this, he must be an evil, terrible person, but he wasn't. He loved his brother and sister, he loved his family. But the drugs changed him.

The article divulged: *Gradually, the Greers have learned that they must grieve in different ways because each had different relationships with the children.*

On the anniversary of the deaths, Gam spent the day at home and at the cemetery. For the first time, he read news reports about the shootings. He looked at family photos.

Becky drove to Lexington, where she met with the couple's counselor.

Becky said: *To other people, it might sound odd that we didn't spend the day together, But through counseling, they have learned people grieve differently. Even though we both lost our children, he didn't lose what I lost, I didn't lose what he lost.*

This is so important for a couple to learn, that we each grieve differently and often need to grieve separately.

January 21, the family had a memorial service at their church. A friend of theirs wrote this poem:

Greer Memorial

*A mother's joy,
A father's pride
Abide in those who died.*

*Their spirits comfort us
Who grieve,
And the ones they leave.*

*Flutterings of angels' wings
Blanket soft memories
Amid the saltiness that stings
Nurtures us with their love
Of life and Lord.*

*Pretty ponies dance
In a little girl's dream
Amid a tomboy stance of courage
A face of peaches and cream*

*David slays Goliath on the court
With sheer love of a sport
The strum of guitar
Calls from afar.*

*A tribute to you we leave
The spirit of hope who grief Their
spirits ascend as a dove To
abide in His eternal love.*

Karen Adams

The family also burned 4 candles, White for Stephen, Purple (his favorite color) for Buzzy, Pink for Kami, and Blue for Todd (He was an avid UK Wildcat fan.)

Give someone a special hug today and save one for yourself! ! Thinking of



you each time I eat a Valentine chocolate. . . So I'm thinking of you often.

