

## Losing

*By Catherine Stead*

I am forever losing things. I can't remember how many times I have lost my keys, or my mobile phone, as well as other annoying things such as forms from school or activity clubs. Often I will smile and say by way of apology to whomever is witnessing my current, frantic search, "I am always losing things," and they will smile back and acknowledge my situation, or even agree that they too, lose things on a regular basis.

As easy as that losing phrase pops out of my mouth, there is one thing I never say, not to anyone: "I lost my baby". Because as unorganized as I can be at home, I always find things. My purse turns up, the forms are usually at the bottom of my handbag and my phone likes to hide down the side of the sofa on a regular basis. As much as I lose things, I also always find them. But I cannot find my baby. Nor can I find the words to express this to others.

The worst thing about the verb 'to lose' is that it implies an element of blame. I don't want to share my blame with others because it is too overwhelming to deal with. I didn't take care of that baby well enough whilst it grew in my womb; I 'lost' it somehow due to something I did. Of course the leaflets you are given, and the professionals that talk to you all have a standard explanation that is given to you, and it is not unkindly delivered. But it really is nonsense, because if you have been through this experience then it doesn't matter what anyone says or does, it happened to you, and you will always believe the blame lies with you. I feel embarrassed and ashamed that this happened, so it is easier to say nothing and pretend the whole thing never happened. Nothing lost over here... let's move on.

But then after a while you can't move on, and the search begins to 'find' the baby. You throw yourself into work or exercise or something, or like me, even more shamefully you plan another child. I concluded that if I had another baby,

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## BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Support for bereaved parents of pregnancy and infant loss

## Upcoming Events

### HAYDEN'S HELPING HANDS

### 7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL HANDS ON HOPE BENEFIT

SEPTEMBER 23, 2017

6:30 PM TO 10:30 PM

Uptown Billiards Club

Portland, Oregon

Details at [HaydensHelpingHands.com](http://HaydensHelpingHands.com)

*Hayden's Helping Hands is a 501(c)3 non-profit foundation dedicated to financially assist parents with the medical expenses after the birth of a stillborn baby. It will forever be our goal to stand by families who were not able to welcome home a child due to a stillbirth.*

## Volunteer opportunities

### HOLIDAY REMEMBRANCE

### CEREMONIES

Volunteers needed to assist with planning our annual holiday remembrance ceremony for adults (December 11th, 7 PM) and our holiday gathering for children who have lost siblings (December 9th, 10 AM). Please contact Rachel if you are interested, [RachelM@briefencounters.org](mailto:RachelM@briefencounters.org).

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## *From the editor...*

I chose this month's articles because each profoundly resonated with me even though I've never had a miscarriage. The "Secret Competition," I've felt it. Even though I know loss is loss and there are no winners, I question myself. Do I deserve to grieve this way? Am I ungrateful for what I did get to experience when I ache for just one more minute? When I start to spiral with these thoughts, I take a deep breath and try to practice kindness towards myself. Meeting myself wherever I am in my grief.

Shannon Stemm Patel  
mother of Charlie and her big sis



## *Upcoming newsletter topics...*

September  
INFERTILITY

Whether your struggle with infertility started before or after your loss(es), please share your experience with us.

October  
COMMUNITY

This is the community that no one ever wants to be a part of, that we'd all give up in exchange for our children. And yet this is where we find the safety, love, compassion and support we need to keep moving. In what ways has this beautiful, messy community served you? How has this sister/brotherhood held you together?

## *Newsletter Submissions*

We welcome and encourage submissions to the newsletter. Submissions may be published anonymously if requested. Sharing your story can provide healing and comfort for you – and other parents. The editor reserves the right to edit and select from the materials submitted. Views and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of Brief Encounters, but those of the individual authors. Please send titled articles and submissions to: [newsletter@briefencounters.org](mailto:newsletter@briefencounters.org)

*What cannot be said will be wept.*

*-Sappho*

## **BRIEF ENCOUNTERS**

2116 NE 18<sup>th</sup> Ave., Portland, OR 97212

Message Phone: 503-699-8006

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

Twitter: [twitter.com/briefencount](https://twitter.com/briefencount)

Facebook: [private/closed groups Brief Encounters](https://www.facebook.com/private/closed/groups/Brief-Encounters-Pregnancy-and-Infant-Loss-Support-and-Brief-Encounters-Parenting-After-Loss/)

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support and Brief Encounters

Parenting After Loss

Established in 1992 by a group of parents, 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, bereaved parents and their families share their stories, discuss issues that arise from pregnancy and infant loss, and remember their children. Through talking or just listening, we learn what grief is --- and how, through understanding and caring, we heal.

