

Helping Hands

Winter 2008

Ghosts of Christmas Past

By Joannetta Hendel

In anticipation of my first Christmas morning, Mamma posed me, freshly scrubbed and curled, before the Christmas tree for my annual holiday photograph. This was the beginning of a lifetime of Christmas celebrations--each one steeped in rituals and traditions built upon those which had gone before.

As a child, I delighted in the magical world created in the minds of the very young. We woke to sparkle and glitter, presents stacked high, and bulging stockings. As I grew, the magic of childhood gave way to a different reality and a different joy, but the rituals remained largely unchanged.

Marriage brought family and babies of my own. The photo albums grew and expanded as I made a career of the holidays and the memories they held. Year after year, I lined up the little ones in front of the tree--just as my mother had done before me. Each holiday celebration was an extension of former joys, other times, different places. Importance was placed on building bridges from the past into the present.

Constancy equals comfort and security. Psychologists agree that tradition is important to the development of society and to family structure. Family traditions are healthy and normal. There's only one thing wrong with tradition--it's filled with should:

“We should have the tree up before the 15th.”

“We should entertain.”

“We should shop...decorate...send cards.”

“We should be happy...”

Tradition creates purpose and connection. Tradition provides roots. But tradition magnifies the pain of our loss. At our house, we trim the tree the first weekend in December. It's tradition. But the year Alexander died, I didn't feel like trimming the tree at all. When we did do it, as many changes as possible were made in the ritual to help me tolerate the empty space left in his absence.

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HAND of the Peninsula

Ways you can support HAND parents

Among the many ways one may honor the memory of their children is to give back to the organization and ensure that HAND of the Peninsula will continue to provide the caring support and other vital services for which it has become well known over 27 years in existence.

As a 501c3 non profit, HAND of the Peninsula is governed by a Board of Directors which welcomes new members who bring fresh ideas, talent and energy to our common endeavor. The Board meetings are held quarterly in the evenings on the fourth Wednesday of the month. HAND of the Peninsula is run exclusively by parents who have experienced a loss and financed entirely with donations from parents, family and friends. Without their support, HAND would cease to exist. Consider getting involved in any of the following ways:

- * **Schedule and/or facilitate inservice trainings where a sharing parent tells their personal story to healthcare providers interested in learning how to be more sensitive and helpful to parents experiencing a loss.**
- * **Library organization and management.**
- * **Write and edit the quarterly newsletter, *Helping Hands*, get it to the printer and post office.**
- * **Distribute brochures to area hospitals which in turn give these to parents experiencing a loss.**
- * **Bookkeeping and accounting**
- * **Fundraising (donations are our sole support)**
- * **Special event coordination such as annual Service of Remembrance, Volunteer Appreciation, Human Race, Scrapbooking or other creative activity workshop, etc.**
- * **Anniversary and Special Dates remembrance**
- * **Schedule meeting facilitators**
- * **Attend training (next one is Jan. 31, 2009 — see page 5) and become a meeting facilitator or phone support volunteer.**

If you have a talent you wish to share or would like to learn more about ways to get involved and support other parents please call (650) 367-6993 or email: volunteers@HANDsupport.org

Helping After Neonatal Death

Chapters:

**HAND of the Peninsula
HAND of Santa Cruz
HAND of Antioch**

**(650) 367-6993 office
(831) 438-4513 Santa Cruz
(925) 437-3406 Antioch**

**P.O. Box 3693
Redwood City, CA 94064**

<http://www.HANDsupport.org>

**HAND of Santa Clara,
Contra Costa, Alameda
Counties, Central Valley
1-888-908-HAND**

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Helping Hands

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Submission deadline for next issue:

FEB. 15, 2009

Like Ronin's Heart

*It wasn't suppose to be this way –
Our tearful eyes, our drooping shoulders,
Our painful faces with worried brows,
Our fearful minds, our deadened spirits –
Our complete anguish.*

*It wasn't suppose to be this way –
Your body was so perfect;
Your coal black hair, high forehead, defined cheekbones like Leslie,
Your nose, toes, ears and hands like Matt,
That dominant Schneider chin –
With its dimple.*

*It wasn't suppose to be this way –
The soft spoken specialists
The beeping breaths
The dismal days
The nauseous nights
Questions, questions –
Hurtful answers.*

*But it is this way –
We wonder when our smiles will return,
When our lives will have purpose again,
When we will be able to look at another child and not weep.
When? When?*

*But then
We remember Ronin and his heart – the other baby – its new heartbeat
New life;
We remember the generous love of his courageous grief-stricken parents;
We know there is such goodness still because of Ronin, Matt and Leslie.*

*And we know that somehow we will find that glint of hope
Like Ronin's heart --
A new beginning.*

*Grandma Barbara
May 18, 2008*

**Barbara Keating composed this poem in remembrance of her grandson, Ronin Keating,
May 12-14, 2008, son of Leslie and Matt Keating.**

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. Call (650) 367-6993 or email info@HANDsupport.org for more information.

