



Helping Hands

Spring 2012

Back to the Light

By Chanel Freeman Blackwell
HAND of San Francisco

I was enduring a cold and windy evening while waiting at a playground before walking to the building to start my healing process. I walked down the hallway looking for the room, thinking that maybe I should turn back and handle this sorrow alone. I told myself, "I am a strong woman and can handle this alone," knowing deep down that I couldn't. I stepped into a conference room where a woman greeted me with a warm, professional smile. It was hard for me to hold eye contact. I took a seat in the back, near the door, so I could leave early if I needed. This first HAND meeting would be the beginning of my healing process.

I have wanted children since I was 26 years old. It took many years of self-searching, therapy, traveling, dating and learning to finally settle down with my soul mate. In 2006 when I was 38, we had a beautiful son. I yearned for one more in another two years, but at that time my husband worried about finances. To him, the cost of living in San Francisco justified having a family with only one child. To me, money did not matter. The child would have what he or she needs. But I took the contraceptive pill and waited patiently and hoped my husband would feel comfortable enough to have a second child because hey, I couldn't do this alone. Years went by and my biological clock was tick-tock, tick-tock. We finally tried again six months after my 41th birthday. I was pregnant in late November 2010, within a month of trying. Yesss! We were over the moon. The "super shooter" as my husband called it, succeeded again. He even bragged about how fast the baby was conceived, dismissing the doubts my doctors expressed about the my eggs considering my age. Right away, we named the baby Cree, after my Indian heritage, middle name Patrick, or Patricia (if a girl), Blackwell. Never did we think that something bad could happen. I had heard of miscarriage of course, but we didn't believe that would happen to us. We were set to have my dream -- a family of four. Of course we told everyone, even though I had wanted to wait until after the doctor visit.

Before being assigned an OB, I had to be checked by a nurse and have a sonogram to check the baby's growth. My husband and I were excited, anxious to see life growing inside, moving and dancing like our firstborn, even though I was only 5 weeks along. It only took a minute, although it felt like forever. The nurse did not see anything. No heartbeat. Her face became serious, as if searching for a way to tell me the bad news. Hmm, maybe she should have left the room to bring in a doctor. The only heart beating was mine and it was pounding loud as I looked at my husband's face! The horrible silence was the worst. I asked her, "Should I be worried?" I heard: "Nature has a way of producing

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something inside and eventually cleans it out if it doesn't develop normally." Yes, she did say this, and at the same time congratulated me on my new job and encouraged me to be grateful. Hmm, are you trying to tell me something lady — that it's possible I could miscarry, but to be grateful that I'm employed? Right?!

I did not want to hear that crap. WTF! Yeah, sometimes nature can be cruel! She set me up for an appointment to monitor the baby's growth for the next week and told me to call if I had any bleeding. So I thanked her and left worried that the life growing inside me could possibly die.

To get my positive mojo back as I started a new job, I called for reinforcements through email and texted friends. All of them responded reassuringly, saying "It's early" and that "The baby will be fine." Three days later, I spotted. I was hysterical. My husband left the bathroom where I was sitting on the toilet. All I can remember from him was OMG, then he vomited in the kitchen sink.

Somehow I pulled myself together and was off to work. The spotting stopped later that day. I told myself that the books were wrong, the bleeding stopped, the baby is still alive, and my eggs are not old, damn it! The husband's super shooter still works! Even my friends encouraged me not to worry. I mean, I spotted when I was pregnant with my firstborn, and my body's healthy for a 41 year old. So, with loads of confidence, I picked up my son from preschool, touching my belly, knowing that life is growing inside of me. I could not wait to prove the nurse wrong at the following day's appointment. You see, Cree has a heart beat.

The next morning, January 15, 2010, changed my life forever. I awoke early from severe cramps. It felt like I was on my cycle. I ran into the bathroom and bled to the point that I went through two pads. The pain hurt so much that I awoke my husband. Something was dying inside me! The morning sickness decreased and a voice inside comforted me: "Cree will leave you and will be fine. You will have another healthy child, but difficult pregnancy." I jumped into a cab to the ER while my husband stayed home until our son's bus arrived for preschool. I was in shock knowing something was dying inside.

