

LAMENTATIONS

Issue 42

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

March 1996

The **winter** of '96 will go in the history books. Those of you who have just recently lost a child will probably not remember this winter as clearly as those of us who are "veteran" grievers. When I look back on the first several months after Young Jim's death, I hardly remember anything except that devastating pain that seemed to tear through my entire body and soul. But I am happy to report that that pain has become a dull ache and it is a pain with which I can live.

Being a citizen of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and being a graduate of the University of Kentucky, makes March a very exciting month for me as well as others. **MARCH MADNESS!!** There are many of you who may not understand this mania, but we true-blue basketball fans really look forward to this month. The University of Kentucky is currently ranked #2 and will be a huge contender in the finals of the NCAA. Our own men's basketball team here at Cumberland College should also receive an invitation to go to the nationals; wish us luck!

Many times, don't you feel that each month is a month of "madness?" We each think that we are truly mad because a sane person could not have the thoughts and feelings that we have in dealing with our grief. But I have found, from reading many, many books, that these "maddening" thoughts are normal—at least as normal as they can be considering our great loss.

Basketball is so much like our grief (but isn't everything?). Bob Buford wrote a challenging book entitled *Half Time*. His only child, Ross, drowned in the Rio Grande River, January 3, 1987. Mr. Buford's book analogizes life as a ballgame. During the *first half* of our lives we are busy getting an education, establishing our careers and raising our children. Then there is *half time*, which is a time in which we evaluate our lives and decide what "game-plan" we will use in playing the second half.

In playing the "game," we are often viciously "fouled," but no matter how injured we are, there are no substitutes for us. We can have "time-outs" when we need them, but we have to play the entire game. What is so hard to accept is that we did not make the rules, we don't know the "rules" and they seem to change, often. When we reach *half time*, we cannot re-play or change the first half. Too many things have changed. But we must remember that the "game" is won or lost in the *second half*. And that is up to us.

My *halftime* came when Young Jim was killed. His death made me evaluate what I would do with the *second half* of my life here on earth. I have chosen to not only survive, but to make my life and that of Young Jim's, significant.

The *second half* is not going to be easy, but it can be very rewarding. Mr. Buford stated: The key to a successful *second half* is not to

change jobs; it is a change of heart, a change in the way you view the world and order your life that will make a difference.

What is so important for each of us to remember is that we have many members on our team (fellow travelers) who will "guard" and "assist" us as we fight the opponent named **grief**. May we all accept the challenge in the *second half* of "slam-dunking" our "madness" through that "net" of grief and receiving the "winning" game of **S.U.C.C.E.S.S.**

St. Patrick's Day is March 17th. It seems that green has become an important color to each of us since it represents growth. We also burn green candles to remember our loved ones. Irish proverbs are interesting as well as challenging. Here are a few challenging ones:

- ✿ Falling is easier than rising.
- ✿ When the tongue slips, it speaks the truth.
- ✿ What's got badly, goes badly.
- ✿ A little help is better than a great deal of pity.
- ✿ Unwillingness easily finds an excuse.
- ✿ You'll never plough a field by turning it over in your mind.
- ✿ There is no joy without affliction.
- ✿ A nation's greatest enemy is the small minds of its people.
- ✿ A man that can't laugh at himself should be given a mirror.
- True greatness knows gentleness.

Grief Grafts

Paul and Marti Cupp's 16-year-old son, Jeremy, was killed in an automobile accident, 5-24-93. Marti shared (prior to the birth):

Paul and I are expecting a daughter, Jillian Alexis. I am thrilled, but it won't take the place of Jeremy. Jillian will know her brother. We cannot see him, but Jeremy is here with us always.



Jillian was born January 14. I'm sure Jeremy is her guardian angel. Jeremy's symbols are a red heart, a soccer ball, track shoes with wings and "teenangel."



Gam and Becky Greer have lost all of their 4 children. Stephen, 2, died from Leukemia, 11-17-79. January 16, '95 their oldest son, Buzzy (23), killed his younger brother, Todd (14) and his younger sister, Kami (10) and then himself Karen Kidd said the following prayer at the memorial service which was held on the first anniversary of their deaths:

Prayer for Those Who are Grieving

Father, we are here today, acknowledging that You are with us as the all knowing, sovereign, trustworthy and compassionate God.

Yet, we are also here confessing that we still have many questions about good and evil, that we are often filled with anger at life and death's unfairness, that at times hopelessness peers at us through the window wanting in.

We wish we could go back to that innocent time when we thought we were invincible and the world was safe, but we can't, it isn't, and we need you here where we are.

Thank you that in the middle of what we are experiencing of reality, You are always with us, carrying us close to your heart.

You understand and welcome our questions and fears, You are helping our

bodies and souls heal, and You are waiting so patiently to send that glimmer of hope when we are ready to receive it.

Father, now we are asking that with your gentle and strong creator hands, You would partner with us who are grieving in reshaping our future. You took the void and darkness and created the world, so we know that if we ask You, You will help us reshape our worlds, our hopes, our dreams, even our belief systems.

Please come in and fill the void in our souls with yourself, with your love, with your purpose, with your joy and with your hope.

Michael, the 15-year-old son of Gary and Viola Correll, died from electrical shock, 8-9-95. Michael's uncle wrote this poem:

MICHAEL'S TRIUMPH

The song birds in the woodland are silent and refuse us their melodies.

The meadow is drab without its coloring of wildflowers.

The sky no longer boasts of its splendor.

The sun is ashamed and will not show its face.

Everybody knows that happiness is as swift as an arrow. Quite often it comes upon us without fanfare and then slips from us before we realize.

Happiness is a butterfly that comes and alights on the flower for only a short time, gently kissing the flower and then . . . carried aloft by the breeze. Its journey is without plan or design.

