



M.I.S.S.ing Angels

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A Sanctuary for Bereaved Families

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Why MISS? Why now?

by Sarah Bain

Last night I facilitated my second support group in Spokane. A mother whose baby had died just 9 days earlier came to the meeting, and I was in awe. Her emotions were raw, her face reflected back to me a familiar image of pain, of grief, of longing, of sorrow. And my heart swelled.

Many people have asked me why I've chosen to run a support group. *Isn't it hard, they ask, to be reminded of your grief so often?* What they don't understand, of course, is that none of us needs to be reminded of our grief. It is there constantly, a kind of sorrow burrowed deep within the depths of our hearts.



I am not facilitating meetings to be reminded of my pain. I facilitate meetings because it heals me, it comforts me, it gives me a kind of 'joy' to know that I can help someone who might feel like they are all alone. I can tell someone that they are not alone, that I know what they are going through, that I am here for them if

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When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.

Henri Nouwen

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Take Note:

• See page 18 for details on...
New CD Single, "Too Beautiful"
Proceeds to Benefit The MISS
Foundation.



Still Living

by Sarah Bain

I flew to Phoenix this weekend to visit a friend who's dying of cancer. He was quick to remind me, however, that we all are terminal, that we all are dying. And certainly as I approach my forties this seems truer than it did ten years ago. But terminal cancer is terminal cancer, and his death seems much more imminent than my own.

His point is not lost on me, though. I realize that I could walk out my front door and get hit by a car. While I'm driving down the street, someone could speed around the corner and slam into me. For some reason this is much harder to imagine than his death, which I am reminded of by his already-shaved head and his loss of fifteen pounds. He is already beginning to look like a cancer patient even though his chemotherapy and radiation haven't started yet.

I am particularly bent on being included in this process of dying. I am, for so many selfish reasons, adamant about him telling me the truth. I want to know what dying feels like, what the treatment does to his body, how he responds. My own father died of cancer when I was five years old, and he battled it for all but eight months of my life. But I don't remember any of it. I was too young to know what was going on, and thirty-five years ago when people were dying, children were protected from the process. I'm sure that no one told me he was dying, no one told me he wasn't going to live to see me grow up.

George, however, is clear about his illness. "I'm dying," he's told me more than once. He is a hopeful fatalist. In fact, now that he has recovered nicely from his first surgery, he's rather certain about his fate. "I think I'm going to make my short-term goal of living until June," he tells me. I want to believe him. "I'm even certain that I might make my next goal of living through the year.

"But," he says, "the reality is that I am going to die of leiomyosarcoma." (Leiomyosarcoma is a cancer of the gastrointestinal system.) When I look up this unpronounceable word on the Internet, the first thing I read is this: "The prognosis ranges from universally fatal to poor." This is not good. I realize that he's right. I feel helpless. I can do very little for him.

His wife, Joanne, bears the burden of worry. We both

acknowledge the fact that women are better worriers. George continues to reassure Joanne that everything will be okay. Easy for him to say. He gets to leave the rest of us behind when he dies, while his wife and the rest of us are left to grieve. We'll have to pick up all the pieces and move on. But moving on is something that doesn't happen without great cost.

One of my daughters, Grace, died twenty months ago. There were more than plenty of pieces for my husband and me to pick up, and we didn't just move on. We have found a way to live with the grief settling inside of our bodies. We do what most parents who lose children do—we keep moving forward; we raise our remaining children; we smile sometimes even when we don't feel like smiling.

At first, we exposed our grief because we could not help it. Other people helped us pick up the pieces, caring for our living children, bringing meals to the house, and sheltering us when we felt exposed. But after a few months, especially after a year, people no longer could do much else to assuage our grief and mitigate our pain. They returned to their familiar lives and we were forced to learn how to live ours again. After a while we began to walk a bit more upright again, and we noticed that the slant of the world was not as great and didn't seem so impossible.