### EXECUTIVE BOARD AND STEERING COMMITTEE

Co-Chairs: Rachel Murfitt & Meagan Golec

Advisor: Pat Schwiebert, RN

Treasurer: Sandy Faber

Secretary: Shannon Stemm Patel

Librarian: Sandy Faber

Database Manager: Megan Wright

Newsletter Editor: Shannon Stemm Patel

Hospital Liaison Coordinator: Laura Prins

Web Site Manager: TBA

Newsletter Mailing: Schwiebert/DeKlyen family

Correspondent: Lisa Peterson

### MEETING AND TELEPHONE FACILITATORS

Kaimana LoBue, Rachel Murfitt, Laura Prins, Daniele Riehl, Pat Schwiebert, Heather Smith, Megan Wright

### HOSPITAL LIAISONS

Raina Dey, Fawn Harris, Cheryl Miller, Rachel Murfitt, Lisa Peterson, Shannon Stemm Patel

### NEWSLETTER MAILING PREP

Holly Donahue

### OTHER VOLUNTEERS

Monica Thompson (Spanish interpreter)

### LOVE GIFTS

Please send Love Gifts and messages to 2116 NE 18<sup>th</sup> Ave., Portland, OR 97212. For Love Gifts to be acknowledged in a specific newsletter issue, we must receive it by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the prior month. Please assist us in reducing the chance of errors by using the form on page 5.

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR REMOVAL FROM MAILING LIST

Please contact our database manager Megan Wright at 503-646-1335 or by email at [megan.k.wright@comcast.net](mailto:megan.k.wright@comcast.net).

### OUR CHILDREN REMEMBERED: INCLUSIONS OR CHANGES

Please contact our database manager Megan Wright at 503-646-1335 or by email at [megan.k.wright@comcast.net](mailto:megan.k.wright@comcast.net). For children to be remembered in a specific newsletter issue, we must receive your request by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the prior month.

### SAFE ARRIVALS

Please send Safe Arrivals to [newsletter@briefencounters.org](mailto:newsletter@briefencounters.org) (preferred), or leave a message at 503-699-8006.

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that would be the baby that I so carelessly lost? Not everyone has this option, but I did and I grabbed that new child as she was being delivered, determined never to lose this one. I felt content and strong and powerful. I had found my baby. I went back to being the woman that just loses phones and keys and purses. I went back to being just like everyone else.

Three years later and my new child is a joy, as are my older children. But they are not my baby that I lost. I know that, but I can't get over it, and I don't expect I ever will. I still cannot say the 'L' word about him because I still desperately want to find him. So I have to be brave and say an even scarier word. Miscarriage. I had a miscarriage near the end of my second trimester and my little boy was born an angel. Maybe one day I will find him, but not in this life. All I can do is kiss the children I do have, whenever I can, and try my best to just be the woman that loses keys and purses and nothing else.

*Originally published on  
www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk*

## **A Letter to My Angel Baby**

*By Janelle Granger*

You were but a tiny baby,  
No more than just a flutter.  
You filled my heart with glowing joy,  
And I love you like no other.  
I long to cradle you in my arms,  
And sing you a lullaby.  
Kiss those soft and rosy cheeks,  
Comfort you as you cry.  
In just weeks time God called you home,  
Leaving my sad heart warm.  
He loved you most of all,  
And brought you home to Jesus' arms.  
You were so precious, as perfect can be,  
Too beautiful for earth.  
You stayed with me for just a moment,  
Then unto heaven, an angel I gave birth.  
My love for you is everlasting,  
As you're in my heart with me.  
And now and for forever,  
My baby you will be.

*Shared with permission of the author, "In memory of our two tiny angel babies waiting in heaven."*

## **The Secret Competition in the Baby Loss Club**

*By Rachel Lewis*

I sat nervously in the hospital conference room. I expected it to be empty, or at least almost empty. I mean, how many women really suffer pregnancy loss in my area anyway?

And as the minutes wore on, the seats filled, answering my unspoken question.

