



VALENTINE'S DAY is another holiday when we bereaved people remember our loved ones and feel sad because they or not here with us.

This year, take time out to be good to yourself Remember your loved ones and the joy you shared. Be thankful that you had them and the wonderful times you had together. Perhaps you would like to remember your loved one with a special flower, or perhaps you could do a kindness for someone that your loved one would have done, or send a card to someone in need of help and understanding... all in memory of your loved ones. But most of all, take time out to tell those you have left, children, spouse, relatives, or a special friend how fortunate you are to have them and how much they mean to you.

The following passages came from Paul and Kathy Havsgaard (who have lost a child), *From My Heart To Yours*, to help families when a child dies:

Keeping Your Marriage Intact

The death of a child is probably the most tragic of any situation a family could ever go through. When a child dies, it is not uncommon for drunkenness, separation, and divorce to occur.

Warren and David Wiershe, in their book, *Comforting the Bereaved* note, "The death of a child can produce problems in the marriage. Studies indicate that 90% of the bereaved couples have marital difficulties within a few months after the child's death. "

The Compassionate Friends Organization adds another startling statistic. They state that approximately 75% of the couples who lose a child divorce within the first five years after the death of that child.

Share your feelings with each other. Holding back from each other the pain, emptiness and hurt that your child's death causes deep down is not only counter-productive-it is a sure road to marital aloofness and disharmony. When a person is wonted or upset about something, and for some reason 'keeps it in', the feelings will rise to the surface in other areas--maybe it will surface as a very short fuse, or as 'illogical' irritability with one's partner or children. There's much truth in the old saying, 'Whoever conceals his/her grief finds no remedy for it.'

Sometimes one partner thinks he/she has to be strong to be a good support jar the other. Rather than being helpful, this approach can leave the 'supported' partner with the impression that the other 'doesn't really care about our child'. Our society wrong wrongly promotes the image of a tearless griever. In fact, the greatest support a person can receive is to hear and understand how the death of the child really affected the other.



Together you must: Recognize Differences Talk Together Encourage One Another Pray Together Forgive One Another

Not only do parents grieve, our surviving children do also, "Don't Forget The Children. "

We are often guilty of trying to give our children "things" instead of giving ourselves. Time is a precious gift we can! share with our family. Let us invest it wisely.



Some Things To Think About:

1. Make time for your family. They are a priority. I don't have to tell you that our families are very, very precious to us.

2. Make time to be alone with your surviving children und your spouse. Re-affirm your love to them often in the weeks and months ahead.

3. Encourage your children and spouse to talk. Help them remember times shared. Make an extra effort, as hard as it is, to understand what they are feeling.

4. Continue to grow spiritually. As husband and wife and as a family.

5. Remember that each family member and each day is a gift from God. Be thankful for the time that we have with each other. Live each day as if it will be your last. Look for ways to show acts of kindness to them frequently.

6. Let each member of your family know that you love them. Today. None of us knows what tomorrow holds. Make a point of telling each member of your family that you love them every day.

Do it today
Say it today
Show it today



Kahlil Gibran expresses how I feel about you and my family: *We forget the people we laugh with: but we never forget the people we cry with.*

Grief Grafts

Brandon Sparks (10-15-78), the son of Donna Isaacs, was killed in an automobile accident, 7-24-95. Brandon's brother, Chad, shares this letter to his brother:

Brandon,
My life has never been the same since that early July morning when Dafford woke me up and said something, I don't know what. I noticed you weren't in your room, in your bed, like you were supposed to be. As I stepped down the stairs, my legs kept getting heavier and heavier and I started to feel faint. When I reached the bottom of the stairs. I saw all of our family surrounding the living room; I knew something was terribly wrong. Everyone was looking at me and crying. Mom was able to say the words "Brandon was killed tonight." The only thing I could do was run and get in her lap for a few minutes. I was in shock!

Then they took Mom and Granny to the hospital because we were afraid they were going into shock and needed medical treatment. Everyone started crying and holding me, I just couldn't believe it so I started to pray, "Dear Lord, please don't allow Brandon to be dead"... my faith was so strong. Penny called the hospital to see if you were OK but you were dead. Mark and Jamie were fine. She could barely say the words; "the funeral home was coming after you." All I could do was bury myself in the cushions on the couch. Then when reality set in and I really started to cry. Then Dad pulled on my shoulder and tried to talk to me.

