



Offering support and understanding to bereaved parents of pregnancy and infant loss

## A Day with Love & Loss

by Jeanine S.

As I am rocking Matilda down for a nap, brushing her fine hair with my hand, I hear Simone and my husband, Jared, playing in the yard with our new puppy Otto.

“Thank you for picking me.” I whisper to Matilda just like I do every night to both girls. My four-year old Simone’s response is consistently an impish smile and the words, “You’re welcome Mommy.” Each night, I tell them that we all started in the stars and that babies choose which mommies and daddies they will come to. I tell them I am forever grateful that they and Max chose us.

Matilda readjusts and I am brought back to the moment as I pat her diapered bottom and breathe in her smell.

Then, as if stillness is pierced, a wave of warmth starts in my abdomen slowly moving up my torso. I love this feeling, it’s spontaneous and it’s addicting. There are days that I wait for it, long for it. It is the feeling of being filled, like my body is stuffed full of calm love and appreciation to the point of bursting.

In these moments, I am so thankful for Jared, and Simone and Max and Matilda. Quick scenes of Jared laughing, Simone dancing and Matilda trying to walk fill my mind’s eye.

And then I feel Max’s presence like warmth in the air—always to the upper left. There is a palpable weight to the air as it rests on my face and shoulder—the physical manifestation of Max’s presence which tells me he is close by in a realm I don’t yet understand but one that I feel and I know is real nonetheless. And I feel full and content. My arms wrapped around Matilda as she dozes off, hearing Simone giggle with Daddy in the yard and feeling the warmth and weight of my son on my face. Strangely, I feel lucky.

My mind starts to wander about a couple I met for the first time yesterday. I wondered if I’d left the same impression I would have years ago. Or if there was a vague scent of damage to me. The instant that thought hits me—damage—I remind myself I chose a long time ago not to be that woman. The one who is whispered about as the old lady who lost her son and herself and lived life with empty smiles under a cloud of sadness.

I feel sadness. And I like it sometimes. I welcome the waves of tears and these new overly sensitive reactions I have to news stories of both death and survival. My heart was cracked open when Max died and while it continues to beat, it remains open—open to sadness but also open to love and happiness and appreciation. I never want my heart to heal closed again. I choose to welcome the sad because now I also feel the good with a new intensity. My life’s pendulum swings broader.

I would never have chosen this life road. Still, it is the one I am on. And I’m walking it. And that is where I stop trying to have it all make sense. There is no reconciling why Max died. Or why Matilda came exactly one year and one day later. I love my three children and I am so grateful they chose us.

Matilda’s little body gets heavy in my arms, her mouth still moving as she talks herself to sleep. I decide to rock her a little more. \*

### What is Brief Encounters?

Brief Encounters is a non-profit, non-sectarian support group for parents whose babies have died before, during, or after birth. At informal, mutually supportive meetings and through our monthly newsletter and Web site, bereaved parents and their families share their stories, discuss issues that arise from pregnancy and infant loss, and remember their children. Through reading, talking and listening, we learn what grief is—and how, through understanding and caring, we heal.

## What Can I Say About Living with Loss?

by Jeremy G.

What kills me these days, what really hurts me the most, is the knowing that my daughter Serena will never understand why her brother Cyrus died after 1 week in February 2007. I mean, we've explained it to her; we've given her all the details in kid language so that she can get it, what death is, why we made the decisions we did as his mom and dad, in the interest of the future and well-being of our sad little family, but it doesn't matter, the explaining never satisfies her or me. She asks the same questions now 2 years later as she did then. *Why did Cy die? Why did he have tubes? Where was I?*

And I'm reminded of how deep the pain is now and will always be as we go on living with this knowing that loss is permanent; that the same questions will always resurface when he comes into our minds, when we look at his pictures, when the holidays and anniversaries come and go and the anticipation of them is horrible and the days after are worse. I feel angry when I have to look into Serena's eyes or my wife's and tell them and believe it and lie, it will get better as we heal, it will get easier with time.

It helps my wife and I that we have a community of parents who have lost a child, a support group, and a place to talk about how we are feeling; it feels good to now have another son after Cyrus that is living and beautiful like his sister. His name is Valor. But the new me is still uncomfortable when I'm asked about my kids; the rock is still in my shoe and I still feel like swearing more than I did before. I still wish the people at my work could understand.

I'm learned these days that our loss will affect many lives in different ways as I tell Cyrus's story over and over again. I've learned to value the telling of all these things, to accept the "and" nature of this new space I'm in; I feel sad and happy, hopeful and not, inflamed and numb, used to the awkwardness and tired of its familiarity, sleeplessness and the desire not to rise from bed. Perhaps you, too, have learned to accept this living way, even as you read this. I find it helps me to say my son's name, to let it out in deep breaths when I walk through a park he would have enjoyed, to remind friends kindly when no one else notices the markers of time or events that would have been different were our children here with us, making their sounds, asking their questions, getting to know the love of their family and the importance of remembering.

My baby died and I am living. \*

## Saint Theresa's Prayer

May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be content knowing you are a child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones,

and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

It is there for each and every one of us.



