



M.I.S.S.ing Angels

MISS Foundation

A Sanctuary for Bereaved Families

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Dear Miss Abby: A Father's Love

by Steve Cunningham

Watch over your Mommy, your little sister, Amie, and me as we begin our day.

strength for those times that I am weak and to pick me up when I fall on my face.

How I miss you so much! I can't believe that you were born two years ago on March 7th, 2001. I don't know where the time has gone. Sometimes it seems like it happened a long, long, time ago and other times it feels like it happened yesterday. I have been on a roller coaster of emotions since that day.

Miss Abby, my how we anticipated your coming. You were our first, named after your Great Grandmother, Abigail, whom you joined.



I remember your mommy would lie on the couch and she and I would talk you to everyday while you were in her womb. You would jump, kick, and twirl and we could see mommy's tummy bounce and wave back and forth. We would just laugh and laugh.

I hope I have learned from the experience and have become stronger, but there are times that I am so weak, so full of grief that I don't feel I can make it any more.

You brought us so much joy into our mundane lives.

Dear Miss Abby, I ask that you give me

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Historical Perspectives on Infant-Child Deaths

By Joanne Cacciatore-Garard
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Relationships, attachments, and emotions are all very complex aspects to the individual human condition. The way our brains regulate emotional responses, even bereavement, can differ based on many variables including physiology, gender, hormones, age, and the most capacious category of all, culture.

I met an older woman a few months ago during a business transaction. Somehow, in our casual

conversation, my involvement with the MISS Foundation became the topic. She responded, "Oh, well, I had a baby a long time ago that died." Surprised I responded, "Oh my goodness, I am *so* sorry. What happened?" She responded, "Oh, don't be sorry. It's okay. She died in her crib." She seemed very nonchalant about her daughter's death so many years ago. I thought perhaps so much time had passed that she was able to detach from the trauma of her child's death. She continued to explain how, 'back in those days,' babies just died and you 'accepted it and went on with your life.'

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Take Note:

- MISS Chapters across the country! See page 22 for chapter information
- See MISS Store order form on Page 21
- Our hearts go out to the families of these children for their recent losses
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We had everything ready for you; your room was decorated with teddy bears and toys and clothes galore. I remember our song, *Butterfly Kisses*, and just like in the song, I would dream about watching you growing up, getting married and eventually having children of your own.

Abby, why did this have to happen?



We were so excited with anticipation. Mommy said let's go and we packed your bags and got the car seat ready. Off we went in the wee hours of the morning to the hospital to have you. The night got longer and longer as the nurses and doctors got more and more concerned. Your momma was in a lot of pain and there was nothing any of us could do, not me, the doctors, or the nurses. They brought up an ultra sound machine and we all looked at it, your beautiful body just lying there, peacefully, but with no heart beat. We all just stared at the monitor hoping, wishing, and praying to see a beat.

I will always remember the doctor's face as he told me what I already knew. A moment ago I was on top of the world and somehow what was holding me up was ripped out from under me and my body came slamming down to the earth. This can't be happening? We did everything by the book. My world went from dreaming of butterfly kisses to when is this nightmare going to end? What should have been one of the happiest days of my life is now the worst.

The nightmare continued as I called your first time grandparents. They were expecting to hear the great news, but how do you tell Grandma and Grandpa that their granddaughter didn't make it.

Morning finally came and you still hadn't been born. Momma still had to go through all the labor even though we knew what the outcome was going to be. At 12:24 you were finally born- no fan fare, no smiles, just tons and tons of tears. The nurses cleaned you up and placed you on your mommy's tummy.

Your mommy and I just were in awe of how beautiful you were. We couldn't believe it; you had been with us for 40 weeks and now you were here and we couldn't take you home with us. What did we do wrong? We would have been good parents? We didn't even get a chance.... Give

us a chance!

Dear Miss Abby, I ask you to help me to understand why this happened. I am so confused and have no explanation for anything. Why did you come into our lives for the nine months that you were with us, just to be taken away in an instant? Why do I have to relive this nightmare over and over again and bear this deep emotional and physical pain? I have so many questions and no right answers.

Miss Abby, I have learned a lot about myself and others in the last 2 years. I can't say this is the hardest thing that anyone will go through, but I know for me it is definitely the hardest thing that I have ever had to deal with.

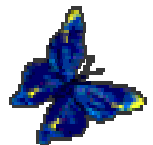
Death is something most of us do not deal well with at all, myself included. I made it through my grandparents' deaths, but your passing has rocked my world, shaken my faith, and made me rethink everything that I believe. Sometimes, I don't even know what I truly believe. You were not supposed to die. Little babies just do not die. We are good people....

