



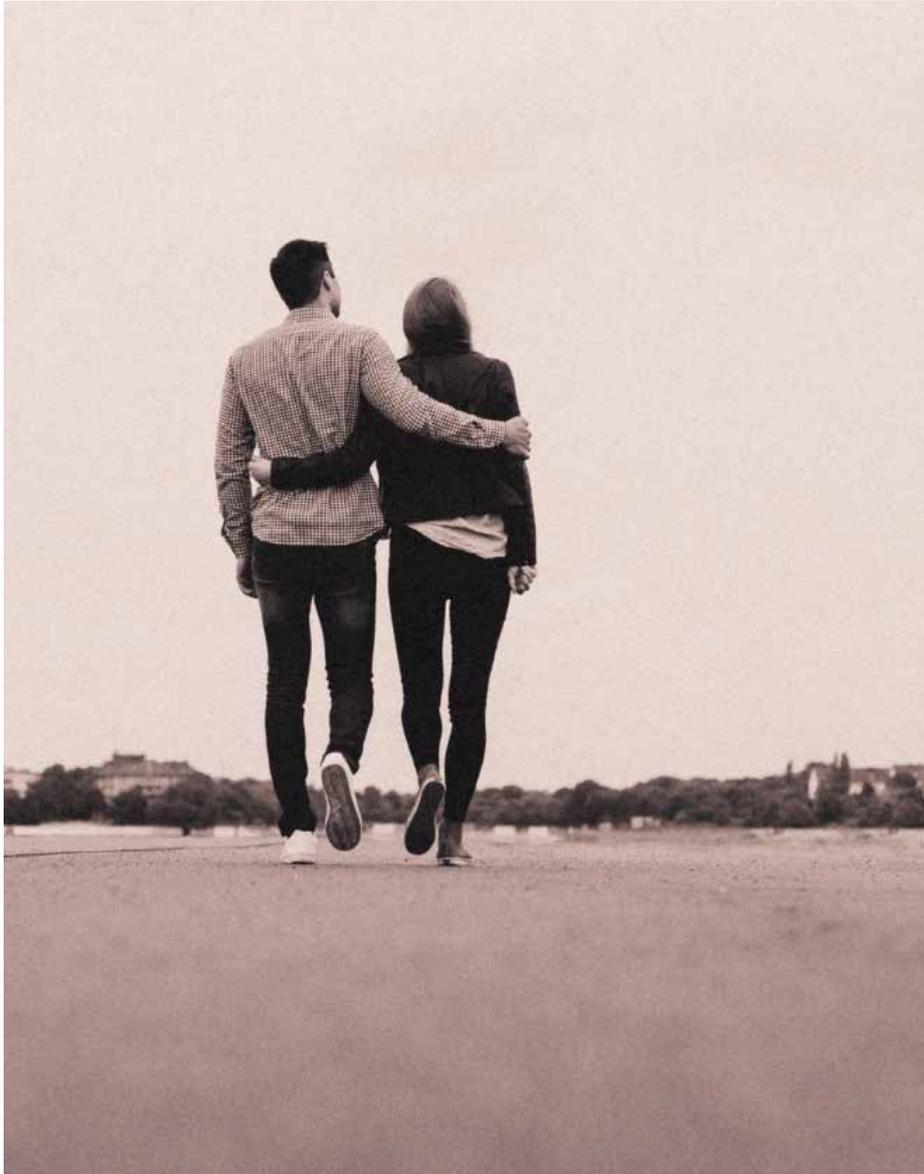
Mommies Enduring Neonatal Death

Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Loss Support

Volume 29, Issue 3

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Embracing Your Title of Mom or Dad

Many dream of becoming Mom and Dad. Unfortunately, too many know the struggle in seeing those dreams fulfilled.

Even if your child is not here earthside, the moment your child was conceived, you became Mom or Dad.

While our lives did not turn out how we dreamed they would be, it does not change who we are.

We are still Mom and Dad. Embrace your title.

Wear it for the world to see, or just for you to know.

In this issue...

Feature Article

Special guest Becky Johnston of M.E.N.D. – MidMichigan explains her struggles in feeling like the "Invisible Mom."

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Jennifer shares the dreams she had for Ava Josephine, and how she still sees and feels her presence.

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A Letter to My Mama

Jenny Albers shares a sweet letter from a baby in heaven to her mama.

