



LAMENTATIONS



Issue 76

Middle

Nov / Dec, 2000

Here we go again.... Another "Season to be Jolly".... Thanksgiving and then Christmas. Deciding what to do with these holidays can, many times, be more difficult than the actual days. It is another time of the year that we want to run away and hide from anything that will be "joyful" If this is the first holiday season since your child's death, you don't know what to expect and you don't know how to plan. You are thinking, "How can anyone celebrate" when you have lost your child? How can anyone be excited about the holiday season?

Jim and I are at the stage in our grief that we can look forward to holidays once again. Since Young Jim's death, we have changed a few holiday rituals, but we have found that we are comforted by "familiar" ways of observing these holidays. This isn't true with everyone. It is up to you to talk with other family members and decide together how you will observe these days. Because you have to go through them whether you want to or not.

Your friends and family want to help in any way possible but don't know how to approach the subject with you, so you must take charge. This letter may help you in guiding others how to help you. It is from the Nov./Dec. issue of *The Compassionate Friends Newsletter*:

A Letter to My Family and Friends
Thank you for not expecting too much from me this holiday season. I have all I can do coping with the "spirit" of the holiday on the radio, TV, in the newspapers and stores. We do not feel joyous, and trying to pretend this Christmas is going to be like the Christmases I had before my child's

death will be impossible because I am missing one.

Please allow me to talk about my child if I feel a need. Don't be uncomfortable with my tears. My heart is breaking and the tears are a way of letting out my sadness.

I plan to do something special in memory of my child. Please recognize my need to do this in order to keep my memories alive. My fear is not that I'll forget, but that you will.

Please don't criticize me if I do something that you don't think is normal. I'm a different person now and it may take a long time before this different person reaches an acceptance of my child's death.

As I survive the stages of grief, I will need your patience and support, especially during the holiday times and the "special" days throughout the year.

Thank you for not expecting too much from me this holiday season.

*A Bereaved parent, TCF
Madison, WI*

The following article was modified from an article by Beryl Hammonds, ARNP, a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner in private practice in Vancouver, WA.

Loss of a child can evoke depression, especially around the holidays. For those who have recently lost a loved one, the core of this depression is what to do now that they are gone. Simple remembrance of a loved one comes with unique issues and feelings. You may ask yourself the following questions:

Am I betraying my love for them if I enjoy myself?

No, you are affirming your love. Share your love, it is what made them love you.

Will other people just forget them if they don't continue to see me grieve?

No, You haven't forgotten, nor have

they. People adjust to loss in many ways. Their way may be different from yours, but does not dictate yours.

Will I make other people uncomfortable just by mentioning it was their favorite pie?

Maybe. But those precious memories are of happiness; savor them. Allow yourself to smile at the memory. It will give others permission to smile too.

My whole holiday was built around him/her, now what?

Build a new one. I know, simply said is not simply done. But you can build a new and happy holiday because of the memories of what they have shared with you. This will be difficult at first, but will become easier as time goes by.

What if I don't mention them and no one else does, is my anger off base?

Think about why you cannot mention them. Other people may be in the same shoes as you. 'If only they were here' -is grief 'They would have enjoyed your pie' -is life.

What if they do mention them and I begin to cry?

Then cry, but don't turn away from the person who mentioned them. Meet their eyes, hug them if you can and thank the person with a smile or comment that lets them know that you do remember. Give yourself permission to cry and to stop crying.

Allow yourself something besides the depression. Celebrate life in a meaningful way. The depression may be alleviated or it may still be there, but the experience will not be all depression anymore. Let your loved one's life become more important than their death. Let your life become more important by having known them.

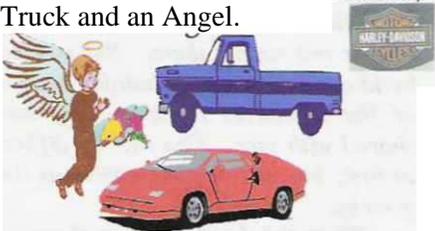
Grief Grafts

Doris Tyler's son, Mark (4-19-66), was murdered 12-5-92. I received this card from Doris last Christmas:

I believe that all of our children who have died are having the greatest Christmas of us all in Heaven with our Lord.

It sure doesn't mean I don't miss Mark so very much. It's been 7 (now 8) years this month since Mark was taken away from us, so useless, so senseless. Even after 7 years, I still think about Mark all through the day. Life will never be the same. I am very thankful for my husband, my daughter and grandchildren. I also have a really good son-in-law_ But part of my heart is with Mark

Mark's symbols are a fish, Harley Davidson motorcycle, Trans Am car, Truck and an Angel.



Judy Quillen's daughter, Jamie Ann (6-7-76), died in an auto accident 2-9-97. Judy tells us about Jamie Ann:

This year, on the anniversary of Jamie Ann's death, I went back to Greenville, Alabama, where the accident happened on 1-65 and put a cross with Jamie's name, birth and death dates high up on the tree. A dear friend, Wayne Pattillo, made the crass of his love for us (he too is a fellow traveler; his son is buried near Jamie) and desire to serve those who grieve. Jamie's birthday is June 7th, so my twin sister (she lost twin babies back in 1975) and I went and cleared all the undergrowth out from around the tree and planted a garden with rose bushes and perennial flowers. We also put up some birdhouses so life will return where life was taken. We have been doing this since the first anniversary of her death, February 9, 1998.

I wanted to share this poem I wrote the first year of mourning:

Where Have You Gone, My Jamie Ann?

*It was a beautiful, sunny day
When you went away.
Who would have known
From this world your spirit had
flown?*

*Doing the usual daily chores
Not believing I'd never hold you
nevermore!*

*With the news I cried
"Not my child! You lied!"
Now, get away from here!"
As I shed the first of a million tears.*

Jamie Ann wrote the following in her Senior Scrapbook. Her Uncle Mark read these for her eulogy and everyone told me after the funeral that they knew her better because of it:

I AM

*I am a girl who has ambition.
I wonder if I'll be successful one day.
I hear my Mom telling me to get my
education.*

*I see myself starting my life as a
flight attendant.*

*I am a girl who has ambition.
I pretend that I'm a successful
actress.*

*I feel the pain of not succeeding.
I touch my tears as they run down my
face.*

*I worry about not being prepared for
an opportunity.*

*I cry for something exciting to hap-
pen in my future.*

I am a girl who has ambition.

I understand the fear of losing.

*I say you never fail until you stop
trying.*

I dream of traveling to Europe.

I try to reach my goals.

I hope I am successful.

I am a girl who has ambition.

September 14, 1993

Jamie Ann Quillen

Tell People I Admire and Why
*There are many people I've met through
my high school years that I admire.*

*Most of them are close family
members and friends*

*My grandparents would probably
be the most influential on me. They
help me realize how important an
education is. They've traveled all
around the world and got me
interested in traveling.*

*My Mom has helped me through
a lot. She helps me out financially
when I'm in debt. Whenever I'm
having boyfriend or friends
problems, she talks to me about it
and gives me advice. She sets good
standards for herself and follows
through. She can blow away peer
pressure like a leaf in the wind.*

*I admire my older sister, Amy, be-
cause she maintained a "B" average
in high school and is now attending
DeKalb College. She has a 1990
Dodge Shadow, which is very nice.
She studies hard and deserves the
grades she makes. My younger sister
Mandy is also greatly admired by
me. She is a leader and is always
herself. She does things out of the
ordinary just because nobody else
does them. Mandy is not afraid to let
people know how she feels or what
she thinks of them.*

*Although my father made a lot of
wrong choices in his life, I still
admire the good qualities he held.
He went to Virginia Military
Institute (VMI) for four years and is
an engineer. He is a very smart
person. He can think of things and
ways of doing them that nobody else
can think of His sense of humor is
great.*

*I also admire my younger sister,
Katie, because she is so cute. She is
dedicated when working on school
projects. She has an imagination
that goes a long way. She has
original ideas.*

*I admire my Aunt JoAnne, who is
my Mom's twin. She started a small
wallpapering business and is now
being referred by Wallpaper Atlanta.
She is dedicated to her job.*

*My cousin, Kristie, and I have
been close for as long as I
remember. When she couldn't drive,
I took her everywhere. Now that she
drives and my car is broken, she
takes me everywhere. We share half
of our clothes and even work at
Ryan's together.*

My best friend, Natalie, is very

.....

potential. I know she will go far in life. Even in our classes, she always makes a few points higher than I do.

Last but not least, I admire Valerie, my other best friend. She is easy to get along with.

These people have been a great influence on me. I admire all the good qualities in each of them.

May 1994

My father never allowed his grandchildren to call him "Grandpa." He never thinks of himself as old enough to be one. He always had them call him "Uncle Steve." Well, when Jamie died, he was so upset because she never called him "Grandpa" and sat down to write the following poem. We had it put on the back of the funeral program and I asked a very dear friend (who was also Jamie's Young Women's President at church) to read the poem:

Good Night Jamie

Rest in peace in God's kind love and tender care

When the hour of our parting we reach, we pray,

We will be worthy enough to join you there.

Now we sit with empty arms

With memories so sweet and dear

Through heavy hearts an eyes of tears.

Good Night Jamie,
We Love You.

With all my love,
Your Grandfather,
Steve Stavron

We put "Good Night Jamie" on her headstone.

Jamie Aim's symbols are a rose, elephant, angel playing a violin and her favorite # 222.



Joe and Elaine Stillwell suffered a double loss, Peggy (8-23-66) and Denis O'Connor (2-4-65), died in an

auto accident 8-2 and 8-6-88. Elaine sent these Christmas and Millennium Greetings from 1999:

Our grandson, Christopher, soon to be two on to our life. Watching him walk and talk brings back many memories. He is a true O'Connor in looks and intelligence, but all our neighbors think he looks like Joe! Annie has enjoyed being a mother and had the thrill of being a "stay-at-home," mom for 15 months. She's now back to work as a Social Worker at Nassau County Medical Center on the psyche floor and Joe and I have the thrill of minding Christopher on Mondays and Fridays. We are now experts on Barney, Elmo, and the Teletubbies. Christopher is like me. loves to read. What a collection of books he has! He pointed to my double angel pin last week and exclaimed, "Angel!" And I replied, "Yes, Peggy and Denis."

And he said, "Peggy .. Denis" and I was so moved. He can name their pictures too, "Aunt Peggy and Uncle Denis." Joe loves taking Chris to the park where he climbs to his heart's delight. But his climbing days came to a brief halt on November 7th when he broke his right leg, falling off Annie's exercise bike. In a cast until Christmas, he acts like he was born with it, so resilient, thank God. Chris' best friend is our black lab, Max, who just turned seven. He sits on him, hugs him, plays ball with him, pulls his tail, and shares his kiddy pool with him. What a team! Max is so good with him. All the neighbors know Joe, Chris and Max, from their walks around the block together.

Christopher enjoys Uncle Kevin, Joe's son, who visits each week. I think Kevin likes being an uncle, a new experience for him.

Annie is busy, juggling motherhood and career as a single mom, and keeping up with the demands of her lovely Wantagh home. Johnny left her and Chris just before Christmas last year and their divorce will be finalized shortly after five years of marriage. We are sad that her dreams did not come true, especially since she tried with all her heart to make the marriage work.

In July, Joe and I celebrated our 15th wedding anniversary. Can believe it? It seems like just yesterday when he asked

me to dance for first the time. We have been blessed with a..... that makes every day special, and retirement even better. How well and I know that the "Lord giveth and Lord taketh," and that He embraces . each day.

