

# LAMENTATIONS

Issue 70

Middle

July, 1998

The following article was written by Jim Dixon, President of Bereaved Parents of the USA, and it is something we have all heard:

*Recently I was asked to speak to a group on a college campus about parental bereavement. I was talking to the person who was going to introduce me and they asked me why I spoke on this topic. I started to tell them about my life experiences and as soon as I told them about our two miscarriages, they replied with, "At least you didn't get to know the children." Then I gently explained that we also experienced the death of our 22 year-old son, Todd. All they could say was "OH", as they looked for a rock to hide under.*

*Not long ago a mother told me that someone said to her, "At least he didn't live at home and you didn't see him everyday. This father and son did talk on the phone everyday. I wonder if the 99-year-old mother who attended the Marion County Florida Chapter has heard something like, "At least he had a god long life."? A mother from Iowa who had already experienced the death of one son had another die a few years later. Her friend said, "At least you have been through this before."*

*The words, "at least", are some of the most hurtful words anyone could speak. They hurt us because they demean us. These words dismiss our feelings about some person or some thing. They say what has happened to us really isn't that bad.*

*One wonders why anyone would ever use those words. In reality, it is simple. When we use the words, we are protecting ourselves by saying it isn't so bad.*

*Or we may be saying our grief is worse than yours.*

*Might I gently suggest, as we walk this journey, let us understand that, for each of us, our grief is as unique as our individual relationship with each of our individual unique children.*

Reprinted from **Bereaved Parents, USA**. Their address is PO Box 95, Park Forest, IL 60466.

*Teresa Schoeneck, "Life isn't Fair" has been the response in our family, as in many families, whenever things didn't go right, or to explain problems and hardships. I guess we said it a lot to our kids. In fact, our daughter Margie came home from her first day in ninth grade and said, "I have a new teacher. I don't like him but you will." When I asked her why, she said because he already said, "**Life Isn't Fair.**"*

*Months after our daughter Mary's death, when I was having a particularly difficult time, my husband said, "it used to be easy to say "Life Isn't Fair." However, when it comes to really experiencing that fact I wanted to fight it. I wanted life "To Be Fair." When Lois Lane died in an earthquake, Superman spun the world back so that she was unhurt.*

*I wanted someone like Superman to spin the world back and make*

*everything fair, to have Mary be alive.*

*When you have experienced the death of a loved one, many things seem unfair. It is unfair to feel such pain, to have holidays, birthdays and anniversaries without your loved one, to have friends and coworkers avoid you, to get depressed for days on end, the list could go on and on.*

*Eventually my grief softened. I realized that "Life Isn't Fair", I have to accept the fact that Mary died and it wasn't fair but other people suffer due to the death of their love, one, a divorce, major illness and other major family losses. Some people experience several deaths and somehow they survive.*

*We can either keep fighting the fact of the death and how unfair it is, or we can work on our grief, don the positives in my life, the people and events that were fair, to choose to appreciate life and , time (lots of time), determination and lots of work the pain become less frequent and softer. As I .....happened warm memories of ..... replaced the painful ones. I have my moments when I hear a song, see one of her friends, someone who looks like her. I can handle moments. **LIFE ISN'T FAIR** but it is good.*

*Best wishes to you on your journey from deep grief to peace & HOPE.*

(Reprinted from **Hope For Bereaved**, Inc. (315-475-9675)

## Grief Grafts

My mother, Margaret Lynch, Young Jim's grandmother, wrote the following poem to him for his birthday (July 26), 1989:

*From a "Birthday Baby"  
Who pinches on his cake,  
To a birthday youth,  
Who just can't wait  
To get his driver's license  
And be his own man!  
From a kindergarten child  
small and shy,  
To a high school scholar,  
who now wears a tie!  
A lot of education going on!  
From a grandparent's sweetheart,  
Who loved their world,  
To a good looking fellow,  
Who is interested in the girls --  
A lot of growing up he's done!  
From a little fellow,  
Fitting lids on pans,  
To an ardent inventor  
And a fine young man--  
That's our Jim!  
A Christian who attends  
His church each week  
Who watches carefully  
The company he keeps  
And desires the good life--  
We're very proud of him!  
Now on his birthday,  
We're wondering how it will be,  
Twenty years from now--  
We'd love to be around and see  
This business man, family man,  
Lovable JIM!*

Jim's symbol is a Pegasus.



