As I write this newsletter, I am thinking about Mother's Day and Father's Day and know that tears will be shed. But this year, I hope to "celebrate" May 13th, which is Mother's Day, and one week later to "celebrate" not the 10th anniversary of Young Jim's death, but to celebrate his life and the 18 years that we had with him here on earth. I find it unbelievable that Young Jim has been gone from us almost 10 years. When I reflect on the 10 years that have passed, I realize that I am a new, and I hope, better person in many ways.

The saddest way that I have changed is that I am now a childless mother. But I have changed for the better in that I feel I have become more empathetic with those who are suffering. I have become more aware that I am here on this earth, not for what people can do for me, but for what I can do for others. Losing Young Jim is the worst, but finding myself and having a mission in life is one of the positives. And I must include getting to know you and your children. What treasures we have in heaven!!

On Mother's and Father's Day, I hope you will be able to list some of the "positives" in your life. Share them with me and others.

The following is a wonderful article from Bereavement Magazine:

Trade-offs

Have you ever thought about the fact that each type of loss, as compared against another, carries with it equalizing factors? It would have been easier, you may think, if he or she died some other way at some other age.

We need to explore that thought. Parents, whose children have a terminal illness, must cope with those long months of having hopes and then having them dashed, maybe, many times.

They have to watch their child go downhill on a daily basis for a long time (and any length of time seems a long time when your child is dying).

Even though they may be exhausted, they still somehow must try to keep the remaining family on an even keel. The stress of a long-term illness takes its toll. By necessity, the day's schedule must be built around the needs of a dying child, and what does one do with all that time when the need is no longer there? They are cast adrift with no anchor and have the hard task ahead of them of restructuring their time and life. Difficult times, and yet, those months (even if they never gave up hope) gave them the opportunity to fulfill as many dreams as was possible; gave them time to make sure the relationship was a good one; gave people time to say goodbye and "I love you." Have you ever thought about the equalizers work?

There's your trade-off

On the other hand, parents, whose children die suddenly, whether by an acute sudden illness, accident, murder or suicide, have no advance warning; no time to prepare. There is the sudden and unexpected amputation of a piece of their life without the benefit of anesthesia.

The shock of that puts cotton where the brain used to be. With no warning, the parents have to live forevermore with whatever their relationship with their child was at that time. Good or bad, it is frozen at that place, with no opportunity to indulge in a longed for anything.

They, too, have the void when the child is no longer there to be parented.

Their child may have died alone or with strangers. It is difficult to deal with not having been there and fertile ground for the "what ifs" and "if onlys." There is no time for an "I'm sorry," "I love you," or "good-bye." Their experience differs in that these parents haven't had to go through a long-term illness and death and all the pain and stress that that involves. Another trade-off

Is it harder, you wonder, to lose a small child or one who is so totally dependent upon you and who may be so young that his or her being is still a wonder to you, or is it harder to lose one maybe more independent, but who has been a part of your life for so long you can't remember when he or she wasn't there? Is there really a choice? If the child was young, all or part of the dreams and hoped-for experiences of watching a child grow and mature are gone. You wonder what kind of person would have developed in this child You grieve for what was and for what might have been. If the child was older, maybe even an adult, you had been through more of the growing up process and already knew more about what your older child's potential was. In this case, you grieve for what was and for all that had and could have been.

If we all wrote down on a piece of paper the way, age and circumstances of our loss and pinned each one to a line, like clothes to dry, I suspect we would, after reading them all, gather up our own circumstance and take it back. It is not important whether or not I have had your exact experience in the way and age your child died; it is, however, important that I take the time to comprehend what you have been through so that I can better support and understand your pain. In the year ahead, let’s spend more time understanding and less time comparing, for, you see, even with trade-offs, there is no good age or way for a child to die. There are just different ways and ages; all of them hard.

Mary Cleckley
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Bereaved Parents USA
Each of you are in my prayers this month.
Grief Grafts

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

The following is my first poem to my beloved daughter, Amy. I’m actually pleased that I was finally able to focus my thoughts, energy and emotions long enough to complete a project:

WITHOUT YOU

For a fleeting second, When I first wake up—
I try to pretend you’re still here.
But, just as quickly, The pain crashes in--
My broken heart is filled with despair.

The tears fall silently, As I look at the picture--
Of a daughter, I’m proud to call "mine"--
We only had 17 years together, To enjoy your life--
"Dear God, why couldn’t we have just had more time?"

Your life ended unexpectedly and so tragically—
Along with it, A big part of my "heart and soul;"
My precious Amy, I can’t imagine my life without you--
You’re "Momma’s Buddy," and I love you so.

I want to hear your voice, And see your beautiful smile—
"Dear God in heaven, How could anyone expect a 'mom' to accept, That all of this will be-- "Never again?'"

I’ll treasure each and every moment we had together.
So many lives have been touched by your love.
Being "Amy's Mom," is one of life’s greatest gifts--
For that, I thank God above.

"They say" that I have to "go on," And will enjoy life again--
Someday;
But for now, I live with endless pain—
And just pretend that I’m doing okay.

Trying to be "strong."
Takes all I’ve got.
I pray for strength to find a way; While the memories of my girl,

Live on in my heart--
Our love--Eternal--
Always--
Forever and a day--
Mom’s first poem for Amy
10-26-2000

Amy’s symbols are a heart with wings, mushrooms "shrooms" and Gemini.

Carrie Elizabeth Griffin Boone (7-1-75), daughter of David and Debbie Griffin, died in an automobile accident, 6-7-96. When her life ended, her daughter, Bailey Elizabeth Boone’s life began. Carrie was pregnant when the accident occurred. Debbie shares her pain:

I am fighting hard, and still struggling with my daughter, Carrie’s, death. Her baby, my granddaughter, Bailey, is healthy and wonderfully happy, despite a rough start, but was spared all the pain we endured Her Mommy is an angel and she’ll tell you all about her, with stars in her eyes. We are blessed!

Carrie’s symbols are angels.

Keith and Beverly Owen’s daughter, Hayley (8-26-80), was killed in an automobile accident, 8-28-00. Beverly has experienced the “coincidences” that we have all experienced since the deaths of our children, of how we meet our fellow travelers:

Thank you so much for sending me LAMENTATIONS I am a new "fellow traveler," and here is a little bit of my "Love Story" (I’m not much of a "writer" to all, and I’m finding it very difficult to articulate what I really want to say in cards and letters, but I know you’ll understand).

My only child, Hayley Marie Bridwell, died August 28, 2000--a single car accident. She was twenty years and two days “young” and still living at home. My husband, Keith, and I married when Hayley was just 2 ½ years old, and Keith raised her as his own.

Keith’s daughter, Betsy, lives next door with her family, and we’ve all shared a wonderful love and togetherness within this “blended family.” Hayley is my everlasting joy, my beautiful “sunflower;” (she would choose that for her symbol).

Hayley was born August 26, 1980, in Louisville, KY she attended St. Aloysius grade school and Bullitt Central High in Shepherdsville, KY. She was employed at Humana, Inc. and a student at Jefferson Community College in Louisville at the time of her death.

I am so very proud of her many accomplishments in a life of just twenty years, most of which was simply to touch, with such warmth and graciousness, the lives of so many people she knew and worked with. Hayley loved children the most; meeting so many while working at McDonald’s during high school. Her next job at the YMCA preschool proved to bring many more friendships, both with children and their parents. I am so grateful for the many people who shared her life and continue to keep me a part of theirs sharing their memories in pictures, cards, letters, calls and visits. From the earliest baby-sitters, to the grade school friends, teachers, Brownies and Girl Scouts, to the high school friends, teachers and choir directors, to all the children who adored “Miss Hayley,” to youth groups, churches, and employers—all complimented Hayley for the “beautiful person she was, inside and out.”

It makes us smile through our tears to think how well she balanced youthfulness and maturity. She still enjoyed watching her Shirley Temple and Disney movie collections (while not missing too many recent movies like Scream and Saving Private Ryan). She routinely enjoyed listening to Broadway music like Showboat and Grease and Stephen Foster songs, (while loving the Dixie Chicks, country and pop music). She played her high school choir Christmas tape all year long. The day before her accident (in August), she and I were returning home from church singing Silent Night.

I am so very grateful for a fast growing "outer chain of support"—the "fellow travelers." My first link in this gracious connection was Frank and Sharon Smith, whose beautiful daughter, Frannie, is in the Children of the Dome book. Shortly thereafter, through a completely different connection, I
spoke with Ella and Willie Prater, whose lovely daughter, Merri. Meanwhile, Rosemary herself was calling and writing-- and I received my first copy of her book. Thank you for adding my name to your mailing list-- I have found LAMENTATIONS so helpful. Just as I've come to include Drew, Jeremiah, Frannie and Merri Kathryn as Hayley's newest friends in Heaven, I will also remember and claim Young Jim. With each new honor of meeting

"Heavenly friends for Hayley." I add their picture or symbol to her "curio cabinet collection," and I remember each one in my thoughts and prayers.

As I refer to this "outer chain of support" or my "stranger friends," like ones I'm meeting through The Compassionate Friends support group, please know that each of you, in fact, will be my strongest link of support over time.

I've already come to realize, with my tragedy only 3 months old that at some point, even family and friends may feel the need to "move on." I know that the "fellow travelers" will always be content to walk with me the worn path of sorrow.

Hayley's symbol is a sunflower.

Bobby (12-17-80), son of Floyd and Nadine Com, was killed in an automobile accident, 8-22-98. Nadine tells us about Bobby:

It has taken me a long time to respond since the death of our son. It has been a really difficult time for us. I "like" reading about others in the same situation and how they are dealing with their tragedies. Our son died August 22, 1998, and this will be our third Thanksgiving without him. When will life seem normal or resemble some type of normalcy? We are dreading the holidays. Everything has changed so much.

Bobby was a good young man at 17 ½ years old. It was the first week of his senior year. On August 20, we celebrated his sister's 15th birthday and he had his senior portrait taken. The next night he was gone from our lives. I did not get to see my son that faithful day to hold him, kiss him or tell him "I love you." I know he knew that I did, but I feel so very guilty for not being able to tell him one last time.

There is so much I could say about Bobby. But words cannot really say how we felt about him and what type of person he was, not the complete Bobby. So many people, adults and classmates, respected him. All through school teachers praised him for his intelligence and his behavior.

The number of people that paid their respects showed us how he was thought about. One teacher said that he was the type of boy every mother wanted her daughter to date and marry. One of his classmates told about the time they were in Louisville at a convention to do with technology when the fire alarm went off at the hotel during the banquet. They had to leave the building and it was cold. Bobby took off his jacket and gave it to her to wear. Others told us about what a good example he set for them and how he had witnessed to them. He always carried his Bible in his backpack and car. Dairy Queen, where Bobby worked, was closed the day of his funeral so his friends and coworkers could attend.

Buses and children, adults and cars stopped on the streets and sidewalks as the procession took him to his final resting place. The outpouring of love for him was tremendous. There were so many items the teens and others placed in his casket. One girl gave him her favorite angel, her favorite beanie baby. Another took off her bracelet that matched her ring and gave it to him so they would always be a matched pair.

Even the boys wrote letters, cards and placed personal items in with him. We found out what a difference he had made in this world by people knowing him. We know what he meant to us as a son, brother and best friend.

How do you go on? The road is so long and hard to travel at times. I know Bobby is in heaven because, a few weeks before the accident, he told me he was ready for what God had in store for him. Did he sense the end was near? A freak accident... why couldn't it have been stopped?

My husband and I were married 9 months for him to come home, we took some advice and moved. That has not turned out to be the right thing to do. Now I feel I don't really have a home. We moved Bobby's furniture and personal stuff to the house and put it in a bedroom. But it isn't his house and this house doesn't feel like home. Our daughter was against the move and has not adjusted, but this is her senior year so she figures she will soon be away at college so why get comfortable. I think Bobby's symbols would have been his Bible, his red car he really appreciated and told us so many times that he did, and an eagle. He always wore an eagle ring and an eagle anchor on a gold chain.

The school gave us so many memories to add to what we already had. At senior night for football, he was honored because he always taped the ball games. The school invited us to the banquet and honored him there. They invited us to the graduation which was really difficult, but they gave us a shadowbox with a cap and gown and his honor's tassels. We were given certificates signed by our people who represent our district here when the house meets for their sessions, his diploma, pictures, and so many things. A page was dedicated to him on the Internet at the schools site that was done by one of his fellow young engineers.

(See if you don't see yourself in Nadine's next paragraph)

Is there something terribly wrong with us that we can't seem to go forward at a steady pace without backtracking two or three steps? (This is normal with grief) I got really, angry last year about this same time and have not been able to yet sweep it away. Depression is really a bad enemy of mine. It just drags me down and I am getting tired of trying to pull myself up and go on. I would appreciate some words from one who knows how we feel, does it get better? It has to somewhere and somehow.

Bobby's symbols are an eagle, a Bible, and a red car
Paul Grammatico (4-20-73), son of Paul and Claudia, was killed by a drunk driver 5-16-99. Since Paul’s death, the family has been tirelessly involved with the state of New York and National Organ Donation Association. The following was written about the Paul Grammatico Memorial Fund which benefits St. Mary’s Children and Family Services:

In May 1999, Paul Grammatico was a victim of a drunk driver in a fatal car crash. Paul was a healthy, vibrant, young man who just turned 26, and had already attained many accomplishments in his career as a successful stockbroker, having risen to the vice president level with a major investment firm. Paul was an extremely generous, caring, family-oriented person who was an innocent passenger in a car who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Due to Paul’s extraordinary physical condition, the first emotionally trying decision his family was confronted with was organ donation. When learning that Paul could literally give life to upwards of ten people, Paul’s parents and sister made the courageous decision to donate his organs, certainly the ultimate act of giving. Knowing her son lives on in others and helped so many lives even in death, has led Paul’s mother to becoming an activist and spokesperson on behalf of the New York Organ Donor Network and MA.D.D. However, it has not stopped here. Paul’s family is committed to continue to give, and have dedicated themselves to the creation of a foundation in Paul’s memory.

The following article was written December 10, 1999, by Antoinette Bosco for The Catholic Free Press:

Claudia Grammatico knows that Christmas will be a difficult holiday for her this year. It will be her first one without her son Paul. Yet she’ll be rejoicing in her soul, knowing that because of Paul, nine people who had been fatally ill will be alive to celebrate this and many Christmases to come.

On May 16, Claudia, her husband Paul and their daughter Christine got the terrible news that devastates a family. Paul Jr., 26, and a friend, Michael Penny, 25, had been fatally injured when a drunken driver slammed into their vehicle. Michael died instantly; Paul was brought to the hospital "brain dead."

"You’re in such shock. I didn’t recognize my handsome, blonde, green-eyed son’s face. I recognized his arms and legs,” said Claudia. But almost immediately she had to go beyond her tears and pain to make a decision. Medical professionals were asking her if the family would consider donating Paul’s organs to people in need of transplants.

Momentarily, this request seemed like a violation of her son. But then came a profound realization. "In that moment, you have the chance to give the gift of life,” Claudia told me.

She thought of how Paul would answer. Paul, a stockbroker, was already a philanthropist who gave generously to help needy children and to a favorite charity, the work of the Sisters of Mercy in Brooklyn, NY. This mother knew that her son would want her to say ‘yes.’”

Paul’s heart now beats in the chest of Joe Senatore of Bay Shore, NY. His liver was given to a woman in New York; one of his kidneys was transplanted in a woman from Kansas with three children, the other to a man in Nevada with two children; a lung went to a nurse in Massachusetts; his bone will help heal children with spinal and joint deformities and his skin aided burn victims needing skin grafts.

Nine lives have been saved, and this "brought Paul back to me in a different way," Claudia said. She now calls herself "Donor Mom." Her experience has given her a mission: to educate people about the importance of organ donation.

Claudia says that giving Paul’s organs to others has "made all the difference in how I cope as well as how I go on with my life." This Catholic mother says that she, too, is a "transplant recipient,” with a "new heart and spirit” to be of service to others in “their trauma, sorrow, grief and transformation.”

She now works with the New York Organ Donor Network and has launched a donor support group, the first ever started by a mother.

At Christmas there will be tears in the Grammatico home, but not bitter ones. A family of faith, they can rejoice for having been the instrument through which Paul in death, gave life to others.

An article in Newsday, dated April 11, 2000, and written by David Schrens explains why Claudia became involved in organ donation:

Paul’s death inspired Claudia Grammatico to become what she calls a donor mom. After the fatal crash, Claudia became an activist in the New York Organ Donor Network, speaking at local hospitals about the importance of the program.
Her decision to make the organ donations, in turn, prompted other people to contribute to the fund. Joe Carlomusto, for instance, a Davis Vision executive, pledged on-campus eye exams and eyeglasses to teenagers at the Syosset facility.

Unlike some parents, Claudia Grammatico has not made frequent visits to her son's grave. "In donating Paul's organs to save other people's lives, I don't think of my son being there in a cemetery." When she wishes to be alone with her memories, she goes to Valley Stream State Park, where a tree was planted in Paul's name.

"I know that other people are living because of Paul, so there is life after life," she said. "It doesn't make my days any less painful, but it has give me a cause."

This summer, she will drive to Syosset to visit the cottage bearing her son's name, "I'll tell those boys, 'You know, you too can graduate from school and go on to be a success,' " So she feels her son lives on."Just not the way I would have chosen it."

Claudia writes poetry. The following are several of her poems:

**Sacred Heart**
Your Sacred Heart Paul is not just an Image or a metaphor but a reality! With wondering Sadness I whispered "Yes" and donated a Most Generous Heart. Transforming your earthly self into a symbol of sharing.

I WEEP bucketfuls when I try to comprehend that in a precious moment You slipped out of life.

Listen to your heart and hear it beating. You are a chain now inside the veins of another.

With your last breath, Paul, You saved futures!

My Dear Son
I am so proud of you.

Paul's symbol is a butterfly. Claudia sent me a picture of her van. The licenses plate reads, "DONOR MOM" and there is a bumper sticker which says "A drunk driver killed someone I love."

Butterflies are painted on the van.

Trish Kochersperger's son, Stephen (9-7-81), died in an auto accident, 5-18-99. Trish wrote about what she has learned:

Thank you for sending me the back issues of LAMENTATIONS They have given me comfort along with tears as I read along.

If there is one thing I've learned over the past months, it's that we are definitely not alone in our grief and that there are families with even more tragic circumstances than ours.

I know, without a doubt, that one of the biggest reasons (besides my faith and hope of eternal life with the Lord), I was able to face each day was my daughter Jamie.She was fourteen when her older brother, Stephen, was killed in a car accident after school (May 18, 1999). He was 17.

