
LAMENTATIONS

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Pat Loder, (Executive Director of The Compassionate Friends/USA), gave me permission to use her speech in the newsletter. It is so profound and touched me so much that I knew I had to share it with you, my fellow travelers. As you read, I hope you will feel the "black veil" lifting from you, only if it is for a moment.

I can say that after 14 years, the black veil has been lifted from me, or I have lifted it from my self. Of course there are times that the veil sneaks back on me, especially around Young Jim's birth and angel dates, but I now know how to lift it from myself and put it in a place that reminds me I am okay and I don't feel guilty when I laugh and enjoy life. I hope you can reach that place also.

The Black Veil

By Pat Loder, Executive Director of The Compassionate Friends

Recently, I was invited to attend a seminar. At one point, almost as an aside, the speaker abruptly stopped her presentation and peered intently at the group who seemed anxious for words of masterful wisdom. "Have you heard," she finally asked, "about the shortest novel ever written? It goes like this. "For sale, baby shoes-never worn."

A shock and hush fell over the crowded room, as everyone pondered the words that were so fresh in their minds. The quiet stretched for what seemed like minutes, but was far, far shorter. "You know," the speaker said softly, "the same silence fell upon the room when I first heard that, too."

I thought about her words and the ensuing silence and finally surmised I was sitting in a room surrounded by people whose lives had not been touched by death. No, I can't say "not touched" by death, because we have all been touched by death. But rather, I decided they had not been

impacted by a death that had come up and struck them in the face with the wallop of a two by four.

In my work with The Compassionate Friends, not a day goes by that I don't talk with someone who hasn't been slapped in the face with the reality that their child has died, and the future no longer holds the same meaning for them.

Yes, sadly, in The Compassionate Friends organization we deal with "short novels" everyday. Sometimes the novel and the shoes left behind are respectively a little longer and a little bigger-perhaps toddler's training shoes, or ballet slippers, or hockey skates, or maybe they made it all the way to golf shoes before the novel abruptly ended. But each represents a book that ended much too soon, and each represents a family who has been left to grieve.

My son was five and my daughter was eight when the accident claimed their lives on the first day of spring many years ago. Those shoes were so small, the novel much too short.

In the early days of grief, those of us struck by tragedy wonder how we will survive-and then we're almost afraid we will, because surviving, we are sure, means that we will have to feel this horrendous ache for the rest of our years.

Sometimes when I think about new grief, the image of Jacqueline Kennedy standing next to her husband's coffin, clothed in a black veil, enters my mind. I was young when President Kennedy was shot, but the image of Jackie, hidden behind that veil, has lasted a lifetime. Maybe that's the reason why I associate it with new grief. When we are newly bereaved it is as though we are clothed in a black veil-everything we do, everything we see, is filtered through the image of grief, our black veil. And it is so very, very thick and so very, very heavy. We see a sporting event on the television and we wonder, how can they be playing? How can life be going on as normal? Don't they know my child is dead? We go to the grocery store and "lose it" when we spot our child's favorite food. We hear someone complaining about how they're always having to pick up their child's dirty socks and we think how lucky they are to have such a "problem."

Our friends and family aren't sure what to do for us. Should they laugh with us or cry with us? Should they hold us or run as fast and as far as their legs will carry them? We want them with us-but yet we want to be left alone. We love them-but we're angry with them. And, nobody in the world understands us! We're absentminded, easily distracted and quick to anger. And our self esteem? It's shattered, because no matter how big those shoes

were, as parents we should have been able to protect our children from dying before us.

The black veil surrounds us from the time we awaken in the morning until we go to bed at night. We eat with it, sleep with it, shower with it, and yes, we curse it. Through our tears and sadness we dream of our old life-the one in which mundane things were not really so mundane after all. And we wish with all our might we weren't wearing "the veil" that stole our innocence. Sometimes the veil slips off and we receive tiny respites from the weight of carrying the black veil. In these respites we may feel almost embarrassed that the weight of the black veil has been lifted for just a moment, and we are now open to a small measure of happiness when pain has been our constant companion. But it wasn't only pain that was with us-there was shock and anger and questions of faith and questions of the meaning of life, especially a life cut so short, still wearing shoes that will never be outgrown.

Over time, the veil fades from black to gray. We still carry it with us but our emotions are easier to control. The fog that has so enveloped our thought-processes begins to lift from our minds. And we see that there may actually just be a reason to go on living. For everyone these reasons are going to be just a little different-the realization that other members of our family need us, the birth of a child, a cause in which to invest our energies or we may simply find a new friend who is struggling with the same loss.

Yes, life deals us some terrible blows. But along with those terrible blows we are given the ability to survive-a survival that for a period of time we thought was impossible. I have heard the analogy that losing a child is like losing a limb from your body. The body may heal, but the stump, even when fitted with the best artificial limb, will never let you lift things quite the same, or walk in quite the same way. You may not run again, at least not as fast. And you may not be able to lift things that are quite as heavy. But you learn to adjust to the new you. You learn what you can handle and what you can't, and how you will have to approach it within all aspects of your life. You learn now to survive even without that limb.

Yes, we will survive after our child dies. Today, working through tragedy seems almost like a part of life. The question becomes one of how we will handle it-what our child, sibling, grandchild or close relative would want for us. In the end, we must reach the realization that it's our job to give it everything we've got to fill the shoes that were left behind. For even the shoes of that shortest novel ever written will be so very, very big to fill. For sale: baby shoes-never worn.

Grief Grafts

Tom & Jan Below's daughter, Samantha Zima (9-20-82), died in an auto accident, 5-28-98. Their son, Dakota Below died prematurely, 12-12-00.

Jan shares Samantha's story:

Jim is so handsome and he died in the same month as my Samantha her accident happened on May 18th she went to heaven on May 28th she was in a coma that 10 days she too was in a car that went off the road her boyfriend was driving had she remained in her seat belt that day she would have walked away shaken only. The road was the same as you described; road no gravel; they went into the ditch and hit a brick embankment. Samantha at some point reached up to avoid hitting the windshield as she had a fracture of the wrist we later learned, but she went head first into the rearview mirror and windshield no outward injuries at all no skull fractures or openings she just looked like she was sleeping is all.

But I am an RN and when I looked at her pupils in the ER that day I knew, but I couldn't let her go without a fight. I knew if I chose to turn off those machines I would go insane always wondering if I had only given her one more minute one more hour one more day what might have been. Instead I took loving care of her for 10 days I got to say goodbye.