Today I think I am still in shock; I 'ish I could wake up from this terrible ightmare. There are parts of me that are gone forever; I miss you so much. That I would give if you would just come through that door or your spirit come talk to me, how it would help me 'much. I miss your smile, your ugh. that bouncy walk of yours, your nice. I miss having a brother. You told me you loved me, but I never told you; I'm so sorry! We were getting so

close. I could tell you everything. I miss going places, with you; you treated me like your best friend. I love you so much for that; you are my big brother and always will be; you taught me so much! Now that I'm getting older, I need you more than ever before. This past year; I went to school with a lot of your friends; that was very hard. I talked with a lot of them about you, it helped give me some relief I remember you talking about your teachers and now they are mine. I want to say your name so bad, but I can't. I know they remember you. I know you are sending me strength from Heaven; thank you my dear brother.

Now that I've lost you. I wish I had more brothers and sisters, but Brooke is here, your little girl. She has helped all of us so much. She is a true blessing! I don't know how I could handle losing you without the Lord in my life. You were saved and so am I now. I can't wait to be with you again. To see your name and picture on a tombstone is so hard to believe. I try to wake up from this dream, but I know I will someday and I'll be with you. I must go on for now without you.



*Sending You Love,
Chad*
Brandon's symbols
are a baseball and fishing.

Ralphie Coomer (7-24-74) was the only son of Ralph and Dana Coomer. He died in an automobile accident on June 11, 1994.

I truly have to say, without my fellow travelers. I don't know how I could have made it this far. I have been trying to contact other parents. Oh how it hurts to see another mother hurting so bad, knowing how her life will never be the same and all the hurt she will feel forever, but I thank God that I can tell her that it does get easier. Time and God helps with the pain. I miss my Ralphie, but I am so much better than I used to be with talking to other mothers and reading LAMENTATIONS, does help ease the pain.

Ralphie's symbols are praying hands and an Eagle,



Melody Claxton Powers (1-1-71 the daughter of Ron and Car Leach, was killed in an automobile accident, 11-1-97. The following: article was written as a tribute 1 Melody in the Newsletter of Baptist: Regional Medical Center, were worked as a phlebotomist:

It seems like only a few hours ago that we learned of the death of our friend and coworker, Melody. How unreal to, know that she will no longer be in the, lab among us.

So many things that went without notice are now so amazingly clear. Her ready smile, her natural beauty, and friendly manner are just a few. Each of us have our own best memories of Melody and, likewise, each of us will miss and mourn her untimely passing in our private and special ways. Someone once said. "Time heals all wounds." Hopefully this will hold true for everyone in the lab that so deeply miss her. It is the feeling of all that even with the hurt subsiding in time, her memory will never pass.

In the Book of Ecclestices, the author writes. "to everything there is a season." We all have to. Sadly, face the realization that Melody had completed the season allotted to her in this life and now she has moved on with her journey.

Melody's time ended before we were ready to give her up, but somehow we all know and believe it was exactly on schedule with the master plan. With this in mind, I will simply close by saying that Melody will always be a part of every heart that knew her.

Our most sincere sympathy is extended to her family and hopefully with their understanding that their loss is also ours.

Melody's symbol is an Angel.



Steve and Janice Tully's son, Todd, (5-8-78) died in an automobile accident on October 12, 1996. Their e-mail is: sinsheep@mis.net
Steve writes:

I am writing on a new computer because I was so very afraid if I continued to use his. I would eventually mess something up and not be able to recover it. I am not very computer literate, but I know enough to not go further than I should. Todd would be so very envious of this computer. I am writing to you and listening to Metallica, and being just as happy as a "hog in slop."

His music and computer were centers of his too short life, and I was always impressed with what he had taught himself.