Our work as TCF Chapter League keeps us busy with preparing monthly meetings, publishing a monthly newsletter, answering phone inquiries for help and taking care of all the paper work, but it always feels good to help people who are hurting, a road we have traveled. I just completed my year as a Bereavement Coordinator the Diocese of Rockville Centre part-time position where my hospice were just doubled to meet the needs of this ever growing ministry. This just being responsible for the training, supervision of the bereavement ministers from 134 parishes of the diocese a "dream come true" for me. It uses the bereavement knowledge I have learned in skills honed in my 35 year career, and all the networking I have done with my years with TCF. But most important of all, it helps make sure parishes are there to help the people who are grieving, something that was missing for me and for many others.

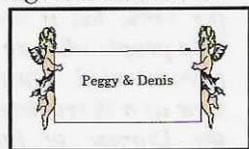
In May I was appointed to the Board of the National Catholic Ministry to the Bereaved which convenes in Ohio twice a year. I attended the July meeting and am now making plans to attend the January one. I did some writing for their newsletter. I love to write but keep putting it on the back burner while I work on other projects. I keep telling myself I have to get up real early in the morning and be disciplined. about this writing, but I love the thrill of gelling up in the daylight, a marvelous bonus of retirement!

On Halloween weekend a TV camera crew visited us and I was interviewed about the work I do, after some shots the day before with two couples who have helped. I think it will be an hour long program (possibly two separate programs since they were so pleased.....)

Channel 23 on a date not yet determined. I was involved with two other programs filmed this year: a TV documentary on HBO in Oct., "Life Afterlife," and a 30 minute interview with Telicare (Channel 25) which has yet to be aired. I haven't replaced Oprah yet! Joe and Max got filmed too. I just finished doing four programs for Coping for the Holidays. All these stipends and my book royalties go to my children's Scholarship Fund at the University of Dayton, which is nearing the \$55,000 mark, a real joy to my heart.

Christmas Blessings and much love!

Denis and Peggy's symbols are angels.



Al and Sandy Hickey's son, Paul (1-1-73), died in an auto accident 11-21-99. Sandy shares:

I grew up in Williamsburg and met my husband at Cumberland College. I remember when your son Jim was killed and I prayed for you many times.

I remember thinking "I could never survive losing a child" Well I did! And all I can say is God's grace is sufficient, and I thank Him daily for Christian friends who pray for us and support us in so many ways. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope.

We were so blessed to be able to be organ donors and seven families have new hope. We will get to meet the heart recipient (a minister with 5 daughters) next month.

I've become very involved in KY Organ Donor Program. They have asked me to speak at the Annual Donor Awards Program Nov. 12. My daughter Marie is going to sing at the program also. Pray that God will use us for His glory.

We have always claimed Romans 8: 28 but now I have added another verse, II Corinthians 1:3,4. My translation is that God comforts me so that I MUST COMFORT OTHERS. It's my new commission.

Pray for us - we're going into that terrible season (1 yr. Thanksgiving).

Paul enjoyed the seasons. When he was young, he loved to visit the apple orchards where he would climb the

trees and shake them for the girls to gather the fallen apples. And he was always the one to carve the pumpkins for the girls. The last time we saw him was when he and his dad went to a UK football game and I met them for dinner afterwards. It was such a special time - just the 3 of us. When he hugged me good-bye, he held on for several minutes and just rocked back and forth. He wouldn't let go. I even asked him if everything was OK. And his response was "I'm going to make it mom, I just want you to know how much I love you." I learned later that he had hugged his grandpa the same way just a few days earlier and said the same thing to him.

Paul's symbol is a white butterfly.



Lisa Bybee's son, Dustin Shane Hay (12-7-78), died in an auto accident 11-24-97. His web site at: www.geocities.com/Heartland/Meadow/2474/Dustin_Hay/Dustin.html Lisa tells us about Dustin:

"Hey, come back, you haven't said good-bye yet," I said as my eighteen year old son, Dustin, was heading out the door. Instead of yelling, "bye," and going on out, he came back in, and stood right in front of me, and said, "Bye, Mom." Dustin, Matt, my other son, and a friend, were going to a high school football game. It was raining and dark. The phone rang about an hour later. "You need to come quick, the boys have been in an accident," a voice on the other end said. "What, where are they? Are they hurt?" She just repeated, "You need to come." I ran and put on my shoes, while telling my daughter, Brooke, that we had to go, and to stay by the phone. My husband, John, got behind the wheel. We prayed all the way to the accident scene. As we rounded the bend, I could see so many flashing lights.

We got out of the car, and started running. I could see Dustin's truck up ahead, and it was still upright, so, for a moment, my heart beat a little easier. I thought everyone would be all right. A cop came over to us, and stopped us from going any closer. I said, "Where are the boys? Are they OK?"

He just looked down at the wet pavement, and I knew at that moment,

without another word being said that someone must be hurt bad. I ran over to the ambulance, and Matt and Brent (their friend) were laying on stretchers. I asked the EMT if they were hurt, and he said they had been walking around, but they needed to have x-rays. I screamed, "Where is Dustin?" The man said, "He is still in his truck. They are getting the Jaws of Life to get him out" "Why aren't they here?" I'm going over there to be with him." The cop said I couldn't go over there. "Let me go!!!!!! I have to be with him! I'm his Mom!"

My husband then said the words that would change my life forever. "Dustin is dead." "No., that's not true. There's been a terrible mistake. When the Jaws of Life get here, they can help him then." "No, Lisa, he's gone. They can't help him now." I just collapsed on the wet pavement, and wouldn't let myself believe what he had just said. My firstborn, the baby doctors told me I would never be able to have, NO, NO!!! They strapped me down on a stretcher beside of Matt in the ambulance, and gave me a shot. A shot wasn't what I needed. All I needed was for them to tell me Dustin was alive!

Most of the rest of the night is a blur. Matt and Brent had x-rays, and had only minor injuries, which I'm so thankful for. Two ministers came in and talked to me so kind and gentle, and gave me words of comfort, but I felt like the only comfort I would have is if they could tell me Dustin was alive.

The days that followed were every parents' worst nightmare. How could I pick out a casket for my son? How could I go to his closet and pick out an outfit for him to be buried in? How could I choose pallbearers to carry my son to his grave? Somehow, decisions were made and people were called. I stood at the casket, and looked down at my son, but I needed so bad to see his sky blue eyes, and his famous smile. I needed him to say, "Mom, I'm going to basketball practice, Mom, can you fix me a grilled cheese? Mom, I love you. "

I placed my hand on his hair, that curly hair, and went back in time in my mind.

I married in 1975, and my doctor told me that I probably would never be able to have children, which devastated me. But, God made a miracle happen, and Dustin was born Dec. 7, 1978. I was so happy!!!! But a day later, he started having seizures. The doctor entered the room and said "Your baby has a blood clot on his brain. We will have to do a spinal tap each day to remove pressure. There can be several complications, I will be frank, and tell you it could be mental retardation, or paralysis. Right now, we just don't know."

My mind was reeling. I had waited so long for this little miracle, and now he could possibly die. NO! The next few days were filled with tests for Dustin. He was hooked to so many tubes, wires, and beepers, that you could barely see him. He developed pneumonia and jaundice. Please, God, let him live! And then the second miracle happened. In two weeks, the blood clot disappeared, and we got to bring him home. I thought I surely was in Heaven! And, then, the third miracle. Dustin grew and developed perfectly. There were no complications from the clot. None at all!! He was always on the Honor Roll, took Advanced Courses, played basketball, and won many awards. He was fun-loving, with a ton of friends. I was so proud of him! He became a Christian, and set an example for others. Even, at times, when I was sick and couldn't attend church, Dustin always went, because he truly loved the Lord.

"I'm so sorry," I heard someone say, and I was brought back to reality then, and knew my world could never be the same. Dustin's funeral was held on Oct. 28, a sunny, warm day. How could the sun be shining when my whole world was dark? How dare the birds to keep singing. How dare the world keep spinning when my world has stopped!! We attend a small country church on a hillside. We rounded the bend, and my husband said, "Oh, my God, look!" The entire hill was covered in cars. Later, we were told that Dustin's service was the largest one our funeral director had ever had in forty seven years of business. What a testimony to the kind of person Dustin was!!! The days and weeks following, I can remember portions. So many friends and family members stopped by and gave us words of comfort and

encouragement We stayed at my sisters' home for a few weeks, and there were so many friends of Dustin, Matt, and Brooke, that came by. The days since Dustin's death have been so very hard.

I now understand why counselors say a child's death is the most devastating thing a person can go through. I had friends who had lost children before, and I thought I could imagine how they felt, but found out there's no way to imagine what it's like until you go through it yourself. I know I still have a long journey before me, and that life for us will never be the same. A part of me is missing, and as much as I would want to bring my precious son back, I know I cannot. I know Dustin is in Heaven, and is experiencing the ultimate happiness with the Lord, but even knowing this, doesn't make us miss him any less. I will always try to hold in my heart the words Dustin wrote to my sister in a card last year. When he found they were having trouble in their marriage, he wrote, "Go to the Lord in prayer. He takes cares of everything."

The day of Dustin's accident, I had taken a roll of film to be developed. I had forgotten all about it until about two weeks after Dustin's funeral. I remembered all of a sudden, and jumped in the car. I thought several on the roll must be of Dustin, because he had given me the roll to take and have developed. I got them, and hurriedly thumbed through them. I gasped when I saw the last picture. Dustin had taken a picture of himself. He was standing in front of a mirror, and had the most radiant smile on his face that I had ever seen. While holding the camera in one hand, he was holding his other hand up and making the "I love you" sign in sign language! Even though I had never gotten to say "I love you" one last time to Dustin, I felt like he was gelling to tell us for the last time. I felt like I now knew why Dustin was so adamant about me hurrying to get the pictures back.

That was the ONLY time in eighteen years that Dustin had ever taken a picture of himself. Did Dustin somehow sense something was going to happen and want to give us comfort? I always keep the picture with me, and look at it and say "I love you, too, Son, forever and always."

Dustin's symbol is the sign language hand for "I Love You."



Peggy Martin's daughter, Shelley Beasley (11-18-79), died from an accidental gunshot 9-28-98. The following is from Shelly's web site: www.angelfire.com/la2/Shelley'sPlace/MyGirl11.html.

On the night of September 28, 1998, our beautiful Shelley was taken from us by a tragic accident. Even though she is not here with us in the flesh, we feel that her spirit will always live on. Two beautiful web sites have been lovingly created for Shelley. We would be honored for you to visit them.

Through the pages of these web sites, we hope to show you the spirit of a beautiful and loving daughter, granddaughter, sister, niece, aunt, cousin, and friend. Shelley was many things to many people and will always be in our hearts forever till we meet her again.

My beautiful doughier, Shelley, became an angel on the night of September 28, 1998, after an accidental gunshot injury.

This web site was created for her by me, Shelley's mom. It is a heartbreaking task, but one that gives some satisfaction in knowing that her memory will live on through its pages.

A mother's greatest fear after losing a child is that others will forget them. It is my hope that in visiting these pages, you will know and feel the love in my heart that aches for my beautiful Shelley. She was not only my daughter, but my friend as well. So for all who knew her and for those who never got the chance, meet Shelley Marie Beasley.

Broken Pieces

*Your heart is broken into pieces!
Oh will it ever be repaired?
Will someone ever find the cure
For the loneliness you have shared?*

Oh, I see a mother without her baby.

*A brother without his friend.
And broken pieces of their hearts*

Scattered to the farthest wind
When accidents happen in life
.. And there is no reason why.
A family may lose a dear loved one.
All in the twinkling of an eye.

