

LAMENTATIONS



Issue 63

Middle

December 1997

Christmas

Last Christmas season I was asked to speak at a remembrance service at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington. I want to share a few of my comments about my own grief:

I would like to take you back to one of the exciting days for our family: May 19th, 1991. My husband, whom I call Taylor, had the great honor of delivering the Baccalaureate Address to our son and his fellow graduating classmates. Young Jim was filled with pride because his father had been asked to speak. In his address, Taylor challenged the graduates: *If you make decisions based upon how comfortable, easy and painless your choices are, then don't expect great rewards. Pay a big price and expect a great return. Turn tragedies into triumphs, obstacles into opportunities, problems into possibilities. At times you may feel like quitting. Don't throw in the towel. You must have darkness to see the stars. The birds still sing after the storm. Life is bittersweet. Experiences are neither totally good nor totally bad. You cannot have good times with out bad times. One makes the other possible, just as night provides a contrast to day. Happiness is a by product and not a goal. Happiness comes by getting involved with others. In this life we only have what we give away. Life is made up of 10% of what happens to us and about 90% of how we respond. I hope you will accept the challenge as I: When faced with a mountain I will not quit. I'll go over it, around*

it, through it, dig a tunnel underneath it or simply stay beside that mountain and turn it into a gold mine. Problems will never leave you where they find you. When a problem comes your way, you will never be the same. It's impossible! The greatest heat tempers the finest steel. The greatest irritation creates the finest pearl. It's not the easy times; it's the hard times that make us and develop character. How do I know? I know because my life is a living testimony. Problems will never leave you where they find you. You will either be bigger or bitter. You will be a better person or a worse person. The future is purchased by the present. Our lives will follow the pathways created by our thoughts... To make deep mental paths we must think again and again the kind of thoughts we wish to have dominate our lives. We will either live constructive lives or destructive lives. There is a relationship between sacrifice and success.

Little did Taylor know that in less than 24 hours, we both would have to begin to "practice what he preached."

May 20, 1991, changed our lives forever. It was our son's Honors Night. It was the day before he would graduate from high school which would end his life in the nucleus of our small town, Williamsburg, and as a high school student, but would begin a new and exciting life in the great big, exciting world of adulthood! Instead, that date became the re-birth date of our 18-year-old son into eternal life.

We are reading this because we have experienced great losses, and so

you have probably come to the same conclusion as I, that we feel the safest and the most comfortable when we are surrounded by fellow travelers in grief. Because of our empathy for each other, I would like to share some of my grief journey with you.

Our son was on a mission of love when he had his automobile accident. Our nephew's wife had just walked out of his life, and Young Jim insisted that he be with his cousin rather than attend the Honor's Night events. Jim was approximately 3 miles from home when the accident occurred. He wasn't doing anything wrong. His mission was to go and comfort the cousin that he loved so dearly. He was driving approximately 25 miles per hour on a rain-slicked road when the right wheels of his auto slipped from the pavement. The road had eroded to the point there was no shoulder, and huge poles had been placed at the edge of the road to keep it from eroding any further. The police surmised that because of his slow speed, the car had careened over the edge of the road onto one of the poles. The pole had gone through the right front passenger window, out the back left window and had just, by an inch, grazed his right temple, killing him instantly. Just an inch changed everything.

How could his life here on earth end on such a special night as this? Why couldn't he have lived to have this wonderful adventure of life? . . .

It took many months before we realized that Young Jim is now on an adventure of a lifetime. . . and so are we.

After Jim's untimely death, I began to realize that I was not alone. There were so many other parents who had lost their precious children due to illness, accidents, murders or suicides, and it made me wonder if they felt as alone and isolated as I. As I corresponded with others, a newsletter developed, as the legendary phoenix, out of the "ashes" of my grief. To lament means to express sorrow or mourning, often demonstratively. It is a crying out in grief; a way of expressing grief.

This word truly describes my grief, as does the verse in Jeremiah 6:26. The prophet Jeremiah said: . . . *make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation.* Verse 27 became my challenge: *I have set thee for a tower and a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know and try their way.* I can only assume this is a challenge for each of us; that we stand as a tower with our fellow travelers since we are experiencing similar grief.

My prayerful question to God has been, "What do I do with the remainder of my life here on earth?" Since I have to take this long journey through grief, where and what is my destination? Show me how to get there. And God has shown me the way through His word, through family and friends, through inspirational and challenging books on grief and through my Fellow Travelers.

Immediately after Young Jim's death, I was plunged into darkness. After reading so many books on grief, I realized that I had to plunge head-on into my grief; to envelop it; and to accept its unknown darkness. John Donne explained that what appears to be opposite, such as the east is from the west, is, in truth, akin. If you follow one direction long enough and far enough, they will come

together, and the quickest way to see the sun is not to pursue the sun by traveling west, but rather plunging into the darkness of the east until you come to the sunrise.

