

# LAMENTATIONS

Issue 50

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

November, 1996



November 5th is Election Day. This year we will elect a President of our United States. To *elect* means *to make a selection of; decide on; to choose; a select or exclusive group of people*. What have you *chosen* to do about your grief? Have you *decided on* what you are going to do with the remainder of your life here on earth? Will it be a life that will represent a positive memory of your child?

Who is the *president* of your grief? Are you letting others preside over your grief, or have you *elected* to be in control? Don't let others tell you what you *need to, ought to, or must* do about your grief. It is your grief and yours alone. When you **understand** (grief) you can **lay a plan**. It is up to you.

We, Fellow Travelers, are a very *select group*. Wouldn't it have been wonderful if we could have had the *choice* of meeting each other under happy circumstances rather than such catastrophic ones? We are an *exclusive group* who understand each other, and that helps us in knowing that we are not alone in our grief and all the diverse feelings we have. Let's each of us *elect* to face our grief and to *serve* the tenure Wtil we reach acceptance.

November 11th is **Veteran's Day** and it is a legal holiday that has been set aside to commemorate the end of the wars in 1918 and 1945. We, too, are Veterans of the worst type of war a person can fight. We

are soldiers of grief and loss--not only of a loved one, but also loss of our "freedom" to be a whole family. We are Veterans of the "cold war" of the reality of death. On Veteran's Day, I encourage you to a green candle to represent our hope for growth and acceptance.



If you are like I, for the next two months, I am thrown into a whirlwind of emotions and an even greater reminder of my loss. Sherran McDonough sent the following article written by Barbara Claire about the holidays:

*Holidays can be difficult for all of us. What helps and what doesn't?*

*Most of us are trying to find readymade answers. We want simple solutions. We want ways to skip our painful memories. We want to feel good. Is this possible? Yes, I think simple solutions are possible if you're willing to take an honest look at your choices.*

*Let's begin with some basic facts. The loss you've experienced has happened. Anniversaries and holidays will come. There is no amount of energy you can put forth that will change those facts. Maybe your mind is already playing games with you saying, "I just won't think about it and maybe it won't happen." This is a choice you can make. Or you can use your strength and power to choose differently. How will you respond to the holidays in a way that's workable for you?*

*Realize that you do have strength and power and the wonderful gift of choice. No one can tell you how to perceive a situation. That's up to the power of your mind. We don't like to hear that sometimes. It takes real courage to be responsible for our choices. So the*

*answer is simple but it isn't easy. How are you going to choose to see this loss, these holidays, and how will you choose to respond to what you can't change?*

*There is no right answer. Some people choose to do some very different things such as eating out on Thanksgiving or going away on vacation for Christmas. Others choose to stay and do what they usually did knowing it will be painful. There are those that do a little of both. What helps is being aware that you do have choices and that's where your strength lies.*

*No matter what, remember your strength lies in your ability to decide how you will respond to any given situation.*

As we each observe this Thanksgiving in whatever manner we choose, I wish us a holiday of peace and acknowledge that there is hope for a happier tomorrow. I leave you with this prayer by Jane Merchant:

*For those, a God, who in the hour of sorrow find little cause for thankfulness, I pray;*

*For those bereaved, whose bright hopes for tomorrow are changed to sudden agony today;*

*For those beset by illness, need, and trouble;*

*For those whose lives are spent in loneliness--*

*On this Thanksgiving Day I ask a double bounty, a God, for them in their distress.*

*Grant, of Thy mercy, such a sense of nearness to Thee in their affliction such a sure awareness of Thy saving love, that dreariness may be illumined for them by the pure assurance of Thy care in darkest days, stirring their heavy heart to fervent praise.*



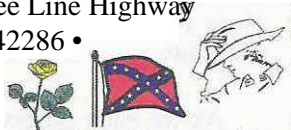
Amen

# Grief Grafts

## *The Compassionate Friends*

chapter in Hopkinsville is entering a float in the Annual Christmas parade. David Westerman has requested that each of us send a picture of our child with his/her name, and birth and death dates to him and he will place the picture on a board that will be on the float. There will also be a Christmas tree and he wants to request that you send your child's symbol or a picture of that symbol that will hang on the Christmas tree. Include the same information on the symbol. Isn't this a wonderful idea? The picture and symbol must reach him by November 30. His address:

David Westerman  
5263 Dixie Bee Line Highway  
Trenton, KY 42286 •  
502-466-3705



David and JoAnn's 19-year-old son, Michael, was killed 1-15-91. Michael's symbols are a cowboy hat, yellow rose and a confederate flag.

Elaine Stillwell's two children, Denis and Peggy O'Connor, died from an automobile accident in 1986. Elaine wrote this article:

### *Preparing for the Holidays*

*Many of us who are grieving feel that Thanksgiving is a useless and painful holiday because we do not feel very thankful with our terribly hurting hearts.*

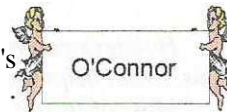
*Maybe we could prepare our hearts for Thanksgiving by peeking into them to find at least one--and maybe even more blessings that we could count at this special time of the year.*

*After I lost my two oldest children, I learned that the tiniest thing that could ease my heart's burden was indeed a blessing! Discovering these "lifts to the heart" may help you prepare your heart for thanksgiving. Sometimes, amid all the pain, we forget what we could be grateful for. Take an "inventory" for*

*your heart. Perhaps you could be thankful for:*

*The strength to get up each day  
The love of one special person  
Someone needing our love  
A special hobby or interest  
A job  
Pictures  
The years we had with our loved one  
Someone reaching out to us  
Music or poetry  
A pet  
Clergy and doctors  
A linking object - something that belonged to our loved one and brings joy to our heart  
Thoughtful relatives and friends  
Traditions or rituals  
Nature  
Cards  
Books  
Prayer  
Time  
May your Thanksgiving be filled with reasons to be thankful! Having loved and having been loved is perhaps the most wonderful reason of all.*

