

NOW ARRIVING:
THE HOLIDAYS

LAMENTATIONS

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News Flash!!!!

The Holidays are arriving!!

Holiday- what a wonderful word ... at least it used to be.. **Holiday:** *a day on which custom or the law dictates a halting of general business activity to commemorate or celebrate a particular event; a day free from work that one may spend at leisure; a day off; a period of rest or recreation.*

Aren't you ready for a holiday?

Aren't you ready for a day free from work...especially ***grief*** work? Would you be satisfied with a week or even a day which would be free from this "work?" If there was only some way, we would be able to recharge our batteries so we could then go back to our "grief work" with renewed spirit.

Leisure is another word that seems to escape me most of the time. **Leisure** is *freedom from time consuming duties, responsibilities, or activities; free time; at one's convenience. Leisurely:* *Acting, proceeding, or done without haste; unhurried, slowly.* Whether we want it to be or not, we have to take our grief at a leisurely pace. At times it consumes every moment, everything we do. Grief cannot be rushed. We have to take it at a leisurely pace. So, too, the holidays. We cannot *rush* them. They will come whether we want them to or not. To help us "deal" with the holidays, we can free ourselves from those duties or responsibilities that make this time even more painful. Allow free time. Pamper yourself and your family. Encourage them to help you plan the holidays. Each person will have their

own needs and desires. Do whatever will help you and your family get through this holiday season.

Susan Larson of Lilburn, Ga, is a substitute teacher, a community columnist for the **Daily Post** (in Gwinnett County Ga) ... and a bereaved parent. Her son, Loren (17), was killed in an auto accident Wednesday night before Thanksgiving in 1998. She knows what it is to travel this road of grief and she has begun to help tell others ... not only by writing articles for her local county newspaper but she also writes a column for her church bulletin ... trying to help them understand our grief.

The following article entitled, ***Littleton Parents Appreciate Your Prayers, but Local Parents Need Help Grieving, too***, was written 10-27-99, by Ms. Larson for the **Gwinnett Daily Post**:

"Think globally. Act locally." Good bumper sticker advice. Take for example, Littleton. Those parents are just now hitting the six-month mark. For some of them, true grieving has not yet begun, yet those parents have one source of comfort that most bereaved parents do not have - a built-in support group and a whole nation that is not afraid to talk about their children.

In earlier times, children's deaths occurred much more frequently, but with modern medicine, it's possible to live into one's seventies before even losing a parent. Years ago, families lived in the same community where they could support each other in grief, but that's often not the case in today's society.

Grief is something most of us neither know nor want to know. Our children dying, leave grief-stricken parents and loved ones behind. Unlike the bereaved Littleton parents, most grieve alone.

A common complaint among bereaved parents is that weeks after their child's death, when they're getting over some of the shock and need people even more, friends and family begin to disappear. People avoid them in public. They act like their child was never alive. Yet a Littleton parent recently expressed frustration at the attention they still receive from total strangers, seeing it as more of an annoyance than a comfort. It appears that for many, death is easier to deal with from a distance.

*Many people sincerely want to help, but do not know what to do. Often they do nothing to avoid doing the "wrong" thing. **The Compassionate Friends**, a support group for bereaved parents, made a wish list for those who would like to help. It's more a matter of attitude than of action. Some of their wishes are:*

- 1. Please don't be afraid to speak my child's name or talk about him. Please don't "kill" him again by removing from your home pictures and remembrances of him.*
- 2. If I cry while we talk about my child, it isn't because you've hurt me. It's because I miss my child. Please let me cry, for in doing so you help me to heal.*
- 3. The death of a child is not like any other. Please do not compare it to the death of your mother, best friend or pet.*
- 4. Please don't tell me what you would do if you were in my shoes. You have no way of knowing.*
- 5. I will have emotional ups and downs. If I'm having a good day, don't assume I'm "over it." If I'm having a bad day,*

please don't suggest I need psychiatric counseling.

6. *Being a bereaved parent is not contagious. Please don't shy away from me.*

7. *It is normal that we re-examine our faith and values after losing a child. Please let me tangle with my religion without making me feel guilty.*

8. *Please don't offer me drinks or drugs. They are temporary crutches and the only way to get through grief is to experience it. I have to hurt before I can heal.*

9. *Please don't expect my grief to be over in six months. It may take years. And even then, I will never be a "former" bereaved parent.*

"Remember that we are bereaved parents and we are different than we were before our child's death. You can't make us better, but you can offer your compassion and support," remarked Kathy Malone, Regional coordinator of The Compassionate Friends for the Atlanta area.

You can probably add many more "wishes" to this list. Add them, makes copies, and share them with your family and friends. I have found that people have to be "guided" by me when sharing wishes and needs. They will be thankful that you have told them.

The following poem was written by a bereaved father:

The worst days now are the holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Birthdays, Anniversaries, Weddings.

Days meant as festivals of happiness and joy are now days of tears.

The gap is too great between day and heart.

Days of routine I can manage; no songs are expected.

But how am I to sing in this desolate land, when there's always one too few?

From: Nicholas Wolterstorf

Resolution is defined as: firm determination. A course of action determined or decided on. The act or process of separating or reducing something into its constituent parts; the subsiding or termination of an abnormal condition, a solution. Are you

ready to make a few resolutions?

Millennium means: A span of 1,000 years; A hoped-for period of joy, serenity, prosperity, and justice. What a wonderful definition This can be our motto as we plan the next millennium. We are struggling for that *period of joy*, and *serenity* sounds like a small slice of heaven! When we seek *joy* and *serenity* rather than wallowing in our grief, we are telling our loved one that we are ready to remember their life rather than their death.

What are your plans for the new millennium? What are your resolutions for the new year? Can you let go of some of your grief to grasp *joy* and *serenity*? Can you *separate* or *reduce* some of that *abnormal condition* of grief? Can you find a *solution* to some of the things that cause that grief to hit you so hard?

You are thinking ..
"That is easy for her to say, Dinah has been living with her grief for 8 years." The statement is absolutely right. I have lived with grief for the last 8 years. I am comfortable with those periods of time when I think I haven't come very far, because I have seen "the other side" and I know there are now more periods of joy than grief and that is what gives me the strength to work my way through the really tough times.

Wishes for Bereaved Parents for the New Year

To the newly bereaved: We wish you patience. Patience with yourselves in the painful weeks, months, even years ahead.

To the bereaved siblings: We wish you and your parents a new understanding of each others' needs and the beginnings of good communication.

To those of you who are single parents: We wish you the inner resources we know you will need to cope, often alone, with your loss.

To those experiencing marital difficulties after the death of your child: We wish you a special willingness and ability to communicate with each other.

To those of you who have suffered the death of more than one child: We wish you the endurance you will need to fight your way back to a meaningful life once again.

To those of you who have experienced the death of an only child or all your children: We offer you our eternal gratitude for serving as such an inspiration to the rest of us.

To those of you who are plagued with guilt: We wish you the reassurance that you did the very best you could under the circumstances, and that your child knew that.

To those of you who are deeply depressed: We wish you the first steps out of the "valley of the shadow."

To all fathers and those of you unable to cry: We wish you healing tears and the ability to express your grief

To those of you who are exhausted from grieving: We wish you the strength to face just one more hour, just one more day.

To all others with special needs that we have not mentioned: We wish you the understanding you need and the assurance that you are loved.

From a speech by Joe Rousseau, former TCF President.

I am happy to report that the holidays are becoming **Holidays** for me. I am actually looking forward to the season. Young Jim will not be forgotten; we integrate him in every holiday we observe. We talk about him and share anecdotes with our family and friends. We are able to talk about him freely ... and most of the time without crying .. Yes, the middle is in sight!!!



Grief Grafts

Great news! The second Worldwide Candle Lighting, which has been supported by The Compassionate Friends, is now further supported by passage of US Senate Resolution 118, declaring December 12 as a National Children's Memorial Day. If the Resolution passes next year, it will become a permanent day of remembrance.

<http://www.tcfatlanta.org/ChildrenMemorial.html>

Michael (8-5-98), son of John and Beth Shultz, died from Osteogenesis Imperfecta and Stomatocytosis, 4-3-99. The following is condensed from two newspaper articles:

Michael was born with a very rare connective tissue disease that causes bones to break literally at the touch. Michael was delivered four weeks early by Caesarean section, and that is probably what gave the family those precious 8 months with him. His ribs were broken, and an arm and leg were broken. He would have been crushed in a regular deliver.

Michael was born with the severest form of Osteogenesis Imperfecta, which left him vulnerable to bone fractures at the slightest touch. He was in the hospital the majority of his short life. He defied all odds by living as long as he did.