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July/August Topic

Infertility and Loss

Deadline: May 31, 2024

September/October Topic

No Answers For Loss

Deadline: July 31, 2024

Stories, poems, thoughts, and/or feelings regarding these topics are welcome. Submissions must be received by the deadline to be considered for publication in the magazine. Unfortunately, there is not enough room to include all submissions. Choices will be left to the discretion of the editors. Please send any submissions to our Magazine Editor, Jennifer Harrison, at jennifer@mend.org. Any submission printed in our magazine will also be posted to our website indefinitely. Because our magazines are posted online, please understand your name will be attached to your submission when searched on the Internet.

Letters to the Editor should be sent to jennifer@mend.org. All letters submitted to the editor are subject to be published in future issues, both in the print version and online, unless a letter's author expressly requests it not be published.

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Birthday Tributes: M.E.N.D. publishes heavenly birthday tributes in the corresponding magazine. Tributes must be submitted via the online form at www.mend.org.

<u>Heavenly Birthday</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
January/February	November 30
March/April	January 31
May/June	March 31
July/August	May 31
September/October	July 31
November/December	September 30



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Guest Feature Article

For this issue, Becky Johnston, Assistant Chapter Director for M.E.N.D. - MidMichigan, shares her feelings and experiences of being Mom to her babies in heaven, Abigail Marie, Baby "Darth" and Baby "Nugget."

Embracing Your Title of Mom or Dad

Mom, yet an invisible Mom. I started referring to myself as that because I do not have any living children. After years of struggling with infertility, my husband and I finally found out we were having a baby in the fall of 2016. In March of 2017, our first child, a daughter we named Abigail Marie, was born at 21 weeks gestation due to an incompetent cervix. Too young to survive, she died a short seven minutes later. Over the next two years, we kept trying for more children, but our two subsequent pregnancies ended in early miscarriages. Our journey to parenthood was long and filled with more valleys than peaks, and ended without children in our arms. How can I embrace the title of Mom when my children are not here with me?

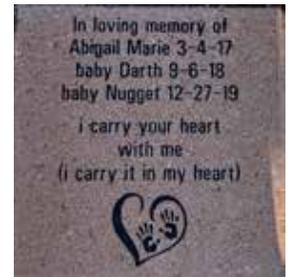
As loss parents, our lives quickly divide into Before and After. Our worlds no longer make sense, but we seek to find meaning and purpose in our babies' brief lives. We turn to our villages of support, and our well-intentioned support people look back at us, trying to find the right words to express their grief and sorrow at something they cannot imagine. The right words are impossible, but I have found that if I embrace my title, my village will know that even though my babies are not here with me, I am, indeed, still a mom.

One place I have embraced my title is on social media. On my daughter Abigail's birthday each year, I write her a letter telling her what she means to me, what lessons I have learned from her passing, or expressing my grief over and gratitude for her brief life. I always sign my letters "Mama," or, more recently, due to the age she would be, "Mom." I choose to embrace this title in a public forum to help break the stigma of miscarriage, pregnancy loss, and infant loss—to help other loss parents give themselves permission to embrace their titles, too.

Another area I have embraced as "Mom" is in opportunities I can include my babies. When we send out Christmas cards, I want to recognize my babies. We don't have the opportunity to share family pictures

of our growing children like so many do—but I want to honor their brief lives and the impact they have had on ours. A simple but meaningful solution I've embraced is to sign our names and include three star-shaped hole punches to represent our babies. Again, we are giving our network of support the sign that we are a family and remember our babies always, and giving ourselves permission to celebrate our parenthood, even though it looks different than the norm.

Believe me, it is not always easy to embrace this title. Recently, I was at a work function during which we played a team-building game. The facilitator read aloud categories my colleagues and I had written to describe ourselves, and we had to stand up if the description applied to us. The object was to start off with a category that was broad enough to include everyone in the room, a slightly smaller category that would include some in the room, and a very specific category that would only include the person who wrote it. Many of my co-workers used "I am a mom" as their second category. When I first heard the facilitator read aloud that description, I hesitated to remain standing. The panicked thoughts ran through my mind: will I have to explain why my children don't appear in pictures with me, or why I never have to take time off to care for them? The facilitator, who happens to be another loss mom, noticed and encouraged me



Continued on page 17.



Happy 7th Birthday, Olly Bear!

