

LAMENTATIONS

Issue 53

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

February, 1997



February 2 is **Groundhog Day**. If the groundhog sees his shadow when he comes out of his hole, the forecast is for six more weeks of bad weather. If he does not see his shadow, spring will come soon. We grievers are like the groundhog. We don't want to see the "shadow" of grief because we think it will make the "winter" of our grief longer. I tend to believe that the winter of our grief will be shorter if we recognize our grief, accept it and try to stay in it rather than hibernating into the hole of denial. May February 2 remind you that there will be a spring time in our future.

February is the month we refer to as The Month of: **LOVE**. It is another month in which there is a special day that pierces our hearts with the realization that we have experienced a great loss. Our hearts have undergone such drastic changes. We have gone from a filled, whole heart, to a broken heart, that happened in just a matter of seconds.



Our lives were changed so quickly, but, oh, how slowly we begin the process of healing.



Our hearts will never be completely Or whole again, but they can be mended with the love and support of our family, friends, and fellow travelers.



Those of you that are married have experienced one horrendous death, that of your child; try not to let another death occur that of your

marriage. Of all the trials and tribulations that effect our marriage, none are as overwhelming as the death of a child. Many grief therapists have estimated that as many as 60% to 80% of the couples who were having marital problems before the death of their child, will experience divorce after the tragedy. Barbara Rosof, a psychotherapist and author of *The Worst Loss: How Families Heal From the Death of a Child* says that even though a couple is married, there is a feeling that they are alone in their grief. Each partner is wrapped up in their own grief. *The time after a child's death means a lengthy spell of acute agony, a period of up to a year and a half when you walk around like you've been hit over the head with a baseball bat.* It is also a time often marked by intense isolation from our spouse despite the fact that he/she is the only person sharing the experience and is also suffering a commensurate amount of pain and loss. This isolation is especially destructive during a time when we need to communicate with one another more than ever.

Instead of being able to support and help our spouse, we feel so empty, numb and devastated, that we don't have much, if any, to give. Our marriage is forgotten as we try to keep our heads above the drowning waters of grief.

But let me also be quick to say that if we remember our spouse, and those of you who have other children, it will strengthen your family in the long run. When we realize that what we have left is priceless and precious, we will work hard to be sure we keep as much of it as possible.

If you are having problems with your marriage and family relations, you may want to consider seeing a counselor. I am almost of the opinion that anyone who has lost a child should seek counseling immediately for themselves and their family. Therapists recommend that grieving parents seek help and support, "no respect the manner in which the other spouse grieves. With time and understanding, you can strengthen your marriage and family



Cupid was the son of Venus, the Greek goddess of beauty. While still a child, his mother gave him a bow and magical arrows. He used these arrows to awaken his true love, Psyche, from a deep sleep. Cupid's arrow brought Psyche back to life and granted eternal love to the two. Cupid, the god of love, has become the symbol of Valentine's Day. May he also become a symbol for each of us. When you see a cupid or cherub, may it remind you that we too have an eternal love with the one who has died. They will always be in our minds and



hearts, and no one can take that away. Perhaps we will be shot by an arrow of love that will help us see a new dimension of our loved ones lives.

Grief Grafts

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

Mending a Broken Heart

For the world, February is the month of hearts. And for grieving persons, it is a time for "mending broken hearts." It's not an easy process, but lots of love mixed with tears is the glue that reshapes the pieces of our heart to fit back together in a new pattern that will give meaning to our life.

When my two oldest children, 19-year-old Peggy and 21-year-old Denis, were killed in an automobile accident, I had to "pick up the pieces" of my heart and make a firm decision to "go on" with my life, so, as I told myself, "I want my children to continue to be proud of me as their mother." As much as I hurt, I didn't want to disappoint them; and that one thought gave my body a lot of momentum, especially in the morning when it would have been far easier to stay in bed with the covers over my head. Every choice I made to "plow ahead" released the vice that seemed to be squeezing the life out of my heart.

You see, each decision of the heart puts you more in control and brings some semblance of order back into your life. Every day you do as much as you can handle. There are no deadlines, no time-schedules, no cards to punch. You set your own pace. You do what you need. There are no correct or incorrect ways of grieving; only different ways. Taking time to count the blessings you still have, to appreciate the family members who remain, to treasure the precious time you had with your loved one, and to share those priceless memories with others - keeping your loved one "alive" in many hearts can ease the burden you are carrying in this shorter, colder winter month that seems too long.