Our spirits are those flowers and Michael the butterfly.

Michael touched my spirit and my spirit was glad.

Like the butterfly, Michael stayed but a short time and touched each one of us.

In this he accomplished so much because he helped us to appreciate all of our butterflies so much more.

OUR CHILDREN....

But when Michael went from us... He carried all the colors of the rainbow with him' It will be a long pain fill process to restore those hues.

I LOVE YOU MICHAEL

--Your Uncle Butch Mullins

Michael's symbols are a policeman, water skis and a butterfly.



Everett and Donna Justice's 33-year-old daughter, Tammi, died from malnutrition resulting from stomach stapling, 7-19-91. Donna described Tammi:

Tammi had been the all-American teenager in high school and college. She was a majorette and homecoming queen in high school. She graduated from Pikeville College with a double major in Psychology and Sociology. She had been in the homecoming court twice and also spring court. She was a beautiful girl with a personality everyone loved.

Tammi had always had a little problem with her weight. She would gain 10 to 15 lbs. and be able to always take it off. In 1980 we went through some very stressful events in our family. Tammi, especially, was very hurt by this. She coped with her stress by eating. She gained an unusually large amount of weight. She was 5'4" and gained up to 240 lbs.

Tammi was a social worker, employed by the state. She became the youngest supervisor in the state. She was a supervisor at the Pikeville office of Social services.

In 1984, after trying and failing on many diets, she had this surgery performed and it was very successful--too successful in fact.

Tammi was once again the slim and trim beauty she had always been. Tammi just didn't realize she was a beautiful person when she was heavy; her beauty came from within.

During the next 7 years, she was very happy. What we didn't know until too late was that all her major organs were being destroyed by lack of proper nutrition.

Tammi was born when I was 18 years old. Just out of high school and married to the football star. Tammi and I grew up together. She was my best friend as well as my daughter. She was always her father's pride and joy. When Tammi was 12 1/2 years old, we had another daughter, Tiffany. Tammi and Tiffany were always very close and loving. You would think with

the age difference they wouldn't be. I believe God sent us Tiffany because He knew we would lose Tammi. Tiffany and I do a lot of talking and remembering the good and the bad times.

Mickey Mouse is Tammi's symbol.



Monica, the 19-year-old daughter of Hershel and Judy Haste, died due to complications from Cerebral Palsy, 4-3-93. Judy writes:

Monica will be gone 3 years in April and it seems only yesterday and then again it seems like an eternity since I saw her beautiful smile.

She ends the letter by saying:

Be good to yourself; 'eat some chocolate for me too. I have lost 96 pounds and chocolate is a No-No.



Congratulations Judy!!!
Monica's symbol is a dove.

Art and Eleanor Foss' 28-year-old son, John, died from bladder cancer, 10-5-93. Eleanor wrote the following poems at the beach:

THAT'S IT

Two short simple words forever more burn an image in my heart.

An ache for my husband.

His hopes and dreams forever shattered; the finite pieces impervious to repair.

A fragile eggshell, a priceless vase, the shreds, the splinters, the scattered glimmering fragments only assuaged by his tears.

The haunting memory of our son's pain.

His infinite suffering, the images etched in our hearts, forever dredged by those two words, whispered by my lifelong friend as our only son, in our arms, took his final breath.

"That's it."

Two simple words forever altering our life path.

John, we must believe

"That's it"

Can only mean that you have moved, you have changed ;your lifestyle

"That's it"

Means that someday when another family member whispers

"That's it"

We will again come together and so gratefully, so joyously cry

"That's it"

You took your last breath Dad said "that's it."

The nurse checked her watch

She listened to your heart.

That heart that knew and held boundless love.

Our dreams so finally and inexorably crushed

Your dreams: wife, child, home, love.

My dreams of growing old surrounded by my children.

Child of my heart

Voyeur of my soul

Handsome, laughing, teasing, loving;

always loving.

Eternal fragile dream

Eternal fleeting thought

Eternal hope, eternal prayer

That life would be

As it should,

As it should

Such empty meaning now or possibly alternate meaning?

A life with God,

Encompassed by light, love, music?

Can this be wrong?

To await our reunion in a heavenly home

Never again to experience pain, to know fear

To ache with a heart so empty it defies definition

When do the bad scenes fade?

When do the happy ones return?

John's symbols are an angel, yellow roses and a red BMW.



Meredith Peters, the 13-year-old daughter of Mike and Maggie, died from osteosarcoma, 9-24-90. Maggie shared her journey:

After 5 years, we continue to plug along, at times doing great, at other times seeming to slip back a bit. And that's okay too, I think. Overall, as a family of 5, we

continue to move forward in processing our grief by God's grace. In our situation, having 3 other children, all younger than Meredith, has demanded our focus and attention whether it be for groceries, laundry, or chauffeuring. If we were older or if we had had no other kids, I think we would have been helped by volunteer work with kids--whether it be in school, Scouts, sports, or Candle lighter's Childhood Cancer Foundation. We have actually done some of that even having the kids of our mm and it still has broadened us. There is really joy in serving and in looking to the needs of others, and indirectly being helped ourselves.

Isn't life strange with its unpredictability and its recurring losses? I think we are all supposed to learn to let go and not cling too possessively.

Meredith's symbols are a cross and a heart.



Karen Hall's husband, Denzil, and only child, Olivia, were killed in an automobile accident, 1-10-93. Karen shared:

After Christmas I was given the book, The Christmas Box, by Richard Paul Evans. The author makes mention of an Angel monument erected in a cemetery in Salt Lake City, Utah in remembrance of all those who have lost children. Mr. Evans invites people who are in the vicinity of Salt Lake City to visit the cemetery and lay a white flower at the statue's base. I have a very dear friend who lives there, and she so graciously consented to take a flower and lay it at the Angel's base in memory of Olivia.