At this point, I'm not sure I am interested in sharing my pain. I think I would much prefer to share with others in our situation the hope that life does go on. Not as it once was, but it does, and will go on even if we prefer not to participate. I have to participate! The alternative to me is just too awful to think about. Janice nor I ever intend to let Todd be forgotten. We speak of him every day of our life. Some of it is sad, but most of it is about what an extraordinary son he was and is to us. We are very sad and grieve deeply for our son. No one we know or will know will ever forget our Todd was here. It's kind of like what a child writes on the wall when no one is looking. You know! "Todd was here!" Only he won't be writing it while he looks over his shoulder. We'll do the writing for him. With the biggest and loudest signs we can make.

I wrote something for Todd and Christmas. Not poetic, not deep, just what I have been thinking to myself for weeks now. Todd allowed so much in his short life.

YOU ALLOWED

Those few years ago, you allowed us to see you come into this world.

You allowed us to hold you, to keep you safe.

You allowed us to see you smile, to see you laugh.

We were the ones you allowed to see your first steps, to hear your first words. You allowed your sister the dignity of showing you off like her first trophy. You belonged to her. The years that followed, you allowed us many happy, painful, funny and sad times.

You allowed us to watch you grow straight and tall, to see you stretch, to see you fall.

Sometimes you even allowed us into your world.

Your first ball game, your first true friend, your first day of school, so many firsts.

You allowed the teachers, the ones you liked, to prepare you for later in life.

The things you loved, you allowed us to see, the pains you felt, you tried to hide, but we knew.

You allowed us to listen to your music, the center of your life, even when we didn't want to.

You allowed us to watch the baby become a boy; to watch the boy to become a young man.

You allowed us to see you find a love of your life, to see you grow, to see you experience, to see you suffer, to see you rage.

Allowed to watch as you became more independent, preparing for your own life. Allowed to watch the sister who loves you grow apart, then come together with a love that was there from the start.

You were allowed to be an open book, no covers, no empty pages, just words that filled your life.

You allowed Mom to experience your every experience, Dad to be Dad.

You allowed us hugs and kisses, then you didn't, but when they were most important, they returned.

You allowed us to watch as you left home for the first time, preparing for what life had to offer. Never without a hug, a smile, and some fear, but leave you did. How we long for those hugs and smiles.

All these things you allowed in your too short life, but the most important of all

these things, you allowed us to love you SON. LOVE YOU WE DO.

Todd's symbols are Yin-Yang, music symbol, computer, a crescent moon.



Sue Wilson's daughter, Taiann (11-3-79), was murdered with her boyfriend, Matt Coomer (8-17-78), 8-31-95. Taiann's Mom wrote this Love Letter to her for Valentine's Day 1997:

My Dearest Taiann,

You know I miss you every day. I wonder where you've been up to. I hope where you are that you can be with your wonderful Matthew. You are still my Princess. I remember the stories I used to tell you at bedtime about the 'Ice Castles' and the Princess who lived there. You were so imaginative that it was hard to keep coming up with new stories.

You would be 17 now. I'm the one with the imagination now and I wonder how beautiful you would be. I'm sending Jessica, Stacy, Missy, Dalena, Josh and Kim a Valentine's Day card for you. Oh yeah - I forgot Ryan. I know how he used to make you laugh, your funny friend at school.

My heart will always be connected to your heart.

I've thought so many times about your bravery as you fought for your life. You saw Matthew shot before your eyes. I know of no one more courageous. I tell you every day that "I am sorry" for what you had to see and what you had to go through before your death. I am sorry I wasn't there to help you.

I will see you one day. I know you and Matthew are OK. You take care and always know 'I LOVE YOU.'

Love,

Your MOM XO-XO-XO



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

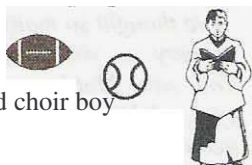
Tim (6-17-67), the son of Frank and Norma Smith, was murdered, 5-19-82. Norma shares:

When we are weak in some areas, whether it is sickness in our body or despair over the loss of a child, I feel someone is asking God to give us another day that's better. Thank you for all the whispered prayers for us.

I saw a beautiful story on 20/20, perhaps you saw it, too. It told of a man dying with cancer, and how his young son and his mom's brother have coped over the last 10 years. When they were talking about their father/brother the tears were always there. Grief is not considered to be time based anymore. (We already knew that) They are discovering it is ongoing and continues. (We knew that, too.) This specialist said society has heaped a great burden on people by saying, "Okay, it's over; get over it." Thank God for people such as yourself, that can emerge a leader, but also one who needs comforting, and who is not ashamed to say so.