I appreciate life more as I know now that life can change in an instant. I try to educate others about you and that you were really with us for ten months. Some people have a hard time understanding that you are still with us.

We knew your personality, when you were awake, when you were playing; we even knew when you had the hiccups. I have a picture of you in my wallet and I try to show it off as much as I can. I am so proud of my *two* daughters, Abby and Amie.

I am sorry though for the times that I don't mention you. I feel my heart wrench when I say that I have only one daughter to avoid a full explanation.

Abby, grief is the hardest thing. It comes and goes; sneaks up on you when you least expect it. No one that I know of has conquered this thing we call grief. There is not a day that goes by that I don't grieve for you. I think about you daily just like this prayer. I do find happy times once in a while, especially when your sister, Amie, was born. People say that we find a new "normal," but I am still looking for some type of normalcy, not that I was ever normal before that day.



Within a few months, she was pregnant again and went on to raise several children to adulthood. No one talked about the experience. She couldn't recall whether the baby died in 1967 or 1969, something I thought was unusual since, nine years later, I still remembered the day, month, year, and time (nearly to the second) of my daughter's death. But when I asked what her baby's name was, she hesitated for a moment looking into my eyes as if to say 'thank you for asking.' With a disquieting quiver in a nearly inaudible voice, she responded, "Nancy."

I have always been mystified at the way women experienced child death in the past. My own grandmother's first two children died at just under one year of age. No one in our family knew about them until we were going through her old photographs just before she died. "Nanny," we asked, "who is this baby?" She responded with her aged, Sicilian intonation, "That's the first Josephine." I was confused knowing that my mother's name was Josephine. "The first Josephine? What do you mean?" I asked. She went on to tell us that the first Josephine died at eleven months of age. (I felt horrible that I had never known this). Then, she said she had another baby just one year later, again named Josephine. That baby also died at just under one year of age. Her third child, a girl she named Mary because she was convinced that the name 'Josephine' was "bad luck," lived to adulthood. Finally, her fourth child, the third and only Josephine to live past childhood, was born—my mother. It was very difficult for me to understand my grandmother's stoicism and the viewpoint of her generation and culture that children are somehow replaceable.

"Nine years later, I still remembered the day, month, year, and time (nearly to the second) of my daughter's death..."

I began to do some research on how responses to child death have been socialized throughout history. From a socio-cultural perspective, the roles of children in society have changed dramatically. Until the late nineteenth century, children played a significant role in labor production and agriculture during the transitory stage between early feudalism and capitalism. But as the United States emerged into the industrial revolution, profound economic changes, improvements in transportation, communications, and textile machinery, reformed the demand for child labor. "Family size declined between 1800 and 1900 from 7.0 to 3.5" children (Centers for Disease Control, 2001). Another significant historical change was also occurring during this period of time. In 1916, Margaret Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in the U.S. and by 1933, with the help of modern contraception, the average family size had declined even greater to 2.3 children.

Mortality statistics reveal more about this framework. Long before the plague epidemics of the fourteenth century, disease, malnutrition, and wars took the lives of countless. The most vulnerable ages, infants and toddlers, most often fell as victims. Still, more than 500 years later in 1900, six to nine of every

1000 women died in childbirth, and one in five children died during the first 5 years of life" (Morbidity and Mortality, December, 1999). Historically, children were often not included in family trees, and in some cultures not even named, until after their first birthday. Deaths, especially of children, were a familiar occurrence.

Even in contemporary society, infants remain the most vulnerable. Perinatal mortality rates during 1999, including stillbirths from 27 weeks gestation to one month of age, were 7.4 per 1,000 (Center for Disease Control, 2000). These data are certainly more favorable than the 1950 statistic of 32.5 per 1,000, yet still significant. Infant mortality rates, ages one month to one year, were 7.1 per 1,000 live births during 1999 and 29.2 per 1,000 live births in 1950. Generations preceding experienced even more infant deaths although they were not formally recorded until the late 1800's. Certainly, in my grandmother's era, the deaths of children were perceived as a grievous, yet somewhat 'normal,' experience.