(If you haven't read this book, I highly recommend it, but I must add that the movie did not correctly depict the characters of the book.)

One of my favorite scriptures is where David loses a child, II Samuel 12:23, "But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." My whole goal in life is to make it to Heaven one day.

I want to see Jesus and give Him praise for dying on the cross so that I might have the opportunity to live in Heaven and to be reunited with Denzil and Olivia Nikole. I am thankful for the hope and promise that God assures us; He will wipe away all our sorrows.

Denzil and Olivia's symbols are musical notes.



George, the 16-year-old son of Don and Linda Diebold, was murdered, 4-2-93. Linda verbalized so many of our thoughts:

We are all well; of course we have good and bad days like everyone.

People ask me who the baby looks like, Bobby or Sharon. They never mention George; so often I do. I've gotten to the point where I don't care if I make them uncomfortable or not.

Garrett looks like all three of our other children.

I often think of everyone we've met and their children, and know I'm not alone. We all miss our children everyday, but those birthdays and holidays and special days are rough. Going to the cemetery and putting a Happy Birthday balloon on your child's headstone is not how we expected we'd celebrate their birthdays.

We all know we have to keep going forward. When Garrett (1) is older he will not only know about his oldest brother, George, he will know about all the other sons and daughters of the people we have met.

My sister tells me she's so proud of Don and me on how we're doing. What she doesn't understand is we all have no other choice.

We all feel our children pushing us forward I feel many times that George is near.

I have many things to be thankful for, my health, husband, family and all the people that do care.

George's symbol is a football



Eric Davis, the 15-year-old son of William and Anita Davis McCarty, died from a gunshot, 10-10-93. Anita lamented:

Often my own family won't talk about Eric, and if I do, they get mad.

Everyone says it's been long enough. How long is enough? It gets harder each day when I can't talk to anyone.

I've lost friends and family because I talk about Eric and still haven't done anything to his room. I just cannot. It helps me to go in there because I think he listens to me.

When I receive a letter such as this, I am continuously reminded that we need each other's support so desperately. I hope you are finding people in your hometown who are meeting your needs. If not, maybe you have read about someone in the newsletter with whom you would like to correspond. Just let me know.

The family has chosen the sun and water to symbolize Eric.



Brandon, the 16-year-old son of Dennis and Linda Holbrook, was killed in an auto accident, 6-17-93. Brandon would have graduated from high school in 1995. The Holbrooks had Brandon's classmates write about him and they put these priceless writings in a book and gave each graduate a copy of it with a guardian angel. The following are excerpts from this book:

Brandon Holbrook was someone who everyone liked. There wasn't anything about Brandon that wasn't to like. The world doesn't have enough people like Brandon.

Brandon tried his best at everything he did from homework to competition in the many sports he participated in. Brandon didn't care to talk to anyone and he didn't give a second thought of helping anyone no matter whom they were.

I can remember being in M. Berger's first grade classroom. We were playing kissing tag during break. Brandon tried his best to kiss all the girls. In Ms. Gearhart's second grade classroom a new student enrolled. His hair was bright red and everyone laughed at him. Brandon told him not to pay any attention to those who laugh. Brandon didn't focus on what the person looked like, but he looked inside for who the person was.

At our eighth grade graduation, I was behind Brandon in line. He was teasing me and telling me how everyone there was to see him graduate and they would be leaving as soon as he got his diploma. There would be no one there to see me get mine. He always kept me laughing.

If Brandon hadn't helped me with my Biology I notebook, I probably would still be trying to get it finished and I would have never made it through Biology II.

I could write ten novels about him and I could never tell you how good a person Brandon was. I'll never forget Brandon. He will always be in my heart.

-Angie

My memories of Brandon are unforgettable. We had a lot of laughs together, being the closest of friends for the last 11 years. The most memorable things are the great times on the baseball field. We played many games together and we always had a lot of laughs. When he messed up, we laughed and he laughed with us.

What I will never forget about Brandon is his warm bright smile that he always had on his face; his caring for other people, and especially the life long friendship that we shared.

-Terry Crager



Brandon's symbol is a rainbow with clouds and tulips.

Paul and Lou Ann Feck's son, Paul, was 32 when he was killed by an assailant in a jealous rage. The man has since been convicted of first degree murder. The following letter comforted the Fecks in their grief:

Hi Mamma and Daddy,

Don't worry about me, I'm fine. I'm with my Heavenly Father. Jesus has already come for me. Tell them I'm alive. I'm having a wonderful time. I'm happy all the time. I'm waiting for you, I want you to be with me.

Think of the most beautiful place you've ever seen, it's nothing compared to heaven. You have never seen such beautiful flowers. Thank you for praying for me. If it hadn't been for you, Mamma and Daddy, I wouldn't be here or have met Jesus. I've got peace now, no worries. I'm rejoicing all the time. Thanks to the Father's mercy, I made it. Tell everybody don't wait, find God today.

It was my time to go. The Father took me before a lot more things could

happen to me. Jesus just put his arms around me and said "Come on in my son." He walks with me and talks with me. You still have work to do, you have to stay there. I protect you and talk to the Father for you. I want you to enjoy life and take good care of each other. Just keep trusting in the Father, He will see you through and you will be with home.

Don't cry, don't be sad, we'll be together through all eternity. The Father will bless you because of everything you've gone through. You have a big mansion up here. There is no pain, no fatigue, no handicap, or worry here. There is no night nor time here. I look young and feel young. I won't be home for Christmas, I am home.