Brief Encounters Leadership Meeting  
Feb. 7, 10 am - 12 pm

If you are interested in becoming part of the leadership of Brief Encounters and would like to do some brainstorming to see if there are other ways we can be there for others as they enter the "dark night," please plan to come to a meeting at the Peace House on Saturday, February 7<sup>th</sup> at 10 am. The meeting will run from 10 am - 12 pm. E-mail [pat@tearsoup.com](mailto:pat@tearsoup.com) or phone me (503) 284-7426 if you can come, or let her know if you are interested, but can't attend that day.

## Resources

### Movies That Bereaved Parents May Choose to Avoid

We have compiled a list of movies that bereaved parents and families may choose to avoid due to potentially upsetting subject matter relating to pregnancy loss or the death of a child. If you have additions to this list, please send them to the editor at [brief\\_encounters\\_news@yahoo.com](mailto:brief_encounters_news@yahoo.com).

1408 (2007)	Joy Luck Club, The (1993)
Accidental Tourist, The (1988)	Jude (1996)
Agnes of God (1985)	Junebug (2005)
AI: Artificial Intelligence (2001)	Juno (2007)
Alien 3 (1992)	Kingdom of Heaven (2005)
Alien 4 (1997)	Knocked Up (2007)
Almost Romeo (2005)	March of the Penguins (2005)
Astronaut's Wife, The (1999)	Matador, The (2006)
Baby Mama (2008)	Message in a Bottle (1999)
Beloved (1998)	Moonlight Mile (2002)
Blood Diamond (2006)	My Girl (1991)
Bridge to Terabithia (2007)	Mystic River (2003)
Butterfly Effect, The (2004)	Pan's Labyrinth (2006)
Candy (2006)	Paradise (1991)
Children of Men (2006)	Pay it Forward (2000)
Cider House Rules, The (1999)	Perfume: The Story of a Murderer (2006)
City Hall (1996)	Quigley Down Under (1990)
Constant Gardener, The (2005)	Ray (2004)
Crash (2005)	Reservation Road (2007)
Cry in the Dark, A (1988)	Saving Private Ryan (1998)
Dark, The (2005)	Sex and Lucia (2002)
Deep End of the Ocean (1999)	She's Having a Baby (1988)
Devil's Advocate, The (1997)	Sixth Sense, The (1999)
Door in the Floor, The (2004)	Sleepy Hollow (1999)
Eastern Promises (2007)	Slingblade (1996)
Elizabeth (1998)	Smilla's Sense of Snow (1997)
Frida (2002)	Sophie's Choice (1982)
Godsend (2004)	Sweet Hereafter, The (1997)
Gone Baby Gone (2007)	Syriana (2005)
Hand That Rocks the Cradle (1992)	Tess (1980)
High Fidelity (2000)	Then She Found Me (2008)
Hours, The (2002)	Walk the Line (2005)
I. Robot (2004)	Whale Rider (2003)
Immediate Family (1989)	What Dreams May Come (1998)
Immortal Beloved (1994)	Waitress (2007)
In the Bedroom (2001)	World According to Garp, The (1982)
Ironweed (1987)	

### Books That Bereaved Parents May Choose to Avoid

Our movie list has been well-received and we hope it is useful to you. We'd like to start a list of books that may include content and/or storylines that bereaved parents may find disturbing. Please send book titles along with author and year of publication to the editor at: [brief\\_encounters\\_news@yahoo.com](mailto:brief_encounters_news@yahoo.com).

### Counselor Referrals

Not all counselors are familiar with the issues that parents face after the death of their baby. If you feel like you would like to talk with a counselor, listed below are the names of persons Brief Encounters recommends:

- \* Gaby Donnell LCSW, (503) 287-2295 (Corrected phone number.)
- \* Britta Dinsmore, LCSW, (503) 913-4791
- \* Audrianna J. Gurr, MS, NCC, (503) 475-4005 or [gurrcounseling.com](http://gurrcounseling.com)
- \* Jillian Romm RN, LCSW, (503) 226-6002
- \* Brynna Sibilla, LCSW, (503) 289-1101
- \* Jennifer Stock, (503) 242-1558
- \* The Dougy Center (for siblings), (503) 775-5683

### Internet Resources

**Postpartum Support International ([postpartum.net](http://postpartum.net))** provides information and support for women coping with postpartum mood disorders.\*

**TABS ([tabs.org.nz](http://tabs.org.nz))** provides information and support for women recovering from a traumatic childbirth and from birth stress.\*

**The Birth Trauma Association ([birthtraumaassociation.org.uk](http://birthtraumaassociation.org.uk))** provides support and information for women and their families as they recover from a traumatic birth.\*

**Centering Corporation ([centeringcorp.com](http://centeringcorp.com))**, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing education and resources for the bereaved, including bereaved parents and siblings.

**Hygeia ([hygeia.org](http://hygeia.org))** enables the exchange of stories and thoughts on message boards and in a private, international e-mail community between those who have experienced a pregnancy loss, intrauterine death, stillborn infant, or other perinatal, neonatal and early childhood loss.