Nancy Hannon's son, Michael (1-28-74), was killed in an auto fire 2-6-93. Nancy shared:

*No one else can feel your exact sorrow, but we can share in your sorrow.  
Young Jim has even more friends today than he did six years ago, thanks to the tremendous support of his parents~ he is continually introduced to an exuberant amount of "NEW" friends.  
We new friends have grown to know him and love him.*

*Young Jim is remembered extra special this week by his loved ones, his old friends and new friends alike. \_*

Michael's symbols are a smiley face and a red rose.



Don and Janie Dry's son, Don V. (6-2-77), died 7-27-93. Janie and Don placed the following in their local paper on the fourth anniversary of Don V's death:

*It has been four long and lonely years since you left us. The hurt feels like it was only yesterday.*

*Your future looked so bright, but shattered in a split second.*

*Your hopes and dreams were our hopes and dreams. We tried to fill all of them but they ended that summer night.*

*We wonder what caused that terrible tragedy something you did or someone else ... We will never know.*

*Whatever caused it, God allowed it to happen. As bad as it is, we must accept it and try to go on.*

*As I walk the block each night and look over the hills and high in the sky, I know your little spirit ascended to heaven that way.*



*We love and miss you,  
Mom and Dad July  
27, 1997*

Don's symbols are an airplane and an eagle.

Ralph and Dana Coomer's son, Ralph (7-24-74), was killed in an auto accident 6-11-94. Dana wrote:

*It seems time flies by, Thank God, because each day, we know we are closer to being with our boys again.*

*Dinah, I am doing better with the help of God and friends like you. Your letters have been such a blessing to me and my daughter, I know Young Jim is so proud of his mommie for reaching out to so many other hurting mothers.*

*Hopefully, my daughter and I will be there for the picnic, we are going to drive down early and come back later the same day.*

*This is how I feel, maybe I'ts the MIDDLE.*

*Grief lived faithfully heals itself in time not full*

*Where once an open wound burned unbearably, "now a thin transparent scar. Still I know that 'til the hour of my own death the scar glows," and now and then bad weather will come and waken the same old ache.*

*A scar is a now and then throb that dies only with one's own death.*

Ralph's symbols are praying hands and an eagle.



Dick and Jean Sand's son, Michael (1-25-71), was killed in an auto accident 6-18-94. Jean observes:

*How are you in the month of July? It also happens to be the MIDDLE of the year. I suppose, if you put your mind to it, there is a beginning and an end for everything and everyone, but also then, there has to be a MIDDLE.*

*What a hard road to travel. Sometimes I think the road is getting easier to walk and other times, I just do not know. It is so hard to forget about the tragedy and think that they are in a better place. I would take my chances, since I have never been able to speak with anyone, where he is, to tell me this is true. If I only had five minutes with Michael to be sure he is happy, healthy and has friends to share his way. I could think a lot more positively. I do believe in God, and without faith I do not think I could have made it this far.*

*I do have signs from my Michael that I do feel that I have been touched by an angel, but sad feeling this is. Michael never leaves my heart and for this I am grateful. UNFORGETTABLE. That's what he was.*

*You, Dinah, are doing a wonderful job and I am sure Young Jim would be so proud of you. I know you have, many times, been touched by an angel too, young Jim.*

Michael's symbols are a star, angel Stetson hat & cowboy.



Mark and Terry Neal's son, Travis (7-23-84), died as a result of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy 11-24-97. Terry tells us about her sons:

*Let me tell you about my boys. Travis was born on July 23, 1984, and died on November 24, 1997. He was 13 years old and always had a smile that would melt your heart. He was the most caring and loving child. He wanted to be friends with everyone. He had talent for music as he began singing early in his life. When he went to Middle School, he found his other talent as a musician. He loved to play the clarinet and had made first chair by the 7th grade. Travis died from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. We did not know he had this disorder. There were no symptoms or signs that would have worried us or led us to investigate them. In fact, he had been for his physical six weeks prior and everything checked out OK. Travis was in gym class running laps when he went into cardiac arrest, the day my heart broke in two. I would like to hear from anyone that has lost a child to this same heart condition.*

*I told a very good friend of mine that it's like part of my soul went with him. I don't think I'll ever feel "complete" again. I feel like I'm just going through the motions of life. I've been told that "I look good" and that I'm "handling this well," but if they only knew that not a minute goes by that I don't seek his face and search for him all day long. I haven't removed anything of his and his room is just as he left it. I even have put away his night shirt so it couldn't be washed I'm working my grief through remodeling. I guess everyone does things during the period of time. I have found that I have so many projects going at the same time, and most are not complete. I work on whatever I want to that day. I did complete one project this weekend with my Dad's help and that was a wallpaper job that I started three weeks ago. Normally, this would have bothered me as I'm usually one that does one thing until it's finished.*

