



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

## Sibling Grief (an excerpt)

by Marggie Gerner

Home may become a pain-filled place. Our parents have been hurt badly. They aren't the same parents we knew before the death. The biggest mistake I made in my grief was trying to "fix" my parents pain. I wished for and acted in ways that I hoped would change them back to happy, whole people again. I know now that it was not my responsibility to do this. In fact, I couldn't do it, now matter how "good" I was, or how much I tried to make our home pleasant, they were still sad. The bad thing was, by trying to make them better, I stuffed a lot of my own sadness, fears and worries inside. This added even more problems to my grief. In some ways, it felt better to worry about them instead of myself, but as I got older, those old painful memories wouldn't stay covered up anymore. It is like a splinter that gets covered up with skin and feels better until the infection sets in, and then it hurts so much more when it comes out. We have to take care of ourselves and trust our parents to take care of themselves.

For years I rarely cried about my brother. I always thought that was strange. It was years before I was able to let the tears flow and then I cried for him and for me. I cried for Arthur because he was dead and I missed him; I cried for myself because of all I had missed. I missed feeling happiness in myself and my family. I missed feeling safe and secure. I missed the attention my parents were no longer able to give me. I missed the years of carefree childhood that were ripped away. Those are all losses that sibling grieve for besides the loss of a brother or sister. Yes, it hurts! Cry about it. Laugh about it. Talk about it. Write about it. Pray about it. Just don't try to bury it, that won't work in the long run. And you know, I can do all those things today and it doesn't hurt nearly as much as it did when I started.

I now realize that my feelings about my brother's death were not the same as my parent's feelings. I used to think that I didn't love my brother because I wasn't as sad as long as they were. They hated the holidays, but I wanted the fun of the

holidays. They couldn't be happy, but I could, especially after the first terrible set of holidays. Our parents have the right to feel sad because that is how they are feeling. We have the right to be happy if that's how we are feeling. Each one of my brothers and sisters had their own feelings. Each was sad, happy, and regretful in their own way and time. We grieved with our separate timetables. Sometimes we shared feelings, and many times they were different. None of us, however bad we felt, came close to having the depth of the pain that our parents did. I didn't understand this then as I do now. This is an important thing to know so that we don't feel guilty about getting on with our lives.

I remember that I used to think about things I did or didn't do with my brother before he died. I felt guilty because I didn't play with him the last time he wanted me to. Of course, I didn't know at the time that he was going to die. I remember times when I got mad and yelled at him for no reason. I felt guilty about that too. I know now that this is just a normal part of a brother-sister relationship. I can now realize that what I did or didn't do had nothing to do with his death. We need to be careful not to take on guilt. One of my brothers had always felt guilty because Arthur was riding his bicycle when he was killed. My brother did not kill Arthur. The woman who was driving the car did. It is important not to blame ourselves. Even if we did have a part in the death (or think we did), we need to forgive ourselves as we certainly didn't deliberately do it. My brother's death definitely changed my life. It brought pain and unhappiness, but it also brought an awareness of other people's pain and the ability to understand and help others. I hope that you can take something from my experience and use it in your grief and maybe you can pass it on someday, too. \*

*Excerpted from Ms. Gerner's article, "Sibling Grief," from A Journey Together, the newsletter of Bereaved Parents of the USA, [bereavedparentsusa.org](http://bereavedparentsusa.org).*

### 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.

# Jenni's Story

by Jenni R.

It was 21 years ago and I was 14 years old when my mother lost our brother Daniel at 7 to 8 months gestation due to a placental abruption. I am the oldest and the only girl in my family. At the time, my brothers were 12 and 7 years old. I can remember being embarrassed that my mom was even pregnant. When I think of that night I can still hear my mother crying out to my father from the bathroom when she started hemorrhaging. I remember my father taking her to the hospital in the middle of the night and hearing my mom sobbing about the baby. I can still picture myself sitting on the couch, trembling, staring out the front window at the darkness, wondering when they would be back. I knew in my heart that things were not going to be good. My father ended up calling me later saying that mom was doing okay and one of my aunts would be coming over to stay with us until he was home. Later that morning my father came home to get some sleep and a shower. I can still see him walking up the stairs saying that the baby had died and mom was still sick. I could tell he had actually had been crying. Seeing my father that way scared me; growing up, I had never seen him show that much emotion from him. We never were able to go see our mother in the hospital; we were told that children were not allowed at the hospital.