But then for a long time I wondered did I make her suffer for my own selfishness. But I got an answer one day out of the blue to that ever hurtful question. It was simple but strong. ANY DECISION MADE OUT OF LOVE IS NEVER WRONG!!!! My son and his wife gave birthday to my grandson last year on the very day she died, however my son's wife is a cruel and heartless woman and I have not see my grandson since that day it was very painful that a gift sent from heaven was again taken from me. However I have just learned my oldest daughter is pregnant with her second child and she is due the last week in May. I have three grandchildren; two are my son's and one is my daughter's. I saw my son's daughter for her first year and then they cut all ties with us all after that so I haven't seen her either in over a year. I miss them so but I know my angel is watching out for them from up above. I remarried after Samantha's return in 2001, but prior to our marriage I lost our baby 22 weeks into my pregnancy; it was a boy. His name is Dakota; this was my second husband's only child. Dec 12, 2000. We

miss him as well. I am too old to have another so my husband loves his grandchildren to death LOL.

Samantha is the baby of three. She was a passenger in her boy friends car. On May 18th I got the phone call every parent fears. Your daughter has been in an accident. Samantha was sliding over to sit next to her boyfriend after saying something funny. As he took his eyes off the road for a second when he looked back they were in the ditch. They hit a brick embankment at 50 miles an hour. There was very little damage to the car or the boyfriend. Samantha however hit the rearview mirror & windshield with her head, breaking both. She was in a coma from that point on. For 10 days I begged, pleaded, & cried. But on May 28th in the early morning hours as I played the song "My Heart Will Go On;" she slipped away to heaven.

I am very grateful for the fight she did to give me those precious days to loving care for her and to say everything I wanted to say. The theme song of both songs has special meaning to us both. My heart will go on was her favorite after seeing the Titanic movie too many times to count. This sparked her need to talk about people going on after someone dies with her family as well as with her boyfriend. I wonder now if somehow she knew she would be gone soon.

The other song still has haunting memories for me and I break down when I hear the first few notes. The song "How Do I Live Without You?" says it all. On the 5th day of her hospital stay, a conference was called, we were told the human that once was Samantha was no longer there and never would be again. This played at 1:00 am. I crawled right in next to her and sang this in her ear between heart wrenching sobs. I had to let her know what her leaving would do to me.

When this song plays I am right back there, I smell her freshly washed hair, feel her cold cheek next to mine and hear the machines in the back ground. Someday I hope it will be a pleasant reminder of those last days. I have been blessed with many signs from her that she indeed does go on. Too many to list here. Samantha loved animals, Unicorns, bunnies, etc. She helped her dad build houses and did the brick work on most. She had plans to work where her sister Angel is now and attend school to get her counseling degree. She had plans to marry and have two children of which she had already named, Mekala Marie & Dakota Keith. She was a packrat that saved many things so I many tapes of her singing and talking with friends. I have two other children both grown now. My three-bedroom home is empty without them. I try to go on through this life as I know she would want but find it hard to do most days. I truly hope my other two understand why I think of her all the time and they know I love them no less. Many

months ago I came here looking for others. I am sad to say I found many, but grateful for the love and comfort I have found. In doing these pages for my angel it has helped me to get through this first tough anniversary. I also hope that by visiting her pages someone else will be able to find comfort with me. I want to thank you for taking the time to meet my special angel. Samantha was also a giving person in her death as well as in her life. Months before the accident she let me know her wishes. She helped to save three peoples lives through her precious gifts. Jan mom to Samantha May forever 15.

I actually see brown bunnies when I am very sad and visit her grave they come out to watch me.

Thanks for letting me share my story and thank you for sharing your angel Jim with me.

This is a poem I wrote for my daughter Samantha's first heavenly birthday in 1998:

How Do I live without U?

*My days are dark and stormy,
My nights are sleepless and long
You left without a warning
As I played the Titanic song.*

You we're my backwards baby you love to see the world from upside down.

*So now I understand young lady why you had to leave the ground.
What better way to see this place than from heaven up above,
As an angel with all your beauty and grace sending us down all your love.*

We could not keep the angels from calling and will you answer me true?

I can not stop these tears from falling how do I live with out U?

Jan

Samantha's website:

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Meadows/2279>

Samantha's symbols are brown bunnies and a Unicorn.

John & Joeann Poe's son, John Jr. (9-20-65), died from a malignant brain tumor, 12-21-80. Their daughter, Sherri Lynn (5-26-67) died from Transposition of Great vessels, 6-17-67, and their son, Kyle (3-15-69) died while waiting for a heart-lung transplant, 11-22-95.

Joeann writes:

I have written a book, it sits on the shelf above my computer. I wrote it a couple of years after Kyle died. It's called From My Heart To Yours. I don't know what to do about it.

It seems so many years ago that our family began. The happiness that our children gave us was more than I could have imagined. Our first child was a very handsome son. We named him John Jr., after his dad. John was beautiful he had the biggest, brightest eyes. Every day was an adventure with him. When he was almost 2 we gave him a sister. Not just any sister but the most spectacular little girl. I had the gold at the end of the rainbow, a son and then a daughter. We were truly blessed.

Twelve hours after her birth, our world came to an end. She was born with a D-Transposition of the Great Vessels, for which there was no correction. She died at 21 days old. This occurred before she had even begun to live. Her name was Sherri Lynn. She had ceased to be except in the memories of our minds. I could not hold, I could not touch her little body again. There would be no midnight feeds, or tears to hush. Our hearts were broken and would never be the same. We attempted to go on. Innocence had been taken from us. A cloud of reality hung over our heads. I was not yet twenty one and my child had died. My arms physically ached to hold my little girl once again. I had carried her inside my body for 9 months and now I had nothing but a few memories and the pain to show she had been here.

We had a third child, Kyle Allen. I never dreamed that lightning could strike twice in the same family, but it did. Without warning, without thought for how we might suffer, it struck once more. Kyle was born at 4 am and by mid morning our world again fell apart. The pediatrician came in to tell us that our son had a very complicated heart defect. I began to scream in denial, hoping it would end this nightmare, but it continued. As though it were some consolation, he explained that he did not think Kyle's defect was as grim as his sisters.

In some ways it did help, but I wanted a perfect heart. He had a 3rd. degree heart block, PDA, a Corrected Transposition of the Great Vessels, and a small VSD. In the years to come we found out he had Ebsteins

Anomaly. He was an active child from the start, always a smile on his face. He was strong willed. This would benefit him no doubt, in the future. He lived a very normal life for the most part getting yearly checkups.

Kyle was 4 and John 8 when I gave birth to Christopher Ryan. He was born without heart problems. He did have the cord around his neck but it posed no problems. Kyle had always wanted me to have another child but I was fearful because of the heart problems. Chris brightened our days, he was so full of life and hope.

While pregnant for Chris, I began to notice unusual behavior in our eldest son, John. He ended up having a cancerous brain tumor, at nine years old. I screamed praying that this was a nightmare and that I would soon awake from it. John was a good kid. Why did it have to be him? He would have done anything possible for you. He was loving, he was brave, he was MY son. After 3 craniotomies, chemo, radiation he died at 15yrs. Old. We were forced to give up another child and the pain of grief was once again upon our home. He was there and then, he was gone. It was devastating without a doubt. There is nothing in life to prepare you for the knife that cuts so deeply to the very depths of your soul, ripping you apart without any anesthesia. It's a pain that is not easily described. Had it not been for my remaining children and most of all, my faith in God, I would not have been able to go on.

