

Here, There, and Everywhere

By Laura Klyzek

Never would I have thought that someday my living daughter would name a doll after her sister who died. "Let's bring Claire with us to the store," and, "Claire is going to the beach," and, "Claire needs a new outfit." These are sentences I expected to say in reference to a living, breathing child-- not about a doll who has taken on the persona of a sister who is missing. It seems that there is now a narrative that must be repeated nearly every day-- a four year-old trying to make sense of the sister she never could meet or play with. My heart stops, and my breath catches in my throat as she explains to the receptionist behind the counter or the lady at the dog park... each time the same rehearsed explanation: "You didn't know I have two sisters. One is named Julia, and the other is named Claire but Claire died." She so easily saying the words that I struggle to admit out-loud to strangers. She laying bare my grief in the span of a few seconds. I hoping not to see the look of pity and confusion in this next unknowing stranger. Have they ever had another child proclaim the existence of their dead sibling? Will we be now forever known as the family with the dead baby?

My older daughter, Julia, met Claire, though she says she doesn't remember. What she does remember comes in bits and pieces from the video that we took of one of their visits. "I remember we sang her 'Hush Little Baby' and I brought her a Winnie the Pooh toy. It had these beads on it and it was like Winnie the Pooh was putting his paw in a honey pot." She pauses for a moment as we drive. The world stands still as we now seem to be moving in slow motion down the road. "I think she really liked that toy." Julia doesn't talk about Claire as vocally as Audrey. At eight, she has come to understand that speaking about the dead is not small talk in this society. She once lived in a world relatively untouched by grief until the age of three when we lost Claire. Soon after she turned four, and I remember her trying to process the loss in her own way. We once went to a park and she saw a utility access cover surrounded by cement. She likened it to a grave and stated, "This must be where somebody else buried their baby." When she looked at the empty crib that was meant for Claire she asked, "If we have another baby, is it going to die, too?" When I bore Audrey, it felt like an eternity explaining that most babies live and, yes, we hope that this baby is going to come home.

My world is now separated into the life that I lived before Claire and the life after. I know that we talk about there being a "new normal," but how can it be when nothing about it is remotely close to "normal?" I used to seek out social opportunities, throwing parties with a larger group of friends and setting up playdates for Julia with moms I met here and there. Now my circle has significantly narrowed. I meet with women who I've become close to because they have also lost children. We have brunch and talk about how we grieve for our old selves as much as we grieve for our child. How we are going to try to *get through* the holidays this year. How relationships have changed or been lost as a result of grief. How we fear for our living children's lives because we know they can be lost in an instant.

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Support for bereaved parents of pregnancy and infant loss

I no longer set up playdates with just anyone because of what they let their children do on the playground-- how can they let their little one climb so high without being there to catch him? There are good things, too. The tree in my neighbor's backyard that sways when the wind blows, shaking its limbs at the world. The beauty and tragedy of the man rummaging through the recycling bin to get the cans. Pulling over to watch a rare rainbow seen at 7:30 in the morning when the sun hits the falling sprinkles at just the right angle. Hearing a song sung by a choir: "People get ready, there's a train a-coming, you don't need no baggage you just get on board." When the worst imaginable thing has happened, the "normal" becomes extravagant. The world, pulsating with life in its every revolution, becomes clearer. Priorities are honed. Extraneous noise eliminated. Direction clarified.

* * *

"What should she wear today?"

"I think she needs all the purple."

"Okay, here's the other shoe. And let's make sure she has a warm coat."

I dress the doll up in every purple thing in her wardrobe. Dress, shoes, coat, skirt under the dress, leggings, and a purse to match.

"Wanna come with us to the store, Claire?"

I pause for a second. Try not to think too much.

"Sure. Let's go!"

* * *

I have a picture of Claire on my dresser. It's been retouched so that the Q-tip and other medical supplies have been removed. She was in her first days of life; the days when she needed the fewest interventions in order to continue living. No oxygen for a few brief moments, no ventilator tube. Just her face in black and white. Her eyes open and searching. She seems calm to me. Before the struggle and the silent cries. Every day I look into her eyes on my way to the shower. Sometimes it's a quick glance and other days I linger; looking into those eyes. Wondering what they would look like today. The eyes of a kindergartner. Still curious about the world.

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From the editor...