You might discover that "planning ahead" is a big aid to mending your heart. Having some things to look forward to - whether it be a trip, a new book, a journal entry, a phone call, a

new hair-do, a visit to or from a dear friend, a day with a grandchild, a quiet dinner, a walk along the beach, a flower garden - makes the time go faster. Anything that speeds up the calendar, hastens our healing. In my grief, I learned that planning specific activities for holidays, birthdays and anniversaries, even if it's just a cup of tea together, making sure I was surrounded by loving people who made me feel comfortable, kept me busy, talking, sharing and living. Being at ease with people who do not put demands on us strengthens our inner core and our public face. The stronger we get, and it happens gradually, the better we can handle people who say the "wrong" things to us and give us unnecessary heartache. Of course, gentle, compassionate people who let us know they "care" about us in simple, loving ways do much for "remolding" our broken hearts. God bless them! Letters, phone calls, listening to us, holding us, not judging or rushing us, allow us time to heal.

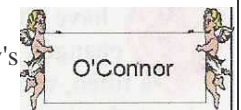
Pushing ourselves to keep busy can be a tiresome job, but spending time making sure our loved one's memory is kept alive in many hearts can add a new dimension to "keeping busy." In my early grieving, designing a meaningful acknowledgment card, complete with my special thoughts about each of my children helped me share them with so many people. Then a few months later, sending a little angel with my children's names and dates inscribed on them to dear relatives and friends for their Christmas trees, insured my children to be part of these peoples Christmas thoughts year after year as they hung these dear ornaments on their trees. Meanwhile, organizing and overseeing the development of a memorial scholarship in my children's names at Peggy's much loved university occupied many precious hours of my time. Keeping Peggy's and Denis' memories alive while helping other young people attain the goals of their dreams does something very special for my heart. Others have set up music and art scholarships, sports awards, summer camp grants and some have established libraries, built gardens, outfitted hospital rooms, donated equipment for special needs, and expanded "make-a wish" programs. As much as your heart hurts, it definitely feels better when you

"reinvest" that special love you have for your loved one by helping others.

Spending time looking over writings, letter", paintings, medals, trophies, pictures, handiwork of our laved one can bring lots of tears, but can also touch our hearts deeply and make us feel very close to our loved one. Arranging any of these in a special way, for ourselves, for relatives, or for the public, can preserve the uniqueness of our loved one. Some people are lucky enough to have beautiful art work, sensitive essays, heart-warming poetry, original music, or dance recital and sports videos. I treasure my children's homemade Mother's Day cards and college letters, swimming medals and 4-H projects. I can still chuckle at my daughter's babysitting "business cards" she made in junior high shop class, unwittingly reversing the letters and loudly proclaiming her services as "Baby-sitter." The crooked wooden lamp my son made in 8th grade has the place of honor on my desk, even though Better Homes and Gardens might not approve.

So as you "pick-up" the pieces of your heart and rearrange them in ways to give "new life" to your heart, may you find the peace that comes with sharing your loved one's memory and your special love. And may the hollow of your heart, caused by grief, begin to fill with joy as you mend your broken heart.

Denis' and Peggy's symbol is an angel.



Stephen, the 26-year-old son of Chip and Nancy Miller died from AIDS, 5-24-89. Nancy wrote the following article for **RENEW Center Newsletter** (1996):

The late summer night was very dark. Stephen had suddenly been admitted to the hospital in respiratory distress. The nurse came to me after several hours of intense work with our youngest son, and encouraged me to go home. "You need to rest," she said, "we do not !mow if he will live through the night. We will call you if we feel you need to

return." Never had I felt so alone. My husband was out of town on business and was to return late that night. He did not know where I was. Neither did he now what was going on in our family. It was difficult to breathe. "Can somebody help?" I wished. "God, where are you?"

The next two days were frantic. Every time we stepped from the elevator our eyes darted into his room. Our hearts were in our throats. We did not know what to expect. We needed to share our fear, but with whom? On Friday morning we stood beside Stephen's bed with a large group of interns and the Infectious Disease doctor. It became very quiet and the doctor looked at each one of us and addressed us by name: "Mr. Miller, Mrs. Miller, Stephen, you do have Pneumocystis pneumonia. You do have AIDS" Now we were delivered the clincher.