Of course you know the devastation we are experiencing. He was a great kid. He loved life, was quite humorous and had many friends. His passions were ice and roller hockey (at which he was quite skilled) and his red 2-door Honda Civic. But, above all, he loved hanging out with his friends. He was on his way to the baseball field to meet his friends to watch the girl's softball team play when he had the accident.

Life continues to go on and we go along with it. However, as you well know, the tug at our hearts is always there. The longing to see Stephen and hear his voice and laughter is always here. I look forward to the day when I'll see my precious red-head again.

If I were to pick a symbol for Stephen, it would have to be "00" (double 0). That was his hockey number and many of his hockey pals and their parents called him that.

**# 0 0**

Bob and Ellen Conroy's son Robert (8-17-63), died suddenly from an aneurysm 2-1-98. The family has formed a foundation in his memory. Robert's sister, Valerie, gave this eulogy:

If anyone were to pick one word to describe Robert Anthony Conroy, Jr. it would have to be KIND, for he was the kindest person we knew. If we had to pick another word to describe him, it would have to be HEART, for he had the biggest heart in the world.

Robert was the light of his parents' life, the protector of Kelly Anne, Valerie and Jeanne, best brother to Jim, Jim and Mike, Nora and Sean's godfather, favorite uncle to Conor and William, best friend, lover and companion to Lisa, "Meat" to the Sigma Gamma fraternity and to his friends -- HEAD. He got the nickname "HEAD" at 8 years old when he tripped on a gutter on his parent's roof fell off and landed on his head and they all said "Head;" a name that stuck with him for the rest of his life. Robert had a network of friends. He was like a pebble you threw in the water that would continue to ripple. In the last few days, it was obvious how many people he touched.

Generosity came naturally to him in that he was most comfortable when he was giving to others. The last thing you ever wanted to do was tell Robert that you liked something he was wearing, or anything in his apartment. All you had to do was admire an item he owned and you were leaving his apartment with it. Dad must have given Robert 20 claddagh tie clips and he gave them all away.

We all knew that Robert loved to collect Superbowl MVP plaques. He wanted to collect a plaque for every Superbowl. However, someone would walk into his apartment during one of his countless parties, and say "This plaque is great." Robert would take it off the wall and say "It's yours." He was more than happy to do it. We finally learned not to show too much excitement when Robert said "check out this plaque," so we wouldn't leave with it.

Two of Robert's greatest attributes were trust and loyalty. You could tell Robert anything and he would never feel compelled to repeat it. Robert was always the first one to offer his assistance in any task needed. Whether you asked him to help you move, pull shrubs, or build a deck, he'd be the first one to arrive at your door with enough coffee for everyone. You could always count on him when you needed a friend, an ear or a big shoulder to lean on. Robert would listen intently, never growing bored, never judging or questioning, and had an uncanny sense of how to comfort you.
Robert was extremely close to his father. They were each other's best friend. Dad would go to Robert's apartment just to hang out and drink coffee. But of course, Robert never had any sugar for him. Dad couldn't leave without checking the fluids in Robert's car. Dad and Robert continually competed in a weight contest. Robert would walk in and say "Hey Tubb," which was always his way of challenging Dad to a weight contest.

They would each get on the scale Believe it or not, Robert always weighed more. They just recently bet fifty dollars on who weighed more. Robert lost again. My mother always thought that Robert would let my father win. Certainly not surprising.

Mom always called Robert "The Messiah." At the countless times the family got together, including Arbor Day, Robert always showed up an hour after everyone else. When Robert walked around the side of the house, mom's face would light up and we could now start the party. Among the many other things mom would get Robert for Christmas, she would give him a basket full of staples from toilet paper to Wheaties because she knew her sonny boy would be too busy taking care of everyone else to bother about his own needs. Mom would always make that extra plate, put it in Tupperware and leave it for him so that Robert could enjoy a good meal at the end of his day.

It was with mom that Robert showed his secretive and vulnerable side. Whether it be in a poem he wrote to her on Mother's Day in 1994, the twenty-eight cent bouquet of daisies, the Waterford Crystal paper weight he thought was a Christmas Tree that he gave 10 her, or his toast at mom's 60th birthday party, she was The only one for Robert.

Waterford Crystal paper weight he gave 10 her, or his toast at mom's 60th birthday party, she was The only one for Robert. When he was a paper boy, Robert rarely delivered the papers on time. One time, after lacrosse practice, he didn't start delivering the papers until 8:00 PM As he was sneaking up to every door and throwing the paper, one of his customer's outside light went on.

The man swung open the door and asked Robert why the paper was so late. Quick on his feet, Robert told him that Newsday was trying a new thing. A late-night edition of the paper to see if the customers preferred it. The customer said, "Well, you tell them at Newsday, I don't like it." Robert said "Okay sir, I'll mark you down as a 'No.'"

Robert and our family just adored all of his friends. They wanted to contribute to this eulogy, but could not describe Robert in just one or two funny stories, because there were too many good times. They all agree that the lyrics of Bruce Springsteen's song "Bobby Jean" came as close as possible to what they felt for him. We would like to share a few verses with you. "Now you hung with me when all the others turned away, turned up their noses, we like the same music, we like the same bands, we like the same clothes. We told each other that we were the wildest, the wildest things we'd ever seen, now we wish you would have told us, we wished we could have talked to you, just to say 'good-bye.' Maybe you'll be out there on that road somewhere, in some bus or train traveling along, in some motel room there'll be a radio playing and you'll hear us sing this song. Well, if you do you'll know we're thinking of you and all the miles in between and we're just calling one last time not to change your mind, but just to say we'll miss you baby, good luck, good-bye."

The reason why the family has asked people to give to St. Jude's Cancer Research Hospital in Memphis, TN is because Robert was a great contributor to that charity. After seeing a story about St. Jude's Hospital several years ago, Robert made monthly contributions to this charity.

We'll never forget Robert, we just couldn't. Because, for each and every one of us, there's at least 10 stories and many great lines about him. Moreover, he wouldn't want us to cry for him, he would want us to think of him. So THINK of him when you're drinking a Bud, LOOK for him when you're at a .lets game, he just might be sitting at the end of the bench; HEAR him when you laugh; THINK of him the next time you're watching Arthur, Easy Money or Fast Times at Ridgemont High; FEEL him the next time someone slaps you on the back after a joke is told, and BE him when you do something nice for somebody else.

Thank you Robert. Thank you for all the laughs and the good times. Thank you for being the most wonderful son that God put on this earth. Thank you for being the greatest brother in the whole world. Thank you for being Uncle Bob. Thank you for being the sweetest most considerate boyfriend to Lisa. Thank you for being the most trusted and loyal friend, and Thank you jar the immeasurable joy you brought to everyone you touched. You were

George Bailey, The Richest Man in Town. We love you. Fly with the angels and be our angel in Heaven. We'll say "See ya for now. You are the best of the best. A true enigma. The Candy Man. Thank God for you. Good-bye our sonny boy."

Robert's mother tells of several ways Robert is being remembered:

Our daughter, Valerie, and Robert's friends started a foundation called "The Robert A. Conroy, Jr. Foundation." We have a picnic in the park every year on a date in August that is
the closest to his birthday, which is August 17th. Last August, over 300 friends and family attended. We also have a horse race named after him at Belmont Race Track every year. His friends run a golf outing every summer in his memory. We have established a scholarship at his high school in his name.

With the money raised for the foundation, we adopted 10 families (this year) for Thanksgiving and for Christmas, 5 (this year) families with teenagers.

In an article written by Carolyn James, Robert was described as:

A young man who lived his life with a keen sense of awareness about and a deep, abiding concern for others.

Nothing came easy to him, said his sisters, except his ability to reach out, be kind and be generous.

"I remember the time that he was watching a commercial for St. Jude's Hospital," said his sister Valerie McKenna. "He didn't have a cent to his name, but he called and made a monthly contribution through his credit card. He said those kids really needed it more than he did and that he'd get the money somehow."

Even in death, Robert continued giving. His family donated his organs as a gift of life to those in need.

"He would have wanted that; there was no one like him," said another sister, Kelly Anne Cronin. "He worried about us, and was our big protector and he loved to laugh." .....  

Robert's symbol is a crow.

Trevor (11-29-81) is the son of Howard and Bonnie Lowe; he died from an accident 3-5-00. Bonnie wrote this letter seven months after Trevor's death:

As I sit here, my son Trevor, has been gone for seven months. The pain of his loss grows with each passing day. We had never been apart for more than three weeks total in his eighteen years, three months, and five days of life. We were such a close family that we never wanted to spend time apart.

When my husband Howard and I were first married, we wanted a large family. I couldn't have children because of endometriosis. I had surgeries and took fertility drugs. We watched our brothers and sisters having children and it hurt.

Finally, after thirteen years of marriage, Trevor came along. He was literally dropped into our laps. We had given up on trying to have children and decided that this was the way it was going to be for us, but because of a friend from back home we were able to adopt.

It was the greatest gift we ever had been given. Our lives were now full and complete. He filled our every waking moment with happiness and joy. It was as if God had made him specially just for us. I used to tell him this all the time.

As a small child, Trevor learned things very quickly. He was walking by the time he turned nine months, talking in sentences by one and one half years, and reading before he turned three. We had him tested at Wright State University when he was not quite three and he was shown to be reading at third grade level. His vocabulary was more of an adult's than a child's. I remember one time we were in a store and I had gotten him a candy bar. He was around two at the time and he said, "Um, this is delicious." Some gentleman overheard him say this and said, "I don't believe I ever heard a child that young use that word before." He had a playmate who was about a year and one half older than himself who couldn't read. He knew Trevor could, so he would bring his book over and ask Trevor to tell him what it said. He then would go home to his older brother and tell him what the story was about.

Trevor learned to say the Pledge of Allegiance at two. We were coming home from Florida and we would see all the flags flying. He would ask me what they were and I told him that they were the symbol of our country's freedom. We pledge our allegiance to our country by honoring the flag. I showed him how you put your hand over your heart and repeat the pledge. He learned the pledge on that trip and was asked by adults to repeat it so many times that he became tired of it. I would have to bribe him to get him to say it after that.

When Trevor started first grade, he was well above most students in his writing ability. He wrote a story entitled "The Flying School" and won the Young Author's Award at Main Elementary in Beaver Creek. But making good grades was never what motivated Trevor. He wanted the acceptance of his classmates more than grades. When he was in the sixth grade, he came home with a not so good report card. His dad asked him what happened. He said, "Dad, people like you better if you don't make good grades." He kept that philosophy throughout his school years, regardless of how hard his dad and I tried to get him to do better. It was not that he was incapable of making the grades; he would always score in the 99th percentile on his Iowa's. He really believed that other people wouldn't like him as much if he did.

Trevor found that special group of friends during his eleventh year of school. He had a group of six boys who were similar to him. His dad asked him one day why one of the boys wore his hair a certain way and he said, "Dad, we don't ask those kinds of questions, we accept each other just the way we are. If one of us wants to go do something different than the others, no one questions it." This group of friends gave him the confidence to grow and feel more secure with who he was. Because of this, he was able to go out and do the things he wanted to do without being afraid of being judged by his peers. I say that they gave him the wings to fly.

Trevor played sports and loved basketball. He played from the time he was in Kindergarten. He was in AAU for three years and traveled all over with them. His team won the State Championship and went to Orlando to play for the National Championship.

They placed twelfth although several of the boys didn't make the trip. At the end of his tenth grade year, he decided that he would rather be on the other side as a referee. He refereed first through sixth grades for two years and really loved it. He loved working with young children and teaching them. He also announced the Junior High football games on Saturdays, kept the scoreboard and time for the reserve girl's basketball games and was a line judge and announcer for girl's volleyball.

Sports weren't his only interest. He also was in the musical, "Once Upon A Mattress, " and was in the Electric Car Club. In the musical, he was to play the part of Lord Stephen. With the Electric Car Club, Trevor was designing the new car that the club will use next year. Many times, he would leave
directly from refereeing to work on the car, without stopping for lunch. If you knew anything about Trevor, it was that he loved to eat. If he was willing to give it up, you could bet he really enjoyed working on the car and refereeing the kids. In lieu of flowers, we asked people to contribute to the Electric Car Club. Over $4,000 was contributed.

Not only did Trevor do all these things and go to school, but also when he was at home, he was busy constantly. He loved airplanes more than anything else. He would take ordinary art paper and create scale airplanes without any patterns. He would draw out each piece and then assemble them in incredible detail. Airplanes from the Wright Brother’s biplane and WWI planes all the way to the Stealth Bomber. One of his favorites was the Tri-plane that Baron Van Richter flew during WWI. He made this plane many times on several different scales and even had his senior picture taken holding one of them.

Trevor loved to work with Lego’s. He would create incredible designs out of all the kits. He would then combine all the pieces together and make something new and different. At night, you would hear him digging through all the pieces, looking for just the right one. Most of the time he was making airplanes with all kinds of moving parts, motors, hydraulic landing gear, propellers, etc. He would bring each new design for us to look at and have his dad critique it.

He loved to draw. He was into the animation cartoons from Japan and would draw all the characters from Sailor Moon and Dragonball Z. He drew a picture of himself and his friends as they usually looked. (See below) He drew himself with his oversized coat and headphones. He created a web page called “Dragonball Z Online” and put the pictures he had drawn of the characters on the page.

He loved to listen to the oldies music and usually wore his headphones to and from school. He kept a CD player in the truck that he always drove. His music wasn’t the loud hard rock of many teenagers, but the music from my generation with some of today’s music thrown in. He also liked comical music such as Weird Al Yankovich. His favorite song was a Simon and Garfunkel tune, “Bridge Over Troubled Waters.”

Trevor had a great sense of humor. He always had a smile on his face. He loved to tell jokes and watch comedies. His jokes were often of the pun variety. He could make people laugh with stories of things that really happened. Often they were stories about the kids that he was refereeing in basketball or the parents. I can see him now, they would take three or four steps without dribbling the ball. He said, “Mom, I let them do this three or four times with just a warning before I would call a foul. Then I would walk up slowly and shake my finger, all the while smiling, and say, 'naw, naw you can’t do that.

You must dribble the ball. You can’t carry it. Here, like this,’ and he would proceed to show them how.

When Trevor would come home after school, his dad was usually watching the Stock Market channel on TV. He would come in, take his shoes off at the door between the kitchen and dining room, and come straight on in to see what the market was doing. He would talk to his dad about his day for a few minutes, and then head for the kitchen table to do his homework. He usually had some activity going on after school so he would eat and be gone a lot of the time before I got home.

We have started a memorial scholarship fund at Oakwood High School for a graduating senior who is part of the gifted program, and has a financial need. Also, Trevor had a drawing in the Dayton Peace Accords Student Art Exchange, which was on display at the Dayton Art Institute and then went to Sarajevo. It was then on display in the K-12 Gallery in November, ’00. We have contributed to this in Trevor’s memory. We also purchased a seat at Oakwood High School’s auditorium renovation.

Trevor was our life and to think of living without him is almost more than I can bear. He lit up our lives in such a special way. His smile was infectious, his presence a vital force, and his energy abundant. Please pray for us that God will give us some sense of peace and a purpose to go on with life.

Trevor wrote this poem: **Airplanes**

Flying, soaring, zooming high; Like an eagle in the sky.
Above my head, airplanes soared
While their giant engines roared.
A fighter, bomber, and Concorde.
I watch with envy as I see

Three airplanes in the sky above me
As they flew out of sight,
I thought with very much delight;
“May the airplane zoom and soar
Through the skies, forevermore.”

Trevor’s symbols are an airplane and a white butterfly.

Rex and Rose Dawson’s son, David (10-6-63) was killed in an automobile accident, 8-5-99. The following poem was written by a friend of David’s on the day after David’s death. She baby-sat for him:

**The Dave Dawson I knew**

He loved to hunt most anything... Turkey, deer or any wild game.
Fishing was the next in line,
Bringing back a mess every time.
Boating and camping were up there too.
From the list of things, he loved to do.

But his pride and joy
More than play,
Was talking about Alex
And her number of “A’s.”

You can still see the glisten
In his eye,
And the joyous smile,
His feeling of pride.

A wonderful father
And a great friend,
We are all so sorry it all had to end.

I will never forget you
Not for a minute,
This world’s been much better
To have had you in it!

-Robbie Richie

Dave’s symbol is a red sunset.

James Hardison (3-3-84), son of James and Malissia, died from an aneurysm, as a result of Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, type VI 11-13-96. I am constantly reminded of the far-reaching effects of LAMENTATIONS. Malissia wrote:

We would like to get in touch with Paul and Opal Rice. Our son, like Debbie, had Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, Type VI and we have never known
anyone other than our son who had this
disease. We think that it will really help
us to talk with someone about E.D.S.

It has been 4 years since James’
death and it is still very hard. The fol-
lowing is what we put in the paper in
memory of James:

In Loving Memory of
James Edward Hardison II
3/3/84 - 11/13/96

Son

Four years have come and gone
since you’ve moved on to your heavenly
home. You’re in our hearts and in our
thoughts. So, we’re never really for
apart. We wait for the day for Jesus to
come. Then we will be with you in your
heavenly home.

So, wait at the gate, son. We won’t
be late, and that will be the day we will
all celebrate, when we see your angel
face.

James’ symbols are a football
and an angel.

Pat and Colette Coyne’s daughter,
Colette (10-10-68) died from Melanoma
10-27-98. Colette speaks of our
concern was how we would be without
her. The first time we sat as a family
and spoke of her death, her eldest
brother said she would never leave him
and so it has been. While I can no
longer put my arms about her, I do feel
her spirit, and have to be content with
asking the Lord to hug her for me.

This is Colette’s Story:
Colette was an extraordinary young
woman, the finishing touch who com-
pleted the circle of our Irish-Catholic
family. She had three brothers and a
sister, who was the closest in age to her.

At 22 years old, she had part of a
mole, a birthmark, removed. Four years
later, she noticed the remaining portion
had changed, and brought it to the
attention of her dermatologist. She was
then referred to a plastic surgeon,
whose surgery left a three inch scar,
quite wide and noticeable. Melanoma
was not diagnosed.

In April 1998, four years after the
surgery, Colette complained of soreness
under her arm. On May 4th, a
sonogram revealed four tumors. On
May 8th, she was told she had cancer,
the type that had not been defined until
her appointment May 11th with the
breast surgeon, at which time we had
heard the word MELANOMA.

On May 12th the surgeon at
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Hospital
informed her the tumors were
inoperable. On May 13th, the oncologist
at Sloan told us it was “very bad” and
made arrangements for chemotherapy.
It was unsuccessful.