"Sorrow" by Krzysztof Babiracki

But the truth is that our daughter is still dead. I won't get to watch her grow up into the beautiful woman I know she would have been, and there is nothing that I can do about it. I am completely helpless.

Over the weekend, Joanne and I talked about how we'd prefer to die if we could choose the way. Right before Christmas, George's kids from his first marriage received a phone call. Their mother had inexplicably died in her sleep. It has been a shock for everyone, though Joanne and I admit that for the person who actually dies, it's not a bad way to go. They just lie down and never wake up again. Not a half-bad way to go.

I am able to acknowledge the gifts we've been given with George's illness. Since we know that he's going to die, we have the opportunity to tell him how much we love him. We're able to process our grief with him. We get to share our surprise and sadness. We have the chance to say goodbye.

I didn't say goodbye to my daughter. She was still inside of

me, forming and growing. Eight months pregnant, I had just begun to let the idea of a third child sink in. I busied myself with the sweet chores of unpacking boxes of infant clothes, cloth diapers, and other sundry baby items. My other children enjoyed suggesting names, one of them hoping for a brother and the other dreaming of a sister. None of us even considered the possibility of death. Birth and death are two words that hardly belong in the same room, let alone the same sentence.

But there we were, all of us witnessing the birth and death of our child in the same moment. I was pushing and pushing, delivering a child while grieving her death. Now it seems like too much for a mother to bear, but I did it. I gave birth to Grace the same way that I gave birth to my other children. And then we began the long and difficult process of mourning. We are not done. A year and a half is hardly enough time to say goodbye to someone I barely knew but who I loved as much as my other children. I simply did not have enough time with her.

And that is what Joanne and I agree upon. There is simply not enough time. There never will be enough time together. We are all dying, and, hopefully without sounding sentimental or clichéd, we have to enjoy the moments when we can. We must learn how to live present in this life.

One way to do this is to let the process of dying be okay, by talking about it when we need to instead of trying to hide from it. It is through these conversations about dying that conversations of loving and living emerge.

I am realistic now about George. He is dying, but he is also still living. And in that living, we get to bask in the glory of his life. He does have the easier task. We can't really mourn for him until he's gone. But when we do, we will hold each other up and find a place inside ourselves to tuck George as we go about the task of living our own lives.

Author Bio: SARAH BAIN works and writes in the Pacific Northwest. She has work forthcoming or previously published in *Long Story Short*, *The Loss Journal*, *The Philosophical Mother*, *Imagine Magazine*, *Moonshinestill* and more. She reads fiction for *Bellevue Literary Magazine* and is a facilitator for the MISS foundation.

This essay originally ran in the March 2005 edition of Moondance (<http://www.moondance.org/2005/spring05/columns/stillliving.html>), an international woman's magazine, and is reprinted here with permission from Moondance's publisher. Visit Moondance Magazine at <http://www.moondance.org>.

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Why MISS? Why now?

they need me. I can practice compassion and kindness, something I think I would have been practicing with my daughter, Grace.

Grace can't be with me physically. She cannot be with me in the kind of physical presence that I crave. But she is here with me in spirit as I print out and fold brochures, as I console a mother over the phone, as I call hospitals, funeral homes and fire stations to let them know about MISS. She is with us all as I put my arm around the mother who came to the meeting, nine days from her son who lived nine hours, two days away from burying him between two pine trees where the grass grows wild and flowers burst through the ground despite the rocky nature of the earth.

I volunteer my time to MISS because it fills the void of space when I should be playing with Grace, who should be turning two years old, who should be tugging at my blouse asking me for one more round of patty cake, who should be fluttering her eyelashes at my own asking for one more butterfly kiss. I volunteer my time because it is how all of us heal, how all of us grow, how all of us hold each other up.

Sarah Bain is a MISS Facilitator in Washington.

"...because no parent should have to endure the pain of an infant's death alone."