As a "preacher's family," we thought we knew enough theology to get us through, but now we realized we did not have the slightest idea of the definition HOPE that we could claim. With no one knowing our heartache and our ignorance around the whole subject of AIDS we felt abandoned, ashamed, afraid, and out of control. Where could we go? "Doctor," we asked, "what about hope?"

"Hope?" he queried. "There is no hope. AIDS is one hundred percent fatal and 50% are dead!" The austere group of men left the room with one exception. He turned to us with all the compassion within him to say he would be back after rounds and we would talk about hope. Hope was demonstrated in that room in several ways but let me tell you about two of them.

Stephen's voice called out to his tranced parents. "Mom, Dad, I am so sorry. I did not by any means intend to hurt you. I have caused enough distress in our family. Dad, what will Kentucky Baptists do? Will you lose your job? Mom, how will your clients react to you? What will Grandmom's friend, say? What about my brother and sister? I've known others who have had this disease and they made it. I want you to know that I can make it somehow. You don't have to stay with me. You are free to go." I saw Dad, whose heart was broken, go to his

youngest child's side and say, "Son, we want to walk the whole distance with you. We need each other. Please don't lock us out. Let us finish the mile together." What a live definition of hope! A long, arduous journey was behind us and perhaps in front of us, but we would go there together.

The second tableau occurred when the young student intern returned to the room. He used his entire visit as a "teachable moment" for us. Since he knew our knowledge of AIDS was limited to its fatality, he sat down on Stephen's bed, put his hand on Stephen's feverish body and left it there. He was showing us it was all right to touch, hug, love, and care for those infected by HIV. Among many things said that afternoon he talked about hope. "Hope," he said, "is a quality word, not quantitative. I have known people who have thrown their hands in the air to declare they were giving up even though their heart was still beating. You can also decide that each moment is worth the effort to give it all you have. To be a contribution to your place in the world, your family, friends, and church is yours for the taking. You can say 'yes' to life or you can say 'no.' In the midst of tears, Stephen raised his hands to say, "That's surely what I want to do. I want to say 'yes' to life as long as my heart beats!" Chip and I joined his commitment.

The next twenty months were a yo-yo experience. We were finally able to tell a few trusted friends about Stephen's illness. They responded with all they knew to do and say. They gave to us freely of their God-given gifts. On May 24, 1989, Stephen found Home. By the time he died, he had lost his sight and hearing. He was deformed and immobilized from neck down. He was incontinent and could not swallow. We fed him with a dropper, swabbed his mouth, bathed him, changed his diapers, sang to him, hugged him, massaged him and attended to everything we could.

Now our friends, our world, know our Stephen's story. Our ministry to the effected and infected is done in his honor. He taught us how to live and how to die. Grief? Ah, yes. From the first day to the last, we grieved in a million different ways. From the last day to now, we still grieve. We realize that though each person is unique, we are connected. The

family, humankind everywhere, can be God's expression of hope, peace, and grace for life to be experienced to the fullest.

If you only knew... our secret, our loneliness, our stress, our loss. You can know if you dare to use the "A" word and reach out. Churches, as well as all caring institutions, must be known for their willingness for involvement and proactivity. When we feel safe, we can share our pain. The community can be family in the real sense of the word. Whether it's the "A" word for AIDS abortion, abuse, or addiction; the "P" word for prison; the "C" word for cancer or whatever the letter, the "C" word for Christian compassion prevails. Elizabeth Barrett Browning penned it better than we can, "Come along with me, the best is yet to be, the last for which the first was made." In our grief we can live!



Stephen's symbol is a dove. Stephen requested that a dove be released at his funeral.

Billy and Trish Barton's 32-year-old son, Michael, died 4-3-96. Trish tells us about Michael:

Michael was a sensitive, caring and tender man, although he was very strong and rugged and loved the outdoors. This is probably why he chose to live in Montana--because he could live his dream of working as a wildlife biologist and enjoy all the beauty of the mountains and rivers. He loved the wildflowers and could name many of them. When he was in the second grade, he could identify most species of ducks in flight. As a man, he was considered an excellent elk bugler. So--it has been difficult for me to choose a symbol for him. He just loved life and loved to "do" a lot of things. Oh, he loved to fish too--and he could build or repair almost anything. He did a lot of wood work and was preparing to build their home in the mountains. He put a new engine in his truck and he had just taken his friend's truck engine out and was going to put in a new one. He was generous with himself and his time.