I must say, even with those two things to help it was very difficult. I watched Kyle as he faced his own mortality after watching his older brother die. Knowing that his sister had also preceded him in death only added to his fears. He did not let the concern stop him from living.

When Kyle turned seventeen, a pacemaker was inserted due to his heart block. It didn't change his way of life. Kyle was always active in school he was on the yearbook staff, MC for a talent show. He was a basketball manager for our team and loved it. They seemed to love him as well. He did not let life get him down but forged forward living each day as though it were his last.

There were ups and downs and he learned to deal with them by writing. He would write in the form of a poem, his feelings of depression, pain, or love. He did this as therapy. I will say they were done quite well. He went to college and graduated with a degree in psychology and became a social worker.

He had open-heart surgery in 1993 for valve replacement and nearly died on the table. He survived the surgery and went on to marry a beautiful young woman. She loved Kyle despite the medical problems. Their marriage was blessed with a beautiful redheaded boy. We were made grandparents

and we couldn't have been happier. Kyle was extremely pleased to find the love he had waited for all his life. To become a father was just an added blessing.

Two months after marrying, he had a stroke. He told me then “Mom I don’t want to be a moron.” I understood what he meant. He had always prided himself on his ability to think and not on his physical looks, as he was very thin. Now his mind was compromised by the stroke. He had difficulty with short- term memory, and numbers. This would make his job more challenging for him, no doubt. He was more determined than ever to work. He went into heart failure that year and suffered another stroke. He was put on the heart-lung transplant list at Pittsburgh. He died waiting for the transplant. With his death went another part of me.

We had always been very close. I will grieve for the talks we would never have, for the advice he would never give, for the love we shared. I will grieve for the hugs I would no longer receive. Life will never be the same. I try to lean on God, knowing he will comfort me if I allow him to. After all he is the GOD of Comfort. Faith is believing without always having the answers to all my questions. It is trusting in the good times as well as the bad times.

I will attempt to carry on with the same bravery my children exhibited in the trials they experienced. They amazed me with their strength and courage. Reminding myself of their courage has helped me to survive. I sound brave don’t I? There is not a day that I don’t think about my children, missing them with all my being. How I wish, how I pray that it would never have happened. I would have given my own life, if that were possible.

We are a family that has grieved from the onset of our lives together. You are left with the feeling that things are incomplete. The loss of a child can never be compared to the loss of someone who lived a long, full life. A parent should never have to bury a child.

I must say that despite the adversities that we have all had to face, we were truly blessed to have had such wonderful children. They gave us so much to treasure in our hearts. Though that is never the same as being blessed to share life with them as most parents are fortunate to be able to do. Thank God each day for your children, because life is so short.

Chris is now married and he and his wife have twin sons. Jenny & Nick (Kyle's wife and son) remain very close to us and I appreciate their love with all my heart. God knew that we would need them to help us as we grieved for our son. They mean the world to us.

There is so much more to our lives that I cannot express in this short story. I hope one day to be able to write something based on our lives with

our children. My only intent in doing this would be to help others in their journey of grief. I also want to let the world know there is MORE to me than meets the eye.

We must band together to work thru this grief, for it lasts a lifetime. To love someone so deeply, means you also will grieve deeply. Grief is all consuming. There are days you can't function, you can't think. You wonder if you will ever come out of this valley of pain, loss. Be patient with yourself; allow time to grieve for your loss.

If I can say anything to others around grieving parents, don't offer advice, don't say they are better off....just be there supporting us, loving us, never giving up on us. Be patient with us. It is a roller coaster ride; some days we are up, then, the slightest reminder might bring us down again. Mention our children's names, remind us of funnier, happier times, and if we should cry, allow us to shed those tears without judgment.

The children's website is:

<http://www.geocities.com/heartland/stream/2668/index.html>

**Vickie Dunlap's son, Cody Wheeler (8-20-79), died from
Ewings Sarcoma, 8-1-02.**

Vickie has chosen symbols for Cody:

Dear Dinah,

I have given a great deal of thought to a symbol for my son, Cody. How about a paintbrush? He was very artistic. He also loved Scooby-Doo. Let me also take this time to thank you for caring about us and everyone else who shares our experience.

I hope God blesses you for all you have done to help lost and grieving parents.

*Gratefully,
Vickie Dunlap*

Cody's symbols are a paintbrush and Scooby-Doo.

**Teresa Cossey's son, Curren (12-6-81), died
8-29-04.**

You will love this quote from Curren:

Curren James Cossey was a wonderful, loving son, and he passed away August 29, 2004. He loved life to the fullest and experienced it so. He was always kind to others- in fact the chaplain at the hospital he worked at came to me after his death with numerous stories of his kindness. Curren's quote that I have on my desk is "Do something good for someone and then sneak off before they know you did it." That speaks of his life.

Thanks for answering me; it's nice to find someone that has/is going down this lonely path.

I'm still thinking of a symbol and will let you know, Curren loved so many things. Something that symbolizes angel kisses I think, but don't know of a symbol yet. Once, more thank you so much. I don't know of anyone here locally that is in my situation; although I know there must be others, and truly unless you have traveled this road- well It's hard to talk about the pain and anguish that is with you all day long, everyday.

In another note,

Curren was a strong strapping boy 22, did bodybuilding, was going to college- went over to a friends house after going out with some friends; either took some oxycotin or someone put it in his drink; but he went to sleep and just never woke up. I still keep in touch with his girlfriend; we go to lunch etc. She's such a sweet girl; her mother died when she was 13 of anorexia; and Curren was her first and only boyfriend.

*Anyway, Curren's death devastated us both and we've just tried to cope the best way we can. I thank God that I found the **Alive Alone** website; it's been a blessing to me for sure.*

Curren's symbol is angel kisses.

**Mike & Sue Wintz's daughter, Sarah Elizabeth (3-28-86), died
in an auto accident 12-2-03.**

Sue is very active in carrying on Sarah's passions:

Thanks, Dinah for putting Sarah on the website lists! Yes, her symbol would be a squirrel. It's a toss-up with yellow roses, but the squirrel always brings a smile to our faces. I'd love to have Sarah's website in the newsletter, too.

Yes, Sarah was a donor for both transplantation and research. Both were her passions and she had, even at the young age of 17, written out the things that she wanted. One was to have her body donated to research, which we were able to do through the International Institute for the Advancement of Medicine. Once Donor Network was able to retrieve for donation, IIAM retrieved numerous gifts for research. She has touched many, many lives.