Denis' and Peggy's O'Connor symbol is an angel:



Gam and Becky Greer have lost all of their 4 children. Stephen, 2, died from Leukemia, 11-17-79. January 16, 1995, their oldest son, Buzzy (23) killed his younger brother Todd (14) and his younger sister Kami (10) and then himself. Becky wrote about her spiritual crisis:

*When I lost my 2 1/2 year old son, Stephen, to leukemia, I was completely devastated. My whole world was shattered and I knew of no other place to turn to but God. I remember experiencing the unconditional love of many friends and family, and, therefore, I began to feel closer to God than I had ever felt. Losing Stephen was the worst thing that had ever happened to me and I felt that nothing any worse could ever happen to me again. So I trusted God to get me through this terrible, terrible time.*

*My son, John Michael (who we called Buzzy) was 7 years old at the time of his brother's death. He became my reason for living. I knew that I had to go on for him. My children meant everything to me. They gave my life purpose and*

*meaning. When I was a child, my dream was to become a mother. I have always loved children. I always wanted to have several children and I wanted lots and lots of grandchildren. I can remember a time before I became a mother when I saw a movie in which a mother's son died and I felt that that had to be the worst thing that could ever happen to someone. How could that mother go on? I knew that if that ever happened to me that I would not be able to go on.*

*Buzzy was born on January 14, 1972, and I became a mother at the age of 20. My dream was fulfilled and I loved being a mother. Five years later on March 27, Stephen was born. Another son for me, a brother for Buzzy. We were now a family of four. Little did I know that in less than three years, what had happened to the woman in the movie would happen to me. Stephen died, and I was able to go on. I had to go on for my other son, Buzzy.*

*On November 29, 1980, a little more than a year after Stephen died, my son, Todd was born. What joy! God gave me another son to love and enjoy. Life would go on. Life was good again. Again, I had two sons to love and to receive love from.*

*God had shown me through losing Stephen what really was important in life. I chose to live my life accordingly. I treasured my children and my time with them. I raised my family with Christian values and even led classes at my church which taught parenting tools to young parents. I wanted everyone to know how important and special their children should be to them. I wanted people to realize what precious gifts their children are. I felt that I had learned a lesson that many people don't learn until it is too late and I wanted to share that important lesson. I valued my children and the time I was able to spend with them. My purpose in life was to make their lives happy and healthy and safe.*

*Four years later, on August 7, 1984, my beautiful daughter, Kami was born. More joy! Finally, after three boys, a precious little girl to love! And, oh, how she was loved, and oh, how she loved. She loved*

people and all God's creatures. Kami was filled with so much love and so she received my love in return.

My oldest son Buzzy, became drawn into something he couldn't seem to escape from no matter how hard he tried. He became involved with drugs and the dark world of the drug culture. He was a very sensitive and loving person who made some very wrong choices which led to his destruction and the destruction of my entire beautiful family.

On January 16, 1995, Buzzy "snapped" and stood up at the dinner table and started shooting a gun that he had hidden in his pocket. When the gun was finally empty, all three of my remaining children were dead and my husband, Gam, was seriously injured. Miraculously, no bullet struck me.

For days and weeks after this terrible tragedy, I was "in a fog" and I was busy taking care of my injured and totally distraught husband. I did not think about God and I tried very hard not to think about what had happened.

As time passed, Gam got better and didn't seem to need all my "nurturing." That left me with more time to deal with what had happened, but I didn't want to deal with what had happened. But sooner or later, we all must deal with what happens to us in our lives.

I began to question God. How could you let this happen? You know what is in my heart, you know I loved you and tried to live my life for you. What about all the evil people in the world? What about the drug dealers? They still have their children. **HOW COULD YOU LET THIS HAPPEN?**

So, I became angry with God ... very angry. I got so angry with God that I even questioned his existence. I did not experience this when Stephen died. I felt God engulfing me with His love and I trusted Him to help get me through that terrible time. Was that not for real? Did I just talk myself into believing God was there so that I could continue to go on? I must have. Because God was nowhere to be found now. I could not find God. Either I lost God or God never existed in the first place.

These are the thoughts and questions that came pouring to me in what I call my "dark time." I could find no reason

or purpose for living. My children were my purpose for living and they had been taken from me. How could I ever find meaning and purpose again? How could I go on living when "all is lost?" If what I found meaning in was gone, how could I go on and why would I choose to go on?

I did not want to see or talk with anyone during the dark time. Partly because I knew that no one had answers to my questions and partly because I did not want anyone to know that I even had these questions and that I felt this way. Just because I knew there wasn't a God. I didn't want to take other people's hope from them. Let them keep kidding themselves. They are better off.

I eventually did share my feelings with my husband, a close friend, my counselor, and finally my pastor. They were all concerned. I think, that I might end my life. No one had answers for me. I knew no one would have answers for me. What I have come to realize and feel that I must share is that we all have to find our own answers within ourselves. We have to ask our own questions to find the answers to those questions. When I began to talk about the dark feelings (getting the feelings out) was when I began down the road toward healing. I have learned that the thing we most don't want to talk about is the thing we need to talk about the most.

Through the love and persistence of fellow strugglers and friends, I was able to see a tiny pinhole of light. I use the word persistence because my friends and strugglers, as well as God, never gave up on me. They were always there, it was me who was not letting them in. Once I let in that tiny pinhole of light into my dark place, I began to see hope again. Slowly, at first, but as I let the light (love) in, the pinhole gets bigger and bigger. I have found God again (He never left me) and the God that I am coming to know now is truly bigger and better than the God I knew before. I know that my children are still with me (just as God is) in spirit and that someday I will be with them in heaven.