The horrible Melanoma Monster
had now spread to her liver, lungs,
bones and brain. It was August 10th and
she was told there wasn’t any further
treatment for her. She was terminal.

After her initial shock, she spent a
period of time grieving for her life and
the one she would never have. She then
was determined not to be a cancer
victim, and never for a moment did she
allow herself to be. She faced her death
and spent her remaining time giving
friends and family with her love and
presents she picked especially for them.

She planned her funeral and made
her last wishes clearly known. She
ministered to our family, enabling them
to share her pain along with her love
and laughter. She prepared them for
what was to be.

She died the night of October 27,
1998, at home in the arms of her broth-
er and sister in our presence.

We miss our daughter more than
we can describe and hope, as a
result of her death, and through her
foundations efforts, that others will
talk the simple steps to prevent this
from happening to themselves and
their loved ones.

The mission of the foundation is
dedicated to increasing public
awareness regarding the dangers
and causes of skin cancer and
changing attitudes and behaviors
toward unsafe tanning and sun
exposure. They encourage everyone
to do self body exams and see a
dermatologist regularly-- To be Sun
Smart!

The foundation is achieving their
goals by educating parents and
children in the schools, public
recreational facilities and
community-based organizations.

The foundation raises money by
sponsoring an annual dinner dance
and auction, an annual Miles for
Melanoma Walk/Run school-based
education initiatives and ongoing
community education and
awareness programs.

The foundation has published a
very informative pamphlet which
includes Melanoma statistics, signs
of which you should be aware, in-
creased risk factors, and prevention
tips. If you would like further
information:

Web page is, www.ccmac.org,
Email is CMBCI@aol.com
Telephone 516-352-4227
Fax: 516-248-8037 or write to:
CCMAC
(Colette Coyne Melanoma Aware-
ness Campaign)
P.O. Box 1179
New Hyde Park, NY 11040

Colette’s symbol is a
sunflower and it is
incorporated in the logo for
her foundation.

Bob and Norma Sisemore’s son,
Eric (5-17-83), was killed in an
ATV accident, 9-21-00. Here is
Eric’s story:

Where to begin? I have lost the
baby of my family. I, on the other
hand, have not lost but gained in
the assurance that I have a child in
Heaven. I hurt too much, yet have a
peace within me. Some days I can
accept what has happened to my family and others, I cry, ask "Why?" and try to figure out how I am going to change my situation. You know only so well these feelings.

I had Eric Norman Sisemore on May 17, 1983. At the time of his birth, he had a brother, Jeremy, who was five and a sister, Christi, who was three. Eric and his siblings were friends throughout their entire childhood. We live on a farm and they went to a private school twenty miles away, so it wasn’t easy to have friends over every day so they played with each other. Even after Jeremy went away for college, Eric and his brother kept their relationship strong with Eric going to Jeremy’s for the weekend occasionally. This past summer, Eric began working part-time with Christi’s fiancé. He worked in the family business with his father and I whenever possible. Eric was a wrestler and worked long and hard hours at the school gym. Whatever he was into, he gave it his all; working, playing, hunting, and riding horses, Sea dos” and ATVs. He was the boy that everybody watched. He was a country boy with the smile that lit up the world and the eyes of laughter in everything he did. And that is the last thing his sister, Christi, heard him do LAUGH. She heard his four wheeler coming through the dark, traveling fast, and he and his cousin, Adam (also his best friend) laughing so loud that she even laughed. Then silence. The ATV had slipped and both boys, without helmets, had hit hard. We had rules about the helmets, but that night they were ignored. Adam was released the next day from Vanderbilt hospital and Eric lived for five days. This is where he is, he is in Heaven with Jesus.

I have read every newsletter and I have read Rosemary Smith’s book. I was looking for answers to my pain and for someone to tell me when the hurting will stop. I realize now that I was never going to stop loving Eric and so the pain of his death will never stop. I will never get “over his death,” I will just learn to live with it.

Your timing of the newsletters was perfect. I was dreading the holidays. As I read of some of the ways people coped, I knew we could make it. I needed to know that Thanksgivings and Christmases would not come easy, but that they WOULD come and I WOULD be able to remember Eric in special ways. Thank Gad for my memories!!! Those memories helped decorate the tree, helped with special gifts and made the macaroni taste even better this year (Eric’s favorite)

We are struggling with each new day. We do have some good news. Christi is getting married December 2, 2001, and Jeremy is marrying December 29, 2001. Eric loved both choices and we know he would approve.

Struggling but Surviving, Norma

Eric’s symbols are cowboy boots and a rottweiler.

There was no pain, no suffering, and no agonizing disabilities that would eventually take his life. Just a peaceful sleep. I sometimes say that I have last my son, but he is not lost. I know exactly where he is, he is in Heaven with Jesus. I sometimes say that I have last my son, but he is not lost. I know exactly where he is, he is in Heaven with Jesus.

Cindy shares Robby with us:

Robby was 19 years old and a sophomore at Morehead State University. He and his brother, Ryan, who is 16 months older, were renting a house together and going to school. Robby was studying to become an attorney.

Robby came home from college in December for Christmas break. At that time I noticed a mole on his right shoulder. He had moles removed before, so we were not overly alarmed about this one. The appointment was made on January 3, 2000.

The doctor who removed it assured us that it was probably nothing. It just looked like maybe it had been traumatized. He even got a second opinion from a partner there. They both agreed it was probably nothing, but decided it should come off anyway. So they removed it and sent it to pathology.

Robby was diagnosed with malignant melanoma, January 5, 2000. At that time, I had never heard of melanoma. So I was not as alarmed as I would later become. Melanoma is an aggressive, sometimes fatal skin cancer. It all started with one small mole on his back. He went through several surgeries, and three different chemotherapy regimes. He went through so much, that sometimes we never realized the depth of it all, until his doctors would remind us. He was so brave, and didn’t want any sympathy from anyone. Most people, just to see or meet him, would not have known how sick he was. He never talked about his illness. He wanted to be treated just like he always had been.

Robby thought from the very beginning that God had a plan for his life. Robby thought Gad was using him to show him and his young friends that they should have their lives right with the Lard, because you never know what can happen at any age. This was to be a “wake up call,” so to speak. Robby was not an angel. He was a typical college sophomore. He liked to party and have fun. And even when sick, there were days he felt pretty good, and he would always find something to do.

Through all of this, Robby had a strong faith in Gad. We never realized how strong, until he got sick. He spent his last six weeks in a hospital, surrounded by family and friends who loved him dearly. Each day Robby would have a different person pick a Bible verse to be put on the bulletin board in his room. By the fourth day, he said it was his turn. He had studied and studied verse, wanting to find just the right one. I think he did. Robby picked the 40th Psalm verses 1-3. “I waited patiently for the Lard; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth. Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust the Lord. Through all of this, Robby had a strong faith in Gad. We never realized how strong, until he got sick. He spent his last six weeks in a hospital, surrounded by family and friends who loved him dearly. Each day Robby would have a different person pick a Bible verse to be put on the bulletin board in his room. By the fourth day, he said it was his turn. He had studied and studied verse, wanting to find just the right one. I think he did. Robby picked the 40th Psalm verses 1-3. “I waited patiently for the Lard; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth. Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust the Lord. Through all of this, Robby had a strong faith in Gad. We never realized how strong, until he got sick. He spent his last six weeks in a hospital, surrounded by family and friends who loved him dearly. Each day Robby would have a different person pick a Bible verse to be put on the bulletin board in his room. By the fourth day, he said it was his turn. He had studied and studied verse, wanting to find just the right one. I think he did. Robby picked the 40th Psalm verses 1-3. “I waited patiently for the Lard; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth. Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust the Lord. Through all of this, Robby had a strong faith in Gad. We never realized how strong, until he got sick. He spent his last six weeks in a hospital, surrounded by family and friends who loved him dearly. Each day Robby would have a different person pick a Bible verse to be put on the bulletin board in his room. By the fourth day, he said it was his turn. He had studied and studied verse, wanting to find just the right one. I think he did. Robby picked the 40th Psalm verses 1-3. “I waited patiently for the Lard; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth. Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust the Lord.
God just wants people to think I am dying so they will get their lives right with Him," He believed that with all his heart. Though the doctors were telling us differently, we believed Robby. He said, "Don't worry about what the doctors say, they don't know me, and they don't know what the Lord can do for me; they don't believe in miracles."

Three days before we lost him, he said to me, "Mom, you know the bumper sticker, "God is my co-pilot?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I think it should be changed to say, 'God is my Pilot, I am just along for the ride.'" By this time, he had come to the realization that no matter what we want in our lives, and no matter how much faith we have, and how badly we want it, (because he wanted to live more than anything) that God is ultimately in control.

Until we accept this with all our hearts, we will not find that inner peace. I have to tell you that Robby had a peace that was truly unbelievable. He was never afraid and never complained.

When the doctor told him it would be just another day or two, he said "Mom, don't worry, everyone has to die. I think God has just changed His plans for me, I think He wants me to help everyone from heaven. So that's what I'll do." For a young man, 20 years of age, and everything in this world to live for, that kind of peace had to be heaven-sent. We can think of no other explanation.

We have a bench by the mausoleum where we put him to rest, and one donated to our church in Corbin, KY, with the inscription, "God is my Pilot. I'm just along for the ride." We think Robby would have liked that, and maybe it will inspire others to put their lives in God's hands. Robby showed us that with faith in the good Lord, we can face even the worst of tragedies with grace and peace.

The nurses put his inscription on the big bulletin board out in the hall. They later told me they left it there for over a month. They loved it, and it inspired them. They were all so good to Robby. We will be forever grateful to all of them.

My husband and I still strive for that inner peace today. We've had so many questions; we have literally worn out our Pastor. To try to go on living without your child is not normal or natural. It's a pain that cannot be put into words. But we struggle to find that peace that Robby had found. We know that's what he would have wanted. We also know that will be the only way of surviving this.

Robby taught us more in those 8 ½ months of his illness, than we had learned in a life-time. And when I think about it, Robby did get the ultimate healing. He may not have gotten the miracle he wanted or we wanted, but he received God's miracle. He was healed for eternity, not just this lifetime. We are grateful for the time we had with him. We just miss him so much.

He told me the day before we lost him, that if just one person was saved by seeing what he had gone through, that this would have all been worth it. He humbled me beyond belief. His courage and faith still astound me today when I think about him. He was willing to give his life if that was what God wanted him to do. He died with a grace and a peace that astounded all who saw and loved him.

We would like Robby's symbol to be the Mustang. He had a red '98 Mustang GT, and he had a wild zest for life which reminded us of the wild mustang. He lived every minute to the fullest. He was "in love" with life.

He fought an 8 ½ month battle with cancer. But he never gave up. He taught us all in 8 ½ months more than we had learned in a lifetime.

He was an inspiration to us. We are trying hard to honor him in death as he honored us in lift.

Robby's symbol is a red '98 Mustang car.

Richard (6-6-79), son of Richard and Geraldine Price, was killed in an auto accident, 12-18-98. The following memorials were written by Richard's family on the anniversary of his death:

"My Brother is Dead!"

My brother is dead! So how do I feel? Mostly in shock - how can this be real? So healthy - but suddenly his life was snuffed out.

"What do you mean 'he's dead'? What's all this about?" I see my parents in pain - it's too hard to bear.

All I can say is "I'll be there." But that doesn't help them, they just want him here.

And the knowledge he's not brings so many tears.

I know that my pain just doesn't compare.

To the utter devastation that Mom and Dad share.

But I miss him so badly, I still can't believe.

Who could have thought I would have to learn how to grieve.

People don't realize that it's hard on me too,

That I loved him also - in filet, I still do.

But always they ask "How are your Mom and Dad?"

They seem to disregard that I, too, am sad.

They say things to help, like "He wasn't your child."

But he was my brother - and that pain isn't mild.

A part of our family; his future has gone.

There's no changing that, yet life still goes on.

So I search and I look for answers and reasons.

But it won't change a thing, no matter how many seasons.

The simple fact is that my brother is dead.

A future without him is what we all dread.

So I hope that in time, the darkness will fade.

That through my grief journey, some progress is made.

For myself and my family, our lives will go on.

For my parents, they'll always be minus one son.

But please don't forget me, for I too feel pain.

That our family will never be normal again.

There'll always be sadness, my tears are still fresh.

For I love you and miss you, my brother Rich!

Your brother, Jamie
Written by Dani Elwood
TCF Queensland

In Loving Memory of a Dear Grandson and Nephew

Greatly missed along life's way Always remembered every day.

No longer here our lives to share, But in our hearts he is always there. We hold you close within our hearts, And there you will remain.
To walk with us throughout our lives
Until we meet again.
There will always be an ache in our hearts
That years won't take away.
We'll always miss and love you.
Richard,
Each and every day.

Submitted with love by Uncle Jim and Grandmother, Annie Snook.

In Memory of
Richard Price
Stirling Perham
Dale Howse

The Missing Graduates

Parents’ happy faces all around us,
with a glow from within,
Pomp and Circumstance is playing,
now the program will begin.
The graduates are all lined up, they are coming down the aisle.
Some have serious faces, yet some have a little smile.
We look down the aisle, hoping for your faces to come into sight.
This is your class, it was to be your graduation night.
All of the graduates pass by, none of them are you.
A tug of our heartstrings tells us you are not here, your deaths are true.
God called you home, we wanted you here in such a bad way.
Looking into your classmates’ faces, do they recall you, missing this day?
Memories, sweet memories now fill our minds and hearts.
There will be no golden tassel this day, for our sweethearts,
But the call is oh, so happy... this isn’t the time to be blue.
We should go now, and shake a hand
and get a hug or two.
Submitted by:
The Price, Perham and Howse Families

In Loving Memory of our Nephew and Cousin

Two years have passed since God called you away,
But we still miss you each and every day.
To hear your voice, and see your smile
To sit with you and chat a while
To be together in the same old way,
Would be our greatest wish today.
So please God, take a message
To our precious nephew up above,
Tell him we miss him terribly, and give him all our love.

Love,
Uncle Joe, Aunt Audrey and family

Memories

If we could have a lifetime wish,
A dream that would come true,
We’d pray to God with all our hearts,
For yesterday and you.
A thousand words can’t bring you back
We know, because we’ve tried.
Neither will a thousand tears,
We know because we’ve cried.
You left behind our broken hearts
And happy memories too...
But we never wanted memories,
We only wanted you.

Love,
Uncle Roy, Aunt Marie,
Lori, Mike, Colin and Brett

We never lose the ones we love,
For even though they’re gone,
Within the hearts of those who care,
Their memory lingers on.
Your memory is our keepsake,
With which we’ll never part,
God has you in His keeping;
We have you in our hearts.

Love,
Uncle Max, Annette,
Valerie and Vanessa

Richard’s symbols are
a car, wrench and stereo.

Billy (6-23-81), the only child of Bill and Teal Snapp, died from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning 2-25-96.

In their Christmas letter to family and friends, Teal wrote of their many activities:

Bill and I continue to be active in two support groups for bereaved parents, as well as keeping in touch with other, similar organizations. We’ve been involved in a planning committee trying to revitalize our chapter of The Compassionate Friends, with very satisfying results. Attendance has increased three-fold because of paying attention to the needs of the newly bereaved and increasing involvement of those who’ve been traveling this road for awhile. In addition to two monthly meetings, Bill is helping to plan the World-Wide Children’s Memorial Service at Centennial Olympic Park, and I am helping with the Holiday Candle-Lighting at the TCF chapter. We’re also hosting a December pot-luck dinner for our Conyers support group.

We’ve both been active with the Mentor Program in the middle school for the last five years, but opted out for this school year. Last year, my assignee wound up in Boot Camp before I could even meet him, and Bill’s sort of wandered off and never attended many of the outings.

I was employed for part of the year as a Census Enumerator. I really enjoyed the work and was part of a great team that made Rockdale County the highest return-area in Georgia.

In the Brentwood neighborhood, our homeowners’ association has resumed the management of the community. The company we’d hired didn’t work out and, in fact, it seems to have lost valuable documents belonging to the community. Bill stays active, on a part time basis as issues arise and I am still secretary for the association, publish the Directory each December, and plan the neighborhood-wide garage sale; most years in the spring.

Bill and I are VERY thankful for many things in our lives. Most of all, we are thankful for good friends who gather close to us. There are memories to be shared and there are good times ahead for us and for our friends. For that, we are thankful. The chair at the dinner table is still empty, the soul still aches, but the heart remembers. For that, we are thankful.

Billy’s symbol is a bowling pin.

Burl and Linda Hogge’s son, Kevin (1973), was killed in an accident, 7-29-00. Linda tells us about Kevin:

My oldest son, Kevin, was killed on Saturday, July 29, 2000, in an automobile accident. He lived around Stanford and Hustonville, and worked at Ephrine McDowell Hospital in Danville in the MRI Department. He was married, but didn’t have any children.

I had gone to Danville the Wednesday before to have lunch with him because he was leaving Saturday to help take the youth of his Church (Hustonville Baptist) to camp for the week. I talked to him on the phone Friday night just to say “Bye and I love you.” He was going to leave about 10:00 AM from the church.

He had a few errands to do before he left. It was raining, and he had the
accident before he reached the church. He was alone in the car and didn’t have a van of children with him and I’m thankful for that. What began as an ordinary day became a day that changed our lives forever.

Until I saw the article about Rosemary Smith’s book in the newspaper, I had not talked to any other parents at length that had lost children. Rosemary gave me a phone number of a mother in Ashland that lost her son a month after I lost Kevin. I am thankful that I have two sons here in Morehead; both students at MSU. They are a blessing to us.

Betty Mastley’s son, Chris (9-2-67), died in an automobile accident 12-5-94. Betty tells of her garden in memory of Chris:

I’ve created a garden for our son, Chris, that has flowers blooming at special times in his life, birthday, graduation, grass that sings in the wind like his guitar. I have a plaque with one of his sayings at the entrance and boulders that represent his life on earth and his life in the here-after. This has really been a comfort to me to work on this garden. It helps to do something.

I received a Christmas card from the Billy and Trish Barton that had a nighttime winter wildlife scene on the front. Trish explained the symbolism of the card:

This card reminds me of Michael—wildlife and the star is like a promise that one day we will be together.

Al and Sandy Hickey’s son, Paul (1-1-73), died in an auto accident 11-21-99. The family donated Paul’s organs. The first poem was written by the youngest daughter of Paul’s heart recipient. The second was written by Paul’s liver recipient:

"Hello Angel"
Hello angel, I know you’re up there smiling,
I feel you in the sun, and I feel you in the rain.
It’s not been that long, you know
Since the day your presence left us.
I didn’t know you then, not even your sweet name.

