
LAMENTATIONS

Issue 85

M.I.D.D.L.E.

March-June 2004

As I sit here working on J.I.M.'s (Joining In Memory) Conference, June 4 and 5th, I think of the past picnics and the past 2 conferences, and my heart is filled with love and joy that I have had the privilege and honor to get to know you and your children. How precious each of them is to you and they are now a part of me. The more wonderful things I hear about them, the more I wish I could have known each of them while they were here on earth. When we gather together each year, I become closer to you and your children. When I look at their pictures, it is as if I am looking at old friends that have been in my life and I think of their symbols and want them to know that I will always remember them. This will be our 12th year to join together and it reinforces the fact that we are fellow travelers through this journey of grief and we are going through it together, hand in hand, arm in arm, and heart to heart. I could not have made this journey alone, I have depended on your love and support and your acceptance of my grief. I thank you for what each of you mean to me and I hope that you have also found love and support from our group.

As you have read (or will read) in the letter, this year is going to be a weekend of truly joining in memory and I can promise you, you will leave with a sense that you are not alone, that you are accepted and loved, and that you have made friends and a support group that will last a lifetime.

For those of you who are unsure about coming to the conference, I think Jackie Wesley has expressed how we all feel about going to The Compassionate Friends for the first time or J.I.M.'s Conference for the first time.

Grief Grafts

Teresa Ellen Wesley Hough (4-25-68), daughter of Ronnie and Jackie Wesley, died from cardiac arrest, 10-2-93.

Gifts I Receive from TERESA

The many gifts I received after Teresa died are just so numerous I don't really know how to prioritize them. Before she died I had heard of and distantly even knew a few parents who had lost their child but looking at them in stores, or on the street they looked fine, like it wasn't

hurting too much, normal? After Teresa died I knew better, I knew it was a mask they wore in public and now I also knew how deep down they were actually hurting. I found that now I wore the same mask! For the first long year I only had my immediate family to talk with, my husband, son and daughter as many friends moved on, I made many long distant calls to my daughter Cindy in South Carolina, to cry and talk about Teresa, I found that men doesn't really grieve together as we ladies do. But I had no other close parents to talk to who had gone through this.

My friend and also my beautician told me about The Compassionate Friends support group and who to contact, I called this wonderful lady (Carolyn McDowell) and we made plans for me to tag along with her to the next meeting. But it was a whole month away!! They had held the monthly meeting the night before I called. Such a long wait.

It was hard to go to that meeting, not knowing anyone or how I'd even be able to talk, but afterwards I felt like a lifeline had been sent to me, I actually left the meeting almost feeling "elated" I finally had found some help to deal with the loss of my daughter by many other, very warm and sharing parents who had suffered and had even gotten through it just as I was doing now. Although, I do remember thinking, "they couldn't possibly have loved their child as much as I loved Teresa" because they even seemed to enjoy being there and sometimes even laughing. Later, at future meetings, I learned they had also suffered the same as I did at that first meeting. I now, even laugh at many meetings and I know Teresa would approve of this.

I looked so forward to our monthly meetings and to receiving that wonderful newsletter each month. A few months later I started to volunteer to help with small things and also to help to label and fold the newsletters each month, I felt I was helping to help others. Then I began to take a small flower arrangement and a card to funeral homes at times of a young person's death and signed it The Compassionate Friends. I felt it helped the parents to know there was a Compassionate Friends chapter they could attend, (How I wish I had known that sooner!)

A few years later I was invited to go to a chapter leader-training program, along with our chapter leader. After I attended, I knew I wanted to become a chapter leader to be able to help others have that same feeling I had on my first meeting, this was actually where my gifts started I think, I was never one to speak in public, I was never a leader type of person. I would even be very worried before a meeting of how I'd get through each meeting. I would have to think, "Teresa will help me through this", I even remember asking her to, and of course she always did. With my husbands continuing help each month, we soon started a chapter in the area we live in, as we were traveling 30 miles each month, so now I was chapter leader for two chapters that were 30miles apart. I also took on the duty of newsletter editor for both chapters, which I knew absolutely nothing about and I have learned a lot on the computer and I feel all this came easy to me because of my help (another gift) from Teresa. She had always wanted us as her family to learn the computer because she loved it so much, and now we all do too, I really do all this in her memory.

I have met so many wonderful friends in these ten years since Teresa died and I think they are all gifts to me, Teresa was such a caring, helpful, bubbly type of person who made friends easily

and always helped anyone who she could, and I really feel she somehow has passed on that gift to me. I could never imagine my life as it is now, if she had never died.