In Gerald Sittser's book, *A Grace Disguised. How the Soul Grows Through Loss*, he told of the tragic death of his wife, daughter and his mother who were all killed in the same accident. He uses the *analogy* of the elasticity of a balloon to describe not only our grief but our capacity for life. He explains that our soul, like a balloon, can grow larger through suffering. *Loss can enlarge its capacity for anger, depression, despair, and anguish, all natural and legitimate emotions whenever we experience loss. Once enlarged, the soul is also capable of experiencing greater joy, strength, peace, and love. What we consider opposites such as east and west, dark and light, sorrow and joy, weakness and strength, anger and love, despair and hope, death and life--are no more mutually exclusive than winter and summer. The soul has the capacity to experience these opposites, even at the same time.*

At times I am very angry with God, but I realize that He is great enough to endure my anger and merciful enough to understand and accept. Anger is just another mechanism we use to try to avoid the pain of grief. We blame God for so many of the things we cannot explain or accept. Death is one of those. I do not believe that God caused Jim's accident. I believe that He cries along with us and guides us with His grace and mercy.

Since we have to grieve alone, we also have to discover what is within ourselves. We discover that we have to go on living, even though we don't want to at times. We find that we have a greater sensitivity to the grief of others and a greater capacity to share our love: Our pain of life is so great because our capacity for happiness is so great.

Memories have now become so important to each of us because they connect us with our loved ones. Sittser describes us: *Those who suffer loss live suspended between a past for which we long, and a future for which we hope. We have ambivalent feelings about our memories. On the one hand, we would like to forget what has happened. But if we choose that route, then we would also have to forget our loved ones and how much they have meant to our lives. It takes quite a while for our memories to become joyful rather than just another reminder of our loved one's absence.* Even though my tears still come frequently and unexpectedly, a smile is always underneath my tears when I think of Jim. If you had known Young Jim, you too would remember him with a smile.

Our loss makes us take inventory of our lives, whether we want to or not. It also makes us reconsider our priorities and goals, and makes us turn in new directions for the future. We cannot change our loss, but we can allow that loss to change us. Can you, this holiday season, list some of your positive changes? I have gained a new understanding of how and why we grieve, and have become more empathetic of others. I now take more time to "smell the roses" and do not postpone activities I really want to do.

Now. . . how do we make it though this season of "good cheer and merriment?" Christmas is going to happen whether we enter into the festivities or not. Barbara Clair made these suggestions: *Most of us are trying to find ready-made answers. We want simple solutions. We want ways to skip our painful memories. We want to feel good. Is*

this possible? Simple solutions are possible if you're willing to take an honest look at your choices.

The loss you have 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 are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Some people choose to do some very different things such as eating out 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. Claire, in her own loss, has been an example.

Remember that a strong person is one who can cry and laugh hard, and one who has learned how to turn to others. Tailor your activities to your energy level.

May you find your own peaceful solutions to fit your own individual

needs and those of your family in coping with this Christmas season. Carol Ruth Blackman, the editor of ***Bereaved Parents Share***, suggested that if you have children, *to remember that they view the celebration of special days as evidence that their happiness is still important to their parents, that they are loved, and hope that their family stability will return. Grieving children need to know that they are valued and special. Many feel that they are not as special as the one who had died since their sibling's absence has caused the parents so much sadness and pain. Because grief can cause parents to be emotionally out of focus towards remaining children, sometimes the only feeling conveyed is pain, so the remaining children may feel abandoned or rejected. Be sure to spend time with them, assuring them through words and actions of your love.*

Rather than buying extravagant gifts for your children, you may want to give them extra time and attention as nothing purchased can replace the loss in their lives.

You may even want to create a special card for your living child listing why they are so special, and reassuring them of your love; maybe including some special reminiscing. Explain that your grief doesn't lessen your love for them.

Don't dampen your remaining children's ability to enjoy themselves by spending the day reminding everyone of the deceased child. Let your living children have their place in the sun. Remember that this is not betraying your deceased child.

As I reflect over the last 6 1/2 years since Young Jim's death, I realize I have traveled a long, arduous journey. . . and I have been happily surprised to find that I can laugh

freely and have the hope of tomorrow and the excitement of what it may bring. How I wish Young Jim could see my progress and how I wish I could share with him, the many things I have learned. How ironic, that the very person I would like to share this with has been the catalyst that has caused the change and the enlightenment. Yes, I continue to cry, and often, I continue to have those dark days, but I now know that this too shall pass. Just as I remember Young Jim with a smile, I also hope he is remembering me with a smile.

Charlie Walton wrote the book, ***When There are No Words*** after the death of two of his sons. He explained that a hug is a method of communication that does work in times of grief. A hug finds its own length and level of intensity depending on the relationship you have with the person who is giving the hug. Our pain feels like we are standing before a mountain that we are going to have to move one spoonful at a time. It is a task we can never hope to complete... a mountain that you can never hope to finish moving. But... as you stand surveying that mountain of grief.. a caring person steps forward with a hug that communicates clearly. You can almost picture that person stepping up to your mountain of grief with a shovel and saying, "I cannot move the mountain for you... but I will take this one shovel full of your grief and deal with it myself"

Since I can't hug each of you, I hope you will eat this HERSHEY KISS HUGS so you will feel that I have taken a shovel full of your grief. Because I have been traveling this road of grief for 6 1/2 years, grief is an old familiar friend and I know how to deal with your shovel full. I wish you many hugs this Christmas season.

Grief Grafts

Scott (9-15-75), the son of Curtis and Pat Livingston, was killed in an automobile accident, 10-14-93. Pat shared her feelings about the holidays with us.

