

Memories Too Few

A Letter to
Parents about
Pregnancy Loss



Kathy Manning Burns

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BY Kathy Manning Burns

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Thank you to

The friends who shared their stories with me, Joyce Lung and Lisa Pendleton of Deaconess Hospital PRIDE for their advice, and my sisters, parents and sons who encouraged me to write this book.

To the Reader

When you lose a child by any pregnancy or newborn loss, unfortunately, the only people on this earth that truly understand your pain are other parents who have experienced the same loss. Others can sympathize but they can not know your pain.

I have been there, I know your pain and I would like to offer you my support.

If you are not feeling a major loss, you should not wonder if there is something wrong with you. If your pregnancy loss came before you had felt an attachment, you may not experience feelings of loss like I describe here. Some people may also experience a delayed reaction to a loss. In either case, just hold on to this book. You may find you want to read it at some later point.

I have written this book as I would write a letter to a friend who had suffered a pregnancy loss, stillbirth or newborn death. If I were really writing a friend, this would be a series of letters or conversations and would be broken up into smaller bites. I encourage you to read this book in the same way. Read the portion that applies to you at the time or read as much as you feel you can take in, then put it down. Pick it up again later when you are ready to go further.



Dedicated to my parents

Doug & Barbara Manning

*Their knowledge, wisdom and compassion
saw me through the darkness*

- Kathy Burns

In Memory of

your baby's name

Dear Grieving Parent,

Your life has been changed. No matter how your baby died—premature birth, miscarriage, stillbirth, as a newborn or from any number of complications—you must now face life without this child. The first thing I want to tell you is, you will survive this pain. Your world has been turned upside down and you may not be sure you can survive it, but you can and I feel privileged to have the opportunity to help you walk through it.

If there were any way I could take this pain away, anything I could do, any words I could say, I would. All I can do is tell you how sorry I am and tell you I have been where you are now. I share my story with you in the hope that it will help you in some small way.

I cannot tell you exactly what your grief will be like. I cannot tell you how long your grief will last. Every person grieves in their own way. Grief is unique to each individual, each personality, each situation. As you read along, if you find something that does not seem to fit you, it doesn't mean you are doing your grief wrong; you can't do it wrong, it is *your* grief. All I can do is tell you what has been observed about grief, stories I have been told and my personal experiences. Not everything will fit you, but I hope you find some nuggets of truth that help.

My son, Isaac, was premature and only lived thirty-four hours. His stay was brief but his impact has been far reaching. I had no idea how much had changed when I left the hospital after he died, I just knew that leaving without a baby in my arms was one of the most painful and difficult things I had ever done. Nothing felt right.

I felt what you are probably feeling now, life had been disrupted and while I longed to be home, I knew home would never be the same again. My world had been forever changed.

Shock, Whirl & Survival

At first I was in shock. You may be too. You may find yourself just moving through the day without any real connection to what is going on around you. I remember things feeling rather surreal. My mind was working and telling me what to do, but the connection between my mind and my feelings had been severed. You may find that you are functioning, taking care of what needs to be done, but at the same time you may feel that you are standing aside, watching things happen.

You may also find that your mind races and it may be very difficult to concentrate. It is in a whirl. You may think of something that needs to be done but before you can act on it, your mind has jumped to another thought and you have totally forgotten what you were thinking about in the first place. You may feel like your mind is spinning out of control.

I don't know that words can properly describe this period of Shock & Whirl. You feel like your mind is firing on all cylinders but at the same time is sluggish. You are totally aware of what is going on but, at the same time, confused. It is almost as if you are watching a movie in fast motion. Everything is moving so quickly and flashing by, but you are standing off to the side watching, just trying to make sense of it all.

In the midst of the Shock & Whirl you may also have moments of dread; times when you ask yourself how you are going to get through this, how are you going to handle this? You look ahead to the time to come and wonder how you will find happiness again. All these questions basically boil down to one question I mentioned at the beginning of this book, "Can I survive this pain?"

Don't panic, the Shock & Whirl period is normal. The questions about surviving are normal. Eventually you will find your equilibrium. The movie that you are watching will slow down and you will be able to keep up. Just take each day at your pace and one day you will realize that your pace and the rest of the world's are in sync again. That day will come.

Beginning the Journey

Your journey through grief began the moment you realized your child would not survive. Here, at the beginning, there is a mix of physical and emotional issues you will need to face.

The Body Betrayal

You will want to discuss with your doctor any physical concerns. Just as any woman who has been through a pregnancy, your body has to adjust to no longer being pregnant. You may have also had surgery or other medical procedures from which you will need to recover. Follow your physician's advice and take care of yourself in order to give yourself time to heal.

Some of your physical care may also be tied closely to your emotional care. A few days after Isaac died my breasts filled and were extremely painful. I followed the medical advice on how to deal with my full breasts. But the physical pain was not the worst part of it for me. I felt betrayed by my body. My mind knew that there was not a baby to feed; why didn't my body know too? It was neither logical nor rational, but it is how I felt. So while I was wrapping myself tightly to deal with the physical problem of engorged breasts, I was sobbing, dealing with the emotional issues of having no child to hold and feed.

The Nursery Dilemma

In the first few days after your loss you may also have other issues to deal with: what to do with the baby's room and things you had prepared for him or her, telling your friends and family about your loss, possibly funeral or memorial plans. You will have your own list.

If you already had a room prepared for the baby, some people close to you may encourage you to let them put everything away so that you will not have to see all those baby items. These people are afraid that seeing the baby things will remind you of your loss. What they don't realize is that you will not have to be reminded of your loss, it will be on your mind every moment. Go with your instincts. If you want the things put away, fine. If you don't, ask your friends to leave them as they are. Do what feels right to you. This is your grief, not anyone else's, so do whatever is healing for you.

I have a friend named Sarah whose mother cleaned out the baby's room and packed everything away while Sarah was still in the hospital, all without a word to her. It was quite an unpleasant shock to her when she returned home. As she put it, "I was not prepared for an empty room along with my empty heart." Facing an empty room was not easier, it was harder. In a way, that empty room symbolized how the

About the Author

Kathy Manning Burns



Kathy is a Vice President of In-Sight Books, graphic designer for In-Sight Institute and an In-Sight Institute Certified Funeral Celebrant. She is a volunteer in the Parents Responding to Infant Death Experience (PRIDE) program at a local hospital and completed RTS Bereavement Training in early pregnancy loss, stillbirth, & newborn death in 2009. She has two adult sons and has written this book in memory of her third son, Isaac.

Resources

Other Resources From In-Sight Books

Don't Take My Grief Away From Me by Doug Manning
Thoughts for the Lonely Nights by Doug Manning (book or CD)
The Journey of Grief DVD by Doug Manning
I Know Someone Who Died coloring book by Connie Manning
Comfort Cards
Footprints and other Lapel Pins

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