As much as I love what I am now doing, to be able to help others through their grief, I'd give it all up in a heartbeat, to never have had thereason.

Teresa Ellen Wesley Hough

4-25-1968- 10-02-1993 By Jackie Wesley/ TCF

I feel it is important to share our gifts we receive, even though it will seem like years to many of you before you notice any gifts, I'm certain they will happen. Some may call them blessings, but whatever they are called, I find comfort and healing in them. I'd like anyone to please send me a story on their gifts they feel they have received since their child died. I will gladly put them in this newsletter.

I am using an idea from Rosemary Smith (author of Children of the Dome) She has another book in mind in the future of "Gifts I received after my child's death" I think it is titled similar to that. I do not plan to write a book, but I am sure interested in your stories and you may even want to send them to Rosemary for her book in the future.

Teresa's website is www.geocities.com/Heartland/Hills/5854/though.html

Teresa's symbols are a butterfly, black cat and dark-haired angel.

Donnell Scott's daughter, Kaitlyn Louise (7-20-00), died from PNET brain tumor 3-24-02.

Donnell sent this poem, which is for all of us. May you adopt this poem each day of the year.

Just for today, I will try to live through the next 24 hours and not expect to get over my child's death, but instead learn to live with it just one day at a time.

Just for today, I will remember my child's life, not his death, and bask in the comfort of all those treasured days and moments we shared.

Just for today, I will forgive all the family and friends who didn't help or comfort me the way I needed them to. they truly did not know how.

Just for today, I will smile no matter how much I hurt on the inside, for maybe if I smile a little, my heart will soften and I will begin to heal.

Just for today, I will reach out to comfort a relative or friend of my child, for they are hurting too, and perhaps we can comfort each other.

Just for today, I will free myself from my self-inflicted burden of guilt, for deep in my heart I know if there was anything in this world I could have done to save my child from death, I would have done it.

Just for today, I will honor my child's memory by doing something with another child because I know that would have made my own child proud.

Just for today, I will offer my hand in friendship to another bereaved parent, for I do know how they feel.

Just for today, when my heart feels like breaking, I will stop and remember that grief is the price we pay for loving, and the only reason I hurt is because I had the privilege of loving so much.

Just for today, I will not compare myself with others. I am fortunate to be who I am and to have had my child for as long as I did.

Just for today, I will allow myself to be happy, for I know that I am not deserting my child by living on.

Just for today, I will accept that I did not die when my child did, my life did go on, and I am the only one who can make that life worthwhile once more.

Vickie Tushingam

Donnell always ends her emails with the following statement:

*"I think about how much I miss her,
and start to feel sorry for myself...
but then I think about all the people*

who never got the chance to meet her,
and I start to feel sorry for them."
~Author Unknown~

Kaitlyn's website is:

www.caringbridge.org/mo/kaitlynlouise

Kaitlyn's symbol is an angel teddy bear

**Karen (11-3-62), sister of Kathleen Hendrickson, died from cancer,
8-23-99.**

Kathleen made a website in memory of Karen. It included:

For My Sister

*Sisters are special
From young ones to old.
God gave me a sister
More precious than gold.
We shared many secrets,
The same mom and dad,
We shared lots of good times,
Don't think of the bad.
Our memories we'll cherish,
With love without end,
I'm glad you're my sister,
I'm glad you're my friend.
-Author Unknown*

MEMORIES OF MY SISTER

My sister Karen was a volunteer in the Peace Corps as a teacher in Kenya, Africa. I received many letters from her (all of which I still have). In one letter, she told me that one of the other volunteers had to fly home because her sister had died.

Karen wrote, "I don't know how I would react if that were you. I think I would take it VERY hard. I miss you. Please take good care of yourself as I don't ever want the Peace Corps director to call me into his office to say that (you had died.)"

Little did she know that thirteen years later I would be feeling the emotions and pain that she could only imagine. Aug. 23, 1999, Karen died from cancer.

In another letter she wrote to me, she told me to try to learn to "seize the day." I am trying to accomplish this by remembering the good times I shared with her. Some of my favorite memories are my first driving lesson, slumber parties, watching "Revenge of the Nerds" together, our zoo trips, and our trip to Sea World. My biggest surprise was when she named her daughter after me! (My niece and nephew are special kids!!)

My sister was very special too, and I miss her very much.

I LOVE YOU KAREN!

Dedicated to my big sister, Karen

Nov 3, 1962 - Aug. 23, 1999

-Kathleen Hendrickson, Miami Valley, Ohio TCF

**This site was created and is maintained in honor of my sister Karen. I am the web master and a bereaved sibling. E-Mail me at:*

<http://www.miamivalleytcf.com/siblings> www.miamivalleytcf@yahoo.com. I'd love to hear from you!-Kathleen.