After his death, Beth said, 'My head tells me he's no longer hurting, but my heart has never felt such pain.' Beth doubts that she'll ever be able to make sense of the plight dealt to Young Michael.

Beth wrote:

Michael touched a lot of people's lives and hearts in his short 8 months of life. Everyday it seems like it gets harder and harder. Especially hard to pretend it isn't really happening.

Some days that is the only thing that gets me through the day. I know he isn't really still in the hospital, but he was there for 5 of his 8 months of life and I guess it's easier to think of him there as opposed to being in heaven where I can never hold, touch, or smell

him again. Of course, the holding part. I'd give anything to have been able to do more of the holding. The longest I got to hold my little angel was after he was already dead. I was always too afraid to hurt him and he would have so much more difficulty breathing that it just made me feel selfish to want to hold him.

I would trade my life to be able to see him smile and hear him and touch him one more time.

Michael died a horrible death. When I say "horrible," I mean very painful. All I could do was yell at him to breath. So my last words to him weren't "I love you" or anything like that. I yelled at him. I wish I could undo that, but I can't. Maybe by my telling Michael's story through you and your newsletter, I too can help someone. And through that, Michael can know I am a good person and that I loved and always will love him with all of my heart, for the rest of my days tell on this earth.

Michael's symbols are an angel, cherub and halo.



Marsha Lockhart's sons Joseph (12-11-86), died (9-15-99) and Brandon (5-5-89) died (9-16-99) as the result of an auto accident. Marsha tells us about her sons:

I lost both my sons, Joseph and Brandon, in an automobile accident. Brandon died 1 hour after the accident and Joseph died at 2:00 a.m., the 16th. I was driving and turned in front of a driver driving a 1974 4x4 Blazer which was going approximately 75 mph. I did not see him come over the top of the hill until it was too late. It was raining and he had no headlights on and was speeding. My whole life changed so much that day. I've always thought that my children would bury me, not the other way around. I felt like I was the only one who this has happened to until I received a bereavement package from Rosemary Smith. Just by talking to her one time, I knew I wasn't alone and would never have to be alone again.

Those two boys were my whole life. Joseph, or "Boomer", as he liked to be called, was a 7th grader and would have been 13 years old, December 11th. He was looking forward to becoming a teenager. He loved to draw and worked

to join the Air Force one day.

Joseph was quiet; did not like much attention. He loved to ride his 4-wheeler and play with his two Rotweillers, Miranda and Baron, and loved wrestling. This year, he would have been old enough to go hunting with my fiancée, whom both the boys loved dearly. He was looking forward to getting a gun this year for Christmas. He always kept a B-average in school and never gave us any problems. Brandon, on the other had, was totally opposite. Brandon or "B.J" as he was called, did everything he could to get attention. Sometimes I felt like he drained me of all my energy just to see what would happen. He was very strong-willed and challenged everything that got in his way. He was in the 4th grade and had a learning disability and had always hated school. But this year was different. He liked school and was starting to grow up. He loved the outdoors and riding his 4-wheeler and getting very dirty. He liked wrestling and playing with Miranda and Baron, just like Joseph. But Brandon could not understand when you told him he could not do everything his brother did. You always knew when Brandon was around because he was never quiet. Sometimes it was hard to believe that they were brothers because they were so different. They would often fight, as brothers do, but when they were getting along those memories are so precious to me.

Every teacher they ever had came to the wake and each one told me the same thing, that you could tell by seeing them together that they were brothers and that they loved each other.

Joseph and Brandon's symbols are a Rotweiler and NWO wrestling.



Cole Matkovic (8- I 9-92), son of Dan and Kathy, was killed with his grandmother in an auto accident, 10-9-98. Coach Dan Foster wrote about Cole:

Our story is a double tragedy. Cole was with his grandma (my mother-in-law) when the accident happened. They were waiting at a stop light at a road construction site, A van hit them from behind going 85 miles per hour. The drunk driver survived and is now serving 14 years in prison. He was sentenced in March. He will only have to serve about 7 years. Not enough for two precious lives. His blood alcohol level was three times the legal limit. The only thing we can be thankful for is that Cole wasn't alone. If I couldn't be with him, then I'm glad it was grandma. When the police officers got to the car after the accident, Cole was laying with his head in grandma's lap. She took good care of him for me. My husband has not even grieved for his mother yet. He can't get past Cole. I'm really afraid of when that day will come. We have gone to counseling once and it seemed to help.

Cole was the light of our lives, the greatest gift God ever gave us. We have two older children and weren't supposed to have any more. Karissa was 15 and Charlie 12 when Cole was born. From the very first minute, he was everyone's baby. As you can imagine, he had all of us wrapped around his finger. He loved baseball. He didn't have much choice-he grew up at the ball diamond. Charlie was a very good baseball player and Cole loved to watch him. The last summer, he was the bat boy for the Legion team Charlie was on. He had the summer of his life. The town we live in has renamed the ballpark for Cole. It has a big sign with his picture on it and they named it the Cole Matkovic Memorial Ballpark. Great honor. Cole would love it.

Cole Matkovic and his grandmother Shirley, were senselessly taken from their family and friends by the acts of a drunk driver. What we would like to share are how a few lives were touched by young Cole.

Most of us only knew him for three short months. He was the 'Bat Boy' on our baseball team this past summer. His older brother Charlie, was our center fielder and Cole's best friend.

It was a pleasure for us to see the little guy so enthusiastic about the game and for us to relive the spark in his

eyes that we had seen in our own 18-year-olds when they were 6.

There were the times when he might get a little bored or couldn't be in the dugout because of safety reasons. But that was OK by him. He could get his mom or dad to play catch and when he had worn them out, another "team dad" would fill in for them.

Cole and his grandmother rarely missed a game. They even spent a weekend trip with us at the University of Illinois.

The players kept him entertained in the pool when there was time.

He was so happy as long as they didn't get his face wet or throw him in like they did one of the mothers. Cole even got to eat pizza with all the big guys in the suite at the hotel one night. He was thrilled to be invited.

We were told many times that we had made his summer so special by letting him help.

He wore his shirt with his legion patch on the sleeve so proudly. And the autographed ball he received from the team players meant as much to him as any Mark McGwire ball would have.

Though Cole's life was cut short, it is comforting to know that we could make his last summer so special,

The memories he has given to all of the parents and players will last a lifetime.

God Bless you, Cole.

An excerpt from another newspaper article:

Cole loved baseball and wanted only to be around it. He tagged along with his older brother Charlie, who played for Milan.

Milan players, coaches and parents have related how special it was to see the spark in Cole's eyes, the same spark they had or saw many years before. A spark that makes you want to love and be around the game.

It amazed them that Cole could- and would-talk anyone with an available few minutes into a game of catch, and after wearing them out, would move on to a fresh face. As adults and strong willed teenagers wilted in the summer sun, Cole never stopped wanting to play.

In an era when many adults put little stock in young people, it's great to know a group of teenagers took to a special little boy like Cole. The Milan team, coaches and parents thought Cole was the best. Even more, they grew to admire and appreciate the love he and Charlie-his best friend (and brother)-shared.

Cole Matkovic will never grow up to show the love for the game he had just begun to nurture, and that is sad. Even sadder is a family without one of its prized possessions and an older brother without his best pal-gone before he got to share his love with others he would have touched.

Stephanie (9-25-71), the daughter of Mary Kate Gach, was stalked and murdered 10-9-92. Mary Kate wrote this on tile 7th anniversary of Stephanie's death:

I am finding this season this year to be one of my most difficult. Last year at this time I had just lost both of my parents and was in that dazed stale-the one we know so well, don't, we? This year I am mourning my mother and dad and my child all-but somehow I seem to have lost my moorings and I am back at the time and place-Oct. 9, 1992, as if it just happened to my daughter. I keep reliving each and every thing, as if I have no control. Is the seventh year harder? Everyone is different- this we know.

I think of Jim often, even though I never met him, but it has seemed like I have known him. I think of him and Stephanie and all of our children, together, and waiting to greet us. I hang onto this thought, Dinah, but it gets so rough sometimes.

Nothing has happened as for as the demon on death row, except that the appeals system crawls as usual at a deadly snail's pace.



Stephanie's symbol is a brown rabbit.

Earl and Carol Sias' son, Greg (9-29-77), was killed in an auto accident, 11-5-97. The following is

We are trying desperately to dig our way out of an enormous, vacuous hole. We will then endeavor to climb our way up to the crest of the mountain to see a glimpse into the Heavens beyond.