We miss you more and more every day. We always wonder what you would be like. Would you like old cartoons like Steven or would you build armor out of cardboard like Dave? I could just imagine what your little laugh would sound like. As much as it hurts our hearts that you're not here, we know you are safe and loved in heaven. So please listen to Grandpa Michael and give Pumpkin Seed a big hug and kiss for us. Olly!! You are an uncle now!! Please watch over your nephew little Michael. We love you, Olly bear.

*Oliver Joseph Rodriguez
June 28, 2017*

*Thanatophoric dysplasia
Also remembering
Pumpkin Seed*

Miscarried February 24, 2016

*Parents: Juan and Amanda Rodriguez
Siblings: Gabby, David, Steven and Ozias*



Happy 6th Birthday, Claire Bear!

Happy birthday, Claire! Your family would absolutely love it if we could spend your birthday celebrating with you. Joseph tells me he misses you and wishes you could hug him. We take care of your rose bush, and it is ready to bloom beautifully this spring. I wonder what 6-year-old you would be like all the time, and it breaks my heart that you have to miss out on everything. Sending you all our love and lots of hugs and kisses!

Love Always,
Mommy, Daddy, JoJo and Jonathan

*Claire Apa
May 8, 2018*

*IUGR, placental insufficiency
Also remembering
Baby Apa*

Miscarried October 2017

*Parents: Garrett and Charla Apa
Siblings: JoJo and Jonathan*



Happy 10th Birthday, Bryson!

Happy 10th birthday to our little guy! Welcome to the double digits! It is hard to believe that 10 years have gone by since we were able to see your beautiful face. Not a day goes by we don't wonder what would you like to do, whose personality you would have, or even who would you look like as you grow into your own. We miss you more than words could ever describe, but we know you are being well taken care of up in heaven. Love you to the moon and back!

Love,
Mommy, Daddy, Mackenzie and Brayden

*Bryson Glenn Middleton
June 19, 2014*

Placental abruption

Also remembering

Baby Middleton

Miscarried April 2007

Parents: Brandon and Jennie Middleton

Siblings: Mackenzie and Brayden



Happy 1st Birthday, Zoe!

Happy 1st birthday, sweet girl! The day of your birth was full of so many emotions, but most of all love. You surprised us all, coming into the world kicking and screaming and full of vigor. Thank you for the four precious days you gave us. Your brother still talks about you all of the time, and we love to look through your pictures and videos as a family. It's an honor and a gift to be your mommy, daddy, and brother.

Happy heavenly birthday, Zoe Bear! Forever and always loved since forever.

*Zoe Marie Matsumura
May 18-22, 2023*

HLHS (Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome)

Parents: Leland and Sarah Matsumura

Big Brother: Tristan



Happy 6th Birthday, Baby!

Happy 6th birthday in heaven, Baby Moody! We love and miss you so much. You will never be forgotten.

Love, Hugs, and Kisses
Mommy, Daddy, Andrew, Abigail and Caleb

*Baby Moody
May 4, 2018*

Missed Miscarriage

*Parents: Justin Moody and Stephanie Grizzel-Moody
Siblings: Andrew, Abigail and Caleb*



Happy 2nd Birthday, Milo!

It's hard to believe two years have passed since we got to hold you, sweet boy. While our hearts take comfort knowing Jesus has you safe in his arms, they still grieve with the heavy loss of you.

You would be so big if you were with us now! Walking and talking. Your sister would love to cuddle you and shower you with kisses. Your brother would love making you laugh with his silliness.

Happy birthday, sweet Milo. We love you with our whole hearts.

Milo Liam Kostrna

May 3-4, 2022

Congenital Alveolar Dysplasia

Parents: Ariel and Stephen Kostrna

Big siblings: Alan and Georgiana



Happy 21st Birthday, Matthew!

Twenty-one years ago, we eagerly anticipated your arrival. Though things didn't proceed according to our plans, you, Matthew, are one of our greatest blessings in life. You are our precious son; we love you and eagerly await that time when we are reunited in heaven. Our loving God holds us just as He holds you. We held you as a tiny baby, but now you are a full-grown adult.

Happy 21st heavenly birthday, Matthew!

We love you always and forever!

Love,
Mom and Dad

Matthew Joel Mifflin

June 6, 2003

Cord accident

Parents: Dennis and Janet Mifflin



Happy 5th Birthday, Cade!

Baby Cade! It's been five years! Five years since that devastating day when you left us...that bittersweet day when we got to meet your sweet, beautiful, silent self. Your brother Jack knows you and loves you so much, and I'm confident that Emilia will be the same way. Cade, I'm so thankful that you made us parents five years ago. We miss you every day and love you so much!