*My other son is Kyle. Kyle is 10 years-old as of April 5. He is in the fourth grade. I just hug on him all the time, but we did that before. He is adjusting to our "new" family structure.*

*Children are so accepting of things and in some ways I think that's good. Kyle has "borrowed" some of Travis' shirts and shorts when the laundry is behind. That has been hard to let go of, but he reasons it out that he can wear them and Travis was given and he wants us to put the bunk beds for many things of Travis; a necklace that Travis was given and he wants us to put the bunk beds back together for him in his room. I'm getting closer to doing that - which is another one of my projects, but it's not foremost on my mind. We've seen some declining grades at school for Kyle, some nervous talking (Kyle is quite shy) and stomach aches, which we've had checked by the doctor and feel it's just nervous stomach. Summer is not far away and with it I pray that it'll be the thing he needs to help him feel more comfortable and self-assured.*

*Kyle, Mark and I have to wait and see if Kyle will develop the same disorder as Travis. It is genetic and all of us have had to undergo echocardiograms to see if we have it. We have all checked out as normal, but they will run an echocardiogram for Kyle each year and his geneticist was encouraging that he probably will not have this, but also they cannot say with 100% certainty.*

*I haven't told you about my husband, Mark, and myself. Mark has "accepted" Travis' death. He told the group in our bereavement class that he knew he couldn't bring Travis back and he has accepted that. I, on the other hand, have not accepted it and it's hard for me to understand how he cannot be in emotional turmoil as I am. But, like I've told everyone who asks, I have to return to the grief support class. It was just too hard for me to bring all the emotions back that I had worked through and he told me he was more depressed the day after than he had been for a long time. So, I think that although he may say he has accepted it, he just deals with it more privately than I do.*

*I have included a copy of the poem Travis' Uncle Brad, my brother, wrote the day of his death. Our church pianist is also composing a song in Travis' memory and as soon as it's completed I'll send you a copy of the words and music.*

*One of God's children sits with him today.*

*Answering all his questions washing his*

*tears away.*

*"I know" replaces "why?" as he walks with God above.*

*Laughter replaces crying as God fills him with His love.*

*His talents must be amazing with angels teaching him how*

*To give praise to the Lord in Heaven's choir, he sings now.*

*One day he'll welcome us with angels by his side,*

*Into his home that God has made Out of love instead of pride.*

*Now comes the time to say "so long" to one who's touched our hearts,*

*And hold on to the memories that let us know we'll never be apart.*

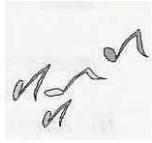
*Love ya Trav - Uncle Brad 11-24-97*

*We chose as Travis' symbols musical notes because he was singing from an early age and had a beautiful voice; also, he played the clarinet in the band at his school and had made first chair. The cocker spaniel represents our pet, Rocksey. Rocksey would sleep with Travis every night. She will occasionally walk into his room and sniff the air as if saying, "Where is he?" We have been blessed with support from family and friends. We have and continue to receive letters and cards from many people, some we don't know. Travis' school has planted a Christmas tree in his memory and has also set up a Music Library in his name. We have received a portrait of his school picture from the school and they will be dedicating the Annual to Travis also. In so many ways, we have been blessed by the goodness of others.*

*While our journey has been and continues to be hard, we find the strength to get through it from Jesus. Every step we take has been with His help. My family is fortunate to have as our pastor someone who has walked where we are walking and has felt the feelings we have felt as he and his wife lost their child as a result of being hit on the playground by a car. I know it was very difficult for him to conduct Travis' funeral as it brought back memories of his loss, and he expressed it during the service.*

Several people who attended the funeral remember that and have since told me that they felt he was speaking from the heart of how difficult it is to lose your child.

Michael's symbols are musical notes.



Lynne Boley's daughter, Randi (4-15-76), died as a result of pneumonia 8-27-93. Lynne tells us about Randi Lee:

Randi Lee Hambrick was born on April 15, 1976, in Virginia and lived on this earth for seventeen (17) years. She was my third child (and last) who had an older brother, Robert Joseph, and one older sister, Kathy Lynne. She had a normal childhood like most children, with the same childhood diseases that most children share like chicken pox, colds, flu, and various other sicknesses. She had one serious bout of pneumonia when she was six months old but recovered and I never thought any more about it. She went to school and played when she came home. Her father and I divorced when she was four years old and I married Randi's stepfather when she was ten. Between the ages of four and ten, Randi, her sister, Kathy, and I were the three musketeers. We did everything together. Randi's brother lived with her father so she did not see very much of him as she grew up. School was not easy for Randi but she tried hard. Randi started playing the trumpet when she was in junior high school and continued on until she passed away. It was the one thing she took pride in and one of the things she was really good at doing.