Their heart aches & breaks into
pieces.

Causing a pain that won't go away.
Their cries in the darkness of every
night

Are heard when light brings the
day-

If you could find these broken
pieces and

Put them back where they belong
Your pain may be replaced with
serenity.

And your tears replaced with a
song.

If you could take a peek into
Heaven,
and see your angel shining there.
You may feel relief from your grief
And your heart's broken pieces
repaired.

-Author-

Kaye Des'Ormeaux

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Dedicated to Peggy Martin

In Memory of Shelley

In Loving Memory of Shelley Marie Beasley

Shelley, you have been gone for one
year,

No day has since passed without a
tear.

You are missed, so very, very much,
Oh, if only your hand, I could touch

In the time that you have been
away,

I've had to survive from day to day.

We are taught that God knows best,
When one is taken and laid to rest,
So, God, please guide me through
this time,

Until one day soon, I will find,

In that far away land waiting for me,
Loved ones, along with Shelley
Marie..

Donna Sibley Thompson

Shelley's symbol is a cat.



Stephanie Gauch (9-25-71), the daughter of Mary Kate, was stalked and murdered 10-9-92. Mary Kate wrote this tribute on the 8th anniversary of Stephanie's death:

The birth of my daughter, Stephanie, came after long years of futile attempts to have a child. She arrived in my thirties, some time after I had given up hope of having my own natural child. Her arrival and her subsequent twenty-one years here defined my life, giving meaning to it, in a way that I never knew before or since. Instinctively I knew she was a gift from God, and I also knew that, along with being given a blessing for my life, I had been given a sacred responsibility for the safekeeping of another human soul. My experience of the absolute holiness of this bonding, unequalled by anything else in life, will remain with me forever, along with my eternal thankfulness for having experienced it.

Stephanie came into our world with His holy imprint all over her, "**trailing clouds of glory**" as the poet put it. A portion of this Wordsworth poem was read at her funeral and these four words are engraved on her marker. The rest of that stanza reminds us that we come from God, who is "**our home**."

I cling to this truth when I feel my loss dragging me down. My sincere belief is that she returned home. I, as her earthly mother, was entrusted and honored to guard her and keep her close for twenty-one years.

Stephanie loved people and wanted to better understand human development and behavior, so she planned to major in psychology, if she could make it through the science and math courses, and minor in Mass Communication. She had completed two years and was six weeks into her Junior year when she was killed.

She was a very sensitive soul, but determined and resilient for beyond her years. She was gentle and appreciative and a truly humble person. We can only speculate about how many people she would have touched and how much positive accomplishment would have been hers.

Stephanie's passions, not necessarily in order were anything chocolate, every cat, rock music and her actual rock collection along with her glass and crystal figures collection, the beach, her

friends, her adoring grandparents, slapstick comedy, Harrison Ford movies, and writing. Her diaries and college notes and doodles are in a box in a closet and perhaps someday I will be able to read them.

My child was killed deliberately and randomly, and every day I deal with the rage. I work very hard to hold onto my beautiful memories, to celebrate her life, to try to remind others that this wonderful human being was here for a brief time, and to thank God with all my being that I got to be her mother. Her last words to me were "Bye, Mom. See you later." Bye,

Stephanie. See you later.



Stephanie's symbol is a brown rabbit.

Paul and Opal Rice's daughter Debbie (3-31-63), died as a result of Ehlers Danlos Syndrome-type 4 8-12-96. The Rices sent a booklet that Debbie had written about her journey with this disease and Opal and Paul "finished" the booklet for her after her death:

Our daughter, Debbie, was very special to us. From the moment Debbie was born she seemed to touch peoples' lives. As the years went by we realized Debbie was special and she was a special gift from God.

Debbie lived a normal life and she never really let her disease or handicap stand in her way. We stood by Debbie and were there at all times for her.

One thing Debbie couldn't understand with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome is that some of the people with this disease got little support from their families.

Some families do not try to understand the disease or the severe pain it can cause.

One of Debbie's orthopedic doctors had written a small message on a card to us after Debbie passed away. "It is like losing a member of my family as Debbie taught me what life is all about."

How true this is as Debbie did show everyone what life is all about.

Debbie believed in God and read her Bible everyday.

It was a great loss when our daughter Debbie passed away. She is greatly missed and it was so hard to let Debbie go. For 33 years we had taken care of her and she was our friend as well as our daughter. We loved Debbie and are thankful that God gave us 33 special years with Debbie. We now know Debbie is with God and in a better place as she is running and walking now.

Debbie can't come to us but we can go to her and this is what keeps us going, believing, and trusting in God.

In Memory Of Debbie

By: Alma McGuffin

Because she was so dear to you, her memory will live on.

Just as the fragrance of a rose still lingers when it's gone.

Her kindly and endearing ways, in thought, are with you still,

And in the hearts that love her, she lives, and always will.

Watch Me Soar

By: Bonnie Woodcox

"Mommy, Daddy, why can't I do that?" she said as she watched the other kids play.

"Because we love you Debbie and you will get hurt playing that way."

"Mommy, Daddy, I just want you to see, I can't let this disease slow me down."

"Because we love you Debbie we won't hold you down."

"Mommy, Daddy, look at all that I have accomplished in my life. I told you that I could. "

"Because we love you Debbie we believed that you would."

"Mommy, Daddy, another operation. I can't explain to you the fear I feel."

"Because we love you Debbie we just know that you will heal."

"Mommy, Daddy, I feel so bad. I just want the pain to go away." "Because we love you Debbie if hurls to see you feel this way." "Mommy, Daddy, look there's Jesus holding His arms out tome!"

"Because we love you Debbie we....."

"Mommy, Daddy, I'm walking! I'm Dancing! I don't feel any pain! "Because we love you Debbie it's hard to believe we'll never see you again."

"Mommy, Daddy, Jesus said to tell you, we will be a family again."

"Because we love you Debbie, we will look forward to when eternity begins. "

Debbie's symbol is an angel.



Josie Mays' son, Farley Ray Spencer, Jr. (11-24-64), died from cancer 8-25-96. Josie's family shared their thoughts about Farley:

One of our memories of our nephew was a speech in high school that he chose to present in class, "What If Was, Was Football", by Andy Griffith.

After that he became, "Andy." We used this name often when we communicated with him while he was serving in the Air Force. In many ways he and Andy Griffith were alike; plain spoken, good hearted, always the same, and a cheerful attitude.

A bit of a prankster, one day we came home from work to find our front yard covered in plastic windmills, pink flamingoes, and silk flowers! Of course he did not have to do this alone, he had brothers who were always willing to initiate or participate! You could depend on something in our house being turned backwards, moved, or upside down after they had visited us. They even managed to get their "Granny" involved in this "game".

He was blessed with a loving wife, Sandy, and a precious daughter, Hannah Rae. Hannah was his sunshine. He and Hannah shared the song, "You Are My Sunshine."

Our greatest memory of Farley Ray was his unwavering faith in God. Like an eagle, he displayed strength and courage as he made his ultimate flight.

Lovingly submitted,
Uncle Ed and Aunt (B) Becky

My First Grandchild

You came into my life just like a flower in spring time. Like a mist you left me knowing you were going to a better home in heaven. We will see you there.

Love You,
Granny (Written by Farley's grandmother Dorothy Mays 06-08-2000)

Farley showed caring and love for everyone. I remember how much he and his brother Mike and Ivan enjoyed their toys. They could play all day with a few trucks and cars. He prayed so much for his family. He wanted us to join him in heaven. That is my earnest prayer also.

Farley had this on his door at Emory University in 1993 when he had his bone marrow transplant.

Proverbs 17- Verse 22

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine but a broken spirit drieth the bones."



Eagle: a bird noted for its strength, keenness of vision, and powers of flight. Farley's symbol is an eagle.

Barbara Alcorn's daughter, Elizabeth Ashcraft (10-28-88), died from an asthma attack 6-7-00. Barbara described Elizabeth:

Elizabeth was loved by everyone who knew her. She would help anyone who needed help. She stopped everyday after school, and checked on four older ladies on the street. She loved the Backstreet Boys, Brian Litteral was her favorite. She loved all dogs.

Elizabeth was always small for her age. She was a really good kid. She liked school a lot, even though she always had lots of homework every night. She was a good student. (Barbara sent me a picture of Elizabeth that was taken 2 days before she passed away. The picture showed Elizabeth with her citizenship award.)

Elizabeth's symbol is a Siberian husky.



Mack and Deedee Ransdell's son, Billy (1-21-66), died from a heart attack 1-4-99. Deedee wrote about their first Christmas without Billy:

Words cannot express how we felt when we received your card. The week before Christmas was horrid. Until then I was going through the motions pretty good, I thought. Then reality crept in and the pain became too intense to describe, other than the fact it hurt into my soul. Christmas Eve we were going to our daughters' home for our Christmas.

Six of our grandchildren were going to be with us. I had to fake it for their sakes, but loading their gifts into our car was devastating. I had no gift for Billy (he would not be there I knew). My tears came as they had come the day of his death. It was another death. The death of our Christmas with our boy. Mack finally held me. All the time saying, "come on now you have been doing so good."

Last week I remembered how Billy used to stretch when he would awaken from a nap on our couch. "Oh, how I miss those times." I miss his calling me, "mom." When he was little he called me, "mama" and as he grew into adulthood it became "mom".

I haven't decided what to use for Billy's symbol. This fellow (Billy) had so many loves along with his challenges in his life so it has to be very special.

Sarah Sneed's son, Matthew (2-25-94), died from an aneurysm 7-22-98. Sarah tells us about **The Matman:**

Let me begin this letter by thanking you for my copy of your newsletter. I have so much in common with these people. I've never read it that I haven't seen my feelings in print. It's so odd. I've felt that I'm totally alone in my pain and even one who's lost a child can't possibly feel what I do. They didn't love their child as much. When I see their feelings written down, it's like these people have read my mind. I guess all parents feel the same.

I'm not sure what I need to tell you, a stranger, but I know what I need to tell someone. I'm almost 32 years old. I've lost all grandparents, both parents, one brother, and the unthinkable, my son. I never knew real pain until the Lord took my child. My baby boy, the last of three, was the most beautiful child in the world. He was born special.

We had a bond like no other. This was my child. He was such a healthy and happy little boy.

At age 2 he changed his name from James Matthew Warren Sneed, Matthew to "Matman," because he loved Batman so much. That's all he would answer to. So this became his name. Everyone knew and loved Matman. This child could brighten you on the most horrible day. He was brilliant and gorgeous. At 4 1/2 he had the world wrapped around him.

On July 21, 1998, Matman woke up sick through the night. I rocked him in the kitchen. I went through various family members and friends explaining to them how I felt dead. They assured me Matman was fine. I took him to the doctor's office at 8:30 a.m. They sent him to the hospital in Danville, who sent him to Central Baptist. They explained to us in Danville that an aneurysm had ruptured in his brain, caused a stroke, and brain surgery was to be performed at Central Baptist/. They wouldn't allow me in the ambulance, so my husband and I followed. He awoke once and asked for me and thank God the nurse pretended. He felt safe.

The surgery went well they told us. I felt dead and angry! Matman finally asked for me and looked straight in my eyes. I knew in my heart we had lost our battle. Our prayers would not be answered. Later in the evening his brain began to swell. The stroke had damaged the stem and all our doctors were helpless. They pronounced my beautiful boy brain dead sometime July 22, 1998. Less than 24 hours. My life ended that day. I need my son. My life was divided in three parts, each child. God took a third.