Be happy, be content. Everything that you have comes from the Father. I wish I had served God more while I was down there. I'm a winner now, I'm a winner now. I've found it all. The day I died was the best day of my life, now I can see it.



I Love You
Your boy

Lou Ann explained Paul's symbol.

Paul's symbol is a guitar because he was a musician. One of his favorite songs was "Have I Told You Lately That I Love You?" by Rod Stewart. The song began to play in shops, restaurants and on the car radio whenever members of the family entered for over 1 ½ years after his death.

Because of his love for music, donations are being made in memory of him to a Western Kentucky Christian radio station. In this way, others continue to be blessed

Paul's memory is kept alive by our collecting his memorabilia. His photos are enlarged and copied. His music is copied; albums are made of his school-work, newspaper clippings and pictures. We exchanged his home videos, music and pictures and "Ah Ha" stories. We placed a picture of him in a gold angel frame on the wall in the entrance foyer to our home, so everyone who enters can see him.

In the word, of friends, "Paul's", love for music and fast cars had a profound influence on me." It made me proud to know what a good man and father he was. I sometimes yearn to hear him play the guitar. I always loved to listen to him play.

The realization of his death blew the wind out of me. I still can't believe it. The same piercing loss I feel is shared

by everyone. Paul will always be in my heart.

We think about him daily and are thankful to have been blessed to have a son like him.

Rick, the 30-year-old son of Sherron Moore, died 6-7-92. Sherron wrote the following personal essay:

CARPE DIEM
(Seize the Day)
MY NEW MOTTO

Last summer, as I walked along the beach listening to the roaring surf and screeching seagulls, my thoughts drifted back over my life and many of the things I **took for granted** Things that seemed insignificant then, but which I now see with stark clarity reserved for hindsight.

I thought about the winter more than 30 years ago when I was pregnant with my son. Unlike so many young women today, I never questioned the care I received at the clinic on the base where my Marine husband was stationed I took for granted that each one of the continually rotating obstetricians who saw me knew what was best for both me and our unborn baby.

Yet, in a very few years, I would learn that many other military wives who were pregnant during that period routinely were given a medication called Thalidomide. We had all **assumed** that our babies would have ten fingers and ten toes and be wailing little bundles of energy. Fortunately, my son, Rick, was one of the lucky ones.

Over the next decade I saw to it that my little boy had the necessary inoculations, took his vitamins, had naps, wore corrective shoes for his inherited flat feet, ate his vegetables, and was in bed by 8:30 p.m. I read bedtime stories to encourage his budding imagination and love of books. I taught him to look under rocks for interesting creepy crawlies and to look up for rainbows and shooting stars. I considered it my duty to show him how to blow bubbles, whistle, tie shoe-strings, tell time, and spit watermelon seeds. I **took for granted** that all this was important in the development of his character.

Later, in the dark early Sunday morning hours I helped 11-year-old Ricky roll newspapers for his route in our apartment complex. And when I walked in the shadows as he made his rounds on collection night, I **took for granted**

that I was safe. After all, I was a mother going about the business of protecting and guiding my only child I was impervious to danger.

During his junior high school days, I endured drum lessons and seemingly incessant practice on everything that would resonate. I took for granted that by his marching with the band, I would not have to worry about Rick's being injured while playing football. My Gemini boy could not be in two places at once, no matter how hard he tried

At 15, Rick enrolled in driver's ed. He loved the class and easily earned A's. He could hardly wait to be 16 and get his driver's permit. I took for granted that my instructions combined with driver's ed. would insure that my son would be a safe driver. I would not have to worry about his being on the road

After high school, Rick went into the Air Force. He loved his job as a dietary technician at the base hospital in Spokane, WA. Although he worked erratic shifts and long hours, I took for granted that his military experience was providing Rick with the discipline and learning opportunities he would draw on later to be a successful and productive civilian.

Rick was tall and gangly with my freckles sprinkled generously across his nose and on his arms. But the gold flecks in his hazel eyes were all his. No one on either side of his family had such striking eyes. He laughed easily and had a knack for making others join in his enthusiasm for life. I took for granted that Rick would have no difficulty finding a suitable young lady to love him and be the mother of the children he often said he hoped to have.

Ah, yes, grandchildren. I was only 20 when Rick was born so I was not exactly eager to become a grandmother. Nevertheless, there were times I would look at him or his photographs and smile to myself thinking that somewhere out in the universe there were two tiny angels waiting for the right moment to be born. One was a little elfin boy with large luminous eyes, delicious tiny fingers and sugar toes, and a laugh that would invite everyone to hold him. The other was a strawberry blonde giggle of a girl with my blue eyes and

freckles, and a love of mischief that I would encourage, of course, I could not be sure when, but I took for granted that one day I would hold

The last time I visited with my son was on a chilly April day in 1991. I was in Houston, Texas, on business, so Rick and I got together for a few hours. We drove around the budding countryside, stopped for more snacks than we needed, and talked animatedly of the many things we were going to do together someday. He picked wild flowers for me and I gave him gas money. We held hands and took for granted that we had all the time in the world. I was busy with a job that sent me traveling frequently to interesting places. He had spent the past three years of his young life providing 24-hour care to a sick and dying father, as well as his grandfather.

At home again in Sarasota, Florida, I wrote letters to Rick when I got around to it and called even less frequently. Sure, I thought about him every day and wrote many letters to him in my mind that somehow never made it onto paper. But I took for granted that we would get caught up on everything when at last the hectic pace of my life slowed a little and when Rick was not so caught up in trying to settle the estates of his father and grandfather.

I guess my son took for granted that he was safe as he drove home in the right lane at 2:30 in the morning on February 17, 1992. I was asleep in my bed 1,200 miles away, possibly anticipating that morning would come too soon, just like all the other Monday mornings, and dreaming that just maybe that week I would get caught up on my phone calls and letters.