There we hope to touch the top of the rainbow whose breathtaking colors span the sky before us. And there we hope to find the answers to end the torment that has described our lives since the loss of our son, Greg, in an automobile accident. He was just beginning to fully bloom and was on the threshold of the bright future that life was going to offer him.

It seems as though we have been in a dense fog that has surrounded us, holding us captive. We have been trying to find our way out of the forest through which we have been walking since the day of the accident.

As we continue to walk, there is in the distance a break in the forest and in that clearing is the faint silhouette of a tall, slender, youthful young man. The golden glow of the warm sun is behind him. There, the trees are glistening with the early morning dew and we are drinking it in. The fragrance of the soft flowers growing beneath the trees circles and drifts until its sweet scent surrounds us. There is something familiar about this young man and yet something is different. We strain to see his features, but they are still hidden in the shadows of the trees.

We are being overtaken by a sense of love, a deep love that binds us to him and draws us nearer. The emotions that begin to surge throughout our bodies are from deep inside our hearts and our souls.

Since the death of our son, we have been wandering alone, with our hearts crashing against the craggy rocks that are hit over and over again by the waves of an angry, unfeeling sea. The fog of sadness and a sense of loss beyond description have surrounded us. As we walk on closer to the faint figure beyond us, the confusion, doubt, fear, and hopelessness are being left behind us.

We had never before felt so alone and scared, filled with grief and devoid of joy. We were grasping for something, anything that would pull us away from the torment that we had felt

There have been so many things that we have not understood and it has not been clear to us how we would ever find our way again. We have looked to the heavenly skies, pleading for some sense of understanding of why this had to happen. We have looked at the stars with their twinkling glowing lights and have wished that we could reach up and take one, hoping to find our son inside so we could bring him back home with us once again. We dream of reaching out and wrapping our arms around him. We have cleaved to hope as we have gazed at the twinkling glitter of lights in the dark horizon, wishing that each one would have an answer to our questions.

For the most part, we have felt as though we have been stuck somewhere between living and dying and we have screamed for the answers to life's mysteries and of Heaven's secrets to be revealed to us.

We now look forward again, and we see first, a golden butterfly signifying the resurrection. Behind the silhouetted young man and the golden light that bathes him, is a breathtaking rainbow. We begin to feel a sense of understanding, knowing that he will not be revealed in this mortal life, but sensing that we have caught enough of a glimpse to know that there is something glorious out there and that there is a future for us here. At this time we walk forward into the light, and there we see our precious son, with his arms outstretched to embrace us. We are overpowered with a sense of love that will endure through the rest of this life and into the next when we will once more be reunited with our son, who we so dearly miss and love.

Although we are not all of the way out of the forest, we know that our past is our future, and that for now, our place is with our other children and those we love. We will be here until we are called Home to be united with our children and other loved ones, for an eternity. We will still feel the pain and the loss, and will miss our son, but we now know that beyond are held the answers we seek. We know that Greg will care for Jonathan, who never experienced an earthly existence, and that our loved ones that preceded us will care for both of our sons until our arrival. We can see the bright golden glow of a light so bright it defies imagination and there we see a host of

angels and hear the beautiful music that surrounds them.

For this is what we pray.

Greg's symbols are "I RULE", skate board, yin yang, music and a helping hand.



Gabriella (10-29-97) (who died 9-16-98) is the daughter of Heather Hassell. Heather wrote:

I wanted to take a moment and thank you for sending me the back issues of Lamentations. As the issues are released, I would like to keep receiving them. I can't explain what a joy it has been to take the journey I have taken this past week, tracing years of recovery, happiness, sadness, joy and grief from all of the wonderful parents. Hearing the stories of the lives cut short has made me feel as though I know Jim, Roger, Ralphie, Scott, Bob, Dell, Terry, Anne and Paxton, and all of the children personally.

My daughter, Gabriella, died September 16, 1998. Her birthday is October 29th, 1997. At 10 1/2 months old, I lost my precious little girl. She died when she slipped between her toddler bed and the wall. The coroner ruled positional asphyxiation. She is with Jesus now, and my 3 1/2 year old son, Clayton, talks about this with me quite frequently. I am planning on volunteering for the **Make a Wish Foundation**. As many of the parents whom I feel I know through their inspirational letters and touching poems, I had no warning of my daughter's death. I feel it will help me heal and will give to the world if I can assist in filling the last requests of other special angels who are close to going home.

Gabriella's symbol is a pumpkin. She was born 2 days before Halloween, so she has always been our little "punkin." Also, my son called her La La her entire life, so those words would be part of her symbol as well.



If you write about Gabriella, please include the fact that her father is Dan Robinson. Although we are divorced now, I could not deny him the recognition as the father of this precious little angel.

Leo and Shirley Plante's daughter, Chantel (12-11-80), died from an eating disorder, 9-23-98. Shirley lamented:

It is nice to be able to talk to someone "who has been there." It seems that life goes on without you.

My daughter and I were best friends. She even gave me a "Best Friends" bracelet last year for my birthday. She was very beautiful with long blonde hair and beautiful big green dancing eyes. She was the kindest, most generous person I knew. The phone would ring off the hook for her not to mention the many boyfriends standing in line. She never believed she was beautiful. When her grandmother died 3 years ago from lung cancer, Chon couldn't deal with it. They were also very close. When my Mom starting losing lots of weight with chemo Chan started her eating disorder. After a year Chon got better and ate normally again. Then last year she started having depression which led to the eating disorder again. She was hospitalized twice and was on antidepressant medication. Nobody knew she was having problems because she always had a smile on her face for everyone. But in her head there was an anorexia monster telling her she couldn't eat anything with fat in it. She deprived herself of all the food she loved. She was always hungry but would only let herself eat rice, and anything that said "fat free" on the package.

We thought she was getting better. She even fooled her doctor. She only had 2 credits to get to graduate and she had a new boyfriend and she seemed very happy. Then on Sept. 23/98, after an upsetting argument at school with a friend, she came home and was so upset she ate some potato chips. I guess the voice in her head took over because she ate something that she denied herself and she took an overdose of medication. There was no note left. I know cry for help. She wasn't as strong as she led us to believe she was. It is so sad. My

daughter was my whole world. I have a 16 year old son who misses her terribly. They were very close, too. My husband is still in denial and is suffering terribly. Our whole family will never be the same. Our hearts have been ripped out of our bodies. Does it ever get better? We are going for therapy every week which helps a lot.

Chantel's symbols are an angel and Winnie the Pooh.



Paul Grammatico (4-20-73), son of Paul and Claudia, died in an auto accident, 5-16-99. Zachary R. Dowdy wrote the following article which was on the front page of *Newsday*:

For seven years, 48-year-old Joe Senatore of Bay Shore endured the slow, torturous advance of heart disease, coping with labored breathing and crippling chest pain. His wait on a lengthy organ donor list for a heart seemed interminable.

By 26, Paul Grammatico of Valley Stream, a rising stock broker at Carnegie investor Services in Manhattan, was an established benefactor, donating thousands of dollars to help children in need.

But a car crash in Atlantic Beach on May 16 killed Grammatico and a friend, Michael Penny, 25, of Valley Stream. The tragedy also linked forever the lives of the once-ailing father of two teenagers and the young philanthropist cut down in his prime.

Since surgeons transplanted Grammatico's heart into Senatore's chest on May 19, Senatore, who now rides a bike daily in preparation for a 5-kilometer race in March, extends Grammatico's legacy of giving with each breath he takes.

"All I can say to him is, 'Thank you,'" said Senatore, a management information systems specialist. "I mean, I'm definitely grateful that I got it. I feel 15 years younger. Somebody upstairs is giving me a second chance at life."

Four other adults are benefiting kidneys went to a 63-year-old woman who is a retired science teacher from Kansas and a 54-year-old father from Nevada. His liver went to a 56-year-old upstate New York woman and one lung was received

by a 59-year-old nurse from Massachusetts.

The needy children he helped support are also poised to benefit.

Grammatico's family launched a memorial fund that, like a bullish stock market, swelled to \$10,000 within a week of its inception. The fund supports the work of St. Mary's Children and Family Services in Syosset and Sisters of Mercy in Brooklyn. They operate boarding homes, adoption services and other programs for children on Long Island and in New York City.

"If I can tell other parents something, I would say definitely donate and let them live on," said Claudia Grammatico, Paul's mother, who said she was inspired to donate his organs because of his sacrifices for others_ "Paul would have wanted if that way I don't feel he's dead now."

Grammatico and Penny were honored at a tree-planting and plaque dedication ceremony in Hendrickson Park in Valley Stream Saturday.

The young men were thrown from the car they were riding in on Park Street in Atlantic Beach on May 16 after the driver, Louis Chirco, 26, of Valley Stream, allegedly hit another car from the rear. Police said Chirco's car then slammed into a pole.

