

# Parenting All Our Children

March 2018, Volume 24, Issue 3

## This is Motherhood, Too

By KerriAnne

There is a tag in social media, #thisismotherhood.

This tag is usually accompanied by photos of mothers with their children, and statuses describing one or many of the difficulties that comes with being a mother.

While I think this is a great movement, I can't help but notice that there is a certain kind of mother that is not represented in these hashtags. It's the sort of mother I am, a mother with no living children.

My only child, a son, was born still at 38 weeks 5 days. My husband and I delivered our son in the hospital, we held him, we named him. We fell so deeply in love with him on the day he was born, like all parents do. We experienced all the things that most parents do, the only difference is that we didn't get to take our son home.

Instead, our journey of parenting began with searches for answers, with long talks with doctors. It began with calls and arrangements, with meetings at funeral homes. It involved picking out a cemetery plot, designing a headstone. Parenthood began with grief, and it continues with grief.

Despite what many people seem to believe, when your child dies, you don't stop being a parent. Just like my son doesn't stop being my son. We are tied, we are family, forever. Motherhood for me involves caring for my son's resting place, it involves talking about his life. It involves tending to and nursing his memory daily, rather than his physical body.

My motherhood looks different from the average motherhood. Motherhood for me is having to defend my motherhood, when people try to strip it from me for having empty arms. I am an invisible mother, and this is my motherhood.

Originally posted on StillMothers.com

KerriAnne Guanch became a bereaved mother at the age of 26, when her first and only son was stillborn at 38 weeks 5 days.

## BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Support for bereaved parents of pregnancy and infant loss

### Upcoming Events

#### 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](http://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

### 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

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*From the editor...*

When my oldest daughter was born, I learned that being a mother was the hardest job I would ever have but also the one that fulfills me most of all. And so, it's the same in parenting Charlie. It's infinitely harder to be the mother of a little girl who isn't here. It certainly doesn't look or feel the same as parenting my living child. And I'd obviously change the circumstances if I could. But we all know, I can't make it different. So I will embrace my love for her and use that extra energy in other ways. What I know with all my heart is I wouldn't give up being her mama for anything.

Shannon Stemm Patel  
mother of Charlie and her big sis



*Upcoming newsletter topics...*

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.

May

MOTHERS

What makes you feel like a mom when you don't have a baby to hold? Mothers' Day is bittersweet for loss mamas; how do you plan to celebrate being a mother? If you have living children how do you/they include missing siblings?

*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)

Newsletter printing provided by AnchorPointe

*The hard part of life is we have to keep on living even when our world has stopped spinning, and all the stars are laying at our feet.*

*-Zoe Clark-Coates  
[sayinggoodbye.org](http://sayinggoodbye.org)*

## 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 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: Shafina Fazal-Gardner

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Database Manager: Megan Wright

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Hospital Liaison Coordinator: OPEN

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### MEETING AND PHONE FACILITATORS

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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 [database@briefencounters.org](mailto:database@briefencounters.org).

### 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).

# Half a Mom

*By Tash*

There comes a point in a pregnancy where one usually starts pondering how things will get balanced after the child is born, in terms of time and psyche: how will I manage to be both a wife and a mother? (Jeebus, is it really 5:30 already?!) How will the time get allocated between my obligations to these distinct places of grocery store and nursery, not to mention work, my friends, my family? A cold wave of early bedtime, schedule-crushed weekends, sick days, babysitters, daycare, and Netflix subscriptions suddenly washes over one as she realizes things will change, radically. There are only so many hours in a day, and while I multitask with the best of them (lifts fingers from keypad ever so slightly in order to blow toddler's nose, take turn at Candyland, throw ball to dog, click over to respond to chat message, and realize chicken needs defrosting) sometimes things need undivided attention and take priority. Babies are one of those things.

I remember in the weeks before Maddy was born, wondering how on earth I was going to juggle two children. And I mean that somewhat in the literal sense of throwing them both in the air, perhaps with a banana some yogurt and a cell phone, and seeing if I could make a five-minute lunch plan out of it for all of us. But I also mean that in the more figurative sense of balancing my time with them, and the more existential sense of how I would carry them around in my heart and my head, equally, and yet individually and appropriately. With liberty and justice for all. And a bit of down time for mom, who needs a good bubble bath now and again.

And so it started, pulling away from the house on a Monday morning, weeping, leaving my toddler behind for 48 hours while I went to birth her sister. The split opened fresh and wide: guilty for leaving one behind, anxious to meet the other.

