

Helping Hands

Helping After Neonatal Death

Winter 2002

ADOPTION

THE HOPE TO HAVE A CHILD AGAIN

"When the door of happiness closes, another opens; but at times we keep looking at the closed door for so long that we don't see the other one." —Helen Keller

By Mari Hayman
Stanford Community Writing Program

After suffering the intense pain that comes with the loss of a child, many parents must learn how to reconcile their suffering with the necessity to move on with their lives.

Even though the desire to have a child continues to occupy the mind of a parent who has recently lost a baby, adoption is often a possibility that goes overlooked. How can you replace a child? It's impossible. And after waiting for so long for your child's birth, how do you surrender your dream of having a child of your own flesh and blood?

These are valid questions that parents ask themselves when the idea to adopt comes up. The truth is, no one will ever replace your child, and adoption is not a search to replace anyone. An adopted child is not, and never will be, a substitute or compensation for the biological child that didn't come; he or she is a unique and special human being who needs and deserves

all the love and affection of a stable family.

When a person makes the decision to adopt, he or she makes a decision to participate in one of the most beautiful and generous ways of creating a family. Adopting allows a prospective mother or father with love in their hearts to find a child that really needs their love, a child who has also suffered an enormous loss and needs to reconcile that pain. The process of adoption demands serious reflection, and it should always be considered mutually. It is fundamental that both adopted child and adoptive parents come to terms with their pain, their loss, and their farewell: the adoptive parents must say good bye to the child they were awaiting who didn't arrive, and the adopted child must say good bye to the parents who gave him his life but could not care for him.

Therefore, before deciding to adopt, parents must confront and resolve the pain that they feel for the child who has passed away. It is important to ask yourself the following questions: Can I love a child who I did not give birth to? Do I have the emotional energy, the money, and other necessary resources

to adopt? How will my family and friends react, and how will I deal with their reactions? Can I explain my child's origin to him or her, and accept the possibility that one day he or she may want to know more about his or her biological parents?

But the most important question is: Am I capable of raising, supporting, and contributing to the physical, emotional, and spiritual growth of another human being even if I won't get the experience of pregnancy, even if the child doesn't have my genes, and could be very different from me?

"Adoption is like giving birth less intensely for an exceedingly long time," says Vicky, an adoptive mother. "It isn't physical labor, it's emotional labor."

Like pregnancy, adoption is certainly not easy and despite the insensitive comments that ignorant people are occasionally liable to make such as "Oh, you got a child the easy way!" it's important to indicate that the decision to adopt demands many sacrifices and a lot of effort, because it is a complicated

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Hand of the Peninsula

A Creative Way to Remember Our Babies

During the months of September and October, HAND parent Kellie Bliss volunteered to lead several craft workshops on Wednesday evenings. Despite having to rely on word-of-mouth to advertise the events, the creative evenings were well attended and much appreciated.

According to Kellie, the memory book workshop was very well received and there was certainly talk of doing it again.

"I liked the way people could work at their own pace—some just needed time to ponder the thought of making an album, some brought photos to show and share, some brought completed albums to share, some worked diligently and created several pages for their albums," she said.

The craft night was also successful. It was very casual and pleasant, Kellie said. "The emphasis was on creating and less on talking. Everyone appreciated that and made several items to remember their babies."

Materials were donated by HAND, and various parents. People made glass swirl balls, painted plaster ornaments, decorated tiny wooden boxes, made heart magnets, all with space for the baby's name.

Kellie has since returned to work and is busier but she is willing to organize the workshops again and not limit the theme to the holidays.

"The idea is to create with your hands while processing grief and remembering our babies by making something beautiful to look at in your home."

Helping After Neonatal Death

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Helping Hands

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process. There are various options for adopting: private and public adoption agencies, independent adoption, and international or interracial adoption.

Adoption agencies are licensed by the state. Public agencies, in particular, are supported by state taxes. Adopting through a public agency is usually the least expensive option, but the possibility exists that you may have to wait a very long time to complete the adoption. The biological parents have rights to the child until the state legally terminates their parental rights, a process that can take a long time. A private agency offers more support to the potential adoptive parent and generally provides advice and help in the process of locating a child with particular characteristics, and it is generally not as long a process as public adoption, although it is usually more expensive.