Apparently, a lot of people lose babies.

A hushed, quiet, almost reverent tone overtook the room.

The moderator began her recitation of expectations for the group. I shuffled in my chair. While her words laid out what I could expect to hear, I had no idea how I could expect to feel over the next two hours.

Introductions began. Instead of sharing our name, our vocation, our hobbies, or the highlights of our family – things you would normally share with a roomful of strangers – we shared the one thing we often don't speak of to people we don't know. Our dead child's name. How old or far along our baby was. The nature of our loss. The names of our family who survived the loss.

As more than a dozen stories of baby death unfolded before me, the tears I so desperately wanted to hold in spilled silently from my swollen lids. I cried not so much because of my own loss – but because of theirs.

This was my first foray into a real baby loss club. And without even trying to, I began silently comparing our stories.

Unlike the majority of my peers in the meeting, I did not suffer a second- or third-trimester loss.

My baby, whom I named Olivia, died because she had implanted in my tube, causing it to rupture. Ectopic pregnancies rarely make it to the second trimester, and mine was no exception.

On the one hand, my loss was completely validated by every member of the group. On the other, I allowed the differences in our experience to invalidate my own grief.

My loss happened at 7 weeks. If I feel this way at 7 weeks, I wondered, how much more for these families grieving losses at 17, 27, or 37 weeks?

These parents had to bury their child. My child was suctioned up in a medical tube during surgery and discarded as medical waste.

They got to hear or see a heartbeat. I never did.

They held their child's hand, got their fingerprints, kissed their toes. I never saw any part of my child's body, either on a screen or in person.

They had baby showers, and nurseries to tear down, and

## Love Gifts

Donations to Brief Encounters help us to maintain our outreach to bereaved families through this newsletter, support groups, and other resources. Often Love Gifts are given by a family in memory of a child who has died. Others may wish to give a general donation, or give thanks for their own living children. We acknowledge gifts here without reference to amount given.

Brief Encounters is a non-profit 501©3 organization; therefore, no gift is too small. Each donation goes a long way toward printing brochures, maintaining the Brief Encounters website, providing monthly meetings, performing outreach to healthcare providers, mailing this newsletter, and many other ways we seek to care for bereaved parents.

This month, we thank the following donors for their generosity and love:

From Belladonna, "Thanks for all the support in a million ways."

For **Emma Claire Prins**, 8/6/2014-8/6/2014, daughter of Laura and Tim Prins. Donated by Grandma Lori and Grandpa Phil Prins, "We love you and miss you so much sweet girl."

**Ongoing Gift:** The internet service for the Brief Encounters Web site is provided by the Wedin Ohana out of love for **Marina Alyssa Wedin**, beloved daughter and sister.

### Love Gift Donation Form

Enclosed is a donation of: \$  
In memory of:

Message to be included in the newsletter with your donation acknowledgement:

Birth date:                      Death date:

Donated by:

**Please consider your employer's matching gift program when submitting a donation. To receive a receipt, please provide your return address:**

I wish for my gift to remain anonymous.

Name(s) of Parents:

Please assist us in reducing the chance of errors or omissions by sending your Love Gift message with this form. Please **do not** send your message separately to the editor or database manager.  
Thank you!

Please note: For Love Gifts to be acknowledged in a particular newsletter issue, we must receive it by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the prior month (example: June 10<sup>th</sup> for July issue).

**Please make check payable to Brief Encounters and send to:  
2116 NE 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Portland, OR 97212**

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS is a non-sectarian, non-profit organization recognized as tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3), Federal ID #45-4822283.

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gifts to return. The only evidence my child was here was a positive pregnancy test I had saved, and the freshly forming scars on my abdomen from my emergency surgery.

I struggled to make sense of my loss. No – not so much the loss itself, rather, the intense feelings of grief over my loss. Because my experience was not the “worst” loss in the history of pregnancy loss, I questioned what right I really had to be as devastated as I was.

It took me several years, and many more losses, to come to accept how I grieved.

I have decided that each week of gestation is not the measurement of love. From the moment I received the second line on the test, I was already head-over-heels in love with my baby. She was the miracle child I didn't think I would have the chance to carry. She already carried all my hopes and dreams. Her loss was not the loss of 7 weeks of pregnancy. It was the loss of a much-wanted, much-loved child.