Karen's symbol is a hummingbird.

Pam Lager's daughter, Heather (3-21-83), died 1-28-01.

Pam would like for you to visit Heather's website:

<http://www.geocities.com/regalmap/index.html>

Pam's symbol is Dreamsicle Angel; the little smiling cherub ones that they have all over her website because those are what she used to buy for her mom as gifts.

Andrew (12-10-96), son of Doris Hooker, died 1-9-01.

Doris wrote this poem the night before Andrew's Angel Date because she couldn't sleep:

Andrew

*Sitting there without a sound
As the doctors talked about what they have found
They say their opinion without a second thought
Shocked that "Abortion" was the only word we caught.*

*They said he would never be like the rest;
It would not be easy for us and it was all for the best
He would never do the things other little boys did
They just couldn't understand why any parent would want this kid.*

*I said to them "Stop, listen and remember
With or without you, our baby will be born this December.
Don't talk about this, that, or the other
He is my son and I am his mother."*

*He was put through what no child should ever have to face,
But fought his way strong through God's loving Grace.
I always knew that one day he would prove them all wrong,
Oh how it came true when he sang his first song.*

*A heart and Cross drawn on both of his hands,
Looking back I now know it was all God's Plan.
God showed him a way, how to finally fight no more
And took him to Heaven at the young age of four.*

*Andrew was our miracle boy, you see
I get so lonely that he is now not with me.
I know that someday we will not be apart
But living here without him breaks my heart.*

*He was a nephew that brought such joy
Grandma's "little buddy" and Mommy's "Drewboy."
Megan's "bubby," and Daddy's "little brat blue,"
Grandpa's "sidekick," and his best friend too.*

*We will never forget the smiles that he brought,
The songs that he sang and the fights that he fought.
We still thank God for that short time we had
And always remember his smile, on days that are sad.*

Please visit Andrew's website: <http://home.insightbb.com/~cdmaa/>

Andrew's symbol has to be a cross with a heart in the middle.

**Christopher (5-7-90) son of Ron and Maria Faller, died from PTLD
3-24-98**

Maria made the following request: "Please include this page in your next issue, I would really appreciate it. You'll understand why when you read it." [My Christmas Visit](#)

Christopher's symbols are Legos, beavers and two hearts intertwined.

The following book reviews are of Elaine Stillwell's new book. Elaine will be our keynote speaker at J.I.M.'s Conference, June 4-5, 2004. Elaine Stillwell's children, Peggy (8-23-66) died 8-2-86, and Denis (2-4-65) died 8-6-86 from an auto accident.

The Death of a Child Reflections for Grieving Parents

By Elaine E. Stillwell

Published by ACTA Publications
4848 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60640
(800) 397-2282

Book Review by Rosemary Smith

(Author of **Children of the Dome**)

In The Death of a Child: Reflections for Grieving Parents, Elaine Stillwell offers you her hand. Reach out and grab it if you are a bereaved parent or anyone who has suffered a loss. Her powerful book will be a catalyst in your recovery.

The loss of a child is the most terrifying of all human experiences. I know because my two oldest sons became angels eleven years ago at ages eighteen and fifteen. I remember feeling like I was standing at the edge of something much too deep. I felt completely alone in a darkness heretofore unimaginable. How I wish this book had been available back then. Thankfully, I met Elaine Stillwell five months afterwards and we began our lifelong friendship.

The Death of a Child is the most masterfully written book on the loss of a child ever published. Hope resounds on every page. The bereaved will see themselves mirrored in Elaine's description of her grief journey. Read her book and you will know you are not alone. Other fellow travelers have gone before you.

Elaine's book focuses on positive action. Grief is not passive. As Elaine says, "We can't walk around grief; we have to walk through it." Most of us are ill prepared to do this, but having Elaine's grief guidebook can pave the way. She discusses support groups, journaling, reading, music, physical activity, nature, pets and reinvestment. Reading what others have done can be an inspiration for each of us to get out from under the covers.

The Death of a Child is like a warm blanket on a snowy night. It envelops you with love, with knowledge, with warmth, and with confidence that you can face the cold. It is an expression of a mother's love that transcends any other written word on grief. Grab that hand and read as Elaine Stillwell "sings the song."