How do you live without being complete? I breathe daily because I have to. I take care of my other children because I love them and owe them that. But I have not lived since he left me. My life is empty and worthless. Nothing makes me happy now. He was my life. All my good came from him. Please help me. Please remember him. His birthday is February 25, 1994. I suppose his symbol would be Batman or a cherub. Especially the Batman symbol. His anniversary is July 22. For the record, he was an organ donor.

I'm sure you're aware of the loneliness of a bereaved mother. I hope I didn't

sound totally desperate, but honestly that is exactly how I feel. It kills me that my child can no longer meet people. He really loved making new friends, of any age. He loved talking and listening to others and he never met a stranger. He was an extremely well known child for his age. There were so many people who didn't know my name from my job. All they knew was Matman's mom. My identity left with him. I find myself now trying to figure out who I am. How long did it take you, or have you yet been able, to figure out what pleasures life holds after losing a child? I feel guilty about anything I do which makes me smile because he's not here to laugh with me. Is this something that eventually passes? (Yes)

He was always such a joy. I look at some of the parents at the daycare where I work, they drop their child and won't take an extra second to hug and kiss their babies to let them know they're loved. I get so angry when I'm holding these little people. I want to shake their parents and make them realize what they have. God has given them the ultimate gift and their lives are too busy to appreciate it. I get so filled with resentment sometimes because there is nothing I wouldn't give for the chance to look in my baby's eyes and kiss his soft little cheek. I've always given my kids three kisses at a time for I Love You. This is our way. And I always "tickled" my babies to sleep. This is a light rubbing to relax them. Now I do this to my babies down there. I get so much love from those kids that I sometimes wonder if my Matman would be jealous.

Even my older boys reach out to these kids. It's so sad to watch my sons try to get from strangers what they're missing with their brother. They break my heart. I watch them open their hearts to these little kids, then cringe when Batman or the Power Rangers are mentioned. These characters were a major part of our lives. People say cartoon characters can't hurt you in real life. Well, if they could climb inside my heart they'd know they can in fact kill

you. It's all the little things that hurt the most. Of course you already know this. I'm sorry, I always forget I'm not alone.

(Sarah sent a picture of one of her other sons with the recipient of Matman's liver and kidney, Jenna Shaye Redman.) Something good has come out of this tragedy.

Matman's symbol is the Batman emblem and a cherub with golden wings and hair.



Andrew (6-4-73), the son of Dr.

Henry and Marcia Jones, died from complications of Cerebral Palsy 12-31-93. Henry talks about the book he is writing about Andrew:

Someday, we, as parents who have lost these beloved children will be rewarded. And all of this time will seem like a "Slight Momentary Affliction" compared to the weight of eternal glory reunited with our children, parents, loved ones, friends and our Lord again.

"Slight Momentary Affliction" is the title of my book about Andrew. I think I am on chapter 7. It is slow and painful, but I feel called by God to get it done, if nothing more than therapy for me and a gift to my children.

Andrew's symbols are children of the world, red, yellow, black, white and handicapped too.



Linda Ertzly's son

David (11-3-79), died in an auto accident 7-17-99. Linda tells us about David and also about the trial the family has been going through:

We have just finished the trial. The lady who was responsible for the horses getting out on the highway was charged and convicted. It is a small piece of justice but really doesn't change anything. Many people have said we should feel sorry for this lady; however, the three families have been to court six times and this woman has yet to ever acknowledge us or to say that she is sorry for what happened. And she is the mother of two young children. I give her very little of my energy; she deserves no more as she has taken enough from us.

David was 19, in college and doing his second year apprenticeship as a heavy equipment mechanic. He loved to work on vehicles - he had a car, a truck, a boat and a dirt bike. He always wanted a snowmobile; but hadn't gotten there yet. David, like his friends Ryan and Geoff, loved life. David had down hill raced for years and was into snowboarding, as is his brother Paul. A good friend of David's has actually set up a website for David; it is http://www.geocities.com/remembering_dave

The day of the accident the boys had spent the afternoon out in Lake Ontario in David's new racing boat. They had a great day. David had gone to get Geoff (who had gone to school with David for years, had moved out of town) on the Friday because he felt Geoff needed a break from his job and his responsibilities.

Geoff supported himself and, at the time of the accident, his older brother. Geoff was the kid who was always at the house through the high school years, for meals, holidays etc. So when the accident happened, it was like we had to deal with the loss of two children. It was a long time before I could deal with Geoff's death; to admit and accept that he was gone as well.

Ryan, I did not know as well, having only met him a couple of times. David spent a lot of time at Ryan's house. Ryan also lived out of town.

Milton is a small town; where kids are bused in to attend the local Catholic high school. Ryan, although French Canadian, had decided he wanted to attend an English speaking school, so attended in Milton. All three boys met in Grade 9 and remained friends.

Ryan's mother and I have become very good friends since this accident. David would think this was cool. We support each other, as well as Geoff's mother, Susan.

Each of the boys left a 21 year old brother, so its like on July 17, 1999, I inherited four new family members; the boys who were killed and their brothers, Dale and Mike.

I have been separated for over six years and have one other son, Paul (aged 22) who is attending his last year of studying business at the University of Toronto. David and Paul were exceptionally close. As young

children they never really fought and always looked out for one another.

The loss of David has been very hard on Paul and dealing with Paul is my greatest concern. It will be hard to go through life without your only sibling. All those special occasions will never be the same.

The loss of a child is something every parent dreads, but I don't think we ever believe it will happen to us. I personally carry on because I know that is what David would want and expect. He loved life and in his 19 short years lived 39, as his grandfather would say. He lived every moment and enjoyed each one of them. He loved his job and as he used to tell me, he loved his lifestyle. He absolutely loved eating out. I think he spent most of his money in restaurants but looking back on it, I am glad he did.

David used to say "I am here for a good time; not a long time." How true that was.

The following newspaper article dated July 17, 1999, read (Name of newspaper is unknown):

They didn't stand a chance. Cresting a hill on a rural road just outside Georgetown, the headlights of David Ertzly's sports car illuminated two horses scant meters ahead.

The Mazda MX6, his pride and joy swerved to avoid one horse, striking it with a glancing blow, but slammed into the other, which crushed the windshield as the car careened into the ditch and flipped.

Ertzly and buddy Ryan Jenkins, both 19, died instantly when they were thrown from the tumbling vehicle shortly before midnight Saturday.

Another friend, Geoff Gall, 20, clung to life after being airlifted to a Toronto hospital. He died Sunday afternoon from massive internal injuries.

The accident had nothing to do with speed or alcohol, it was simply a tragic case of beautiful in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There was nothing the three young men could do to avoid the terrible

accident that has plunged three communities into mourning.

The pavement near the accident scene has been spray painted with black hearts and the words. "We will remember you, Geoff, Dave, Ryan, RIP"

"No matter what, Geoff will always be here and here," Mike Gall, Geoff's brother, said while tapping his head and heart. "And in my body and soul forever."

A little bit of David Ertzly will live on, too. His parents donated his eyes so someone who needs a cornea transplant can have a second chance at sight.

"His brother Paul has a rare eye condition and will require a cornea transplant one day," Linda Ertzly said outside the family's Milton home. "So David would have liked that they were very close. "



David's symbol is a snowboarder.

David and Mary Marsters' son, Donnie (11-16-66) died 5-20-89 (which is the same death date as Young Jim). Mary tells of a special sign from Donnie:

Today was one of those days for no reason I could really feel Donnie around me-just out of the blue I was sitting at work and I just got that overpowering feeling that comes from no where - I just missed him so much and could feel the tears start. I just wanted him to come back to me. Then that feeling of needing to go to the grave and put some new flowers on it and make it beautiful. I no longer live in the town where my son is buried.

His grave is about 45 minutes from here. It's one of the reasons that I didn't want to move back to my hometown when I returned from living in Florida for three years. I knew that there were too many memories and I went to the grave constantly.

Two months after Donnie died, I went to visit my mother in Bunnell, Florida. I was making my bed one morning and realized that I was feeling so happy and so good. So much guilt came across me as I quickly remembered my beautiful son and his

lying in his grave. I got down on my knees and asked Donnie to please let me know if it was okay for me to feel happy. I asked him for a sign of some sort. My husband and I went out sightseeing for the day.

Late that afternoon as we were driving down the highway, my husband shook me awake from sleeping next to him as he drove. He kept shaking me and telling me to look out the front window-he was so excited. As I sat up and opened my eyes, there in front of me was a huge double rainbow and my husband got a picture of it. Then I remembered how I had prayed that morning. I knew the rainbow was from Donnie. I had read in his diaries, that I had found in his room shortly after he died, how the rainbow was a sign to Donnie of eternal life and God's love for us.

When my own mother died from lung cancer in 1994, I was driving down a deserted road in Florida, alone in my own thoughts about my mother. I had just thought to myself "I wonder if my mother is with Donnie right now"? The next second a beautiful rainbow appeared in the sky. I just pulled over and had a good cry-but a cry of joy.

I learned about what the rose meant to Donnie from all the beautiful girls that he dated-although he was only 22 years old when he died, different girls he had gone out with and had their first experience with my son, came to me one by one and shared that beautiful special moment with me. Each one cried and said to me how even though they didn't continue to date my son that he never forgot them and on each one's birthday they always received a white rose from him and they each cried and asked me what they were going to do as they would not be receiving that rose on their birthdays anymore. What a special honor I received to have his former girlfriends feel that they could share that special moment with me. He has been so close to me today .. I can really feel him still.

Donnie was truly the "Wind Beneath my Wings." I would not be where I am and have risen to the heights that I have as a single mom of 4 children if it hadn't been for Donnie. He inspired everyone he came into contact with. Somehow he had something that could transform a person into extraordinary

feats. Nothing happens in this world by mistake.



Donnie's symbols are a rainbow and roses.

Gloria Carr's son, Aaron (2-22-82), died in an auto accident 7-28-99. Gloria wrote this letter this past April. She laments:

I am another "fellow traveler" who got on this road by accident-an automobile accident that killed my youngest child-Aaron Carr. He was on his way home on July 28, 1999, when he swerved to miss a dog (his friend's dog), lost control of his car and hit a tree just before the entrance to our neighborhood. He was killed instantly. One minute he was a thriving, hopeful and brilliant young man about to start his senior year of high school and the next minute he was dead. I still haven't made my peace with those facts. I still feel my mind and body rail against the thought of his death and of no more experiences with him. It has been almost nine months and I miss his sweet presence in my life. We have made it through Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, all of our birthdays, Valentines Day, and Easter.

We still have Mother's Day, Father's Day, and his Graduation Day and "the most dreaded day." He looked forward to being part of the Class of 2000. The principal of his school called me a couple of weeks ago and told me they are going to award his diploma posthumously. I am grateful, but it is a bittersweet accomplishment. What can a diploma do for him? I felt like we had to see this graduation through for him. We had to get his diploma for him. But I know it is not for him. We are just searching for something that will make us feel closer to him, something to make us feel better. The truth is that nothing makes this better. But I will be there wishing his friend's well and most of all wishing he were there.

Will this agony ever end? I look to.....

this life-shattering experience to learn what my life can or will be like now that it has been set on a different course. I have read so many of the newsletters that you sent to me back a few weeks ago. I am grateful to Judy Davidson for giving our names to you and to you for sending us the newsletters.

After talking to many fellow travelers and reading about your loss and other parents' losses, I wrote the following to help express my thoughts:

7 Months 6 Days

Comfort Where We Can Find It

Why is there comfort in other parents who have lost a child? Their child's death doesn't make ours easier to bear. Yet whether their grief is older or newer than ours, there are lessons to be learned. We see ourselves in these people--either our past or our future--where 'we have been or where we will be.