As I go through the holidays, I will think of our loved one's that made our lives so full of life and happy memories.

Life is not the same and we have had to adjust and make a new one. In our minds and hearts we can only imagine and dream what it would be like if they were still here on earth.

Holidays are hard for me as I know they are for you too. Christmas is especially hard because Scott loved it so.

Scott's symbol is a baseball.



Rita Beck's only child, Kelly Ann (4-17-78), died in an automobile accident 3-9-96.

My only child, Kelly Ann Kime was killed on March 9, 1996. She was 17 years old and a Junior at Minden High School. Kelly was with some friends and the driver was speeding, when they were hit. The driver suffered only a broken nose and the other passenger in the back seat was in critical condition for several weeks. The driver acted to me as if he didn't care if the two girls were dead, only if his car was OK.

After she died, several of her friends took something from her room to remember her by.

The policeman who worked the accident wants to put a cross at the sight of the wreck for Kelly.

Our church has also published a cookbook in memory of Kelly and all of the youth wrote a little something about her in the book. After the book was released, all of the youth signed one for me.

Her classmates dedicated the Senior Graduation ceremony to her and are going to plant a flower garden and place a bench in the school yard to remember her.

I am making a shadow box with some things of hers inside. I have included things like one of her baby dresses, sunglasses, car keys, her Sr. key and library card among other things.

Kelly loved teddy bears, so this year I plan to give bears at Christmas to children who are needy.

She touched a lot of lives during her short time on earth by not being afraid to talk about God.

Kelly's symbol is a teddybear.



Joan Rambo's son, Bill (7-29-54), died from a self-inflicted injury, 9-12-95. John (12-23-30), her husband, passed away 4-22-97.

I still don't understand why we have had to lose our loved ones, but still trust God's perfect love will carry us through. I miss my son and husband soul mate so very much. He was my support and nothing can replace it at this time.

Bill's symbols are a hummingbird and a Labrador.



David and Cindy Jo Greever's daughter, Michelle (8-24-84), was struck by a car 11-5-93.

I just wanted to enclose a small donation as Michelle's 4th anniversary and Christmas approach. In many ways for me this past month has been more difficult than past years. Funny how grief work can be! But I'm keeping my chin up and remembering God and Michelle want me to be happy!

Well, it is officially autumn, with Christmas and Holidays around the corner! Time to get out the "FALL" decorating items, such as the corn stalks, pumpkins, etc. I always think of Michelle and her decorating "frenzies" she would go on, splashing her colorful artworks and ideas all about the house, inside and out; her creativity was beyond anyone's I ever knew. She always amazed me with her excitement and anticipation of each and every Holiday!! I will never forget when she dug out the old large canning pot from the basement and set to action for the

"witch's brew" which she placed on the front porch, along with the stuffed scarecrow she made and the spider webs she placed outdoors, the bats she made, the large Halloween poster she made and attached to our bathroom window inside, she did this all herself, busying herself endlessly and without effort or any questions or opinions, she just did it!! How I miss her and her precious smiles and her precious heart! I remember the night before she parted, I told her it was time to get the scarecrow "unstuffed," it was quite cold that night and of course quite dark too. She went out back and set to work. It was very lightly snowing, looked like little diamonds coming down ever so lightly, she stopped and held out her hands to "catch" the diamond dust, she smile for a long time as she felt it melt into her palms... it was to be her last time to see or clutch snow in her lifetime of this earth... That same night, her last on earth which was November 4, 1993, she created a manger with the "Star of David" and made a salt shaker and a small quilted Christmas tree, even though Christmas was nearly two months away. Memories... They do flood my soul and I thank God for them, for they are all I have and all I will need to get by for the rest of my earthly life... Like I always say, material things can be lost and replaced but without memories, material things nor anything else matter when we know not what they are, or what they ever were... Memories are more precious than any tangible thing could ever be. I will love my precious Michelle forever!

January 1996

Melissa (14), when her sister went to heaven, wrote the following poem:

Angels
Happy Angels sing around my
Christmas tree.
Jolly, happy Angels make the season
bright and merry.
All the bells ring and all the new An-
gels get their wings. They fly about and
make the world seem happy, but
without love, peace, happiness and
God, the world is crappy.

*We all need Angels to fly around and
bring us love.
And that's why God has an Angel for
each of us.*

*By: Melissa Mae Greever
12-28-95*

*To Michelle Marie Greever
The time is coming nearer and nearer
every day. We miss you in every kind
of way. Every time we turn around we
see your smiley face or a beautiful
piece of artwork you made at a slow
pace.*

*You took so much time on everything
you made. We don't put effort in any-
thing today. We love you with all our
hearts. When you died we were torn
apart. But someday we will meet in a
wonderful kingdom. With Love, Peace
and Freedom...*

By: Melissa Greever

Cindy shared these thoughts:

*My "Diamond" from Heaven
The snow covers
The flowers from Heaven~
God's Kingdom came
To visit again...*

*The diamonds glistening
All over the snow
My heart yearns
For the joy of tomorrow...*

*Knowing I'll see
My flower, my diamond again
My sweet daughter
My friend. . .*

*In the flesh it is hard. . .
By the spirit it is won!!!*

*Love is the object of the heart
not the subject of the mind...*

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



*Dale and Marlene Stokes' son,
Darren (7-22-65), committed suicide, 3-
31-86. Darren was their only child.
Marlene shares her thoughts of holiday
excitement:*

*I am now able to celebrate the
holidays with a degree of excitement.
The joy is diminished and my life will
never be the same, carefree fun that It
was with Darren, but I can enjoy friends
and family once again.*

*The nicest gift we can give one an
other is the gift of friendship.*



] Darren's symbol is a deer.

