

Memories

February 2018, Volume 24, Issue 2

Tragic or Beautiful, the Memories Are All We Have

By Jennifer Roberts

He's been gone for 21 months and still, every day is different. Most days are manageable now - you just keep swimming and you get through it. Some days are exhausting and memories haunt your mind. Someone recently told me to "Only remember the good times with Ben." I stared at that text for 10 minutes. The good times? I'm guessing she meant while I was pregnant? Ben was alive outside my body for 18 hours and all but one of those hours was filled with confusion, shock, false hope and.... literally I can't even describe it.

I can't describe what it feels like to watch people try everything they can to keep a tiny baby alive. Your tiny baby. The one that took so long to make. I can't even begin to put into words what it feels like to have only held your son AFTER he died. His lifeless body getting cold and stiff in your arms. The horror of leaving the hospital without him and having to make arrangements for cremation. The weeks and months that followed in a blur, where I had to relearn how to live my new life as a mother of a baby who was no longer living.

There aren't enough good memories to fill a lifetime of remembering Ben. I have just a few physical things and only 40 pictures to trigger memories to last the rest of my life. I used to sing to him on my way to work and he was super active in the morning, kicking up a little storm in there. One day I was interviewing someone at work and he kicked me so hard I forgot what I was saying. That employee turned out to be a big problem for the company I worked for so I like to think Ben was trying to warn me not to hire her. All the ultrasounds we got while I was pregnant with him were fun. I loved seeing him. I wished I could get an ultrasound every week. Even more so now, since the ultrasounds were the only times I got to witness him healthy and moving around. The minute he was born was amazing. Truly the best moment of my life. He seemed to be healthy for the first hour and even though I was being stitched up and couldn't hold him, I was beyond elated. While he was still alive, but during the time that he was not doing well he squeezed my finger and opened one eye. That was exciting.

So there they are, less than a paragraph of good memories of Ben. All the rest are tragic, terrible, and

Continued on page 6

A monthly publication of Brief Encounters, www.briefencounters.org

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Support for bereaved parents of pregnancy and infant loss

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 listed at CelebrateSilas.com

Save the Date!

NOAH'S QUEST WALK/RUN

A benefit for Brief Encounters

June 23rd, 2017

Sandy Bluff Park

For everyone who has lost a child or the hope of a child, and for those who care.

In this issue...

"Tragic or Beautiful, the Memories Are All We Have" by Jennifer, pages 1 & 6

Untitled, by Ellie's Mom, page 3

"Memories..." By Éva, page 3

Our Children Remembered, pages 4 & 5

Love Gifts, page 5

"Those Facebook Memories..." by Amanda, page 6

From the editor...

My memories of Charlie are so cherished and bittersweet because there are so few. But like many of this month's contributors I've come to a place where I welcome any memory, hard or not, of her and her time. And of course, I ache for all the memories we didn't get to make. It is my hope that if you are on this path, you are able to find moments of peace and know that your memories, no matter how few, are a sign of your deep love for your baby.

Shannon Stemm Patel
mother of Charlie and her big sis



Upcoming newsletter topics...

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.

April
SELF-CARE

We are told that self-care is important, especially for griever. But when you're grieving, it's often so hard to do. What do you do for self-care? Please consider sharing your experience with us.

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

Newsletter printing provided by AnchorPointe

Grief is the last act of love we can give to those we have loved. Where there is deep grief, there was great love.

-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
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.

Untitled

By Ellie's Mom

When I first started this journey, I looked to grief support pages for hope. Much of what I saw worried me. I wondered if I would ever be able to breathe again without pain. Many of the visitors to the pages were in pain and were there to share their pain. It was a bit overwhelming at first. I hope this will bring some of you a bit of relief.

I thought of my daughter today. It sounds weird to say that. I think of her every day. But today, it was different. I was doing the dishes tonight. We just switched back to daylight savings time so it was very dark outside. I looked up into the window and saw my kitchen reflected there. It reminded me of all the times I had looked there to keep an eye on my daughter while I washed her bottles, or the thousands of items necessary to pump what she needed in those bottles. I remembered talking to her reflection and her smiling and playing with her toys.