So often I have wondered if my son also took for granted that the headlights of the 18-wheeler barreling down on his car would stop glaring in his rear view mirror when the truck logically moved to the center lane or to the far left lane where a truck going 70 miles per hour belongs. Why else would Rick have continued to slow down as he approached the exit near his home?

My son's fiancé died upon impact when their car was crushed under the weight of the fully-loaded tractor trailer. Rick suffered third and fourth degree burns

over 95% of his beautiful body, yet miraculously kicked his way out of that inferno. For 112 days he valiantly fought to live. I was there with him for the second day to his last.

During those days Rick was in intensive care at the burn unit in Houston, I resolved never again to take anything for granted. From one minute to the next, I rode an emotional roller coaster that took me plummeting from the highs of incredible optimism into the depths of despair and back again.

For three and a half years I have struggled to come to terms with his death and the emptiness of my new life without my son. Often I reflect over all the things Rick taught me, his family, and the friends who loved him during those 112 days with which he blessed us. I am grateful to have spent another of my birthdays with him, one more Easter, Mother's Day, and his 30th birthday on June 2. His death five days later left me numb, exhausted and hollow.

No longer do I procrastinate telling someone I care about that I am thinking of them or that I love them. I write letters more frequently and promptly answer the ones I receive. I make time to enjoy the world around me. There is no job, no activity so important that I cannot find time to nurture myself and those I care about.

There will be no grand babies for me now, no son to look after me when I am 107 and no longer getting around as well as I would like.

I wish there were some way I could reach out today and impress upon just one young mother that there are no guarantees in life. I would tell her not to take for granted a future with her child, and, to love her baby as much as she possibly can today. For this instant, this one, this, is all anyone ever has. I would tell her: give your best today; you'll have fewer regrets tomorrow.

EPILOGUE

The police at the scene forgot to test the truck driver for substance abuse, precluding felony charges. Our investigation, however, revealed that he was known to always carry a thermos of bourbon and cola when he was on the road. He was a man who could "handle" his drinking. The trucker pled guilty to

two counts of misdemeanor negligent homicide and was sentenced to 2 years of probation, 300 hours of community service in emergency rooms, and a \$1,500 fine (which was paid to the county). He retained his driver's license.

To honor my son, I established the RICHARD MAXWELL STEPP MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND. To be eligible, a student must come from a single parent household and never have been arrested for driving under the influence. The scholarship is managed by the Community Foundation of Sarasota, P.O. Box 49587, Sarasota, FL 34230-6587. Five students began the Fall '93 semester as recipients of this scholarship.

Rick's symbols are a RAINBOW because he loved them and I have many photos of him with rainbows. To me, they represent reassurance and happiness; and the Pink Panther. That was his mascot when he and one of my brothers took several vacation road trips together. On their last vacation, they put a stuffed Pink Panther in every photo they took, including one showing the three of them floating in Crater Lake. That same stuffed animal hung from a light over Rick's intensive care bed where we hoped Rick could see him. The nurses put bandages on the panther's legs and tail. On days when we had to wear masks, the panther wore one too. The Pink Panther has popped up in my everyday life, and when he does, I smile and know that Rick is lovingly playing with me.



David and JoAnn Westerman wrote:

The loss of a child has a great impact on our everyday life that most people don't realize that we have to go through.

January 14, 1995, our son, Michael was shot and later died on January 15. He was our only son and the middle child of three. We have an extra room in our home and we have

put a lot of Michael's toys we have kept over the years, photos, school report cards and even special drawings and homemade cards he gave to us. We have 2 pieces of Michael's workshop items he made in school. One is an entertainment center with shelves. We have put Michaels "Heman" set on the bottom shelf. It is a great feeling to see his 13-month-old twins walk up to that shelf and look at it, look back at us and smile really big and then they will start playing with them. It is a great joy to see them play with the same things that Michael did since he isn't here to play with them.



The Westermans have chosen a cowboy hat and a confederate flag as Michael's symbol because he comes to their mind when they see them. David made a large candle holder that is wind and rain proof and on the front is a piece of wood with these words burned into it, "With the birth of Jesus, I still live on." The family burned a candle at Michael's grave all through Christmas.

Joe and Susan Walters' 4-year-old son, Ralph, was killed in a truck accident. Instead of sending out a Christmas letter, this year Joe and Susan sent a winter letter to family and friends. They shared:

Today (1-29-96) marks the two and a half year date since the accident which continues to mark our lives. Ralph would have been seven and our life together would have been so full with his learning and growing. We wish that was the case, but it is not. We are so grateful to be Ralph's parents, no matter where he is, and grateful for our God, gracious care far all three of us.

I write this letter to keep up with you who are dear to us, but also out of a bereaved mother's need to keep her child in the hearts and minds of others.

Isn't this a good idea? How warming to hear from others on a cold, dreary day.



Ralph's symbols are international children.

Gary and Angie Cunningham's 21-year-old son, Ernie, was killed in an automobile accident, 11-10-95. Angie remarked:

You've asked me to tell you about our son, Ernie. I'd love to tell you everything about him, but, you know, it hurts so much to write. Do I say Ernie was? I think that is much too painful.

Ernie graduated from Northern Kentucky University in May of '95, with a degree in Communications. He received an award in April. He was named the Outstanding Senior in Speech. He was on the Speech and Drama Team. He loved it! I used to wonder about his talent. Where did it come from? I'm a very proud mother. In truth, I was in awe of his talent.

He was working so hard this year. He had some debt to repay, and needed to earn money for graduate school. He wanted to attend Wayne State in Detroit.