Love,
Mommy and Daddy

Cade Cashion

June 5, 2019

Placental abruption/Hydrops and fetal anemia

Parents: Holly and Andrew Cashion

Siblings: Jack and Emilia



Happy 15th Birthday, Jackson Glen and Tyler Ray!

Lord, on this day 15 years ago, You blessed us with our precious firstborn sons Jackson Glen and Tyler Ray. Our time with them was so very short, but they changed us forever. Help us today to live our lives with the empathy and compassion we learned in our grief, to walk beside others in their darkness just as You used others to hold us up. Let us live lives that honor and glorify You and of which our sons would be proud. Lastly, Lord, please hold us a little tenderly today. May our hearts overflow with gratitude to You, and may the angels' songs celebrating our sons reach our ears too.

Jackson Glen and Tyler Ray Light
February 23, 2009

Premature birth

Parents: Kirk and Diana Light

Siblings: Brayden and Lexi



Happy 3rd Birthday, Nova!

Happy 3rd birthday, Nova! It's hard to believe you are 3 years old already. We hope your birthday celebration in heaven is full of rainbows, bubbles, cupcakes, balloons and all the things that make a birthday special. We miss you every day, and never stop wondering what you'd be like. You are missed and loved so very much. Happy birthday, our son.

Nova Tikvah Brown

Miscarried May 13, 2021

Parents: Kevin and Annie Brown

Sister: Sarah



Happy 14th Birthday, Sophia!

Happy heavenly 14th birthday, Sophia. You have impacted so many lives with your short life, and we thank God for you every day.

Sophia Rose McGhee

Stillborn March 29, 2010

Also remembering

Baby McGhee #1

Miscarried July 2002

Baby McGhee #3

Miscarried January 2009

Baby McGhee #4

Miscarried April 2009

Parents: Matt and Stacy McGhee

Siblings: Micah and Scarlett



Happy 3rd Birthday, Arlo!

Happy 3rd birthday to our beautiful angel, Arlo! We miss and love you so much. Your little brother, Renzo, turned 1 this past October. We love to talk to Renzo about his strong big brother. We dream about what you would be like if you were with us. Thank you for watching over us. We love you so much, our sweet boy.

Arlo Molina
May 17, 2021

Cervical insufficiency

Parents: Diana and Mauricio Molina

Little Brother: Renzo



Happy 3rd Birthday, Arabella!

Three years of missing you, baby girl. Happy birthday! We love and miss you! We think of you daily!

Arabella Alleigh-Nichol Wright
Stillborn June 24, 2021

Parents: Ben and Destiny Wright

Siblings: Aria and Anapaige



The Lion Prince

Limbs unfolding and extending,
The softest cutest feet ever felt,
Hands just like his daddy,
Nose and lips like his mummy,
Cheeks blossoming like cherries,
A boy that exuded so much potential,
Yet moved us with his calm, peace, strength, and power.
Your lion paws left their mark of legacy in us all.

Written by Kamran Assadi on 12th April 2024

Daddy to Malakhi Matthew Assadi.

Men of M.E.N.D.



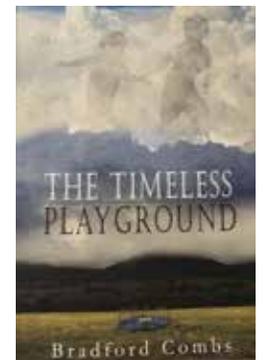
Book Review

"The Timeless Playground"

Written by Bradford Combs

Bradford Combs does a great job detailing how couples grieve differently after losing a baby to miscarriage. He shows the differences in how men and women grieve, from their inner thoughts, to their conversations and how they helped each other grieve, and realizing we grieve very differently and have different ways of coping. He walks you along with them as they navigate fresh grief, healing and relationships with family and friends who have also lost a baby to miscarriage and abortion. Their faith plays a big role in their journey, not just with themselves, but in their marriage and with friends and family. The constant reminder that God uses all things for good, and we will be reunited with our babies in heaven is a common thread and is a helpful reminder in grief. He does a great job of explaining Jesus' love for all his children and the reward of knowing Him.

His imaginative version of heaven was a great way to give him peace that his child had experiences that he felt she missed out on not being born. It gave her the life he never got to see her live. He also uses the heaven chapters to explain the role our salvation has, and how we can have hope of seeing our family again. Overall a good book, rooted in faith, and I was glad to see he really showed how men and women process and deal with grief differently, but together. They worked through it, giving their pain and sorrow to God for Him to carry.



