

**'How can I remember my child(ren) in a meaningful way?'** is a common question from bereaved parents. Here are some ideas for your consideration:

## Immediately following the death

- It may be possible to take hand and/or foot prints of your baby(ies). These can be carefully framed in a shadow box with an engraved nameplate. The hospital staff will be able to guide you at/after delivery if this is at all possible. Depending upon how long the infant has been deceased while in utero, it may not be possible to make casts.
- Have photos taken of both/all of your babies together as well as apart. This will be the only time they will be together and later in life these photos can become extremely important, not only for the parents but also for the surviving co-multiple(s) in actually seeing his/her sibling(s). One family noted that these photos were important in confirming to them that they did, indeed, have another baby. In some areas professional photographers donate their time and take the photos for free. *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep* is one such organization. Alternatively, you can take the photos yourself, or ask a friend or hospital staff person to take the pictures for you.
- Consider taking photos of hands, feet, ears as well. Baby(ies) can be carefully wrapped to facilitate such photos.

## For the funeral or memorial service

- Consider releasing homing pigeons either at the baby(ies)'s funeral or memorial. Try the yellow pages or internet for a local business offering this service. The birds are for rent for services and memorials. *Note: Releasing mylar helium-filled balloons is not recommended as deflated balloons have been found in the stomachs and intestines of whales, turtles and birds. It is a difficult and sometimes painful death for unsuspecting animals. For the most part, regular balloons are biodegradable, but the strings, ribbons and cords are not. These parts remain a hazard for animals.*
- Consider involving the grandparents in the memorial or special services. They, too, have suffered a loss (and also grieve that they were not able to protect their own child from such a loss), and including them in a part of the service plans will help as you rely on each other's strengths for mutual support;
- Consider involving older children in the funeral and/or memorial service. Young children don't always understand the concept of death, but involving them in funeral arrangements helps them better understand what is happening and why their parents are upset and sad. Left to their own devices, children can internalize negative feelings and interpret those feelings as if they, themselves, have not 'been good' and as a result their parents are sad, upset or angry. Including them and explaining the situation in age-appropriate language ensures they understand that the situation is not their fault, and helps them feel connected rather than left out or marginalized;
- If the service occurs when there is still a survivor(s) either in hospital or at home with a sitter, allow yourself to be mentally, emotionally and physically present at the service. You are in the right place at the right time, so try not to be hard on yourself with thoughts of your surviving co-multiple(s) and that you should be with him/her/them.

## Support at home

One idea, as a bereaved grandmother explains, occurred when her daughter and son-in-law returned home after losing triplet babies.

*"My daughter is home from the hospital and I will be going to take care of her this coming week so her husband can go back to work. I thought I would pass on what a loving thing their friends did. When my daughter and her husband arrived home, they were greeted by friends who [had arranged] a "shower" of love and comfort. They brought presents like plants for the house, gift certificates to the video store, cooked meals for the freezer, etc. One woman's gift was to clean my daughter's windows in a couple of weeks. Since we live in a desert environment, this is a very loving thing to do. They also brought covered dishes and spent time with the couple and just let them guide the conversation. My daughter said she felt so loved and cared for by so many people. One woman (although she was a little nervous about it) brought her newborn (2 weeks old) and let my daughter hold him. This did not upset my daughter. Instead she said it gave her a chance to hold a baby in her arms and it just felt so natural. I thought this was such a wonderful, thoughtful thing that made their homecoming less painful."*

## On birth or death days

- Light a special candle on either the birth day or death day or both, whichever works for you;
- Make a donation in your child(ren)'s name;
- Do some volunteer work in your child(ren)'s name;
- Some families spend the birth or death day at the cemetery with a picnic;
- Some families do not want to take away from their surviving co-multiple(s)'s joy, and so if the death day is the same as the birth day, the family will set aside a different day in which to remember their deceased baby(ies);
- One couple donates a baby layette each year in their son's name to a male child born in the same hospital on the day their son died.
- Consider planting a tree or flowers. One couple planted daffodil bulbs in a forest spot they liked, and went to visit them every spring and just sat in the quiet to think.

## Helping a surviving co-multiple learn about their beginnings

- Having photos around the house or perhaps making a memorial book can not only help with the grief process but also provide an opportunity for questions at a later point in time. Photos (even just one) around the house will encourage a surviving co-multiple(s) to ask questions, and provide an opportunity to explain and answer questions in age-appropriate language.

## Down the road

- Make a difference in the life of a child and ask the school board if you can help a child learn to improve his/her reading skills;
- Donate a book to a local school or public library each year in your child's name;
- Plant a tree in a private space, or get permission to donate one to a public space;

Following is an idea from a triplet family who lost one of their young sons at 21 months due to complications from his prematurity.