I learned that we don't get to choose our losses. If I can be so vulnerable, I would admit that at times on my journey, I wished I would have had a stillbirth or late miscarriage so I could have seen my baby. I desperately wanted to connect with my child, to learn about her, to know her cute lips or her tiny fingers. I wanted some memento, anything really, to cling to. I wanted memories of kicks. I wanted more than a phantom loss of a phantom baby. I wanted the physical evidence that I had indeed lost a child and not just a pregnancy.

And yet – the idea that any loss would be better or worse than the one I had was really a moot point. I did not choose my early loss any more than my friend chose her late one. The cards were dealt, the dice were thrown, and we each navigated the intricacies of our individual losses as best as we could.

I learned that early losses are hard in their own right, just as late losses are hard in their own right. The silence around an early loss became stifling. It began to feel like a secret to be carried rather than a grief to be shared. That the absence of some of the more formal rites of grief such as a memorial service, a grave to visit, or the outpouring of support from your community, made grief lonelier to bear. It seemed that others around me were ready to write off our pregnancy as a simple mistake we needed to hurry to get over.

I discovered that grief is valid no matter the type of loss. Since the almost 5 years since we lost Olivia, I have dealt with my fair share of grief. We tried to conceive for 4 years, resulting in 4 miscarriages between 5-8 weeks gestation. While the pregnancies went on for weeks,

none resulted in a baby with a heartbeat.

When we were pregnant with Olivia, I was yet unscathed by pregnancy loss. I was able to embrace the few weeks we had with her with an unadulterated joy and love I've never experienced before or since. And yet, the physical and emotional trauma of my tube rupturing left permanent scars on my heart and body. The initial plummet into deep grief shocked me as I tried to navigate my way to a new normal.

In the baby loss club, it can be so easy to subconsciously match up our experiences against others, and compare who has earned the right to grieve harder. We think about gestational age, how badly a baby was wanted, how easy or hard the baby was to conceive, how the baby died, and if and how they were birthed. We think about future and past fertility. We think about if the couple has living children or if this was their only child.

The fact is: There are a million ways we could calculate the intricacies of grief. And while it can be helpful to process through the nuances of our own losses, it is never helpful to compare our nuances to someone else's.

When we invalidate someone else's pain, it does not validate our own.

And when we invalidate our own pain, it does not validate someone else's pain.

If you have suffered the loss – any loss – then you have the right to grieve. Period.

As for the baby loss club I joined... While I had been working to invalidate my loss – they worked just as hard at validating it for me. This group of women became some of my most cherished friends, biggest cheerleaders, and grief supporters I have ever known. The love we share for each other and our babies, both living and dead, knocked down whatever barrier the secret competition tried to create between us.

And it was in the safety of each other's heartbreak that we were each finally free to grieve.

*Edited for length. Full version originally posted on Still Standing.com*

*Rachel Lewis is a bio mom, adoptive mom, and foster mom. She is currently writing her memoir, and her book, Living Through Loss, is available for free on her website at [www.thelewisnote.com](http://www.thelewisnote.com). Rachel has struggled with life-threatening pregnancy complications, recurrent pregnancy loss, ruptured ectopic pregnancy, unexplained secondary infertility, and pregnancy after loss. She has also released a foster son she raised back to his bio family. In spite of the challenges and heartaches of becoming a family, she now gets to call three precious daughters her own.*

## 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 meetings.

For more information or directions, please call 503-699-8006.

### **PARENTS OF INFANT LOSS & PREGNANCY LOSS, INCLUDING EARLY PREGNANCY LOSS**

Out of consideration for other bereaved parents, we ask that children not attend these meetings. Thank you.

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

**August 14, September 11**

Peace House, 2116 NE 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Portland

Contact: Rachel Murfitt

(RachelM@briefencounters.org)

This group also meets the fourth Tuesday of each month, 7:00pm

**August 22, September 26**

Peace House, 2116 NE 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Portland

Contact: Daniele (daniele@diglife.com)

### **PARENTS OF PREGNANCY INTERRUPTION DUE TO MEDICAL REASONS**

Out of consideration for other bereaved parents, we ask that children not attend these meetings. Thank you.

