

Forever Angels



Hello Everyone,

A complicated situation. A Mom wrote in with to ask about a situation that isn't so far removed for many of us, that is how and when (if?) to acknowledge the lives of our precious babies and children. To explain further, this family lost twins, then had twins again. They got involved with their local twin and triplet support group. At a meeting with Mothers and infants, a new Mom pregnant with twins also attended and expressed worries about the health and safety of her babies. She was assured by the other Moms present that all will be well, "After all look at us. All our children are fine." Of course Mom with her second set of twins was left feeling trapped and conflicted while also not wanting to upset the pregnant Mom. She was therefore forced to squash her feelings of loss and "deny" two little babies whom were much-wanted, still loved and missed.

This type of "denial" occurs in many different forms. How about the triplet family who loses one triplet in utero, at birth or shortly thereafter and their "twins" are much admired each time they are in public? There is the family with one surviving twin who cannot actively participate in the joys, unique challenges and pride that comes with having two healthy infants, toddlers, preteens or adolescents and no one knows that there should have been two. I have been working with a Mom for a couple of years now (we garden together at a local heritage home) and I asked her if she had children. She responded "one" but then burst out "I had two but my 35-year old son died of a heart attack two years ago!" Her eyes brimmed with tears because she missed and loved her son, and perhaps also because she initially told me she had "one child." Her telling me she had one child did not make her seem wrong in my eyes but spoke to her pain, her wish that it wasn't so and the emptiness that her son's death had left, while still being thankful for having her daughter.

What do the parents say to include their deceased child(ren)? Do they say anything? How is this type of situation handled so that one or more precious lives are not negated? How does a bereaved parent find balance, acceptance of their truth, even in their own minds, and strength in such cases? There are no easy answers. The answers will change from situation to situation, and how much parents might be willing to share at a particular time. I congratulate the twin Mom who lost her first set of twins for unselfishly thinking of another pregnant woman and offering her a safe place to share her worries without adding a possible different truth. Mom did not, in my opinion, negate her babies' short lives but instead offered peace and comfort to a worried Mom to be. How kind and generous is that! I have no doubt her two Little Guardian Angels are applauding their Mom and are very proud of her generous decision.

When we find ourselves in a situation where it might be difficult to acknowledge the children whom are no longer with us, here are some suggestions to consider. If a stranger admires our "twins" when we know there should have been three or even four, we may just say "Thank you." If a neighbour down the street comments the same way, we still might respond, "Thank you," or we might respond "They were actually triplets (or quadruplets) and one died." The detail in which we respond probably depends upon whom is commenting and in what circumstances, e.g. a person at the Mall vs a friend at a family wedding or perhaps it could be which way the wind blows. There isn't a right or wrong way to respond. It just needs to work for you at that time.

What is right is that our children continue to live in our minds and our hearts and if we cannot openly acknowledge them for whatever reason, we can always blow them a kiss in our mind and cover them gently with our loving thoughts.

*Thinking of you,
Lynda*

For some, life lasts a short while, but the memories it holds last forever. ~ Laura Swenson

There is nothing so whole as a broken heart.

Mendel of Kotzk

This quote reminds me of what I've learned during my grief journey.

I've learned that in brokenness, there can be wholeness. In the darkness, there can be light. In egoism, there can be selflessness. In despair, there can be hope. In ungratefulness, there must, eventually, be gratitude.

This isn't just psychobabble; for many, it is their survivalist reality. It is the only way that so many bereaved have moved beyond mere suspension. Those who allow themselves to experience gratitude are often able to transcend their former place in the world. They not only become whole again, but they have reached a threshold of completeness they would never have known would it have not been for their confinement to the gallows.

These are individuals who, despite incapacitating trauma and turmoil, manage to find gratitude for the goodness in their lives. This is not a magical moment of epiphany for many of them. Rather, it evolves over time and with intense cognitive effort. I believe that finding gratitude- even crumbs or morsels at first- requires emotional maturation, practice, and mindfulness.