And why do we feel losing an "only child" would be worse? Having another child to love and share in life's events gives us hope. Yet another child or three other children cannot take away the hurt you feel for this child's death. It is as though each child is on "only child". He or she is the only child who holds this place in your life and your heart. There is no consolation for this loss. The loss is immense and so significant. The grief is present no matter what the circumstances. When you love someone so much, it hurts, grief is the expression of that love.

Why is a grieving parent ambivalent about the fellow traveler' 'stories of grief subsiding with time? What can this possibly mean? Does the hurt of the loss diminish? Does that mean you don't care as much as time goes by?

The reality is that we have an incredible capacity to bear the loss, work through those proverbial stages of grief, and somewhere down the line, who knows exactly when or where, we have learned to live our lives again. The life we live is a different one. It has a tragic turn that takes us down another road --a road less traveled. Can it still hold a worthwhile journey?

Each of us must decide.

Aaron's symbol is a snowflake because of his love of snow and because of his unique qualities.



Paul Grammatico (4-20-73), son of Paul and Claudia, died in an auto accident, 5-16-99. Claudia needs your help:

I had the wonderful pleasure of meeting Rosemary Smith at The Compassionate Friends meeting, here in Long Island, New York.

Right now I am presently giving talks for the Donor Network and Madd because my son was killed by a drunk driver. I have met the heart recipient and attached to this email is a photo.

A building has been named for Paul at St. Mary's Children and Family Services in Syosset, Long Island. I will be going for training soon to be an advocate for Madd and presently I help parents write impact statements to the judge for sentencing. Some parents cannot do this, so if I can be of some help, I do.

Claudia is collecting stories of parents' experiences as donor parents. You may contact her at 516-791-2334, or e-mail her at:

www.claudpaul@aol.com.

setting up a

www.donormom.com.

She is
website

Claudia wrote these poems:

MOTHER OF SORROW

I long for you Paul, your spirit
resounds in my heart.

Why were you a victim of misfortune?
That you disappeared in a blink of an
eye, a flash-

Is a horrendous tragedy and some-
times incomprehensible.

Oh God, why have I been robbed of
you?

I am in torment while you are eter-
nally happy-

I am in prison walking this uncharted
territory of grief-

The fury of your death cannot sepa-
rate us.

Help me Paul in my suffering.

Place me into the chalice with the
brokenhearted.

I am an angel with one only one wing

and I can only "fly" embracing
others. In my brokenness I can
embrace another and care, and that
seems so fit and divine.

The Gift of Holding Another's Profound Pain

I am sad for myself but I 'grow' and
realize that 'gifts' before me become
'unwrapped' with sheer 'faith' and
becoming aware that we only exist in
God's divine presence.

I cannot 'fly' until these things are
learned. Trust is a difficult road. I
will be braver and my arms will be
stronger. With my last earthly breath
I will 'fly' to you.

I hold you tight, Paulie Boy, and
know, you will give me strength and
courage that it will take to walk the
walk of MERCY.

My heart is pierced like our Blessed
Mother.

Our Lady of Sorrow knows the depth
of my loss. I am your unhappy
mother-

I miss you so!

Paul my son/sun, you now reside in
the MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST
Reach for me Paulie. You have
ascended into the Arms of Almighty
God. You are forever pure and
unscathed by your earthly
misfortune.

In my grief of exile, be my consoling
angel. My passionate spirit knows I
will see you again, but oh, my desire
for that Moment of LOVE.



Paul's symbol is a butterfly.

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

We got your newsletter on the
anniversary of our son's death. It is
helpful even after 5 years to know we
aren't alone and people we don't
even know have helped us through
the past long hard 5 years.

I want you to know how much
your card every year telling us how
special Scott was and how he will
not be forgotten means to us. As you
know, we just don't want Scott to be
forgotten, he was so special and left
his mark on this world.

There is just one person who re-
members us on or around the

anniversary of Scott's. I am so sad with the knowledge that no one will acknowledge to us that they remember Scott and miss him. Do they think if they don't say anything that we won't remember and our pain will go away?

We will never forget the day Scott died nor will we EVER forget Scott.

People should know that not remembering our son makes our pain deeper.



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

fighter plane.

(Sandy's letter reminded me again of how important it is for us to remember each other's children on their birth and death dates. If you come to J.I.M.'s Picnic June 2, 2001, you will be given a list of our children and their dates.)

David and Cindy Jo Greever's daughter, Michelle (8-24-84), died after being struck by a school bus 11-5-93. Cindy Jo shares this letter:

My Dear Sweet Angel Michelle,

I know where you dwell, in the House of our Father, beyond Heaven's Gates where there is only beauty and love and no one ever hates ... There is no pain, no sorrow, no yesterday but forever a tomorrow, for eternity is beside you and mother hen is too, I will always be near .. I will always love you ... Your eyes how they sparkled every time you looked into my eyes, how you always faithfully remained by my side ... Your flowing auburn hair how it shined, brilliant like a diamond mine ..

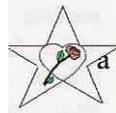
Oh sweet Angel, my baby girl ... you brought so much beauty and joy to my world. . .I will treasure sweet memories of you for as long as I survive this life on earth until] arrive ... to embrace you eternally, I will never let you go again because then my child, my dear sweet little child, we will be entwined in Paradise forever and then ... Baby daughter, I miss you!! Please take care, before you know it I will be there .. .It is hard for me here left standing without you, who ever could have imagined that it would be you???

Ushered to Paradise on the wings of a dove, flying with an Angel

clutching you by her side, in Jesus' arms, swept away. .. only to leave me here bereaved in this way ... me left standing with my arms open wide, bidding you farewell as I returned to my hell, knowing you are safe, my fears only begun ... trying to renew my life and pick up where it left off when you were gone ... How could this be, all these seven years I am still standing, how could I not have fallen so hard that in landing, I could never get up to my feet again yet still I did. .. and here I am!! It is "You" precious child that have kept me standing, you and our God, your sister and brother ... your Father .. .I love you sweet child, I love Daddy and Bubba and Sissa too ... please know that my heart is forever with our family and forever with you ..

Love Always and Forever and Ever and Ever until we embrace for eternity!!!

Michelle's symbols are



star, heart and a rose.

Marc Schuster (7-30-75) the son of Janet Mart, died from a gunshot accident 3-22-93. Janet is working for CODA and wanted to share this revelation with fellow travelers:

I think of you nearly daily and speak of you and Rosemary almost as often-that's exactly how Sandy Hickey came to realize we had more in common than lost sons who became organ donors. You were the first person I met (and inimitably so even now) that really spoke with candor and humor about your life since the loss of your son.

Those lucky enough not to share our travels would not understand that last statement, but I know you do.

I'm attempting to start a local Donor Family Council.

My life has gone up and down, backwards and forwards since we last spoke or wrote. The incredible thing is that I have learned a great deal. I'm lucky enough in my position at Kentucky Organ Donor Affiliates to utilize some of it. About 50% of my time is spent with an Aftercare Program that follows donor families for 18 months after a donation has been made. I am continually humbled by the surviving families.

Part of this program is facilitating correspondence between

donor families and recipients and occasionally, if both parties wish, meetings. Wow! The letters are all unique and I never fail to cry--joyful tears of gifts and gratitude. The rest of the time I plan special events like parades, etc., and deal with the media--sometimes sort of like a circus!

This summer I had an experience I hope all parents who have lost a child will someday have. I was in my favorite position lying by a pool on a beautiful sunny day as I looked toward the sky. As the wind moved the branches of the tree, I knew everything was right in the world at that moment. Then I thought "not quite, Marc isn't here" but just as quickly, had the most powerful feeling that even Marc was where he was supposed to be. Some would say a simple sentiment, but it took 7 years to believe. My Dad is in the final days of a long illness and I have been out of town quite a bit with him.

I have a sense of peace about Marc being where he is supposed to be. With my Dad's recent decline, I can add more. Dad has felt a presence standing behind him several times. At first he thought it was my brother because he knew it was male and tall and had very large hands. It took him several times before he realized it was Marc, presenting a warmth and comfort he had never experienced. The stature and the warmth were sensed rather than visualized, but every bit as strong as a sighting would be. It's interesting to me because at the same time I felt all was right with the world, I also finally figured out a way to answer people when they inquired about BOTH of my sons. Of course I could speak of Jason's successes, but it was always difficult to dignify my other son's life without causing an uncomfortable silence. Now, with the same smile of pride I exhibit when discussing Jason, I say Marc is working in Heaven. With my Dad's experience, I now know Marc has very specific responsibilities.

My role at KODA is diverse and rewarding. I plan special events to promote public awareness of organ donation such as our float in the

Kentucky Derby Festival Pegasus Parade. I speak to civic organizations about the need for donor organs and also sharing my personal story of strength and purpose derived from donating Marc's organs. Sharing Marc's legacy of life or sight to individuals is pretty powerful stuff for the Rotary and I have the opportunity to talk about my son.

I have the privilege and honor of overseeing the Aftercare program which follows donor families for 18 months following a donation. So I get to speak and write to these wonderful people who were able to put aside their own pain long enough to think of another family that desperately needed their help. These families cross all socio-economic lines, but one characteristic is constant. The unselfish act of consenting to donation so that another family does not have to experience the devastation of what they are facing now true.

Another privilege I have is facilitating correspondence between donor families and transplant recipients. I function as the initial liaison between the two parties by reviewing and forwarding the letters and cards. This maintains anonymity as long as either party wishes. If both parties agree to exchange names and addresses, then I sometimes am present for a meeting of the donor family and one or more of the recipients. Photographing the parts of a young donor walking arm in arm with the recipient of her lungs was struggle because I couldn't see through my own tears. And there are so many more, just like this. To witness such triumph over tragedy certainly humbles me every time.

I direct a volunteer force of about 15 mostly recipient volunteers who come to us after receiving a transplant. These men and women are filled with the gratitude after receiving a second chance at life and they want to help us gather public awareness .. They staff booths at the State Fair, health fairs, speaking to over 20,000 high school students each school year and generally do anything to help. Walking into a room of transplant recipients is coming in out of the cold into the sunshine. The unconditional love that innate from these grateful individuals unmatched.

Oh, how many people have asked,

"How did you survive the death of your son?" Well, as much as I may not have wanted to, I did survive. In Marc's final hours, understanding his terminal injury. I promised him I would live a good life hoping he could then peacefully slip away. The opportunities I have been presented have certainly been rare and unusual but they have enabled me to survive joyfully, in Marc's honor.

Lisa Klingseisen's son Tyler (9-21-92), died in an auto accident 2-14-99. Tyler's websites are:
www.hometown.aol.com/lisaann2u
www.hometown.aol.com/browneyedlisaann. Lisa tells us about Tyler and shares some exciting news:

I lost my 6 year old son in a car accident on 2/14/99. I have a surviving 10 year old daughter. I am expecting a new baby December 2000. Life for any of us will never be the same.

I just read chapter one of the Children of the Dome. Rosemary's story gave me hope. Hope that sometimes I forget that I have.

My Tyler was a beautiful blonde-haired, blue-eyed six year old full of so much energy. He was a first grader at the local elementary school. He was my angel. Tyler was so loving, so happy. He never let a day go by without telling everyone how much he loved them. He walked around the house saying "I love you Mommy, I love you Daddy, I love you Brittany, I love you Nanny & Pop Pop." That was his known trait; his love he showed for everyone and he was never afraid to show it. He was so huggable, but he was just starting to get to the age where I could only give him a kiss on the head.