**The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Alliance ([ptsdalliance.org](http://ptsdalliance.org))** provides educational resources to individuals diagnosed with PTSD and their loved ones, those at risk for developing PTSD, and medical, healthcare and other frontline professionals.

\*Excerpted from Good Mojab, C. *When Birth is Traumatic*. Hillsboro, OR: LifeCircle Counseling and Consulting, LLC. URL: [lifecirclecc.com/files/When\\_Birth\\_Is\\_Traumatic.pdf](http://lifecirclecc.com/files/When_Birth_Is_Traumatic.pdf)

**Resources for Family and Friends of the Bereaved**  
**When Your Friend's Child Dies: A Guide to Being a Thoughtful and Caring Friend**, a book by Julane Grant

**Ten Ways to Help Grieving Families Survive the Holidays After the Death of a Child ([health-informant.com/article131.html](http://health-informant.com/article131.html))** offers concrete suggestions for how our family and friends can help us get through the holidays.

**Advice for the Holidays for Family and Friends of Parents Who Have Lost a Baby ([handonline.org/family/famholi.html](http://handonline.org/family/famholi.html))** offers suggestions of what to do—and what not to do—to offer support during the holidays or at any time.

## Telephone & E-mail Support

Need to talk and don't want to wait until the next group meeting? Here are some friends who are willing to talk—or just listen. If you are interested in being listed as a support person, or wish to have your name removed, please contact the editor.

### Telephone Support

**Gayle** (503-661-0764) had a son who was stillborn after a ruptured cord during labor at 34 weeks, lost a son at 17 weeks, and experienced four early pregnancy losses. She has two living children, a son ('96) and a daughter ('01).

**Ken** (503-761-3816, 503-516-2761 cell) had a son, Mitchell, who died from heart failure ('00). He has two living sons, Mason and Marshall.

**Charlotte** (503-513-5448) had a son who died at one month of a heart defect. She has also experienced four early pregnancy losses, infertility issues, and a successful subsequent pregnancy.

### E-mail Support

Please put "Brief Encounters" in the message line of your e-mail so that our volunteers will be sure to read your message.

**Nancy** (bump7911@comcast.net or 503-666-1998) had a miscarriage at 11.5 weeks (8/99) and delivered a full term son, Nicolas (9/13/00), who died 2 months and 8 days later (11/21/00). Nicolas had severe brain damage due to complications during labor. Nancy and Don have one living son, Alex (1994).

**Karin** (kersgrim@msn.com) lost her son, stillborn at full term without explanation (9/94), experienced two miscarriages, and a pregnancy interruption of a son, at 23 weeks, who had Trisomy 18. Karen has two living children.

**Shannon** (adamshannon@n-venture.com) lost her daughter, Heather Renee, stillborn due to an intrauterine infection and premature birth. She has experienced a successful subsequent pregnancy.

**Terri** (ststrauss@comcast.net) lost her son, stillborn without explanation at 36 weeks. She has three living children (Delanie 3/99 and Genna & Cara 5/02).

**Joanie** (miniquilter79@hotmail.com) had a daughter, Melissa Catherine, who died of SIDS at 6 weeks of age. She has 3 living children.

**Maura** (cioeta@comcast.net) lost her son, stillborn at full term without explanation (6/96). She has two healthy children (Anthony, 1/98) and (Annamarie, 4/01). Due to serious high blood pressure at the end of her last pregnancy, which caused a stressful delivery, she plans to have no more children.

**Carol** (carolyork@verizon.net) experienced a miscarriage (7/96) and the loss of a son, stillborn due to a cord accident (3/00). She has two living children (9/97 and 6/01).

**Shannon** (djzela@yahoo.com) lost her daughter, Dorothy Raine (6/1/07), full term (39 weeks) during labor due to an umbilical cord incident. She and her husband have a son, born 11/08.

## Brief Encounters Meetings

You are welcome and encouraged to attend our support group meetings.

**Location:** Except where noted, all support groups meet at the Peace House, 2116 NE 18th Ave. Portland. For more information or directions, please call (503) 699-8006.

### Parents of Infant Loss and Pregnancy Loss, Including Early Pregnancy Loss

*Out of consideration for other bereaved parents, we ask that children not attend these meetings. Thank you.*

Meets the second Monday of each month, 7:00 pm

**If you are interested in attending the Beaverton loss meeting, call Rachel at (503) 287-2628. Meets as needed.** (Beaverton: King's Court Apartments, Recreation Room, 16300 SW Estuary Dr., off Walker Rd. and 158th.)

### Parents of Pregnancy Interruption Due to Medical Reasons

*Out of consideration for other bereaved parents, we ask that children not attend these meetings. Thank you.*

Meets the fourth Thursday of each month, 7:00 pm

### Parents of Subsequent Pregnancies and Adoptions & Parents Trying to Conceive

Meets the fourth Monday of each month, 7:00 pm

### Fertility & Adoption Support Group

Meets the first Tuesday of each month, 7:00 pm

### Brief Encounters

Metanoia Peace Community  
United Methodist Church  
2116 NE 18th Ave.  
Portland, OR 97212

**Message Line: Support, Questions**  
(503) 699-8006

**Web site**  
briefencounters.org

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