Your life was lived far away from mine
And we knew not of each other.
How strange it is, now you see
Because I feel so very close to you.
You gave me a very precious gift
In a moment when your path crossed mine.
We never met in person, our eyes never met
I didn’t know your favorite food, favorite color, or favorite season.
All I know is of your unselfish spirit
And how that changed my life.
You see, angel, my father lives today
I hear his voice on the other line
I feel his warm, strong hug.
You gave him a gift— the gift of life;
He’s here because of you.
You left us, angel, one sorrowful day
Your family wept and grieved
And somewhere down that hospital hall
My family wept in joy.
Dear angel, your Life was taken
So that another’s may go on.
They say everything happens for a reason
And indeed, this does hold true,
My dad received your precious heart
And he’ll walk us down the aisle one day.
Your Mom and Dad will never see you marry,
But they’ll feel you in the sun,
And they’ll feel you in the rain.
For your presence is all around us.

"He/Me Together"

He died, I lived; now we are a pair
Something about this just doesn’t seem fair.
He’s not a passenger; he’s in my side
Together we fit so nicely, his spirit I carry with pride.
What I lacked, he had; what he had, he gave

We simply traded places standing at the grave.
I became the receiver of his healthy liver.
He became the angel of the Almighty Giver.
Paul died, I live; now we are a pair.
Something about this still doesn’t seem fair.
Most graciously, this precious gift
His family did share.

He: Paul Travis Hickey
Jan. 1, 1973 - Nov. 21, 1999

Me: Frances Cashwell Kennedy
Aug. 11, 1937 - New Birthday Nov. 22, 1999

Paul’s symbol is a white butterfly.

Pat Sharp’s son, Lyle (7-17-63), died from Leukemia 2-29-00. Pat shares her feelings about The Compassionate Friends:

Compassionate Friends have meant so much to me, especially 2 people who are also a part of my church family, Jolene Hutchison and DeeDee Ransdall.

Lyle’s symbol, which I wear every day now, is a dolphin jumping through a heart. His heart was so full of love for his family, and so much courage for his long fight. And the dolphin because of his love for the ocean.

With the help of God, family and friends, I survived this Christmas. Last year I believe Lyle knew he would not see another Christmas. We all got together, ate, laughed, and cried and held each other close as we parted.

He left us to go to his Lord and peace on February 29, 2000. July 9, 2000, my Mom, 18 days short of her 90th year, left us suddenly to go to her Lord and peace and hug my big ole boy for me.

May faith, family and friends help us through the coming days.

Lyle’s symbols are a heart with a dolphin jumping through it.

Jay Crim (5-23-74) is the son of Keith and Becky LaVey and died in his sleep, 1-17-99. Becky tells of what The Compassionate Friends group in Lexington have meant to her:
I was so fortunate to become involved with TCF soon after Jay passed away. I don't know what shape I would be in now, without going. I feel sure I have gotten better "quicker."

It is so healthy to meet with other bereaved parents once a month and talk about your child. And your pain. TCF is one of the few places (and your picnic) that we can. Thank God other bereaved parents still want to know about Jay, and don't cringe or remain silent when I bring up his name and his life. When I am with other bereaved parents, I can relax and feel "normal" (our new normal), and somehow, by sharing our stories with others, it lessens our pain. As you put it so well, Young Jim has pushed you into parents. After I thought about this, I knew Jay had been doing the same thing with me. Every time I've reached out to another bereaved family, I had been feeling like I had been doing something "for Jay." Now, after pondering on your words, I believe he has been pushing me to do those things. What comfort this brings me, which is yet another sign that not only is Jay still alive and well, but he still can push his mom into doing what he wants me to do. Jay is a strong willed child.

I don't have the answers as to "Why?" all of our children have passed away, but I do know this much, God won't let you go through this by yourself I urge all the families who receive Lamentations to join TCF or another support group for bereaved parents. If you don't have one in your area, start one! At the very least, call another bereaved parent quite often and share your child and your pain.

Remember Dinah, at your last picnic, we talked about "adopting" a new parent that has come for the first time. At your request, I talked to and became friends with another parent. She and I have corresponded its past year by phone, letters and cards. I know she has helped me as much as I have helped her.

Thank you for sharing yourself and Young Jim with us. You are a shining example of a bereaved parent who can be better. We have such a struggle to work through our pain, but we do have a choice. We can get better or stay in the valley of the shadow of death and despair. You have chosen life and peace.

You, Rosemary Smith, and my many friends from the Bluegrass Chapter of TCF give me strength to keep on living. WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE.

So please remember that we are not alone, for God cares, and will continue to bring us together if we let Him.

Jay's symbol is a Boxer.

Joseph and Enola Gaye Ryan's son Joey (11-6-74), was accidentally shot by a friend, 8-22-86. Enola Gaye, with special thanks to Beth Ann Ross, wrote the following about God's perfect miracle:

I always wanted to have children perfect and precious, and on November 6, 1974, my family would become complete. My wonderful little girl born November 11, 1972, is now joined by her precious 9-lb. 1 oz. baby brother. It was perfect, my family was complete.

We believed we were blessed with two perfect babies. The first week we were home, I noticed that something was wrong. Joey became listless and seemed to sleep a lot. We had to wake him up to get him to eat. He started spitting up his food which had a green color. His bowel movements didn't seem to be quite right and he wasn't eating well. I felt that something was wrong, but was unsure what it was. We waited that week and returned to the hospital to have him checked. He was just two weeks old and they wanted to admit him for an infection. They said that he possibly ingested some bacteria during birth. Joey was in the hospital for one week when the doctors told us that his blood count was dropping and they couldn't explain why. For no apparent cause, he was slowly dying. Only three weeks old and I was losing my precious baby.

They took Joey to emergency and transferred him by ambulance to the Riley Children's Hospital where we met a large staff of doctors and nurses who were concerned that Joey was so very sick. They started running all kinds of tests to see if they could pin-point the problem and correct it before it took his life... and all I could do was wait.

I kept telling myself that he was going to be all right, that the infection would disappear as quickly as it had appeared. I knew that my prayers were going to be answered. God had given me this perfect child. He couldn't take him away after only three weeks. Our bond was strong and God wouldn't breach it. I think that's why it was so hard for me to accept what the doctor told me two hours after the examination started. They said that Joey had a disease in his colon where the nerve endings had not developed and he couldn't have bowel movements. This disease, called Hirschsprung's, was causing his whole system to shut down from infection. He needed surgery and quickly. Surgery consisted of pulling the bowel to the outside and attaching the colon to the stomach so that it might grow more nerve tissue. Joey would have a colostomy if he were to survive. Overwhelmed with the diagnosis, I was unsure, scared and completely dumb founded. I didn't want him to suffer, but most of all; I didn't want him to die.

The next few years were extremely difficult. By the time Joey was one and a half years old, he had undergone five surgeries to correct the problem. When he was two years old, we were told they could reverse his colostomy; he would be normal. We hesitated. I had stayed with him twenty-four hours a day through every admittance to the hospital. Already in the hospital for one year of his two year life, we had another surgery to go through. With all of this time to think, I reconfirmed my peace with God and decided that he must have great plans for Joey since He had brought us through all of the pain and suffering Joey had to endure. Whenever we were in the hospital, I tried to relieve his pain by reading or playing with him. It's hard to watch your child suffer and not be able to stop the pain. You wish it was you instead of them. I believe that this made Joey and me much closer than most parents could ever be. I could tell when Joey was in pain and he never had to say a word.

My love for him grew tremendously, but much different than for my little girl. It's hard to explain, but I never let him out of my sight. He couldn't go anywhere by himself As he grew and wanted to stay the night with his friends, I couldn't let him and he was all right with that. I didn't know it at the time, but he was teaching me something that I never had learned before... he taught me patience and endurance.

Joey was different than most kids. All I had to do was ask him to do something and he would do it. I never had to spank him. He was so lovable and spent a lot of time with me. By the time he was four, he would try to help with the housework. We would sit and talk,
watch television, or play games. I always thought that he would grow out of wanting to be with me, but he didn’t. There was never a day that went by that he didn’t give me a big hug and kiss and tell me that he loved me. He was so joyful and easy to please. He never complained about anything and was very thankful for anything that he received from anyone at any time in his life, and he always made a point to let you know.

I hope you don’t think that I turned him into a sissy because I didn’t. As he grew, he was all boy. He loved football, baseball, bike riding, wrestling around with other boys, and most of all, fishing. He was a tough kid. I remember one time, another boy hit him in the head with a rock and he didn’t cry, but his sister did. Another time when he and another boy were fighting over a kite string and the other boy pulled the string through Joey’s hand and cut four of his fingers, and he didn’t tell us until they became infected. I told him to tell me when he got hurt so I could take care of it and he said he didn’t want to worry me, but I was always worried about him.

He was sick throughout most of his life. When he was six, we went for his check-up and the doctor told us that he had developed hernias in his colon and they had to be removed. So we went through another surgery, but Joey didn’t complain. It was very unusual to hear him complain about what bothered him. After so many times of being in the hospital, Joey would have bad dreams so I told him to sleep with his Bible and it would stop the bad dreams and let the good ones through. He told all of his friends about this and that it worked for him.

He was a very confident child except for writing. When he tried to write, his hands would shake and his letters were all wiggly and that bothered him. He liked reading, history and school projects. He excelled in other things such as hunting, fishing, animals, nature and Bible study. When he went to Bible camp, he received three trophies for memorizing Bible verses. I took the kids to church and Sunday school all the time. Joey loved it and the people, even at eleven years of age, he would still go up to people he knew, would hug them and tell them that he loved them. This seemed unusual for a boy of his age, but our church family really loved him for it, for that and other remarkable qualities. He would carry on a conversation with an adult like an adult. He loved talking to people about things kids his age wouldn’t normally think of. All through his days with me, I thought he would do remarkable things in the church or with the young people. God was going to use him in a special way.

On Friday, August 22, 1986, I got up to go to work like I had for years, but on that morning, it seemed like I was glued to the kitchen chair. I didn’t go to work and I wondered why I felt this way. When the kids got up, they wanted to know why I wasn’t at work, but they were happy I was home with them. We spent most of the day together and Joey asked if he could go to Dwight’s house to get his fishing pole. He was gone about thirty minutes, so I sent his sister to get him. We were going to my sister’s about 1:00 PM I heard my daughter screaming. I knew it was she because she would get really excited if anything at all happened to Joey. I wondered to myself what had happened to Joey this time. She came running through the back gate and through the sliding glass door. She was white... shaking all over and crying hard. I had to shake her and I yelled “what happened!” She said, “Joey has been shot by Dwight!” We ran back down the alley to the edge of the yard. That is where I found the most horrible nightmare anybody could see. I screamed “NO!” and started shaking all over. My baby was lying on the ground in a pool of blood. His face and body was splattered with blood. I fell to my knees. I told him I loved him, I was there and that Jesus was there with him, not to be afraid.

Then I heard the boys behind me... one was Dwight. I don’t remember getting up, but when I came to my senses, I was shaking Dwight and yelling at him, “You know better... you know not to play with guns... all of you knew better than to play with that gun.” Dwight kept saying “it was broke, it was broke,” as if to say there was no way it could have gone off... but it did. Dwight kept saying he didn’t mean it. I turned back to Joey and knelt down. I couldn’t cry. I felt like I was going to explode. His eyes were half closed, covered by a gray film. I pulled up his shirt and found the hole in his chest. The hole was covered by a ball of flesh that would push in and out as he gasped for air.

The ambulance was there. I helped the EMT cut off his gray T-shirt and green shorts. He gasped twice more for air and they lost his pulse. I rode in the ambulance with him to the hospital. As I watched them work on him, blood was pouring on the floor like a glass of water running over. When we arrived at the hospital, they took him into surgery and left me standing at the door.

When I looked down, there was blood on my knees, and blood covered my hands. I couldn’t stop shaking. I was alone. A nurse asked me to sign some paperwork; like I could do that. I was mad at her for being so rude. She could have waited until my family got there to help me. I wanted to punch her.

I was hurt, sad, and mad at the world. Then I remembered the Bible and how God could take the sting out of death. When the doctor came and told us that he couldn’t save Joey, it really hit home. My husband and I were allowed to see him after surgery. They had cut him across his chest to work on his lungs and heart. I knew I had to touch him all over because I would never be able to again.

When we left the hospital in a state of shock, we ran into Joey’s best friend... yes, the one who shot him. They were just leaving the police station where Dwight had to make a statement as to what happened. We stopped and I talked to Dwight and I told him that I loved him and that Joey had died, but I didn’t blame him.

Going through the funeral and burial with no one to talk to, created a major void in my heart that quickly filled with hate for such a loss. A child’s death devastates your whole being. I think God sends us children as angels to bless us and not burden us. I wanted to talk to my husband and family about Joey, but nobody wanted to talk. I wanted to yell at them and say “Joey was here. He was part of all of our lives.” But it seemed like they wanted to act like he never existed.

Life is so fragile; like the wind, only here for a moment and then we move to a different place and time. After years of hate, my hate for people has gone. I think it’s because I have two grandchildren. Taylor Brooke, a girl now five years old, and Cody Joseph, a boy now three years old. Cody reminds me a lot of Joey because he tells me every time he sees me that he loves me. I thank...
God every day for these precious babies. He gave me two to replace my greatest loss. Inscribed on Joey's head-stone is the simple phrase, "Joey, our precious pretty boy, will always be our eternal light. Just trust in our savior, Jesus Christ, He will give you eternal life."

Joey's symbol is an angel.

Chad (3-4-78), son of Jim and Cheryl Eatherly, died from undetermined causes, 3-5-99. Chad was an exceptional young man which is demonstrated by the following articles written by Blake Fontenay, a writer for The Commercial Appeal:

Charles "Chad" Wilson Eatherly was a young man who dared to be different. Friends and family said the 21-year-old Memphis resident didn't worry about peer pressure while lecturing on the University of Missouri campus about the dangers of alcohol and drugs.

He wasn't afraid to show affection toward family members, even at an age when that wasn't considered cool. And he didn't feel awkward about expressing his appreciation for the simple things in life, like the beauty of a flower or a rain shower.

Eatherly died one day after his 21st birthday and one day before he was to be honored for his uncommon flair for making a difference in people's lives.

Eatherly, a University of Missouri junior, was due to receive one of the University's "Unsung Heroes" awards at a banquet Saturday night.

After Eatherly's death from an undetermined type of heart failure Friday afternoon, his brothers in the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity chapter said Eatherly had a favorite quote that he often repeated: "Build your hopes on things eternal, for they are the things that will never break"

Andy Davis, reporter@digmo.org wrote this article:

"There isn't a whole lot he didn't do," said Brian Johnston, one of his longtime friends. "The term 'Renaissance man' pops into my head. He liked to read. He liked to write. He kept himself very busy."

Johnston said Eatherly was an artistic type who liked all sorts of music and movies. He also enjoyed mountain biking and ran cross-country for Christian Brothers High School. "He was in the best shape, by far, of any of us," Johnston said.

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"If you advance confidently in the direction of your own dreams and have endeavored to live the life that you have imagined, you will meet with a success unexpected in common hour."

Chad lived out his own dreams. He was always ready to stand up for another and his life was beautiful and happy because of this. A story I’ve recently heard about Thoreau makes me think about the type of person Chad was. Thoreau, disgusted with the governmental oppression of Native Americans, refused to pay taxes until the government quit stealing all the Indians’ land. He was then thrown in jail.

His friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, visited him in jail. Unable to understand Thoreau’s reasoning (He had himself offered to pay the taxes and he also knew that Thoreau had the money to pay them), Emerson asked him, “What are you doing in there?” Thoreau replied, “The real question, my friend, is what are you doing out there?” This is the type of person Chad was; always ready to stand up for someone weaker.

We miss seeing him work his magic, miss seeing him in action. But, we can find solace in the fact that Chad now resides in a much more glorious place—a kinder, gentler place where he certainly fits in.

Chad’s symbol is a Fetish bear.

David and Sharon Smith’s daughter Leticia (8-14-81), died in an automobile accident, 4-24-99.

Sharon tells us not only about her precious daughter, Leticia, but about Leticia’s best friend, Jenny Sipes (5-8-81) who died in an automobile accident 9-15-95.

Leticia Michelle Smith was born on August 14, 1981. She was always a very active child!!! There was never a dull moment when she was around!! She was either into something, saying something off the wall, or just keeping us in stitches. In fact, over the years, we would all catch ourselves from time to time saying, “What would we ever do without Leticia?” Sometimes now, when I think back, I wonder if God was trying to prepare us in some small way. Who knows? Leticia was also a VERY caring and loving person. She was forever doing something nice for someone else or looking out for someone that was down and out. We never knew who she might bring home to eat supper, spend the night, or even stay as an “unofficial foster child.”

One day after school, (around 3rd grade), I was going down the hall past her room and saw her stuffing things into a brown paper sack. I stopped and asked what she was doing She said, “Mom, there’s a girl at school whose mom died and she lives with her father. He doesn’t know how to fix her hair or anything, and she wears the same outfit almost every day.” Leticia was taking her clothes, hair ribbons, combs, etc.

And going to fix her hair for her the next day. And so that was how she was until the day she died.

Leticia was killed in a car accident on April 24, 1999. We lived in Brandenburg at the time, which is just 35 miles south of Louisville. We worked and attended church in Louisville and made daily trips to Louisville.

However, we had already started building a new house in Louisville so that we could move as soon as Leticia and her sister, Trelawny both graduated from high school. Trelawny had graduated the year before.

Saturday, April 24, 1999, was to be Leticia’s senior prom. She was so excited!! She had made arrangements for everything! I had gone with her and we had both agreed on the most beautiful yellow prom dress. It just set her bronze-tanned skin off perfectly!! It had a slit in the back and she wanted it to hang just right, so she took it to Mrs. Bright (a lady who did alterations for us). Leticia had worked for days on sketching out the exact colors she wanted her nails and toe nails to be polished. She had bought new white clog shoes with the toes out and wanted her toes to perfectly match her nails and dress. She was going to polish with 3 different shades and have rhinestones on the big toes. A week before prom, she had gone to the hairdresser for a “practice run” on her hair... so all was set in place well in advance. She and her boyfriend, Dennis, had decided not to rent a limo and asked my husband and me to go to dinner with them prior to going to the prom!

So, on that Saturday morning, I had come into Louisville to do some work at my office. Leticia also came into Louisville to have her nails done and then went to Mrs. Brights to pick up her dress (which needed just a couple more touches). After going there, she came by the office bringing lunch for all of us and ate lunch with us. But, she was so careful, only eating one piece offish so her stomach wouldn’t stick out in her dress! After we had lunch, she had to return to the Brights to pick up her dress for the final fitting. It was just right!