Ernie had a lot of fun. He complained about his job as a server at **Rafferty's** and as a substitute teacher (especially middle school.) But I think he had fun wherever he was. He was really enjoying his work as a coach for the Beechwood High School Speech and Drama Team.

Ernie had a wonderful laugh and I miss hearing it so much. It started deep in his belly. It was wonderful to hear. He had a deep and lovely voice and I can hear him now--"Ernie Rules!"

Ernie often grabbed me or his dad around the head (he didn't hurt us) and he would say, "Who's the Best Son?" as he gave us a nudge. We always said "You are Ernie--you're the one hurting us right now."

Gary often called Ernie Andre the Gentle Giant. I called him Old Ern He was a big boy-6'4" and well over 200 lbs. He had a size 14 foot. I miss his bigness. Where is my BIG son?

After Ernie's death, the family received so many loving cards and letters. I have included a few.

You may not remember me, but I live down the street. I wanted to write this to tell you how Ernie has helped me be a better person. When I was younger he would always get the bigger kids away from me. He not only did that for me, he did that for anybody.

He has also done wonders with the kids he helped coach at Boone County last year. One person to benefit from his coaching is my girlfriend who has always been appreciative of what Ernie has done. By writing this, I was wanting to show you that Ernie's time on earth was very well spent.

-Mark Hoffinan

The world suffered a terrible loss when a precious young Christian's life was cut short after a horrible auto accident. Ernie Cunningham, my fellow classmate both at Boone County High School and Northern Kentucky University, was a hardworking, honorable man who surely would have achieved greatness had his life not been cut short. In the 21 years he had on this earth, Ernie achieved much more than most do in a lifetime.

Ernie was a doer. He graduated high school at age 16, went on to graduate at the top of his class from Northern, and was planning to attend graduate school to become a professor in communications.

I was privileged enough to count myself among those who could call Ernie a dear friend. I find solace in the thought of Ernie in heaven, where he will never feel pain or suffering again. But I want the world to know that Ernie Cunningham was a great man who touched the lives of many during his time on earth, and I am one of them. I will miss him.

God bless his family in this trying time.

-Cher Mahoney

Adam, the 11-year-old son of Eddie and Janet Warnick, was killed in a train accident with Casey Russell. Janet shares Adam with us:

There is so much I would love to share about my Adam with you. Adam was my first born, conceived after five years of marriage. Eddie and I were so ready for his bundle of joy. I wanted a biblical name for my little boy and yet it had to be tied into his father's name. He was named Edward Adam Warnick (keeping his father's initials.)

I look back now and realize what a gift from God I had. He was born December 11, 1982, right before Christmas. What a wonderful Christmas present. Adam would not only fill our hearts with love and joy, but help another family through a tough time also.

When I had to return to work, we were fortunate to find a woman from our church to take care of Adam. My mom was church secretary and one day Sarah came by the office to chat. Sarah had seven children of her own, ages four to sixteen. Sarah had lost her six-year-old Tim to leukemia a year or two before joining our church. She explained to my mom she needed something to lift her spirits and fill her day...then came Adam. Even at six weeks old, he was fulfilling a need of someone else.

Adam seemed so smart to us as all parents feel toward their child. He loved playing with little cars in the dirt, soccer, little league baseball and most of all going to the hunting club with his dad. He loved all animals and the nature around them.

About the 3rd and part of the 4th grade we noticed a change in Adam. He had problems concentrating and comprehending his work. Along with this his self-esteem was starting to drop along with his grades. Midway in 4th grade, Adam was evaluated with the help of his doctor and special teachers and counselors to have ADD, Attention Deficit Disorder (without hyperactivity, in fact, Adam had become very passive.) With the help of medication, work and love and many prayers, we went from D's & C's to A-B Honor roll the entire rest of 4th grade and all of 5th. His confidence was coming back and his self-esteem improved tremendously.

Adam's last year with us on earth was like no other, as I look back and remember. He was always such a loving child, but '93 and '94 would be the exception especially for the age of 11. How many little boys do you know that didn't mind holding his mom's hand in a mall or even give his dad a hug in public? Not many, but Adam did. I long for his touch every day.

Adam always had a tender heart for the underdog. If there was a new kid in school, Adam would befriend them. We

had a young boy on our ball team one year that could not afford a team picture. This bothered Adam so that he asked his dad if he could pay for Bo's picture. If anyone needed anything, Adam would try his best to help.

Adam was so fortunate and I think he knew it too. We spent a lot of time together as a family, church, camping, ball games and going to the hunting club where he learned to respect nature and what it held in store for all of us. In this busy time in our lives, not many children get to see and do all the things this young man did.

Adam's little sister, Katie, was born when he was five. He was so proud of her and wanted to teach her everything he knew. He was a protective big brother when she started to school as well as a quarreling sibling. Katie misses her big brother. She misses the sharing of good and bad times. And there are times when she says she feels so alone. I hope, in time, she will be able to share these feelings with me in more detail. If you have ever had a brother or sister, you know that certain bond between the two of you regardless of age.

Adam accepted Christ as his Savior at Vacation Bible School in July, '92 and was baptized that following September. To me as a mother, this was as exciting as his birth, only a new birth. As a parent, I promised God when he and Katie were born, that I would do my best to make sure they knew God as their personal Savior.

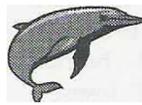
As a mother, I could go on and on. There has been one particular thing that has stuck in my mind I can't help but think God had a purpose for me and Adam very early on. When Adam was born, I remember having the "Baby Blues" so I thought. I would spend several hours rocking and crying over Adam thinking, dear God, what a wonderful miracle life is. Please do not let anything happen to my Adam for if it does, I would surely die. Later on, when Adam was older, I would always go by and check on him in his room before going to bed. There would always be this voice in my head that would say, "kiss him good night, for tomorrow may never come." It would scare me in a way. I would kiss him on the cheek and whisper how proud I was of him and how much I loved him and watch him sleep for a few minutes longer.