We have found out we can go on, yet differently. I told you about the 70 pounds I had gained. I'm down 35 of them now. I was trying to tell my brother yesterday how I have tried to work through my grief, go on, and lose weight without eating everything that's loose. This is the first time in 15 years that I have told him that. It felt good, but on the other hand, people must be willing to listen.

Tim's symbols are a



Charles (2-22-75), the son of Joe and Carolyn Hargrove, died as a passenger in an auto accident, 10-7-91. Charles' symbol is a '57 Chevy.



Ryan (4-15-75), the son of Tom and Florence Walker, died from cancer, 11-29-97. Ryan wrote the following letter and poem to his parents in July '97:

To all of those I leave behind:

I want you to be assured that I died happy. In the ending days of my life I learned how to live. I learned who I was and how to love myself and life, no matter what. I also had the opportunity to spend my remaining days with all of you showing you how much you mean to me. I have no regrets. I led a great life. Please honor my memory by remembering that tomorrow is not a guarantee, and whatever goes left unsaid today may never be heard tomorrow. Even in the hardest of times life is a blessing. Happiness can only be found within oneself, but I found happiness in the face of death and misery. Life is precious. Enjoy it.

*I Love You All,
Ryan "Rooster" Mitchell Walker
July 21, 1997*

*I never knew life
until I learned death. I found that true
living takes more than mere breath. A
day shy of action for measuring the
cost is a day short of living and
another day lost. If you spend all your
time fearing to die you'll never have
lived
and you 'll never know why. Living takes
courage that few people show, but it
brings satisfaction like few people
know. When a soul dies hungry
fruits of life untasted,
it's another life ended and another life
wasted. You can spend your days
laughing
You can spend your days crying You
can spend your lifetime living You can
spend your lifetime dying. Don't waste
your life fearing what's ahead. For
fearing to live proves you're already
dead. Be sure to love yourself, and
your family and friends. Enjoy living
YOU! life and don't ever fear the end.
Ryan M. Walker*

Joe and Susan Walters' son, Ralph (10-31-88), was killed in a truck accident, 7-29-93. Susan writes:

Let me say bit about how we've used Ralph:, money in the last while. In 1996 the accrued interest from Ralph's Fund, housed in The Foundation for the Roanoke Valley, was used to provide extra school presentations for an area child abuse project. In 1997 that disbursement felt even better to me as I thought Ralph would have loved to have been involved in how it was used that year. It went to begin a new little Cub Scout troop in a low income area of Roanoke. I talked to the scoutmaster and saw pictures of some of the little boys. Oh, how I looked forward to school and the activities of childhood with my precious little boy!

His money spent closer to home included gifts to the University in the form of donations to the new University Residence, which my dad had a major responsibility for building, and as support for an exceptional Brazilian couple studying here. This year's special contribution will be for something here in town that Ralph really loved, but that's still a surprise for a couple of important people in our lives. so I'll tell you next year about that! A property near the new President's house was also given and is now named after him. "Ralph's House." Other charities and individuals have also been in receipt of Ralph's generosity. Our thinking is that if we would have wanted someone to do such and such a thing for Ralph we need to do it for them.

Along with "Ralph's House" another special campus addition in Ralph's memory has been stained glass windows in the campus prayer chapel. This chapel, which Ralph called "the baby church," is exactly that, a tiny white frame, steepled, four pews, one pulpit church which was built by a local man as a prototype that was to be placed in Holiday Inns all over the Us. Due to a change in ownership the original plan for the church was not completed and there are now only four of these charming structures in the country, the first being the one here which was a gift to the college from the builder. The new windows are quite unusual, the original designs were

created by Barbara Norman Lashley, a special artist friend in Virginia. In 1993 Barbara was working on her Master's thesis in art, and creating a calendar of her work, one piece for each day of that year. At the time of the accident Barbara and her husband, Kirk were traveling in Taos, NM, where she was appreciating the wonderful religious folk art of the area. Those images and a sensing of our pain, as she and Kirk had lost a child early in their marriage, caused her to focus on Ralph in her August images which are a month of crosses. She always cites Ralph's death when explaining that part of her overall MA project. Mother had been truly captured by the crosses and had the idea to adapt some of them to the elongated, 9x18 inch window openings in the chapel (which then held plastic panels in an orange, blue and red harlequin design!). Mother did all the adapting and drawing off of the panels and a local stained glass artisan did the actual work. The windows are stunning. They were, by sheer coincidence, dedicated on my birthday 1996.