She did not practice at home much but had a real talent for playing. She played with the band at every football game as well as competitions for which her school won quite a few awards.

She had turned seventeen years old in April of 1993. She had lots of friends and attended our local Baptist Church most of her life where she was an active member of the youth group. She accepted Jesus as her Savior in October, 1987 and was baptized on November 1, 1987. She had been dating a little over a year and her life was that of a typical teenager (aggravating to me but was the way

she wanted it to be for her).

She was a pain sometimes, rebellious sometimes, and a real joy sometimes. I admired her because she was all the things I am not. She was a person who spoke her mind and if she thought she was right would defend her actions to the limit. She had the courage of her beliefs, was tenderhearted, and was one who loved her family deeply. She was trying to find herself as most seventeen year olds do. She did babysitting sometimes, mostly for other family members. She had been visiting with her father for part of that Summer and was looking for a job.

I had talked with Randi on July 18, 1993, and she seemed to be just fine. She gave no clue that she felt bad or that she was sick in any way. She talked about going to band camp in a few weeks and how she was really looking forward to going. She went out to a job interview on July 19 to one of our local Wal - Mart stores and when she got back to her father's house, she complained that she was having trouble breathing. Her father's wife is a nurse and she looked her over and listened to her lungs but could hear nothing wrong. Randi had no other symptoms like fever, cough, chills, or anything else. That afternoon her father took her to our family doctor who took x-rays and found that she had double pneumonia.

Her father took her to one of our local hospitals and she was placed in the Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU). Her father's wife came to my house to let me know what was going on and to take me to the hospital after she was admitted. They figured it would be better if someone told me in person rather than on the phone. I was afraid because she was in the hospital but I was not overly concerned at this point because like I said Randi had pneumonia when she was 6 months old and she recovered just fine.

When we got to the hospital it was about 8:00 p.m. and I went in to see Randi. She was in bed and had several IV's hooked up to her and they had her on an oxygen mask. She had to keep taking it off in order to talk. She told everyone to leave the room so that she could talk to me alone. After everyone left the room, she told me that she loved me and how scared she was at being in the hospital sick. I told her

it would be alright and related to her about her bout with pneumonia at 6 months of age and that in this day and age with all the modern technology they have, that people (especially young people) did not die from pneumonia any more. I could not have been more wrong. (The doctor told me that about every three or four years a young person about Randi's age comes in with what she had and some made it and some didn't. Randi didn't.) She told me that she felt better after talking with me. I told her goodnight and that I would be back in the morning. I went home thinking it was all going to be alright.

The next morning, July 20, 1993, I went back to the hospital at 10:00 a.m. (which was one of the visiting times for MICU).

Randi was sitting up in the bed, but she still had the oxygen mask on her face. She looked really pale and now she had a bad cough. The doctors took her father and I aside and told us that they were going to have to put her on a respirator or she would not make it to nightfall. I had no idea what that entailed but was soon to find out. I felt like someone had slapped me in the face because I could not believe that it was this bad. By this time I was getting scared myself at what I was being told of her condition. We agreed to the procedure. I went in to tell Randi what was going on and she told me how scared she was again. I again told her that it would be alright and that I loved her. Like a typical parent, I told her that I would be there for her and would not let anything happen to her. I had no clue that in less than six weeks, she would be gone. She seemed satisfied and as I was walking out the door from her room, she told me good-bye and that she loved me. Little did either one of us know that this would be the last thing she would ever say to me.

After the rest of the family went in to visit with her, the doctors sedated her and put her on the respirator. The next time I saw Randi she had a tube in her mouth and I just stood there and cried. They had to keep her sedated to keep her from taking the tube out. They kept her sedated

for the next 5 1/2 weeks until she died. She never was conscious again. From then on, I learned more about lung disease than I ever wanted to know. I learned how to read the monitor above her bed that told of her heart beat, respiration, temperature and so forth. I learned about all the drugs that they were pumping into her body to keep her alive. I had no sooner gotten home from the hospital when I had to go back because she had taken a turn for the worse. One of her lungs had developed a hole in it and they had to put in a chest tube. I finally called the rest of my family and told them what was going on. They all came to the hospital and stayed with me until after midnight. Before she died, she had a total of six chest tubes in her body.