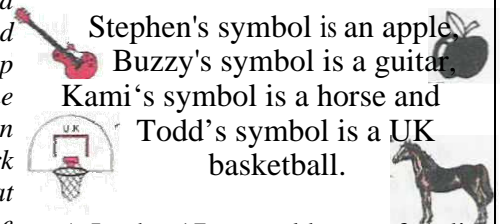
Though life is still a struggle and dark times do creep back in. I feel I have found meaning and purpose in my life again. My purpose is to honor God. I am to "press on." even in my trials and struggles for the glory and honor of God. That was my purpose even when I had

my children. I just didn't know it then.

To my fellow strugglers, I encourage you to find a reason "to keep turning the pages" to see what is still out there for you. During my darkest time, my reason to "keep turning the pages" was to help my husband pick out a monument for our children. I felt he needed me for that and it was a final gift I could give my children. We now have that task completed and because I kept turning the pages I have found my real reason to keep pressing on. I hope that you will search for your answers and that you will find meaning and purpose in your life.

It was through the love and care of others that I was able to see "God's light" again. We must all reach out in love to each other so that others can know that He is there--even in the darkest of times.

I am aware that there will be times that I am not able to reach out to others and hopefully, during those times, someone will reach out to me. We don't know what each new day will hold for us. But if we will risk reaching out to one another so that we can help each other out of the "dark places" we will find healing for ourselves. When we reach out to help others, we also help ourselves. I know this to be true.



Stephen's symbol is an apple  
Buzzy's symbol is a guitar  
Kami's symbol is a horse and  
Todd's symbol is a UK  
basketball.

A.J., the 17-year-old son of Arlin and Carol Hudson was killed in an automobile accident, 8-11-96. Leisa Reed, A. J.'s aunt, wrote a loving tribute about A.J.:

Arlin James. "A.J." Hudson, tire only child of Carol and Arlin Hudson, was born on March 25, 1979. He passed from this earth on August 11 1996, in a single car accident when his truck went off the road in a curve and struck a tree as he was returning home from a

friend's house. A.J.'s death came just 4 days before the start of his senior year of high school at Jackson City High School.. He was a member of the National Honor Society and listed in **Who's Who of American High School Students**. He maintained a 3.5 or better GPA during his high school career.

A.J. was best known for his winning smile and outgoing personality. He had friends from all age groups. His quick wit and great sense of humor made him popular with all those he met. Many of his friends have commented that he had a special way of seeing the humor in any situation and making the most dark day seem bright. He found humor and laughter in all aspects of life and he shared that gift with those who shared his life.

A.J. enjoyed being unique. He didn't want to follow anyone. He enjoyed being first in all aspects of his life. He had a subtle competitiveness about him that few people recognized. The things A.J. did, he did for himself because they were important to him. He set goals for himself that he strove to achieve. He did well in school because it was something he valued. His parents and friends would have valued him no less had he had poorer grades, but intelligence and education were things that A.J. valued and, therefore, he strove to attain both. A.J. was unique and all who knew him would agree; there was something special about him, a discernible difference in him that was noticeable since he was a small child. People were always drawn to him, like metal to a magnet. Just to know him made you want to be near him.

A.J.'s greatest joy came from those he cared about most in his life. Whether he was hanging out with his friends, watching a movie with his mom or going to the races with his dad, he enjoyed that time shared to the fullest. It is difficult to explain in words what kind of person A.J. was. He was so many different things to so many different people. Whether he was your student, your friend or your son, he was special to all who knew him. He touched our lives in a unique and meaningful way that was all his own. A.J.'s passing has left a huge void in all our lives that we now attempt to fill with the memories he shared with us.

When I remember A.J., I do not focus on the brief moments of his death, but instead on the way in which he lived his life with happiness, humor and laughter. Although his passing was sudden and his time here brief, it is comforting to know that he enjoyed life to the fullest and knew in his heart and mind who he was and what he meant to all those who cared for him. He was greatly loved and will be deeply missed, but when I think of A.J., I smile because I know that is the way he would have wanted it and he always had a smile for me.



A.J.'s symbols are a '93 Chevy pickup, a smiley face and the #3.

David and Cindy Jo Greever's 9-year-old daughter, Michelle, died 11-5-93. The following poems were written by Cindy Jo:

#### SPIRITS

*Their gentle spirits guide us They whisper in our ear*

*"We love you Mommy and Daddy, and we're happy, oh so happy up here."*

*"Please remember~ we love you so, we will never leave you~ we will be together always, and our love will forever grow ... "*

#### THE NIGHT IS CALM, MICHELLE

*The night is calm, my mind is at rest  
My heart is peaceful, I miss you at best ...  
Peaceful, indeed, you - I've learned much*

*Adjusted--somewhat ... How I miss your touch!*

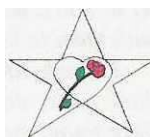
*Time is like an agent to get me through But  
Lord knows how much I love you!  
Sweetest little daughter, Angel of mine  
You are now in Heaven, and so divine ...  
I'll love you forever, and miss you until that day*

*When the Lord calls me Home, and I come your way!*

*For now I'm passing through this life of flesh*

*But Michelle I can't wait for us to for ever mesh!*

Michelle's symbols are a star with a heart and a flower.



Bruce and Karen James son, Caleb, died 7-23-95, when he was 15 years old. Karen wrote the following letter to me and Rosemary Smith:

*The battle of fatigue has been long enduring. Many times each day, sleepiness overwhelms me with a wish to go to bed and stay there. Most of the time I am able to shake it off and go on. Before Caleb passed away I appreciated my inner-strength. Now I am so weak and frail. I have had so much hurting since July 23, 1995, it makes me wonder if I have been permanently damaged by sorrow.*

*After baring my heart with you and others, a little peace settled over me. -- Someone understood-- Why is that so important? On the outside, in public, I am able to maintain and shield others from the torrent of emotions that sweep over me like tidal waves. When I get alone... I cry, scream (sometimes), and pray "God ... I have felt that no one could understand the loss in my life and the depth of grief that is just under my skin, behind my eyes, at the center of my stomach, and issuing from my heart." When you let me talk and listened with such empathy to the horror of my mournful journey ... I could, somehow, rest a little. Only another mother could have opened me up.*

*My sorrow has isolated me during this most needy time in my life. Under the best of circumstances, I am an odd person. People usually end up liking me once they get past my weirdsome ways. I felt this depth of sadness had made it impossible for me to relate to others. I didn't have the energy or patience to give others entrance to my inner-self I don't know how to learn to go on living without my Caleb. It feels like I am being pulled, against my will, down a raging river, and I am injured over and over by jagged rocks hidden below the surface. It has drained me trying to stay afloat. And that is where I am. It was so comforting to be embraced by a survivor.*

*After our sharing, I've had a change of positions, and am now going to vigorously pursue some support. There is a parent-grief group that meets in our area. Once I am there, I am going to inquire about local resources for my*

sons. Maybe I will be able to report that the James Gang (our family's nickname) are all reaching out and receiving help.