Book Review

By Claudia Grammatico, Valley Stream, NY

The Death of a Child: Reflections for Grieving Parents

By Elaine E. Stillwell

ACTA Publications, 160 pages, January 2004, \$9.95

1-800-397-2282

(available at booksellers and amazon.com)

I am a bereaved mom whose 26-year-old Son/Sun Paul was killed by a drunk driver. This book brought me face to face with life. God sends the bereaved to touch the lives of others in order that we become touched. I loved the key points highlighted in large print boxes on many of the pages. I felt it set a mood of vision and inspiration. As Elaine so eloquently shows us, there is a constant periphery of life after the death of a child. We have endured great grief and sorrow, yet we tap into our courage and find out who we really are.

Hope is great and this book validates and motivates us towards circles of community. We are held in deep moments reading the book because in that sacred silence is the language of unconditional love. The words teach us that we have the skills to give our suffering a sense of meaning and purpose by the way we embrace the death of our child and life's adversities in general as a result of their death. This wonderful book is a proof positive journey that those who lose a child do not lose sight of the big picture.

Some parts of our lives are treacherous, arduous passageways but communication moves us toward communion with one another. The very wisdom and spirit of Elaine's words purges and the reader is purified within the furnace of grief. Each chapter enters into the place of wounded souls and this integrates into the fabric of who we are. Each paragraph has a musical quality and ecumenical tones as it rhythmically flows into the reality that there is

faith in all of our own “ground zero.” Our thought process focuses on how to honor our child through our own life. Our emotional energy now is who we become in our “new life without our child.” Reading the stories of others reveals also an inner strength that we didn’t know was there.

The scripture quotes at the beginning and end of each chapter set a mood of celebration and holiness, wrapping us in an imaginary blanket of sacred warmth and security. We have not chosen loss but loss opens up alternatives. Healing is enhanced because as Elaine teaches us...we all can assign meaning and purpose to the death of our child. We also give meaning and purpose to our own life.

The fruits of Elaine’s tears speak volumes of courage in the aftermath and give brighter light to the eye of the bereaved. Read Elaine’s words out loud! To lose her children, Peggy and Denis, so suddenly, is the very thing that plunders hope. Yet, her broken heart was able to accomplish so much of God’s work embracing others in her brokenness and that seems so fit and divine!

How wonderful that the heart of a wounded parent when transformed emerges as suffering embraced! It then becomes celebration and resurrection! The inviting cover of the book is beautifully designed and the flowers sizzle with the color of God’s glory in life. The Gift of the book holds another’s profound pain. Like Music of the heart, it transcends all barriers and languages. We grow and realize that the gifts before us become unwrapped with sheer faith and we become aware that we exist in the divine presence of our child and that there is Presence in the Absence!

The Death of a Child is a book of discipleship in grief and brings peace through that understanding. Elaine’s narratives are wise, real, palpable, visible, sometimes raw, but they also resonate long after the sentence is finished. They affirm and validate that we are resilient and we will survive!

The book teaches that we can reach out, support, comfort and hold dearly. It provides all with the opportunity to live more deeply and to learn the meaning of life after life. Sometimes pain truly faced leads to untapped sources of grace. Grieving can be chaotic breathing but it also is an “art.” After reading the book, study it, look at it, absorb it, and a new creativity kicks in. We cannot reverse the death of our child, but we will look at “What is” and ask ourselves “What can come from this?”

The book, The Death of a Child, is a prophetic source of peace, power, wisdom and grace.

Peggy's and Denis' symbol is an angel.

Paul and Claudia Grammatico's son, Paul (4-20-73), was killed by a drunk driver, 5-16-99.

Claudia is known as "Donor Mom" because of her tireless effort in educating others about organ donation. She has been an inspiring facilitator in many workshops throughout the country. She and Elaine will be doing a workshop on "Creating a New Normal" at this year's conference. She has a CD that will be available at the conference and she writes to tell the latest news:

Wanted to share that in the new instrumental there is a constant beat of a drum. That is Paul's love & mine, always there, totally, subtle, unconditional, never skipping a beat, movin', smokin', shakin'..... There is "never closure" for a lost child. The love is boundless. The fact that Paul is not physically here in front of me means that I am sustaining and maintaining a continuing healthy relationship in the center of my heart, setting goals and making circles that are bonds. Make a difference, make a change so love/life remains..ours and theirs! I recognize their importance in not saying good-bye, but carrying forth with projects to help/serve/heal. Living Life for 26 years with my sun/son, Paul I thought I had forever, but yesterday came suddenly.