Reflection, Contemplation, Hope

Reflections of the MISS Conference May 26-29, 2005

Dear MISS,

Three days after the end of the MISS 2005 "Reflection, Contemplation, Hope" conference, I walk around feeling lost, feeling empty, feeling utterly quiet. Today is the second anniversary of my daughter Grace's death. It is something many of you understand, and I walk around today feeling out of context, out of sync, off balance. In the midst of this confusion, I am trying to place the conference into the context of my life here in Spokane, Washington. It is difficult.

The conference was simply amazing in ways that is difficult to describe in words. It surpassed even my most hopeful expectations and renewed my spirit for honoring Grace and for reaching out to bereaved parents.

Being at the conference is one thing; being in the world is quite another. And therein lies the mystery and complexity of our lives—we live our lives out of context, without our children, and become part of a group no one would enter willingly. And yet it is a beautiful thing to be a part of MISS, to share each other's grief and pain, to walk into a workshop or a panel or a group and feel at home, feel understood, feel alive. To be able to laugh and cry honestly and compassionately. To simply be without having to be anything else but ourselves. For that, I thank all of you.

Blessings and peace,
Sarah Bain



Dear MISS,

I attended the MISS Conference for the first time this year, and the experience changed my life. My son Benjamin was stillborn on April 14, 1994. Since then I have been struggling with my grief all alone. I have been unable to move forward in my life. MISS has shown me that my grief is shared by many others. Knowing that there are others who truly understand is emancipating.

I want to give back. My education is in Elementary Education and my work experience is in both Teaching and Business Management. I am currently on a soul searching sabbatical and would like very much to assist the MISS Foundation in any capacity needed. Please let me know what I can do. And

thank you for changing my life.

Sincerely,
Lori Carter

Dear MISS,

I just wanted to thank you again for allowing me to participate in what was a most beautiful, moving, and meaningful four days at the MISS conference. There are not words to say how much I appreciated being there, truly. I will cherish the experience and look forward to allowing what I learned inform the work I do here with Tu Nidito.

I am certain I have arrived in the vocation I was meant for, and anticipate a long career growing into this work of the heart.

I also wanted to share how particularly inspired I was by Peter, and found myself imagining how wonderful it would be to have an opportunity to study with him in a more ongoing way (me and the rest of the conference I'm sure) He brought a depth that I so appreciated.

Thank you so very much~ for everything. You have touched so many lives, and in such a powerful way. I celebrate who you are.

With love and respect,
Jason Zontanos



A Father's Pain: A speech by Roberto Sanchez Garcia given at the 2005 MISS Passages Conference

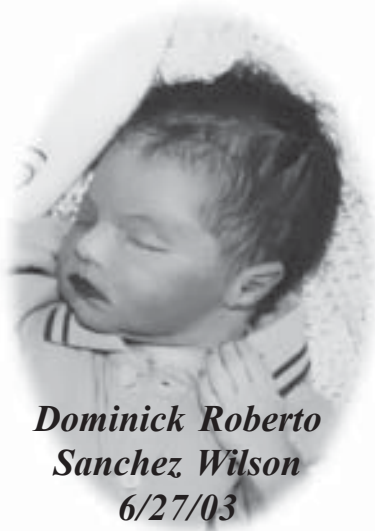
Almost two years ago, my wife Andra and I lost our son Dominick. I have to tell you, the only thing I was not prepared for during Andra's pregnancy, was for something as painful as losing our son. Before this tragic incident, I thought we were prepared for everything. We had already chosen his name, knew who his godparents would be.... I even knew which baseball team he was going to cheer for. Having him, knowing him, taking care of him, and living for him was already our reality. However, things unfolded differently, unfortunately. And for a long time after his passing, I thought I was not going to be able to stand the pain of losing him.