The hospital would only let us visit her three times a day (10:00 am, 2:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m.) and for only 15 minutes each time. I was limited in how much time I could spend with her because there were others who wanted to see her (her father, brother, sister and the boyfriend she had at the time). I was there every day for the entire 5 1/2 weeks at every visiting hour. I would pray all day long for her healing. We had quite a number of churches in our area praying for her healing but it was not to be. I would not let myself consider the fact that she might die. I just could not believe that in this day and age, with all the modern technology, that someone as young and in good health as Randi was could die from pneumonia. I just knew that God would heal her. I thought that the God that I served would not let my child die if I prayed hard enough and believed the right things and had enough of other people praying for her too. But that was not to be either. I had a lot of support from our church and especially my Sunday School class. They kept us fed and emotionally supported throughout the entire time. One in particular came to the hospital every day at the 2:00 visiting hour just to sit with me when others went in to see Randi. She went in to see her several times but mostly just sat with me.

For the next few weeks, she just kept getting worse. For the next 5 1/2 weeks,

we watched as Randi slowly deteriorated. I also learned more about medicine than I ever wanted to know. I learned new drug names, I learned how to read patient monitors, I learned how to read Randi's chart, I learned about chest tubes when she would get holes in her lungs, I learned about tracheotomy, and oxygen levels and all kinds of other things too numerous to go into here. She would have one crisis after another and kept me scared all along the way. Her heart would stop and they would have to get it going again. She would have an allergic reaction to some of the medicine they would be giving her and they would have to give her something to counteract it. She would develop more holes in her lungs and they would keep putting in more chest tubes. She would swell up and develop a rash and they would have to give her medicine to combat that. About three weeks into her hospital stay, they put in a trachea and took the tubes from her mouth. I just kept going through all this with Randi and tried to maintain my sanity at the same time. I just kept on praying and believing that she would be alright in the end. That was not to be. For five and a half weeks, she battled for her life. But in the end, she lost the battle. And so did I, because I lost the battle of my faith.

One of the things that I remember most about spending time with Randi while she was in the hospital was that at the 10:00 visiting time, I was almost always the only one to be there to see her because everyone else had to work and could not be there at that time. Because of that, I got to spend the entire fifteen minutes with her alone. The first thing I would do when I went into her room was to sing to her. I would sing her two choruses that she and I had learned in church and they were "Jesus Never Fails" and "Oh How He Loves You and Me" I would hold her hand and pretend that she was singing with me and we would be connected together for a while. This time was so special for me and I hope for her too. Then I would pray for her and then for me. I would tell her that I loved her and relate to her what was going on with her and the rest of the family. I just kept on believing that God would heal her. Well He did heal her, just not in the way I thought He

should have and thus the losing battle of my faith. Because of my way of thinking at the time, I left myself wide open for my faith to be devastated when she died. If you want to know more about my struggle with my faith (or lack thereof) and trusting God, Email me and I will be glad to tell you about it. I don't have all the answers but I can try to tell you how I coped.

She finally was diagnosed with Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome which is most commonly called ARDS and is a complication of lung disease. Mostly it just means that the lungs become hard and cannot exchange air anymore. The doctors kept telling us that she still could recover and that they had patients that were worse off than Randi recover. A lady even came to the hospital to see me that had recovered from the very thing Randi was dying from. She told us that it took her three months before she started to recover. So we held on to that hope. My life revolved around the hospital visiting hours. When I was not at the hospital, I was at home praying for her and just trying to keep a clear head because she might need me. I am thankful that I did not have to go to work because I could not have done that. My mind was in Randi's hospital room even when I was not there physically. I don't remember much about anything else that was going on at the time. My sister-in-law told me at the beginning that I should keep a journal of all that happened during the time Randi was sick and I did. I am so grateful that I did that because I would not remember much about what happened if I did not have this to refer to. Every night when I would go home to try to get some sleep, I would write in my journal what had happened during that day.

During this time, our family became even closer than it was before. We saw a great deal of each other. Randi's older sister, Kathy, who was married before Randi got

sick, and her husband were at the hospital when they got off from work. Randi's older brother, Robert, came when he got off from work also and brought Randi's niece, Alyssa, with him sometimes. Various other members of Randi's family came every day along with her boyfriend who also came every day to see her.

