



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

## Creativity and Healing

by Kristen Larsen

Chances are if you are reading this article you or someone you know has experienced a baby's death, pregnancy loss and/or infertility. Losing an infant. A miscarriage. Struggling to conceive a child. These can be the most devastating experiences of a person's life, redefining their entire existence, yet they are rarely talked about in a public forum. One can go to a support group or grieve in private, yet creativity can also be a powerful way to explore emotions of grief and loss; sharing this process can be a tremendous source of healing.

Many individuals throughout time have used creative expression to document and honor important life events including loss and grief. Words are composed, written or spoken, rituals performed, songs are sung, and imagery created. For some, creating after loss is an important part of the grieving process. The creative work may serve as a memorial, a release of the powerful emotions, or a search for meaning and acceptance.

For me, after three miscarriages in one year, the last in August 2011, I found myself struggling to express all the emotions that took over my life. Though my first miscarriage occurred in July of 2010, for me the number three was a medical and emotional turning point in my life. I found myself grieving all the losses at the same time and feeling extremely isolated. Though it wasn't easy, as an art therapist, I knew I needed to find creative ways to provide an outlet for the primitive emotions I was feeling. I have always used art as a way to cope with tragedy and trauma in my life, and now was the time to fully embrace the reality that I had lost three pregnancies. Through my art process, I wanted to tell my story of loss and grief.

After making art feverishly for a few weeks, I was at a crossroads as I looked at my creations and wondered if anyone would ever want to see them. They were painful and

hard for some to take, but they were honest and essential to my healing process; they were important for me to share. Thus I came up with the idea to host an art show, "Bearing Witness: Healing Pregnancy Loss and Infertility Through the Arts," an exhibit featuring writing, visual art and music.

By having an open collaboration in a public setting, the hope is to create a dialogue between the ones who have suffered and the ones who may never fully understand. Allowing others to bear witness and honor the creativity that comes with loss can build a stronger community and create a deeper understanding of this human experience.

One mustn't be an "artist" to submit work to this exhibit. The goal of the exhibit is to allow the creativity of grief to be shared, not critiqued. If you have written a story, poetry or a eulogy, play music, or create visual art about infant loss, pregnancy loss, and/or infertility, please consider submitting a piece.

### **Bearing Witness: Healing Pregnancy Loss and Infertility Through the Arts**

Each person who experiences loss has a story to tell, and some tell their tale and express their emotions using creativity. Through this collaborative art show, individuals who have experienced a loss, including those who are grieving the loss of an infant or who have struggled with infertility, will allow others to bear witness to their experience and expression. The mission of the show is to help individuals and their communities connect through shared experiences, create a deeper understanding, honor creative expression and bear witness to each individual's story.

**When: May 11, 12, 2012**

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

For more information or to submit a piece visit:

<http://theartofpregnancyloss.blogspot.com/>

### **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.

## Ten Years Without Him

by Pat Schwiebert

What is it like to be ten years without him, she asked?  
Is it like it was the first month and second month out  
When I could barely breathe?  
No, not like that...or rarely.  
Is it like learning to live without a limb?  
At first yes, but now he's grown to be a part of me.  
Will I always hate pregnant women?  
Only for a while...or could be a long while.  
Have I lost my old friends forever?  
No, at some point you'll let them back into the universe.  
Will I always be this angry?  
No, at some point your anger becomes gratitude.  
Do you still look back and cry?  
Yes. And I also look back and smile as I remember his life  
within me.  
Do you still think life is unfair?  
I know it's unfair, but I don't worry so much about that  
anymore.  
What can you do for someone as lost as me?  
I'll cry with you and remind you that it will get better.

## New Vancouver Support Group Seeking Volunteers

If you are interested in helping start a support group in Vancouver, please contact Viktoria Szupiany at rhu-barbartart@yahoo.com or (503) 750-6197.

## ¿Hablas español? Spanish-speaking Support Person Needed

If you speak Spanish and would like to help with the Spanish language phone line, please call Pat at (503) 706-6583 or email her at pat@tearsoup.com.



*Joseph Phoenix Memorial Concert*

## Lincoln & Enemies Crockett with special guest Chris Kokesh



*A Benefit for* **Grief Watch**  
and **The Dougy Center**

**Saturday, February 18**  
**The Old Church** 7 pm, Tickets \$15 at the door  
1422 SW 11th Ave, Portland, OR or at **Brown Paper Tickets.com**

**Doors open at 6pm, show from 7-9:30pm**

To purchase tickets:

<http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/219801>

## Benefit Concert for Grief Watch and the Dougy Center

In February 2011, local songwriter and performer Lincoln Crockett ([www.lincolncrockett.com](http://www.lincolncrockett.com)) and his wife Alicia lost their baby, Joseph Phoenix, shortly after childbirth. As they and their four year old son grieved they were buoyed by friends and family who introduced them to two priceless resources: Grief Watch ([www.griefwatch.com](http://www.griefwatch.com)), a resource for dealing with loss, and The Dougy Center ([www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)), supporting grieving children and families. These organizations not only give support to grieving families and children right here in Portland but from all over the country. Both groups are filled with information, knowledge and experience on how to grieve, how to heal, how to live again after the kinds of losses and tragedies people fear most.