My song will be sung live by Delisco on Donate Life Day here in New York. It will be televised to 12 hospitals and there will be media. We are also doing a TV special for St Mary's. It is unbelievable to me that Delisco grew up in a foster home. He never thought he would be anything because of that. Yet he rose to Broadway and stardom. He gave a concert to the boys and educators at St Mary's. Next week he will stay on the campus and teach them my song so that he could sing it at our annual fundraiser dinner dance. The boy's choir will sing behind him. My song will be sung live by Delisco on the altar of St Patrick's Cathedral (New York City) at the candle light ceremony on April 3rd at the Remember and Rejoice Celebration of Donor & Recipients. This is the honor of all honors. At least 1,000 people will attend. On May 10th, in addition to myself and others receiving an award for Volunteer Recognition-Service Above Self, the NYODN has decided to give Delisco an award as well for his work on behalf of the Gift of Life-Donate Life Program through my song and his help in promoting the song as public awareness. He has worked tirelessly with me and is a gentle and caring soul. I received the phone call this evening from the NYODN. They also called him. This, in addition to have the song sung at St. Patrick's Cathedral is a Wonderful Gift and a Blessing! As Delisco said to me, "...It is truly God's work, we are instruments in the symphony of life....."

This is a miracle, Un milagro!

Paul's symbol is a butterfly.

Faye Martin's daughter, Lisa Newbourne (9-23-65) died from a self-inflicted gunshot, 4-22-91. Faye sent the following letter:

I'm sure that many of you know Karyl Beal of "Parents of Suicides." She lives in Pavo, Georgia, and has one of the largest, most successful, subscriber lists in the country. Karyl has recently sponsored a cookbook for suicide survivors that features favorite recipes of our children. It also has many articles about suicide and will be a great comfort to survivors. The book is being professionally printed and published and will be something to be proud of. The cost is \$8.00 per book including shipping, (USA shipping only) and you may order extras for gifts.

Karyl has told me that there are 88 cookbooks left, so you may want to contact her right away to order your copies. Orders will have to be processed on a "first-come, first-served" basis. Call or e-mail Karyl and she will send you an order form with complete instructions for ordering. Her name and contact information is below:

*Karyl Chastain Beal, mother of Arlyn
POS-FFOS Cookbook
PO Box 417
Pavo, GA 31778
arlynsmom@alltel.net
Phone: 1.229.859.2976*

To my friends at Christmas...

This is a busy time of year, full of shopping and baking and so many fun things that usually revolve around our families and other loved ones. Would you please take a moment out to remember one no longer with us....my beautiful daughter, Lisa. I miss her every day of the year, but Christmas is by far the worst holiday without her. I have so many memories of Christmases past where she lit up the room with her smile and her energetic presence. Our home would ring with her laughter.

<http://www.hayeskent.com/christmasangels12.html>

The link above will take you to a safe website created by a bereaved mom to honor our children. Please take a few minutes to visit. There are twelve trees filled with ornaments. The link opens to the 12th tree; scroll down and Lisa is on the bottom row. A link with her name is provided under the tree, and that will take you to her memorial site. If you knew Lisa, maybe you could write a brief remembrance of her in the guest book. If you didn't, then maybe just a "hello" to her and her mom at Christmas.

I wish each of you a joyous Christmas and holiday season filled with good times and good memories. Let's all remember the REAL reason for the season!

*Love and Merry Christmas,
Faye (Lisa's mom forever)*

Lisa's symbol is a lamb.

Jay Jacobson (7-31-78), nephew and legal guardian of Brenda Reeves, died from suicide, 3-4-02.

I have formed an in-person support group (we have a snail mail newsletter) for those left behind after suicide, I have formed 4 on-line groups for survivors and one for suicide attempters and self-injurers.

I also just recently started an online magazine for those who would like info on suicide and to share with their loved ones.

I have 2 step-children that spent a lot of time with Jay the last 2 years of his life.... this has been very hard for them as they were only 10 and 13 when he passed. I hurt but it hurts me even more to see their pain.

Jay was like a son to me and I miss him so very much.

Valentine's Day, Without Jay

No chocolates, no cards, no roses

No hugs, no "I love yous"

Memories of you

Still shine through

Valentine's Day

Without Jay

Breaks our hearts

As we are apart

Our memories are beautiful

They are very bountiful

But they can't replace

The smile on your face

I look to the sky

I wonder why

And hope that you know

How much we didn't want you to go

Our love for you

Will always stay true

Until we see you again

When we join you in Heaven

*For my precious nephew, Jay D. Jacobson
07-31-78 ~ 03-04-02
Love, Aunt Brenda (Feb. 2004)*