I started Our Children's' Quilts as a way of remembering and honoring our children. As you've said, it is so important for us to have our children remembered. I'm part of a group called Angel Reminders that focuses on remembering our children by helping develop websites, signing guestbooks on important dates, giving support, and designing graphic gifts. The Quilts grew out of that. So did my beginning to offer memorial graphics for parents to use on their children's' sites - learning how to make graphics has been good therapy for me. And I remember how difficult it was when I was trying to make Sarah's site to find anything appropriate.

I've been fortunate to carry on Sarah's passions. I work as a professional chaplain in a large academic trauma center. My clinical specialties are with high risk pregnancy, neonatal ICU, pediatrics, trauma, and bereavement. The irony was that after working in these areas for 25 years, the knock came to our door with police detectives standing there to tell us about the accident; one of whom I knew well from the trauma room. I've also worked with Donor Network of Arizona as an approacher for the last 10 years, and suddenly we became a donor family. I took bereavement leave for 7 weeks after Sarah died, but then went back to work. I was a good chaplain before, but my work now has a whole new meaning because I am now on the other side of knowing the deep dark hole one falls into after the death of a child.

I also teach and do consultation nationally in my clinical areas and in the practice of professional chaplaincy. I am very active in the donation world as well, now on the national level - always had been, but now with that added insight of being a donor mom. I'm also active in the state's red light running coalition with a passion to work so that no one else has to live through the loss of a child due to a reckless, unthinking driver. I will always have my moments of intense grief - I miss Sarah with every breath I take and want her back!

You're so right in that it is important for parents to find ways to carry on their child's life and passions. Relearning the world - and relearning our relationship with our child that changes but never ends - is the most difficult task of grief.

*Hugs,
Sue*

Sarah's symbol is a squirrel.

Mary Treadway and Robert Joseph's son, Robert Allen Joseph, II (8-19-71), died in an auto accident 12-14-05.

Mary is reaching out to others:

Dear Dinah,

I feel that I know your son now and all of the children in the book (Rosemary Smith's book, Children of the Dome). I have now introduced another person to your children; she lost her 13-year-old child last year from a "tonsillectomy"! I have worked with elderly low income housing for several years. Why did I never think of losing my child? Heath my other son, eleven months younger than Robbie, is in the Air Force. I always felt concern that with his travel, there was danger. Your Jim was so cute and I love the story on the web page. Now, that this fog has lifted from my head a little more everyday I am going back and reading parts of the book over again. You did a great job to get the road corrected where your Jim had his accident.

Today a gentleman that worked with my husband, Jeff, had an incident with his son. This young man is one year younger than Robbie. This young man was a nice guy, worked his way through college at a print shop, married two years ago and has a great job at a bank. One night he went to another city, became very intoxicated, drove on the wrong side of the interstate, hit two semis and tried to flee from the scene.

I called his father and he was so embarrassed. I ask if his son was okay; is he hurt. The father said his son did not get hurt at all. I told the father that he is very blessed, that he can be angry, but his son can get help. I told him how blessed he was and advised him to support his son but to not

enable him. We talked in length and I truly heard a change in the father's tone after he realized it could be worse.

I felt like I maybe helped him a little. I have also woken up enough to try to comfort Heath.

Mary explains Robbie's death:

Robbie died from having a drunk driving car accident, his ethanol level was.238. Robbie was also seen on the 9th of December for flu like symptoms was given an injection of lidocaine and cough medication which contained DEXTROMETHORPHAN and CHLORPHENIRRAMINE. There were no illegal. Although at this point a drug alcohol and driving killed him. Cause of death: BLUNT FORCE HEAD TRAUMA Due to: MOTOR VEHICLE COLLISION WITH EMBANKMENT. Robbie had been in a sports bar; why they did not "cut him off" or "call for someone to drive him" I do not know. I know this was not a habit of his, he never had a DUI. I have joined MADD. I will not hide the fact that Robbie was drinking, because it will not educate or remind others that it will kill them. Robbie was air lifted from the scene to UK Hospital here in Lexington. Robbie died and was put on a ventilator, with systemic injuries punctured lungs (this is why I could not donate his organs; they were to damaged I was told). Robbie had brain surgery and became pulse-less. Even on a ventilator, his alcohol level by the time my friend, Gary Ginn Fayette County Coroner's Office, obtained his level it was.142 still at the level of intoxication.

I love Robbie and I can blame no one. I would like other's to know that it will kill you or you will kill someone else and go to prison. I have many "whys" but I do not question God. On the phone December 12, 2005, my last conversation with Robbie, he told me he was happier than he had ever been, but was frustrated with his half brothers because they were on drugs. Heath, Robbie's brother, does not even drink. I knew that Robbie did not have alcohol in his home and believe me I stopped by there many times after Shannon died.

Dinah, if he had cancer and died I would not deny it or be ashamed that it would make other people think I was a bad person. I cannot deny or be ashamed that Robbie was selfish when he drank, drove his vehicle and killed himself.

If I deny this I would be a liar and possibly not help someone else. I have to find a reason for Robbie's death. Was he depressed? I miss him so, but he cannot do it over.

I think of your son Jim and how innocent he was just a bad road. However, you fought for him and did a good job. When Robbie was Jim's age he was so funny and happy. I remember his senior year and all that consumed his life was football, basketball and he went to the prom. I have a picture of him going to the prom and the girl he took was at his funeral visitation. Why could he not have liked someone like her, would his life have been different? No, he always had to have someone that was down and out so he could help them. It makes no sense.

Please Pray For Me,

Thank you and God Bless

Please continue to pray for all of us as I will all of you.

Mary Spencer Treadway Robbie's Mom

Mary tells of her contact with another family who has lost a child:

I have been in touch with MADD and will be going to court with one of their advisors on Feb. 10th at 10:00 A.M for the sentencing of Shanna Whalen, the woman who killed Shannon Lee Jones Joseph. I am also getting together with my son Heath this weekend for dinner before he goes home. MADD is sending me information for him as the sibling. Last night when Heath and I talked I told him about The Children of the Dome he was fascinated. Please use my story. I also sent a letter to the editor in Mt. Sterling, Ky. which I would like to mail to you. Perhaps Robbie and Jim have us to now help those poor down and out souls.

I have been meeting other travelers and trying to be busy. I am looking forward to all newsletters. Shanna Whalen was formally sentenced on February 17th 2006. Due to Shannon Josephs Dad working with the commonwealth attorney the sentence was reduced to wreckless homicide! I have talked to Shannon's Dad and I don't understand the lesser charge. However, Shannon's Dad had a slight stroke on January 8th 2005 and I think he is just worn out. Whalen was sentenced to five years and probably will serve 24 months. I have found much support thus far in MADD they are great. Just to let you know I am still here. When I hear the news of a child being taken away from a car accident my thoughts go to you and Rosemary. I hope the family will hear of your work.

Robbie's symbol is a baseball.

Bob & Nancy Long's son, Joseph Beatty (6-25-80), died in an auto accident 5-11-05.