Reviewed by Stacy McGhee,
M.E.N.D.-Marketing Director

From Monarch to Morphin

Written by Jennifer Malave
Mommy to Ava Josephine Lacy

butterfly was the same color as a monarch but had a different pattern. It made me think of Ava and how she would be growing, evolving, changing, and coming into her own, at 3 years old now. It inspired me to write this poem:

"From Monarch to Morphin"

**As a Monarch I watched you fly,
Orange spots, Black Spots, Yellow Spots
You'd always come on by.**

**The first year without you
the monarchs came brand new
The second year without you
they were just by the few.**

**The third year brought
some changes unseen
Thoughts pondered for months in between
Still nothing prepared me
for the aftermath feeling
Loneliness, peace, yet ready for healing**

**From Monarch to Morphin
Your spots changed places
Orange, Black, and Yellow
As I make different faces
My heart warms with joy
at the thought of you changing
Yet I can't help but wonder
"I wish things were different"**

**As you blossom and grow into your own
I promise to never forget
the spots you'd first shown**

**As long as you promise to stay by my side,
My Baby, My Princess,
AVA JOSEPHINE
My Mighty Morphin Butterfly**

Life without my daughter earthside will never be the same, but over time, I've learned to embrace the outlets God has led me to in expressing and processing my grief. Whether it be journaling, pottery painting, expressive art journaling, poetry, etc., I have found purpose in these outlets...not just in working through my grief, but rebuilding my faith and my relationship with God, and honoring my daughter's memory.

They are stories of cautious optimism, of fear and anxiety. They are stories of short-lived miracles and unimaginable grief.

The tragedy of pregnancy and infant loss is more common than you might think, but for many it remains a deeply private experience. Social media from Monarch to Morphin.

The day I found out I was pregnant, my world was turned upside down. My daughter's father and I were so filled with joy we couldn't contain ourselves. I prayed so hard for so long to have a child to share my love with, and once I found out we were having a girl, I started making so many plans. "Mommy and Me" Days, trips to Disney, mani/pedis, dress-up fun, and so many other things. I planned on sharing all of the wonderful things my grandmother shared with me with my daughter. Becoming an Angel Mom has changed the way I do those things but doesn't take away the opportunity for me to do them. Aside from being involved with M.E.N.D. activities, I still take the time to share traditions with my daughter on days that are special for me and her. Her father and I participate in annual events with March of Dimes Inc., and with Children's Heart Foundation, sharing her story on both platforms and creating fundraising teams in her name, Princess Ava Josephine. On her birthday, I also take time to go pottery painting and paint a piece that I feel resonates with me in her memory. Her father and I also participate in an annual balloon release tradition, sing "Happy Birthday" over a glazed donut (her favorite snack during pregnancy), and during the Christmas holiday, her stocking still gets hung next to other family members' stockings.

After her passing, it took me some time to find my interests and hobbies again. One of those, hiking and nature walks, have become more therapeutic than ever before.

On my most recent hike at Sculpture Falls in Austin, I saw a butterfly, a sign that I've come to believe is my little girl visiting me. This



To Love an Angel

Written by Aaron Reynods
Daddy to Emma Rae Reynolds

I am a father and husband first and foremost. I have a beautiful, smart, and immeasurably strong wife who's a Saint for living with me. I have 4 wonderful kids (3 that walk with us and my angel, my eldest daughter) and I LOVE them each beyond measure. I'm a son to two wonderful and supportive parents, a brother to a beautiful and kind sister, and many things to many others. I'm a runner with nowhere to go, running 1,000's of miles to prove to myself you can do things you despise and still find both pleasure in the pain along with some solace. But in this case, what I want to relay most is that I am the father of an angel. Given the gift of identical twin girls was not to be. We prepared, we celebrated, we were nervous and excited, we did everything we thought was right.....and then?..... We Broke.)

Love is everything.

To run to the safety of our parents, to see our children beam with laughter, to have long talks with our siblings, feel the warm embrace of our spouse at the end of a bad day, or catch up with a dear friend. Those are what make us happy and most days fill us with joy and hope that everything is just as it should be.