## **Our fifth family member...**

*A friend of mine from Oslo, Norway, who also lost her young son, shared this poem with me. Loosely translated from Norwegian and paraphrased, it reads:*

***We are four in our family.***

***We are five in our family.***

***We have an invisible one in our family.***

***If you don't know our fifth family member, you don't know us.***

*This poem sums up for me the importance to us of always including our Angel Joey as a member of our family. This is especially so as he is one of our triplets. People will insist on calling our boys 'twins'... but they are not. We have many pictures of Joey from his brief time with us but every year at portrait time, we want to make sure he is with us. Another friend suggested including some memento of his or even a framed picture in our family portrait. I found a small, stuffed bear with a blue ribbon and holding a wooden block with the letter 'J' on it. This is our 'Joey Bear'. For the past two years, Joey Bear has joined us in our Family portraits. He is a small reminder that we are not as complete a family as we once were. One is absent from us physically but always present in our hearts.*

## **If there has been a baby shower, ideas for what to do with the gifts**

Gifts given belong to the receiver. This might not hold true if the gift is a family heirloom, e.g. silver cup or spoon. You may wish to return any special items. However, all other shower gifts or gift certificates can be kept by the receiver or returned, as you see fit. An option might be to donate some, or all, of it to a needy cause such as your community home for unwed mothers or other charity. If this latter option is chosen, think about writing a note to the giver of the gift and letting them know that their generous gift has been forwarded to a worthy cause. Reasons that gifts/certificates might be passed along include: the parents feel unable to keep them as they are a reminder of their loss, fear of more "bad luck" or parents want their next pregnancy to have a more positive outcome.

## **Additional Resources**

### **Organizations**

Multiple Births Canada - Loss Support Network  
[www.multiplebirthscanada.org/english/loss.php](http://www.multiplebirthscanada.org/english/loss.php)  
Toll-Free (in Canada): 1-866-228-8824  
Telephone: 613-834-TWIN(8946)  
Email: [loss@multiplebirthscanada.org](mailto:loss@multiplebirthscanada.org)

Multiple Births: Prenatal Education & Bereavement Support – Lynda P. Haddon  
[www.multiplebirthsfamilies.com](http://www.multiplebirthsfamilies.com)

Center for Loss in Multiple Birth (CLIMB)  
[www.climb-support.org](http://www.climb-support.org)  
Jean Kollantai  
Telephone: (907) 222-5321  
Email: [climb@pobox.alaska.net](mailto:climb@pobox.alaska.net)

The Compassionate Friends of Canada  
[www.tcfcanada.net](http://www.tcfcanada.net)  
Toll-Free: 1-866-823-0141  
Email: [nationaloffice@tcfcanada.net](mailto:nationaloffice@tcfcanada.net)

Bereaved Families of Ontario (BFO)  
[www.bereavedfamilies.net](http://www.bereavedfamilies.net)  
Email: [info@bereavedfamilies.net](mailto:info@bereavedfamilies.net)  
Telephone: (416) 440-0290  
[www.bfotoronto.ca](http://www.bfotoronto.ca)  
Email: [info@bfotoronto.ca](mailto:info@bfotoronto.ca)

**Multiple Births Canada Loss Support Kit**, which includes one copy of each of the following booklets and Fact Sheets.

## Multiple Births Canada Booklets:

Loss of a Multiple: Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infancy

Loss of a Multiple: Childhood, Teens

Loss of a Multiple: The Role of a Parents of Multiples Club

## Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheets:

Loss and Grief: Statement of Rights

Loss of One, More or All Babies\*

Talking to Your Children About Death

Vanishing Twin Syndrome

Multifetal Pregnancy Reduction

Pregnancy After Loss

Holidays & Grief!

Grief – How Can I Help?

How Can You Help Yourself? Dealing with Grief

Grieving Grandparents

Suggestions for Widows/Widowers

When a Multiple Birth Parent Dies...

Monochorionic Multiple Pregnancy and Twin to Twin Transfusion Syndrome

Memorial Ideas...

*\*also available in French*

## Questions?

1 (866) 228-8824 (toll free in Canada)

To order copies, contact:

office@multiplebirthscanada.org

www.multiplebirthscanada.org

## Books

Forever Our Angels, Hannah Stone, Lulu Publishing (2006).

Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby, by Deborah L. Davis, Fulcrum Publishing (revised edition 1996).

The Worst Loss: How Families Heal from the Death of a Child, by Barbara D. Rosof, Henry Hold and Co., N.Y. (1995).

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