Dominick was our first child, our first son. Our only child, in fact. He had me running all over town, shopping in anticipation of his arrival: a Diamondbacks cap, a car-seat, stuff for the nursery. And of course, there were the endless discussions about who he was going to look like. But what we had anticipated did not come true. And all of our happiness and hopes became sadness and hopelessness. Ours, was a painful, indescribable experience that tested our strength, that generated conflicting feelings of grief, sadness, disbelief, denial, courage, and, above all, feelings of guilt.

As time went by, those feelings intensified and they became even more difficult to overcome. In some cases, not only for us, but also for those around us – those who did not know if they were going to hurt us with their comments, with their expressions of friendship, with their well-intended words -which personally drove me crazy. Words such as “you are young, you will have more kids”, “time heals everything”, “better now than later”. On more than one occasion, such comments led to tears, and my wife and I cried, alone with our grief, realizing that we live in a society that is not prepared to accept that losing a child is a horrific reality that will always be present in our lives, in our minds, in our conversations - that my son will continue to be part of

this family, that his memory, his photos and our daily thoughts of him will always be with us.

I also learned that when such tragedies occur, we, especially men, have been brought up to hide our feelings, to repress our emotions. I personally remember when I was a small child, how more than once I was reprimanded for crying,



*Dominick Roberto
Sanchez Wilson
6/27/03*

because “men are not supposed to cry”. Maybe this is the reason I learned to express and share my feelings with those who, like me, have gone through this experience. This is why I feel such gratitude to be here today. While I regret that grief has brought us all together, it is comforting to be with others who have endured similar agonizing experiences but yet are still able to offer incredible support and understanding to others.

There are those of us who wake up in the morning afraid of losing their profound sadness because that would indicate that the love for their child is diminishing. But there is no such thing, because the loss of pain gives way to valuable reflections that will be with us forever... reflections that I would have loved to convey to my son once he had been old enough, so he would understand the logic that motivates parents.

Today I say to him:
I would have loved you enough to...

- ask you where you were going, with whom, and at what time would you be coming home.
- insist on you saving money.
- shut my mouth and allow you to discover that your friends are not always your friends.
- allow you to see me disappointed, crying, because children must understand that parents are not perfect.
- But most of all, I would have loved you enough to say NO, knowing that you would hate me for that.

Ironically, rather than teaching my son, I learned valuable lessons from *him* instead. Today, I know what is important in life. I am less materialistic and more spiritual. I am less selfish and more giving. Whereas I used to derive much of my self worth from my accomplishments at work, I now feel best about myself when I am helping others. Today, I am much more compassionate toward others who are experiencing difficulties and loss in their lives. I take the time to listen and offer support, rather than offering some trite comment and then immersing myself back into my own life. Today, I value much more the people who surround me, and it is much easier for me to tell my friends and family how much I love them. I no longer fear their rejection, because now I know, I truly know, that he who gives love, receives love.

In the end, the loss of Dominick has become the force that pushed my wife and me to join our wills with those of other parents, to force the public to be aware of cases like ours. I believe that the key to helping each other is to join hands and understand that our experiences must be used to help others. I encourage you to remember the child you lost with the knowledge that there are still beautiful sunrises to come, that there is still much to build ahead, that our wives need our support, as much as we need theirs, that by not forgetting, we will find a reason to fight so that future families are not deprived of the blessing of having a child.

~ *The Arizona Republic* ~
**Birthing Project Working
Program helps Black Infants**
By Christina Leonard
The Arizona Republic
Dec. 26, 2002

The statistic is alarming: African-American Babies die at twice the rate of White and Hispanic babies born in Maricopa County.

For years, those who work with the Phoenix Birthing Project – the state’s first African-American maternal and child health agency – have devoted their efforts to curbing that trend.

Since its 1991 creation, the agency has celebrated more than 900 births.

And they’ve found some success: Organizers now say that babies in the project tend to weigh at least 1 pound more than other African-American babies.