*Michael (1-25-71), son of Dick and
Jean Sand, was killed in an automobile
accident 6-18-94. Jean writes about her
1996 holidays on blue stationery:*

*Yes, it is hard to believe, but we are in
another holiday season, and my reason
for using blue paper, is because "it is a
blue Christmas without him."*

*This is always an extremely hard time
of the year with so much happiness,
hustle and bustle around us and yet so
much sadness.*

*Michael was such a Christmas kind of
guy. He was always in the middle of
everything, shopping, decorating,
Christmas music, etc. He was like a little
elf, or should I say a six foot elf. If you
were around Michael and not in the
spirit, it did not take long and you were
in the spirit.*

*Christmas has always been my favorite
time of the year also, and I thank God
for all of our family being together, our
children, brothers, sisters, nieces,
nephews, mother-in-law as they have
helped us a great deal to celebrate the
birthday of Christ, and help us to forget
about our misfortune jar a short time.*

*I hope Michael, young Jim and all the
other fellow travelers deceased children
are all in heaven and have met and they
are all wonderfully happy. Each and
every one of them are in our thoughts
and prayers.*

12-10-96

*We are back into dull and boring dol-
drums of January. For me, this is a time
to think, dream and to remember we will
always love our Michael and we know he
is with us in spirit.*

Even though the holidays are over, it

*never seems to get much easier, but
certainly, keeping him in our thoughts,
prayers, and in our hearts keeps us all
going. Michael has a birthday in Janu-
ary, so this is a hard month for our
family.*

*Thank you for the Christmas
package remembrance at the holiday
time. It is always a nice surprise at
this time of the month, when I receive
Lamentations, but it is also a sad time
when I read it. I reach out to all of
these parents as I can feel for each
and every one of them and wish they
did not have to go through all the
agony. I suppose It is a part of
healing.*

*Michael is very much alive in our
hearts at Christmas, and we know he
is with us and praying for us and
lighting the way for us. We loved our
12 days of Christmas. We went to
Michael's grave and covered it with a
ground cover with bows and pine
cones, etc., which we do every year,
and we use the same cover each year
and add more bows, etc. We also put
up a tiny Christmas tree with an angel,
so he is on top 'if the tree. We were
very proud to be Michael's parents
and we would not trade the time we
had together. Michael was not just our
son, he was our friend too.*

*We have a grieving family, here in
our subdivision. They lost their son-in-
law at Thanksgiving time to a car
accident. We plan to try to help them
and their daughter and their two
children. God works things in funny
ways.*

1-10-97

*Michael's symbols
are a star, an angel, a
Stetson hat and boots.*



*Mike Bowman (12-11-46), the son
of Elizabeth Quinn, died of a heart
attack as a complication of diabetes, 9-
23-91.*

*I've been planning to write and tell
you how much I enjoy the newsletter.
Then I received the June newsletter
and just had to write. The article
about Mike, my son was so sweet.
There are no words to express how
much I loved him. But I don't even
have to try to tell you, because you
know exactly how*

much I loved him. Only a mother understands. He was so dear to me. I agree with you, "He was the wind beneath my wings." Without him, it seems my life is so empty.

He didn't meet his father until he was 25 years of age. But he never complained. My father was near to him and he loved him dearly. He even called him dad.

Later his father and he met. When he came out to meet Mike, he lived in St. Paul, Minn., then Mike visited him two or three times. But I was so hurt when I found out that later he didn't even send his son flowers. We had kept in touch while Mike was so sick for so long through letters. And he was called when Mike passed away. It doesn't matter anymore, my precious Mike is OK now. No pain. No dialysis and he can see all the beautiful sights. He is "safe in the arms of Jesus."

Now would you believe it? I have developed Diabetes, the same disease that took my son. But I'm doing OK, I know all the rules. I'll be OK.

I hope you all had a nice time and a big crowd at the picnic.

Janie, is so good to me. She comes by every time there is a meeting at Compassionate Friends. She said Rosemary was going to be at the last meeting, but I had company and couldn't go. I would love to have met her. She sounded so nice in her letter she sent me.

P.S. Thanks for remembering Mike.



Mike's symbol is an eagle.

Michael (6-30-76), the son of Michael and Linda Miller died as a result of an automobile accident on February 15, 1995. The Millers shared this letter with family and friends 1996 holiday season:

We are again sending a Christmas letter instead of cards just to let you know where we are at and what we have been doing.

January 1996 came in on a sad note without Michael D. On February 15,

1996, Michael Duncan had been gone one year. We both took off work that day and spent a quiet day at home together. We experienced sadness, tears, flashbacks and memories of our son. We received many cards and some phone calls from family and friends. February was also the 8th anniversary of the deaths of my Dad and brother. You can see why we try to forget the month of February.