Motherhood has always been my highest calling. **I believe** that my sons belong to my Heavenly Father, and that He entrusted them with me as a wondrous responsibility.

I have taken this responsibility with the utmost seriousness and pleasure. Being a good mother is the most difficult, joyous, and richest experience I have ever encountered. Caleb's death altered my universe. His absence from this world has left an unfillable void. Because of his passing, I no longer feel at home. The unnaturalness of me outliving my child leaves me as if some crucial life sustaining part of me has been physically amputated. I shouldn't be able to function without life support, but I do.

Caleb was such a part of Bruce and me. He was a rare treasure. I long to see him again face to face and hug and kiss him. The most precious price for salvation, the blood of Jesus Christ, has a deeper meaning to me now. He provided. I want my days to be a blessing to Caleb and I want to make Jesus proud of me. I need to heal.

A symbol that would best represent Caleb for me is a treasure chest full of riches. This would signify his great worth to all the lives he touched.

Karen tells us about Caleb:

Caleb Nathaniel James. My second son. He had big beautiful brown eyes and dark skin that was smooth and sweet. When he laughed hard, his nose curled up and his mouth opened wide, but no sound would come through. He would lean back and hold his side as he chuckled with delight. Sometimes Caleb's heart broke, and as his eyes filled with tears, he would search out my face and words to see if I understood why he hurt. Caleb walked straight and tall with confidence and ease. He ran fast like a deer. At times he laid around like a couch potato. I loved seeing him first thing in the morning, with his hair sticking out every which way and his eyes puffy with sleepiness. Caleb observed life and people with a passion. He enjoyed learning and experiencing new things.

Life was an art form to perfect in its richness of hues, textures and depths. He was a leader. People were drawn to him. He cared. Caleb was a source of pride and joy to me. I feel blessed and privileged that he was my boy. He was loving and affectionate, with ample hugs and kisses. He sat with me most everyday to share his life and adventures, beliefs and opinions. Oh what a loss!

On July 23, 1995, Caleb took his younger brothers and two friends swimming at my sister's pond. I was in the house, in viewing distance, watching a few younger children. When I went out to check on the boys, Caleb was missing. The next couple of hours we searched the pond along with family, friends and rescue crews. Our worst nightmare was confirmed when my husband and brother spotted Caleb at the bottom of the pond. They brought him out of the water and he was taken by ambulance to the hospital. It was much too late to save him. Later, x-rays revealed that he had died from a severe break of his neck. No one saw how it happened. He was gone.

Karen wrote this poem:

upon our meeting  
a year has past without You to hold  
i have survived  
breathing, learning, hurting and living.  
life can be so short.  
make mine a testament,  
of life such with meaning, truth, hope.  
for You, a rare and precious treasure,  
may be proud of your mother  
upon our meeting..  
Caleb Nathaniel James  
4/26/80 - 7/23/95




Tommy and Connie Elza's 14-year-old daughter, Tommie Lou, was killed in a 4-wheeler accident, 3-14-96. Tommie Lou has been described by her family as:

Tommie Lou Elza was very special from the day she was born. She never met a stranger throughout her 14 years and 11 months on this earth. We often worried that someone might take her one day because she would go up and talk to anyone, but the Lord had his hand on her and was protecting her until he needed her home with him

In those short years, she went from a little, white-headed girl to a beautiful young woman. She was just beginning to blossom, like a beautiful rose beginning to open. She always had a smile on her face and a laugh in her heart. She was so full of love. Tommie Lou didn't have any prejudices. Old, young, rich, poor, black, or white, she loved everyone just the same. She used to go to the nursing home and visit with the elderly and walk around with her great uncle. She was a beautiful daughter, wonderful sister, loving aunt, a/ld truly a child of God.

When she started high school, she joined the colorguard team and she was so enthusiastic about it. She was always wanting to show us new routines she had learned. She loved being a part of this team and when she was on the field holding her flag high in the air, her hair would blow in the wind and shine as the sun came down upon her. She looked beautiful!

There are really no words to describe how great a person Tommie Lou was. She always had a hug for everyone, she never seem to run out of hugs and smiles. She touched hundreds of lives with her love and kindness. She said one time that she was popular but you can't imagine just how popular she was. If you had met her one time for only 1 minute, you would never have forgotten her. That's how special she was. She will be forever missed by so many people, but we have the assurance of seeing her once more. She was an angel on earth, now she is an angel in heaven. We truly have more to look forward to after our life here is over, because we know she is waiting for us at the gate.

 Tommie Lou's symbols love, smiley face and a color guard.

Jennifer McClung's daughter, Jennifer Rose (6), was killed in an automobile accident 11-26-93. Jennifer's family has had another tragedy. Jennifer shares:

Months ago my Daddy had a place removed from his stomach which was pre-cancerous. He was really upset

over this. He had just gotten out of the hospital 9 days before. He had been treated for depression because of this, at the V A Hospital in Louisville.

When all of this (Jennifer's father took his own life, Sept. 29) happened, he was taken to the local hospital. They called Louisville for his records. It was faxed that he had stomach cancer. He had told no one. He was a very open person, but this was his breaking point. Life is so short and precious. My family is so small. It is so hard.