When society cares about an issue, we legislate it, creating laws, task forces, watchdog groups, and agencies to monitor it. Certainly, another consideration affecting the historical implications of child death has to do with society's realization and acknowledgement of child abuse. The inception of the feminist and anti-domestic violence crusades during the mid-twentieth century played a key role in promoting the interests of the abused. These movements carried children's rights on the wings of their political trajectories. A new value was attached to children. The first key federal legislation addressing child abuse and neglect, known as the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), was enacted in 1974. Despite this watershed legislation, much work remains to be done in this arena. As a bereaved parent, I find it incomprehensible that any parent could harm his or her own child. Yet, during 1999, 15 out of every 1,000 children were substantiated as victims of child abuse. In fact, the National Institute of Health declared homicide as the leading cause of infant death due to injury (NICHD, 1998).

What does all of this say about the perspective of some individuals as parents? Perhaps, there are those who came from a cultural intersection of time that, due to the anticipated nature of their child's death, enabled them to be better prepared for the inevitable and helped them to accept death as a part of life. Maybe, some are predisposed to deny and repress the most visceral emotions, conforming to the social mores of society. Perhaps, there are just individual differences in responses to child death or perhaps others who honestly *do* value one child over another. Perhaps there are even those parental abusers who would intentionally harm, injure, or even kill their own child. But for most in our generation, the death of a child will evoke the deepest, inexplicable feelings of grief, despite the cause,

(cont'd on page 4)

age, or *perceived* societal value of their child. There are so many different individual and societal dimensions to child death, all influenced by just as many variables. Understanding these factors helps me on many levels.

The social value of children has evolved remarkably throughout history. Couples are having fewer children and they are waiting longer to have them. The advent of ultrasound, more recently three dimensional technology, brings mothers, fathers, and siblings closer to the mystical world of the womb and the bonding process becomes a tangible aspect of early pregnancy. In today's world, couples have children to add dimension to their lives, bringing joy, love, and hope. Children are often treated as autonomous individuals deserving of respect and rights from society.

Perhaps then, it is this culture that has championed the shift of the historical implications of infant-child death in society. In egalitarian societies, with the emergence of technological and medical advancement, plentiful resources, and public health education, children are expected to outlive their parents. The expectation is that in western civilization babies do not die- such that when it does occur, it is recognized as an uncommon event. These factors have influenced the way families grieve in the culture of our century. While we have a long way to go at improving psychosocial support of the bereavement community, families certainly have increased recognition of the mourning process and compassion is given more freely without boundaries of race, gender, or religion.

Retrospectively, I am grateful that I was born in an era when the sublime, irreconcilable grief of my child's death can be fully expressed. Occasionally, however, I'm reminded that our attitudes toward child death, particularly of the very young, still clench to

antiquated responses of generations past. I recall an incident very early in my grief journey, when I met a neighbor at our local grade school. My 2nd grader and hers were running around our legs as she and I talked. She asked about my children and I told her that I had five altogether, but that my fourth child died during her birth. "Well," she replied without much thought, "you probably feel fortunate it wasn't your older child who died." I stood there speechless. Startled, I responded with the only logical thing I could think of, "You know, I've heard that there were people who loved their older children more than their younger children, but I'm not one of them." I walked away hurt, angry, and confused. I felt that my response was not offensive, but rather, it was a spontaneous, innate defense. I felt compelled to defend the memory of a child whom I loved. I love all my children in the same way and certainly do not feel that it would be harder to lose one just because he or she were older or younger in age and thus, held some quixotic value above the other.

However, I'm in a different place today, nine years after Cheyenne's death. In understanding the multifariousness of life, and the illimitable influences which the past has on the present and the future, I am better able to empathize with others who have a different view than my own. That ability, in my opinion, is a treasure, for it helps me realize that I am fortunate in many ways. There are some people in our world who will never experience grief the way that I have. But on that same continuum, I also feel the light of love in a way that most never will. There is an old saying that those who have experience the deepest of sorrows also experience the deepest of love. For that, I am thankful.

Joanne Cacciatore-Garard
Mother of four who walk, one who soars
Founder of the M.I.S.S. Foundation

You who never arrived

You who never arrived
in my arms, Beloved, who were lost
from the start,
I don't even know what songs
would please you. I have given up trying
to recognize you in the surging wave of the
next moment.

All the immense
images in me- the far-off, deeply-felt landscape,
cities, towers, and bridges, and
unsuspected turns in the path,
and those powerful lands that were once
pulsing with the life of the gods-
all rise within me to mean
you, who forever elude me.



You, Beloved, who are all
the gardens I have ever gazed at,
longing. An open window
in a country house-, and you almost
stepped out, pensive, to meet me.
Streets that I chanced upon,-
you had just walked down them and vanished.
And sometimes, in a shop, the mirrors
were still dizzy with your presence and, startled,
gave back my too-sudden image.