We did have an "interesting" experience in June. We went to a "picnic" in Williamsburg, KY. The 100 people there had lost one or more children. It was a very moving experience.

June 30th would have been Michael's 20th birthday. That was the hardest day to cope. We always made birthdays special for each other. We placed a white rose on the alter at Bartlett United Methodist Church that day. Michael gave a lot of his time and talent to the church during the seven years we attended BUMC that weekend we went to the cemetery in Louisville and placed flowers in a vase at Michael's marker.

We are still trying to deal with the loss of Michael Duncan. We are still seeing our counselor. Now our biggest adjustment is that many people feel we should have dealt with this and moved on. All we can say to that is "easier said than done." They haven't "been there, done that."

We attended the 1995 Bartlett High School football banquet. This was the first year to award the Michael D. Miller Memorial award to the Best Offensive Lineman. We have already made plans to attend the 1996 banquet. In May, we attended the Senior Awards Day. We were again privileged to award the Michael D. Miller Memorial Scholarship to a graduating senior. This is a \$2000 scholarship given by Edgcomb Metals of Murfreesboro.

I am still working at the Middle Tennessee Medical Center. Michael my husband, has just completed his 19th year at Edgcomb Metals. In September, he accepted a new position as Plant Quality Manager.

Our nephew, David, will be getting married December 21. His bride's name is Brandi. Michael has the honor of being David's Best Man. After the wedding, we will be spending a few days with our family. We will then return to Murfreesboro to spend Christmas at our home. We want to spend Christmas with just the two

of us and our cowboy angel, Michael Duncan.

Michael had carpal tunnel surgery on his right hand in November. He is scheduled to have the same surgery on his left hand after the first of the year.

We did add to our home this year. In October we got a little 7-week-old Boston Terrier puppy. We named him Trigger IV He adds a little life to our home.

We are certain that Michael Duncan, as an angel in Heaven, is with us every day. We continue to hear of the many ways Michael lives on. The legacy Michael Duncan left us is in the many lives that he touched And this legacy continues to grow. We continue hearing many stories from people about Michael and how, in some way, he touched their lives.

We will not celebrate the Holiday season as most do. We will not have a Christmas tree. Our Christmas decorations will be a single electric candle with a white bulb in the window. We will also burn a white candle in our living room. These candles are symbols of Michael Duncan's spirit with us. This Christmas will be spent at home with "Our Angel in Heaven."

One of our hardest adjustments has been that some family and friendly don't want us to talk about Michael D. In response to this, we would like to share the enclosed poem with you.

The Elephant in the Room REVISED

*There's an elephant in the room.
It is large and squatting, so it is
hard to get around.
Yet we squeeze by with "How are
you?" and "I'm fine..."
And a thousand other forms of
trivial chatter.*

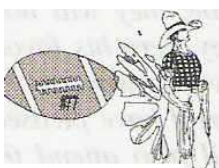
*We talk about the weather.
We talk about work.*

*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 walk together.
It is constantly on our minds.*

For, you see, it is a very big elephant,
 It hurts us all,
 But we do not talk about the elephant
 in the room,
 Oh, please, say his name.
 Oh, please, say "Michael" again.
 Oh, please, let's talk about the elephant
 in the room.
 For if we talk about his death,
 Perhaps we can talk about his life.
 Can I say "Michael" to you and
 not have you turn away?
 For if I cannot, then you are
 leaving me
 Alone... . In a room..
 With an elephant.

Michael's symbols
 are a cowboy angel,
 a football, and the
 #77.



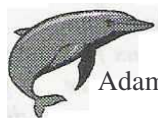
Adam (12-11-82), the son of Eddie and Janet Warnick, was killed in a train accident, 6-20-94, with Casey Russell. I received a card from Janet 12-21-96:

These past 2 1/2 years we weren't really up to sending out Christmas cards but, because of all of your support through this trying time in our life we felt the need to let you all know how special you are to us.

Your prayers, cards and even your notes of sharing a special memory of Adam has meant more to us than you will ever know, They always seem to come when we need it the most.

Adam's life and death has taught us many things. It has taught us what's important in life and what's not. We're learning to treasure each moment together. However, a high school friend expressed it the best... God's promise in Proverbs - "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path." The "whys and what ifs," will drive us crazy but, when I think of the above scripture it seems to put it all in place for the time being.

Our wish for you this season is that you'll continue to be blessed in many ways and that we'll all learn to appreciate every day, every friend, every smile and every moment.



Adam's symbol is a dolphin.

Elaine Stillwell's two children, Denis (2-4-65), and Peggy O'Connor (2-23-66), died from an automobile accident 8-2-86 (Peggy), and 8-6-86 (Denis).

Most of my writing is for bereaved families and is basically everything I've learned in ten years of grieving. Some is published in books and magazines and other columns. When I speak to bereaved audiences throughout the United States, I share ideas with them and the people are so warm and responsive. From one of these seminars, I made a 65 minute video this year, "Helping Your Heart Through Grief" which has been well received To my delight, all the speaking, writing, and video stipends go directly to my children's memorial scholarship, at the University of Dayton, which keep it continually growing, kind of like an eternal flame. That makes my heart sing.