I was planning a get-away weekend with my boyfriend to go skiing for Valentines day. It was a Friday morning, and I was getting them ready for school. Britt had an attitude, didn't want to wait for her brother because her friends were there, so she crossed the road ahead of him. Her friends waited for Tyler and I told him "goodbye," that I loved him and told him to have a good weekend at his daddy's because he would be going there for the weekend. He told me he loved me and I kissed him on his forehead. That was the last time I saw him alive, he was running across the

street to catch up with the girls to finish his walk to school.

Shortly after, I left for my skiing trip. For some reason, I didn't call him or the children, which is totally unusual. I called my house on Sunday morning and my dad, who was staying with my dogs, told me I had just missed them. They had dropped their back packs off. Little did I know that in less than 15 minutes they would be in the accident.

Shane and I left to get ready to go skiing. We went to dinner, and didn't return to the hotel until around 6:00. The dreaded red light was on. I remember calling and getting the message from the hotel and they told me to call a certain officer. They told me there was an accident.

Nobody told me what happened. I begged for them to put Dennis (my ex-husband) on the phone. All he would do is cry. I screamed. .. I screamed so loud. I thought both of them were dead, Brittany and Tyler. Then my sister got on the phone and tried to calm me down. I was running around the room like an idiot trying to pack up all of our stuff. My sister eventually told me that it was Tyler and by that time I was already numb.

That is such a strange feeling. I couldn't do anything. Couldn't cry, couldn't walk, couldn't talk, I just sat in the truck and Shane drove me home. It took about 90 minutes to get to the hospital. We pulled up and my brother and sister and best friend were waiting for me.

They walked the back to Tyler. He was laying in a room on a bed. He had a bump on his head, and little bit of blood coming out of his mouth. Other than that, he looked as if he were sleeping. I held him, touched him, looked and felt every part of his body, sang to him. It didn't sink in. I couldn't really cry. I couldn't feel anything.

I went up to see my daughter, she was admitted for 2 days. She had a severed ear and a laceration above her eye, which by the time I got there, had already had been repaired by the plastic surgeon.

I miss him so much. The next weeks were a blur to me. Between being numb, and the doctor putting me on medicine, I don't remember too much except for a lot of crying and asking "Why? Why? Why?"

Its been 19 months and I still ask "Why? Why? Why?" But I've come to realize that Tyler was an angel and God must have needed him. I have many communications with Tyler which I can tell you about sometime if you want.

Through alarm clocks to lights, to butterflies to dreams!!! I know he is safe. He is waiting for me. And he is with me whenever I need him to be.

It still doesn't take the hurt away. Some days, as you know, the pain is so intense. Others, I find myself smiling remembering something Tyler did or said.

I am now expecting another child, and we have decided if it is a boy to have his middle name be Tyler. I feel Tyler close to me at times when I need him the most. I will be crying, and all of a sudden I feel wrapped in a warmth and somebody is telling me to be calm, that it is okay. And the tears just go away. It's hard to explain. But I feel its my Tyler.



Tyler's symbol is an angel.

Joyce Dunham's daughter, Kara Leigh Broughton (5-30-75), died 5-8-95. Kara's website is: geocities.com/Heartland/Pointe/6582/Kara/html. Joyce includes some of her writings and some of Kara's:

Before Kara died, she lived--and what a life she had during her almost 20years!!

This is the thought I try to keep in my mind during those times of deep despair. In the weeks after Kara's death when I wanted to do nothing and could not imagine my life continuing without "my baby", I could see her giving me a kick in the rear, saying "Hey Ma" as only she could, and telling me to go on in her behalf. That is what I have tried to do since May 8, 1995, at 12:10 p.m. when I walked in my office and saw my husband there. I knew, without a word being said, that Kara was dead. Just 5 days

before her college graduation, she had been killed in a car accident, falling asleep at the wheel of her new car. She had driven all night after visiting a friend out east and obviously thought she could make it home.

She almost did--just 13 miles to go-but not quite. Kara was a focused, almost driven, individual. Maybe she sensed her life would be short, so she crammed as much in it as she possibly could. After finishing high school at 16, she was going to graduate from college with a double major in Sociology and Law Enforcement before her 20th birthday. She had her life planned, with her goal being a position in the FBI. Since this would not be attainable until she was older, she was to leave the day after graduation for Arizona to complete an internship in juvenile justice which she hoped would lead to a job in that field. Kara truly wanted to "make a difference" in the world. In the weeks before her death, she was excited about graduating and was looking forward to her "new life." She was the happiest I had ever seen her.

Since her first birthday, I had raised Kara as a single parent. Ours had always been a close bond of unconditional love, but especially so in her college years. We talked daily on the phone--a source of some joking from Kara's friends. No matter where she was or what she was doing, the nightly call would occur, always ending with "Love you Mom." In the weeks after Kara's death, the absence of that phone ringing was the most painful reminder imaginable. At times, it still is.

Less than a year before Kara's death, I had met and married a wonderful man. Kara was the maid of honor at our wedding. Finally, my life was complete--a super husband, a fantastic daughter--how could it be any better!!

Then came May 8, 1995. I now believe that Mike entered my life to give me a reason to continue existing.

The first Christmas without Kara, I asked friends and family to send me a favorite memory of her. Many recalled her generous nature and her willingness to help anyone in time of need. (I used to tell her she had a "marshmallow heart," one that was sometimes taken advantage of by others.) These letters help me remember the good times, as do the many cards and notes (all of which I saved) she sent me throughout her life.

When I went through her personal belongings, I found that she had also kept all the cards and notes I had ever sent her! I sit, read them, and cry, but I am so glad I have them.

To honor Kara's memory and "make a difference" in her behalf, a scholarship is awarded annually at her college. I now volunteer at the hospital, as Kara had previously done. Keeping in touch with her friends is another source of comfort to me. But nothing can fill the void I feel in my heart or replace the "Mommy hugs" I cherished so much. Kara often said (half jokingly but half seriously) that since I had taken care of her when she was young, she would take care of me when I got old. Facing the upcoming years without her seems at times impossible.

Before Kara died, she lived--

I only wish it could have been longer.

*Love you Kara,
Mom*

The following are some writings by Kara:

**MERRY CHRISTMAS,
MOM 1993**

*You will always have my love
In everything you hope or do,
I'll encourage you and believe in you,
For every joy is my joy too ..
You'll always have my love
You don't have to keep your doubts inside,*

*There's nothing that you have to hide,
For whatever feelings you confide*

*You will always have my love
No matter what, no matter where,
You can count on me and I'll be there,
To understand, to show I care
You will always have my love.*

Mom,

*You're my bestest buddy and
you mean the world to me ...
I love you very much.
Love always,
Kara Leigh*

The following is a message Kara had written in a card she had planned to give me on the day of her college graduation, May 13, 1995. As she died on May 8th, she was not able to give it to me personally, but it is a card I treasure so very much.

Dear Mom,

I realize my college years have not been easy on either of us, yet you found the love and patience to put up with me and stand by me through the roughest of times. I would not have survived college (let alone the almost twenty years of my life) without you by my side. I only hope I have made you proud.

I also want to thank you for instilling proper morals and behavior in me (although I may not always use them). I only hope that when I have kids (a long way down the road) I can raise them as well as you raised me... I love you.

Your daughter,
Kara

My mother's nickname for her was "Sunshine" because she was always so happy and positive as a child. The flowers I had on her casket were yellow roses, as yellow has always been my favorite color and also makes me think of sunshine.



Larry Johnson (11-5-63), son of Phil and Marilyn Waisblum, died from a malignant melanoma 12-8-98. Marilyn talks about J.I.M.'s Picnic:

When I have one of my "down days" I think of all the remarkable people I met at J.I.M.'s Picnic and it gives me courage.

When my grandson, Colin, now 3, tells me about going to see his Daddy and leaving him a shiny penny and some pictures, I smile and say, "How wonderful," then turn my head to take a deep breath to get a hold of myself. He was just 15 months when Larry died and obviously will only remember him through pictures of which we have many, and of telling him about his Daddy.

When I arrived home one day, my best friend was seated on my steps. She had purchased a beautiful stone and laid it among my flowers. It reads:

If Tears Could Build a Stairway and Memories a Lane, I'd Walk Right Up To Heaven and Bring You Home Again. And then we sat and cried. I feel as though I live with one foot here on earth and one in Heaven.

Larry's symbol is a computer.



Jason Robinson (12-4-79), the son of Sam and Kathy Caudill, was killed in an automobile accident 5-30-94. Kathy sent a copy of what she had written to friends in January of 1995. The following are a few excerpts:

The past few months have been both a heartache and a joy. You know the heartache. The joy has been the love and support shown to Sam and me throughout this time.

In October, a tree was dedicated to Jason's memory at First Baptist Church in Miamisburg, Ohio. We attended First Baptist for the first 12 years of Jason's life where he made a profession of faith and was baptized. The tree is a Purple Ash. A dedication service was held with special music by special friends. The scripture used on the plaques that were given to Jason's father and me was, "And he shall be like a tree planted by living waters which gives forth its fruit in due season."

Jason's birthday is December 4th. I knew this would be a difficult day. However, it came on a Sunday and our church family gave us a spiritual lift through their sweet fellowship and love. Later in the afternoon, about 20 of Jason's friends came to our house for a time of fun and fellowship. They put up the Christmas tree and decorated the house. They brought special gifts in remembrance of Jason.

From 4:00 until 9:30 PM, everyone played games, talked and ate pizza, we gave out red velvet ribbons and invited everyone to tie it on Jason's tree at the church or in their own yards in memory of Jason.

Some suggestions for those who wish to know how to comfort a bereaved parent or anyone who has lost a loved one.

Just be there and listen. We may ask questions, but we do not necessarily want answers. Just listen. When we cry, cry

with us. Talking is not necessary. Silence is welcomed. Don't put a time limit on our bad days. We may seem to "get over" it, however, we still have our bad days. Be patient. Share your memories of our loved one with us. We want to hear their name and talk about them. I know that the worst thing that could happen for me would be that people forget Jason. Let us know that our loved one may be gone from here but they are not forgotten.



Jason's symbols are a tennis racket and a smile.

Thelma (Bird) Wexler's son Ben (10-8-93) drowned 8-11-97. Ben's best friend's mother wrote this poem shortly after Ben's death:

I SAW AN ANGEL

STILL I TRY TO UNDERSTAND
I'M ON WHAT FEELS TO BE A MOUNTAIN
I LOOK FOR HIM
ALL I SEE IS THE BLUE SKY
I REACH FOR HIS HAND ALL I HOLD IS A
SMALL STONE
I ASK FOR 1 LAST KISS
ALL I FEEL IS A SOFT WARMTH ON MY
CHEEKS
THAT IS WHEN I REALIZED
I SAW AN ANGEL
EYES SO BLUE, HANDS SO SMALL. HAIR
SO SOFT
I ONCE AGAIN LOOK AT HIS PARENTS
AN ANGEL GOD HAD GIVEN THEM

John (9-29-77), the son of Peggy Taylor, was killed in a motorcycle accident 7-28-99. Peggy wrote the following (you decide why I am upset with her):

I received your letter and card a couple of weeks ago which invited us all to stop by the Cumberland Inn if in the area and possibly call you. This came a day before I headed for Florida. Imagine my surprise when I glanced up from the road and saw the Cumberland Inn. I was so excited. I had to stop. What a beautiful place it is and the dome is awesome! I would have loved it if I could have had time to call you, but time did not allow. (This is why I am upset.)