So, again for a symbol (s). I would like to have a duck in flight, an elk ugling a fish jumping, a horse running, and Michael the Archangel.

Michael did love horses too. He had worked for a famous Montana back packer and was in charge of his horses. He was planning to have horses at his new home. We also had horses when he was young. Horses are magnificent and spirited! Our family has a big interest in horses. It is said, "The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man." Horses bond with us and most of us need that.

We named our only son, Michael, because the name "Michael" means "gift of God." We also have one daughter, Gwen, and a grandson and granddaughter-each gifts of God. For all our blessings, we thank God and pray that through our grief we walk closer with Him and love others more, striving always to know and do His will.

Sue Wilson's 15-year-old daughter, Taiann, was murdered with her boyfriend, Matt Coomer, 8-31-95. Sue laments:

Taiann and Matthew were on their first date. She was so excited that day and as I helped her pick out which outfit to wear that evening, I could tell she was so happy. Matthew had waited three years to ask her out. Matthew asked me if he could take her on a picnic to a little stream behind his house. He said that it was the most beautiful place that he knew of. The accused murderer testified that they were sitting on the little bridge taking off their socks and shoes when he came out of the woods and crossed the stream in front of them, splashing mud and water on them. He said that Matthew yelled something at him and he went on down the stream. He said the farther he went, the madder he got. So he turned around and went back and with a gun he had on his four-wheeler; he shot Matthew and then turned to Taiann and told her that he could not leave any witnesses. Taiann was stabbed to death with a bayonet and a hunting knife. She had close to 100 knife wounds over her body. She fought for her last

breath as a witness who heard her screaming called the police.

Taiann and Matthew were two popular, honor roll, church-going students who were varsity basketball players. We still have to attend the trial. I ask for your gift of prayer for the Lord to continue to give us the strength to get through the trial and that the Lord keep His hand on the trial. We continue to give the Lord credit for getting us this far.

I miss my Taiann so very much. I know Taiann is in heaven with her beloved Matthew. She comes back in dreams to tell me that she loves and misses us, but she is happier than she has ever been, and she and Matthew have not left each other's side. She was truly my "Joy in the morning."

The following poem was written by Missy Patterson to Taiann when she was 11 years old:

MY CERTAIN FRIEND

A friend is a person that is warm,
kind and understanding.

One who is special in time of need
and always there to lend a hand.

Someone who is a person who will
stick with you during anything, no matter what.

A friend is a person that you can talk
to about anything. A person you feel
comfortable with and know you can always
be yourself.

Well, when I was 11 years old, I met a
girl that stood out by herself. She wasn't
different in any way. She was just an
ordinary girl, like anyone else.

Her talents would amaze you and her
abilities just the same. She was always a
great person to have around.

This girl that I know was a very special
friend of mine. She always told me
to hold my head high and don't let anyone
look down on me. She said, "Let
people know what kind of person you
are and always stand up for what you
believe in."

Now after knowing this girl for only
a few years now, I will always be
thankful to God for giving me such a
friend and I hope that if she ever needs
anything that she can always depend on
me to be there for her. I love you,
Taiann!

Now from our team, we would like to say, "Thank You, Taiann for your love and friendship you brought to all of us. We will always have a place for you in our hearts..."



Taiann's symbol is a dolphin jumping through a heart.

Kyle, the 17-year-old son of Gary and Angela Wilkins, died 1-7-96. Angela is on the Kentucky Trauma Response Team from the Kentucky Department of Education. Angela tells of her own grief struggle:

It has taken one year to translate my searing pain from Kyle's sudden death in his sleep to this poem. Kyle wrestled, like many young people, with the challenges of learning disabilities and being labeled "special education." My dear Friend, Lois Weinberg of Knott County, told me we mothers of L.D. children are "turtle moms," for our L.D. children are like turtles. Turtles have their own pace, can't be rushed, and go into their shells when pressure occurs.

Kyle used his music to comfort him, and enjoyed anything in life that was set to music. I console myself thinking about the glorious music he now hears.

After one year of mourning, I now know what his symbols are-a turtle with music notes around him!

Angela wrote this Ode:
ODE TO KYLE'S JOY

One year ago today,
Heaven called you home.
No longer on earth
To play music or roam.