Penny died shortly after the crash at St. John's Episcopal Hospital in Far Rockaway, and Grammatico died two days later at Nassau County Medical Center in East Meadow.

Nassau County police charged Chirco with driving under the influence of alcohol and two counts of vehicular homicide. Chirco has pleaded not guilty, and the case is pending.

As Grammatico lay unconscious in the hospital, his family met with trauma specialists and representatives of the New York Organ Donor New York, who advised them of the organ donation option.

Claudia Grammatico said that allowing her son to continue giving to others has helped her family grieve.

More and more people are deciding to donate organs.

Geralyn LaNeve, spokeswoman for the New York Organ Donor Network, said metropolitan New York saw a 9 percent jump in donations last year with 247 donors, up from 227 in 1997, while the rest of the nation experienced a 5.6 percent rise from 5,479 in 1997 to 5,788 in 1998.

She said the uptake may stem from a public-awareness campaign by the Clinton administration in 1997. The National Organ and Tissue Donor initiative also requires hospitals to report deaths to organ procurement organizations.

Still, 63,000 Americans await transplants and up to 12 people die each day while waiting for organs, LaNeve said, adding that potential donors may call 800-GIFT-4-NY.

Hours before the crash, Grammatico made what would be his last donation before death. He pulled out a \$20 bill and asked his mother to treat one of the nuns at Sisters of Mercy, Lenore Guirrerri, to lunch and, as was his custom, gave a \$100 donation to the charity.

"Paul has made many gifts over the years," Guirrerri said. The donations paid for items ranging from ice cream to flowers.

Claudia shares Paul love with us:

He was 26, a stockbroker ... VP of his company and killed by a drunk driver. His best buddy, also in the car, was killed. A real tragedy. Although our sons died together, Mike died instantly from a broken neck. Paul was brain dead but his heart was beating and alive and strong. I knew my son's spirit was gone.... so I signed the papers to let them take his organs, and tissue, bone and skin. The story made the FRONT PAGE of the newspaper here in NY. ... a second chance at life. I will send you the electronic copy of the newspaper story.

I am very involved now in donor awareness and have been called to speak at functions.

My son was a generous and kind man and that is why the reporter made such a large story. I have received letters from all over with checks to his foundation which will help abused children.

This was a young man who made a lot of money and gave it away. .. only befitting his heart was given away in

his death-the ultimate gift .. Paul and Mike were honored in the park here by town officials and a plaque and a tree was planted in their honor.

I write prose and poetry to my son Paul, and the donor network will be using some of them. Let me know if you are interested. My daughter got married a month after Paul's death, that was indeed a bittersweet day.

To bury a child and marry a child all in one month.

Thank you for sharing with me

We belong to the same club

and join hands in a circle ...

**THERE IS PRESENCE IN THE
ABSENCE
AND THE DEATH OF A CHILD
IS A TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE
SUN TOTAL DARKNESS
TOTAL LIGHT.**

I HAVE A MAJESTIC SON/SUN

Claudia wrote the following poem to the recipient of Paul's heart:

Dear Joe
Our Hearts reach out to You
In this moment in time our families weathered the
Hurricane of the Hearts.
Stormy and Cloudy at first
but the predictability of the SUN constant.
As the Sun emerges
our Son Paul emerges.
Joe, divinity is clearly felt
and is motivating.
It will be an emotional feeling
to feel Paul's Heart beating in You
and we as a family
will be refueled by this miracle!
Paul's Heart Remains.
Paul's magnetic spirit remains.
Paul's vibrancy and generosity remain.
Paul's wonderful large and giving heart
beats in you Joe.
Paul's veins interlock with yours.
Paul is doing what he Loved to do...
being Energized
by "Working Out
and Pumping Iron!"
As your healing emerges Joe
so does our healing in the name of Paul's spirit
There is no sense to what happened
but you make meaning in the senseless.
There is no justice in us being robbed of Precious Paul
but Joe... you have given life throughout it.
There is Faith
There is Hope
There is Strength
There is More.....
The Divine part of these heartbeats
is what happens now.
Your body and soul has accepted Paul's Heart.
We are as overwhelmed and equally as grateful
family and yours find the JOY
to go on and thrive in these
life giving "NOW" moments
Your new life Joe
and the Life of Paul
signifies the **STRENGTH IN THE HUMAN SPIRIT**
God gave Paul to us
We gave Paul to you.
Your 'PRESENCE' now Joe
will be a present from Paul
We are gifts to one another
from God and Beyond.
We are Ready when you are READY
JOE... YOU ARE ALWAYS IN OUR HEARTS! ♥
The Grammatico Family

**"Your Presence Will Be a
Present from Paul"
by Jamie Stegall**

On May 16, Jericho Claims Staff Appraiser Paul Grammatico, Sr. and his wife, Claudia, faced the unthinkable. Their only son, Paul Grammatico, Jr.,

had been in a serious auto crash caused by a drunk driver with road rage, and was in the hospital. Claudia was home alone when she got the news, and arrived at the hospital unprepared for what she had to face. Two days later, the 26-year-old stockbroker and philanthropist died at Nassau County Medical Center.

If that were the end of the story, it would be a heartrending tale of a life cut short. But Paul's story goes on. His parents made the difficult decision to donate his organs, which enriched the lives of five people. They also donated his tissue and bone marrow. In fact, Paul and the man who received his donated heart wound up on the cover of Long Island's *Newsday*, bumping the story of John Kennedy's loss from the first page and giving Paul Sr. quite a surprise. He didn't realize the article would be on the front page, "Paul says. "It was a real shock to see my son's face on the newsstand, and to see one of the organ recipients come forward. Not many of them do. "

Claudia emphasizes "the importance of saying yes." "Most people in my situation say no," she explains. "Part of the reason, I believe, is that they have not been educated about organ donation. Another part is that medical professionals have not been taught how to ask grieving families or friends to sign the consent forms that will allow the donation to proceed. When they first asked me about donating, it was almost like a violation of my child.

"But then I realized my son had such a powerful body, it didn't make sense not to give all of him, even his skin (which can be used for skin grafts to help burn victims). It brought Paul back to me in a different way. One of Paul's friends was also killed in the crash. His organs were not donated. When his mother buried her boy, she buried her boy. Paul is coming back to me. "

As Claudia wrote to the heart recipient, "As your healing emerges, so does our healing in the name of Paul's spirit. There is no sense to what

happened but you make meaning in the senseless. There is no justice in us being robbed of precious Paul, but you have been given life through it. God gave Paul to us. We gave Paul to you. Your presence will be a present from Paul."

Because of her experience, Claudia has become a determined activist for organ donation, and has spoken at many area events to raise awareness among the general public and the medical community. She regularly brings her audience to tears, and has received a standing ovation from 200 medical personnel. Claudia also educates medical staff about empathetic treatment for family members of trauma victims.

"My calling in life is to educate others about organ donation," she says. "I just tell the audience my story. I know moms who have given up. I decided to carry on Paul's good work in his place. I pretend it's him up there talking, not me. It really is terrible to lose a kid, but I have to do something with the loss. I just can't let my son be dead. Losing a child is so final. Saying yes is power over death. I can carry Paul's presence forward."

Claudia's speaking engagements have become so numerous, she has trouble keeping up with them. She had a green butterfly, the symbol for the rebirth that organ donation brings, painted on Paul's truck, and uses that as her transportation. The body shop that did the work refused to take any payment, and in fact donated \$500 to Paul's memorial fund.

As of Oct. 6 of this year, there are 65,963 patients on the United Network for Organ Sharing waiting list. Last year, 21,197 transplants were performed, using organs from a total of 9,913 donors. The need for more donors is great. It is easy enough to sign up for the donor program when you renew your drivers license, but that may not be enough. Claudia explains that even with a donor card, 75% of parents say no to the donation. Be sure to discuss your decision with your family, so that they know your wishes and can sign a consent form for the greatest gift of all to proceed.

Claudia wrote the following poems:

Just Say Yes

If ever thrown into the trench
I was pushed into
SAY YES.
JUST SAY YES.

Saying Yes
has Supported my growth
in this horrific life change.

Saying Yes
made all the difference
in how I cope as well
as how I go on with my life.

Saying Yes
is a positive courageous
life affirming action
in a time of great incomprehensible
loss.

Saying Yes
empowers me to be
a Creative Survivor Mom.

Saying Yes
was a profound accomplishment
when Paul's story
was front page in Newsday.

Saying Yes
has now become my Tool
to encourage others
to see the sense
in the senseless
and the LIFE
in death.