I think it was from that moment on when I stepped into a mother-type role. I needed to keep everything moving smoothly, not wanting anything to upset the house and, therefore, my parents. My mother had hemorrhaged quite a bit and had some complications. She was in the hospital for about a week. During that time, I felt it was up to me to try to keep the house and attempt to keep my brothers in line. When mom came home, I felt more of a need to try to make everything "just right." All I knew was how sad my mother was and did not want anything else to make her sad. I can remember hearing her cry in the shower. I can also remember finding things around the house that were for the baby and quickly hiding them. I did not want my mother to find them and be sad. Being 14, I could not understand or comprehend what she was feeling; Daniel was never real to me. I never saw him, held him or touched him. I did once see a card with his tiny footprints on it, but I never comprehended what it meant to my mother. Those footprints were of a small baby. All I knew was that anything about the baby made her cry and I did not want to see her cry.

Thinking back about that time, I do not remember my parents or anyone ever sitting us kids down and actually explaining what had happened and what was going on with my mom and dad. Explaining to us why they were so upset and emotional. I do not think any of us kids even thought about bringing up the subject. Until then, the only other issue of death we had faced was when my grandfather had died from cancer a few years before.. I can look back at that time and can now see how Daniel's death changed my relationships with my brothers. Being the oldest, and a girl, I felt like I was forced into a mother type role for my brothers, which was my way of dealing with the emotions I was feeling towards my mother at that time. To them I became the bossy big sister, not someone they could have fun with or confide in. I felt I had to grow up and my brothers did not. Sadly, that is still the type of relationship I have with my brothers in adulthood now.

Two years later, my mother had another child, another brother. Now that I am older and a mother of three myself, I think back on how sad it was that I never felt like I could ever talk about my emotions of that time with my mother. Today I feel that we have a very open and honest relationship. I now work in the medical field and I have always been up front and open to my children about death and grieving. I hope that I have instilled in them not to be afraid to show their emotions and to ask questions when they need to. \*

# To My Baby Sister, Audrie

by Jennifer R.

If I seem distant, it is because I am thinking about you and  
If I seem lost, it is because I am looking for a sign from you.

If I am smiling, it is because I can hear you and  
If I am crying, it is because I miss you.

If I look sad, it is because I wish I could hold you and  
If I look happy, it is because I can feel the presence of you.

If I seem quiet, it is because I am listening for you and  
If I seem mad, it is because I still don't understand why we lost you.

I had so much to tell you. Can you hear me now?  
I had so much to teach you. But I think you taught me more.

I wanted to pass you the title of daddy's little girl.  
I wanted to be the big sister you looked up to, be your mentor.

I will never forget you Audrie Claire, I will carry the memory of you  
always. I will love you forever.

-your big sister, nenner

*Written by Jennifer R. in honor of Audrie Claire R., February 26, 2009  
- February 27, 2009*

## Resources

### Support for Children

**Stepping Stones** is a grief resource for children and their families at The Bereavement Center at Memorial Health Center, 100 E. 33rd St., Ste. 202., Vancouver, WA. Families attend an intake session and are assigned to a group. For more information, call (360) 696-5100.

**The Dougy Center for Grieving Children** provides families in Portland and the surrounding region loving support in a safe place where children, teens and their families grieving a death can share their experience as they move through their healing process. For more information, call (503) 775-5683 or visit dougy.org.

### Books

**Someone Came Before You**, by Pat Schwiebert. Illustrated by Taylor Bills (Order through Grief Watch, griefwatch.com)

Now there is a book for the child who comes after the one who died. It explains in a gentle way the parents' desire for a child and the sadness that comes over them when that baby dies. It then shares how the parents, with the help of the baby, get to the point of wanting another child to come into their lives.