Who knows?
perhaps the same bird echoed through both of us
yesterday, separate, in the evening...

by Rainier Maria Rilke
Translated by Stephen Mitchell

We now dedicate everything that we do to you. Your momma and I have helped out our support group by translating brochures into Spanish and we are currently working on a book (well, your momma does the translating and I do the typing. We make a pretty good team.) Your momma is also doing great in setting up a support group for the Spanish speaking families. She is working very, very hard. Help us to keep up our stamina as we try to help others while we try to take care of your sister, Amie and ourselves.

be able to talk to you face to face, again and maybe that day I will finally be totally at peace.

Watch over me, your momma, and your sister, Amie.

We love and MISS you!!!!

IN MEMORY OF ABIGAYLE VICTORIA CUNNINGHAM MARCH 7, 2001



Abby, you know I talk to you everyday and one day I will

Butterfly Kisses

Written by Bob Carlisle and R. Thomas

*There's two things I know for sure,
She was sent here from heaven,
And she's daddy's little girl.*

*As I drop to my knees by her bed at night,
She talks to Jesus, and I close my eyes.
And I thank God for all of the joy in
My life. But most of all, for...*

*Butterfly kisses after bedtime prayer.
Sticken' little white flowers all up in her hair.*

*"Walk beside the pony
Daddy, it's my first ride."
"I know the cake looks funny,
Daddy, but I sure tried."*

*Oh, with all that I've done wrong,
I must have done something right
To deserve a hug every morning.
And butterfly kisses at night.*



*Sweet sixteen today.
She's looking like her momma
A little more every day.
One part woman, the other part girl.
To perfume and makeup,
From ribbons and curls.
Trying her wings out in a great
Big world. But I remember...*

*Butterfly kisses after bedtime prayer.
Sticken' little white flowers all up in her hair.*

*"You know how much I love you Daddy,
but if you don't mind
I'm only going to kiss you on
The cheek this time."
With all that I've done wrong,*



*I must have done something right,
To deserve her love every morning
And butterfly kisses at night.*

*All the precious time
Like the wind, the years go by
Precious butterfly
Spread your wings and fly*

*She'll change her name today.
She'll make a promise,
And I'll give her away
Standing in the bride room
Just staring at her,
She asked me what I'm thinking
And I said "I'm not sure,
I just feel like I'm loving my baby girl."
Then she leaned over... and gave me...*



*Butterfly Kisses, with her mama there
Sticking little white flowers all up in her hair
"Walk me down the aisle Daddy, it's just about time"
"Does my wedding gown look pretty Daddy?"
"Daddy don't cry"
With all that I've done wrong, I must have done
something right*

*To deserve her love every morning,
And butterfly kisses
I couldn't ask God for more, man this is what love is
I know I've gotta let her go, but I'll always
remember
Every hug in the morning .
and butterfly kisses...*

There is a growing realization among those who care for the bereaved that support groups are an appropriate and effective way to help bereaved people heal. Because they offer a safe place for people to do the work of mourning, support groups encourage members to reconcile their losses and go on to find continued meaning in life and living. Attending a support group facilitated by skilled leaders often brings comfort and understanding beyond many peoples' expectations.

Support groups help bereaved people by:

- countering the sense of isolation that many experience in our shame-based, mourning-avoiding culture.
- providing emotional, physical, and spiritual support in a safe, nonjudgmental environment.
- allowing them to explore their many thoughts and feelings about grief in a way that helps them be compassionate with themselves.
- encouraging members to not only receive support and understanding for themselves but also to provide the same to others.
- offering opportunities to learn new ways of approaching problems (e.g. the friend or in-law who lacks an understanding of the need to mourn and pushes you to "return to normal").
- helping them trust their fellow human beings again in what for many in grief feels like an unsafe, uncaring world.
- providing a supportive environment that can reawaken their zest for life.

In short, as group members give and receive help, they feel less helpless and are able to discover continued meaning in life. Feeling understood by others brings down barriers between the bereaved person and the world outside. This process of being understood is central to being compassionate with oneself as a bereaved person. **The more people are compassionate to the bereaved from the outside in, the more the bereaved are capable of being self-compassionate from the inside out.**

Our mourning-avoiding culture often forces bereaved people to withdraw from insensitive friends and family or to adopt ways of avoiding the painful, but necessary work of mourning; support groups, which instead foster the experience of trusting and being trusted, can do wonders in meeting the needs of bereaved people. In an effective bereavement support group, members can achieve a balance between giving and receiving, between independence and an appropriate, self-sustaining dependence. The group provides a safe harbor where hurting people can pull in, anchor while the wind still blows them around, and search for safe ground on which to go on living.