1996 has been a busy year, but the nice part about retirement is that you can enjoy everything you do. Even grocery shopping is Jim. We welcomed in the New Year at The Tavern on the Green, in NYC, as guests of our dear friends from Kentucky. It was like being Cinderella. Joe and I pretended we were young again and enjoyed a sparking night.

In April, Joe and I made a nostalgic trip to the University of Dayton, to attend a special dinner honoring people who had endowed the college and the recipients of those scholarships. It was the first time we had ventured there since Peggy and Denis wed and we went in honor of the 10th anniversary of the scholarship. We were treated like royalty, while surrounded with very loving people. How glad we were that we had gotten the courage to go!

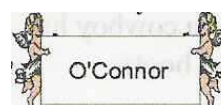
The first week of June, we traveled to Cumberland College in Williamsburg, KY, where I spoke to a beautiful group of newly bereaved parents attending the Annual Picnic sponsored by Dinah Taylor. We stayed with Rosemary and Luther Smith and enjoyed our precious time with them. They, too, lost their two oldest children in a car accident and our similar losses have bonded our families closely.

Joe and I just returned from Louisville, KY, where I delivered a talk in Louisville Auditorium to prepare bereaved families for Thanksgiving, This was the third annual seminar there and it is booked again for next November, Joe and I have made four trips to the Kentucky area, meeting with bereaved families and offering them hope to live a meaningful life again. We have made wonderful friends there and have fallen in love with KY Frank and Sharon Smith, the hosts of the seminar, welcomed us to their home again and made it a very special weekend for us. We even got to visit Churchill Downs this trip,

We got home just in time to start cooking for Thanksgiving. It was a very special Thanksgiving for us because it was the first time we celebrated it at home since the kids died. For the past years we have been welcomed by dear friends at their tables so we wouldn't have to face the two empty chairs here and their love helped us a lot. This year we had Annie and Johnnie, his parents and brother, my Aunt Clare and Uncle Tom, and a single friend, Helen, and Max our dog. We had a wonderful day,

To avoid all the shoppers in the Christmas rush the weekend after Thanksgiving, Joe and I busied ourselves putting up the Christmas tree and all the household decorations. I know there is a little child inside of me because I just love all the things that go with Christmas. Our home now looks like "Christmas Land." So many of our decorations have "history" that they really make it feel like a walk down "Memory Lane," I guess I savor all those memories, How sweet they are!

Denis' and Peggy's symbol is an angel.



O'Connor

Garva and Beulah Wilson's son, Boyd (3-13-54) died from liver cancer 7-14-97.

Thank you for Lamentations. I haven't gotten to read them all yet, but I have received comfort knowing of others who have experienced the same trial as I have.

Our son was a Baptist minister and music Director. He left a wonderful wife and four beautiful Christian daughters 11-20 years of age, all are still at home. The two oldest are in Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and the younger two are home schooled.

Bill and Carole Kemper's son, Chris (6-30-75), was killed in a truck accident, 7-21-93. Carole shared this poem that was on the back of her church's bulletin 12-22-96:

*The Empty Chair
This year when Christmas boughs are draped,
And cards around the doorway taped,
And cookies baked, and green wreaths hung,
and carols in the crisp night sung;
This Christmas cannot be as fair
In homes where there's an empty chair.
Dear God in heaven, bless with peace
Those whose Christmas joy has ceased,
For those who grieve and cannot bear
The stillness of the empty chair.
Instill in them a second sight
To see in death a lasting light
Which reassures that those who've died
Now kneel before the manger side
To celebrate the blessed birth
More grandly than we can on earth.
And those visions of your care
Bring hope enough to fill that chair
So Christmas carols may be sung
And Christmas bells may still be rung
And Christmas peace replace all fears
And Christmas joy be felt through tears.*

Debbie W. Parvin - Montgomery, AL

Chris' symbols are a cowboy hat and boots.



Paula Hardin's son, Jeremy (3-24-75), died 9-5-94, as the result of injuries he sustained from falling from a bridge.

We've been keeping a candle lit for Jeremy every evening for the last couple of weeks. Somehow it helps us feel his presence, almost as though we're waiting for him to come home. How are you doing this Christmas? Are there good and bad as time goes on or does it take on a "sameness." As for me, I feel such anticipation but I can't identify the reason. Maybe there will be a special feeling of closeness. I'm still pondering discernment from George A., in May, at Cincinnati. Time will tell.

Smile into the eyes of a stranger this Christmas. You'll find Young Jim

Jeremy's symbols are a twinkling star and drama masks



Audra (6-6-75), the daughter of Allen and Vicki Sparks, died of cancer, 11-3-94. Last year Vicki wrote this:

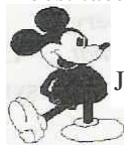
Christmas of 1995 I asked that a green candle be included in our church candle service. This was carried through and is now a part of our Christmas tradition.

Audra's symbol is a yellow rose.



Joe and Gail Friedmann's daughter, Jaci (4-10-84) was hit and killed by a school bus on JtU1e 8, 1995. Gail shared her 1996 holiday plans:

We decided to stay home this year, our son wanted us to. We put up a different tree and we're doing things a little different on Christmas Eve. I'm actually looking forward to it, Joe doesn't care if it comes or not. Thank you so much for the gift in December's newsletter. I share it every month with our support group. A couple of people have told me they've gotten some of the best ideas from your cover letter.