Saying Yes
especially means
my being a service to others
in their trauma,
sorrow,
grief and transformation.

Saying Yes
truly validates
that Paul, My Dear Beautiful Son
CONTINUES LIFE
housed in the bodies of others.

Saying Yes
has enabled me
to continue "GIVING"
in Paul's name
through his memorial fund.

SAYING YES
is a benefit to the donor family
not just the recipient families.

Because I Said Yes
It is not over with Yes

Donor Mom

I have *lost* my child.
My beloved beautiful Paul.
How can I enhance my life
In this lonely time of great need?

I have been branded by the
Hot Tool of Grief and
buckets of tears
do not soothe
the searing pain.

How do I take the Pain
and accept the Loss
as a Gift
with a very
very *specific* purpose?

I am tested severely.
I am devastated. I
must find means
to survive
this horrific holocaust the
heinous death of my son.

How do I restore myself
daily as
death deepens
into reality?

What do I do
when I smell
with my own nose
the insurmountable anguish,
endless hours of suffered smelly
noisy silent death

How do I break through
the denial of death
and look it
square in the eyes
when the image of
my broken son
is embossed on my corneas?

What do I do
when the unwelcome guest
the "Presence of Absence"
comes to visit
and stays

seated in my brain
embedded in my heart?

To make it meaningful
I must choose
the path of
Holy Conscious Transformation.

I will Never be the same!

I have been titled
I am now
more than just
Paul's Mom.

I am instrumental,
influential,
and effective.

I serve,
and teach,
as a compassionate helper.

I present myself
with my
newly catapulted wisdom.

I am a
"Sacred Donor Mom."

Transplant Mom

My Dear Paul

In your death
my dear son/sun
I also
was Transplanted!

From one who lived
in the shadow
of the pain of the past
to one who lives
in the pain in the present.

It calls and demands
And urges me
To step FORWARD.

Answering your call
Not just as the "Donor"
But "YES"
As a Recipient by Proxy.

"YES" to a life
in new meaning.
My biological realities
never before imagined

a New HEART
and Spirit
within myself
to new avenues of expression
and opportunities for contribution.

Your face Paul is always in my face.

New faces
and roles
and responsibilities
even before my healing
from the excruciating grief
of your loss/absence.

Transplanted
I proceed
to that which awaits
my unique gifts and contributions
with my own heart and soul.

And so,
in the very same dark
ominous moment you left,
the Paradox of our
Life/Death
Loss and Growth
Intersect.

I am your "Donor Mom."
I am a Transplant Recipient.

And as my heart beats,
it does so
infused with the
Heart and Spirit of You.

I so Love You
and are so Loved by You.

Even death cannot
quiet the majesty
of your Sturdy, Steady, Heartbeat.

The Strength and Generosity
of you and me
is now **multiplied**
among its many recipients.

As your Mother,
I am the most Fortunate
and Glorious
among them.

Paul's symbol is a
butterfly.



Fred and Marilyn Zimmerman's
son Eric (10-15-72), died in an auto
accident, 12-21-97. The following is
from a pamphlet about the D.A.R.E.
program in memory of Eric:

*The EX Plus (Positive Living Util-
izing Skills) Program is named in
memory of Patrolman Eric
Zimmerman. Ptl. Zimmerman was
killed in an off duty auto accident
in December of 1997. It is the
wishes of Eric's family, as well as the
Bowling Green Police Division, to
have a living memorial in his name.
It was Eric's dream to one day
become a DA.R.E. officer and impact
the youth of our city in a positive
way. It is everyone's goal to see that
his wishes become a reality.*

Eric's (E.L.) initials and
the "plus" sign make up his
symbol which represents the
D.A.R.E. program dedicated
in his memory.



Darren (12-21-65), son of Lillian
Cox, completed suicide, 6-25-98.
Lillian writes:

*I truly believe if it were not for
Darren's son, Destin, and the other
children and grand children, I could
just lay down and never get up. The
family is coping as best as we can.
We are so different and are getting
through this so differently, but I try
to do my crying at night and be there
for them. When it is said that "time
heals all" I don't believe it. I think
you just learn to tuck this hurt in
somewhere and go ahead with the
living family. We got together at my
oldest son's last night. We didn't talk
a lot, but were there for each other. I
had just read the following writing
and it seemed to help me, so I passed
it around for the adults to read and
kept quiet for the younger ones.
Don't know if that is right or wrong,
but it felt right at the time.*

*I find the feathers still very
comforting. I drove to the river the
other day and was sitting there. I
decided to roll the window down and
check the clouds without the tinting.
When I rolled the window back up,*

there was a small feather on the outside at eye level.

This morning I was talking to one of my daughters on the phone and looking outside. The wind was still, but a tiny fluff of a feather whirled through the air, then did it again. Coincidence, perhaps, but I prefer to think he is saying "hello!"

A heart of gold stopped beating.
Two shining eyes are at rest. God
broke our hearts to prove,
That we can pass the test.
A million times we've needed you,
A million times we've cried;
If love could have saved you.
You never would have died.
It broke our hearts to lose you.
But, you didn't go alone
For part of us went with you.
The day God called you home.

Darren's symbol is a feather.



Rita Blanchfield Kleppinger's 20-year-old identical twin daughters, Debbie and Diana Blanchfield (7-15-52) were killed in an auto accident 4-23-73. Rita reflected on J.I.M.'s picnic:

I had a good time at JIM's picnic one of my favorites there is to release a balloon. There is such a strong, and strange emotion. I feel a release from my sorrow, yet a sadness too. Like the Ziggy card (How come our saddest sadness comes from what once was our most joyous joy?). Each time it's like we are all so close in our thoughts and souls.

In our group, we are all "heroes," or else we would never survive the tragedies we have been through.

Their symbol is a rose.



Becky (10-20-79), the daughter of Don and Mary Salisbury, died in an automobile accident, 5-13-97. Mary writes:

A special thank you for remembering Becky's anniversary. It is hard to believe that 2 years have gone by already, yet forever since we had her

here. I spent the day trying to keep busy. I went to church with my mom, two brothers and sister. My father's anniversary is only 4 days after Becky's so we usually have a mass said for both of them. I spent hours planting flowers at my mom's. Then I went to the cemetery to see Becky and plant flowers for her. I ended up planting flowers on graves around Becky's that no one ever takes care of. Kind of like sprucing up the area.

The night before I noticed something on the floor of my closet from a distance it looked like a star (Becky's symbol). Close up it was a 5 point flower. When I showed this to my husband, Don, he said, "you've been to the cemetery?" He saw the same thing on the base of the headstone when he was there earlier in the week and he left it there. Yes, I do think it was Becky saying "Hi" to me.

Becky's symbol is a star.



Richard and Geraldine Price's son, Richard (6-6-79), died in an auto accident, 12-18-98. Geraldine tells us about Young Richard:

I will attempt to tell you about our son. Richard was born on June 6, 1979. I was 16 at the time, his father (also Richard) was 18.

My 17th birthday was August 3. My husband's 19th birthday was October 18. On October 1979, four and a half months after Richard's birth, we were married. From that point we began building our family. We struggled, financially, for a while, but managed to make it through. On November 27, 1984, our second son, Jamie was born. Richard was very excited (and a bit jealous, though he would never admit it) to have a brother.

Richard started kindergarten in September 1984. It didn't take long to see how intelligent he was. He excelled academically in every subject and continued to do so right throughout school. He graduated with honors in June 1997.

In August 1996, he got his driver's license. I think if anyone had ever asked him what his most prized possession was, he would have said his driver's license and his car, a 1984 Pontiac Fiero. He

dearly loved to drive, the faster, the better. When he wasn't driving his car, he was repairing it, tuning it up, washing/waxing it, installing a new stereo or new speakers, etc. He loved to do this for himself and also for his friends. We received many phone calls from people asking for Richard's advice or help with a problem they were having with their car, truck, bike, anything that had a motor. His friends and classmates at the university said, "When it came to anything mechanical" Richard was a pro." He was always ready and willing to lend a helping hand, free of charge.

In June 1997, he received word from Memorial University in St. John's Nfld that he had been accepted into Memorial University's (MUN) Marine Institute for a three and a half year program in Marine Engineering. While we were excited and happy for him, I have to admit, we were dreading for the time to come for him to have to leave home and go so far away. St. John's is a 7 hour drive, one way, from here, so it's not like he could travel home every weekend.

In August 1997, we took Richard to St. John's to get him settled in. I cannot explain the feeling I had when we left to drive back home without him. We talked every night on the phone (our telephone bill sky rocketed) and he did manage to get a ride home, with friends once a month or so for a weekend. He had not taken his car to St. John's, it is an older model car and he was not used to city driving, so we decided that it would be best to wait a year or so before he look his car in.