Forever Twenty Three

*In memory of our beloved Jay Jacobson
On his 24th birthday (07-31-03)*

*Forever twenty-three
That's how you will always be
In our hearts and memories
Forever twenty-three.
Never growing old, forever young
Gone before your life had really begun
Since losing you, the pain has stung
Never growing old, forever young.
The beautiful world, we hoped for you
On this earth, never came through
We pray God sees, you are due
The beautiful world, we hoped for you.
Forever twenty-three
Oh Jay, we pray you see
We love and miss you, tremendously
Forever twenty-three.*

by
Brenda Reeves

Jay's symbol is a dove. Brenda wrote: *I chose this symbol because Jay raised pigeons and they are related to doves. Jay also loved to give red roses to those he cared for so I think the dove should be carrying a red rose in it's beak. The dove is also a Heavenly messenger... I think that would be a great choice.*

For more information about Brenda's newsletter, other information, etc. she sent the following information: If you have any questions, you can contact her at brendajreeves@msn.com

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/tmdj/>

Memory Tree of Lights Website:
<http://www.memorytrees.org/index.html>

My Page on the Memory Tree of Lights Website:

http://www.memorytrees.org/coordinators/brenda_reeves.htm

Online Support Groups:

[South Dakota Friends & Families of Suicides](#) We are a support group for friends and family members of suicide victims.

[South Dakota Parents of Suicides](#) We are a support group exclusive to parents who have lost a child to suicide.

[South Dakota Surviving Siblings of Suicides](#) We are a support group exclusively for siblings suffering a loss after suicide.

[South Dakota YOUTH-FFOS](#) We are a support group exclusively for youth who are suffering from a suicide loss of a friend or family member. The membership is made up of 10-17 year olds. Parental consent to join is necessary.

[HOPE for Suicide Attempters](#)

This group is for those who have attempted suicide and for self-injurers. We are offering hope and friendship as a tool to prevent future attempts.

[South Dakota Friends & Families and Parents Of Suicides Information and Experience Sharing Board](#)

This is a public board and anyone who visits may post here. The purpose of this board is to provide an informative and safe place for the discussion of and sharing personal experiences with each other on issues related to suicide.

[The Most Difficult Journey](http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/tmdj/) <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/tmdj/>

This magazine was created for our members as a supplement to the snail mail newsletter and to reach people who do not get our snail mail newsletter. Anyone can receive the magazine by going to our Yahoo Groups website and signing up. This magazine is sent out bi-weekly - internationally. Feel free to sign up and start sharing with our readers!

John (1-24-84), son of George and Annette Walker, III, was killed in an auto accident, 10-12-02.

The following article was written about Annette's reinvestment to remember John and others who have died too soon:

Published November 24, 2003

Benny Campbell of Attalla Florists hangs a gold star on the Heaven's Child tree at the Mary G. Hardin Center for Cultural Arts. Stars on the tree contain the names of children who have died and whose parents wish to celebrate their lives by including them in the project. The tree is being put together by other parents in the same circumstance.
Zoom

*By Joshua W. Bingham
Times Staff Writer*

On Sunday, 25 decorated Christmas trees were introduced in the annual Festival of Trees exhibit at the Mary G. Hardin Center for Cultural Arts.

All decorated quite beautifully, some involving the hands and imaginations of hundreds of children; one of them is not finished.

If needed, this pine standing alone in the center's courtyard will have stars added to it until the day the exhibit ends, Dec. 23.

Each star carries the name of a child or loved one who passed away too early in life. Tree coordinator Annette Walker said because everybody who has lost a loved one may not have heard about this memorial tree, adding names to stars will not stop.

"I've had calls from all over the country from individuals who have heard about this from someone who lived here," Walker said. "And you know what, I would never turn down a parent who asked me to put a star on a tree with their child's name on it."

This tree and helping as many people as possible celebrate the life of a loved one is important to Walker because she knows how it feels. Her and husband George III's son, John, died last year. He was killed in a car accident in Utah while a student at Brigham Young University.

At first, Walker was going to decorate the tree just in the memory of John. But she realized the comfort it could provide for so many others.

"You know, once you lose a child, it's like you have such a connection with those other parents that it's like a family," she said. "And it's as if your child is theirs, and their child is yours."

Beyond that, Walker realized something only a parent who has lost a child could: This reminds parents how special their child was.

"A very important thing after a child dies is validation," she said. "We want people to tell us how wonderful our child was, or that they were important, or that they mattered - that their name is worth putting on a tree."

Because the tree represents a specific child for each parent, Walker chose to name it Heaven's Child.

The idea for this tree began, Walker said, through Donna Kilgo mentioning it to her. Kilgo lost a son, Stephen, a few months ago.