There were other family members there to see Randi during the 5 1/2 weeks and I had my friends who came by at least once a day at the hospital to keep a check on me. I don't know what I would have done if not for the rest of my family and my friends. I asked the doctor one day, about a week before Randi died, if I could spend the entire day in her room with her. It was a feeling I had inside urging me to do that, and I would have done it whether the doctors agreed to it or not, after all I was paying the bills. I am glad I was able to spend the day with her. I read to her and just talked to her, but mostly just held her hand to let her know that she was not alone. It was during this day that I realized that severe illness and death is not just a physical event but it was spiritual in nature also. I felt that as I spent the day with Randi and the feeling continued for a long time after she died.

I received a phone call from Randi's father at 3:30 a.m. on August 27, 1993, telling me that Randi had passed away a few minutes earlier. I just went numb. I just could not believe that after all we went through, she died anyway. I got dressed somehow and went to the hospital. My husband, the assistant pastor of our church, my sister-in-law (who is a nurse) and I were the only ones there.

I went in to see Randi one last time. They had removed her trachea and all the tubes and she was just laying there on the bed. There was a peaceful air about her and I went over to her and hugged her and kissed her cheek. I told her good-bye and told her that I loved her. I also told her that one day we would be together again. I went back out to the waiting room one last time and just sat and cried until there were no tears left. Then I went home without Randi and it was one of the hardest things I have ever done in my life.

We went through the usual funeral arrangements and notified the church that I wanted her funeral held at the church and not at the funeral home. For some reason this shocked everyone from the funeral home to my own church. The pastor and the funeral director both told me it was because most people do not hold funeral services in their church because then they could not face going back there because they would see the casket all the time. But I did not feel that way and I figured that Randi had a right for her funeral to be held at the church she grew up in. And yes I see her casket at the altar every Sunday. But it is not a painful memory but a good one because I know that one day we will be together again.

At her funeral I sang to her for the last time the two songs I sang every day to her in the hospital. I knew it was the right thing to do and I felt like I needed to do that just one more time. It had become a part of my life for 5 1/2 weeks that I just had to do it once more. The rest of the funeral is a blur to me. I am thankful that someone at our church had the presence of thought to make me a cassette recording of the funeral service itself. I have not listened to it yet, but one day I will.

Randi knew that I liked thunderstorms with lightning so from August 27, the day she passed, to August 30, the day we buried her, it thundered each day with some lightning too. Most of the time it just thundered with no rain and sometimes not even a cloud in the sky. At the graveside service as we were walking to the grave it started to thunder. It thundered the whole time we were there. (in fact, we had thunderstorms for most of September and October of that year.) Odd, huh. The high school band she played with when she was alive played taps for her as we were leaving the cemetery. For the next six months to a year, shock took over every aspect of my life. I don't remember too much about it. I remember I could not pray for myself or anyone else during this time. All I could do was get up and take each day as it came.

The following April 15, which was her birthday. I had a birthday party for Randi and invited her family and

to pay her honor. One of the things that was odd to the party was that two separate people, who had not talked to one another, each brought balloons. One person bought ten balloons and one person bought eight balloons. Randi was eighteen years old that birthday. Odd wasn't it. We celebrated her life as best we could that day.

There have been other things that happened to me during that first year after Randi died. The first time I had to go back over to the hospital where she died and had to pass the MICU, I thought I was going to have a panic attack before we could get to the car outside. But as we stepped outside the hospital doors, I saw a rainbow in the sky. It was not raining, and the sun was shining brightly. I knew it was Randi's way of telling me it was alright. Sometimes I would see a butterfly at her grave when I would go there. Just little things to let me know she was near.

Now, on her birthday and the anniversary of her death date, her sister, Kathy, and I go and do what we know Randi always liked to do. First we go to the cemetery and put flowers on her grave and release balloons with messages to her from us. Then we go shopping and to a movie, the two things Randi liked to do the most. We just spend the day together remembering Randi and her life with us. It is our way of honoring her memory together.

Needless to say, when Randi died, my life was turned upside down. Parents don't expect to outlive their children. Losing a child is like losing your future. It is definitely like losing a part of yourself. There is a saying that goes like this: "When you lose your spouse you are called a widow, when you lose your parents you are called an orphan, but when you lose a child the loss is so great that there is not a word to call it." Randi's death has left a big gap in my life. People used to tell me after a year or so that I needed to get on with my life and get over this, but I tell them that yes I will get on with my life but I will never get over this. It will stay with me until I see Randi again. I

*don't want to give up the pain of grief because I have given up so much already I don't want to let anything else go. The grief is my constant reminder of Randi. There is not a day that goes by that I don't think of her. Some days I think of her more than others. But always she is on my mind. People tell you that they don't want to mention her name or ask you how you are doing because they are afraid they will remind you about it. Duh? As if you are not already thinking about it anyway. She is never far from my mind.*