Before I could secure on my helmet, my brain began careening from one wall to the other, not only between Bella and Maddy, House and Hospital, but Well and Sick. It became clear to us by late Tuesday that Maddy was severely impaired, and would likely require exclusive hospitalization or institutional care. How on earth would I ever manage parenting, loving, holding two extremely different individuals under two roofs separated by distance, time, and most likely money and visiting hours? This was not what I envisioned when I imagined pointing out to Bella that her sister had just spit up some god-awful substance on my couch that demanded immediate attention, sorry if I couldn't help her find other maraca right

this second. It somehow seemed justified, explainable, easy when both were right there, in front of me.

As the week dragged on I couldn't settle in either place. When I was at the hospital, I simply longed to be home, snuggled with the well, knowing what sweet life could be. While I was home, I was racked with guilt for not being at the bedside of an infant -- a tiny babe who couldn't possibly understand, but needed nothing more than her mother next to her side and I yearned to return and touch her small hands. I was restless in both places, both in spirit and in body. My eyes cried, my breasts leaked, my head screamed for silence and sleep, my legs found themselves heading to the door, my hands constantly picking up the phone to check on the other, my mouth always speaking of the other daughter: "Bella, your sister is very sick. But she is so beautiful." "Maddy, your big sister Bella wants to meet you so much. She used precious Dora stickers on your valentine, she must love you immensely." There was no way to bring these worlds together -- Bella was on month three of a post-nasal drip hack. One NICU deemed her too young, the other I didn't dare bring her into. Maddy, with her sea of tubes and wires and machines that go "ping" was in no shape to leave the hospital. Both children demanded my attention. Both children deserved it. I couldn't reconcile my obligations.

The last 24 hours of Maddy's life were spent exclusively at the hospital; I left my home Saturday a mother of two, but two split by location and health. I came home Sunday night, the mother of two, divided by living and dead.

I wish I could announce that at that point the pendulum finally quit its manic swing, and I settled back into my one-dimensional life. But it actually became worse. To this day, I fly back and forth between earth and the underworld, my family room and Hades, with a surprise and suddenness that brings whiplash. My mind smashes against one wall and is suddenly spinning pel-mel towards the other until it crashes again. The duties I feel toward my two disparate daughters have left me concussed.

I'm still always guilty of where I am, feeling that I'm snubbing one daughter for the other, unable to spend quality time with one and pay attention to the other's needs. I often feel like half a mom.

I discovered early on that Bella, only two-and-a-half at the time of Maddy's death, began associating my frequent and random griefbursts with whatever activity we happened to be involved in at the time. Music Class, for example, quickly got scuttled when I

*Continued on page 6*

# 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 15<sup>th</sup> of the prior month (example: June 15<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**

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## Half a Mom

*Continued from page 3*

cried roundtrip the first week back. The following week Bella blew up and refused to leave the car, pronouncing “music makes me sad.” (Maddy 1, Bella 0). The tears, apparently, would have to stop during daylight hours lest she begin associating them with trips to the grocery or walking the dog. I had to manage my grief, no matter how badly I simply wanted to curl in a ball and cry and remember Maddy, and hold it off. (Bella 1, Maddy 1).

My Maddy-time is right here, right now, on the keypad, typing her name, sharing my memories and feelings. I try desperately to limit this to when Bella is killing gray matter in front of the television, or when she’s off at school or in bed, but sometimes I need to “check my mail” – see her name, send my love, receive support. It kills me that when Bella picked up her dad’s camera she turned it and caught me, as I must always seem to her, hunched over the keyboard. *Bella can’t you see that she needs me right now? That she’s crying? That she reeks a bit of stale vomit? That her hands are outstretched? That mommy needs a few minutes with her?* No, of course you can’t. Truth be known, I can’t either honey. But I just need to be with her a moment, m’kay? (Bella 2,346, Maddy 4, 578)

And then there are the times I stifle my memories, my feelings, my grief, and mentally block out the picture of my other daughter and what she would look like today stumbling across the lawn so that I may enjoy Bella attempting to blow bubbles and then eat them, or hanging upside down out of the hammock or delivering Little Miss Bossy Boss her Milk! Now! “Oh and some crackers too, Mom!” So that I can pay attention and avoid a trip to the emergency room, and not get too impatient and testy and be in the moment and breathe and enjoy. *Shit Maddy, your sister’s doing that thing where she’s hangs upside down by one arm on the tree branch and tries to drop four feet, and I can’t right now!*. But the otherworld baby can’t possibly know when it’s a good time to slap me upside the head and demand attention. (Bella,  $1.67 \times 10^7$ , Maddy  $1.24 \times 10^7$ ).