Walker also was familiar with a tree festival in Salt Lake City, Utah, in which a family may decorate a Christmas tree themed after their child. The tree would then be auctioned off, and the money raised would go toward a children's hospital.

The biggest inspiration, though, came from former first lady Barbara Bush.

Through watching her interview on "Larry King Live," Walker heard that Bush had lost a daughter, Robin, to leukemia. The child died just before she turned 4.

"And something that she said that just really would not leave my mind, and it just inspired me to move on about the tree, was that she had planted a tree that day in memory of her daughter," Walker said.

King inquired why she did that and how she was able to move on.

Bush said something to the effect of, "We have to make something good come of it, otherwise an entire life is lost and no one would remember," Walker recalled. "At that time I remembered that Donna Kilgo had mentioned the tree, and it just hit me, "Well, she's right. And we do have to make something good come of it."

Through word of mouth and much help from Maryann Dalton, who formed a local support group called Matter of Hope after her son, Matt, died last year, many people have contacted Walker.

She now has about 100 names to put on the tree, and stars for many more. Benny Campbell of Attalla Florist is helping decorate the tree.

Many parents have told Walker they want to help pay for the decoration of Heaven's Child. However, because this tree is being funded by David Ranes, a Hollywood producer for whom John interned before his death, funds aren't needed. Instead, Walker has encouraged anybody who feels the need to give something to make a donation the center's scholarship fund.

"I've really realized what those scholarships do in helping children that otherwise couldn't afford to get lessons," she said. "And that, again, is benefiting the children."

If anybody would like to have their child or loved one honored this Christmas season with a star on Heaven's Child, Walker encouraged contacting her at 256-442-1133.

She also is developing a diagram of the tree so that each person will be able to know where a specific name is. A link to the online version of the diagram should be available shortly on the center's Web site (www.culturalarts.com).

Because Barbara Bush's words were so inspirational in the creation of Heaven's Child, Walker has also made a star for Robin. She informed the former first lady through a letter.

But the "really interesting thing" about putting Robin's name on the tree, Walker said, is that it ties into this year's Festival of Trees theme, American presidents.

And I thought, "Oh my gosh. That means we have a presidential tree, because we have Robin Bush's name on it," Walker said.

"When you've lost a child, you find miracles in everything, and you must keep yourselves going."

I emailed Annette to seek permission to use the article and to give her email address georgep@cybrtyme.com and she sent the following note:

I haven't made concrete plans for next year but have discussed with some members of a grief group "Matter of Hope" that has now been started in Gadsden about forming a committee to do such. We ended up with 246 stars on the tree in just a few weeks. I heard many touching stories. The director of the Cultural Arts Center predicted that it would take many trees once the word gets out. I suppose we need to get serious and start planning.

John's symbol is a star.

Marie White's son, Chip Whitley (9-24-62), died with undiagnosed diabetes/pancreatitis, 3-10-97.

Marie would like for you to get to know her son by viewing his website:

[www.geocities.com/%7Eatlantatcf/Chip Whitley/Chip.html](http://www.geocities.com/%7Eatlantatcf/Chip_Whitley/Chip.html)

Whitney (6-8-82), daughter of Jerry and Sherry Sharp, died from Lymphocytic Myocarditis, 8-4-99.

Sherry sent the following email:

We want to share a very special event with you. There is an article on UK's athletic homepage about Whitney. Go to www.ukathletics.com at the bottom left there is a picture of Whitney. Click on the picture to get to the article. We were invited as VIP guests to Senior Night on March 5th by the UK Gymnastics Team. It was a powerful and emotional night as we were treated with respect and compassion by everyone from the Assistant Athletic Director to the gymnasts themselves. Whitney would have been proud to have been a part of their gym family, a wonderful group of people. By the way, UK won the meet!

**Rob, son of Tim and Connie Dehner, was killed in an auto accident
5-19-99. Rob (9-15-79), son**

Tim wrote the following poem:

To all my friends: I have been feeling a bit down, so sit down in front of my keyboard and typed out these words tonight. It's funny, how sometimes I can see the words in front on my eyes and how they come to tell my story. My story is now yours as I now share them with you. May you find something within the verses that is yours to keep.