*Randi's death made me question everything I believed in. I still ask the question "WHY" but I know that no answer would be good enough. Randi is gone from this place and there is no good reason why it had to be that way. I had to question my perception of God and who He is. I had to question the reason for praying because a lot of people were praying for Randi but she still died, so I had to ask what is the point of prayer. I don't know why God did not intervene in Randi's case. I have talked to another person who had the same thing Randi had but she lived. She was older than Randi and was in poorer health than Randi but she lived and Randi did not. Go figure. It makes no sense to me. A lot of things now make no sense to me. After Randi died, my whole perspective on life changed. The death of a child changes you as a person. Nothing is ever the same again no matter how hard you try to make it so. Things that used to bother me now don't. I have very little compassion for people who think little things are important. I just tell them that in the big scheme of things the little things don't matter and very few of the big things matter either. The only thing that matters is God, love, and family. All else is just surface stuff*

*I can look back now over the past 4 years since Randi died and I can see that God was with me the whole time even when I did not feel like He was. He held me up because I could not have held myself up. He gave me strength to do what I had to do.*

*He guided me where I needed to be.*

*And He heard my heart when my mouth could not speak to Him in prayer. He was a light unto my path*

*guiding my feet to the next step I would have to take. He never got angry when I screamed at Him for letting Randi die, He never chastised me for blaming Him, He never left me, and in the middle of my most heart-wrenching day, He was there. I believe that God held me in the palm of His hand so that I could survive the loss of my child. I lived under the wings of God for a long time after she died. He was even strong enough to listen to my questioning of Him and still never left me. He gave me friends that were in place long before Randi died so that when I needed them they were already there to help.*

*And help they did. They supported me, they let me talk about Randi, they talked about Randi, and they never told me to quit crying or mentioning her name. To this day, I can still mention Randi with these friends and they all stop and listen. I thank God every day for these people, every day.*

*I still have a hard time with my trust in God, even after all that He did for me, because I have not fully understood who He really is in my life. But I could not stay angry with the very person who has my Randi and who is entrusted with her care. So I just keep plodding along, searching for answers and knowing that one day it will all not matter any longer when Randi and I are reunited again. I look forward to that day.*

*I have been given the honor of doing a monthly newsletter for a support group made up of other bereaved parents that I attend here where I live. I collect poems, quotes, articles, etc. from off the Internet and from other various sources and put them in the bereavement newsletter sent to those who have attended our group locally. One of our local hospitals sponsors our group called Parents' Grief Support Group and they send out the newsletter to our members. All I do is collect the material and put it in a newsletter format for them. This gives me a great deal of satisfaction as well as helps me along with my own grief. I feel like I am giving back to the group all that they have given me over the past 4 1/2 years. I also do a card ministry at our church where I make and send parent in our church on the anniversary of their child's death date. I make the cards on*

*computer so I can personalize each one to fit the child. This is also my way of giving back to others who need help at that particular time of the year. Our church has also started a ministry called Crises Care and I am in the group to help people who have lost loved ones, especially children. This is just getting started and I am not sure how that is going to go yet. You can go to my homepage where you will find lots of grief links if you should need them. I found them to be very helpful, I hope you do too. The Boley's website is a remembrance card to each bereaved:*

*[www.members.xoom.com/doodle/mystory.htm](http://www.members.xoom.com/doodle/mystory.htm)*



*Randi's symbol is a butterfly.*

*Lynda Boucugnani-Whitehead's daughter Maria (4-30), was killed in an auto accident 9-13-96. Lynda shared how they celebrated Maria-Victoria's birth date:*

*Maria-Victoria's birthday is April 30th. Just went through that day - it was harder this year than last. Last year on her birthday we dedicated a beautiful memorial garden called the "Secret Garden" at her school on her birthday. The garden is wonderful with benches and statues, bunnies and a stone walk area. There is a plaque with her picture on it at the entrance to the garden which is in a courtyard from one of the main halls in the school. The Beta Club (she was president) put on a beautiful ceremony with poems written by students, a musical piece written especially in her honor and statements from friends and teachers. Then 14 students released balloons for her birthday and it was so moving. The high school sent a group of flute players that played at the beginning and at the reception for her birthday held later. We then had a birthday party at the school for her and students from her class*

and Beta Club and teachers with little birthday cakes that she always wanted to get every time we went to the bakery. It was very special.