This is not that. This is what I've found to be an added curse and blessing to our journey of love. The love of my angel, my baby in heaven. This love is heavy, burdensome, frightening, angry, filled with despair, sorrow and everything except what is described above. It's a car crash of your senses over and over and the questioning of everything you've done to lead to the moment our angels are created. From my experience, the less time you have to prepare and the younger the child, the journey can become a lifelong walk with no closure that's very trying to comprehend and exhausting to carry. It's terrifying, and it's real.

What do we do when our fight or flight senses kick in, and there's nothing to fight and nowhere to run? Your adrenaline rushing a million miles a minute, every pounding of your heart sends anxiety through your entire being, your tear-filled eyes blurred with liquid and fear, and you're sick to your stomach because of trauma. What do we do? We break..... Our souls shatter, and the person we were is no more. We spend years trying to answer unanswerable questions that can lead us into despair. We anger with God's unwilling participation to save us and those we hold dearest from this tragedy.

The Struggle in Love

It's the antithesis of what we've been taught, felt and learned of love. It's an explosion of all the feelings not connected to our dictionary definition of love, yet

it is precisely that (I explain this as best I can later). When your love loses its outlet, it becomes huge and scary. The more traumatic the moment, the more overwhelming the love envelopes you. It's a newfound love we are unaccustomed to and takes lots of time to learn to carry with us. You start over regardless of your age as though you're a child. You're suddenly a whole new person being held face first into the sun (your trauma). You can't close your eyes; and you must look directly at the sun. There is no choice.

First thing we must do is simply learn to breathe again (seriously no metaphor here, just breathing). Slow and steady, one breath in, one breath out. Take your time, no rush, keep going. Deep and intentional breaths. Second you learn to walk (live). One foot in front of the other, step by step to steady ourselves. There is no time-frame on those two steps; and the quicker it occurs, the younger and closer to the baby you were, the longer it takes. These are necessary and must be done with intent. I'm not asking you to do these things; your baby in heaven requires it, and we owe them the debt. Mine took roughly five years after the loss of our firstborn daughter to get those two steps down without having to intentionally think about it. Breathe and step, breathe and step, over and over. Filled with grief and despair, we press on for our eternity never to be the same again. A new version of ourselves with love that has nowhere to go.

Time passes (years possibly)....breath.....step..... breath.....step.....and you find yourself not 100% consumed with the normal emotion of despair. You break again out of fear of forgetting. Then something makes you smile and laugh again. You break again out of guilt of being happy. People fear your angel's name because of the discomfort and fear of damaging you, they've not been forced to look directly into the sun. They weren't close enough to the sun. You hope you've shaded their view; you're thankful they had the distance and the shade. You long for your baby's presence and to speak about them but you don't. More appropriately, you can't, and you break yet again. An endless cycle of sadness and despair while moving forward and feeling fleeting moments of laughter or happiness followed by guilt of continuing your journey with a baby in heaven becomes normal. Slowly those emotions even up as you begin to learn to carry this new love for your baby. Always a moment, thought, or a word away from a complete train wreck of emotion knocking you to your knees.

The Struggle with "Why?"

The main question I asked early on was "Why?" Why us? Why me? Why!? I felt as though I was punished yet I was generally a pretty good person. It consumed me with anger, despair, and sorrow for years that I could

do nothing but watch as our world turned upside down, and darkness descended on our family. I was supposed to be the protector. I wanted to fight, but there was nothing I could battle against. I wanted desperately to run, but there was nowhere to go where these emotions wouldn't hunt me down. So I sat there, broken, unequipped to deal with being held face first into the sun, eyes wide open, blinded, scared, and angry. I had the clinical reason for the cause but that didn't answer the bigger why so I continued breathing and walking.

One day as I sat alone in tears at home years later, I asked my "Why!?" I'd asked this countless times before with deafening silence. I'm not saying I heard a voice, but I absolutely got an answer. A moment of clarity in my brain? Did my baby decide to call out? Was it Him? No idea, but it did help me begin to reconcile, and this is word-for-word what is etched into my brain still today.

Me: Why?

Answer: You are no different.

Me: I am no different? What does that mean.

Answer: Why are you special?

Me: I've never thought I was special.

Answer: Who killed my son?

Me: People did but that wasn't me. I don't hurt people and screw you while we're here. (Just in case I had the right person)

Answer: Why are you different?

Me: I've already said I DON'T HURT PEOPLE! I'M NOT LIKE THEM!

Answer: I had to watch my Son die. Do you think I haven't felt what you feel? Why are you special? Why are you different than ME?