I never told anyone, not even Eddie, until

after Adam died. Somehow, I feel in some strange way, it was God speaking to me then to let me know I would not have all the years I wanted with my Adam. Another strange thing happened too. I love Dr. Dobson and have his calendar in my kitchen. On the day Adam and Casey died, this is what is said:

"Our children are not casual guests in our homes they have been loaned to us temporarily for the purpose of loving them and instilling a foundation of values on which their future lives will be built. We will be accountable through eternity for the way we discharge that responsibility."

This sounds crazy I know, but somehow I do feel that God loaned Adam to us for eleven and a half years. If I could do it all again, I would and my life has been the richer for those years. I am ever so thankful for the most precious gift I have ever been given.



If I were to choose a symbol for Adam, it would have to be a dolphin or whale. Adam wanted to be a marine biologist when he grew up. I hope his wish comes true in heaven.

Martha Ridenour's 38-year-old daughter, Suzanne, died from aspiration, 9-20-94. Martha wrote:

I would like to share a little about my daughter's life and death.

Suzanne was my only child, and after four miscarriages, I really felt she was a gift from God. From childhood, she loved dance, and she loved people. She could never stand to see anyone hurt or to hurt anyone, and she was always trying to help someone else.

Growing up, she always was dancing and smiling. She also had a horse and liked riding and rode in horse shows. She liked to swim and water ski. Our house was always full of her friends. She dated a lot of different boys and had a wonderful time. She was captain of the flag team, and also worked a part-time job in the summers after she was 16. She also

modeled clothes for some of the stores and always continued to dance.

She went to UK where she belonged to Alpha Delta Pi sorority, and danced with the Blue Grass Ballet who performed at half-time of the UK ball games and with the UK Ballet. She also modeled for some of the stores in Lexington, and still managed to stay on the Dean's List.

After graduation, she married a boy she had been dating. Suzanne began working for the Department of Human Resources and loved the job because she was helping people. She also taught ballet at Pikeville College at night and danced in many performances.

In 1983 my husband died at the age of 53. This was very difficult for me and for Suzanne. My only 'brother' had died in 1980, and both my parents had died when I was young, so Suzanne was the only family I had left.

Everyone loved my daughter. After her death, I was swamped with letters, many from people I did not know, telling me about things she had done to help them. She had bought a bicycle for a little boy for Christmas whose father had lost his job. She had given free dancing lessons to a little girl who could not afford them. She had paid a doctor bill for lady. The list went on and on.

One of Suzanne's friends wrote the following poem:

Suzanne, Our Friend

We don't remember when we actually began to call you friend.

Our goings and comings rambled through the years.

It was a gradual growing
Much like ivy which entwines.

It was a friendship which turned a bright golden color through the years.

You entertained with your antics and made our hearts smile with your laughter.

Just as a ballerina, you gracefully danced into our lives.

Our lives were better for having known you.

Your passing left us empty.
But because of your life, we have learned to love each other more.

We miss you, our friend,
But to live in the hearts you left behind is to be here always and forever

Written with love by your friend.
May the Lord bless you and keep you

Pikeville College has dedicated the **Suzanne Ridenour Dance Studios** in memory of Suzanne who was a dance

instructor at the college as well as a performer. She was honored posthumously for her immense love for dance and commitment to educating the area's youth. A special dance was dedicated to Suzanne and was choreographed by Claire Olson, Artistic director and friend of Suzanne's. In addition, many friends donated money to establish a dance section in the Public Library and it is stocked with books on dance. Martha's next goal is to establish a dance scholarship at Pikeville College in Suzanne's memory.

At the time of her husband's death, Martha had given a room at the hospital in his memory. She has now given the one beside her husband in Suzanne's memory.

Martha has selected ballet slippers as Suzanne's symbol.



Don, the 36-year-old son of Dale and Claudia Lynch, died from a degenerative lung disease, 6-15-94. Claudia described Don:

My son, Rev. Donald Dwayne Lynch, had finished his Interim as a Chaplain in Cincinnati. When he became very sick, he had always had asthmatic bronchitis, he had gotten a staff germ. He had a degenerated lung disease which was terminal. He went into remission which lasted for 2 1/2 years. He worked as a counselor in Lexington and taught part-time in the Community College, a Death and Dying class.

When he became ill the next time, he had to give up his apartment and take a room. His dad and I got him to live his last year with us, which helped us both to deal more with his death. Don used his illness to help others. He was very religious! He kept telling me he was going to a higher job in heaven. God did not make mistakes that his illness and death was for God's glory. I miss him every day. He loved teddy bears. He specialized in women having miscarriages or babies being still-born.

He would have a funeral in the Chapel of the hospital if the family wanted it. He would use a candle with a cross in front of it with a teddy bear with moving arms and legs.

I have teddy bears in his room and pictures which he has painted are all over the house. His rock collection, all his bibles, and his sea shells displayed in glass bowls. I distributed his library to Pineville, Cumberland College, and gave a student some of his Hebrew and Greek books. I gave some others to a man with Lupus. My brother, who is a Chaplain in California took some of them also. Anything I can do in his behalf to keep his memory alive, I do.

Don graduated from St. Camillus Academy and went into the Navy, became certified EMT I and II, went to Cumberland College and graduated in 1984 with a BS in Allied Health and Biblical Religion. He attended the Seminary in Kansas City and pastored a church in Armstrong. He was a member of "The Agape Gospel Singers." He served as Blue River Kansas City Deaf Coordinator. He then moved to Louisville and finished his Master in Divinity at Southern Seminary. While there, he was a Case manager at Salvation Army Rehab. Pastoral Counselor Chaplain, on Board of Directors of Love and Action and on Revival Teams. Worked with Way side Christian Missions, Shelter Coordinator.