While waiting to be examined I had an urge to pee. I went into the bathroom and sat on the toilet. I felt a strong pressure and splash. I knew what it was so I turned and looked down seeing Cree. Tears streaming down my face, I said, "Hi there. Say hello to my unborn brother, my beloved grand mom and uncle. Goodbye and I love you." Just then the intern entered the room, put the fetus -- once known as Cree Patrick Blackwell -- into a jar. My only regret was not taking that jar home to give him, or her a proper burial. The OB doctor examined me and told me I had miscarried. Tell me something I don't know. Then I heard the words D&C or let nature take its course. "Are you saying the fetus has not passed out completely? Give me the D&C, this pain had to end." Little did I know, the emotional pain was just beginning. My husband arrived for the procedure. Just like that, life was gone inside my body. My heart was broken.

Helping After Neonatal Death

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Helping Hands

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Physically I healed nicely, but spiritually I was quickly breaking down. I did not want to talk to anyone. I even went to a party like nothing had happened, as if I was going to say, "Hi, I just had a miscarriage. Could you pass the dip?" I sent out emails regarding the loss. The responses were: "You have a son," "This was meant to be," "God planned this," or no comment at all from some. They meant well, but I couldn't explain the hurt I felt to have once had a life growing inside, only to have it taken away so quickly. It sucks! I was lost in a dark hole not seeing signs of light. It felt like I was in a secret shame club that no one discusses. My remedy was to just listen to sad songs. For comfort, I repeatedly listened to the song "This Too Shall Pass" by artist India Arie. But it was not enough. I needed a helping hand for the darkness to lift. A friend suggested going to a HAND grief support meeting.

Once there, I was able to listen to everyone share their experiences. The comfortable surroundings allowed me to tell my story. I did not feel alone, nor did I think I caused the miscarriage by lifting my son, eating the wrong foods, or having sex. Grieving for my unborn is OK. This was the place to do it. I went three times as was suggested, each time feeling stronger. My last meeting was on St. Patrick's Day. I encouraged my husband to come, for other men attended the support group as well. Losing a baby affects everyone! Despite our loss, my husband was confident to try again for a baby even though I had some doubts. I got pregnant quickly and lost it at six weeks. I was crushed. I was turning 42 soon. For a bonus kick in the ass, I was laid off from my job. Why? Am I being punished? Did I hurt someone in the past, or in another life? I thought

about the brave women's shares, and the importance of grieving for the loss with the hope that I could thrive in life again, and go on to have another baby. It is OK to grieve for Cree, and the lost nameless child, while pregnant. It could happen to anyone regardless of age, it's just that no one talks about it. Who wants to join the miscarriage club?

Encouraged by my inner voice and husband we tried again two months after my 42nd birthday. I became pregnant with a healthy egg just waiting for me. Jesse Patrick Blackwell, a.k.a. JP, was born, April 5, 2011. The middle name is in remembrance of my second child, and to never forget. Looking at JP now, I sometimes think about the two unborn babies I lost, and wonder. What would they look like? Would they have been boys, or girls? What could I have done differently?

I still have a moment of silence on the days of their passing, due dates, and times they were conceived. I also think of the women and their husbands, lovers, or partners who have also lost babies and grieve for their losses. HAND taught me I could grieve. There is no time limit on how long I choose to grieve. It was not my fault. There was no way I could have prevented a miscarriage. Bad things do happen to good people! No matter how young the fetus, it was a living human being that deserved goodbyes and a burial in order to move on and be free. I no longer ask why. I'm just grateful that I was involved with HAND which helped me heal from the pain and move on the best I can. Thank you HAND.

Chanel Freeman lives in San Francisco with her husband John Blackwell and sons Liam Sky and Jesse Patrick.

My Shoes

I am wearing a pair of shoes.

They are ugly shoes, uncomfortable shoes,

I hate my shoes.

Each day I wear them, and each day I wish I had another pair.

Some days my shoes hurt so badly that I do not think I can take another step.

Yet I continue to wear them.

I get funny looks wearing these shoes.

They are looks of sympathy

I can tell in others' eyes, yet they are glad they are my shoes and not theirs.

They never talk about my shoes.

To learn how awful my shoes are might

make them uncomfortable.

To truly understand these shoes,

you must walk in them.

But once you put them on,

you can never take them off.

I realize that I am not the only one who wears these shoes.

There are many pairs in the world.

Some women are like me and ache daily as they walk in them.