Me: I'm not?

Answer: Didn't I create you in my likeness?

Me: From what I've read and been told.

Answer: You are no different than ME, not them.

Me: This has really hurt me and my wife, and we are filled with despair and fear. How do we survive this?

Answer: The love and emotions are your cross to carry for the need to create a baby and care for her this side of heaven. Carry your cross on your back, not too far left or right, or you will falter and fail. Have others carry you if you need it. Walk, breathe, and help others carry theirs when they allow. You will be allowed to lay down your cross in time.

That was it. Silence returned. I searched no further because that was all I could begin to understand. I sat trying to make sense of it. Most all of us all know of Christ's death and resurrection. Why did this come back to me at this very moment?

The Struggle to Understand

Ok, I have an baby in heaven, my angel? I've always said I would do anything to change this. Would I really do anything to change this? What could change these feelings? Would I go back in time and erase their life from mine and remove what this baby gave me? That's the only feasible question since I couldn't change a thing. To remove this traumatic ending, would I hope none of this actually happened? My wife, my other children, my very walk up to today, would I hope that all away? No, I wouldn't. Would I erase the laughter, happiness, conversations, or hope that gave me a feeling of love? No, I wouldn't. I wouldn't do absolutely anything.

What can I understand of this? My feelings are now intertwined. Happiness as I used to understand it singularly as an emotion now comes with grief. Laughter may come with my tears. Hope is complicated by fear. My emotions are no longer simple feelings after this "never-setting sun" was placed in my face. The combination is endless depending on your unique position to this newly created life.

I've walked in proximity to numerous angels in my life now, but none as close as my eldest daughter. That one blinded me, burned me, and broke me to what I thought was beyond recovery. Hopes, dreams, future kisses, hugs, and laughter shattered into love that could go nowhere. I've learned that when I'm happy, I will also be sad. I've learned that my joy is filled with grief. I've learned that I can be filled with countless positive and negative emotions and still breathe and walk and look at the sun square in my eyes.

The Gift of Love

More than 20 years down the road, I've learned that LOVE is the ultimate emotion. Love is our cross. It comes with despair, joy, anger, happiness, laughter, grief, and on and on. I've learned that as a parent of an angel, forgiveness is likely not in the cards for Him. He did create me in his likeness, right? I think He will understand. I've learned my death gives me little concern except for those closest to me and how it will blind and burn them, so I march on, one breath and step at a time. I've learned I've made the following statement my mantra, "I will breathe, I will walk, I will look at the sun, I will do good things, I will be kind, I will try and give everyone I touch enough of the good emotions to help them carry and balance their bad ones." I will do for others what my angel has done for me until I'm no longer allowed, because I owe them that. I've learned that when my cross is dropped, cover your ears and shield your eyes because the clap of

Continued on page 11.

You Will Never Stop Being His Mom and Dad

To the new couple in our group, You said something significant right before you left the last meeting, saying, "We wanted you to tell us when this would all end." And the rest of us all kind of mumbled some thought about how we wish we could. And while that's true, it doesn't sound very hopeful, and I've been thinking so much about it these last weeks. Here's what I want you to know:

You will never stop loving your baby, so you will never stop grieving his death. That will not end. You will never stop wanting to honor him, to remember him, and you will never stop wondering who he would be. You will never stop being his mom and dad. You will never stop having moments of grief, some expected, some unexpected, sucker punches we call them. And you will never stop missing him.

What will end...being brokenhearted every second of every hour of every day, the constant waves of grief and pain, the feelings of emptiness, the desperate longing, the feeling of carrying a great weight that you just want to put down but can't. This will end. And those unexpected sucker punches? They won't happen so often, and you'll be more versed in how to deal with them when they come.

You will always miss your son, but it won't feel so all-encompassing, casting a shadow over all your days and all your nights. You will still have some really hard days now and again, but there will be some really great ones in between them, and more and more until the good ones will far outnumber the bad ones. You will still shed tears for what would have been, but you will also smile more, laugh even. You will never be the same people that you were, but you will find your "new normal," and this "new you" won't always

feel so uncomfortable in this skin. Grief won't feel so much like a blindfold. It will be more like a veil...it will be there changing your perspective of the world ever so slightly, but you will be able to see past it, see through it. The music has changed, but you will slowly learn how to dance to it. You will always keep your son's memory with you; it will shade and color all the rest of your days, but you will bring all the ways you have grown and changed to bear on all the other things that lay ahead of you. And there will be beauty again.