I've never liked the term "new normal". Really how can anything be normal when your baby has died? But after a few years, I can't think of a different term to use. After all, most of life is normal, mundane. Except now I have this extra weight with me everywhere I go. I've built my strength up to carry it, all day every day. Sometimes it's very heavy, sometimes it's not, but it's always there. Really it's just become part of my old normal. So much is still the same but now I carry her everywhere I go, through all the wonderful, awful, and normal moments of life.

Shannon Stemm Patel
mother of Charlie and her big sis



Upcoming newsletter topics...

February
MEMORIES

We all have so few precious memories of our babies. And often not many people to share them with. Please consider sharing them here in this safe and loving space.

March
PARENTING ALL OUR CHILDREN

How do you take care of and raise children who aren't here? Did you already have a living child before your loss or did you lose your first? How do you feel this has affected your style of parenting? Please share your experiences as we all struggle with this 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

Honestly...

*I spent today missing you,
and that's probably
how I will spend tomorrow
and the day after that
and all the days after that
too.*

—Unknown

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

2116 NE 18th Ave., Portland, OR 97212

Message Phone: 503-699-8006

Web: www.briefencounters.org

Twitter: 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.

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LOVE GIFTS

Please send Love Gifts and messages to 2116 NE 18th Ave., Portland, OR 97212. For Love Gifts to be acknowledged in a specific newsletter issue, we must receive it by the 10th 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.

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. For children to be remembered in a specific newsletter issue, we must receive your request by the 10th of the prior month.

SAFE ARRIVALS

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

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 15th of the prior month (example: June 15th for July issue).

**Please make check payable to Brief Encounters and send to:
2116 NE 18th 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.

Angelo's Song

by Kaimana LoBue and family

In loving memory of Angelo Patrick Kaimana, 1/1/2003-1/12/2003

Diamond on the water, only here for a while we were blessed by the sparkle of your smile.

An angel now in heaven, in the Lord's embrace, and memories of every night when we kissed your face.

Born in peace, caught in the hands of joy, we held you in our arms of love, you only knew harmony!

Your footprints in the bible and with your wings of white, you flew from here to a more holy place.

A poem though you were, so precious and so sweet a novel you've become, in all of our lives.

Hello mama don't you cry, I see daddy when we meet in the sky and I watch my siblings play, as they grow every day!

And mama I'm with you every step of the way!

Diamond on the water, only here for a while we were blessed by the sparkle of your smile.

The First 1,000

By Justin

It is no surprise that I have a tendency to gravitate toward numbers. My education and profession are based in calculations, predictions and statistics. I often present a summation of numbers and data points in order to explain a trend or to tell a story. And it is through this minor obsession, particularly with a unique set of numbers, that I realize in just a short span of 9 days, our family will approach a milestone of sorts. This number can easily be considered arbitrary, one that would otherwise come and go without any recognition, perhaps it's only quality being that it is so tidy and divisible. I hesitate on letting my mind wander to this calculation in the first place. What good can come from this? It is a simple formula with only two variables, measuring one unit of distance since I last held my middle child.

1,000 days.

My mind takes off cycling through the catalog of memories. And at first, this number seems large, but honestly I struggle to define this period of time. Is it a long time? To be fair, I could just as easily reduce or expand this number using a different measure—perhaps it is really only a few years, or mountain of unbearable minutes? Time has felt anything but consistent, with the only real constant being the anticipation that slowly builds with a looming anniversary, the duality of an approaching holiday or meaningful date. However, I can admit that the days leading up to this marker in time appear to be accelerating, lacking the torturous pace of days gone where hours would stretch out without forgiveness.

As I drift into this new normal, I look back across the yawning timeline and see the knots and entanglements that give weight to my perception. I roll through the checklist of past events: an immersion into activism with fundraising, networking and organization, exploration and growth through rituals, sharing and writing, learning the new language of life after loss and wading through the misplaced ignorance and insensitivity from others, surviving the balancing act between hope and fear intertwined in pregnancy after loss. Stacked one atop the other, these 1,000 days hardly seem adequate to hold so much.

Weighing down the other end of the scales are the events yet to come, or to be painfully accurate, that will never be. The absent first day of school, her first tooth that will never be lost. Scores of missed goals and an empty trophy bookshelf. A complete history of stubborn disagreements and frustrations, of laughter and inside jokes never to be recorded. Sing-alongs that have fallen silent, dances that sit quietly. The long goodbye hug and misty eyes before driving away from her first college dorm. When I allow myself to wander in this place, I quickly realize that I have barely walked down path that stretches out forever. My obsessive count is a mere dot on the timeline of loss.