I hope you will remember Jennifer's family in your prayers. An angel and a white rose are Jennifer's symbols.

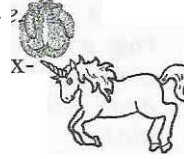
Marcia Carson's 21-year-old son, Dell, was murdered 12-15-91. Marcia is reaching out to new fellow travelers:

I received a "care" package from Rosemary Smith. She sent a book "When There Are No Words" and a video. I will share the video with a friend, Mrs. Annie Howard. She lost her brother and two months later her son. The book was wonderful. I wish I had it in '91 when my son died. I am passing it along to one of my coworkers whose 14-year-old daughter was killed by a train last week. I will wait until she returns to work. I hope that will be my signal that she is trying to return to life and ready to accept the book. When I went to the wake, all she would do was hug me and cry, "You understand, don't you Marcia?" It seemed like little Donna's death gave the other people at work an idea of what I have been going through since '91, everyone is understanding, and now are asking me about my son, and requesting that I talk to her.

Rosemary's children's symbol is butterflies. She sent me a bumper sticker that says, "I break for butterflies" (which was designed by Donna Herndon. Her son, Roger's, symbol is a monarch butterfly.) One day a coworker asked me if I really break for butterflies. I told her that if she is ever behind a burgundy caivaler on I-64 or I-75, to watch out because if I stop my car suddenly, it's because I am letting a butterfly pass.

I can't explain it, but I think I am getting better. Time will tell. I could hear his song, **It's so hard to say goodbye by Boyz to Men** five minutes from now, and be back at square one.

Dell's symbols are boxing gloves and a unicorn.



Johnathan Stone, the 16-year-old son of Rick and Claire Brown, was accidentally shot 12-16-95. Claire laments:

My son, Johnathan Stone, was killed this past December. Johnathan and another young man were in our driveway. It was about 7:00 PM. My husband, our youngest son, and I were down the street at some neighbors. Our oldest son was inside our house on the phone. The young man with Johnathan was in possession of a 357 magnum handgun. Obviously, we didn't know that! All we do know is that Johnathan was shot in the heart and died. It was called an "accidental shooting." The young man was arrested and charged with Negligent Homicide, but he has not gone before the grand jury yet. He lives in our neighborhood and we have to see him all the time. That's so hard.

Johnathan was born October 15, 1979. He was real sick at birth and almost died. He pulled through only to lose his life 16 years, 2 months and 1 day later.

Johnathan was so full of life and love. He had beautiful blue eyes that sparkled and winked. He had dark red, wavy hair and freckles on his nose. He was always smiling. He was 6'1" tall and weighed only 120 lbs. He was a Sophomore at Houston High School and worked part-time at Seessel's Grocery Store. He was so popular and had tons of Fiends, lots of girl friends. He played soccer and sang in the school chorus. He was not a great student. He was in school for "social and social only"! He did just what he had to do to pass!

He was into everything when he was younger. When he was 4 years old, he super glued all my cologne bottles to my dresser so they wouldn't fall over when you bumped into it! When he was 3, he was in a church program. All the children had a Commandment

to recite. His was "Thou Shalt not Commit Adultery." He said, very loudly, "Thou Shalt Not Admit Adultery!"

Johnathan was the laughter in our home and the light in our hearts. Our home is now a house and our hearts are dark and empty.

Rocky is now 18 years old. He and Johnathan were by my first marriage. They were not just brothers, they were best friends. He's really had a hard time.

Matthew is 12 1/2. He doesn't understand, and misses Johnathan a lot.

Rick and I have been married for almost 14 years, so Johnathan was as much his as he was mine. He's the only dad that Rocky or Johnathan have ever known. He's also had a hard time.

You never expect to outlive your children, but in such a horrible, negligent and stupid act, it is just so unreal. We were all together just 45 minutes before. We were laughing and cutting up. Rick and Johnathan were clowning around in the den, and I was "play" fussing that they better not break anything. In just a few short minutes, our world was turned upside down. I guess you know what I'm talking about!

Between the visitation and the funeral service, there were over 900 people there. There are still flowers, notes and balloons being left at his grave all the time. I go out there several times a week. It helps me.

Johnathan's symbol is a soccer ball.



Karen Hall's husband, Denzil, and only child, Nikole, were killed in an automobile accident, 1-10-93. Karen shares a way she has remembered her loved ones:

I purchased a Peace Angel for Denzil Ray and Nikole. I was so thrilled when we set this angel on the monument at the cemetery. This angel captured the sun's energy during the day and released a red glow throughout the night. I was so excited and happy because my Nikole never liked to sleep alone and she always wanted a light left on. To my surprise, after two weeks, the angel

was stolen. I was DEVASTATED!!! I just prayed that whoever stole the angel would be forgiven. Maybe they needed it worse than I did (If you are interested in more information about the Peace Angel, you may telephone 1-800-444-1429).

We have spent seven weeks in school (Karen is a teacher). I stay really busy with work. I am so grateful to God for allowing me to return to work and I hope others can see me as a miracle. I do want others to see God's goodness and grace!

Denzil and Nicole's symbols are musical notes.