Some have learned how to walk in them so that they don't hurt quite so much.

Some have worn the shoes so long

that days will go by before they think about how much they hurt.

No woman deserves to wear these shoes.

Yet, because of these shoes,

I am a stronger woman.

These shoes have given me strength to face anything.

They have made me who I am.

I will forever walk in the shoes of a woman who has lost a child.

Author Unknown

Donations

Our warmest thanks to those who have sent donations to HAND of the Peninsula. It is through your support that HAND is able to grow and help others.

Agustin Luna Presents, in memory of his goddaughter Naima Kali Liu-Fernandez
Katrina Barnett and Zimran Ahmed, in memory of Naia Ahmed

Kellie and David Bliss, in memory of Rose Tamikka Bliss
Emily and John Corpos, in memory of Maria Corpos

Friends at Pixar University, in memory of Darion Cuevas
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Marie Violet

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Connie and Brian Fong, in memory of M. Young Fong

Carolyn Laub and Heather Tumey, in memory of Zoe Ryan Laub
Nursing Mothers Counsel, Inc.
Susan Greenberg, in memory of Aekash and Arzoe

Siengxay Nhien, in memory of Aekash and Arzoe on their 10th birthday
Noreen Phillips, in memory of Arzoe Kaur

Maureen O'Connor, in memory of Samantha Chong Elrod
Mariah and David Bianchi, in memory of Dylan Cruz Bianchi

Jennifer and Eric Chan, in memory of Logan Chan
Judy Moltzen
Anna and Rob Strong

Joanne and Michael Regalia
Roshni Singh, in honor of Gurpreet Padam
Lauren Zorfas, in honor of Arzoe Kaur's birthday

Support Meetings

Support meetings are informal gatherings where parents can receive and give support by sharing common experiences as we work through and resolve our loss. We cordially invite you to attend.

Meetings may start out with a topic of discussion, but everyone is free to bring up any questions or aspects of their loss which may concern them.

Attending your first meeting does take courage, but parents who attend find a comforting network of support, encouragement, friendship and understanding.

Nothing is required of you. There are no dues or fees. You need not speak one word. Even if you no longer need the meetings for yourself, come and share your experiences with someone who has recently suffered a loss.

HAND of the Peninsula

Support meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of the month.

Contact: (650) 367-6993

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: March 7 and 21
April 4 and 18
May 2 and 16
June 6 and 20

Location: Follow signs to Palm Room at Mills Health and Wellness Center, 100 S. San Mateo Dr., San Mateo

HAND of Santa Cruz

Support meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Contact: Kristie Shulman (831) 438-4513

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: March 21
April 18
May 16
June 20

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

Dates: March 7
April 4
May 2
June 6

HAND of San Francisco

Support meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Contact: Chris Lehr, LCSW, (415) 282-7330.

Time: 6:30-8:30 P.M.

Dates: March 7 and 21
April 4 and 18
May 2 and 16
June 6 and 20

Location: Davies Campus of CPMC, Castro at Duboce, Support Services Conference Room, Level B

Pregnancy Support Meetings

Parents who are pregnant again after a loss have special emotional and psychological needs. Pregnancy Support Group meetings address the concerns of bereaved parents who have started or are thinking about starting another pregnancy. Fathers are especially encouraged to attend.

HAND of the Peninsula

holds subsequent pregnancy support meetings on the second Wednesday of the month at Mills Health and Wellness Center, 100 S. San Mateo Dr., in San Mateo. Contact: (650) 367-6993.

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: March 14
April 11
May 9
June 13

HAND of Santa Cruz

Subsequent pregnancy meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month. Contact: Kristie Shulman (831) 438-4513

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

Births

Henry Hugo Gunn

Rodenbeck — Dec. 17, 2011, to Nikki Gunn and Eric Rodenbeck

Sayler Ciel Hirsch — Jan. 18, 2012, to Paige and Scott Hirsch and big brother Severin Cayden

Musa Khan-Ibarra

Jan. 27, 2012, to Sabina Kahn-Ibarra and Christian Ibarra

Inservices

Sept. 12, 2011 — Lucile Packard Children's Hospital NCIU and OB social workers. Presenting parent, Lisa Morse and sharing parent, Kara Juneau.

March 21, 2012 — San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of Nursing Mothers' Counsel new volunteer orientees, Ronna Edwards, sharing parent.