Glad to hear you were thinking of us - I got a call today from the solicitor's office. The court date is the 10th (Feb.). It is the 9 month anniversary of the accident - they offered to change it but I think we want to go ahead and be done with this part.

He (the man who is responsible for Joseph's death) is trying to get a plea bargain so he would end up with a year's probation - community service in the trauma center at Atlanta's public hospital - instead of paying a fine to the county - he will make restitution to me for the price of Joseph's memorial bench. If he is allowed to plead "no contest" his license won't be suspended - otherwise a years suspension. As far as I know he physically has not been able to drive yet. He had significant head injuries too.

My daughter-in-law wrote a letter to the court requesting all charges be dropped. We are going to attend and "present" Joseph to the court. We were told to bring pictures for the judge to see. The driver is sitting there for the judge to see so we have to make Joseph into a "real" person for them. The victim's advocate said to tell stories about him and also tell how this has impacted our family. Where do you begin? I think I am going to try to talk and probably both his brother and sister will too.

My husbands name is Bob - we married when Joseph was 7 and Joseph always considered him his father - he is even listed on the death certificate as his father.

Joseph's symbol would have to be a guitar with a dragonfly on it.

After this court appearance I will send you what I told the court - Joseph's story - and, when I get the picture for the marker I will scan it in and send it.

Joseph was a musician - he played guitar, wrote the songs and sang lead for his band. We played his music at his funeral - it was definitely unique - Rock and Roll music blaring through the funeral home. Joseph would have loved it - 350 in attendance - probably the biggest crowd he ever played to. His past and present band members were the pall bearers (except the drummer who was still in the hospital - he was the driver).

And - right after he died and before I ever encountered TCF - I was at the cemetery and this dragonfly kept buzzing me and was hovering around me and I figured Joseph had sent the dragonfly to keep me company.

I wear a dragonfly pendent on a chain around my neck 24/7 - and a bright green "donate life" bracelet. A woman at our chapter was making picture pins last month and we got 2 made to wear too.

I don't know if you had other children or not - but one of the worst things is it's bad enough I couldn't protect Joseph - if I could just somehow stop the pain my other children are going through I would take it on gladly.

I send out the birthday and angel anniversary cards for our TCF group - volunteered to do it because Joseph was born on my birthday and I didn't think I wanted to get a card for him on my birthday. Now that I have read them and thought about it - it is a very sweet and touching gesture and no card is going to make the day any worse than it already is..

Thanks for thinking of us and please pray for us to get through next Friday with as little pain as possible.

*Nancy Long
Mother of Joseph Beatty*

This was written February 13th

Well - we survived court. They got up first (he and his family) I think they tried to exaggerate his injuries and the judge caught on. We found out he was back in school by June. His mother was boo-hooing the physical therapy he had to have and his father was talking about how horrible it was to get "that call" - they were trying to make the judge view him as a victim too. When our turn came I told the judge I wish we had to worry about physical therapy and when we got "the call" and arrived - we were told he was in a deep coma and they wanted to do surgery and when they came out they told us there was no hope - instead of sitting and watching our son get better - we sat and waited for him to die - and then sat and waited for the transplant team to get in order and then went and made funeral arrangements instead of physical therapy arrangements. The kid claimed he couldn't remember and my husband said there were days he wished he couldn't remember but we weren't that lucky.

Anyway - he was allowed to plead no contest - but - he got a years probation and along with probation fees he has to pay into the Cobb County Victims Fund monthly. He can only drive to school for 6 months and had to turn in his route to the court - if he is caught on ANY other road - he goes to jail. No alcohol either. He had to make restitution to us for the memorial bench and the judge required him to personally apologize to every member

of Joseph's family who was in court and he has to send a written apology too.

Not much - but better than we had hoped for.

We were wearing our picture pins and told the judge about TCF - and how we get new members every month - oh - he also has to take a defensive driving course and do community service at a fire station or somewhere similar where he's around people who deal with these kinds of accidents. I had put together a real nice scrapbook the judge looked through. When the state gave him the accident photos - he knew the intersection - and was very upset because it is such a straight stretch of road (being in the South you know how rare those are). When his lawyer said he didn't see the other vehicle the judge held up a picture and yelled "It was a BIG YELLOW Truck - how could he NOT see it?" I stepped behind my husband - I didn't want to see any pictures - he saw me and didn't hold up any more.

Anyway - we are glad that much is behind us - another step on the journey. Baby steps all but still a step.

I also told the judge that 6 weeks after his death I had to spend my first birthday alone in 25 years. (Joseph was born on my birthday). And - at Thanksgiving how when "everyone" is together - it is even more obvious that we aren't all there and never will be again and at Christmas while Eric's mom was shopping for his gifts - we were trying to find a tree and decorations to put on our sons grave.

After they accepted the judges ruling (so it wouldn't go to trial) and he was going to apologize to us - the judge said I can't handle any more of this - I feel awful and left the courtroom. The kid was crying and rambling and FINALLY said "I hope you can forgive me" and I said we're working on that and we all got up and left.

*Love,
Nancy*

Joseph's symbols are a guitar with a dragonfly on it.

Jerry & Sherry Sharp's daughter, Whitney (6-8-82), died from Lymphocytic Myocarditis, 8-4-99.

They have chosen a symbol for Whitney:

We have talked about a symbol; if we need to choose just one it would be a dolphin. Whitney loved watching them and the water. In her gymnastics and diving she would sometimes pretend to be a dolphin! Don't you just love them and miss them sooooo much? For some reason I am having a very difficult week. Thank you for all you do for us. It is always a bright spot in my day when I hear from you. Take care of yourself.

*Love ya,
Sherry*

Whitney's symbol is a dolphin.

Royce & Tonya Robinson, Sr.'s son, Royce, Jr. (7-15-88), died from being hit in the head by a gang and then had a seizure, 11-8-05.

Tonya tells of Royce's death:

This is what happened to Royce; he went to a school-sponsored skating event and was randomly sought out by some gang members doing an initiation and was attacked. He was hit so hard in the face that he fell to the skating rink floor; went into a seizure and never regained conscious. I have not been contacted by other parents who have gone through something like this (murder). This very word haunts me. I would love to hear from others who can help us get through the trial process.

Thank you so much for the beautiful card and your comforting words. It is just so precious to be able to share my loss with someone who truly knows the pain, emptiness, and sometimes psychotic behaviors we go through. My husband and I now have to get ready to go through the ordeal of a trial, and re-live the events of our son's death all over again (sad). Royce wrote this poem just two weeks before he was killed (such insight). Royce was only 17 years old, but so wise for his years. Royce was born 7/15/1988. His angel date is 11/8/2005. Some days it's all I can do just to get up and other days, well, you know!!! Your son Jim was a very caring and loving young man (so special). Family and friends meant so much to him, like my Royce. I am sure they are looking out for "us" in heaven above (smile). Please keep us in your prayers and I will keep you in mine.