He was a very talented young man, even if he was my son. I am very proud of his achievements, of which these are only a few.

A teddy bear is Don's symbol.



Lydia Israel-Trostel's 21-year-old daughter, Dana, died from complications following a bone marrow transplant. Lydia conveyed all of our feelings:

We've made it through a full year-oil trip I'd never have believed we'd make. Sometimes, though, I think I hurt more now than him. Guess God protects us the first few months. I hardly remember them. Reality has set in--She's not coming back--ever. She's in a better place, but, selfishly, I still wish she were here.

Dana-My brave and beautiful girl. Dana had ovarian cancer at age 17-very rare, and unfortunately, fairly well progressed by the time we knew. Surgery, chemo (time out for high school graduation. I grabbed her to hug her and she told me I was going to pull off her wig!!) And more surgery. We took a 4-day "Bahama Mama" cruise before her second-look surgery, hoping for the best. Good news! Lymph nodes negative. By November 1991, no residual tumor found! How happy we were-how relieved! Maybe we could get back to normal-whatever "normal" is!

Dana enjoyed fairly good health for about 1 1/2 years. She was tall (5'11") and she seemed so very thin to a Mom who wanted to fatten her up! She was thinking about further schooling, perhaps something in the medical profession (I'm a nurse myself); then her blood counts started to fall, she became weaker. Many tests later declared her

to be in bone marrow failure, probably due to the very strong doses of chemo used to arrest her cancer. To beat cancer, and die of bone marrow failure! No way. She struggled with the thoughts of re-entering the hospital, radiation, losing her hair once again she decided against it. If God wanted her, so be it. She did what she pleased (saw movies, bowled, ran around with friends, etc.) until her platelets got so low she started having spontaneous nose bleeds that would not stop. In 2-3 months she became transfusion and platelet dependent-quality of life was just going down hill. Dana wanted to do what she wanted to do when she wanted to do it! This weekly and biweekly trip to the hospital was indeed cramping her style. She, along with family support, decided on a bone marrow transplant-no family member was a good enough match-we finally found a donor in August, 1994. She would be 21-years-old that month! What a gift! She entered the hospital in September. She died of acute renal failure, liver failure, heart--her body was just tired, tired of being sick. We miss her so much.

Dana's symbols are an angel and a rose.



Ruth Canter's 40-year-old son, Charles, died from an overdose of prescription drugs, 10-8-95. Ruth laments:

I am 74 years old In November of 1993 I lost my husband of 45 years. My son was shot during a robbery, and now I have lost my other son to an overdose of pills. The pain and loneliness which I have endured is unbelievable.

I hope you will drop Ruth a card of support. Her address is:
2301 Eastland Parkway.
Lexington, KY 40505

Charles' symbol is a sunflower.



Geraldine Fitzgerald's daughter, Linda, died of Marfans Syndrome, 7-24-91, at the age of 28. Geraldine is now a lay minister in her church for bereavement. Geraldine shared this poem of encouragement:

Remember

When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you, that I have left some mark of who I am on who you are.

It means that you can summon me back to your mind even though countless years and miles may stand between us.

It means that even after I die, you can still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart.

For as long as you remember me, I am never entirely lost.

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," the good thief said from his cross.

There are perhaps no more human word" in all of Scripture, no prayer we can pray so well.



Linda's symbol is an angel.



Frank and Gail Noble's son, Chad, and Chad's friend, Tony, were killed in an automobile accident March 9, 1991. Chad's symbols are praying hands.



Don and Barbara Spires' two daughters were murdered, 3-20-95, thirty-two-year old Sally, and Chandra-22. Their symbols are a guardian angel.

Doug, the 30-year-old son of Gene and Jean Gilvin, died from a brain tumor, 2-10-95. The Gilvin's daughter gave them this poem:

*God saw you getting tired
And a cure was not to be
So He put His arms around you
And whispered "Come With Me. "*

*With tearful eyes
We watched you suffer
And saw you fade away
Although we loved you dearly
We could not make you stay.*

*A golden heart stopped beating
Hardworking hands at rest God broke
our hearts to prove
He only takes the best.
It's lonesome here without you
We miss you more each day
Life doesn't seem the same
Since you've gone away.*

*When days are sad and lonely
And everything else goes wrong
We seem to hear you whisper
"Cheer up and carry on."*

*Each time we see your picture
You seem to smile and say
"Don't cry I'm in God's keeping
We'll meet again someday."*



Doug was a policeman in Lexington.

James and Nancy Lawson's 15-year-old son, Bobby, died from a gunshot wound, 3-13-94. Bobby's symbols are a karate person and a soccer ball.



I have been trying to learn more about nutrition, and I have some wonderful revelations to share about chocolate:



Chocolate is made from cacao beans. Beans are legumes and as are vegetables.



Chocolate covered raisins are a fruit and a great source of fiber and iron.



Chocolate has milk in it. Chocolate is made with sugar and cocoa butter. Sugar is made from beets (vegetables) and butter is a dairy product.



If you don't eat chocolate, some may assume you'd rather have broccoli.



Chocolate is lower in sodium than pork rinds.



Malted milk balls are the same size and shape as grapes. So they must have the same number of calories as grapes.



Most fresh fruit is not in season this time of the year. You have to eat chocolate.



Peanuts are a good source of protein. Chocolate covered peanuts are excellent for vegetarians or people who are trying to cut back on red meat.



For every candy bar we eat, there is a lima bean that will be saved!!