It requires us to first focus on the self- to take personal responsibility for our own suffering. To acknowledge it. To tell and retell our story. To know ourselves well. It requires us to acknowledge that there is healing in our suffering. It requires that we silence our minds, respect our body's response to the grief, and be gentle with ourselves. It commands patience, intentionality, and commitment to the insufferable pain that radiates from the tips of our hair to the tips of our toes...the agony that causes every cell in our bodies to ache. It requires that we reach out for help from others, sometimes strangers, and that we accept the outreached hand with grace.

Then, when we are ready, we must move beyond the self. We must see the suffering of others. We must acknowledge the other's pain sans the fear of losing or diminishing our own suffering. We must be able to sit compassionately with another, abandoning for a moment our own grief's narcissistic exigence. We must widen our circle of compassion for all beings suffering. We must see the world through others' eyes.

We must recognize the acts of kindness, courage, and sacrifice that others have offered along our journey, and extend that droplet of hope to another. It requires that we honor even ill-fated attempts to comfort, and that we reconsider exchanging alienation, anger, and resentment for tolerance, empathy, and acceptance. We must seek gratitude daily, even for the 'small' things in life, like a dandelion dancing on the warm breeze, shadows playing in the park, or a fiery sun setting against a mountainous silhouette- or perhaps, a simple kind word of support from a friend...

Like threads in a garment, grief runs in and out of our daily lives from the instant of Death, one moment often indistinguishable from the next for many days and months. There is a time for this. There is a time to wallow in the mud, a time to pause for the entangling. The garment is unravelling and grief has patterned your life, against your will, in an unfamiliar mosaic. Yet, gratitude can truly help us to heal from our suffering when the time is right to reconvene our lives.

And when that time comes, consider your complaints and revisit your expectations. Take the time to fill your heart with gratitude. You can be grateful for what you do have without taking away from that which you have lost. So, tell someone who has helped you how grateful you are for their presence in your life. Hug someone you love and tell them three things you admire about them. Write a letter or send a card to someone who is making a difference in your community. Leave an anonymous gift for a teacher, doctor, or other "carer". Reach out to another person in mourning. Let gratitude hang in the shadows, parallel to your grief. It is not magic, but it is transformative.

When we allow the experience of gratitude, the heart may still be broken but the heart is also most full, most whole, and most complete. Mendel of Kotzk also said, "Where is God to be found? In the place where He is given entry". Where is gratitude to be found? It can be found in the very place where you have also given it entry.

From the Gallows of Grief to Gratitude
by Dr. Joanne Cacciatore
(c) 2008 All Rights Reserved

Text to the piece included here

End: This is an excerpt written by Dr. Joanne Cacciatore from her blog:
<http://www.drjoanne.blogspot.com>
You may reach Dr. Cacciatore at Dr_Joanne@missfoundation.org
or visit the MISS Foundation's website at www.missfoundation.org

DADDY'S GRIEVE TOO

*It must be so hard on you to be a Dad who grieves,
When real men don't cry or become upset
Only women do you are told to believe.*

*Your dreams are gone,
Your future has changed
Your wife is just not the same,
You hold your head as high as you can
And play your part of the game*

*Your heart just tells you differently,
It aches and hurts you so,
When will someone give you permission
To let your emotions show?*

*They ask you how your wife is,
Ignoring the fact you hurt too,
You answer the question but always wonder
When they will ask about you.*

*Keep the memory alive of the child you love
And your love will always shine through.
And maybe one day this world will know
That Daddies always grieve too.*

Sands TAS June 2001

Reprinted with permission from the International Stillbirth Alliance's May, 2008 e-newsletter. The International Stillbirth Alliance is a non profit coalition of organizations dedicated to understanding the causes and prevention of stillbirth and they can be reached at www.stillbirthalliance.org

*Along the road to yesterday,
That leads us straight to you,
Are memories of the happy days,
Together we once knew.
And always every evening,
We seem to have a way,
Of wandering back to meet you,
On the road to yesterday.*

~from an obituary