She returned to our office so happy she showed me a crocheted cross that she had seen the first time we had gone over to the Bright’s with her dress. It had been laying on the coffee table and Leticia had commented to me how she had remembered my mom having a bookmark just like it. (My mom had passed away in 1989) When she had gone back to the Brights, they had given her the cross and she asked me to please keep it for her. Leticia shared with me, another employee, and her sister, Trelawny, how she and the Brights (Mrs. Bright has two older daughters who live with her) had been discussing the Bible and the end of time. She was very moved! Later, we found out that Leticia had told the Brights all about her best friend, Jenny, who had died in a car accident on September 15, 1995. So they had talked about heaven. They also said that Leticia had gone into the bathroom and had stayed a long time. They felt sure she had spent some time in prayers. What a comfort!

So Leticia was with us at the office, waiting for her hair appointment time. She decided to put on her makeup there at the office so that when she got home, all she would need to do was slip her dress on. I had to head on home so that I could be ready when she arrived and we would be heading to the Galt House for dinner. Excitement was in the air!! Leticia made it to the hair salon and according to the stylist was just radiant and beautiful. She left the salon for home. Approximately half the way home, on Dixie Highway in front of the Thorobred Lounge, a driver who had previously been seen drinking in the bar, pulled out directly in front of her, cutting her off, causing her to swerve, and she slammed into a parked semi in the bars parking lot. She died in the ambulance before arriving at the hospital. As you well know, our lives have forever been changed. We miss her deeply!!

Leticia’s best friend, Jenny Sipes was born on May 8, 1981, and died in 1995. Leticia grieved tremendously for Jenny,
are still best friends... soul mates. We share so many miraculous, comforting signs from God that the girls are together and that He has them in His care. That is the only reason I have been able to endure another day.

On a positive note, we are in the process of adopting a little girl from China. We have considered doing this for many years. In fact, the night prior to Leticia's accident, she had asked me, "Mom, when are we getting our baby?" And so, here we go! I just wish she were here to enjoy this new little one!

What a joy it would have been to see her with this sweet baby. But, I've had confirmations from Leticia or from God, for Leticia, concerning the baby. So, at least we do have that comfort and hope.

At Leticia and Jenny's high school graduation, Leticia and Jenny's families gave each classmate a bookmark with Leticia and Jenny's picture and the following:

Class of '99:
Love God
Love Life
Love One Another
Love Yourself
-Romans 8:28

Wishing each one of you a happy and successful future.

On April 24th in 1999:
God picked a flower
The most beautiful kind.
He went out to the garden and said,
"Hmmm...Let's see, this one named Leticia is just for me.
She was yellow in color and most beautiful in sight.
And, He knew when He picked her,
He picked right.
For this was to please a friend from long ago,
But, this flower was red and her name was Jenny Rose.
Now they are having fun and waiting for the day.
When God picks us to take us on our way
-Sarah Greenwell
Keep us in your heart!!!!

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:

I will also send you a copy of a story that I wrote that is true called the Christmas lights.

I can tell you this as you will know what I mean. 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 nowhere. 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.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate all of the newsletters that you mailed. It makes me really feel part of your group. Thank you. Even though it's been 11 years, I still need you. Thank you for the wonderful job you are doing for others.

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 laying 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...! can really feel him still.

I am glad that I was able to help you.

Someone shared that information with a grief group meeting that I attended one night years ago. It came at the right time as I was getting ready to settle my civil suite I wouldn't have even been able to go back to the medical board now if I had signed a secret agreement. I would have broken it anyway. What are they going to do come after me for the money and ask me to repay it?? I would just go to all the major newspapers!

Donnie's symbols are a rainbow and roses.

Alex and Donna Hutchins' son, Troy (2-7-76) died 4-7-00. Donna writes:

I cannot begin to tell you how much I am enjoying your newsletter. I can only read a little bit at a time. I am also going to grief therapy every week. Sometimes I feel like not going back because I feel like no one can help me; we can sit there and talk all day, but the fact is when I leave there I still have to face the facts— he's never coming home. I have not begun my journal, I have thought about it; but I guess I feel like to see it in words how I feel would be so hard. The first time I went to the grave sight and the temporary marker was there with his name, that was ultimate pain and I know you know what I mean. I have a poem that I want to share with
you and after reading your letters and talking about symbols, I realized that I have picked angels.

I also have read a lot of grief books and one talked about “The Gentle Whispers” the day before Mother’s Day I was going through a drawer looking for a letter from my oldest son and something kept me looking in this drawer and when I got to the very bottom there was a Mother’s Day card and I opened it and it was the card that

Troy had sent me last year, I got my Mother’s Day card after all!!! Troy was in the Air Force in Tampa, FL, and was getting out in six weeks when this happened. He was also enrolled in electronics with honors. He had been chosen Senior Airman Of The Quarter because of his honors in school and all of his hard work and the effort that he put forth in the Air Force. Yes I am bragging and, yes, he was my pride and joy.

I now live in Chattanooga, but Troy was born and raised in Morristown, TN and that is where we buried him. I am trying to sell my house and move back to Morristown. I lived there for 27 years and I want to be there with my friends that knew Troy and watched him grow into the wonderful man that he was.

Yes, he also had fights but he was always my angel and will always be, the last thing that I ask God every night is, “Please God, hug him for me.” Some people say that they do not remember in Heaven and that hurts me so because I do not want him to forget me. I have no regrets, we had a wonderful relationship, he knew how much I loved him and I know that he loved me.

I loved the part where you said, “We either get bigger or bitter,” I am not going to be bitter, I promise. My mother is having some heart problems and I had told my therapist just a few weeks ago that I wonder who will be next and if I would be able to handle another death this year. But I am no longer afraid of death because I know that I will get to be with my love. I think I made a little progress today. I went on an interview at the bank for a teller’s position. I have been an assistant manager for the last six plus hours every week, I want to have more and more time with my family.

Yes, it is time to prioritize. Now to share my poem and thank you for listening. You wrote that you were having some health problems? I hope you are doing better.

God Bless!! A fellow traveler, Donna

My Son

All the things I dreamed you’d be are all the things you are. You once were my little boy, now my Shinning Star....

Troy’s symbol is an angel.

Cheryl Griffiths daughter, Courtney (6-7-00) died 7-26-00.

I would love to tell you about my beautiful little princess. She also has two big brothers, Clinton (8) and Corey (6). She was born on June 7 of this year at 38 weeks with a loud scream and a head full of auburn hair. She weighed 5 lb. 9 oz. and seemed to be healthy as could be. The next day the pediatric nurse thought she heard a heart murmur. That terrified me but she said not to worry because almost 90% of all babies are born with one and it goes away in a day or so. So the doctor then listened and heard nothing. By that time I was almost completely relieved and we went home as scheduled the next day.

She was nursing great and seemed very comfortable. After a week of being home, she started sweating when she nursed and she looked a little blue to me around her eyes and lips. I called her doctor immediately. He asked if she was nursing OK and of course I said yes because she was. I told him she was sweating a little when she did, but other than that she ate great. So, he told me to watch her closely and wait for her appointment the following week (this was Saturday when I called). Later that day her color improved greatly and we stopped worrying as much.

The following Sunday she started crying really hard, like something hurt, I picked her up to console her and she stopped crying and turned totally blue. I grabbed her and gave her CPR which brought her breath back in short ragged breaths. We ran her to the hospital (which thank God is only two minutes away) and there they called Pegasus (aeroplane) to transport her to UVA. When she got there, they did an echo of her heart. We sat and waited in agony for three hours before hearing a peep. Then we saw two stern-looking doctors asking for us. My first impression was “Oh no, this is way bad I just know it.” They introduced themselves as heart cardiologists and that they had done Of echo of Courtney’s heart which found that she had a CHD called Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome and the chance", of her survival were 50 to 50%. I don’t remember much of what they said after that except that she would have to have, a series of three surgeries to make the heart adequate enough to work.

She had her first surgery (the Norwood Procedure) on June 30 and did great. Later that night she developed a bleed. They had to go in and open heart back up. They could barely get the blood to her fast enough. After the her stabilized she started improving a little day by day. 6 days later I got to hold her. Oh what a glorious day that was! 9 days after surgery we got to move out of the PICU and to the regular floor. We stayed there for 13 days before they finally let us go home on the 21st. She had to go home on an apnea monitor, pulse oximeter, and an NG tube. Medications were lasix, methadone, and iron supplement.

When we arrived at home my sisters had put balloons and signs everywhere saying “Welcome home Courtney”. I Dearly love my sisters (I have 3). Anyway, she did fine for 4 days. She started sweating a lot more and was a little more irritable. So I called her cardiologists at midnight and she said that I have to remember that she could be a typical baby sometimes also. That kind of made me feel like I was a paranoid mom. The next morning I noticed she didn’t pee enough. The next morning I noticed she hadn’t peed as much as usual (because I was weighing her diapers). This concerned me because they said if she doesn’t pee enough the fluid could build up around her heart and make her go into congestive heart failure. I also weighed her every day and she had gained 4 oz. since the day before. I also told them that she was breathing a little heavier than usual. So again I called at 8:00 am. She had a cardiologists appointment at 2:15 that same day, so she told me not too worry too much and just bring her in as scheduled. My mother-in-law was taking us to the cardiologists appointment at 2:15 that same day, so we stopped to get gas and Courtney started breathing even harder. I asked her to run back to the house to get Courtney’s oxygen tank. I put it on her and it seemed to not help at all so I asked her to stop by her regular doctors office before we started the...
long trip to her cardiologist. He then proceeded to tell me to take her to the ER to get a better O2 reading on her. I did and there everything looked good, but she was just laboring to breath. They asked me to leave the room for awhile because they wanted to get an IV started. I asked to go back in with her after about 15 minutes and they said OK. I stood there beside her bed with her looking up at me with those gorgeous blue eyes of hers with my index fingers inside of her tiny little hands. She gave me a beautiful little smile, squeezed my fingers tight, pushed out her arms and stopped breathing. I screamed because I knew she was gone right then and there. They rushed me out of the room and started CPR. They proceeded to do so for about an hour to no avail. She died that day in the ER on July 26, 2000, at 2:11 PM. Exactly 7 weeks after she was born. I miss her so much and I know I always will.

Jamie Harring's son, Toby (11-4-82) died in an auto accident 11-25-99. Jamie tells us about Jamie:

My son was killed in a car accident one year ago today. He was 17 and growing into an incredible young man. Needless to say, he is sorely missed. It has also been a time of spiritual growth for me.

Although I am trying to work, I have kept to myself lately, and miss the support of others who know the devastating pain of losing a child.

Toby was a great kid, aren't they all. He was 17 - a junior in high school. He was very intelligent, and played football and basketball. He had just fallen in love, and I was so happy for him, as he was always experiencing teenage angst over one thing or another. In fact, he was driving home alone on Thanksgiving night after visiting with his girlfriend when his car swerved off the road and hit a tree. It was a foggy and drizzly night. How the accident happened is still somewhat of a mystery. We live in a very rural area of Maryland and the roads are narrow and curved. Toby was a pretty straight arrow. He didn't drink or do drugs his main vice was driving too just. He had many good friends, but he didn't really hang out with the fast crowd or the partying football players. I think sometimes he felt left out, but he just wasn't like them. Apparently he was thrown sideways and sustained a bad blow to the head. It was too foggy to take him to the shock trauma by helicopter so they had to transport him in an ambulance. It all happened about 11:30 at night and we were awakened by police trying to determine if we were his parents. He was on a ventilator by the time we saw him. In retrospect, I don't think there was any hope, but the doctors tried everything to get him to hold on to see if there was brain damage was. He died the next day.

Toby had a sixteen year old sister and a 21 year old brother. They are my joys now. I treasure every day with them, as I understand better than I ever have how precious life can be. They are both devastated. My son, Chris, wrote a remarkable eulogy about Toby - he really captured Toby's essence and shared just how important Toby was in his life. Liz is also struggling hard with the loss. Toby and she were born on the same day exactly two years apart. They were very close as they grew up, drifted apart as Toby entered early adolescence, but had become very close the past year. She relied heavily on him for advice on boys and all the new high school experiences.

He relied heavily on her for advice on girls and how to dress. They spent a lot of time supporting each other. Needless to say, she feels lost now and has tried some crazy things, but she sees a good psychiatrist and we hope she will get through this in tact.

I have developed spirituality I never imagined. It is what helps keep me going.

Chris wrote this eulogy and read it at Toby's memorial service:

"Einstein, at one point later in his life, ruminated on the enormous and not fully understood amount of energy contained within the human brain. In his mind, death liberated this energy, released the soul from the depths of the mind into the natural world. Where it goes or what it is capable of was beyond Einstein, and therefore far beyond me. But this concept serves as the basis for my faith in the human spirit and my confidence in Toby Harring's life eternal.

My brother was the greatest human being I have ever had the privilege of knowing. His virtues were numerous, and to list them specifically would require unlimited space. He had unsurpassed physical prowess, able to give 100% to an activity even when he doubted himself or his mission.

He had a capacity for compassion that was unheard of, if hidden behind his outwardly shy demeanor. He was beautifully honest and understanding at the same time. Toby was coming into his own, beginning to understand himself and the world that he inhabited.

But the most relevant was his intelligence. Success in school or the eradication of all comers in the strategy game of their choice, he could apply it to any situation. This is the energy and the spirit that I speak of. One could feel it just by being around him; he radiated potential. It was so powerful in him that to try to put it in words would be to do my brother a great disservice.

And knowing all of these things, it is even tougher for me to speak because I know how very truly he deserved to live. I know what he could have been capable of, the changes he could have made to the world. It is when I start hopelessly speculating like this that I wish I had something charming to say, something that would put everyone at ease. But charm and humor and any related sensation are concepts so far beyond my present comprehension that I wouldn't know where to begin.

What I can say is that my brother was the best friend I ever had, though I fear I never told him this. But I don't think I had to. Sometimes a week would pass without a conversation between us, just because we were so wrapped up in our respective lives. But the minute that we heard each others voices, it was like we were still living across the hall from one another, and we would talk endlessly.

No one will ever relate to me the way he did. We could begin a conversation that was unheard of, if hidden behind the fast crowd or the partying football players. I think sometimes he felt left out, but he just wasn't like them. Apparently he was thrown sideways and sustained a bad blow to the head. It was too foggy to take him to the shock trauma by helicopter so they had to transport him in an ambulance. It all happened about 11:30 at night and we were awakened by police trying to determine if we were his parents. He was on a ventilator by the time we saw him. In retrospect, I don't think there was any hope, but the doctors tried everything to get him to hold on to see if there was brain damage was. He died the next day.

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Kenneth and Carla Smith's daughter, Kassie (11-14-91) died as a result of being struck by an ATV 11-12-99. The family shares poems:

Our baby girl,
The center of our world.
It's hard to believe a year has passed,
Living without you fills our hearts with
Grief and pain, even though we know
Our loss is Heaven's gain.
Not A day goes by,
We don't ask ourselves "why?"
Why you had to go,
I guess we'll never know.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY KASSI
By: Carla Smith

(In the Clay City Times the week of Kassie's Birthday)

God Looked around his garden and
found an empty space.
He looked upon the earth and saw
Kassie's beautiful face.
He put his arms around her and took
her to rest.
God's garden must be beautiful be-
cause He only takes the best.
It broke my heart to lose her but she
didn't go alone.
For my heart went with her the day
God called her home.

By: Leatha Smith

(In the Clay City Times the week of
Kassie's Birthday)

God's Little Angel
The Face of an Angel is all that is here
One tiny beautiful freckle, equals one
terrified tear.
So young and innocent
Not ready to leave, but has to go
She wants to come back,
But God says no
Leaving life is a scary thought,
But I guess it's something that can't
Be fought
A mother, and father, granny, and
sisters.
A meaningful life with so much ahead
Suddenly comes to a tragic end
An angel was what she was meant to be
Now just think of all she can see
Looking over us all
Saying I LOVE YOU in her own special
way.
We cry both night and day,
God's little angel watches from above

As a tear runs down her face,
Not from sadness but from love.
By: Billie Jo Abney

It's been six months today,
Since God called you away.
The pain is still fresh in all of our
hearts,
Wondering if the healing will ever,
start.
I loved you like you were my own,
But your time was short, now you sit
on the throne.
I was there when you were born and
watched you grow,
What you could have accomplish, we'll
never know.
There are so many things I wanted to say
I never took the time, now it's too late.
I always depended on you to do the
things I couldn't do.
Be J.D. 's rock, help him through the
day,
Hold his hand so he won't be afraid
His school is a big place for such
small child,
But I trusted him with you,
So I could work for awhile.
Small things I miss,
Your hug, your kiss,
No more arms around my waist,
No "Aunt Sheila, will you take me
home today?"
J.D. has so many questions,
But I don't have any answers,
I try to find them in nightly prayers.
Kassie was my cousin, Mom,
And my best friend too.
But now she is gone,
What am I to do?
If Kassie is an angel Mom,
Way above the clouds,
What holds her up there and
Keeps her from falling on the ground?
I remember when we used to run a,
play,
She was the coolest, he'd always say.
The most fun we ever had
Was when we argued about our Smiths
Brother Dad's.
Those days are gone,
But our memories are strong
I could go on and on,
About the peoples lives you touched,
The times you spent
That mean so much
For now, your wrapped in Jesus arms,
But you'll be forever in our hearts.
By: Sheila Smith

Kassie's symbols are angels and
butterflies.
Curt's symbols are an open book and an eternity cross.

Bird Wexler’s son, Ben (10-08-93) drowned 08-11-97. Bird shares a poem:

Things have been very hectic around here with me getting sick and mom getting operated on, but Ben has 2 symbols; a feather that is how he lets us know he is still with us, we find them in the strangest places, and a cow.

I SAW AN ANGEL

Still I try to understand
I’m on what feels to be a mountain
I look for him
And all I see is the blue sky
I reach jar his hand all I hold is a small stone
I ask for I 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.

By Rochelle S.

This is part of a poem that Ben’s best friend’s mother wrote shortly after Ben drowned. Without friends like her I don’t think I would have made it.

Ben’s symbols are a feather and a cow.

Christy Caldwell’s daughter, Rebecca (6-29-75), was murdered 9-18-00. Christy shares:

Thank you so much for your wonderful packet and caring concern. You are right! No one seems to understand unless they’re walking in our shoes.

I have dozens of friends and I stay very, very busy, but eventually each night I have to be alone with my thoughts. That is very painful. People seem to think that I should be “over it” after all of it has been “5 ½ months.”