“A lot of these girls have gotten in situations where there are drugs, they

have low self-esteem, and they are uneducated. Some of them are even homeless,” said Dottie Scott, president of the project’s board. “We try to open our hearts and doors to show them that you can be successful.”

This year, the non-profit agency’s “Saving Our Babies” program plans to assess the needs of 50 pregnant women and teens, then match them with community volunteers called “sister friends” to help support them through the pregnancy until the baby’s first birthday.

They take them to doctor’s appointments. They provide them with baby formula and car seats. And they will even go to the delivery room with them.

The project at 301 W. Roosevelt St. in Phoenix is one of many organizations expected to receive funds from this year’s Season for Sharing campaign.

In 2001, African-Americans had the highest infant mortality rate in the county at 14.9 per 1,000 live births, compared with other races, which were all under

8.3 deaths per 1,000 births, according to the Maricopa County Maternal and Child Health Needs Assessment for 2002.

African-American babies also suffered the highest percentage of those born with low birth weight compared with other races in the study.

The Phoenix project, which has served as a role model for some of the 70 other birthing projects nationwide, has expanded over the years to include child-abuse prevention and teen pregnancy programs, Scott said.

It also established a charter high school for pregnant and parenting teens, where on-site childcare is offered.

“We show them that they’re not in it alone. There are others just like them.” Scott said. “We just try to help them succeed.”

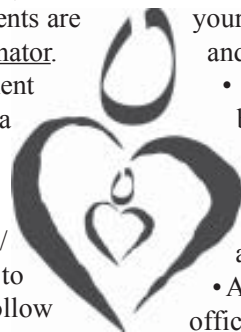
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Meeting with your legislators: helpful hints for new political activists!

Your first step is to find out who your local senator and representatives are. You can find that out by going to this {link}. Ensure that you know your district because when you call your legislator, you will be a constituent. Constituents are very important to legislators. [Find your State Senator](#). Call your legislator’s office and set up an appointment to meet for 20 minutes. Tell them that you are a constituent in his or her district.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Write a letter to your senator, representative, and/or assemblyman. Tell them you are a constituent, to please read the letter carefully, and that you will follow up in one week with an appointment.
- Make an appointment with legislator’s staff. Tell them you have already sent a letter (you stand a better chance if you are a constituent) and would like to meet with them.
- Dress professional and present yourself as a concerned citizen, not just for yourself but for your community members as well.
- Plan your visit carefully! Be clear about the facts and try to be direct. Know your members and their “issues” before meeting with them.



- Be prompt and patient!
- Be prepared! Print pages from the M.I.S.S.ing Angels Bill page and read through the history and impetus for the bill. Know your national and state statistics (we can help you with that!) and bring the HB2416 information sheet with you.
- Be political! Demonstrate the connection between this bill and the interests of their constituents. Ask for a commitment.
- Be responsive and follow up. Send a thank you letter outlining their discussion and commitment and send along any follow up information they may have requested.
- Ask them for a bill number and email the MISS Foundation office immediately so we can begin to assist you in getting support.

MISSing Angels Bill Update: The House of Representatives of Texas just passed the MISSing Angels Bill with overwhelming support! Thank you to those who helped make this possible!

For more information on the MISSing Angels Bill, please visit www.MISSingAngelsBill.org. Source: *The Washington Times*, Revised Congress Journal 3, adapted by the MISS Foundation.



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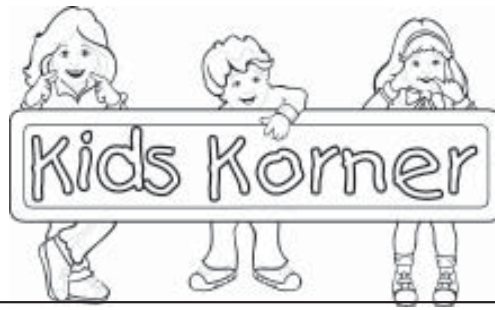
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"The most honest, truth-telling in this world is done by children." Oliver Wendall Holmes