To Know The Words

*My love for you is certain, unwavering and true.
No matter how long the hands of time do turn.
My heart misses and empty arms yearn for you.*

*Each and every day starts out the same ole way.
And it would seem days ending is about the same.
It's the in between times I haven't got used to yet.*

*Trying to get on with my life is easier said than done.
Not that I don't try to find happiness out of the shadows
It's just each time I take a step it's backward I seem to get.*

*Love is a funny thing at least it is to someone like me.
When you are given a gift that is all so precious
Why would I take their life and love for granted?*

*To say you don't know what you have until it's gone
Is so true and then it is to late to speak the words
You held on the tip of your tongue, I love you.*

*Is it not enough for the heart to know the words
Though the lips withhold and may refuse to say?
It is with time that I have learned no it is not enough!*

*For this one thing is certain, life is fragile and unsure.
If you read these words yet your mind not understand
All you need do is ask and from experience shall share.*

*From the depths of despair and anguish, reach out for healing.
From this hellish place for which by name remains nameless.
Yet find only time can heal and this thing called time is not my friend.*

*Time slips through my hands as though they are but sand upon the beach.
There was a time when time had no meaning merely days of the week.
Today, I marvel at how time flies yet in my mind it is for yesterday I seek.*

*It is yesterday I forgot to hold you closer and say what it is my heart knew.
And yesterday has begot today and today brings forth all of tomorrow
And somehow I seek a peace that eludes me and causes my heart to cry.*

*Can you know how much I love you, and long to hold you close to my breast?
My heart cries out, yet no one hears, my body aches and not a soul knows.
It is by only these words some share this journey of anguish and loneliness.*

*The path that I trod is one that I did not choose nor is a journey that I want.
Yet it has been upon me thrust and burns as a sword dipped in hot coals.
This sword did cut and pierce my body through to the depths of my soul.*

*Yet here am I alive yet am I dead, for though I breathe my life has ended.
Yet, out of the ashes come I, and a life so strange and unfamiliar have I.
This new life feels so odd and hollow for I live yet feel no life inside of me.*

*Somehow in this new life I have learned to smile and at times learn to have joy.
I have discovered this new life doesn't always allow me to laugh and be happy.
Instead realized there are peaks and valleys that I must travel through.*

*Nights' travels have befriended me for it is in them I can dream and see you again.
It is day that comes and robs me of my night and wakes me from my yesterday.
For now it is today, and it is another day I am alone and unsure I am ready to face.*

*Face this day by choice I have none, but pray God for strength and hope it is enough.
Am I doing better today than I was last year, last month, last week, or yesterday?
Sometimes I am and sometimes I am not, at times it's really quite hard to say.*

*All I can say is that I'm here and doing the best I can find inside of me today.
Maybe tomorrow I'll find the strength to do a little bit better than I did this day.
Who knows what tomorrow holds, it is enough that I have found the strength for today.*

*With another day ending and night falling upon me as an old trusted friend;
I will find myself preparing for sleep and hoping to take a trip this very night.
To a wondrous place where we're together, and my heart forgets it's broken.*

*In memory of Rob,
From dad, Tim*

Rob's symbol is a rose.

Mack and Deedee Ransdell's son, Billy (1-21-66), died from a heart attack, 1-4-99.

Deedee shared:

Thank you so much for remembering our Billy's special birthday with Jesus... It means more to me than words can express... I am looking forward to the conference again this year... The workshops were so helpful and the fellowship was again like a family reunion. Seeing Billy's brick meant so much to my heart.

This has been a year of my health going down hill... My Osteoporosis in my hips has me walking at times like an old lady... And throbbing as I try to sleep... A week ago I had a health screening only to find I am developing an Aneurysm on my aorta... Grief, what a toll it is taking on my body.

Mack and I went to Cancun a year ago this month (March) and we are returning in April this year. In this place (Cancun), I found peace... I like to think of it as meeting with the Lord and finally being able to let Him take my devastation, pain, anger and turmoil...

We stayed in south Cancun called Playa del Carma. Crowded, but peaceful. It was the first time I had seen blue ocean... I would go to the beach at sunrise- just me and the Lord and His blue sky (approaching) and blue water and His peace... There He reassured me He was with me always... Oh, how I needed His reassurance... He knows my heart.

I do still cry for my lonely heart. Missing Billy so, so much... I know he is happy and some day I will hold him again. But the sadness creeps in at the most unusual times. His daughter's birthday was March 3rd... Oh how I missed him that day. She will graduate from high school in May... Another day I am dreading.

I look forward to seeing you and Jim in June... I will need a gentle hug. Also remembering your Jim.

Billy's symbols are fireworks, sparklers, and American flag.

Love starts with a smile, grows with a kiss, and ends with a tear.

Fellow Travelers are the siblings God forgot to give us.

When it hurts to look back, and you're afraid to look ahead, you can look beside you and your Fellow Travelers will be there.

Chocolate Sundae (A Religious Experience for me)

If you are a bereaved parent and/or would like more information about Lamentations, please e-mail:

dinah@cumberlandcollege.edu