You were only seventeen,
When Heaven said, "Depart."
A deadly virus had
Destroyed your kind heart.

You taught us lessons,
About life, you weren't coy,
But your best teachings
Were on life's greatest joy.

You just wanted folks' love,
For what you truly were,
A young man called "special,"
Who knew miracles occur.

The greatest joy in life,

*The greatest joy by far,
Is unconditional love,
For whom we really are.*

--From "The Mom" to her youngest child.

Marc Nelson, the 16-year-old son of Wayne and Connie, was killed in a 4-wheeler accident 2-8-95. Connie expressed the feelings and questions we have all had:

Holidays are very hard on us all, I would have given my life if Marc could have just lived. I was so hungry to see him on his 18th birthday (Nov. 30). He was growing into such a handsome young man. He was such a big help to us and everyone. I often wonder how these terrible things happen to these young people.



Mark's symbol's are an angel and 4 aces.

Themba, the 19-year-old son of Vivian Williams, was murdered 11-29-94. Vivian writes:

*I wanted to update you on what I am doing. I am still going to the court 3-4 times a week (Vivian sits with parents who are attending the trials of their children's accused murderers) and also going to jails and prisons. I have a devotional and pray. I pray jar the inmates by name. I send cards to the inmates, also the one that killed my son. He will be getting out of prison next year and I know I will see him again. After he is out, we hope to begin a newsletter after he is out and I can express more of my feelings and talk more about what I am doing. Please pray for my new group called **The Dove Prison Ministries.***

Themba's symbols are a sunshine and an angel.



Becky Kemper's 16 year-old son, Ross, was killed in accident with 3 other young people, 2-25-95. There was an article written by Stephen Trimble, in the

Lexington Herald-Leader about the journal she had kept at Ross' grave in a clear, plastic box. The journal had disappeared from his grave. The article stated:

Ross' mother left the journal in a plastic bag at Ross' grave in the fall of 1995.

Since then, almost 50 entries written by Becky, her two children, other family members and Ross' friends had nearly filled the book.

Becky said she bought the clear box to protect the journal from the winter. "It's like a diary almost," Becky said, "that different people have written."

Soccer teammates wrote to Ross about their season. Friends noted in the journal they were skipping class to visit his grave in Bluegrass Memorial Gardens off Harrodsburg Road.

One particularly depressed visitor lamented to Ross: "Why did it have to be you? You were flying to do so much good. Why couldn't it have been me?"



These caricature are of the 4 young who were killed.

David and Helen Gardener's 19-year-old son, Curt, died 11-20-95. Curt's family has a wonderful idea for encouraging others to remember Curt. This is a good idea for any of us. Helen explained:

Our son Curt worked at the food court at the mall. He did not get tips, but people left pennies and change on the tables. He started picking them up and we cut a hole in a 2-liter Dr. Pepper (Curt's favorite drink) bottle for all the change. His change added up, and I turned it in for paper money after he died. There was over \$100 in that bottle and I wanted so badly to tell him.

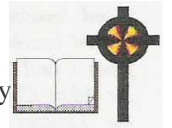
I started picking up pennies and change after he died. I decided to do something special with the money on the one year date of Curt's death. I told several people what I was doing as they saw me stopping to pick up the pennies. As November 20, 1996, got closer, I still didn't know what I could

do. I could add money to the pennies, but I didn't want to. I wanted the money to do something by itself. Then we opened the church bulletin one Sunday and the church asked for crayons for the children. What a marvelous idea! We could buy crayons and Curt would be pleased with that idea too. So the prayer was answered. The day I went to buy the crayons, the store had a big "buy one, get one free" offer. So I was able to make the money go farther.

One of the members of my support group was having a hard time with the word "acceptance" in the final stages of grief. I shared "adapt" that had been suggested by someone else who was not able to use "acceptance."

I gather the sprinkles from the newsletter each month and when we are in Lexington, I leave them at Curt's grave. He would love them. He enjoyed picking out a derby winner. He won more often than the rest of us. So the horses would have been meaningful to him.

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



Janna, the 9-year-old daughter of Gregg and Linda Miller, died 2-27-92. Linda shared how she deals with her grief:

My therapy seems to be hard work so I teach second grade and play the organ at church.

We passed through our 5th Christmas without Janna. Much has changed since that last Christmas together--We have changed forever.

God has proven Himself time and again to be our strength, our peace, our anchor. We don't understand, but we trust. We walk by faith and hold onto His promise.