I would love for you to send my email address to other parents like ourselves. This is Royce's poem; it appeared in the Forum Section of The Courier-Journal newspaper:

No Time To Waste

One out of one: That's the ratio of how many of us are eventually going to die. Now if you're anything like I, you may have realized that those are pretty good numbers. That is the reason why when I hear or see people fighting and squabbling over small things, I have to ask myself, "Is it really that serious?" My philosophy on life is fairly simple and can be summed up by two quotes: "Aim for the moon; if you miss, you'll land among the stars," and "Look on the brighter side of things, it's easier to see." Basically, just try to accomplish as much as possible and have fun doing it. I mean, if life isn't lived to the fullest, then what is the point? Now I'm not a Gandhi wanna-be or anything like that, but if you're too busy worrying about what's going on around you, you just might miss what's going on in front of you. Much too often I see people who have made themselves fit into society's image of what they should be. Not that it is always a bad thing, but it makes you wonder if "That person" hadn't been pushed down "That path," which one would he or she have chosen. It's crazy to think about. A lot of my friends and peers often complain about the bad around them; they are so busy complaining about the bad that they wouldn't see the good if it hit them with an iron bat. I tell them all the time that they are missing the fruits because they can't allow themselves to see past the darkness to the light. But most of the time they just laugh it off and say I'm weird--- Maybe I am. So, in ending, all I can say is that if every minute life is not lived to the fullest, then it's just a life of half victories and wasted moments, and I don't think we have any time to waste or anything to lose. I mean, none of us are going to make it out alive anyway. That's just me though. Who am I to say how your life should be lived? I still live at home with my Mom and watch cartoons.

*Much love,
Tanya Robinson*

Rr905@bellsouth.net

**Ron & Maria Faller's son, Christopher (5-7-90) died from
PTLD, 3-24-98.**

Maria made a Valentine page for Christopher:

I know it is early for this page, but I have such a problem with Valentines Day because it was the last holiday that my little boy was awake and alert for to even try to celebrate, so I wanted to share this page for My Little Valentine ---

<http://www.angelfire.com/amiga/ourangelboy/valentine2.html>

Christopher's symbols are Legos, beavers and 2 hearts intertwined.

Skip & Jerry Mudge, have lost a total of three children. Jerry's two children, Wayne (8-19-62) and Leon Jonas, Jr. (2-17-61), were killed in an auto-truck accident, 10-26-90. Skip's son, Jeff (1-14-61), completed suicide, 10-24-87.

The Mudges' local newspaper asked for stories for Valentine's Day on how you met and fell in love. They submitted their story and wanted to share it with us.

We met in a Sunday school class for Senior Singles at Hickory Grove Baptist Church on Feb. 11, 1996. I had only been a widow for just a little over nine weeks. My first husband of 35 years died in Nov. '95. I was just visiting the class with my widowed aunt. I was a member of Ascension Lutheran, where my husband and family went for 35 years. I had lost my only two sons in Oct '90 in a car crash and now my husband. I was not looking for another husband since I was in my 50's and thought it would be too hard to "train" another one that my age.

Skip was the teacher that first Sunday and for some unknown reason he kept looking at me. I later found out that he also lost a wife of 37 years and a son to suicide also. So within a few months, I asked him to join my

board of Footprints Ministry that God gave me after my sons died. We saw that the church did not have a widow's ministry and the Singles pastor asked us to start one. We worked many months on getting it started and unknown to me God was using that to bring us together as a couple.

I still was not interested in marrying again, but I ask God to give me five signs if Skip was the man He wanted me to marry. In my first marriage I never thought about asking God about His choice for my life. This time, I had grown so much closer to God after losing my two sons together and my husband. Skip met all four signs I asked God for.

- 1. He was a Christian*
- 2. He was active in his church, and on fire for the Lord.*
- 3. He had lost a child, and knew the forever pain of losing part of your future. You cannot replace a child*
- 4. He had lost a wife, who was his lifetime partner*
- 5. I wanted someone who could see in me how God could use me mightily one day.*

He met all the requirements that I had asked of God, the last one, was really special. One morning on his way to work, he brought over a package that had my name on it. When I opened it, the package contained a book on how to get your story published into a book. I knew at that moment, he was the one God had hand picked for me.

The next week, I met him at his work and he introduced me to everyone and we went to lunch and that was where he proposed to me. I answered right away, "YES." Knowing that we had God's approval, we wanted to get married right away. Our church, which is a large one, did not have an open date until April 10, so we set that date down but could not wait so we eloped on March 13, 1997 by going to York S. C. We kept it a secret from our family and friends until after the April 10 public wedding at our church.

The secret to a good marriage is to put God first and work together as partners in His Service. Skip completes me, where I am weak, like in being organized, he is strong and where he is weak is speaking from the heart, I am stronger. We have a Christian ministry for bereaved parents in our area called Footprints and we are two of the founders of a community Memorial Garden called Our Children's Memorial Garden located in Frazier Park. Skip did all the grant writing for it while I did the speaking to the board of County Commissioners and the County Park and Recreation Department to get their permission and other organizations to get them involved.

He even can think the same thoughts as I do, it took my first husband years to do that. We are so thankful that God knew the day we were born that He was going to one day bring us together. Years ago, we would not

have been right for each other, but now we have a ONE FLESH relationship in our marriage.

Leon Jr. and Wayne's symbol is a rose. Jeff's symbol is a car.

Guy & Debbie Jackson's son, Michael (2-12-82), was killed in an auto accident, 12-15-02.

Debbie again reminds us of how small the world really is:

Dear Dinah,

Thanks for the sweet note remembering Michael. I can't believe he has been gone from this earth for three years. Guy, my mother and I went to the cemetery and had our own candle light service in memory of Michael. We just lost another young man in our community.

Michael and Michelle knew him well. His mother taught Michael in 4th grade. My heart aches for parents that lose their children. It changes your life forever.

I hope our group gets together again, soon. Thank you for inviting us to Jim's Conference. Each year was so meaningful for us.

My cousin, mother and I stopped by Cumberland College (which is now University of the Cumberlands) to see the stained glass window. It is so beautiful. Can you believe I'm teaching Bill's (Bill Rogers, the artist who made the Window of Hope) granddaughter in Science this year? It's a small world. I'm going to retire after this year. Then I might try to write. I'm definitely going to spend more time with my granddaughter. She's growing so fast. Time marches on.

*Love,
Debbie and Guy*

Michael's symbol is a shining star. You can see Michael's window by clicking here:

<http://www.ucumberland.edu/lamentations/WindowofHopededication.html>

Pat & Patti Ward's child, Tracey (10-12-99), died from cancer, 1-6-99.

Patti sent this note:

Dearest Dinah,

Thank you for all you've done in Jim's memory to strengthen and inspire other parents, such as we.