*Sweetie, I’m in an important meeting and everyone’s looking at me, I can’t, I just can’t, can it wait?*

*I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, but rush hour tonight is a bitch without taking that detour over the River Styx. Maybe tomorrow night? Ok?*

*I’m right in the middle of dinner, I have raw chicken yuk on my hands, the stove is on, the dog is barking, Bella is crying in front of the fridge, the phone is ringing, the cat just coughed up a hairball perilously close to the salad, can’t you see? Can’t you see that I just need a few*

*minutes here and then I’ll deal with you? I’ll be there in just a second.*

I know a day will come when the head-banging oscillation will cease, and that I’ll find myself firmly planted here, with only an occasional, slightly depressing venture to visit Maddy. But I almost dread that day; it will mean we all have grown: neither of my daughters will need me as much, and I’ll come to realize that the voices in my head aren’t really, it’s just my need to grieve finally waning. One will no longer be a baby, and I’ll come to realize that the other never was, on this plane. At which point I’ll only be able to look back and hope I did the best I could, by both of them.

Mother’s Day looms large right there around the corner and I can’t bring myself to celebrate and feel rather guilty accepting anything from the live daughter. I feel I haven’t been there in full. For either of them. I’m constantly distracted by the other, and have yet to figure out how to hold each of them against my still poochy stomach and tell them both simultaneously, “I love you both, equally, fully, with all of my might and ability. Recognizing that you both are quite different, of course. You know, in case you hadn’t noticed.”

*Originally posted on GlowInTheWoods.com*

*After five years of a miscarriage, infertility, infertility treatment, and a healthy toddler, Tash decided to try one more time for one more baby. Tash and her family are left with a gaping hole following the six days of thier baby’s so-called life. She copes, grieves, and mothers a live, inquisitive three-and-a-half year old as well as the memory of her dead daughter.*

## Always in love

*By John Mayer*

I’m in love, I always will be.

Two marks on my arm, two daughters born.

I will always love

but one will grow

and one will stay

here in memory,

curled and translucent.

She is little and beautiful.

The other keeps changing and

now I see her missing you

when I look into her eyes – all joy

but for the missing – knowing she is

but can’t be a big sister. She will never meet

her little, but in dreams.

How do you do that when you’re two?

*John is a bereaved father and brother. His daughter River was born at 24 weeks and died that same day in her mother’s arms.*

*John’s book is available for purchase at [www.lulu.com/spotlight/bendoftheriver](http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/bendoftheriver)*

## 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

**March 12, April 9**

Contact: Rachel Murfitt (RachelM@briefencounters.org)

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

**March 27, April 24**

Contact: Daniele (DanieleR@briefencounters.org)

### 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

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

**March 22, April 26**

Contact: Heather (HeatherS@briefencounters.org)

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

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

**March 26, April 23**

Contact: Heather (HeatherS@briefencounters.org)

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

## 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*

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](http://www.mootherootscounseling.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)
- ♥ Rachel Starck, LPC, North Portland  
503.929.2773 [www.thethrivingmama.com](http://www.thethrivingmama.com)
- ♥ Laurie Cox, LCSW, NE Portland  
503-819-6354 [mootherootscounseling.com/laurie-cox](http://mootherootscounseling.com/laurie-cox)
- ♥ Lauren Marie Barthelemy, LPC, SE Portland  
412-715-2391
- ♥ Debbie Benschung, MSW, LCSW, SW Portland  
503-944-5032 [DebbieBenschung.com](http://DebbieBenschung.com)

- ♥ Tina Lilly, MS, Inner SE Portland  
503-380-0424 [www.foryouaremadeofstars.com](http://www.foryouaremadeofstars.com)
- ♥ Ava M. Stone, Ph.D., PC, SE Portland  
503-279-8160 [www.pacificcenter.org](http://www.pacificcenter.org)
- ♥ Tara May, PhD, Vancouver  
360-904-1008 [www.taramay.com](http://www.taramay.com)
- ♥ Nalini Kuruppu MSW, LCSW, North Portland  
503-753-9157
- ♥ Kari Maljai, LPC, SE Portland  
503.936.7658 [www.pnwbh.com](http://www.pnwbh.com)
- ♥ Brooke Noli, MFT, Inner NE Portland  
971-645-1180 [portlandbirthcounseling.com](http://portlandbirthcounseling.com)
- ♥ 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

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and infant loss

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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

*Parenting  
All Our  
Children*

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

Please contact our database manager Megan Wright at 503-646-1335 or by email at [database@briefencounters.org](mailto:database@briefencounters.org).

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

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See page 7 for a detailed schedule

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