Janna loved basketball. Her number was #5.



Stacey, the 21-year-old son of Paul and Pat Daugherty, died 12-30-93. Pat writes of the anniversary of Stacey's death:

We thought these dates would get to be a little easier, but we are so worried

about our son, Mike. Mike is 26 and has been a diabetic for 11 years. He has a drinking problem and his doctor suspects he may have liver cancer. He has Hepatitis C which can be cured if he would not drink. It is awful to find out on the anniversary of your son's death that you may be facing losing another son. Mike really needs your prayers and good thought-waves right now.

I hope you will remember this family in your prayers.

Stacey's symbol is an eagle in flight.



Joel and Debbie South's only child, Chris (19) was killed in an auto accident with two other young men, 11-17-96. Debbie describes Chris:

Let me tell you about Chris. He loved baseball and 4-wheeling. He played baseball since he was about 7, from T-ball League on up. He played for Adair County for 4 years, tried out for Lindsey Wilson College; didn't make the team so at that time he turned his interest to 4-wheeling. He drove a '90 Chevy 4-wheel-drive truck, which took a lot of abuse as he and his friends loved to play in the mud and see how many hills they could climb. He also enjoyed riding his Polaris 4-wheeler just for the same reason, to see who could get the most mud.

He accepted Christ in his life about 6 years ago, so we have a special peace that he is with God. Our loneliness is very real, but we have comfort knowing he is in heaven.

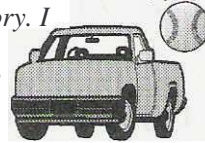
Chris and two of his friends were out for a Sunday drive. One of his friends lost control of the car and they hit a tree. They were all thrown out and killed instantly. Chris, according to the State Police, was in the front seat in the middle, making him the farthest from the impact. They were traveling way too fast and hydroplaned. No one had on their seat belts, but according to the police, it wouldn't have mattered. It probably would have caused more damage if they had been on. They wrecked in the city limits of Columbia, 3 blocks from our house.

So many thoughts have gone through my mind because that Sunday, Chris' truck was torn up and he had been driving my car. Sunday, when I started to church, I learned the axle boot was torn and the car was not driveable. His dad, who had been deer hunting, came back to get me. Chris said he would get someone to come get him when he decided to go out. Chris worked third shift at Firestar Food Mart in Columbia and slept during the day usually.

It seems that everything worked for him to be in that car. Our neighbors said he didn't leave the house until around 3:30 that afternoon and they wrecked at 4:17.

Chris was our lives and it's hard for me to tell everything about Chris because I was so proud of him. I'm not saying he was a perfect child, because he wasn't, but he was ours and we loved him very much. Chris was a quiet, kind person who made friends easily. Some of his friends told me he would give you anything if you needed or wanted it and never expect it back.

We chose for Chris' symbol a baseball and a 4-wheel drive truck. We have donated some Bibles to Chris' Sunday School class in his memory. I want Chris' smiling face to live on in other minds and hearts as it will in ours.



Shelby, the 18-year-old son of Jaybo and Rowena Warner, died due to complications from Hodgkin's Disease, 10-28-92. Teresa, Shelby's sister, wrote the following letter last year:

February was always a big month at our house. My sister's birthday was Feb. 5, Shelby's birthday the 13th, Valentine's Day the 14th and Mother's birthday, the 15th. I was 15 when I found out mother was pregnant with Shelby and was embarrassed to death that my Mom was 43 and pregnant. All of my friends and classmates thought it was so neat, but I cried for 2 weeks. When the librarian at school saw me crying, she called me into her office and told me that my mom wasn't too old to have a baby or the Lord wouldn't have allowed her to become pregnant.

From that day on, I got use to the idea.

My mom had a really rough 9 months; sick at least 21-22 hours each day, even the day he was born. I took care of the baby (Shelby) with the help of Daddy.

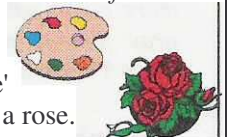
Never in a million years would I have ever believed that I would grow to love him so much. From birth to death, we were always together. I took him to school his first day and I took him to school his last day. Everyone said I had him spoiled rotten. He wasn't. I had taught him what to expect of me.

Pay day was our day. We would shop till we dropped! He loved shopping. I always gave him a present on every holiday. Sometimes they would be funny gag gifts and we'd have a good laugh.