We don't know where we'd be without people like you.

Gratefully, Tracey's parents,

Pat & Patti Ward

Tracey's symbol is a blue angel.

Carl & Barbara Kinne's son, Joe Frank Banks (10-30-1977), completed suicide, 7-17-01.

Barbara has found a good way for the bereaved to be recognized:

Dinah,

Thinking of you often. Sending you my website card that I told you about. www.joescloud.com (The card reads: Let us share stories of the ones we love. For it is in the stories of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, that their memory lasts forever.) I leave them everywhere I go. Also, the "mourning pin." I ordered it from Darcie Sims at www.griefstore.com (It is a black ribbon pin and the card that comes with it says: Please join us in wearing the black mourning pin as an outward symbol of grief, sympathy and support for all of us who grieve the loss of a loved one, today, yesterday, and forever more. It is a quiet and dignified way to be united in grief, united in support, united in love.) For a bulk order, they are only \$1.00 each. At

Dad's funeral I pinned one on each of my brothers and sisters and Mother and Dad. Everyone knew who was "immediate family" by this symbol. I gave each one in my Compassionate Friends' group meeting one for Christmas. I want you to know that you are the one and the reason that makes me want to spread my compassion.

*Thank you,
I love you,
Your Friend,
Barbara Kinne*

A later note:

I have new news..... I have taken training to be a Hospice Volunteer. I am going to comfort the terminally ill and be with patients in what is called "the eleventh hour" that is the hour that they are dying. My son died alone and that hurts me so bad. I wish for no one to be alone at their time of death. So I will be there to hold their hand and tell them that they mattered. I will also go to camps with bereaved children and teens. I am excited about it. If not for Joe,, where would I be??????

More news.... I nominated my factory, Osram Sylvania Glass for the Compassionate Employer award from T.C.F. and they have accepted them. It has taken a couple months but by next week they will recognize them via me dia nationally. I have only told two people at work. It has been hard to keep it a secret. My work has been very lenient and compassionate to me since Joe Frank died. They make exceptions for me and don't put great demands on me. It is my hope that the next coworker that may have to suffer the loss of a child will be treated with the same or even more compassion that has been shown to me.

Even More News.... I never thought about a sign to represent Joe Frank until coming to Jim's Picnic. I chose the "I Love You" hand sign for the deaf. Well, one of my co-workers has a son that is incarcerated. He talks about suicide and the wish to die. I accidentally saw his art work and knew he had great talent. I had him draw the hand sign, weave a ribbon through it and on the ribbon he wrote "JOE FRANK FOREVER 23," (the hand sign already says the I love you part itself.) It is absolutely beautiful. I took it to a graphics place to have window decals made from it. It cost me a little over one hundred dollars for ten of them. The master dye was 25. After that all my stickers will only be 5.00 each. (That is not much money considering I don't GET to spend money on him for Christmas and birthdays anymore.) I am going to put the decal on the rear window of my car. I am sending some

to Alabama and North Carolina so friends and families can display them on their cars. I am going to even have coozies made from the drawing. I told the boy that drew it how much it meant to me. I told him I want him to design the graphic for my book I am writing. I think he feels proud that he accomplished something so meaningful. I am making sure his signature is on his artwork so he will get noticed. I would like to share this idea with all the other parents. Any sign shop can make the decals from their child's sign.

Isn't it beautiful? The boy used his own hand to draw from. I changed his writing to Old English Script because that was Joe Frank's favorite. Maybe Clint's (the boy) day was a little brighter after doing this remembrance picture for me. While writing to him I also get to talk with him about suicide and how that is NOT the choice he needs to make. It is ironic that my son was also an artist. I told Clint that when I look at Joe Franks drawings I am sadly reminded of the potential that he had.



drawing

Joe Frank's symbol is "I Love You" in sign language.

Debbie Garber's son, Justin Ratliff (6-14-81), died in an auto accident, 12-13-01.

Dear Dinah,

Each year I am so very grateful that you remember us and Justin! We are so blessed to know you, Jim and Young Jim. Your friendship is a treasured gift.

Debbie

Justin's symbol is a deer.

Louise Wallace's daughter, Kim (3-24-83), died from a head-on collision with a delivery truck, 11-26-02.

Lou told me of Keith, her husband, having kidney cancer. In a later correspondence, she told me that he had passed January 12, 2006. I asked her if there was a difference in Kim's death and Keith's. She replied:

Dear Dinah

Thank you so much for the kind notes and prayers during Keith's illness and passing. You are a very special person. Keith's death is a very difficult situation to go thru. Our plans of retiring to Florida (he hated snow) is just another dream unfulfilled, but you know, he had a good, successful life with loving children and a loving wife. So many can not say that. It is a different kind of hurt you feel when it is your spouse. When Kim passed, I was in shock for 3 months, then I totally lost it. Therapy helped and I began to learn to cope. With Keith, he was sick for so long (almost 6 months) and we were told in the beginning that he probably had 1 or 2 months left. I had him for 3 more months than the experts told us. I cherish those extra months and was holding him when he left. He looked at me and smiled then took his last breath. I know he was smiling because he was with Kim. He never got over her death and I know now they are together. I did get to tell him it was okay to leave and say goodbye which is something I didn't get to do with Kim. She was gone before I knew it. He was in so much pain at the end that it would have been selfish to ask him to stay any longer than necessary. I know he is out of pain and is healthy once again and is at peace. Heaven must be glorious having my two angels there.

Love

Lou

Kim's symbols are Scooby-Doo, sunflowers and butterflies.

Judy Denney's son, Jamon Guthrie (1-1-76), died as a passenger in an auto accident, 10-8-93.

I asked Judy what she was doing since she received her Master's Degree in counseling. Her response:

Dinah,

I am a counselor for adolescent boys in troubled situations at a residential facility, (Foothills Academy), here in Albany, Ky. I have a case load of 12 individuals, and I love what I do. God has created this Big world for us to explore and I do not know where He will lead me. I want to come to Williamsburg for a visit, perhaps this year; it is my goal to meet you. I do

not want to put it off too long. You do not realize how I appreciate you. Thank you so very much for your kindness that you have shown throughout these years, you have NEVER forgotten Jamon's birth date or the anniversary date of his death. I will always be grateful to you.

*Thanks,
Judy Denney*

So many parents become counselors, etc. to help others. It is as if they have a mission to carry on for their child after their death.

Jamon's symbols are a deer and red roses.

Gary & Nancy Bilderback's son, Cary (6-20-70), died in an auto accident, 1-13-89.

Nancy expressed her thoughts of Cary's 17th angel date:

Dear Dinah,

Thank you so much for the note you sent on Cary's day. Seventeen years have now gone by; some days it feels like yesterday and then on others, it seems like forever. This year was actually as it was. Friday the 13th of January. It was cold and dreary as it was on that day. We quietly spent the day at home, reflecting on many thoughts of Cary.