Independent adoption is a legal agreement between the biological parents and the adoptive parents, mediated by a lawyer, and the biological parents are more involved in the process of looking for an adoptive parent for their child. Generally, adoptive parents pay the biological mother's medical expenses directly, and she has more contact with the child after she gives up her parental rights. At times, biological parents and adoptive parents participate in an open adoption, in which the adoptive parent and the biological parent have an opportunity to meet.

Adopting a child through an international agency requires that the adoptive parents participate in a home study. The adoption agency completes an investigation of the prospective parents' home before matching them up with a child.

Margaret and Daniel, members of HAND of the Peninsula, participated in a home study with ACCEPT before adopting their daughter, Rachel. Margaret says that the home study with ACCEPT, based out of Los Altos, was not a difficult experience.

"They were kind, sincere, specialize in international adoptions, had adopted children themselves. They knew that I had suffered miscarriages and was grieving these losses," Margaret explains.

In international adoption, the adoptive parents generally have to travel to the country of origin to receive their parental rights through a liaison in that country. There, they complete a culture study so that they can familiarize themselves with the culture in which their child was born. The culture study is helpful in that it facilitates the adaptation process for both parents and child.

Even though international adoption is a more expensive process, depending on the country, it is one of the more liberal ways of obtaining a child (for example, it's much easier for a single mother to adopt), and the wait to adopt is shorter. The risk that biological parents may reclaim their children is significantly lower, and the adoptive parents have the satisfaction of knowing that they are helping a child who needs their love very much.

"After losing babies through miscarriage or in early life, we adopting parents have enough troubles that we're going through," Margaret emphasizes. "Make sure to focus on the child's needs and not your own. But also be honest with yourself about what you can live with and what you cannot. You have to accept this child as your own, no matter what happens. Make sure you're up for those challenges of just being a parent."

Adopting is an unbreakable contract of love between parents and their child that allows the child to grow as an individual, conscious of his or her past but sure of a future in which he or she will be an important and irreplaceable member of the family. With much patience, sincerity, and common sense, an adoptive parent can enjoy the incredible experience of supporting, raising, and loving the "child of their heart."

SOURCES in HAND's Library

Adoption without Fear by James L. Gritter, 1989 HAND BOOK # 1416

Adopt the Baby You Want by Michael R. Sullivan, 1990 HAND BOOK # 1603

How to Adopt from Central and South America by Jean and Heino Erichsen, 1985 HAND BOOK # 1410

The Ache for a Child by Debra Bridwell, 1994 HAND BOOK # 1681

Waiting for Baby by Mary Earle Chase, 1990 HANDBOOK # 1417

Special thanks to Margaret Seligson and her family for their help in this interview.

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: Celia Hartnett (650) 367-6993

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

Dates: Dec. 4 and 18
Jan. 1 and 15, 2003
Feb. 5 and 19
March 5 and 19

Location: Sequoia Health and Wellness Services, 702 Marshall St., Redwood City.

HAND of Santa Cruz Co.

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: Dec. 18
Jan. 15, 2003
Feb. 19
March 19

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

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 depending on demand so please call the office at (650) 367-6993 if you are interested in attending.

HAND of Santa Cruz's subsequent pregnancy meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month.

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

Dates: Dec. 4
Jan. 1, 2003
Feb. 5
March 5

Call (831) 438-4513 for more information.

Births

Hannah Grace Walters, Aug. 13, 2002, to Erin and Kevin Walters.

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.

Special thanks to Steve Hurst, Inhale Employees Foundation Board President, Donna Chadwell, Employees Foundation Secretary, and Julie Raithel, HAND parent and past Treasurer.