In the summer of 1996 Joe and I traveled with our University Chorale on their tour to France. This group of 30 plus students were fun for us to be with and the country, most especially the northern, Normandy region of France, was fascinating. But, as ever in life. I think the most important part of the trip was a special relationship begun with one of the students, Allison Sewell, then a junior here at school. Later in the summer Allie spent part of a weekend with Us at the house, singing at our church on Sunday. Some weeks later a promised parcel arrived in the mail. Little could I have imagined those two days in our home could have so communicated Ralph to this young 20 year old, herself her mom's own Ralph. I share following the text of the song that Allie wrote (along with beautiful music, suited to her soprano voice), has copyrighted and has performed, on Ralph's birthday in 1996. It is a treasure to us, as is she.

An Only Son (Ralph's Song) for Joe and Susan Walters Scattered pictures adorning every wall.

Moments sealed forever going down the hall.
A smiling face, eyes glittering like the sun
Reaching out from behind the glass; their
only begotten son.

He was just a child; a little boy he will
always be. He'll never see the hurt in this
world that we continually see. His eyes are
on the Father, and His only Son Looking
down upon the two who lost their precious
one.

His first "big boy bed" is left just as it used to
be, Little handprints are hanging there for us
to see. Jesus loves the little children: they are
all his own. And sometimes he picks one
early and wants to bring him home.

A void has been cut into the lives of those so
dear. Tears are shed, hurts will mend, but he
is always near. God knows all the heartache
in losing
an only son,

And He is watching over the two who lost
their precious one.

Father, take care of my child.

Keep him warm and happy, laughing
all the while.

Keep him safe until the time will come,
We will meet again, my child, when Jesus
calls me home.

Words and Music by Allison Sewell
August 1996

Ralph's symbols are international
children.



Michael (6-30-76), the son of Michael and Linda Miller died as a result of an automobile accident on 2-15-95. Linda shared a special gift they have received:

I got a call from my sister that she had
received an envelope addressed to

Mike Miller and postmarked from FA, (we lived in PA from Sept. 96 to June 97) with no return address. I asked her to open it. It had a small envelope inside. It was addressed to Mike Miller with our address and my sister's return address. It was written in Michael Duncan's hand writing. I told her to mail it to me. When I received the letter it was a letter written by Michael Duncan. We tracked his teacher down by phone in FA. He was in the fifth grade at the time. His teacher had them write a letter to themselves as a time capsule project. Eleven years later she mailed all of their letters. His teacher knew we were moving so that is why she sent it to my sister's address which he had put as a return address. This was truly a strange experience. I am sending you a copy of his letter. He wrote the letter September 15, 1986. His teacher had mailed it to us on September 16, 1997.

Another strange part of the puzzle; his teacher is now a principal of a school. We talked to her secretary' and she told us about the letter being a time capsule. Michael told her why he called and the secretary told him that Michael D's teacher had lost her daughter in February of this year. It was 2 years to the month after Michael D's accident. I hope this all makes sense. It is hard to explain on paper. I hope you enjoy reading his letter. We sure have had a lot of laughs reading it. I am going to frame it. Our sons memories go on and on forever. I just have a hard time accepting that he is not here to enjoy these kind of experiences.

The following letter is exactly how Michael D wrote it:

Sept. 15, 1986

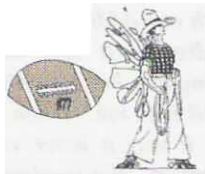
Dear Me

After being humiliated by the teacher from losing my letter with I'm writing again, I have been doing nothing just homework which is boring I've first been crying my eyes out because the lady how showed us the townhouse said that skateboards were aloud but their not.

I've been doing my homework with out my mommy or daddy having to stay on me all the time. Me and scott are getting along real well. We both ride the

same bus. Are moms kind of know each other. I might have scott over today I don't know. yet his or my mom might not want us to. I've made a lot of friends but Scott is my best.