He finished his first year at the Marine institute in June of '98 and came home for the summer. He was happy to be home for a while and happy to be spending the Summer with his girlfriend, Jodi. Richard and Jodi had been dating for four years.

In August '98, we once again took Richard to St. John's to get him settled for his second year. We had decided it would be best for him to wait until the.....

After his fall semester at the Marine Institute he was to go on a four month work term, on a ship, from January '99 to April '99. So we decided he would take his car in then.

He continued to get rides home with friends for weekends. One evening in October he called to say he was coming home for the weekend with a friend of his, Dale Howse. My husband, in particular, expressed concern that we did not know Dale Howse. Richard explained that Dale was a classmate of his and promptly reassured us that Dale was the same age as we were (37) and was married with kids. He was also quick to add that Dale was an excellent driver. This was all the reassurance we needed. Richard was not an easy person to impress, especially when it came to driving. He told us Dale lived in Botwood, NFLD which is about a two hour drive from here, one way, so he needed his father to come to the Grand Falls intersection and pick him up.

In December, Richard phoned to say that he would be leaving St. John's, to come home for the holidays, late Friday evening (December 18) and that he was traveling with Dale. He said another classmate, Stirling, was traveling with them as well. Once again he needed his father to come to the Grand Falls intersection to pick him and Stirling up (Stirling is from a small community about a half an hour drive from here),

So, on December 18, 1998, at 2:20nPM Richard phoned (he had our cell phone in the car with him) to say they were on their way. I told him we were paving a snow, slush, rain storm out there and that roads were slippery. He said they just had rain.

At 4:02 pm, my husband and son, Jamie, left to go to pick Richard up. The roads here were deplorable. What usually a two hour drive to Grand Falls from here, took them three and a half hours. I stayed at home and continued to check in with Richard on the phone to see where they were and how the weather and road., were like. It still just had rain,

The last time I spoke to Richard was 5.00pm. He said they were close to

Gander and that roads were beginning to get a little slushy. I told him to call me as soon as he met with his father.

Sometime between 5:30 pm and 5:45 pm, the car in which Richard was traveling was hit by a tractor trailer. All three in the car were killed instantly, Richard, 19, Stirling Perham, 20, and the driver, Dale Howse, a 37 year-old father of four (ages 3, 5, 9 and 11).

I heard of the accident at 7 o'clock PM while passing along by the TV. The announcer broke in with a special report, She said there has been an accident on the Trans Canada Highway near Gander and that three people had been killed. I fell to the floor, knowing immediately it was them. I managed to get to the phone and dial our cell phone number, but to no avail. I could not reach Richard. Chaos ensued from that moment. I desperately continued to try to reach Richard, but it was no use. It was eleven o'clock that night before I finally got confirmation that it was Richard. My husband and Jamie were still at the intersection waiting for Richard.

From that moment, I don't have to tell you, it has been a nightmare. Our worst fear has come true. We have experienced every emotion from guilt, anger, remorse, depression, more than I can name. The grief is overwhelming. We miss Richard more every day.

He was full of life. He lived every day to the fullest and everyone keeps telling us we have to be thankful for that and for the nineteen years we had with Richard. We are grateful for that but 19 years was not long enough. When I think of all the things that he wanted to do, the potential he had, the dreams he had, the dreams love had for him, I don't feel very grateful, When people say, you have to move on, you have Jamie to think about, I get really upset and angry. We know we have Jamie to think about and we know we have to go on. We will do the same for Jamie as we always did for Richard, but it makes me angry because I know if they were in our situation, they would feel exactly the same as we do. Then I get depressed and frustrated because I get angry. Then I become exhausted. I have never felt so out of control in my entire life. It takes so much energy to force myself out of bed in the

mornings and to get through the day, at night I am completely exhausted.

When I started writing this letter, I didn't think I would get a complete page. If I continue to write like this, I will have written you a short novel. There are just a few more things I would like to say about Richard before I finish.

He was a special boy. He was a very intelligent and caring boy. If you asked Richard for all opinion, you got an honest answer. It may not have been the answer you were hoping for, but you could be sure it was the truth. There was no pretense with him. If he liked you, you knew it and if he didn't like you, you knew that as well. There were few he didn't like just those who had an arrogant attitude and thought they were better than everyone else. He would do anything for anyone, just when he felt like doing it. It didn't matter to Richard if you were rich or poor, black or white, big or small. He treated everyone the same and judged no one. He was an honest and loyal friend to those who were privileged enough to have had him as a friend

I have begun trying to compose a poem to put in our local newspaper for the first anniversary of Richard's death (December 18, 1999). Although it is not nearly finished yet, the following verse will be included:

We'll never be the same again
Our hearts are broken in two
We miss you, Rich, so very
much We don't know what to do.

Crying again. We do a lot of that; crying, remembering, wishing, wailing. I know we will never be the same again. We feel incomplete and this house does not feel like a home anymore. We are "trying" to do the best we can. That is all we are capable of doing right now.

Richard's symbols are a car, a wrench, and a stereo.



Amy (10-7-77), Sue Lindenberg's daughter, die in an auto accident, 9-27-97. Sne wrote of the tragic accident:

My lovely 19-year-old daughter was killed in a car accident on September 27, 1997 She had been to a party with a friend. The friend decided to go to Evansville to see her boyfriend. Before she left, Amy and Angie found a ride back home to Mt. Vernon with her cousin, which Amy knew and was friends with. This was around 10:00 PM and I was told she was ready to come home because she was not feeling very comfortable and was to go to work the next day, so she was anxious to get home. The young man that was to bring her home decided at about midnight that he had too much to drink and couldn't drive them home. This was a jeep with no top. He wasn't a mile down the road and he lost control, sideswiped a tree on the side where my daughter was and ejected her from the jeep. She hit the tree with her head and never came to. She was left at the scene. This boy told a lady who stopped to help them he had to go because he was in enough trouble. She told him he should wait for the police, but he took off walking back to the party. Amy was flown by Life Flight to the hospital. The police went looking for Josh and picked him up several hours later. The hospital didn't know who Amy was. The police finally went back to the scene of the accident and found her purse and went back to the hospital and called us. The accident happened about 12:30 and we finally got a phone call at 3:45 am. When we got to the hospital, she was in a very deep coma. It was a parent's very worst nightmare. The accident happened on September 21st and she died on September 27th. She was our baby and such a sweet, loving child. My heart is broken in a million pieces and I can't seem to get it back together. Two weeks to the day, hour and minute, my beautiful mother died. She went into the hospital on October 7th, which was Amy's 20th birthday, she died an Saturday October 11th at 10:25 AM. Amy had died on Saturday September 27th at 10.25am. I

keep hoping that means they are with each other. The day of Amy's funeral, when we returned to the funeral home, there was this beautiful rainbow over the funeral home. The day of my mothers funeral, when we returned to the funeral home, there were two beautiful rainbows.

They must be together.

Amy's symbols are an angel and a star.



Gary and Viola Correll's son, Michael (8-18-79), was killed in an electrical shock-drowning 8-9-95. Michael's Mamaw wrote the following letter to Michael:

Dearest Michael,

Four years today, seems like a long while,

Since we've heard your voice or seen your beautiful smile.

Our own special Angel from the day you were born,

So handsome, so joyful, you brightened each morn.

I've come to your grave, we know you're not there,

To think of you alone, and let you know how much we still care.

As the years go by, should we remain,

Will memories grow dim, Will we feel less pain?

Our hearts say no, as we gather today,

To remember you still in our own special way.

Miss you? Oh yes, we surely do!

With God's grace, we're, making it through

In his time, we will each join you,

Until then, remembering you with love will have to do!

-Mamaw Correll

*We think of Michael all the time
His smiles, his frowns and humor in mind.*

*But now he is no longer here
As to so much we will have to bear.
But when we see him in time to come*

*Our hearts will cheer, yet not alone.
With all the joy that is in store*

We will have with Michael once more.

-Sarah Franklin (cousin)

If God had a favorite

It would have been you.

We could see God's hand on you

You showed His love through thing you'd do.

Your humble spirit inspired so many,

You gave yourself and smiles of plenty.

Your tender heart was always willing,

Receiving your hug was more than filling.

You were special, your soul was true,

The joy you'd bring us just being you,

On August ninth of ninety five,

He took just one for whom He died.

Now in Heaven you are there with Christ,

You were a touch of Heaven for those in life.

If God had favorites, if it were true,

I would definitely say it would have been you.

- Rebekah Franklin

Michael's symbols are a butterfly, a policeman and water skis.