Jaci's symbol is Mickey Mouse.

Carlos, the 34-year-old son of Clifford and June Morris, husband of Lois, and the father of Mary Joyce, was killed in an automobile accident, 8-12-93.

Remembering the pleasant things of life and the good memories of the past. I guess we're doing the same thing we did last year. Having our family over for Christmas dinner and having breakfast at our daughter-in-law's, watching Mary Joyce open Christmas gifts. After we will be going out of town, probably to French Lick for a few days.

I guess the only things we are doing to remember Carlos Ray is placing a growing orchid in the living room, placing roses on his grave and a poinsettia at our church in his honor. I know they will not live very long but they were his favorite flowers. It's for love anyway, so I will do what I feel would have pleased him the most. We will also attend the Candlelit service, and the Lord's Supper at his church.

Carlos' symbol is the scales of justice since he was a lawyer.



Jerry and Sherry Becker's daughter, Leanne (10-10-78), died from leukemia 9-15-97. Sherry sent this e-mail and wrote the following lamentation:

Thank you so much for your newsletters. I am the mother of Leanne Lynch. I am in the process of writing to you. I have no idea what I am doing on her computer other than attempting to learn what she and my son found so intriguing about this thing. If you receive this message, I would love an answer. It is one a.m. and I cannot sleep for thinking about my great loss. I suppose I need to communicate with a fellow traveler. Thanks for listening.

How can I thank you for the newsletters you sent. I sit reading them nightly. They do seem to reach me when no one else can.

I am truly sorry to hear about your son. He must have been a wonderful young man. I know he is proud of you

and the work you are doing to help others in our situation.

I have watched many parents lose children during my daughter's illness and have always wondered how they endured. Now I am wondering how I possibly can.

Leanne, my daughter and very best friend, was diagnosed with leukemia a little over five years ago. She had AML, a difficult disease to cure, but we were fortunate because her brother was a perfect donor match. Leanne received a bone marrow transplant at children's hospital in Cincinnati on February 17, 1993. She later developed chronic graft vs. host disease which primarily involved her skin. She had good days and bad, but we were very thankful her leukemia had been cured. However, Leanne died suddenly at UK Children's hospital last month. After five years of struggle, Leanne died while I was sleeping beside her in the early morning hours of September 15.

I am at present having a great deal of difficulty dealing not only with my child's death, but also with the denial of promised information.

Leanne was eighteen years old and had just begun at Transylvania University on a top scholarship. She had a great love of animals and desired with a passion to become a veterinarian. Leanne was an accomplished rider and found her greatest joy in the barn or riding her thoroughbred "Willing Wish." She loved every thing about life!

Leanne's symbols are a horse and yellow Labrador Retriever



Jill (6-6-74), the daughter of Oscar and Leola Cole, was killed in an automobile accident 5-24-92. Leola shares her memories of Christmas with Jill:

I was thinking of the 1st Christmas that we had with Jill. She was six months old. She was a delight.

I have a picture of her with a cousin under our Christmas tree. Of course they were tearing it apart (both being 6 months old).

Her first outing was at 2 weeks old, we took her to church. We took her always. Her 1st Christmas she was in the youth's Christmas program. There was a young boy who held her in his lap while they sang, "I saw Mommy kissing Santa Clause. Of course she was pulling at his beard and hair.

The 2nd Christmas she was 18 months old. They chose her to be in the nativity scene and she was to say three words. She looked beautiful. I had made her a long red velvet dress with white antique lace on it. Her hair was long and beautiful. As her dad, brothers and myself, with the whole church sitting on pins waiting for the three magical words to come from her mouth, when it came her time to perform she stood straight up and said her three words. What an applause she got. Then she ran to get the Baby Jesus out of the Manger.

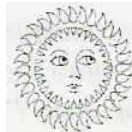
The last Christmas we had with her was 1991. I bought her some things to put under the tree. All of our family was here. But later that afternoon I remembered I had gotten her something else that was missing. I told her I had put it up somewhere and couldn't remember what it was or where it was at.

Surprising to me, she said, "Mom, I know where it is and what."

I collect Precious Moments, she gave me a Precious Moments clock. I keep it in the living room, hanging on the wall next to the curio cabinet where I keep those that she has given me.

Since her death all the Christmas' have become as one. The last one we spent with her.

Jill's symbol is a sunshine.



Geraldine Fitzgerald's daughter, Linda (11-7-54), died of Marfans Syndrome, 7-24-91. Geraldine shares this Christmas lamentation and poems:

Peace and Love to your hearts during this beautiful season and all the seasons of your life. At the Crib on Christmas I will ask the Infant Jesus to kiss our children for us. We miss them so.

THIS CHRISTMAS:

- Mend a quarrel.
- Seek out a forgotten friend.
- Dismiss suspicion and replace it with trust.
- Write a love letter... to yourself.... or to God.
- Give a soft answer.
- Encourage youth.
- Manifest your loyalty in word and deed.
- Keep a promise.
- Find the time.
- Forego a grudge.
- Forgive an enemy.
- Listen.
- Apologize if you are wrong.
- Try to understand.
- Flout envy.
- Examine your demands of others.
- Think first of someone else.
- Appreciate.
- Be kind.
- Be gentle.
- Laugh.
- Laugh a little more.
- Express your gratitude.
- Go to church.
- Gladden the heart of a child.
- Take pleasure in the beauty and wonder of the earth.
- Speak your love.
- Speak it again.
- Speak it still once again.