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



Marcia Carson's son, Dell (12-22-69), was murdered 12-15-91. Marcia shares a writing with us:

PAIN IS MY CONSTANT COMPANION

True grief is a profound remembering; If I can forget [can live? How can I live, I cannot forget? The dimpled smiles, the twice broken arm, the "old man" hands, that far away look in your eyes like you have the world's problems on your young shoulders (when you have no knowledge of being watched). The look of worrying on your face even as I watched you sleep. The many tears falling on those smooth brown cheeks, leaving tracks and trails of the pains suffered that day and many days to come. The hair the color of copper. How can a mother forget the child she knew for 21 years? How can I forget the father of my first grandchild? How can I forget the tears when my grandchild visits from Georgia, and [find her looking at your picture and crying her 7 year-old <ryes out? How can I forget when I ask her why she is crying and she says, "I miss my daddy!" What memories she must have of you. She was only three when you were shot. What memories you instilled in her those three short years. She still cries for you and still call you

Daddy. Memories for your first nephew who says, "when Uncle Dell comes back

Uncle Dell was shot,

Uncle Dell will do this and that with me. Uncle Dell, Uncle Dell. Granny where is Uncle Dell. can I see him. can I talk to him?" And your sister and two brothers I cannot forget the pain I see in their every being, every day. How can

[forget? [cannot.

Pain is My Constant Companion.

She also wrote the following as she passed the road signs throughout the Bert T. Combs Mountain Parkway 1995:

Welcome to the Bert T. Combs Mountain Parkway where you will see water, fed by underground springs of long ago, dripping from between rocks; through rocks, over and under rocks, rocks wet, slick, trees lush and green, continuously fed by the drips off the mountains onto the Parkway. Parkway twisting like a snake:

LANE END-MERGE RIGHT, water merging with the ground as it drips off the mountains on the Parkway

RIGHT LANE ENDS. however. the water is never ending as it drips off the mountains on the Parkway

FALLING ROCK ZONE on the Parkway, building new shapes and directions for the water to fall as it drips off the mountains on the Parkway. water never ending throughout the Parkway

SLOWER DRIVERS KEEP RIGHT to better see the water dripping from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

NO PASSING ZONE if water is dripping off the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

BUCKLE UP-IT'S STATE LA W that water is dripping from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

PASS ONLY IF CENTER LANE IS CLEAR of water falling from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

The **END OF CONSTRUCTION** of water falling from the rocks throughout the Mountain Parkway

DEER CROSSING to the water dripping from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

Impatient **FASTER DRIVERS KEEP LEFT** and giving driver of burgundy Cavalier the finger because driver is watching the dripping of water from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

Trees are **HAZEL GREEN** growing tall and strong, nourished by the sun and the water dripping from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway.

Water dripping onto burgundy Cavalier that just smashed into mountain because driver is watching water dripping

from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

Eighteen wheelers zooming past not seeing the beauty of the water dripping from the rocks through the Mountain Parkway

NO U-TURN except to see the water dripping from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

Pines, cedars, purple locus flowers, patches of blackberry blooms, drinking from the water dripping from rocks on the Mountain Parkway

VISITOR INFORMATION "You've just passed the water dripping from the Mountains on the Parkway

REST AREA to think about the water dripping from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

EMERGENCY STOPPING ONLY to watch the water dripping from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

SPEED LIMIT 65 is too fast to see water dripping from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

COAL TRUCKS ONLY, 5 TONS, 10 TONS, 50 TONS of water dripping from rocks on the Mountain Parkway

EXIT TO 96A BERT T, COMBS MOUNTAIN PARKWAY, where water drips from rocks onto the Mountain Parkway

TRAFFIC ISLANDS AHEAD caused by water dripping from the rocks on the Mountain Parkway

WINCHESTER/LEXINGTON NEXT EXIT, there's no water dripping from these mountains, I am out of the Mountain Parkway!

Dell's symbols are boxing gloves and a unicorn.



Valentine's Day is a very special day for lovers...

Especially us **CHOCOLATE LOVERS!!**

(Enough of this mushy stuff-- go for the chocolate!!)