Tim and Vicki Williams' son, Jeremy (10-4-79), died in an auto accident, 5-24-98. Vicki talks about the accident and Jeremy:

My husband, Tim and lost our only son, Jeremy, on May 24, last year. I still sometimes don't think its real. I miss him so much. He was 18, and 16 days away graduating high school. He was with his best friend, Jared, and Jared's cousin, Pete. Pete was driving and went off the road, and over-corrected. They weren't going very fast, but weren't wearing seat belts. Jared is in a coma. It just isn't right. These kids had so much to look forward to and so much to accomplish.

Jeremy, loved life. He was always on the go, and very active in school, sports and community activities. He

was class president and was salutatorian of his class. He didn't get to receive his medal. I have it framed now with his diploma. We have set up a memorial scholarship fund in his name, for a graduate of Gerlach High that will go on to further their education. Tim and I are going to choose who receives it. This year is going to be the hardest. All the graduates this year were all so close friends of Jeremy's. I wish we could give them all some, but I know that wouldn't be fair for the next year's students. We live in a very small town of about 350. Everybody knows everybody. The outpouring from the community has helped us also. Everybody misses Jeremy. He was loved by all. The kids at the school wrote a memorial book for Tim and me. We treasure it. I found out just how much Jeremy enriched so many lives.

The week before, we had traveled to Prescott, AZ, checking out Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, where Jeremy was going to attend college. He wanted to be an Airline pilot ever since I can remember. He was so ready to make his dream come true. On the way back we went to the Grand Canyon. I still can't watch the movies we made, all the way. I have tried several times, but can only get so far. The last year of his life, we did so many things together, not that we didn't before, but that year was unlike any other. At times I thought it was because he was going to graduate and go off to college. Now I wonder if it was so we would have so many special memories. When we were coming home from Arizona, I looked over at Jeremy, while he was driving, and smiled, because I was so proud of him, and this little voice in my head said, You're going to have to call them and let them know Jeremy will not be coming, there will be lots of people. I was so shocked. I thought, why am I thinking such a thing, what did that mean. It scared me. Was that my guardian angel preparing me? I thought so afterwards and thought why didn't they tell me how to prevent it. I'm so confused and mad at the same time.

This has been my worst nightmare come true, as I know it was for you

also. I'm really having a hard time and I know I will never get over this. The only thing that keeps me going, is that I know I will see him again, and I can't wait. I dream about him a lot. He told me he is with my grandma, which makes me feel very good. I know that he is OK, and with God and my loved ones. He turned 19, October 4th. These "Firsts" are so hard. I know you know.

Psamantha (8-10-82), the adopted daughter of Gary and Diann Foster, died from an asthma attack, 3-17-91.

Psamantha's symbol is a



Brittany Ann (1-31-91), a foster daughter of Gary and Diann, died of pneumonia, 2-21-98. Brittany's symbol is a Teddy Bear as she loved her stuffed animals.

Diann laments about another foster child, Elijah (4-14-93):

Sadly, we lost another foster child, Elijah, 8-19-98. Elijah was just with us for seven weeks. I wonder why? But we are not to question God's way, but.. Paul and Sue Ayer cared for Elijah for over five years and it was a very hard decision for them to let him go. We want to thank them for entrusting Elijah to us.

Peter John, who is six, bonded with Elijah from the first day he stayed with us. Even before, when Elijah visited, Peter John was fascinated with him. I really did not want Peter John sleeping in the same bed with Elijah because I was afraid Peter would become entangled in Elijah's tubes, but that afternoon, I found them cuddled up together both napping; it was just too cute. After that, Peter John slept at Elijah's feet. Every night and morning, Peter John prayed for Elijah, that he would not need suctioning; that he would breathe better. And Elijah did not need suctioning many times after the prayers. He adjusted to our home very quickly.

What was to be the last day of Elijah's life, everyone commented how well adjusted he had become. The Physical Therapist was pleased with his mobility--even though Elijah did not even wiggle! Sandi G. commented how

he loved his bath and the "shower hose" so well and how he laughed with Jessica that afternoon.

Elijah died quickly as the doctors predicted. He just did it five years later. At the funeral home, Peter John stood by his casket and patted his hand, just as he had done so many times in his life. Peter John prayed for Elijah's father, that he would not hurt any more little children. He thanked God that Elijah did not hurt anymore and he truly believes, as we all who love Elijah, that he will be with him again, but that Elijah will run and jump and play on that great day.

*Our Life will go on day by day
Without your presence*

*But in our hearts and souls is a
little spot*

*we will keep for your memory
And when those days of missing
comes*

*We'll remember that the One who
Holds the sparrow, will keep you
safe*

Until we meet again.

-Diann Foster

David and Helen Gardener's son, Curt (10-16-76), died 11-20-95. This letter was written last December:

*We have now had 2 years since
our precious Curt died. I miss him
so much. He would have celebrated
his 21st birthday, October 16. I've
continued to search for pennies and
change dropped on the ground. On
the second year of Curt's death, we
were able to purchase children's
books for our church nursery.*

*As we started over, the first
penny I found looked so lonely in
the cup, but the pennies are
growing already.*

*I just received a card from the
church camp Curt attended. They
are using the money that was
donated in his name for a little
bridge. I'm glad they have found a
great project for that money.*

*Our daughter (now our only
child) and her husband are
missionaries in Mali, Africa. They
will be gone for 2 years. We had*

decided not to put up a tree this year, but our church family decided to plan a party here to see our tree. We have now decorated a tree. Actually, it was nice to see those familiar ornaments. Yes, the tears came, but we were glad to be reminded of all those fun years.

I think of our children when I see butterflies; red cars, basketballs, roses, hearts and all the other symbols.

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



Michael (6-30-76), the son of Michael and Linda Miller, died from a truck accident, 2-15-95. Michael wrote this last year:

A Special Time

*Christmas should be a special time
When we're filled with wonder and joy.*

*Christmas should be a special time
For us all, be we girl or boy.*

*Christmas should be a special time
To celebrate the birth of the King.
Christmas should be a special time,
But, for some, it's become a hard,
lonely time,
Remembering those that are missed.*

*On Christmas morn, when I finally arise
And shake the sleep from my head,
Its hard to be filled with wonder and joy
When I gaze on that small, empty bed.*

*Christmas should be a special time
When we're filled with wonder and joy.
But, its hard to be filled with thoughts of good cheer
When I'm missing my one special boy.*

*I miss you.
I love you.
Daddy*

Their last year's Christmas letter:

The first half of 1998 was kind of quiet for the Millers. On February 15,

Michael D. had been gone three years. It still hurts not to have our child with us. We remembered our son on this day by putting flowers on the altar at church. We still keep Michael D alive in our home with his smiling pictures around us.

Our hardest day is still June 30, Michael D's birthday. He would have been 22 this year, but he will always be 18 to us. Michael and I took this week off from work. We spent a week of tears, laughs, and a lot of memories. We still keep his room the same with a lot of memories. He still lives, for us, in his room.

We were invited to weddings by four of Michael D.'s friends. Even though these weddings were hard to attend, it made Michael and me feel so good that Michael's friends still stay in contact with us. Our best wishes go out to all of these young adults.

Michael and I are still working. Michael accomplished a big milestone this summer. He was able to go fishing for the first time in four years. Fishing was a time that Michael D. and his Dad could spend together. It was a big father/son sport for both of them and they would go quite often. It was a day of mixed emotions, tears, and a lot of memories far Michael.

On October 18, I suffered a heart attack and had to have emergency surgery. I had one blocked artery and had a stint implanted in the artery. It was a scare for both of us. I am doing better. I had quite a bit of heart damage and I am taking eight weeks of cardiac rehabilitation. We are so grateful for all the prayers that pulled me through this time.

We will be having our traditional Christmas this year. We will be spending a quiet Christmas at home by ourselves with our angel. Our only decoration will be a white electric candle in the window in memory of all our family members. We will also burn a white candle during the Christmas season. The glow of this burning candle reminds us of Michael Duncan's glowing face and smile.

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



David and Cindy Jo Greeve daughter, Michelle (8-24-84), was struck by a car .11-5-93. The following was written in memory Michelle:

August 24, 1984 – November 1993

My dear little daughter in Heaven above-

*Mommy sends you all her love..
For you see, though it has been six years since you went away~
I love you more **and** more each an every day ...*

Time does not take a mother's love not heart

***And I love you as much now as I had from the start**
November 5th is the day you parted this earth*

And yet my dear precious little Angel for all its worth

*I tell you now I hold you so very dear
You are never far, and in my heart and soul you will always be near
Until that day we are reunited for eternity*

I send you my Love, my dear daughter to you from me ...