All proceeds from the show will go to benefit these two fantastic organizations.

The show will be headlined by Lincoln Crockett & Enemies, a fusion of Lincoln's acoustic and electric roots all in one vibrant band. Award winning singer/songwriter Chris Kokesh and Lincoln Crockett's popular and dynamic duo will be opening the night. These two don't get together very often so don't miss your chance to witness the magic!

# Resources

## Newsletter Format Change: Movie and Book Lists

The Steering Committee recently made the recommendation to make **Movies That Bereaved Parents May Choose to Avoid** and **Books That Bereaved Parents May Choose to Avoid** website-only lists, opening up space in the newsletter for other things. I'm excited about being able to share more of your submissions and other information here in the print newsletter, and I welcome your comments and suggestions.

The lists of books and movies bereaved parents may choose to avoid are continuously being updated, thanks to your input. If you know of a book or movie containing potentially upsetting material relating to pregnancy loss or the death of a child, or which includes content bereaved parents may find disturbing, please send the title (and year of publication and author if a book) to the editor at: [brief\\_encounters\\_news@yahoo.com](mailto:brief_encounters_news@yahoo.com).

## Brief Encounters Online

### Website

The Brief Encounters website [briefencounters.org](http://briefencounters.org) is a great resource, including past newsletter issues, upcoming events and announcements, helpful links, numerous resources, support meetings, etc. If you haven't visited the site in a while, you might want to check it out. It's very easy to get around, and you can even subscribe to get email notifications of new posts.

Twitter 

[@briefencount](https://twitter.com/briefencount) ([twitter.com/briefencount](https://twitter.com/briefencount)) is the Twitter handle to follow for news and helpful links and information about pregnancy loss, infant death, and grief resources.

Facebook 

**Brief Encounters Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support** is the name of our brand new private/closed Facebook group. It's a little hard to find, but if you search the entire group name from within Facebook, you'll get there. Because it is private, the group requires approval to join, and posts are hidden from anyone who is not a group member.

Thank you very much to the Brief Encounters volunteers who are managing these online outreach projects: Troy Peterson, Raina Dey and Rachel Murfitt.

## Counselor Referrals

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

- \* Paula Acker, LCSW, (503) 940-5777
- \* Gaby Donnell, LCSW, (503) 287-2295
- \* Britta Dinsmore, LCSW (503) 913-4791
- \* Audrianna J. Gurr, MS, NCC, (503) 475-4005
- \* Jillian Romm RN, LCSW (503) 226-6002
- \* Brynna Sibilla, LCSW (503) 280-1101
- \* Jennifer Stock (503) 242-1558
- \* The Dougy Center (for bereaved siblings) (503) 775-5683

## Remembrance Jewelry

**Carla's Angels** ([carlasangels.com](http://carlasangels.com)) creates customized angel pins for bereaved parents.

**Elena's Inspiration: The Shining Light Fund** ([shininglightfund.org](http://shininglightfund.org)), provides customized birthstone Mother's bracelets, free of charge, to moms who have suffered the loss of a child through miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death.

**Miscarriage and Infant Loss Jewelry** ([labelledame.com](http://labelledame.com)). Charms, bracelets and other jewelry to memorialize babies lost at any stage of pregnancy, as well as support and sympathy cards.

**My Forever Child** ([myforeverchild.com](http://myforeverchild.com)) creates unique acknowledgement and memorial keepsakes, remembrance jewelry and sympathy gifts to comfort those touched by the loss of a child.

## Books

Many of these books are available through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and/or Brief Encounters:

- \* *After The Death of A Child: Living with Loss Through the Years* by Ann K. Finkbeiner
- \* *The Bereaved Parent* by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff
- \* *Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby* by Deborah L. Davis
- \* *Help, Comfort and Hope After Losing Your Baby in Pregnancy or the First Year* by Hannah Lothrop
- \* *Our Stories of Miscarriage: Healing with Words* edited by Rachel Faldet and Karen Fitton
- \* *Strong and Tender* by Pat Schwiebert (for fathers)
- \* *Tear Soup* by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen
- \* *Trying Again: A Guide to Pregnancy After Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Loss* by Ann Douglas, et al
- \* *We Were Gonna Have a Baby, But We Had an Angel Instead* by Pat Schwiebert (for children)
- \* *When the Bough Breaks: Forever After the Death of a Son or Daughter* by Judith R. Bernstein

## 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. 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).

**Dominique** (503-281-6970 or ddallmayr@yahoo.com) adopted a son after a full term stillbirth.

**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@q.com) 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.

**Elizabeth** (503-648-1458 or odekirk\_hash@yahoo.com) lost a child at 6.5 months gestation after trying to conceive for 7 years and using IVF. She has since adopted a girl.

**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 Catharine, 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@frontier.com) 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.

#### \*Westside Meeting!\*

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

*(Starting in March meetings will be fourth Thursdays.)*

**Beaverton:** Fire Station #60, 8585 NW Johnson St.

E-mail Caroline (cfalcone@mail.com) or Daniele (daniele@dignlife.com) with questions.

### 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., babies welcome

### 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. Questions? Contact Delcie (delcie@delcieadams.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: 503-972-3376)

**Web site**

www.briefencounters.org

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

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