My other 2 children, Rich who will be 23 on March 15 and Catherine who will be 20 on March 11, moved up to Worcester, MA after the funeral because I was afraid that the murder trial would be long and drawn out.

The estranged boyfriend pled guilty and was sentenced to life in prison on February 5.

Rebecca was 25. She was the light of my life. She had an emergency protective order against him for a prior assault. There were 2 warrants for his arrest signed 6 days before he murdered her. Due to backlog of 70,000 warrants, at that time the warrants did not get served or even entered into the computer.

Now I am involved in domestic violence issues and warrant issues.

Also I’m on a campaign against how the media handles “breaking news” because I learned of Rebecca’s murder by watching the Louisville news at noon. They stood in front of her apartment and gave her exact address 224 W Magnolia #10 and that police were inside investigating the murder of an unidentified warrant against her estranged boyfriend.

I am especially worried about my other 2 kids, Rich and Catherine, who are suffering such depression and loss. They do not have the support system they need

Rich and Catherine would like to talk to other siblings:

Richard H. Caldwell, Jr.
Catherine M. Caldwell
1038 Main Street 2 R
Worcester, MA 01603
Phone: 508-757-1021
Richard’s Email: nilskidoo17@hotmail.com
Catherine’s Email:
Cat_caldwell@hotmail.com

Rebecca’s symbol is a hummingbird.

Maureen (7-29-69), Elaine Craven’s daughter, died in an auto accident 11-5-89. Elaine writes about Rosemary’s book:

I just finished reading the chapter in Children of the Dome on your Jim. How sad, and yet how heartwarming!

Your words and the courage you and your husband have shown since your loss of your only son gave me much consolation to face yet another day.

I cannot even imagine your pain! I thought mine and Bill’s was unbearable with the loss of our daughter, Maureen, but I am blessed in that I have three other children and three grandchildren. They cannot and will never take Maureen’s place in my heart, for each child has their own SPECIAL corner in my mind and in my heart.

You were so thoughtful to send the box with Lamentations Newsletters you have compiled over the years. I know they will give me the support I so need as I continue my journey.

I loved the picture of young Jim, your husband and you. Whoever captured Jim and his love of horses on the black and white card did a wonderful drawing, and I know you treasure it. I also liked the Christmas Bag and all the things it symbolized. I have not savored the herbal tea as yet and will save it for a time when I am especially in need of soothing. Thank you for all of the above.

I looked and looked for a picture of my family with Bill and my four children and the only one I found was when my eldest, Tricia, was married on August 11, 1984. The other pictures have just us with a couple of the children in it. That really upset me. I had no idea because I have album on top of album of snapshots. Maureen had so many snapshot albums she compiled that cover so much of her life.

The picture I shared with you was one taken on Maureen’s camera about two and half hours before Maureen’s accident at her Dad’s retirement party (after 33 years with the Memphis Police Department) for a few family members and friends. The police department had a huge retirement party for him as Deputy
which devastated me. The only consolation I could take from his death was that he was with Maureen. He could never accept her death, and I truly believe that contributed to his death at age 67. He had a slight TIA in July 1999, but after an overnight stay in the hospital with many tests, was dismissed. He did take an aspirin a day and Lipitor to lower his cholesterol, but it was under control and monitored by the doctor as early as November. His blood pressure was always very good.

I have lost so many of my family members in the last six years that I feel completely alone at times. My sister, Rosemary, died six years ago this week. She lived in San Jose. My twin brother Edward had an accident resulting in brain injury five years ago after my son Dennis' wedding. He fell asleep at the wheel driving back to Jonesboro, AK. I found my older brother Bob (who was Edward’s guardian after the accident) dead of an apparent heart attack three years ago. He never married and lived alone in Memphis. Then in November of 2000, Edward (I called him Bubba) died alone in Jonesboro of an apparent heart attack. All of these deaths have shown their toll on me.

Fortunately, I am surrounded by many good friends who understand and care. Of course, my two sons Billy and Dennis, their wives Naomi and Hope, and my grandson William, whom I adore, live here in Memphis and are an endless source of consolation to me. My daughter Tricia, her husband Greg and my other two grandchildren, Reilly and Jay, live in Washington State. I just wish they weren't so far away, but they are happy there. Dennis and Hope are expecting another baby in May, whom I'm sure will claim yet another comer in my heart. Life and love go on in spite of loss.

I feel I have somewhat of a connection with you and Rosemary by name association. You have a sister named Elaine and I had a sister named Rosemary. I do have another brother Jack in St. Louis and a sister Patty in Boston. There are only three out of six of us left.

Needless to say, I feel so alone without Bill. We would have been married 42 years on June 21, 1999. I miss him more than I can express at this time.

Like all of our children, Maureen was a "treasure" from the time she came into this world. She loved her friends and family and was always so full of life and so caring. I always thought she was wise beyond her years, and called her "my little Irish biddy" as a baby.

She was very involved with her sorority, Della Gamma, at Memphis State and also participated in many other extra curricular activities. She was going to be President of the Panhellenic in her senior year at MSU.

Between her studies, she found time to hold jobs to help her with her personal expenses, having worked in retail, at a pharmacy, restaurant and a church nursery and baby sat and did volunteer work as a Candy Striper when she was too young to get a job.

Maureen not only distinguished herself in college, but also throughout her eight years at Holy Rosary Catholic School. She was involved with scouts, sports, cheerleading, and on the swim team for the Catholic Club from age 5–13. At the time of her eighth grade graduation, she won awards in subjects she studied, plus she was awarded an anonymous scholarship to Immaculate Conception High School.

At Immaculate Conception she was active both in school and after with many extra curricular activities and held many class officer positions. She was an ambassador to the Hugh O'Brien Youth Foundation and served on the Model United Nations panel at Rhodes College. She was an International Baccalaureate Candidate, a member of Mu Alpha Theta National Honor Society and was listed in the Who's Who among American High School Students. She was first runner-up in the Miss IC contest in her senior year, attesting her popularity with her fellow students, teachers and her academic grades. Maureen's GPA was 3.9. As a result of her scores on her ACT and SAT, she was offered scholarships of Merit at the time of her graduation to Christian Brothers University, Spring Hill College in Alabama and Memphis State University. She also received the Josten's Foundations Leadership Award and the Presidential Academic Fitness Award.

Renee Avery Murray's son, Nathan (3-1-74), died in an automobile accident 9-7-95. Renee tells how she heard about LAMENTATIONS:

I got your name from the Children of the Dome web site. I just finished Mrs. Smith's book today and found the stories very helpful. I lost my only son, Nathan, in a car accident on September 7, 1995. Living with the loss of a child is true agony but I can say this past year I have felt a little better and feel more hopeful that I will be able to carry on with my life and actually want to, which is a big statement for me. Tomorrow he would have been 27 years old so this is an especially hard time of the year. But there are so many special days and or anniversaries of something that bereaved parents have to get through all the time (while trying to keep working and acting "normal"!?! I think the strength that we develop as bereaved parents is amazing and, of course, we would all chose to be mere weaklings once again if we could only have our kids back!

I worked with the Hoosier National Forest a year or so after Nathan's death and had a new trail adopted in his name; something they had never done before, but were generous enough to do. It made such a difference in my healing. We visit
there 3 or 4 times a year if it is in Southern Indiana about 5 hrs from us). When I walk the trail, I like to think of him there. He loved the forest very much and hiked often when he went to school at IU. I guess a forest scene or a treed pathway would be his symbol.

Wren and Volinda Walter's son, John Edward (8-28-56), died in a scuba diving accident 7-5-74. Volinda tells us about John:

Thank you so much for the gift of your Lamentations. They are so inspirational. And to read of the magnitude of others' losses puts your own in perspective. It is also a comfort to know there are other "fellow travelers."

Our youngest son died July 5, 1974, in a scuba diving accident. At that time there were no support groups and it was a rather solitary journey for my husband, Wren and me. We needed to talk about John but, as you know; others were not comfortable with that. We found ourselves trying to make others at ease.

Had I been told that I would survive the loss of one of my children, I would have said that is not possible. We were both so helpless that there was nothing to do but let God take over.

We have survived one step at a time. And now we offer and lend our support to one person or family at a time.

In the late 1900's, Wren and Volinda did a family history, the following is from their "Self-Discovery Journey:"

John Edward Walters is about life and death. He was all about life. When I look back, I think he must have had a sense that his time was limited here. Every day he seemed to want to crowd so much into it, especially the last year. He was always tomorrow, especially that last summer.

John had a wonderful high school senior year. His class work improved dramatically and he developed a maturity that year that was almost unreal. And it seemed that he literally blossomed into his own from Easter until he died in July.

John lived and played football, a game I never understood or liked. But we would make trips to sit and watch something I could not understand.

We learned after John's death, that John's classmates and others had given him the nickname of "Doc." It's odd because "Doc" was one of the nicknames "Paw-Paw" Walters had many years ago when he played football.

John could be a bit of a clown and when he was being so, he had a way of talking through his teeth.

John was a very caring person. He was never hesitant to show affection or that he cared. He loved children and pets and often referred to them as being cute.

We have a picture of John giving me a peck on the cheek as we were preparing to leave him after a visit at his school. What we didn't know was that he was giving Arkie, one of his buddies, the finger on my other cheek. I have treasured that picture.

On April 3, 1974, a tornado swept through Kentucky and Tennessee. Homes were flattened and severely damaged in Frankfort and to a lesser extent in Lebanon, Tennessee. John's headmaster told us that as they were warned of the approaching tornado. John, knowing the headmaster could not leave his post, asked permission to leave his barracks (he was in command there) to check on the headmaster's wife and two young children. John was always somewhat afraid of storms, but in this instance, he ran through falling trees and limbs to shelter the family under an overturned sofa in their home just as the tornado hit.

At his commencement exercise that year, he was recognized for that action and also received the Demolay Award of that year.

Another of my most treasured memories is when we attended Heights' equivalent of a prom. Wren Jr. and Wanda came and the parents were invited to be on the sidelines. I was so proud of both of my boys to see the social graces they had developed.

After graduation and upon arrival home for the summer, John seemed to have a need to crowd so much into each day. He had a summer job with the state in Civil Defense and they, too, seemed to sense his intensity for each day.

John, Wren and Wren Sr. all loved to swim. John and Wren Jr. were also into scuba diving. Wren had been to Florida at least a couple of times to scuba dive. In fact, one was a college course.

I really didn't want John to go on that trip in July; but I finally relented.

And when they left for Florida that Tuesday night, July 2nd, I felt good about the trip. There were six young people, one of whom was in his thirties and very responsible; and they were all so happy. Little did I know what was ahead.

John died on July 5, 1974, in Florida. What is amazing is that on that Friday, I accomplished so much at the office and when I left that day, my desk was cleared.

John's death has been almost unbearable. I didn't get through those following days myself. The Lord literally carried me. I know that I was not functional on my own.

Even today, over twenty-two years later, not a day goes by without my longing for John.

It seems, so often, that after the loss of a child in death, the marriage ends in divorce. I can understand that now.

Each parent has his or her own grief and it is very, very difficult to lend support to the other. Wren and I were fortunate that in the beginning, in our shock, we each withdrew a bit into our own cocoon. And as reality began to surface, it seemed that when one of us was at our lowest, the other was a little stronger. Thus, we were able to lean on each other.

One concern I continue to have is that we were so engrossed in our own grief that we may not have given Wren Jr. as much support as he needed from us. It is comforting to know that Wanda was there for him. We did the best we could at the time.

Oh, how we have loved our children. You don't realize how much they are a part of you until one is gone.

The outpouring of love, concern and care helped to carry us through. The reaching out of Wren's and John's friends as well as our own, was just unbelievable. John's classmates and fellow students came from all over the country.
I have never thought of a symbol for John but it would have been "love." Love of everything living, love of life and all of outdoors. He was one who crowded so much of living in each day of his life. So I don’t have a symbol per se. If I were to have a symbol for John, it would be out-stretched arms to embrace life and the world all about him.

Leo and Shirley Plante’s daughter, Chantel (12-11-80), died from an eating disorder, 9-23-98. Shirley laments:

Thank you so much for the Xmas package and newsletter. I received it today and it was such a nice touch. I really appreciate receiving those newsletters and anniversary date cards.

Because of you I contacted Rosemary Smith and she sent me her book Children of the Dome. It was such a great book. Thank you for emailing me about the early edition show she was on I would never have known about this book otherwise. It gives me some hope.

I now have a memorial website for Chantel. It isn’t finished yet. The music, pictures and links should be up soon. There are also poems written by Chantel about her Anorexia:

http://www.geocities.com/myangelchantel

Please sign my guestbook. This is very exciting for me. I’ve been wanting to do this for a year now and it finally happened It is like giving this to Chantel for Christmas.

The following poems are from Chantel’s website:

**MY BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER**

Once upon a time a beautiful daughter was born unto me,

She brought so much joy and love till her death at age seventeen.

My heart remains so heavy since that day when she died,

I know it’s weighted with more tears that I have yet to cry.

Outwardly, I’m moving along; you say that’s good to see."

But you don’t know about the quiet
times when I’m alone with me.

I think about her passing, how I’ll never be the same

Sorrow is a part of my life, it enters daily as I whisper Chan’s name.

Oh yes, I smile, I laugh, and I go to work each day

As I carry on with my lift in a façade kind of way.

For behind my outward appearance, way down deep inside my soul

Is the pain that’s with me always, for the child I long to hold.

One day passes another, the years till continue on

I’ve had days of joy and laughter, but in my silence it’s her I reflect on.

I’m not the “me” that lance knew, I changed two years ago,

When life showed me the suffering and pain no one should ever know. Yes, once upon a time, a beautiful daughter was born unto me,

And I thought I’d live happily ever after, but I can’t……

For what I want most can never, ever be.

**MY SUNSHINE**

Memories of you blur in my mind And in my life I’m struggling to find

The answers to questions I’m trying to face.

While dreaming of you in that heavenly place.

I know you’re at peace, I know you’re at ease

I just long to hold you or drift away in a breeze.

Together at last for now and always

I know it can’t be, but with you my heart stays.

So until that day we shall meet again

I’ll be thinking of you and loving with out end.

Your soul is eternal, so giving, so free

But oh how I wish you were just here with me.

I pray so that God will uncover my eyes

And bless me to be with you in the skies.

For now I’ll remain on this life’s broken path

Enduring this trial of the bitter aftermath.

Each day turns to months, months into years

The world keeps on turning and won’t stop for my tears.

Oh cherished angel in heaven above

Don’t cry for me as I feel your sweet love.

For all that you’ve given, will not go to waste.

I’ve learned much from your parting
tears we must face.

Yes, I am your mother, though not by your side

We are together like the moon to the sun

And you are my sunshine,

Sweet, Sweet Chan,

Never leaving my heart, never, ever can.

Love you forever,

Mom

Chantel’s symbols are butterflies and Winnie the Pooh.

Bobby and Linda Clark’s son, 10 (7-2-82), died in an auto accident 9-23-00. Linda shares her feelings:

Today is my birthday and I was awakened at 4AM with a sense of peace that I have not felt since Jon’s death (September 23, 2000) I realized that I am thankful for my life and the beautiful, child that defined who I was, even if only for eighteen years. Perhaps this is my birthday gift from Jon… this sense of peace, I ask no questions, just grateful for the good days!

I am thankful that I talked with you early in my grief journey and for my friend Joe who helped us find each other, October 18, 2000, you called and I felt I had finally talked with someone who understood my pain. Through you, Rosemary, Claudia, Kay and other fellow travelers have blessed me. I feel I know the parents in your newsletters. I began to read old copies of Lamentations that you had sent to me this morning and I am overwhelmed by the stories of our precious children who are no longer with us. These parents comfort me in ways that no one else has been able to do.

I was looking at my garden yesterday. I have not touched it since Jon died and it is a real mess of weeds, dead vines and limbs. I have a stone in my garden that read, “One is closer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth” and I have always felt such peace working in my garden. I am feeling the need to place my hands in the dirt and plant flowers when I thought of you and how like a gardener you have been to all of us.

You have planted seeds of hope in all of us who have suffered the greatest loss of all - the deaths of our children. You patiently and lovingly tend to our needs like a gardener who nurtures his plants – knowing at times we look and feel barren and lifeless yet you pray for
our return to life. You are willing to shovel our grief,” carry our burdens in your wheelbarrow of love-sprinkling nourishment and encouragement in the most compassionate way I have ever observed. You realize that without feeding our souls, our spirits will wither and sag yet your words of love allow us to stand tall and smile at the sunshine and to also endure the rainy storms that now are a part of what we know as our life. You demonstrate that when we reach out to help others, it is we who are helped.

I would be honored for you to share my Christmas letter and my phone number and address. I would love to know other fellow travelers in a more personal way.

I have just emerged from my dark days of depression and my counselor asked me, “What helped you come out of the darkness?” It was easy to answer. I had felt Jon saying to me, “Get up MOM, you have slept enough. It is time to get on with your life. You NEED to talk about me, so remember me and make my life count.” I promised him I would. I am feeling a surge of energy I have not felt in some time. I realize tomorrow that I may be lifeless, yet I now accept what bright moments I am given as precious gifts.

I realize there is a purpose for my life and that is to talk about Jon - to keep his memory alive - and to do whatever I can to ease the burdens of other fellow travelers.

Just like the gardener who brings life to his dying plants, you have helped nurture me back to life and I thank you.

Jon’s symbols are a monarch butterfly and the peace symbol.

Bill and Gwen Kallie’s son, Jim (5-8-74), was murdered 4-6-99. Gwen encourages us all to be good citizens:

What a pleasant surprise to find a card from you in my mailbox. Bill and I both hope that reading our story will bring a degree of comfort to other fellow travelers.

Please encourage others that read the newsletter to help us by calling in on the secret witness hot lines if they ever learn of anyone talking about or having any information that will help us bring Jim’s murderer(s) to justice.

May I present my beloved and youngest son, Jim, to you. So many memories flood my mind in regard to James. I will start with the basics.

James Herbert Kallies was born on Mother’s Day weekend 1974. He was my Mothers Day gift. Jamie won the cutest baby in the nursery award at one day old and the nursing staff at St. Vincent’s Hospital in Green Bay, Wisconsin placed a little pink ribbon bow on the outside of his receiving blanket in the middle of his butt so the world could see his award.