*Love Always and Forever~
Mother Hen, Daddy Roo, Bubba and Sissa too!!*

Michelle's symbols are a star, heart and a rose.



Emily, the daughter of David and Judy NuHavun, died in an auto accident, 5-4-95. Judy shared:

As the dawn of a beautiful spring day crept through our window, the distant ringing of the downstairs phone disturbed my early morning slumber -. ignored it. Twenty minutes later the insistent ringing forced me awake. I picked up the extension by the bed and, still drowsy, said "hello." The voice of my new son-in-law said, 'There was a car accident - Emily died.'" Seven monotone words, spoken in shock by a mere boy of twenty, now a widowed newlywed, shattered our world. I pushed away the reality by screaming the word "NO!" about 200 times. Life had changed forever.

Our breathtakingly beautiful daughter was just starting her new

life with her young husband, was killed instantly in an automobile accident on a country road in Scotland. Emily was the radiant sunshine of the whole family, the one everyone loved to tease because she would just laugh in her sweet way. She always gave more to others than she could possibly get back. How could we ever live without her?!

And so the journey began for us, as it does for hundreds of other parents every day throughout the country as they struggle to hold together the fragmented pieces of their shattered hearts, hopes, dreams and lives. As the days and weeks crawled by, we found ourselves craving a oneness with each other that would ease the loneliness of grief and pain that engulfed us.

We became aware of the fact that we were not the only ones experiencing this need for oneness. Through our interaction with other grieving parents, we saw intense suffering and the sad phenomenon of feeling lonely, misunderstood and isolated, even while being together.

The most shocking fact was that so many of the marriages of these hurting couples were ending in divorce. We were shattered to learn that a tragically high rate of divorce persists in families grieving the loss of a child. Dermis Rainey, author and founder of Family Life Marriage Conferences; Dr. Gory Oliver, author and director of John Brown University's Dept. of Marriage and Family; and Dr. Gary Rosberg, author and director of American Family Coaches, along with many other experts in the field of bereavement, assert that 75 - 90% of marriages end in divorce within a 5 year period following the death of a child. We would have found this statistic unbelievable had we not been experiencing ourselves what grief can do to a couple. Our personal experience overcame our initial reluctance to accept this jarring statistic and jolted us into action.

Hoping that, somehow, some good would result from our personal tragedy, we storied Emily's Foundation to initiate measures that would help relieve, and if possible save the.....

1995, a world of grief and stress and fear and isolation entered our previously calm, content and strong marriage. We knew that if we were suffering this intensely and going through problems in our relationship, other couples must really need help too. We also knew instinctively that a large number of these divorces would never have happened if their child had not died and could have been avoided if help had been available.

According to National Safety Council statistics, over 300 children under age 25 die each day; that is over 200,000 new broken hearted parents per year. The time of greatest risk to the marriage is the five years following their child's death. At any given time, over 500,000 bereaved families are struggling to hold together the fragmented pieces of their shattered hearts, hopes, dreams and lives. They are desperately in need of help.

One might wonder why a bereaved couple's marriage is more at risk than anyone else's might be. Many people actually believe that the death of a child would draw a couple closer together and solidify their marriage forever. There are a few lucky ones that can claim that as true. There are also some who know of the danger and make every effort to avoid becoming a part of the statistic_ Sadly, however, the majority are plunged into the nightmare and drown without ever coming up for air.

Bereaved couples are most vulnerable when they are unaware of these dangerous pitfalls:

- *Blame and guilt
- *Different styles of grieving
- *Closing up and burying the hurt inside
- *Not recognizing the need for help
- *Ignoring that the loss occurred
- *Descending into debilitating depression
- *Frenzied activity
- *Refusing to "remember" the child through conversation and pictures
- *Turning to alcohol, drugs or infidelity to ease the pain

One major reason for conflict in a bereaved marriage is the presence of blame and it's ugly companion, guilt.....child's death can be di-.... real or perceived..... parent. The devastating effect this has on the relationship cannot be overstated. It

is imperative that both parents get help in forgiving each other and themselves.



Emily's Foundation is the only national organization formed for the exclusive purpose of preserving and strengthening the marriages and families of bereaved parents who have lost a child. Although millions of dollars are needed to accomplish this mission, billions of dollars are spent each year to cope with the list of problems that divorce and critical stress levels create.

Emily's Foundation exists as a legacy of love for bereaved families and, above all, to honor Emily and, by helping others, perpetuate her giving nature and reinforce her loving memory in a continuous way.

The Foundation is devoted to offering current proven options of help to as many bereaved families as funds will allow. Five programs have emerged as the most useful and applicable to saving these marriages and families:

*Underwriting bereaved couples attendance at marriage conference held throughout the nation such a Family Life, Marriage Encounter an others.

*Coordinating the formation small groups of bereaved couples in home study format focusing on marital and family issues, known as HomeBuilders.

*Providing private places of "retreat", called "Emily's House", grieving and healing alone together.

*Underwriting a week at Young Camp for the high school aged siblings in the family.

*Establishing a nation-wide men..... ing network for the support of new bereaved parents.

David and Judy have established Emily's Foundation, which is a profit organization dedicated

preserving families who have lost a child. This organization picks up where *Children's Miracle Network* and *Make A Wish Foundation* leave off, by providing the family with the tools they need to stay together through the long tough process of healing.

If you would like further information, you may contact them:

Emily's Foundation
418 Mackay Ave.
Syracuse, NY 13219
315-484-2175

mle@emilysfoundation.org

(website) www.entilysfoundation.org



Emily's symbol is an elephant.

To Those I Love

When I am gone, release me, let me go, I have so many things to see and do.

You mustn't tie yourself to me with tears, be thankful for our beautiful years.

I gave to you my love; you can only guess how much you gave me in happiness.

I thank you for the love you each have shown, but now its time to travel on alone.

So grieve a while for me, then let your grief be comforted by trust. It's only for a lime that we must part, so bless the memories within your heart.

I won't be for away, for life goes on, so if you need me, call and I will come. Though you can't see or touch me, I'll be near and if you listen with your heart, you'll hear all my love around you soft and clear.

And then, when you must come this way alone, I'll greet you with a smile, and say - "Welcome Home!"

The step parent is often forgotten when a child has died. This article was written by a step mother:

Reflection's of A Step Parent

I watched my mate go through pure hell.

And felt helpless, useless, and some-times, invisible.

Other times I stood strong while bearing the brunt of my love's anger that lashed out at the world.

As an angry God would open the heavens.

With roaring thunder and lightning. I was accused of not understanding and surely I could not.

I felt heavy pain for my step child.

The one I took as my own.

I grieved for the good times we had together, the lugs at my heart that always pierced through any resentments.

At the funeral home, I felt even a pang of yes, jealousy

Toward the natural parent of my beloved step child.

Knowing that they and my mate shared a private room from the past that I could never ever enter.

Life must go on this day to day existence but things are different now.

I offer my support as I see eyes staring off into a distant land. I hold a hand and kiss away the tear drops.

With an added sorrow, I wonder if my love will return to me or stay in that for off land forever. For deep in my heart I know that this tragedy will bring us closer together, or tear us completely apart.

-Peggi Hull, Houston Bay Area
Bereaved Parents USA

Tread Gently

*Tread gently near the tender souls
Who've lost a child,*

*Whose hearts are bruised and
bleeding;*

*For healing comes slowly,
With pain in every forward step,
Tears in every backward look.*

So much love still flows

*For that special one-
Arms reach out to hold
And back to cling,
But reach forward only numbly,
Fearful of forgetting
Or being disloyal by going on.*

*There is guilt in laughing,
Feeling pleasure,
Even being alive.
There are questions.*

*Longings, heartaches.
But slowly, surely,
Strength and healing come
In God's own time-
Not as answer,
Nor as forgetting,
But as acceptance
That this pain, this loss,
Is ours to live with
And somehow,
By God's grace,
To use to bless*

-Joan Spletstoesser

The Roman Numeral for the year, 2000, is **MM**. And of course that reminds me of chocolate, and chocolate reminds me of **M & Ms**, and **M & Ms** remind me of the grief work we each have to do. As you begin the new year, **I** encourage you to eat as many **M & Ms** as possible, and with each bite, may they remind you that we have a:

Monumental Mission of remembering the
Marvelous Memories, and
Make More Motivational Movements to
March to the Middle.
May Mothers Mirror Models of other
Morning Maidens and
May the Males Muster the Moxie to
Methodically Mourn

What are some of your **M & M's** for the new millennium? Are yours going to be plain or with peanuts? (I have found that mine are usually a little nutty!) _____