Candy, the 14-year-old daughter of Sammy and Sheila Hall was killed with Clint Sturgill by a drunk driver 4-25-92. Sheila described her emotions:

*I, too, am a victim of a tragedy. My 14-year-old daughter was killed by a drunk driver. Candy and her 18-year-old boyfriend, Clint SM-gill, were returning home from the movies when Clint's small pick-up truck was hit head-on by a man who was .360 drunk (3 times the legal limit). They were both killed instantly. The drunk driver received no injuries. For a long time, I was filled with so much hate and a feeling of loneliness that is impossible to describe. Like you, I have so many friends, but I could not get what I needed from any of them except from Clint's mother, Karen. We clung to each other for day after day, and week after week, and month after month. The months turned into year after year and we are still clinging to each other. It is true that people who experience a tragedy are bonded with people who have experienced similar experiences. Only those who have lost children can truly understand what we are going through.*

*I have worked through my grief by keeping a daily journal, submerging myself in activities with work and staying involved in my son's life. I have also been very active in our small community in trying to rid the town of alcohol and organizing a local MADD Chapter. I have worked diligently and*

*persistently in my efforts to find purpose and meaning in life after the loss of Candy, but there are still times when I still hurt so badly that I just want to give up.*

*I, too, collect angels. I also collect Precious Moments figurines. I started collecting both after Candy's death. I receive a great deal of comfort from being surrounded by Angelic presence.*



'Candy's symbol is a dimple cheeked angel holding a 4-leaf clover with one missing leaf.

Brandon, the 16-year-old son of Dennis and Linda Holbrook, was killed in an auto accident, 6-17-93. The Holbrook's compiled a book which contained Brandon's pictures and letters that had been written to the Holbrook family by Brandon's friends. The family wrote this forward:

*On October 7, 1976, a beautiful baby boy was welcomed into the Holbrook family and we experienced a joy we had never known. The moment we held our son, we understood the love of God even more.*

*Brandon was always such a happy baby, always smiling (even then!). He never wanted to sleep, I think he was afraid he might miss something. He was a very active child, proven by his numerous visits to the emergency room, numerous stitches, and broken bones through the years. He did everything early, walk, talk, etc, He must have known that he had to get everything done in 16 years.*

*Brandon would have to be described as a "people person." He was so thrilled when his brother arrived and he would have someone to play with all the time. He was so disappointed when we brought the baby home and all he could do was eat and sleep! Brandon always loved being around people, especially family and friends. He loved family gatherings, the people and the food. He loved carrying on conversations with all ages, he could talk all the telephone for hours! If he didn't know you when you entered the room, you could bet he would know you and something about you before he left!*

*Brandon has been described by those who knew him so well as a kind, sharing, thoughtful person with a "big heart." He will always be remembered by his warm smile which said so much about his personality. Friends were so important to him, it was only appropriate that the closing song for his funeral was "Friends."*

*Brandon accomplished a lot during his school years. He loved to learn--after he learned to read "The Cat in the Hat" by Dr. Seuss, there was no stopping him! He always wanted to know more, so he either read to gain knowledge or he would tear something apart to figure out how it worked. He was co-valedictorian of Melvin Elementary School and was ranked third in his class at Wheelwright High School. His future plans were to attend the university of Kentucky on scholarship and study to become an engineer.*

*He was involved with athletics since he was 5 years old. He participated in basketball, football, baseball, and track. According to all his coaches (including his Dad) he would give everything he had, whether it be in practice or in a game.*

*His favorite sport was football, so it was only appropriate that we bury him in his jersey-#81. We always thought that maybe he loved football so much because he got the opportunity to be a little rowdy, hit someone, and not get into trouble!*

*Brandon had a promising career in track. He placed first in the EKMC only weeks before his death. He had placed third in the state regional competition at Pikeville. His own running form is etched on his monument with the scripture from II Timothy 4: 7: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course. I have kept the faith." He has now finished his course of life and he did indeed win the big race!*

*Brandon also loved music, both listening and playing. He enjoyed mostly rock music, but he would also listen to country songs. His favorite was "Tears in Heaven." Ironically, this song was written by a father who had lost his own son.*

*He had played the saxophone and been a member of the high school band since fifth grade. At his last concert, he played a solo. **"I'll Be Home for***

## **Christmas, if Only in My Dreams."**

*He will ALWAYS be with each of us in our dreams ...*

*For the past months, we have surrounded ourselves with rainbows. Just as a rainbow was God's promise to Noah, a rainbow is a symbol for our promise that we will see each other again someday. One day while standing on the cemetery shortly after Brandon's death, we looked in the sky and saw the most beautiful rainbow. Immediate/y, we smiled at each other and knew that we had "Our Promise." So whenever you see a rainbow, take a moment to smile and think of Brandon!*

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



Ed and Pat Kuzela's 20-year-old son, Chris, died as the result of a fall from an interstate bridge while drinking on 4-24-88. Pat has written a wonderful article entitled:

### **GOING CRAZY (or I've got BBD)**

*O.K., today there was no way to deny it--I definitely have serious symptoms of an aberrant mental condition that I have been calling "BBD" for the past few years: BEREAVEMENT BRAIN DAMAGE. This time it wasn't just a case of forgetting my purse, shopping list, someone's birthday, someone's name, or even being unable to find a pen or document that I just laid down in front of me. No, this one was serious: I left my car running for a good 50 minutes while I was keeping an appointment! The dashboard has one of those computer gadgets, and it told me that I had lost almost 100 miles worth of gas while I had left it running. Granted, there were extenuating circumstances that can serve to salvage a bit of ego--A dreadful thunderstorm was in progress, so I was unable to hear the engine, and I was distracted by a losing battle with one of those self-opening umbrellas that refused to open.*

*When I was a kid, There was this corny dialog that went something like this:*

*"Where are you going?"*

*"Crazy, wanna come?"*

*"Nah. I've already been."*

*When newly-bereaved parents get together, invariably the topic of "going crazy" comes up. We not only feel that we've "already been," but that we ARE crazy! In the early period of our experience, everything seems surreal; everything seems crazy: We are, and so is the entire world, which for some infuriating reason is continuing to exist no matter who is now absent from it. This unnerving lapse regarding the car forced me to do some research to see WHY?. 6 years after my child's death, when I have worked so hard to reorient myself and adjust to the loss, this dramatic episode of "BBD" had happened.*

*I found that what I had been calling "BBD" seems to belong in the same category as "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," which came to public attention when studies were made of many Vietnam Veterans who couldn't seem to "get on with their lives." The first criterion for PTSD is "exposure to a traumatic event outside the range of normal human experience ...*