On Valentine's Day he expected candy, balloons, stuffed animals or something from me. On Easter I would always make him an Easter basket, right up until his last Easter. He was 18, but I still made him an Easter basket with his favorite goodies, Pay Day candy bars, all of the art supplies he liked and usually some cologne. On his last Valentine's Day, I sent him red roses. They were his favorite, even though he loved all live flowers and had planted all kinds in a flower bed that he had made.

Every day I thank God for the time that we had and for the librarian who made me realize that Shelby was a gift from God.

Shelby had a never-ending smile that never stopped. He touched people wherever he was. I love him so much and miss him and his witty sense of humor. There was never a dull moment with him. He loved and lived life to its fullest.



Shelby's symbols are an artist's pallet and a rose.

Charles E. Poole wrote the book, **Is Life Fair? Good Words for Hard Times**. In his first chapter entitled, *Strong in Broken Places*, Poole says that just as you want a wheelbarrow of gravel to be distributed evenly so you can roll it easier, we yearn for someone to distribute

our burdens evenly in hopes that it will make our load lighter. Over and over again we witness in our own lives, and in the lives of others, the truth that we can bring goodness out of brokenness, joy out of pain, and blessing out of sorrow. We can emerge from the "shadows" stronger and better people than we were before our loss. We can emerge with a quieter voice, a gentler heart, and a softer eye for the struggles and doubts of others.

We have a choice whether to become brittle at the broken places because of our loss, or strong. No matter what we choose, we still have to live through this grief, and we can actually live to laugh again, and we can live to live again. We are living though we have lost our precious children. If someone had told us we were going to have to live through the loss of a child, we would have sworn we could not. But we do live, and with God's help, and the support and love of our fellow travelers, we will emerge better, kinder, wiser and stronger. That is our S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

Poole's chapter, *What Judas Did Not Know*, discusses suicide from a religious viewpoint. Poole challenges the church, the church must say with compassion and courage that, while suicide is a tragic choice, suicide does not nullify the grace of God. The church needs to have enough candor and compassion to tell the truth. Suicide is a tragic choice. That is true. But it is also true that a child of God's grace who, in a state of utter despair, ends his or her life is not separated from God forever. If committing suicide could cause one to "lose their salvation," then that would mean that the destructive act of suicide would be stronger than the saving grace of God. If that were true, then a tragic

decision made in the last second of life could erase and annul a lifetime of walking in the light of God's love. And that is not the way God is. If someone who has been saved by God's grace can lose their place in God's kingdom and be eternally condemned on the basis of a tragic choice made in a state of despair in the last second of life, then I do not know God.

Suicide does not annul the saving grace of God received by faith in the life of God's child. God's grace is greater than our worst choices.

The taking of one's own life is a physical act. If you are carrying a load of guilt and self-hatred because someone in your life made Judas's choice, then you need to let go of that today. People do not stop breathing because we miss clues or fail to see signs. People die of suicide because they make a tragic choice and commit a physical act. You cannot take responsibility for someone else's tragic choice. You and I can no more take responsibility for someone else's actions than the other eleven disciples could take responsibility for Judas's tragic choice.

Our lives are not defined by our worst choices, our darkest secrets, or our biggest failures. Rather, our lives are defined by the fact that we are children of God's grace who are loved and valued by God despite our failures and flaws.

The chapter entitled, *When It Isn't the Thought that Counts*, Poole said that we must not allow all the things we have not done and cannot do to paralyze us with regret. We must decide to do our best to do at least some of the good things we have planned and thought and intended. Since our children's deaths, we now see how important it is to contact others who have lost a loved one. Don't wait until you think you have just the right words to say, or until you have baked a cake...

go now and go often to visit. Try to do for them what you want done for you. It will help you both.

Sometimes, all we can do is "think of someone." In those times, it is the thought that counts, but sometimes we need to realize that maybe only a deed will count.

This statement challenged me: *If you and I wait until we can do everything for everybody before we do something for somebody, then we will never do anything for anybody.* Do what you can. Because when you've done what you can, you've done what you should.

Even though we are grieving, we can help others because we truly know each others thoughts and needs. I need to be able to talk about Young Jim and share his life with others. Often times people will shy away when I begin talking about him, but when I am talking with one of you, my fellow travelers, you are as eager to hear about him as I am to hear about your children. Thank you for allowing me that privilege.