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

Dates: Dec. 3 and 17
Jan. 7 and 21, 2009
Feb. 4 and 18
March 4 and 18

Location: Ellsworth Room at Mills Health 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: Dec. 17
Jan. 21, 2009
Feb. 18
March 18

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

New HAND of Antioch

Support group meetings are held on the first and third Thursday of the month. Contact (925) 437-3406 for location and more information.

Time: 7:30 –9:30 P.M

Dates: Dec. 3 and 17
Jan. 7 and 21, 2009
Feb. 4 and 18
March 4 and 18

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 as needed. Please call the HAND office (650) 367-6993 if you plan to attend or need more information

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

Dates: Dec. 10
Jan. 14, 2009
Feb. 11
March 11

Location: Ellsworth Room at Mills Health Center, 100 S. San Mateo Dr., San Mateo

HAND of Santa Cruz

HAND of Santa Cruz subsequent pregnancy support meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month. Please call (831) 438-4513 for more information.

Births

Alia Jane Mockett Hutcherson — Aug. 4, 2008, to Emily Mockett and Philip Hutcherson

Natalia Aleksandra Vowles — Nov. 19, 2008, to Aga and Derek Vowles

Inservice

Oct. 29, 2008 — Nursing Mothers' Counsel, Shoneen Erskine, presenter and sharing parent

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 continue helping others.

Twila Forbes, in memory of Cosmo

Mary and William Schorr, in memory of Ronin Keating and in memory of Danny's 31st birthday

Anna Heffron, in memory of my daughter, Michal, on her 29th birthday

Melisse Lusin and Brian Holtz, in memory of Blake Charles Holtz

Todd Lund Anonymous Stephen Buchner, M.D.

Emily Mockett and Phil Hutcherson, in memory of Julia Mockett Hutcherson on the sixth anniversary of her lifetime

Shoneen and John Erskine, in memory of Jessica L. Erskine on her 8th birthday

Thomas Corso, in memory of Nicky
Michele and Mark Hollar, in memory of William Adam Hollar
Shirley and David Guidi, in loving memory of Natalie



HAND of the Peninsula

Volunteer Training

Saturday, Jan. 31, 2009

**HAND Co-founder Celia Hartnett
and board member, Jill Ludwig,
have scheduled a day-long
volunteer training workshop on
Saturday, Jan. 31, 2009,
place and time yet to be
determined.**

**HAND parents interested in
giving back by facilitating meetings
or offering phone support are
welcome to participate whether
they feel ready to jump in and help
right away or down the road. For
more information call
(650) 367-6993 or email
volunteers@HANDsupport.org**

Ghost *continued from page 1*

The children receive a new Christmas ornament each year to add to their collections. Someday these ornaments will adorn their own Christmas trees in their own homes. But what about Alex's set? Those three ornaments will never bloom into twenty and will never follow him into adulthood. That first year after Alex's death I bought him one anyway--an angel in flight.

Four stockings hang from the mantel. Do I hang Alexander's stocking, or do I put it away forever? The first year, I hung his apart from the others. But every year since, his stocking has hung with the other four. I have five children with five Christmas stockings--and I always will.

The key to surviving Christmas as a bereaved individual is flexibility and foresight. It's important to plan ahead, and it's important to anticipate the changes you will need to make. Habit is easy, and it does take a little more effort to implement creative change in holiday planning. But change and adjustment are essential for the newly bereaved.

Families can spend so many years following the same patterns and routines that they forget these choices were made because they were right for their moment. But choices made under different circumstances may not be the right choices for the newly bereaved. The early moments of grief demand new rules.

Even customs "set in stone" can be bent. Festivities that expend more energy than we have to give can be skipped. Entertaining and socializing can be altered or curtailed altogether. Decisions can be delayed and new plans designed and implemented at the last minute. The bereaved can learn to be creative and flexible in customizing their holiday plans.

Traditions bind families and societies tightly to one another. But altering our traditions to suit our current needs makes sense. Each moment, each stage of life, demands its own customs and its own rituals. By building our bridges moment to moment, we link the past and present to the future.

*from *Bereavement*, a magazine of hope and healing.*