Now, about my son, John W Taylor, Jr. He was our only son and we have one daughter. Johnny was so loved. He had so many friends; it was unbelievable. Johnny was the one who always made the plans and got everyone together. He was the one that cared for the ones no one else wanted anything to do with He always made them feel special and included. He was the one they came to for comfort when they had a problem in their life.

He had a strong religious belief and trusted Christ as a very young child. I am so thankful. It was the only thing that sustains us through this difficult time, to know we will one day see him again.

Johnny was also the one to be there to hug the women at church, no matter how old. He was always there to let them know he cared. He especially made the extra effort if he knew one of them was having a bad day. Many of them have let me know how much they miss his hugs.

Johnny was 21; had recently purchased his own home (the hangout for all the kids. What a great time they were having)

He loved life. He couldn't get enough of it. He loved to ski, snow board, cliff climb and jet ski. The more he could pack in, the happier he was. So he bought a motorcycle. He loved that bike; going everywhere on it He had a new girlfriend, a bike, a house, and tons of friends, (he had the world by the tail.)

But 2 days after his dad and I got back from Alaska, he was killed on that bike he'd only had for 7 weeks.

He always said he'd rather live a short life doing what he wanted, than to live a long life doing nothing For him; what away to go! It was instant and he had all life had to offer. For us; how devastating.

God has been so good to me. My marriage has not survived the tragedy, but God has given me such peace and comfort I would never have believed.

I have had such love and support from friends and family. And it has been 15 months already. Life is short and I am looking forward to that day when God calls me home and I am welcomed

into Jesus' arms and then my loving son's. At that time, I also look forward to meeting all the children I have read about.



Johnny's symbols are the moon and stars.

Jim and June Brown's son, Aaron (2-17-83), died from an accidental shooting 1-8-96. June wrote this in 1998, but these words could be written by any of us during the times we don't think we can survive:

Yes, we are surviving the worst thing that can happen to a parent. I, too, don't look too far into the future and I take one day as it comes. I know that I will survive today and tomorrow because of the "yesterdays." Of course I didn't fell this way in 1996. So I know I've come a long, long way.

When my son Aaron died, I asked the Lord, every day, to please take me out of this world. Just let me die too because I was in so much pain. I did not believe I could stand it in this life without my Aaron. I would really, really pray for this to happen to me. Then I would go into his room and start reading your newsletters. I would read them and then, "I'm not the only one hurting. I'm not the only one that is in so much grief. Pain so intense that I feel like my heart has been ripped out. If Dinah and Rosemary can survive this and all of these other parents, I, some how, have to. "

Aaron's symbols are a sunshine, a heart with wings, a bass fish and an angel



Darren (12-21-65), son of Lillian Cox, completed suicide, 6-25-98. See if you don't see yourself in Lillian's letter: It has been much too long since I wrote and told you how much you and your newsletter has helped me. In the beginning I soaked up all the information I could find to take away some of the pain, bring me to some level of understanding and a small amount of peace. Your newsletter helped very much and your notes and messages, too. Now, I just try to get through each day without falling apart.

It has been 2 years and 4 months since my loss and at times the pain is still unbearable. I was shopping the other day and looked up and saw a young man with the same hair color, cut and shaped to the back of his head. It was all I could do to keep from breaking down right there in the store. Sometimes all it takes is a smell, a voice or a car on the street to set you off, or the way his little boy walks across the room.

I am keeping Darren's son, Destin, some of the time and have for the past two years. Destin turned three in March. Destin is behind in speech and needed physical therapy. We found his speech was related to a hearing problem, so he wears hearing aids now. He is in preschool 5 days a week for two and a half hours. He is an intelligent child and works very hard in everything he has to do. He has come a long way in the two years he has had special help. He is a wonderful little boy that never sees a stranger. Very out-going. His mother is an EMF and works long hours and still finds time to read, play and take Destin to his many appointments. I keep him while she is working.

I have found it emotionally and physically draining The first year, I had panic attacks every minute I had him in my care. It took a while to figure out what was going on, but I think I was so afraid something was going to happen to him. He is built so much like his Dad and has the same color eyes. Some days it is a blessing and some days it breaks my heart.

Darren's wife put this in our local paper as a memorial:

If tears could build a stairway
And memories a lane,
I would walk right up Heaven
And bring you home again.

In three words I can sum up
everything I have learned about
life--

IT GOES ON.

-Robert Frost

(Of Frost's 6 children, 2 died in infancy, one by suicide and one after giving birth.)

Darren's symbol is a feather.



Cole Matkovic (8-19-92), son of Dan and Kathy, was killed with his grandmother in an auto accident, 10-9-98. Kathy tells of starting a support group:

I can't believe its been 2 years already. Maybe God will make all the years go faster for us. We had a shock 2 weeks ago. The man who killed Cole won an appeal on a little-known technicality and gets to have a new trial. So we get to go through everything again.

A fellow mom and I started a support group for parents in our area. At the first meeting, we had 7 people and our second meeting 11. This number by word-of-mouth only.

We chose symbols for Cole- a baseball, because he "lived and breathed" baseball and a leaf. At the funeral, Father Jim compared Cole to a leaf .We get some good signs from leaves.



The Matkovics live in Matherville, IL. If you are interested in receiving further information about the support group, you may e-mail www.kathym@qconline.com or by phone 309-754-8855.

Malisa Pitts' daughter Amy Nycole Darland (6-1-83) died 6-22-00. Malisa shares:

Thank you so much for sending the box full of newsletters! I haven't read them all yet- my moods are still "up and down," and I kinda "come and go." But, I will often try to find some peace through reading a few at a time, and it truly helps to know "I'm not alone." and others have survived this consuming pain.

I am very sorry for your own loss, as well as my own. I often wonder to myself, as I reach out and am blessed with the comfort of "strangers," (that are forever bonded in my heart)_ I

wonder if our kids are also finding each other in heaven, and are working together, to give us all strength. Maybe they found each other first, and that's why we get connected to the people that we do ... these thoughts make me feel a little closer to my beloved Amy-my beautiful "Bubby," (as only "mom" called her!)

I lost my precious doughier just 4 months and 2 weeks ago, in some ways, it feels like an eternity ago- others, like it was just yesterday. The pain feels so "raw," a lot of the time ... there's still so many days I can't even get out of bed. I just cry and am overwhelmed with grief I'm a pediatric nurse, and have not returned to work yet--maybe soon ... my job is there whenever I'm ready; thats a blessing that I'm thankful for.

My Amy had moved out to her dad's old trailer (about 200 miles away) the end of March. She always loved going there-small, little country lawn where she knew everyone. The trailer was on her Gma and Gpo's land; their house was just past a row of trees and great Gma's house was a few yards away. Great Gmo had broken her hip and Amy was helping to take care of her. That was typical of Amy- at only 17, she had such a big heart; loved her family deeply, and is known for always helping someone and/or cheering them up when they needed it.

I always called her, "Momma's little Save-the-wayward Soul Girl!" She loved animals just as much and in the 3 months she lived there, she not only look over 10-year-old Peek-a-poo (Keely), but also "adopted" a beagle (Fat Boy), a dachshund puppy (Rosco), and 2 kitties! All were being taken to the pound, but saved by my girl. Her dad wanted to keep Keely, a friend look Fat-Boy, and I brought Rosco home to live with us. The cats are at her friends' also.

Amy and I were so close; she wrote, but called every 3-4 days and shared many things that a lot of kids wouldn't ever tell their parents!!! My oldest daughter, Windi (21), is the same way! (I'm so grateful for this).

Amy had had the same boyfriend off and on for almost 2 years. He lived out by her dad. They'd visit each other, write and talk on the phone while she lived with me. He was a nice enough boy, but had recently gotten into drugs and alcohol.

Amy was so concerned and was pushing rehab. I talked to her on a Tuesday- She was her usual self and was making plans for her 10-year-old cousin, whom she loved dearly, to visit for a week, then together, they were coming back home. She'd bought me a Beanie Baby, and was so excited about giving it to me then. My last words were, "I love you, Bubby" and she said, "I love you too, Mom." Two days later, I got the call from her dad saying that Josh, Amy's boyfriend, said that she'd hung herself from the ceiling fan and he'd thought she'd been "planning it for awhile. No One actually saw this; her dad, just by chance, called Amy. The boy answered and told him she'd killed herself .. My "ex" called 911 and flew out to the house- 9 minutes later, the boy finally called 911. His statement had several inconsistencies; there was a broken window and lamps knocked over. I saw additional markings on my daughter's neck that looked like fingerprint bruises, along with a bruise on her face. I spoke personally with the paramedic that tried so hard to revive her. He is devastated about the whole thing and is sure that Amy was strangled and did not hang herself

But the Sheriff's department says "There was no sign of a struggle." The bruises aren't even documented on the autopsy (the coroner actually became belligerent with me; accused me and her dad of neglect and threatened to call child abuse) - So, the final call is "suicide," which no one that knew Amy believes for a second.

It's hard enough to deal with such an extraordinary loss- but, all of this, on top of that pain, almost kills me. I cannot believe the rudeness and coldhearted, unprofessional ways we've been treated--and don't even know what, if anything, I can do. I'm looked at "as a mom who can't accept "suicide." But, there's not much to prove that theory and so much to point towards :murder ... " The anger rips through me at times.

What a terrible ordeal, and it breaks my heart that Amy wasn't given more consideration or thought.

It wears me out so much, emotionally. I keep a lot of the painful details tucked inside, but felt like "sharing" it with someone who obviously has "a heart."

My husband and I are hoping to attend the picnic. June will be a rough month- June 1 is Amy's birthday and we lost her, June 22, 2000.

I've chosen 3 symbols for Amy (1) A heart with wings (she always signed her name with that heart and now she truly does have wings); (2) She loved mushrooms, especially candles so "shrooms" is another and (3) She loved being a Gemini so that symbol is definitely hers. Of course, she also loved crosses. She had so many facets to her strong-minded, free-spirited personality. She was so much fun and I'm just very proud to be her Mom. I don't know how I'll ever get through this pain ... I miss her so much. She had the most beautiful smile and loved to tease her Momma. I feel so empty without her.

One day at a time. I guess.

You've done a wonderful thing as a tribute to your love for Jim. I hope, someday, I can do something as significant in behalf of my Amy.

I appreciate any kind of support---it helps so much, especially during those times I feel like I'm all alone, fighting run up-hill battle, just to survive. Several of Amy's closest friends, (from Derrance), write regularly, & I feel more 'connected" to Amy, when I write them .. it's bittersweet.

If any other parents who have experienced this type of frustration, I will like to hear from them. My address is:

*Malisa Pitts
200 Main Street
Grain Valley, Mo 64029*

Amy's symbols are a heart with wings, mushrooms and Gemini.



Maryellen Feasters daughter, Hilary (6-25-80), died in a train/car accident 10-15-97. Maryellen tells about Hilary and describes her grief:

Hilary was in her senior year of high school when she was killed while

crossing one of the all too numerous ungated crossings in this state.

Complicating matters was the fact that at that time of day, the sun was directly in her eyes and also there was an overgrowth of vegetation AND the train was coming around a curve. How many more things could have been wrong?

The part that is difficult to deal with is the fact that 2 young men were killed at the same crossing 5 years before that and because the railroad didn't think it was worth reporting to the Dept. of Transportation (who actually installs the gates) for some reason, it was never put on their priority list. A lot of people made a lot of mistakes and still have no idea of the devastation their greed has left behind.

We also have a 16 year old son who has had to witness both his parents falling apart over and over again. He has felt the need to care for us emotionally and he shouldn't have to do that. I try to go on with our lives and, in fact, Colin brings me incredible joy. The moments are sporadic and fleeting, but I am grateful for his sake that they are there at all.