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

**August 24, September 28**

Peace House, 2116 NE 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Portland

Contact: Heather (heatherksmith5@gmail.com)

### **PARENTS OF SUBSEQUENT PREGNANCIES, ADOPTIONS, & PARENTS TRYING TO CONCEIVE** Babies welcome.

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

**August 28, September 25**

Peace House, 2116 NE 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Portland

Contact: Heather (heatherksmith5@gmail.com)

## RESOURCES

### *Brief Encounters Online*

#### WEBSITE

The Brief Encounters website [www.briefencounters.org](http://www.briefencounters.org) is a great resource, including past newsletter issues, upcoming events and announcements, helpful links, numerous resources, support meeting information, etc.

#### TWITTER

@**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 and Brief Encounters Parenting After Loss are the names of our private/closed Facebook mutual support groups. Because they are private, each group requires approval to join, and posts are hidden from anyone who is not a group member.

*Please remember to take the usual precautions to protect yourself when using any social media outlets, keeping in mind that online communication is never completely private or secure. And remember that everyone who posts or reads will be in different places in their grief, so let's all be mindful and considerate. You can find articles about online safety with a quick online search. Be safe.*

### *Counselor Referrals*

The counselors listed, recommended by Brief Encounters parents, are familiar with issues we face after the loss of a baby or during fertility treatment:

- ♥ Gaby Donnell, LCSW, Inner NE Portland  
503-287-2295 [www.motherrootscounseling.com](http://www.motherrootscounseling.com)
- ♥ Teni Davoudian, Ph.D., OHSU  
503-418-4500 [www.ohsu.edu](http://www.ohsu.edu)
- ♥ Britta Dinsmore, PhD, SW Portland  
503-913-4791 [www.brittadinsmore.com](http://www.brittadinsmore.com)
- ♥ Adria Goodness, CNW, PMHNP, SE Portland  
503-224-3438 [www.adriagoodness.com](http://www.adriagoodness.com)
- ♥ Audrianna J. Gurr, MS, NCC, SE Portland  
503-475-4005 [www.gurrcounseling.com](http://www.gurrcounseling.com)

- ♥ Tina Lilly, MS, Inner SE Portland  
503-380-0424 [www.foryouaremadeofstars.com](http://www.foryouaremadeofstars.com)
- ♥ Tara May, PhD, Vancouver  
360-904-1008 [www.taramay.com](http://www.taramay.com)
- ♥ Brooke Noli, MFT, Inner NE Portland
- ♥ Brynna Sibilla, LCSW, Inner NE  
503-280-1101 [www.psychotherapyportland.com](http://www.psychotherapyportland.com)
- ♥ Jennifer Singleton, PhD, PC, Downtown, 503-242-1558
- ♥ Lynne Phillips-Werbel, LCSW, Beaverton  
503-690-9119 [www.wildwoodpsych.com](http://www.wildwoodpsych.com)
- ♥ The Dougy Center (for bereaved siblings)  
503-775-5683 [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)

*Editor's Note: We would appreciate receiving suggestions, changes, or corrections to any of these resource listings; please send them to the editor at [newsletter@briefencounters.org](mailto:newsletter@briefencounters.org)*

# BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Support for bereaved parents of pregnancy  
and infant loss

2116 NE 18<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Portland, OR 97212

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**Twitter:** [twitter.com/briefencount](https://twitter.com/briefencount)

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Nonprofit  
Organization  
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Permit No. 546  
Portland, OR

**Return Service  
Requested**

Postmaster: Dated material, please do not delay

*Miscarriage*



## **Change of Address or Removal from Mailing List**

Please contact our database manager Megan Wright at 503-646-1335 or by email at [megan.k.wright@comcast.net](mailto:megan.k.wright@comcast.net)

### **UPCOMING MEETINGS**

#### **PARENTS OF INFANT LOSS & PREGNANCY LOSS, INCLUDING EARLY PREGNANCY LOSS**

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

**August 14, September 11**

This group also meets the fourth Tuesday of each  
month, 7:00pm

**August 22, September 26**

See page 6 for a detailed schedule

#### **PARENTS OF PREGNANCY INTERRUPTION DUE TO MEDICAL REASONS**

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

**August 24, September 28**

#### **PARENTS OF SUBSEQUENT PREGNANCIES, ADOPTIONS, & PARENTS TRYING TO CONCEIVE**

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

**August 28, September 25**

All meetings held at The Peace House, 2116 NE 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Portland