And then there is Lydia, who seems to transcend time itself. My imagination runs wild with the visions of who she should be—a bright-eyed toddler, exhausting me with her go-go energy and confounding me with her stubborn need to

express her independence, all while I marvel at her budding personality. Mixed in are the realizations of who she is, the warm space that she occupies in our family despite her physical absence. And while these thoughts inherently carry yearning and sadness within them, they ultimately bring me peace. These are not bittersweet moments of the past, nor are they daunting hours yet to come. It is in these moments I find I am released from my perpetual time-keeping, and can just be present with my daughter and the space I hold for her in my life.

Originally posted on July 24, 2015 at glowinthewoods.com, a community for bereaved parents

Justin is a storyteller, weaving together the emotions and day-to-day events that fill our babylost lives. Before stumbling out of the hospital and into the cold rain of November, he kissed his daughter one last time and told her that he loved her so very much. The kind nurse rocking her looked up at him and said, "She knows." The words he collects on Glowinthewoods.com are one way he makes sure she never forgets.

Safe Arrival

On August 5th, Alana Hartman and Michael Ellick welcomed their daughter, Zuzu Magdalene Ellick. Zuzu has an older sister **Isadora Mei Ellick**, who was stillborn on February 14, 2015.

Upcoming Event

Celebrate Silas 2018 Memorial

5k run/walk

Sunday, March 4th, 2018

Help raise \$10,000 for The Dougy Center! Your donation includes participation in the event, a commemorative t-shirt and free admission to the Crystal Springs Rhododendron Garden, for day of event. 100% of all registration donations will go directly to The Dougy Center, The National Center for Grieving Children & Families, and is fully tax-deductible. Visit CelebrateSilas.com for more information and to get registered for the walk today!

9:30am - Sign In

10:00am - 5k Run / Walk

Duniway Elementary School

7700 SE Reed College Place, Portland, OR

Celebrate Silas Mural Project

This year Celebrate Silas 2018, in collaboration with local artist, Max Collins, brings you a Mural Project to help honor and share the memory of your loved one. You are invited to come to The Dougy Center and make a mural based on a photograph of your loved one. Workshop times list at CelebrateSilas.com

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

January 8, February 12

Contact: Rachel Murfitt (RachelM@briefencounters.org)

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

January 23, February 27

Contact: Daniele (daniele@dignlife.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

January 25, February 22

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

January 22, February 26

Contact: Heather (heatherksmith5@gmail.com)

All meetings held at The Peace House, 2116 NE 18th Avenue, Portland

RESOURCES

Brief Encounters Online

WEBSITE

The Brief Encounters website 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) 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
- ♥ Teni Davoudian, Ph.D., OHSU
503-418-4500 www.ohsu.edu
- ♥ Britta Dinsmore, PhD, SW Portland
503-913-4791 www.brittadinsmore.com
- ♥ Adria Goodness, CNW, PMHNP, SE Portland
503-224-3438 www.adriagoodness.com
- ♥ Audrianna J. Gurr, MS, NCC, SE Portland
503-475-4005 www.gurrcounseling.com
- ♥ Tina Lilly, MS, Inner SE Portland
503-380-0424 www.foryouaremadeofstars.com
- ♥ Tara May, PhD, Vancouver
360-904-1008 www.taramay.com
- ♥ Brooke Noli, MFT, Inner NE Portland
971-645-1180 portlandbirthcounseling.com
- ♥ Brynna Sibilla, LCSW, Inner NE
503-280-1101 www.psychotherapyportland.com
- ♥ Jennifer Singleton, PhD, PC, Downtown, 503-242-1558
- ♥ Lynne Phillips-Werbel, LCSW, Beaverton
503-690-9119 www.wildwoodpsych.com
- ♥ The Dougy Center (for bereaved siblings)
503-775-5683 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

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Support for bereaved parents of pregnancy
and infant loss

2116 NE 18th Ave.
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Message Phone: 503-699-8006

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**Return Service
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Postmaster: Dated material, please do not delay

*New
Normal*



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.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

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

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

January 8, February 12

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

January 23, February 27

See page 7 for a detailed schedule

PARENTS OF PREGNANCY INTERRUPTION DUE TO MEDICAL REASONS

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

January 25, February 22

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

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

January 22, February 26

All meetings held at The Peace House, 2116 NE 18th Avenue, Portland