Also, since Hilary's death I have moved out of our home and into an apartment. It's like the domino effect. I just was so constantly aware that I wasn't available that I felt the need to be alone and try to deal with this horror.

Hilary was the most cheerful teenager you could ever hope to meet. She was optimistic, but at the same time grounded in reality. Her name means "cheerful" and her middle name Orion means "brightest star in the heavens."

She embodied her name totally. She had plans to go to college in Boston and then on to medical school and was leaning towards psychiatry, but who knows where her life would have gone. She was bright and beautiful. I still get a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach when I realize (as I do each day) that she is gone. I am struggling. I have questions to which nobody has the answer. I'm getting tired of living with the questions.

I work, I'm going back to school for a degree in Social Work, I run, I keep busy and yet always in the back of my mind I'm asking "Why?" I know this letter sounds scattered, but I know you of all

*people will understand why.
Sincerely and with love,
mother heart to mother heart*

Hilary's symbol is a



Chris (1-23-75) is the son of Carol Cicero and was killed in a motorcycle accident 7-8-00. Carol tells us about her family:

I'm a single parent and raised two sons (Peter and Chris) on my own since they were 3 years and 5 1/2 years old. Peter is the oldest. He was a brother, partner and best friend to Chris. He misses him a lot. I realize I have to be strong for Peter. I'd never want him to think I'd feel any different if the situation was reversed.

Christopher was born January 23, 1975, at 1:10 PM and he was a great baby. So many different things had happened to him. At 3 years of age, he got bitten by a dog and he had to have 30 stitches in his head. Once I almost ran over him with my car, and he almost hung himself on a garage rope. I got to him just as he turned blue. He was shutting the garage door and the rope came down around his neck. He had to have an operation on his intestines. I realized I could have lost him at three. Thank God I didn't.

Chris was slow doing everything. He had a learning disability in reading

He hated school. He was very mechanical, taking things apart and putting them together again. He loved motor bikes.

He loved the mountains and riding scooters. Loved fishing and went with my family, often .

My Dad died in 1984 - now he and Chris are together. Chris can drive him nuts for awhile. He loved to do that to his family - tease and irritate!!!

He had the greatest smile and laugh. He was real touchy and loved to hug by putting his arms around you. I really miss him - A LOT.

Christopher and Peter started their own title company January 3, 2000, doing mortgage closings. I started working for them. It was a real compliment for them.

It was going so well. Until January, Chris worked for his Dad building swimming pools in the summer and at a gym in winter. Chris had his hands in anything he could. He and Peter plowed snow in the winter and loved it!

Chris moved out of my condo in April 2000. I "re-nested," painted, papered. I finally had my own home and Chris had his.

He bought a great condo-I called it his "station"- A place he went to stay until he went home. The night I moved him in, we had a "farewell talk" and I told him how much I loved him and how proud I was of him; how happy I was for him and hoped his life would be great. He told me how much he loved me and thanked me for being a great Mom. That was the lost talk we really had together. At work it was business and small talk. I'm so blessed that I was able to say what I did, though he already knew how much I truly adored and loved him - Thank God.

I always talked to Chris of my hate for his motorcycle and he'd laugh and tell me if something happened that it was his time to die. He wasn't afraid and he'd be fine. A talk we had at least 6 times over breakfast.

My fear come truly July 8. My son died on his motorcycle. 2:10 AM he wrecked and died instantly. I was blessed again. I thank God he didn't suffer; he never knew what happened. I believe that he went from darkness into light and said, "Oh, my Mom's going to be upset!!!" It makes me smile, anyway..

That's my son's semi-life story. He was always there for me and I really miss him, but I have to move on with my life to make him proud of his Mom and Peter too! I'm taking about one moment at a time, and asking God and Chris to help. They got me into this and they have to help me through this!!!

My symbol for Christopher is a yellow butterfly because that is what everyone saw after Chris passed. .. except Mom ... Peter had one follow him down the fairway at the golf course.

I told Carol that Young Jim had a learning disability also and she wrote:

That's amazing that your son also had a learning disability ... it sure was a challenge. I always said that raising

him and his brother was like pulling a boulder up a hill with dental floss. It would break after a fourth of the way up and you would have to start all over again. It was a tiring adventure. Motherhood, but a great one .



Sallie Jones' son Corey Tackett (8-28-69) completed suicide, 1-22-99. Sallie tells about her family and shares her grief:

Thank you so much for the newsletters. There are no words to tell you how much they have meant to me. The first few days after I received these letters, I never went to bed until between 2 and 4 AM And I am still reading them, searching for just how many of our darling children have left us by way of suicide. My heart aches for everyone who has lost a child, no matter how, but my son took his own life and I guess I connect more with these parents that have faced that

I am divorced. I have four living children Kenneth (38), Lisa Rene (36), Robert (34), and Tamara (29). Corey Len was my fourth child. He and my baby, Tammy, were 15 months apart. So as you can see, my children are all adults.

But it has been a living hell since Corey's death. My family will not talk about it. The only person I have had to really understand and talk to me is Judy Davidson. She is a wonderful person and I can relate to her because I know she understands. I'm so grateful to her.

I am so sorry about your son. I can't even begin to imagine losing my only child. I can't imagine how you and your husband can go on.

I am blessed with other children, even though they are "silent" about their brother when I need them the most. Some days I feel like I can't go on, nor do I want to. Is this normal? (Yes) Did you ever feel that way? (Yes) I feel so lost at times.

I lost my last of four brothers, January 1, 98; my mother, December 1, 1998, and then Corey, January 22, 1999.

Corey's symbols are

anything to do with fishing.



Marc Colletti (11-27-68), son of Joe and Lorenza died from a fishing accident 9-26-95. The following letter was

written by Lorenza to Marc on his birthday after his death:

Dear Marc,

In all the bereavement books that I read in the past 5 years, I found a common theme that prevails. "Something good has to come from the tragedy of the loss of a child." So I ask myself: "What have I learned?"

Since your death on September 26, 1995, my beloved Marc, I have learned that the missing - the longing for you is paramount in my life. I hurt when I see young parents at a store, scolding or hitting their child. I have to refrain from telling the parents to cherish each day, and not to take their child for granted. I have learned that there are no answers to all the "Whys?" I have stopped tormenting myself. I have learned to be less superficial. The accumulation of material goods, like clothes, cars, or furniture mean nothing to me. Even traveling, which used to be one of the most enjoyable things for me, now means nothing. If I do something or go somewhere, fine. If I don't, that's fine, also.

I have learned to be more focused on what is really important in life: the love and connection with other human beings. To be more giving and accepting, and certainly more humble in front of a "greater power" who can take your life away at any given moment. My life has changed so much in the past 5 years. It feels like an eternity, yet feels as if it happened just yesterday.

I learned that human beings are very resilient. A parent actually survives the death of a child! I thought that I would never again be able to function, but I find myself able to do more and more each day.

These are all great lessons in life, and I feel that I have become a better person. However, I would gladly return to my "old" self if I could have you back, get one of your hugs, or hear you call me "Ma."

Missing you always.
Love and Happy Birthday,
Mom

The following article was written by Lauren Terrazzano for their local paper:

Marc Colletti spent many afternoons in a quiet East Moriches cove, watching clouds roll by or waiting for fluke to tug at the tip of his fishing pole.

So when the 26-year-old Department of Environmental Conservation scientist died in a fishing accident, his co-workers, friends and family thought it only fitting to honor him at the place he loved most.

It was a quiet but moving ceremony that officially opened a small public boat launch at the Moriches Bay Recreational Fishing Access Site, where a plaque now stands to recall the husband, brother, son, co-worker and friend who was known not only for his deep passion for the sport but for championing every Long Islander's right to access their precious waterfront.

"The irony was that he loved the water and dedicated his life to it. It ended up taking him," said his mother. She explained that Colletti drowned at the mouth of Wading River Creek in an early-evening, solitary fishing expedition. "Now this is a way for us to remember him."

Waterfront access is an issue close to the hearts of many Long Islanders, who have argued the necessity of giving back the shoreline to residents following what some contend has been over-aggressive development.

"The eleven acre East Moriches boat launch site is a parcel of land which is on Oceanview Drive in Mastic Beach," Brookhaven Town Councilman Edward Hennessy said. The \$50,000 project, a collaboration between the DECV and the town, was inspired by the town's community hamlet study last year, which outlined the need for more public waterfront access along the South Shore, he said. "We need to create places where you can go to breathe in the salt air and enjoy the waterfront most people live on Long Island for."

Lorenza Colletti said public access to the Long Island shorelines is something her son wanted for everyone.

She said her son would take his wife, Kate, to the East Moriches site for

picnics or to watch the sun set. He would also take his small fishing boat and launch it into the shallow water, waiting for the fish to bite.

"Marc began fishing there the day we moved to Shirley," Kate Colletti said. "This was the most beautiful bay on Long Island, in my husband's eyes."

They had just gotten married last June. And while other soon-to-be-wedded bachelors chose racier destinations for their bachelor parties, Marc insisted on a deep-sea fishing expedition with his buddies, his mother said. "He loved to fish. All I remember hearing was, 'I'm going fishing, Ma'"

When most teenagers saved their money for their first car, Marc saved his money for a 17-foot boat.

But it was a 16-footer he used to use in Hart's Cove, which is an important feeding ground for many of the marine fish species that inhabit Moriches Bay.



Marc's symbols are fish and boats.

In June, we had the best **J.I.M.'s** Picnic ever! Friday afternoon was the premier of Rosemary Smith's book, **Children of the Dome**. There was a large crowd and it goes without saying that we are all so proud of Rosemary. She will be the speaker for next year's picnic and she will share what this past year has meant to her. Hope you saw her on the CBS Early Show.

We had the first candle-lighting service on Friday night and we all agreed that we wanted to include that in next year's schedule. It was so symbolic of how just one of us reaching out to another with a light, will light up that person's life and they in turn light up someone else's life. Our children are still the light within us and we need to share them with others so their life will be enriched by knowing them.

Becky Greer spoke at the picnic on Saturday and each person that attended the picnic was blessed by her.

I have included a copy of her speech in the newsletter. Her journey from that "dark place" is an amazing testimony to herself and her God. My husband has said it was the best and most sincere speech he has ever heard ... and he has heard a lot!!

On Saturday, all but four families, whose chapters are in the book, were there to sign their individual chapters. What an experience! We plan to have these families back to sign more books this next picnic.

If you have not been to **J.I.M.'s** Picnic before, I encourage you to come June 2, 2001. Deedee Ransdell has described **J.I.M.'s** Picnic perfectly; she said it is like going to a family reunion. A reunion is *a social gathering of persons who have been separated or who have interests in common*. We have been separated in two ways. From our children we have lost in death, and from each other. She is absolutely right...we are a family and it is important for us to stay in touch and to come together and **J.I.M.'s** Picnic, June 2, 2001 will be the perfect time. Hope to see you in June!!

I have become interested in math the last several days ... especially the symbol for **PI**. It is not only the 16th letter of the Greek alphabet, but also the symbol which expresses the ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle. My reasoning ... Pie is round, so I like **Pi**-

Lemon **Pi**

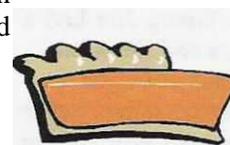
My husband -Honey **Pi**

Derby **Pi**

My great nieces - Cutie **Pi**

My great nephew - Sweetie **Pi**

But my favorite ..



You guessed it ...
**CHOCOLATE
PIE!!!**