Decide to be peaceful.
Render others peaceful.
Be a model of peace.
Irradiate your peace.
Love passionately the peace of our beautiful planet.
Do not listen to the warmongers, haterseeders and powerseekers.
Dream always of a peaceful, warless, disarmed world.
Think always of a peaceful world.
Work always for a peaceful world.
Switch on and keep on, in yourself, the peaceful buttons, those marked love, serenity, happiness, truth, kindness, friendliness, understanding and tolerance.
Pray and thank God every day for peace,
Pray for the United Nations

and all peacemakers.
 Pray for leaders of nations
 who hold the peace of the world
 in their hands.
 Pray God to let our planet at long last
 become the
 Planet of Peace.

And sing in unison with all humanity:
 "Let there be peach on Earth,
 And let it begin with me."
 Peace my friends, always peace.
 Love, geraldine Fitzgerald



Linda's symbol is an angel.

J.B. and Dottie Fuqua lost a son
 several years ago. When J.B. was in the
 7th grade, he wrote this very mature and
 insightful essay about Christmas:



Keeping Christmas

It is a good thing to observe Christ-
 mas. Christmas should be made
 Christmas and not a holiday. We
 should enjoy ourselves on Christmas.
 This great day reminds man to set his
 own little watch by the great clock of
 humanity which runs on sun time. One
 should forget what one has done for
 others, but do not forget what others
 have done for him. Put your rights in
 the background and your duties in the
 middle distances. It is not what you are
 going to get out of life, but what you
 give it. You should look around to where
 you can sow a few seeds of happiness.
 Keep a beautiful garden for your kindly
 feelings.

Are you willing to trim your lamp so
 as to make more light and less smoke
 and carry it in front so that your shadow
 will be behind you; to step down and
 consider the needs and desires of little
 children; to remember the weakness and
 loneliness of old people; to stop asking
 how much your friends love you and ask
 yourself if you love them enough; to
 bear in mind the things other people
 have to bear in their hearts? If you can
 do this then you can keep Christmas.

Aren't you willing to believe that love
 is the strongest thing in the world--

that it is even stronger than hate or
 death -- and that the blessed life that
 began nineteen hundred and thirty years
 ago is the image and brightness of
 eternal love? If you believe this,
 then you can keep Christmas.

"Candle Story" by Kristin With this candle....

Where there is light there is hope.
 Where there is friendship, peace and
 truth.
 Christmas is a time for celebrating the
 special people in our lives.
 When I cannot find my way I light a
 flame,
 and at Christmastime...
 I think of you.

The following poem was written by
 Helen Steiner Rice; I added the last two
 lines:

I have a list of folks I know, all written
 in a book...
 And every year when Christmas comes,
 I go and take a look..
 And that is when I realize that these
 names are a part...
 Not of the book they're written in, but
 of my very heart...
 For each name stands for someone who
 has crossed my path sometime...
 And in that meeting they've become the
 rhythm in each rhyme...
 And while it sounds fantastic for me to
 make this claim...
 I really feel that I'm composed of each
 remembered name...
 And while you may not be aware of any
 special link...
 Just meeting you has shaped my life a
 Lot more than you think..
 For once I've met somebody, the years
 cannot erase...
 They memory of a pleasant word or of
 a friendly face...
 So never think my Christmas cards are
 just a mere routine...
 Of names upon a Christmas list forgotten
 in between..
 For when I send a Christmas card that is
 addressed to you...
 It's because you're on that list of folks
 whom I'm indebted to...
 For I am but the total of the many folks
 I've met...

And you happen to be one of those I
 prefer not to forget...
 For if I've known you many years or
 only just a few...
 In some way, be it large or small, I
 owe myself to you...
 And every year when Christmas comes,
 I realize anew...
 The best gift life can offer is meeting
 folks like you.
 Thank you for sharing your precious
 angels with me
 The middle is what we each seek, may
 we find it under this year's Christmas
 tree.

What do the following have in
 common:

- 1) A calculator
- 1) The song "White Christmas" and
- 3) The number 57,738,491,375?
 M.J.M., Plainville, Conn.

ANSWER:

Sleigh bells! (Enter the digits
 57738491375 on a calculator and
 turn it upside down to see why.)

An Old Fashioned Christmas Recipe for Someone Special

- 1c Love
- 1c Hot Chocolate
- 3 Christmas Carols
- 1 Large Decorated Christmas Tree
- 1 Special Christmas Party with
 Friends and Family
- 1/2 tsp Happiness
- 2 Bunches of Presents to Open
- 2 Dashes of Joy
- 1 Plate of Favorite Christmas
 Cookies
- 1 Sprinkle Peace on Earth
- 1 Cozy Fire to Warm Us
- 1/2 cup **MEMORIES**

Add these special ingredients to a
 favorite recipe
 To make this the best Christmas
 There could ever be!

C is for chocolate, h is for hand,
 o is for overweight, o is for out,
 I is for last piece, when most of .
 us pout.

A is for apple, t is for treat,
 but when we spell it, e is for
 Eat. We are "menta" for
 chocolate