Two weeks before Jim’s birth, we had our brand new home burned to the ground due to an electrical fire that started in the attic in a humidifying fan. I was the only adult at home that day and discovered that something was not right when my three-year-old son, John came screaming through the house to me with fire in his hair. I grabbed him up and ran to the bathroom, threw a bath towel over his head to put out the fire. Thank God I was able to get the fire out before it burned his scalp. I grabbed John by the arm and dragged him to the telephone and called the fire department and then tried to call the company my husband worked for to have them send him home. I said to him: “The house is on fire!” They thought I had gone to the hospital so they told my husband, “Gwen said to tell you the house is on fire.” Bill started calling the hospital instead of coming home right away. A neighbor and fireman was passing by and came to the front door to tell me that my roof was on fire. That was the first that I was aware of the location of the fire and smoke... If it hadn't been for that man insisting that I not continue to look for the fire to put it out, John and I probably wouldn't have gotten out of the house in time to save ourselves.

When we told them that we had been running into his little body that I didn't run for permission for the hospital to do a spinal tap on Jim, to find out what we were dealing with. Spinal meningitis was ruled out. James was admitted to the hospital and intensive intravenous therapy was begun. I was so angry, sad and stressed out at seeing my baby with all the tubes running into his little body that I didn’t know what to do. So I called the pastor of our church, Ron Voss, and asked him to please have everyone pray for our precious baby boy... God granted us our wish and restored our James to relative good health, even though he had to live with some large and awful-looking scars on his stomach and back.

Our James grew up to be big and strong, 6’3” tall and weight of 204 lbs. He was an intelligent, loving, kind, gifted and giving person, who loved animals and people. He never met a
stranger that he didn't consider to be a friend that he hadn't met yet! This trait always worried me because Jim would give the shirt off his own back to anyone that seemed to need it. Whenever I tried to caution him about this, he would simply say, "Oh Mom, don't worry, everything is going to be OK!"

James Herbert Kallies was named for my father, Herbert Leland Hill. Jim, at the time of his death, had completed 13 years of formal education, 1 year of college and three years of trade school as an honor student and plumbing pipefitting and welding apprentice in Local 525 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Jim worked on some of the major hotels and casinos on the Las Vegas Strip; the last one being the new Venetian hotel and Casino. A picture of his name badge has been enclosed. I really cherish this photo of him because I made the welder's cap that he had on his head and had just given him his own leather welder's jacket. (An honor to a welding apprentice) Jim aspired to someday be a master plumber, Pipe fitter and Building trades welder just like his oldest brother, William, and his Pappa, Willis.

Jim worked very hard at whatever he was doing and made money in the process. When he wasn't at work, he was fixing up custom cars for others, polishing up his own midnight blue Trans-am car, motor cycling with his friends in the Road Rider's Motor Cycle club or playing pool with his team, the Las Vegas Sharks.

On April 6, 1999, (Jim's great grandmother, Anna Hills birthday), in the early morning hours, in a quiet residential street on the east side of Las Vegas, Nevada, our son James H was shot with a 380 pistol, twice in the head and three times in his body. A man and a woman were seen running away from the scene by witnesses that lived in the homes nearby. No one has been charged with murdering our son. So we can't have closure or comfort in knowing that the killers won't kill any one else's loved ones. Witnesses are afraid to come forward and tell what they know. Even with a reward being offered, no one will help us get the killers off the streets. So some more lives are bound to be shattered before this nightmare ends. We, as a family, are asking all that hear our voices to keep praying for the capture and conviction of our son, Jim's murderers. May they not experience another day of peace until they confess to what they have done and why they did it.

Within minutes of hearing gun shots, 3 people called 911 to summons help for Jim. To those folks, we are deeply grateful. A police officer said he was on the sight within a minute, but there was nothing that could be done to save Jims life. For five hours, our son's body laid in the street along-side his blue-black pick-up truck. This was a homicide; nothing could be removed or touched. I felt like my heart was being wrenched right out of my body and these guardians of the law were doing a stomping dance on it. At that time, all I wanted was to gather my son up in my arms and carry him home where it was safe and never let him go. No one would allow me to even touch my own son. I felt like I was going to die right there. We learned, two days later, that our beloved son had been robbed of his wallet, cash and credit cards as well as his lap top computer that he used for his schoolwork.

Jim Kallies' symbol is the many faceted, round diamond. Close friends and his family knew him as "Diamond Jim." In his short life, he developed many dimensions, was like a precisely cut and polished diamond that could light up a room with his very presence. I should have guessed that he was only on loan from heaven for a short time. I should be grateful for the 24 and 3/4 years that God let me keep and enjoy him. As I approach the second anniversary of Diamond Jim's passing, I don't feel very thankful. I wanted much more time with my precious son, just like, I'm sure, you wanted with your Jim...

Bob and Betsy Friends' son, Drew Lawrence (5-25-84), died in an auto accident 10-9-99. Betsy writes:

Thank you so much for your sweet card and the Lamentations package. I enjoyed getting to meet you at the Memphis Compassionate Friends and hear the story of your son. I ordered Children of the Dome the next day from Amazon.com. Every story touched my heart. I am inspired by the messages of hope throughout the book. I'm sure it was therapeutic for you to write your story, and I hope you realize how helpful it is to the many readers who struggle daily though our grief journeys.

I would love to share the story of my Drew with you. Thank you for asking.

Drew was born May 25, 1984, and welcomed to our family by his brother Clark who was 3 at the time. I was hoping for a girl this time, but was thrilled with my new son. The first thing he did as he entered this world was to tee-tee on my stomach. He was a cone-head and it seemed that everyone who came to see him brought him a hat. Within a few weeks, his little head had straightened up and he was a beautiful baby.

Clark was like having a little adult around the house. He had always been such a calm and mature little fellow.

Like Rosemary said about Jeremiah, he was born with an old soul. Therefore, little were we prepared for the spunkly spirit of his little brother Drew. He was a handful.

Drew was a bright-eyed, boisterous, curious, hot tempered and friendly toddler. My family owns a business and I worked part-time when the boys were little. At the little nursery school/day care that they attended, the teachers often commented on how quiet Drew was! I was flabbergasted. I guess if he was going to be a little angel at times, I'm glad he did it at school.

When Clark was 8 and Drew was 4, their dad, Ron, and I divorced. It was devastating for me and Clark took it really hard. However, Drew faced it with a resiliency that was amazing. He was a Mama's boy and as long as I was around, he was O.K. He carried this resiliency throughout many obstacles in his life. Ron and I were able to part as friends, and within a few years of the divorce, he moved a few blocks away, and the boys were able to move freely between the two households, and had a room and clothes at both houses. For children of divorce, they adjusted beautifully. In fact, Clark commented after Drew's death that because of the divorce, the bond between the two of them was stronger. Before their dad settled in Collierville, he lived in apartments.

When the boys would go to spend the weekend with him, Clark says that they only had each other to play with. They played so well together. My parents often took the boys to their lake house for the weekend. They would fish, and swim, and picnic. My mother has often commented at how well the boys could amuse themselves sitting in the boat on dry ground and pretending, or by rolling play cars and trucks through the woods. Today,
staying awake in class. I kind of dis-
grade year, that he was having trouble 
complained a lot during his seventh 
school, he wanted me to back off and let 
did it all the time. 
he wanted that so badly, as his brother 
the fifth grade, he finally had a report 
was diagnosed with an auditory 
the sleeping sickness where you have 
Drew agreed. He came 
she felt that another year of maturity 
learned methods, and organize himself. 
I am so thankful 
I'm lost. It was about this time that he 
would help him. Drew agreed. He came 
home one day and said, Mama, I think I 
I need to go back through the first grade. 
I'm lost. It was about this time that he 
was diagnosed with an auditory 
proceeding problem. 
Unfortunately, there was no pill or 
cure. He just had to learn to adapt his 
learning methods, and organize himself. 
I spent nearly every night reviewing and 
studying with Drew. I am so thankful 
now for his learning problem as It 
allowed me this special time with him. 
This continued throughout his 
elementary years. By the time he was in 
the fifth grade, he finally had a report 
card with straight A's. God bless him, 
he wanted that so badly, as his brother 
did it all the time. 
By the time he got to the middle 
school, he wanted me to back off and let 
him go it alone. He did a good job, 
though it was hard for me to let go. He 
complained a lot during his seventh 
grade year, that he was having trouble 
staying awake in class. I kind of dis-
missed this as a teenage thing. But, he 
continued to complain that he was 
sleepy all day. My dad has narcolepsy 
(the sleeping sickness where you have 
progressive daytime sleepiness). So I 
decided to have Drew tested. He went 
through a sleep study at 14 years old. 
He failed it miserably. The doctor 
said that Drew probably never felt the 
alertness that normal people did. So he 
started Ritalin to help his narcolepsy. I 
remember feeling so badly for Drew. It 
is enough to have to battle a learning 
problem, but to compound It with nar-
colepsy, was too much. I felt so proud of 
him for his positive attitude and 
wondered how his grades were as good 
as they were. This resilience that he 
displayed as a small boy was back into 
play. The last semester report card 
Drew would ever have was all A's and 
B's - he made the honor roll!! 

Drew played many sports, starting 
with soccer when he was 4. He also 
played basketball, baseball, football, 
and taekwondo. His great love was 
baseball, and he played at a competitive 
level since the age of 7. He was a 
talented pitcher. His 13 year old season, 
he was the team's MVP, leading the 
team in pitching, fielding, and batting. 
Clark also played baseball and had just 
completed his 4 years of varsity 
baseball for the high school when Drew 
was an entering freshman. The summer 
before his freshman year, Drew got to 
play with the Junior Varsity team. This 
is something that rarely happens. Most 
boys don't play until they are already in 
high school. I thank God that Drew got 
that opportunity. 

Drew was so happy to be starting 
high school. He only got to attend for 
seven weeks. My phone call came on 
Saturday, October 2, 1999. I was at Ole 
Miss that day. I had moved Clark down 
there seven weeks before for his 
freshman year. I was down there with a 
friend, helping our sorority with rush. 
After the helicopter got there, they 
helped get there was about 30 minutes. 
After the helicopter got there, they 
worked on Drew for about 30-40 
minutes before they flew him to The Med. 
I had lost consciousness, but on the flight, he woke up and began to 
talk to them. 

Drew arrived at the hospital at 
nighttime, but it was about 5 AM 
before we could see him. We felt pretty 
good about the prognosis. Drew was 
on a ventilator and sedated when we 
first saw him. He had some scrapes on 
his forehead and a big cut in the back 
of his head that they hadn't sutured 
yet. He had 2nd to 3rd degree 
chemical burns all over his chest 
and belly and upper arms from the 
gasoline, but they had a bum vest on 
them. His body temperature was 86 
degrees and he had a warming 
blanket. 

He was swollen due to all the 
fluids they were pumping in him. 
There were many people there with us 
that night, and after we saw him 
and got the hopeful news, most of them 
left. Josh, the driver and his family 
were devastated. He was treated and 
released as were the other boys. They 
all had minor scrapes and a few of 
them had concussions. Bob, Clark, 
and I along with Drew's dad Ron and
his wife Regina settled in the ICU waiting room at The Med. The Med is a Level 1 Trauma Center, and we knew Drew was getting the best care possible.

Around noon Sunday, we were called to a conference with the attending doctors. She told us that Drew's liver was failing, and they wanted to do exploratory surgery to see if the tests and X-rays had missed anything. I believe she gave him a 50-50 chance of surviving this surgery. They did the surgery, but couldn't see any reason for his problems. They then began to believe that some toxin from the gasoline or gasoline additives was attacking Drew's system. They said that this is not supposed to happen. They have never seen anyone react to gasoline this way.

By Sunday night, we had a good visit with Drew. He was giving us the A flying Hawaiian sign (Shaka) and squeezing everyone's hand.

On Monday, he was sitting up trying to communicate with us through writing and lip reading. At our afternoon visit, Drew had extubated himself and removed his nasal tube. We had a hard time getting him to wake up and talk to us, but we were so excited to see him without the ventilator. He finally opened his eyes, and his dad asked him how he was. In a gruff voice he said, "Oh, I'm all right." That's all we ever got to hear him say, as they had to reintubate him after that visit.

I had one of the most touching moments of my life that day. Drew often laid down by me at night before he went to bed. He had trouble falling asleep and would get me to rub his face to make him sleepy. In the hospital that day, he took my hand and put it to his cheek and began a rubbing motion.

He wanted his Mama to help him rest. Drew had the most wonderful nurse, Patti Pike. She fell in love with Drew, and he with her. His primary doctor was a 4-year resident named Ron Smith. He also bonded with Drew. He slept at Drew's bedside. He would later tell me that of all the hundreds of patients he tended, Drew touched his heart in a way that he cannot explain.

He and Patti came to Drew's funeral, although they are not encouraged to do this by the hospital. Patti later said that she was planning to leave the trauma unit, but her experience with Drew convinced her to stay. Even at the worst moments of his life, Drew touched hearts.

By Monday night, Dr. Smith came to us and said that Drew had crashed. His kidneys had failed, and they needed to get dialysis started, but he might not live long enough to get it started. He was on a minute-by-minute status. The hospital was full of friends and family and they all packed into the chapel. Ron, Clark, Bob, Regina, and I stayed by the phone in the waiting room while they worked on Drew. Dr. Smith told us that Drew needed a miracle to make it through the crisis, but he believed that Drew was a miracle boy. He did make it, and by the next day he was trying to communicate with us again. This was also the day that we were told that tests showed his liver to be 90% dead, and he needed a liver transplant to live. I might mention here that Drew decided at 10 years old to become an organ donor. He even made me sign my donor card. How ironic that he now needed a transplant in order to live. His bone marrow had also failed, and he was struggling with his lungs. We had meetings with the transplant doctor who told us that Drew would be listed as #1 on the list for a liver, but he must first get the approval of every doctor. This meant tests by neurologists, cardiologists, etc.

Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday were spent testing and evaluating. Patti worked so hard to get Drew ready. She concentrated on every little number on every machine. He was sedated most of the time these days. He continued to have many, many visitors, and the doctors allowed all of them to see Drew. We only could see him for 30 minutes, 4 times a day, so we had to coordinate everyone in and out of there after a few minutes at a time. The nurses would allow family to visit late in the night when things were quiet. One morning around 3 AM I went for a visit and just held his hand.

It was decided on Friday, Oct. 8th that the transplant was a go. Every doctor had given their O.K. However, the burn doctors decided that it would be best to remove the burned skin on Drew's torso so that they wouldn't have to risk infection during his recovery of liver the transplant when his immune system would be down. I didn't feel good about this because his clotting factors were so poor due to his liver failure, but they wouldn't proceed with the transplant without it. They did the surgery in about 30 minutes, when it should have taken 2 hours. He lost massive amounts of blood. Finally, before we settled in for the night, they had gotten the bleeding under control and he was stable. We wanted to get some sleep, because we hoped he would be getting his new liver Saturday. The five of us were sharing a hotel room that adjoined the hospital, so we could be at his bedside in minutes. We were called by Dr. Smith at about 1:30 AM to tell us that they were having problems keeping his oxygen levels up and controlling the fluid in his lungs. He said that we couldn't come because they were constantly working on him.

We tried to sleep, but got a call at 3:30 AM that we should come. We ran over there and Dr. Smith met us in the hall to tell us that they had done all they could, but it was time to say goodbye. Actually, he couldn't seem to find the words to tell us that, but when I finally realized what he was saying and asked him if it was over, he nodded his head yes. The machines were keeping him alive, but his little body had done all it could. At around 5:30, we called family and Drew's closest friends to come tell him goodbye.

Somehow, I found the strength and courage to help my precious son die.

I wanted to scream and beg for him not to die, but instead I told him it was okay to let go. I laid him of the people he would see and that he would be with Jesus. I told him to follow the light. I am more proud of being able to do this than anything else I've ever done. At 7:50 AM, Saturday October 9, 1999, Drew left this world, and my world was forever changed. I am grateful for the week we had with him and the chance to tell him over and over how much he was loved and how proud he made me.

I am sometimes haunted by the experiences of that week and sometimes comforted as I was able to see through the hundreds of visitors how many lives Drew touched. They were unable to use any of Drews organs, as they were in various stages of failure, but he was able to be a tissue donor.

We knew how much he believed in this. In one short week, we went from a family who desperately needed an organ to a donor family.

Drew's funeral services were attended by about 1000 people. We were unable to open the casket as he didn't look anything like himself Drew was 5'9" tall and weighed 145 lb. When he died he weighed 238 lbs. due to many factors.
to the massive amount of fluids. His body had been through so much, they were unable to dress him or even embalm his body. He told me when he was a little boy that he wanted to be buried in Collierville, not Memphis. He had lived in Collierville since he was a year old.

We were able to get a plot in a beautiful old cemetery, Magnolia Cemetery, in the heart of Collierville. Bob and I bought two plots next to Drew, and Ron and Regina bought 3 plots at his head. My Mom and Dad bought plots there as well.

I received so many cards, letters, and visits from Drew’s classmates telling us how he was such a friend to everyone. He was the one to make new students feel welcome. His teachers talked so kindly of Drew and his positive attitude. He battled a learning problem and narcolepsy, but he never gave up. He was working so hard on baseball at the time of his death. He had turned his thin body into a beautiful muscular machine. He had just finished driver’s ed and had gotten his permit two days before the accident.

He was so proud of that. He got to drive for 2 days with me. We found out the day after the funeral, that Drew was voted Class Favorite in the freshman class, and this is in a high school of 2000 students. The vote was a few days before the accident, so it wasn’t a sympathy thing. He never knew. By the way, Clark was also Class Favorite his freshman year.

Drew had beautiful green eyes and a killer smile. He had a hearty laugh that was contagious. I often went to comedy movies with him just to hear him laugh. He was a dreamer and a schemer. Drew was quick-witted, so hysterically funny. He could do the best impersonations. His favorite movie was Brave heart and was fascinated by the Civil War.

He could eat his weight in lobster and was a member of two large extended families and was such a vibrant and vital part of both families. He was able to take some wonderful trips. He was also blessed with so many good friends.

They have been so wonderful to me and Drew’s dad, remembering all the special days and hard days with calls, visits, and gifts.

I am enclosing my angel picture. It was taken on the day of Drew’s death at the accident site by his friends. There was no flash used, and the day was overcast and rainy. I believe that this is the angel who took Drew to heaven, and that held me up that week, and helped me as I stood at his bedside when he died. My watch stopped exactly one hour after Drew’s death, and started the next night as the visitation began at the funeral home. It continued to run for over a year after that before I replaced the battery. Twelve days after his death, I laid down in Drew’s bed for a nap. As I slept, I had a visit from Drew. He held me in his arms like a baby, and we sat on the edge of my bed. I asked him what had happened, and he told me that it was an accident. I asked him if he was all right, and if he’d seen Jesus. He said “yes.” He told me not to worry, that it would be O.K. He let me rub his arms and face and I asked him for a kiss. He gave me a big kiss on the mouth.

When I awoke, I knew that this was not just a dream. He came to give me comfort. Drew was so loving, and always full of I love you’s and hugs and kisses. I miss that so much.