Mary and William Schorr, in memory of the birth and death of Daniel Patrick Schorr 25 years go

Kristy Turner and James Riley. Yvonne Nava, in memory of Danielle Nava on her 7th birthday. Kathleen and Victor Parrette, in memory of Malorie Anne Parrette

Rita and Mike Cheong, in memory of Cheri Yu Cheong. Celia and Don Hartnett, in honor of Leslie Muennemann and Laura Hawkins for all they do to help families at HAND

Caryn Goldman, in memory of Sasha Goldman. Christina and Fraser Louie, in memory of Baby Louie The First. Eileen K Stadtner Real Estate, Inc., in honor of Donna Marie Baldwin

Barbara Kirsch, Ph.D. and Bob Feiner, in honor of the marriage of Nisha Zenoff and Steve Tennis. Shoneen and John Erskine, in memory of Jessica Erskine

Rachel Kindt and Gregory Marcus. Maureen and Nelson Layag, in memory of Meadow. Patty Leeper and Craig Ball, in memory of Abigail and William Leeper Ball

Juliet Butterfield and Ejner Fulsang, Lory and Dan Kitamura-Tintor, Constance and Michael Mitchell, Emily and Steven Becker, Melissa and Jim Lane, in memory of Julia Mockett Hutcherson

Stephen Buchner, M.D., Marcy and Robert Walliser

Service of Remembrance

Thank you HAND parents Joan Stone, Celia Hartnett and Leslie Muennemann and singer Jayme Kelly Curtis for a beautiful and moving service held under a blue, sunny sky on Sept. 28.

Approximately 25 HAND parents, friends and relatives gathered to remember the babies they have lost, to read poems and babies' names. The service concluded with the scattering of wildflower seeds contributed by Common Ground of Palo Alto, among the oak trees and manzanita at the Miwok Shelter at Huddart Park in Woodside.

eScrip Donations

HAND of the Peninsula has received \$1,447.28 in the past 12 months from supporters signed up with the eScrip program. To learn more about this free and effortless method for you, your family and friends to remember your baby and support HAND of the Peninsula, call the HAND office 367-6993 or go online to <http://www.escrip.com> HAND's ID number is 141808774.

HAND Seeks New Home

Sequoia Health and Wellness Center has generously donated the space we have occupied for the past five years but now they need it back.

HAND of the Peninsula cannot afford rent, but only needs a small space for our one employee, a computer, copy machine, files and book shelves.

If you know of anyone who can donate office space or if you have a spare room in your company, please call HAND's office at (650)367-6993.

Baby Louie the First

It was a great pregnancy. I had no morning sickness except for the one morning I ate a banana and a prenatal vitamin. I knew of you on the night of February 27, 2002. I was so happy and could only gasp in disbelief. Your father knew before I, he held the pregnancy test in his hands as it turned positively purple.

In the beginning, I was hungry for bacon and beef, then, it was juices and tomatoes. My breasts tingled, were sore every other day, and soon my D cup bra size was too small. It was nice to not have a period or go shopping for feminine products. My complexion was clearer and I drank a lot of water everyday. I was always so thirsty. As soon as I found out I was pregnant, I started to take prenatal vitamins.

Your father was to pick your name if you were a girl and I would pick your name if you were a boy. I felt a new hope in my life. Your father started thinking about your red egg party. Two pregnancy books were given to me. I purchased another one over a year ago. I read them constantly.

A pacifier and a pacifier holder were given to me by a secret co-worker. Your paternal grandmother, bought maternity clothes for me. Your maternal grandmother would kiss you through my belly every time I saw her.

At your first prenatal visit, the doctor couldn't find your heartbeat. We all thought it could have been the dates, maybe they were off. The ultra sound confirmed you had died during the seventh week of pregnancy and you hadn't left me by week twelve.

We read our poem, said goodbye, then, four days later you were ready to pass through me. The contractions were the one thing I never anticipated. They were amazing yet painful. It was a sad, scary and anxious time not knowing what would really happen next. Over a month later, finally, I'm not bleeding anymore.

We still talk about you. It was surprising to see my nipples get back to their pre-pregnancy color. I haven't felt alone, empty, or aching for you. What I do think of often is how I felt special. I felt like a mom. I felt so close to your father. I felt so much love for you. So much love for my baby. We are parents of a baby that will only live in our hearts for the rest of our lives. You are Baby Louie the First.

Volunteer Training

SUPPORT AND INSERVICE FACILITATORS

January 18 and 27, 2003

HAND of the Peninsula founder Emily Corpos and cofounder Celia Hartnett will conduct the free training from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 18 and 6 to 9 p.m. Monday, Jan. 27, 2003 at Sequoia Health and Wellness, 702 Marshall St., Redwood City. Call HAND's office (650) 367-6993 to sign up.

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