*Editor's note: This article is excerpted from Dr. Wolfelt's book *How to Start and Lead a Bereavement Support Group*, available from Companion Press. If you would like to find a support group in your area, please contact the MISS Foundation at 623.979.1000 or visit our website at www.missfoundation.org. Not everyone feels comfortable in a group setting, however, for many, the support group is a place of hope, healing, and friendship.*

Update on MISSing Angels Bill:

States Authoring and/or Mobilizing:

Texas, Washington, New York, Colorado, California, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey

Bill Already Introduced:

Illinois, Virginia, New Jersey, Maryland, Minnesota, Pennsylvania

Bill Passed:

Arizona, Indiana, Massachusetts, Utah

Across the country



If you are interested in having a MISSing Angels Bill introduced into your state's legislation or if you would like to help those members who are working on passing this bill, please contact your group leader or log onto The MISS Foundation website for information.

We must become the change we desire to see in the world. -Mahatma Gandhi

Baby Ariel

by Maegan Buchanan

Today, December 10, 2002, was the day that my life was supposed to change forever. You were due to be born. Your daddy Jerry and I prayed about you for a whole year before we tried to conceive. We wanted to be sure we were ready to become parents.

While Daddy and I were visiting your grandparents in Florida, I missed my cycle. We were anxious to take a pregnancy test, but decided to wait until we arrived back home so that we could be alone. Your daddy was the one who realized that it was positive, and that you were really and truly coming to stay in nine months.

Daddy went to every one of my doctor appointments with me. He had a very busy job as a Captain in the Army, but he always made you his top priority. I don't know who was more excited, daddy or me!

The first time we saw you on the ultrasound monitor, you waved to us, and I cried happy tears when I heard your heartbeat. I can still remember the look on your daddy's face. He was shocked and amazed at the miracle that was you, already a tiny baby inside my womb.

Daddy and I spent so much time and effort into getting the nursery ready for your arrival. We chose your baby furniture and laughed a lot as we attempted to put it together. I spent hours searching for just the right crib bedding for you. When I finally found it, I couldn't believe how perfect it was for our little princess.

When your room was finally finished, I would sit in the rocking chair and imagine what it would be like to hold you in my arms, inhale your baby scent, and kiss your sweet face. I folded and re-folded the tiny pale-pink onesies and outfits I had lovingly chosen for you to wear, and dreamed of the day when I could dress you in them.

We marveled at the wonder of your tiny kicks and punches. We wanted you to come out and play! Each night before we went to sleep, your daddy had a precious routine with you. He would talk to you and tell you that he loved you, and give my belly a kiss. The three of us were becoming a family.

We took one last trip together to Florida when I was seven months pregnant with you. It was supposed to be our final vacation as a couple, but we didn't even think of it that way, because we were so excited for you to arrive.

I was worried about you, though. You didn't seem to be

moving around as much, and it scared me. Daddy said not to worry, that he was sure you were okay, and that maybe you had just slowed down because you were growing bigger. After all, hadn't we prayed every night together that you would be healthy and strong?

The day after we arrived from vacation, I went to the hospital to hear your heartbeat. The nurses came in and out of the room, and for the first time, I was really frightened that something was wrong. The doctor was quiet as she looked at the monitor, and pointed to where your heart was. She said she was so sorry, but that you had no heartbeat. My sweet baby Ariel, why did you die? Nothing could have prepared me for the pain of losing you.

The doctor who delivered you said your umbilical cord was somehow compressed, keeping you from receiving the oxygen you needed to survive. There was nothing anyone could have done to prevent it, but I still feel responsible somehow. That it was my fault you died. I am so sorry if you were in any pain. I would have done anything to keep you from hurting.

We held you in our arms and said goodbye to you on September 30, 2002. Our whole family was there with us, and took turns holding you. Your Aunt Erin and your Uncle Erik kissed you and said how beautiful you were. Your Grandma Carol touched your tiny fingers and your red rosebud lips, and Grandma Robbie gently wiped your little nose as she held you close. Grandpa Brad spoke at the memorial service we had for you in the hospital chapel, and said that one day, we would see you again.

I still can't believe you are gone. You were just weeks away from being born. Daddy and I wanted you so much, and our hearts are broken that we lost you. We love you more than anything.

Daddy and I will always think of you and hold you close in our hearts and in our memories.

I'll love you forever,
Your Mommy

*This letter is written for and dedicated to the memory of my daughter, **Ariel Madden-Victoria Buchanan**, who was stillborn on September 30, 2002.*