At an age when most young men are at odds with their parents, Drew and I had found a way to get through the turbulence of the teenage years with peace. Thank God.

I had taken a $50,000 life insurance policy out on both my boys a year before Drew died. I am using the $50,000 to help build a new baseball field on the campus of the high school. The baseball team has renamed their annual tournament The Drew Lawrence Dragon Classic and there are t-shirts all over town that say this. They also created a Drew Lawrence Memorial Golf Tournament and donate a portion of the proceeds to the scholarship fund I established in his name. The Variety Club of Memphis, which supports children’s charities, dedicated a Sunshine Coach (a 13 passenger van) in Drew’s memory and his name is painted on the van. This van was donated to The Porter Leath Children’s Center in Memphis. Drew also has a brick in the Variety Heart House in Memphis.

Clark and I also dedicated a brick in the Ole Miss Walk of Champions in Drew’s memory. It was Drew’s dream to attend Ole Miss. He was a huge fan. Drew’s three best buds adopted a tree in the town square of Collierville and dedicated it to Drew.

They put plaque at the base of the tree proclaiming their love and friendship. It is my primary focus in life to tell Drews story and ensure that his memory live on. With the help of the baseball group, and our friends I can rest assured that this will happen.

Clark is now a sophomore at Ole Miss and doing so well. He maintains a 3.77 GPA and is the vice president of his fraternity. When he went back to school after Drew’s death, he had missed 2 weeks right at the mid term mark. Somehow, he was able to go back and maintain his grades and move forward with his life. Soon after he returned, he had to write a character sketch for a freshman English class, and he wrote it on Drew.

It is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever read. It was so honest and funny, but most of all loving. I try not to obsess and worry about Clark too much.

I know that I’m not immune from losing him too, but one thing I learned is that we’re not in control. All the worry in the world is not going to prevent another tragedy. Clark is a sensible young man and he deserves to live his life without a smothering mother. I’m trying.

As for myself, I am now 16 months into my new life. I still am not sure who I am now or what the future holds. I sought out counseling from a wonderful doctor who lost a child himself. I go to Compassionate Friends. I’ve read numerous books on grief, the loss of a child, heaven, near-death experiences, etc. I write in a journal. I continue to work in my family business part time.

Twice a month, two friends and myself take meals to the Critical Care waiting room at The Med. I was so fortunate to have all that I needed, but so many of these people are hours from home and have very little money. Some are there for months.

It helps me as much as them. I have been blessed with 3 friends that go back to my childhood that let me talk and make me move forward. I have many friends in Collierville, but these 3 that share my past seem to understand and have been rocks for me.

There is never a good time to lose a child, but I was hit with a double whammy when Drew’s death came
Imagine. For all the dreams and hopes, there are no answers. Some day I will ask God, but by then it won't matter. It was an accident. Drew would be so happy if we blamed Josh. He never believed in passing the buck. We have become close friends with Josh's parents. This destroyed their lives too. On Oct. 9, 2000, (the first anniversary of Drew's death) a local radio station announced Ron and I as Hometown Heros. Josh and his family nominated us for standing by Josh and for what we've done in Drew's memory. The local NBC affiliate picked up on the story and set up an interview with all of us that day. We took pictures of Drew and told the story of his lift and death. The focus was on how we had taken the tragedy into triumph. It aired at the 6:00 evening news. What a great thing to happen on such a hard day. Drew would've loved to have his picture all over the television.

He was not modest. I will always wonder why 4 boys walked away, and Drew lost his lift in this accident. But I no longer obsession with the "why's?" There are no answers. Some day I will ask God, but by then it won't matter anymore. What peace I have comes from knowing that Drew lives on in a place so spectacular that we can't even imagine. For all the dreams and hopes I had for him, God had something better in mind.

I am also enclosing a poem I wrote. I am not a poet, but I had so many thoughts swirling through my mind at the time I wrote this, and this is how they came out. I'm sure you can relate.

God bless you for the hope you offer to others. Your son must be so proud of you. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you. It helps me to tell it. I hope Drew has met up with Jim in heaven. I think they would enjoy each other!

I'm past the denial, I accept that you are gone. I understand that my only choice is simply to go on. I've met other parents who share my ordeal. Most have assured me that with time I will heal. I've read all the books, and gone to the meetings, I've received many cards, words of hope and warm greetings.

I am taking care army physical and mental health. I am not worried with my personal wealth. I have worn your clothes and slept in your bed. I visit your grave where so many have tread. I've brought angels, cards, and beautiful flowers, I even go there when it's wet from rain showers.

I've saved the many mementos of your life, Reminders of good times, even times full of strife. I've framed many photos, your smile is everywhere, I talk to you often as though you were here. I shared your dreams and I shared your goals, I felt we were joined, even deep in our souls. I try not to dwell on all that you've missed, But think of the happy days when we were so blessed I talk to God, I kneel and I pray, I ask Him to help make this pain go away. My days are so empty, so dark are my nights. I ask God to hold me until there is light.

Our bond was unique, our love was so strong.
Your dying so young was unfair, it was wrong.
I am still your mother, and you are my son.
Though Death has separated us, it has not won.
I know that you live in the palm of God's hand,
In the place where angels take care of His land.
Watch over and guide me while I am still here,
Till it's my time to join you, my heart holds you near.

Drew's symbol is an angel.

Tim and Connie Dehner's son, Rob (9-15-79), died in an automobile accident, 5-19-99. Tim is a wonderful poet. He has written many poems, here are three:

It's after midnight as I write to each of you. My heart has been heavy with my thoughts of Robert. As the days pass me by, it is still so hard to tell myself he's no longer here. How much I want to tell myself it is not so. Yet it is my heart that I must embrace, for it is here that Rob does live. Our hearts are wounded, and yet blessed. For in each of us our heart lies wounded, and yet with memories of a life filled. This poem, inspiration from another I had It was inspired of a woman the day before her death, a poem she did write, and had left on her desk. Having read her poem many months ago, brought a thought to my mind today. If our children were to ask us these questions I did write, while they were living. How would we have answered? Or, what and how would we each speak, with what words, and feelings replied? Day to day had I wondered about this lady and only one question she asked, "would anyone miss me if I were to go away today?" I gave it much thought, and yes with tears, I read each line I had written. I don't know why I can write without a tear shed. Not until I sit back and read each and every completed line. Then there are times I have difficulty reading the words I have written. I hope that you believe me when I say it was with each and every one of you in mind as I penned these lines. There are a couple of special references made in this poem. I hope that you
each know what they mean. One is about a rose, and the other a butterfly.

If I were to go away

What if you awoke and I wasn’t there, Would you think of me or really care? Would you really miss, not seeing me? Would you take the time to think of me? Would you ever wonder where I went? Or think about me, even a moment spent? Would the world stop turning if I were gone, Or would it keep turning even, even though? Would you miss me if I were to go away? Even if I chose not to go and I want to stay. What if I were in heaven and my tears fell as rain, Knowing this in your heart would it a difference make? Or what if I, were a simple floating butterfly, Could you see me, as I try to fly by your side? What if I would be a beautiful yet thorny rose, Could you sense my sweet aroma ticking your nose? What if I left you, never to come back, today? Do you think you’d care if I were to go away? I won’t ask you this, it sounds too silly to say, Would you really miss me if I were to go away? If tomorrow you realize, that I really was not here. Would from your eyes sorrow I see, oh so clear? What if I really did go away today, Would it make a difference in your day? If I were to tell you I had to go away today, Would you stop me and here make me stay? If so, I can tell you I don’t really want to go. If you could, please tell me I don’t have to go. ‘Cause, it would make me sad to have to go, Having known just how much you love me so. --- I believe that my words will describe. There are times wish as I may, words come slowly. Though in my mind, I see and feel what it is I need to say. Words are not found that give meaning. It is with this in mind I send this to you. May you, in some way, find these words a comfort, or meaningful even in a small way I thank God.

For it is with His help, and the love of my two sons, I live. I sit here before my keyboard with mixed emotions and struggle for words. Now searching my heart, my soul and the very depths of my being. How is it, words escape... only now do I, before the world, want to cry out.

My love is such that words created cannot begin to describe its depth. Nor the heavens mass, oceans wide, and mountain grandeur spy. For my heart as a cup overflows, there’s no beginning or end to it. Therefore, one cannot measure the desire and want, have this picture made. If only, this one time, can I bring unto your eye, this image which I clearly see? Oh, it is with great pain, and sorrow, that what I want most I cannot have.

So unto others who cannot understand, these words are dark and void. For those who, through the shadows see how it is you share with me. For we both have and have not, yet we hold, for love is the bond. Yet words cannot describe, love speaks volumes, without word spoken.

For this reason I can live, for those I love are with me, in body and spirit. Thank you, who can with me walk, for as angels wings do carry. Knowing with your love I can face tomorrow, and each tomorrow there after.

Written for all parents, with love for our children.

Tim wrote this poem while he was sitting in an airport. The poem was written to embrace the children that still abide with us here on earth, not those that have passed. Connie reminded Tim of the poems that he has written to keep the memory of Rob alive, but Tim had never once thought to give their only son words to make Tim’s love for him come to life. Tim wrote, "I may be the only father to neglect. With shame I admit that. I have wronged Bill, for I do not offer to him myself as I should. Therefore, I have put into words, what it is that I need most for him to know."

My Dearest One

It is often that words go unspoken, To leave you: with thoughts unknowing. Feelings, made into words, or loving touch, Not shown, though my heart knows how much, I watch you, and study everything about you.

From the waking of day till still of night’s dew. There is never a moment you’re not about me.

For to you my dearest one, I hold close, Even if I neglect, in words left unspoken. Or gentle touch, to hold you close to my heart, Ever to remind, my love shall not depart.

No matter how wide the miles shall impart, There is no gulf in keeping our parting far. Only a whispered breath of my name shall be, There at your side you shall, comfort that I bring. Never mean I harm, though words, may sing.

Out, and bring to you shattered memories. I will mend each one, If I may try and bring, Only I find that hard as I may try. Sometimes, I fail, and in this I can only cry.

For there are some things I cannot, No matter how I want the past to have gone.

The future, I know not what it shall hold, Only today, for this is what we have I’m told.

So, I shall give you, my rose, this vow To ever hold you close, and cherish as now. This promise I make, and forever will be. Though, time no more, look, for I am with thee. To my son Billy, with love and admiration.

Robby’s symbol is a rose.

Steve and Kathy Bechard’s daughter, Tracey (7-3-70), died 1-11-86. Kathy e-mailed
I thank God every day, for finding you and Rosemary. We never had a lot of support dealing with Tracey's death after we left Maryland. No one knew that we had lost a child, unless we told them. Christmas is getting closer and I hate not having Tracey here! But knowing that you and Rosemary are there for us will make it a lot easier this year!

Tracey Ann was born July 3, 1970, in Sheffield, Alabama, weighing in at 5lbs 61/20z., bald headed as could be. I was the ripe old age of 19. She was a good baby though, and with the help of my Mom and brother we took turns getting up to feed her. Tracey passed away January 11, 1986. Six months shy of her 16th birthday. Since she loved butterflies so much, I guess that should be her symbol.

She wanted to be a Doctor (pediatrician) she wanted to help children. She was my strength when things didn’t go very well with her treatments. I really thought that Johns Hopkins Hospital and Dr. Kwiterovich would find a cure. Look for the Book Beyond Cholesterol by Dr. Peter O. Kwiterovich. This book explains about Tracey's problem, better than I ever could.

Tracey's symbols are butterflies.

Elaine Stillwell, mother of Denis (8/2/23/66 - 8/2/86) and Peggy (2/4/65 - 8/6/86) has written two new small booklets. Drawing upon the loss of her two oldest children in a car accident a dozen years ago, Elaine offers these heartfelt, uplifting meditations to help readers in the tremendous struggle toward finding peace in the midst of grieving the death of a loved one. Stepping Stones for the Bereaved helps us realize that, while we can't bring back a loved one who has died, we can use our time of grief as a stepping stone toward personal renewal in reacquainting ourselves with Jesus Christ. The author's words bear a welcome message for anyone who is struggling with the fear, anger, and helplessness that accompany a painful loss.

Healing: After Your Child's Death, is for those grieving the loss of a child, the helplessness, combined with the sorrow, often proves to be an overwhelming combination. Essentially, we have two choices; lay down and give up or fight to stay alive and make our child's life count for something.

This pamphlet shows readers how to channel the love they have for their deceased children into a way of living whereby they can face their grief in a series of stages that lead to personal healing.

You may purchase these booklets by calling 1-800-325-9521, by email, www.ligouri.org, or their web site www.catholicbooksonline.com. The pamphlets are $1.00 plus tax and shipping.

Peggy and Denis' symbols are angels.

Tom and Carol Stork's son, Thomas (9-29-86), died from cancer, 12-7-96. Carol shared some poetry written by Jessica Jeffcoat, Thomas' half sister:

#21 (I would have skipped it if I knew)

she said the tests were routine
then she added that he was feeling pain
having some (a little, not much) trouble breathning
same conversation, only two years earlier
me in another room, longer hair, plum lipstick
nothing new, the projection
black and white against the wall
the mass the size of a grapefruit
stuck between, pushing on
his esophagus and aorta
blocking paths for oxygen and blood.

she said he was not sleeping well
I felt him standing beside me,
his hand on my eyelid about to open it for me
"little frog, are you dead?" he whispered
I smiled, stretched, moved back against the wall
he climbed up and sat in the "j" my body made

with legs bent at the waist
"I couldn't sleep. I was having bad dreams again."
images terrible, grotesque
monster with seven heads and 24 eyes
that lived in you and ate your insides slowly,
savoring each bite, until, finally,
there was nothing left of you
his tiny brain consumed with saving him,
scared to die.

it had been a week-seven days, six hours
the results should have come back yesterday
she asks if I can miss class Tuesday to go to San Diego
make a wish, blowout the candles, he asked to go to the zoo
he said they had pandas, koalas mountain gorillas, Tasmanian devils
"you like those, Jessica," he said and smiled
crooked teeth that needed braces
the cracked and scabbed sore on the corner
that came from that medicine, the one that started with XZQ or something impossible

I was on a plane to meet them mother, brother, sister and sister
I couldn't read, I couldn't eat, if I slept
I would see what I had not seen yet
she warned me that he was discolored
(slightly green, mostly yellow)
his body swollen, stomach sunken and concave
little legs, tight and tough
eyes, eyes I could not butterfly kiss anymore,
puffy cheeks like mine the day they pulled four teeth
except I didn't have those raw places that covered his bald head, his chin, neck
throat swollen so that even ice cream and water hurt
all from that same __ng drug

the one that made him talk crazy
made him forget that I had read whole stories only
minutes before
made him frustrated that he couldn't reach that shelf that was so high
that wasn't really there
made his legs too weak to hold his 43 Lb. body
made him wake up shrieking at 2:02, 3:09, 4:18 am
made him ask if I was afraid, what made me scared.
said that horrible book about the girl who becomes a snake
I could have read it 16 billion times just to listen to him laugh
tell his 10 year old mind jokes
I thought I was the one suffering, in pain
him, so much smaller, younger, weaker, braver, stronger
when he struggled to sit up
leaned over, hugged me, whispered those three words
little brothers never tell their older sisters "I love you."

she called again Saturday, early 8:17 am
I heard her say, "Thomas is calling"
I turned off the stereo, he hated loud music
I swallowed my gum, he said it popped when I chewed
I sat down anxious to hear #21 in the pick your own ending story he told each week
I thought I heard her give him the phone and his breath replaced hers
she said, "I said, Thomas is gone."

Three weeks before his death, Thomas wrote the following things for which he was thankful:

**I AM THANKFUL**
..For my Mother, Father, my sisters Charlotte, Jessica, and Rachel, and my cat and bird.
I am also thankful for doctors, hospitals, and medicine.
I am also thankful for science, and plants and animals.
I also am thankful for food to eat and water to drink
I am also thankful for policemen who keep us safe.
Most of all, I am thankful for the God who loves us.

This poem was written by Jill Kelleher. She and Thomas were sweethearts from 2nd grade. She wrote this 3 months after Thomas’ death. She was 11:

**LOVE NEVER DIES**
We met, it seems, such a short time ago;
I looked at Thomas, he needed me so.
We made each other happy as our friendship grew,
And I found out; I needed him too.
I remember how we used to play;
We vowed our love on Valentine’s Day.
Then one day, he became very ill;
When his mom asked me to visit him, I said, “I will!”
He was diagnosed with a disease called cancer.
How he got it, only God knows the answer.
When Thomas was in fifth grade, he had to die.
When he was only ten, I don’t know why.
I know he loved nature, I know he loved the sea.
I know he loved his family, and he also loved me
People with understanding could see the love in his eyes.
And love like ours... never, ever dies.

Thomas’ symbol is a Lion because he loved all animals, but especially the endangered species. Also Native Americans, his Indian name means "Faster than the wolves."

Carol met Rosemary Smith at a Bereavement conference in Columbia, Sc. She gave Rosemary a wonderful CD called *Something Between Heaven and Earth* by Cindy Bullen, another bereaved mother. Because of Carol giving Rosemary this CD, we are happy to tell you that Cindy will be at J.I.M.’s Picnic to sing some of the songs she has written since Rachel’s death. Rachel’s symbol is “scarlet wings” which also the name of one her songs.

I am so excited about J.I.M.’s picnic this year! It will be the absolute best!!! We are going to have a candle lighting service in memory of our children at the Cumberland hm on Friday, June 1 at 8:30(ish) PM. Last year was the first year to have the service and it was very meaningful for those of us who were there.

Saturday is a full day! We will begin J.I.M.’s Picnic at 11:00 AM. The place is undetermined at this early date, but if you stop at the inn first, they will give you complete details. Be sure to bring pictures, symbols, etc. We will have a display area so we can put “faces” to the children we have the honor of knowing from the newsletter.

After lunch (we ask that a love offering be taken to defray the cost of the meal), we will have the dome dedication at the new Crum Rollins Fine Arts Building. This dome was commissioned by Luther, Rosemary and Jordan Smith in memory of not only Drew and Jeremiah, but in memory of all of our children. As you can tell from the picture, it is breathtaking!!

After the dedication, Rosemary will share some of the unbelievable experiences she has had speaking to groups and at book signings for *Children of the Dome*. Her book has touched so many lives.

Carol will then entertain us with her beautiful and touching music. It will be a weekend none of us will ever forget!!

Remember that this is a “picnic” so please dress casually. Another request is that you please not bring children. We each need this time of celebration and reflection.

**Chocolate and Prayer...**
A sure cure for the grief and stress du jour!!!