Wanted to let you know that Maria-Victoria's brother, David, has started a web-site for her where there are pictures. We plan to add much more to the site but are just beginning. Web address is:

[HTTP://www.arches.uga.edu/~dagustin/Victoria/mvbthum1.html](http://www.arches.uga.edu/~dagustin/Victoria/mvbthum1.html)



Mariea-Victoria's symbols are a green and blue butterfly the sun, moon and stars, and a special puppy she drew as her signature.

Marcia Carson's son, Dell (12-22-69), was murdered 12-15-91.

Thank you for sending my address to Claudine Nickens, she sent me her newsletter, Alive Again.

I have some wonderful news about Dell's murderer. HE WAS FOUND. The murderer is only 33 years old. His name, David Anthony Fisher, will live in my mind forever. He was known the Wednesday after Easter, arrested on Thursday. It's a long story but I was visiting Augusta, Georgia and went to the police department to talk with the detective in charge of the case. I discovered that the original detective had retired. I talked with a young guy who was not familiar with the case and thought, well here we go again, another six years of hearing, "sorry, we have not heard anything." Three days after talking with this detective, he called me with the wonderful news that they had the guy who killed Dell. It took Det .. Bunton two days to do what the first detective couldn't do in six years.

Dell's symbol's are a unicorn and boxing gloves.



Barbara Kidd's daughter, Mart Sue (12-8-74), died from Adult Respiratory Syndrome 3-1-94.

I just wanted to drop a note to tell you how much I appreciate you and your newsletter. It always serves as a comfort as well as an inspiration to me and my mother.

Marti Sue has been gone 4 years, but her memory keeps me strong. She had a very special effect on everyone who knew her, all her friends who have visited us since her death have referred to her as their "best friend." That means a lot, since she has been gone. I lost my father on December 29, 1995. I know he and my "Suzie" are having a good time in Heaven, for he always called her "The apple of my eye" or his "Little Joy." She was truly a joy to us all. I look forward to seeing her again someday.

Marti's symbol is her Siamese cat "Prissy."



Sue Wilson's daughter, Taiann (11-3-79), was murdered 8-31-95. Sue shared a letter she had written to Taiann if she had been able to attend her high school graduation:

My dearest beloved Taiann,

This week would have been your graduation from Southwestern High. All of your friends have sent me invitations to the graduation ceremony on May 24th. They have really meant a lot to me these last two and one half years after losing you. I know why you loved them so much - they are all truly wonderful human beings. Their cards and letters with pictures are priceless to me. It has meant so much to receive a letter from one of your friends with a story or memory of you and them. I know that their hearts have been heavy with sadness over the loss of a precious friend who is irreplaceable.

Everyone is wearing pink and black ribbons in your memory. Oh Taiann, how I wish you could be walking down that isle with your cap and gown on, Smiling that beautiful smile that we all remember so well. It's something that I know you looked forward to and talked about so much.

I will never understand or comprehend your brutal and horrific death committed by a man who never even knew you, all because he was having a bad day. He will never even begin to have the slightest comprehension of what he took from us, how could he?

I am sorry for your pain and terror that I know you felt before your horrendous and untimely death.

Yes! We will be at your graduation and we will give all your friends hugs and kisses and get pictures. I am so very proud of every one of them.

Your brother and sister misses and love you each and every day, as do I.



Taiann's symbols are a dolphin jumping through a heart.

Jim and Grace Hawkins' son, Tim Stevens (6-3-53), died as a result of pancreatitis 1-17-98.

Thank you so much for remembering us on Tims birthday.

I do enjoy the newsletters but it is too painful to write our story to anyone.

We fought a long and hard battle with Schizaphrenia, when he was 19. Tim was one of the very lucky one's who had a loving family who cared for him.

We were with him as much as we could, we bought him his own little house and even though it was always furnished with everyone else's hand me downs, he loved it. Tim was like a child in a big beautiful body of a man.

He loved family, and holidays were always his favorites. He helped all his little relatives pick and carve pumpkins on Halloween and had at least 200 trick or treaters to come see him. I think Halloween was his favorite. Tim was always trying to make all of us laugh. I think it made him feel he was normal when we all laughed at his off the wall conversations.

I guess this is why I feel lost without him to care for. I cry buckets, which I know he would hate, but I just can't help it.

Tim's symbols are a heart with LOVE in the center and a sun.



As I gaze into my crystal ball (and as you chew your fortune bubble gum) I hope you will receive good health, happiness that we so desperately need, and chocolate everyday!!!