Richard S. Hipps edited the book, *When a Child Dies. Stories of Survival and Hope*. In the chapter, *Our Journey through Grief* written by Walt and Elizabeth Barnes, they told of the death of their daughter, Janet. The couple wrote:

Grief is such a very, very personal torment. It cannot be shared in total by or with another person. In the case of a married couple, they may both be dealing with the loss of the same child, but the vestiges of persona lloss that a father feels for a child differ from those of a mother bereft of her child. The other surprising element of a couple's grief is that it totally absorbs each

person involved in it, leaving them very little to give to the other, despite what they might want to do. Grief is indeed the loneliest game in town.

We could talk about our loss, about what we were feeling, but we experienced a sense of real helplessness because we were totally unable to help each other.

We have characterized a scenario in which a couple sweeps issues under a rug throughout their relationship, rather than dealing with them. When the rug is suddenly stripped away (by the death of a child), the issues are laid bare, demanding resolution. The loss of a child on top of other significant marital tensions often requires more personal resources than two people can muster.

We tried in small ways to be proactive during the healing process. We agreed that we would never avoid difficult situations. We became determined to deal with our grief head-on rather than avoiding it. We never ran from people, places, or memories, but rather walked right through the midst of them. It was not easy, but we learned we could do it on a day-by-day basis. This built confidence in our ability to keep going.

We find that we have changed so much, both as individuals and as a couple. Our sadness comes from realizing, however, that our growth is in response to this tragedy. But why couldn't we have grown some other way?

As I am writing this newsletter, I have to confess that I have been very disturbed by the way Bill Cosby has reacted to his son's death. I feel that he has made it even more difficult for others to understand our grieving. He does not realize that this first week since his son's death is probably the easiest week he will have for a very long time. He is still numb from the fact that his son has been killed and he has no concept of the grief he is yet to face in the days and years to come.

By him saying that he must "go on" and by not letting others see how he hurts and is broken hearted, it makes the rest of us look like we are not coping. We are on the right path of our struggle with grief... he will find that to be so in the future. But, in the meantime, others will look at us and wonder why we are not coping as well as he. We know that he loved his son as much as we loved ours. How I would love to talk with him and tell him that it is okay to show his pain. That it is natural and "normal." He doesn't have to help us or be brave for anyone. This is the time for others to help him and his family. When President Kennedy was shot, Jackie Kennedy also acted stoic and in complete control. We are not in control! If we were in control, we would have prevented the death of our loved one. How do you feel? I am really interested in your opinion.

February 12 is Abraham Lincoln's birthday. Three of his children died: Edward (4), William (11), and Thomas (18). Struggling with "melancholia," (depression), he worried about losing our nation while mourning the death of his second son, "Little Willie." He took time from his personal grief to write a bereaved parent:

In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all. It comes with bittersweet, agony. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You cannot realize that you will ever feel better. And yet this is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say.

What are you doing this winter season to help you beat those winter blues? Here are some suggestions:

Make and decorate Valentine cookies and give them to some of your children's friends.

♥ Send Valentines to people who are in the hospital or confined to their home. Send Valentines to your children's mends and/or special teachers, or someone who meant so much to them.

♥ Invite fellow travelers to your home for a tea party and share memories.

♥ Put a bird house outside your favorite window and feed them during these cold months. They Me so much fun to watch.

♥ Do your Christmas shopping for next year if you do not like to shop during the Christmas season.

♥ Go to a funny movie, or rent funny movies. It is healing to laugh.

♥ Learn a new hobby or read a relaxing book.

♥ Make Christmas ornaments of your child's symbol and you will have them ready to give next Christmas.

♥ This may be a time in which you can redecorate your child's room or go through some of your child's things and decide what you want to do with them. Don't push yourself. Set small goals and establish deadlines.

♥ Write a letter to one of your fellow travelers whose child died in the same manner as yours. (Remember that we need to stay in touch with each other.)


♥ Make plans to attend J.I.M.'s Picnic in June.

♥ Turn on all the lights in the house, turn up the music, and clean, sing and swing!

♥ February- 7 is the **Chinese New Year-**

The year of the **Ox**. Eat Chinese food with chop sticks (that will take your mind off your grief).



 Sit down and eat this chocolate coin and may it remind you that you are worth a million to me!! Thank you for your love and support in all that I at tempt to do.