I also remembered right after she died. I remembered not being able to do the dishes for quite a while. It was too hard to look into the window and not see her reflected there. Everyone always said I was so brave and they could never do what I was doing. They didn't know that I couldn't do the dishes at home those first few months. They didn't know that I returned to work to volunteer because being a stay at home mom without a little one was too painful.

But tonight was different. I smiled briefly at my fleeting memory. A quiet voice whispered to me, "She was never far from your sight." I thought how true that was. Unless she was sleeping, she was almost always within reach... even when I was taking care of my "personal business". I had been robbed of those small moments because I felt guilty about not being able to save her. My daughter died sometime during her nap. I did not even know until I went to get her for dinner at 5. By then she was long gone and slightly damp with a cold sweat. I felt for sure it was my fault and I should have known somehow.

Tonight, though... I know. I was a good mother. My daughter was always with me. Taking a nap and cooking dinner for the rest of my family did not make me a bad mother. Feelings of guilt should not be able to keep the memories of the good times away.

I hope that if you are new to your grief, you find hope in this. Yes, I still think of my baby every day. Yes, I still miss her. But today I can remember a moment with my baby and smile at the memory of her laughter. Today, I can smile having known her.

Memories...

By Eva Isák

How often do you allow yourself to remember? How often do you recall those days, hours when you lost your beloved child or children? What effect does it have on you if you do so?

I'm asking all these questions because sometimes I do. Something switches in me and I relive the events of that day, all over again. I may not remember every single detail, but I have certain pictures, images in my mind that I can see and recall anytime. These occasions happen without any notice, all of a sudden I just find myself there and then.

Then there are the occasions when I recall these memories deliberately. Anniversaries, special days, or those times when I passed in front of those different buildings where all those last memorable events happened. And I allow myself to remember. The last ultrasound, the color of the wall, the clock opposite my bed, the pain, both physically and emotionally, that sleepless night alone, empty and broken - all these belong to that tragic and long day when my baby boy was born and died.

You may ask why I am torturing myself with these images, why it is not better to keep them buried way back in my brain, somewhere in the right hemisphere, or somewhere around that.

I don't feel bad about these images, you see. Quite the contrary. These memories, these events and buildings are the earthly proof that my sweet child has come into my life. Even though I become sad and broken all over again, I may even cry (it's not been a big challenge for me to break into tears ever since...), it's some sort of a good sadness. These images are also my connections to him, tokens of our special relationship.

I allow myself some time at these places. Some time on my own. Very private, very personal time it is.

You know, I have never talked about this to anyone before. However, now it comes naturally.

And when eventually I leave sad and broken-hearted I still feel much better. It may sound somewhat silly, I can see that, but you should believe me that it is so. These are moments when time stands still. These are precious minutes that I can spend with my dear, beloved little son of mine. Nothing else matters. I don't see anyone or anything else around me, I don't care about the weather, people passing by, it's just us, my angel baby and his loving mom.

Originally posted on StillMothers.com

Éva lives in Hungary and Italy. She is a teacher and an interpreter, but now also a medical school student. Her little angel, Peter is her only child. He died five years ago due to a premature rupture of membranes.

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

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Those Facebook Memories...

By Amanda Ross-White

Another one came up today. I wasn't expecting it, unlike some of the others where the dates are imprinted on my mind. But there I was, smiling back at myself, with my mother and sister smiling back too. I look hot and tired but still happy. My sister is glowing, which is ironic, because she's the one who's sick in the picture. My mom looks young. And of course, she was 9 years younger than she is today.

The picture was taken at my baby shower.

I have just finished opening gifts for babies who would never get to see them.

My sister came in for a surprise visit. She lives half-way around the world and wanted to be there for this special day, knowing she wouldn't be able to make it when the babies are born. She was sick, waiting for the call from a bone marrow donor and didn't know if she'd be able to travel for a while. Still she wanted to be there for me.

It was a great shower. My best friend put it on, with cute cupcakes for eating and so many good friends and family around. We laughed, and played silly games. We joked about how big the diaper bag was and how much I'd have to carry. We had a really good time.