Our lives have changed somewhat. Six years ago February, I met a girl at school in the 2nd grade. She had been in 3 foster homes. I taught her step-dad (#4) several years ago. With no plans of anything but helping her with school supplies, I became involved with Allie. Her teacher was one of Cary's best friends.

Three years ago we were given the chance to adopt her and that is what we did. She is an excellent student, and has a beautiful voice (taking voice lessons and 4th year of piano).

Cary (was adopted) will always be with us and I am ready for the day I see him again. For now, we will continue to do for Allie. I know Cary sees her and is pleased that we would help someone else.

I hope all is well with you. We were so fortunate to have sons that were the very best, weren't we?

I retired from teaching school last year after 32 ½ years. I do contract work for the Board of Education.

Gary is still farming. Allie keeps us busy with basketball, piano, voice, and the National Honor Society (she is going to New York in June).

Yes, life presents many choices. I think we did the right option. Cary is well remembered. Allie wants to go to Ole Miss like he did. He lives in my heart every day.

Thank you for your kind thoughts. My heart was warmed by you.
Sincerely,
Nancy & Gary

Cary's symbols are water skis.

Malisa Pitts' daughter, Amy Nycole Darland (6-1-83), died, 6-22-00.

Dear Dinah,

Thank you for all the cards and kindnesses that you've sent me these past 5 1.2 years. You will forever be in my heart...as we keep the memory of our children alive.

Remembering Jim and Amy always

Peace and love,

Malisa Pitts Amy's Mom always

I asked permission to use her note in the newsletter. Her response:

Dearest Dinah,

Of course, you always have my permission to use the words from my heart to put in your newsletters!

As readers, we all have a common bond—of such intensity...the loss of losing a child, and that incredible love that remains.

Take care of yourself!

Malisa Pitts

Amy's Mom always

Amy's symbols are Gemini symbol, heart with wings, and Celtic cross.

Terry & Wilma Caudill's daughter, Mandy (7-25-79), died from complications from gastric bypass, 1-28-05.

Wilma shared Mandy and her angel anniversary:

Dear Dinah,

I got your card and I really appreciated it. I had a hard day on January 28th. That made a year Mandy had been gone. Mandy had a hard life from the time she was born. She was born with both hips, dislocated. She was a Shriner's patient until she was 21 years old. She took her first step at 4 years old. She had asthma and she was in and out of the hospital all her life. She was the sweetest little angel you would ever want to meet.

She always put others before herself. She never held a grudge against anyone no matter what they did to her. She was a Mommy's girl.

Mandy would have asthma attacks and would have to be taken to the ER or hospital. They would give her medication that was called steroids and that caused Amanda's weight problem. She only weighed 4 lbs. 10 ozs. at birth.

Over the years, Mandy's weight got to where it caused other problems. She had high blood pressure, diabetes, among other problems. Her weight got to 270 lbs. and that really depressed her. Her doctor told her if she didn't have this gastric bypass surgery, she would die. So Mandy had them make her an appointment with a doctor in Lexington. He did this surgery on July 24, 2003. Mandy did well until March, 2004, and then she started having back pains. She had a bad liver and they didn't come out and tell Terry and me until the surgery was over. They were so mad that they said that Mandy had lied to them about the diet she was on. She didn't life.

Any way, the doctors told us Mandy's liver would heal on its on so they let it go. Mandy would call them and they would say "Well, come back down and we will run a light down in your stomach to see if it's in tack." They did this 4 times and nothing showed up. She had this surgery on the 24th of July and on August 4th; we took her back to be checked. The doctor took out some of Mandy's stitches and told her to come back in a week.

We got as far as Winchester and we went into a restaurant and the incision burst opened and I have never seen so much blood in my life. Her dad called the doctor back and he said, "I think she will be alright, but if it makes you feel any better, you can bring her back." We did and the doctor was scared at what he saw. Her Dad was as white as a sheet and I was crying. I was never more scared as I was that day.

Instead of admitting her in the hospital, he packed the incision with gauze and sent her back home. The doctor had Home Health to come to our home to teach her sister and me how to dress the wound.

Mandy got really bad on a Monday. She had gone to stay a few days with her friend in Clintonwood, VA. She called for us to come and get her. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Her eyes were sunk back in her head and she was so black around her eyes. I had to almost carry her to the car. She couldn't eat or drink, so her Dad called the doctor and at first he said, "Make her eat a little at a time." Her Dad said, "No, I'm bringing her in." So we took her in on Wednesday, the 26th. Mandy and I had never closed our eyes since Sunday. I made Mandy lay down with me at night and she would lie there looking at me.

On Tuesday night, she told me, "Mom, I feel like I'm dieing," and I said, "Oh, Babe, you are just very sick." When she went in the hospital on the 26th, I had to lead her because she was so weak. The doctor said, "We will give her a couple of bags of fluid and send her home." Well, they did blood work and it came back that her liver and kidneys were shutting down. On Thursday, they took her to ICU. Before they took her, she was eating a little, but after she went to ICU, Mandy went down. They were so mean to Mandy on the 4th floor and in ICU.

Terry and I went back to the ICU twice to see her and they put us out. They told us to ring before we wanted to come in. I asked them that if there was any change to call or come to get me. They never did. They had her on life-support Friday morning. Her doctor came to tell me that Mandy had had a hard night. They lied to Terry and me the whole time, even before Mandy's surgery.

Her doctor came out a second time and told me they were working with her. Then they called "Code Blue" in ICU and I knew that was my beautiful little angel. I saw the doctor coming and I didn't have to be told. Her Dad and I passed out. I couldn't remember anything for at least a week. I still don't remember things, not even her funeral.

Mandy was made fun of in school over her weight. She was called names. She lost 150 lbs, but it wasn't worth it. I would rather have her the way she was before she lost all that weight and have her with me. But I believe my little angel is resting in peace now. I still have days that I can hardly get through. I have faith in the Lord. I turned it over to Him. I still miss my beautiful little angel and I still have days I cry a lot. I was married over 2 years before I had her and lost her so fast. Sometimes, I can't believe she's gone, but I know she's in a better place; she's with Jesus.

God bless you for being a friend when I really need one.

Mandy's symbol is a dolphin.

**Angela Fagan's son, Chris (5-22-84), died in an auto accident,
12-22-01.**

Angela shares another great thought:

Dear Dinah,

Thank you for the love and comfort you so selflessly give to others. A famous quote from a current popular movie is: "If you can't fix it, you have to stand it." Thanks for helping me and countless others to "stand it."

*God bless you,
Angela*

Chris' symbol is half of Angela's soul.

When my time is up, let it be death by chocolate.
Chocolate is to die for. Only it's so sinfully good I'd never get to heaven!



My new email address is: dinah@ucumberland.edu

The website's new address is <http://www.ucumberland.edu/lamentations/>