*The immediate reaction when the "bomb fill on us" was a tremendous surge of adrenaline. In fact, the way we find out appears to have an influence upon the severity of the adrenaline surge. The adrenaline continues to work overtime in those early months as we struggle to comprehend the incomprehensible: That something has happened to our child that was totally out of our control to prevent.*

*Then some crazy "automatic pilot" turns on the "IF ONLY" switch: Without our consent, our minds become obsessed with searching for clues that might have alerted us, so that we might have stopped the death. We torment ourselves with "magical thinking: "If only I had done \_\_\_\_\_, my child wouldn't have died." We attach ourselves and family members with recriminations.*

*In the early weeks, we feel as if our chests have exploded and our hearts have swollen and are ripping in half-in effect, a powerful feeling of a physical wound. Another common physical response is that of feeling that we have been blasted right through the center of our bodies with an enormous weapon, and what appears to be the center of the body is just all illusion. We are at war with the death.*

*One of our major skirmishes is with the unbidden "replay" of the death. We go over and over it obsessively, trying to hang all to that last second of life until we are sure we are losing our minds. And in a way, we are; Our minds are going to replay this, until the mind is "sick" of it, and gradually, the replays fade out.*

*What makes us no longer the master of even our thoughts? The present research suggests that specific sites in our brains have actually undergone a biological change as a result of brain hormones. Sleep disturbance is an example of this. Insomnia, or gruesome nightmares in which we are being tortured, or dreams of exhausting searches over the entire planet to find our child occur, when we desperately need "the sleep that mends the raveled sleeve of care." On the other hand. We may feel so totally empty that we never want to get up out of the bed again. The life we had, with its vivid delights and temporary setbacks, seems pointless. We don't have the energy nor the desire to participate anymore. We don't even recognize ourselves. We have BBD.*

*Everywhere we turn, we are up against the wall, because there is nothing more we can do for our child. Thoughts that never entered Our minds before, such as suicide, as a means of ending the unbearable pain and despair, and especially as a means of joining our child, are commonplace. It is a relief when those thoughts run their course. No wonder we feel that we are going crazy!*

*We are supposed to "know" our child died, yet we still worry about the child as if he or she were still alive. We may be constantly asking the child. "Are you all right?" and then searching for some "sign" as all answer. The frustration is absolute. Our coping mechanisms are so overwhelmed, and we are so focused on the missing child in those early days that nothing seems to penetrate the fog. Is it any wonder that we feel lonely, isolated, irritable, have difficulty concentrating, and have frightening episodes of loss of short-term memory?*

We have PSTS/BBD. How has this affected us? To begin with, we have become "hyper vigilant," or what people generally call "paranoid." We are on the lookout for more trouble. *This* has happened; what else can happen? We fear the deaths of others, but not our own. Unfortunately, our way of coping with this could take one of several forms that alienate us from others; We may become over-protective (overcontrolling) of other family members, which actually prevents them, if they are surviving children, from maturing in an age-appropriate manner. Or, we may detach from everyone in an attempt to ward off further loss. If we have surviving children, we know we are casting them adrift, yet we feel helpless to do otherwise. Again, we are so focused on the one who is missing that we are simply unable to respond to the ones who are still with us.

Because we have emotion centers in our brains, and the emergency hormones are stimulated repeatedly, our entire bodies are affected. The intense grief and the "aftershocks" that hit us like waves as we slowly absorb the blow continually precipitate the hormone production. Our immune systems are weakened, and all sorts of illnesses can beset us. We definitely learn what a "gut reaction" is; eating problems and digestive disorders often result.

Another form of BBD that is a result of changed brain functioning is that of "emotional numbness." This is the manifestation of another defense mechanism, as the opioid system of the brain, aroused by the overwhelming stress, not only blunts the feeling of pain, but can also block normal feelings to tenderness and empathy.

Most of these symptoms decline with time, allowing us to adapt to living with our loss. I prefer the word "adapt." (I despise that other "a" -word, accept--it seems to imply a kind of consent.) This takes a much longer time than anyone realizes, except those who have traveled the path before us. If we are not meeting their recover expectations, they aren't too subtle about telling us we need to seek "professional help." So now we have confirmation that we ARE crazy! It takes a while to realize they need us to get back to normal as soon as possible for two reasons:

First, they have no conception of the magnitude of our loss. Two, it makes us easier to deal with. They can stop worrying about us and "what to say" to us.

It is a relief to learn that studies are now showing that if we are still having difficulties coming to terms with the loss after four to seven years, this is a common response, not a failure of our coping mechanisms. And so, even if six years later, someone leaves the car running unattended in the rain, it can be taken in stride. After all, we at least remembered where we were headed, arrived, and completed the errand. Almost like normal folks, only with a bit of BBD thrown in to show us that another little "hero's journey" has been completed.



"Where are you going?"  
"Crazy, wanna come?"  
"Nope, I've already been."

Chris' symbol is an eagle in flight.

Benjamin, the 2-week-old child of Mark and Karen Henson, died 9-8-95. Karen wanted us to know Benjamin:

The child that I lost is Benjamin. He lived for 2 weeks.

I had to take fertility drugs to get pregnant with our son. Dakota and with Benjamin. Dakota was born with a hole in his heart that closed up when he was 2 years old. When I finally became pregnant with Benjamin, I had to see a Gynecologist in Lexington that deals with high-risk pregnancies because I became a diet-controlled diabetic.

I had no problems with my sugar levels or my pregnancy until my check-up at 5 months. When doing the ultrasound to get measurements, the doctor found a problem with the baby's heart (the same day that I found out the baby was a boy).

I was then referred to UK to a pediatric Cardiologist who told me the baby had a hypoplastic left heart, which basically means that the left side of the heart was developed, but had stopped growing. I had 3 options: A heart transplant; a three-part heart surgery to repair the existing heart or compassionate care and let nature take over.