But as the memories come up on Facebook today, I'm not sure how to feel. Sadness, definitely. I so desperately wish things hadn't turned out the way they did. I can't believe I was so happy when less than a month from that picture, everything was shattered. Happiness, a little. My baby shower really was a great day, and I probably wouldn't remember it as well if my babies had been born alive. The fact that this was one of the few happy celebrations of my sons makes it extra special. I'm not struggling to remember who was there, or whether that was some other party we had for them.

In the nine years since that baby shower, there have been many other celebrations, as well as some sad moments. Friends have gotten married, had babies of their own. There have been 40th birthday celebrations and family reunions. Some have divorced, or split up with boyfriends, or never gotten to have children. And despite my last post, most of my friends have stuck with me through all of it! My sister has been in remission five years, thanks in part to the anonymous donor who saved her life the same day my sons lost theirs.

So, bring on those Facebook memories. Happy memories. Sad memories. And everything in between.

They are all part of this beautiful journey of life and I will live through it all in honor of my sons.

Originally posted on stillstandingmag.com

Amanda Ross-White is the proud mother of four beautiful children, including her twin boys Nate and Sam, who were stillborn in 2007. She is eternally grateful to watch her rainbow children, daughter Rebecca and son Alex, grow around her. She is also the author of *Joy at the End of the Rainbow: A Guide to Pregnancy After a Loss*.

Tragic or Beautiful, the Memories Are All We Have

Continued from page 1

truly indescribable. Too bad there isn't some kind of pill to take to only keep the good memories alive right? To be honest though, I wouldn't take it. I'd rather remember every detail of him and his life, like I do every night, than forget any of it. That is what it's like for all loss moms, I believe. We have to live our entire lives with a limited amount of memories of our babies, so the horrifying ones are as important as the beautiful ones.

In a way, the pain of missing him that comes every night before bed is almost reassuring now. I sometimes look forward to the release of emotions and feel like it's my quiet time every day to remember him. He's been gone way longer than he was alive and I still long for him as much as the first day. And because of that, I feel my unending love for him and I am reassured that I'll never forget him.

Normal parents get feel their unending love for their children when they look at them or speak to them. When they play with them or rock them to sleep. When they teach them, guide them, and even discipline them. Bereaved Mothers have to feel it through our pain.

Jennifer Roberts has been married for five years to her husband, Josh. They have survived infertility, the loss of their son, Ben, who died shortly after birth and a first trimester miscarriage. They struggle every day to remain hopeful that they will someday have a family. Jennifer's personal blog is benwashere2016.blogspot.com

One of the realities of grief and loss is that the rest of the world seems to keep on going forward, while we feel like we have been stopped in our tracks.

-Alan Wolfelt

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

February 12, March 12

Contact: Rachel Murfitt (RachelM@briefencounters.org)

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

February 27, March 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

February 22, March 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

February 26, March 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

Not all counselors are familiar with the issues that parents face after the death of their baby or during infertility treatment. If you feel like you would like to talk with a counselor, listed below are individuals who have been recommended to us by parents in the BE community.:

- ♥ Gaby Donnell, LCSW, Inner NE Portland
503-287-2295 www.mootherootscounseling.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
- ♥ Rachel Starck, LPC, North Portland
503.929.2773 www.thethrivingmama.com
- ♥ Laurie Cox, LCSW, NE Portland
503-819-6354 mootherootscounseling.com/laurie-cox
- ♥ Lauren Marie Barthelemy, LPC, SE Portland
412-715-2391
- ♥ Debbie Bensching, MSW, LCSW, SW Portland
503-944-5032 DebbieBensching.com

- ♥ Tina Lilly, MS, Inner SE Portland
503-380-0424 www.foryouaremadeofstars.com
- ♥ Ava M. Stone, Ph.D., PC, SE Portland
503-279-8160 www.pacificcenter.org
- ♥ Tara May, PhD, Vancouver
360-904-1008 www.taramay.com
- ♥ Nalini Kuruppu MSW, LCSW, North Portland
503-753-9157
- ♥ Kari Maljai, LPC, SE Portland
503.936.7658 www.pnwbh.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

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Memories

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

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February 12, March 12

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month, 7:00pm

February 27, March 27

See page 7 for a detailed schedule

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February 26, March 26

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