**Sibling Grief: Healing After the Death of a Sister or Brother** by P. Gill White, PhD, director of The Sibling Connection (siblingconnection.net)

**The Empty Room: Understanding Sibling Loss** by Elizabeth DeVita-Raeburn

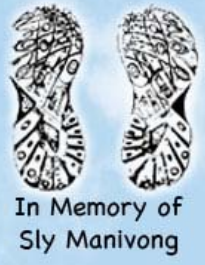
**We Were Gonna Have a Baby, But We Had An Angel Instead** by Pat Schwiebert. Illustrated by Taylor Bills (Order through Grief Watch, griefwatch.com)

# NOAH'S QUEST

## 5k/10k Walk & Run



For everyone who has lost a child  
or the hope of a child and those who care



### Saturday, June 27, 2009

Sandy High School Track - 17100 SE Bluff Rd, Sandy, OR  
Registration begins at 8:00am - Opening Ceremony at 8:45am

Registration Fees  
\$25 for all events by Friday, June 26  
\$35 on race day  
Ages 6 & under are FREE



### The 32nd Annual Compassionate Friends Conference

August 7 - 9, 2009 at the DoubleTree  
Lloyd Center, Portland  
*featuring A Walk to Remember on  
Sunday, August 9 at 8 am*



Pat Schwiebert RN will be speaking at three sessions: Making Tear Soup, Infant Loss Panel, and How to Parent a Dead Baby While Making Decisions About the Future. There are nearly 100 workshop sessions for parents, grandparents, and siblings. Volunteer with BE to help at the conference and BE will pay \$25 of your registration. If you would like to volunteer a few hours prior to or during the conference, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator Carolyn Harrington at (503) 307-8450 or [linerharrington@yahoo.com](mailto:linerharrington@yahoo.com). The early registration deadline is Friday, June 26 (\$75 early, \$100 after 6/26). Siblings are \$30 early, \$50 after 6/26. To register, or for more information, visit [compassionatefriends.org](http://compassionatefriends.org). You do not have to sign up for the conference to register for the walk. Go to [compassionatefriends.org](http://compassionatefriends.org) to sign up.

## Support Between Meetings

Do you need to talk but don't want to wait until the next group meeting? Here are some friends who are willing to talk—or just listen. You may be looking to connect with someone who has experienced similar circumstances in his or her loss(es.) These volunteers welcome your contact by phone or e-mail. If by e-mail, please put "Brief Encounters" in the message line of your e-mail so that our volunteers will be sure to read your message. If you are interested in being listed as a support person, or wish to have your name removed, please contact the editor.

**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** (adamshannon75@comcast.net) lost her daughter, Heather Renee, stillborn due to an intrauterine infection and premature birth. She has experienced a successful subsequent pregnancy.

**Rachel** (503-287-2628) has had 3 early miscarriages and lost twins at 21.5 weeks due to premature labor in January 2004. She has 2 living children.

**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.

**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).

**Sarah** (scellwood@yahoo.com) lost her daughter, Audrey, stillborn at 38.5 weeks in January 2008 due to an umbilical cord incident. She has one living daughter.

**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.

**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.

**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

Our support group meetings are a safe place to talk about your child, your loss and your grief. You are welcome to share, or just listen. A facilitator guides the meeting. For more information or directions, please call (503) 699-8006.

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

*We ask that children not attend these meetings. Thank you.*

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

**Portland:** Peace House, 2116 NE 18th Ave.

### New Beaverton Meeting!

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

**Beaverton:** King's Court Apartments, Recreation Room, 16300 SW Estuary Dr., off Walker Rd. and 158th.

### Parents of Pregnancy Interruption Due to Medical Reasons

*We ask that children not attend these meetings. Thank you.*

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

**Portland:** Peace House, 2116 NE 18th Ave.

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

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

**Portland:** Peace House, 2116 NE 18th Ave.

### Fertility & Adoption Support Group

*We ask that children not attend these meetings. Thank you.*

This group is exclusively for women who are trying to conceive their first, second or more child. Women who have not experienced a loss are also welcome. This group offers a friendly and relaxed atmosphere where you can have a sense of not being alone and receive encouragement, have a chance to express what the experience is like, share what we have learned about fertility and ourselves, and receive positive support. RSVP to Anne at (503) 570-3498 or [annehend@aol.com](mailto:annehend@aol.com), or Carol at (503) 280-0238 or [carol@riverhealing.com](mailto:carol@riverhealing.com).

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

**Portland:** Peace House, 2116 NE 18th Ave.

### Brief Encounters

Metanoia Peace Community

United Methodist Church

2116 NE 18th Ave.

Portland, OR 97212

**Message Line: Support, Questions**

(503) 699-8006 (Spanish line: 503-419-6299)

**Web site**

[briefencounters.org](http://briefencounters.org)

**Mailing List: Add or Drop, or Address Changes**

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