After further tests, a heart transplant was ruled out because the aorta had not developed enough to attach a new heart to it. Then I was discouraged from having the 3-part surgery done because there hasn't

been a baby in Kentucky that has survived all 3 surgeries yet and Benjamin's was one of the worst they had ever seen. I next had the option of terminating the pregnancy. The board at Central Baptist met to decide whether to allow an abortion at their hospital. They decided that it could be done there because of the circumstances. I had a few days to decide because I was already 5 months pregnant. I decided to carry the baby to term. I decided that I couldn't fix his heart, but that I could keep him alive as long as he was inside me.

The next 3 months were a mixture of heaven and hell. The mother in me felt the love grow daily as the baby did, but it was hell knowing that the baby had no chance of surviving. I couldn't even buy new things for it like normal expectant mothers. I wouldn't go in to the baby section of stores when that is normally where pregnant women love to go. I couldn't look forward to the birth of my baby because this also would mean his death.

I was told that the baby could be dead when it was born and that if he was alive, that he would live from 2 hours to 2 weeks. My labor was induced 3 week, early (they said to get it over with). I had 15 members of my family with me until right before I gave birth. The hospital gave me special treatment under the circumstances.

After birth, I had problems with my epidural and with bleeding. I had to stay in the hospital for 4 days, all the time hoping Benjamin would live long enough to bring him home. On the outside, he was a beautiful baby that looked completely normal, but we had to live each day not knowing if it would be the last day he would live.

When he was a week old, we took him to Louisville for a second opinion. They agreed with UK's diagnosis and told us there was nothing they could do. Benjamin died in our arms one week later.

The past year has been hard, but is getting better. Reading the newsletter has made me realize that all the feelings I've had the past year are normal.

On the anniversary of Benjamin's death, I was thinking that no one remembered except me and my husband. But I realized later that everyone remembered, they just didn't want to say



anything to me. It amazes me that people think it's better not to say anything, but we all know that it's not.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt is a noted author, teacher and practicing clinical thanatologist. He has made several suggestions in helping us to deal with the holidays:

**Talk about your grief.** Don't be afraid to express your feelings of grief. Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly of ten makes you feel better. Find caring friends and relatives who will listen without judging you. They will help you feel understood.

**Eliminate unnecessary stress.** Don't over-extend yourself. Avoid isolating yourself, but be sure to recognize the need to have special time for yourself. Realize also that merely "keeping busy" won't distract you from your grief. Experience suggests that it only increases stress and postpones the need to talk out thoughts and feelings.

**Be with supportive, comforting people.** Identify those friends and relatives who understand that the holiday season can increase your sense of loss and who will allow you to talk openly about your feelings. Find those who encourage you to be yourself and accept your feelings both happy and sad.

**Mention the name of the person who has died.** Include the person's name in your holiday conversation. If you are able to talk candidly, other people are more likely to recognize your need to remember that special person who was an important part of your life.

**Do what is right for you during the holidays.** Well-meaning friends and family often try to prescribe what is good for you during the holidays. Instead of going along with their plans, focus on what you personally want to do. Talking about these wishes will help you to clarify what it is you want to do, and share them with your friends and family.

**Be of your physical or psychological limits.** Feelings of loss will probably leave you fatigued... Your low energy level may naturally slow you down. Respect what your body and mind are telling you and lower your own expectations about being at your peak during the holiday season.

**Express your faith.** You may find a renewed sense of faith or discover a new set of beliefs. Associate with people who understand and respect your need to talk about these beliefs. You may want to attend a holiday service or special religious ceremony.

**Embrace your treasure of memories.** Memories are one of the legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. And holidays always make you think about times past. Instead of ignoring these memories, share them with your family and friends. Keep in mind that memories are tinged with both happiness and sadness. If your memories bring laughter - smile. If your memories bring sadness - It's all right to cry.

**Renew your resources for living.** Spend time thinking about the meaning and purpose of your life. The death of one loved creates opportunities for taking inventory of your life; past, present and future. The combination of a holiday and a loss naturally results in looking inward and assessing your individual situation. Use this time to define the positive things in life that surround you.

**Plan ahead for family gatherings.** Decide the family traditions you want to continue and the new ones you would like to begin following the death of someone loved. Structure your holiday time. This will help you anticipate activities, rather than just reacting to whatever happens. Getting caught off guard can create feelings of panic, fear and anxiety. As you make your plans, however, leave room to change them if you feel it is appropriate.

**As you approach the holidays, Remember: GRIEF IS BOTH A NECESSITY AND A PRIVILEGE.** It comes as a result of giving and receiving love. Don't let anyone take your grief away. Love yourself. Be patient with yourself, and allow yourself to be surrounded by loving and caring people.

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

There's an elephant in the room.  
It is large and squatting, so it is hard to get around it.  
Yet we squeeze by with, "How are you?"  
And, "I'm fine" ...  
And a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.  
We talk about the weather.  
We talk about Thanksgiving or Christmas.  
We talk about everything else except the elephant in the room.  
There's an elephant in the room.  
We all know it is there.  
We are thinking about the elephant as we talk together.  
It is constantly on our minds.  
As you can see, it is a very big elephant.  
It has hurt us all.  
But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.  
Oh, please say (his/her) name.  
Oh, please say our child's name again.  
  
Oh, please let's talk about the elephant in the room.  
For if we talk about (his/her) death.  
Perhaps we can talk about (his/her) life.  
Can I say our child's name to you and not have you look away?  
For if I cannot, then you are leaving me Alone...  
In a room...  
With an elephant.  
-Poet unknown



Pamela Patrick Novotny wrote an article entitled "Sweet surrender. How eating the chocolate you crave can help you look and feel great." She says that Chocolate is the perfect combination of fat and sugar, and thereby the answer to most women's cravings. Our bodies instinctively know what's best for us, and those chocolate cravings are Nature's way of telling us what's going to make us look and feel better."



See, I have been right about chocolate all these years. Look what it has done for me!!! (And you questioned me.)