Everyone's grief is different, but If I could draw you a general map that might help you along on your grief journey, it would show this terrible pit at the beginning and a path that seems to go nowhere for a time, but then it starts to rise, a slight incline, hardly noticeable. Then there would be some sharper rises, some unexpected obstacles along the way, some slight curves back a bit, but always the path would be going forward. Yet around 6-9 months down the road, the path would look like it is going back the wrong way. "What?" You will think. "I thought I was doing so much better!" You were and you are. There is a time that feels like you're going backwards, regressing in grief, but I'd put a sign on the map right about there saying, "Keep going; it's still the right way".

Then a good rise is on the path, and it feels like you are getting to something, finally reaching an end...and then you see it. "But this can't be right... isn't this the same place I started?" It feels like it in some ways, it seems like it some ways, but it's also completely different. Yes, the calendar shows the same date, but the year is different, and it is the pit again, but it doesn't feel as dark as it once did, as

hopeless, because you've spent the last year unknowingly filling it in a bit. And you will turn and see the path going forward and you will keep going, knowing you have successfully trekked it once before and every time you return to that terrible date, it will be different in some way, that pit will be less and less deep. It will still make you sad, but it will no longer be as dark or as hopeless as it once was. And there will be joy, surprising joy, unexpected joy that you never thought you'd ever see again, never thought possible again, but there it will be and somehow it will seem even more joyful for having walked the dark path you've walked.

So keep pressing forward, keep breathing, keep remembering, keep hurting, keep crying, keep talking to each other, one day at a time, sometimes one hour at a time, because right now your baby's life and your baby's death are so intertwined it is impossible to separate them, but it won't always be so. Someday you will be able to think about your baby's life, the joy he brought you, and it won't be cancelled out by the grief of his death.

In Memory of Beau Foster Schlieder
Son of Charlie and Natalie Schlieder
Written by Kathleen Moore
Mom to Lily Joy Moore

**Letter originally written to Charlie and Natalie Schlieder.
Printed with permission in hopes of answering other parents asking the same question, "Will it ever end?"

Empty Arms

Another Mother's Day has come again
And her arms are empty still
She sits in a pew quietly
As her eyes begin to fill

The ache she feels inside her heart
Makes Mother's Day so trying
Seeing all the handmade cards
Leaves her on the floor still crying

Her Savior quietly whispers from Heaven
A promise of "I am near.
I feel your pain. I see your heart.
I'll wipe away every tear."

He holds her gently in His arms
And steadies her weary frame
He reminds her with his steady voice
Of a promise made in His name

He promised her a child one day
He will never give up on her
If she will only trust Him daily
And stand upon His Word

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"To Love an Angel" continued from page 9.

thunder will be so loud with rage and love that could go nowhere, it's going to startle you. I can't rush this, I need to feel it, learn it, embrace it, and love it.

During that time, five years of anguish, grief, and despair began to lift a little. Not gone, of course, since it's part of what being a parent to a baby in heaven is, but with a smidge of understanding. Understanding the gift that this unimaginable pain, grief, despair, and love with nowhere to go is a part of your love for your baby. Because without it, there is no them. I wouldn't dare wish away the pain of them now nor would you. The pain doesn't fade in its sharpness over time, but you do learn to carry it. However, when your angel needs you, they call with their memories and you will remember. You will break, you will breathe, and you will walk. Why? Because to carry it is our duty to our little angels.

The memories of hope, joy, smiles, hugs, aggravation, and kisses they've given us come, cemented into our memories with an ending of deep despair, tragedy, and endless grief. Our stories are not the same: they are not different. They are unique to the proximity in which this angel of ours is created - life and death. When your cross gets too heavy to lift, I hope at the very least somewhere in this writing you can feel me grab an edge and hold you steady, if but only a moment, so you can breathe and step as you work on strengthening yourself. We carry one another on our journey with our angels, and we lay down our crosses when we are allowed.

A Letter to My Mama, From Your Baby in Heaven

Written by Jenny Albers, on Her View From Home.

Dear Mama,

I know you miss me and wish you could watch me grow up. But instead, you sit in that rocking chair, tears streaming down your face, arms wrapped around the blanket that was supposed to be mine.

I see you crying, Mama, wishing you could hold me. Wishing you could look into my eyes. Wishing you could hear me cry or call you "Mama".

I want you to know Jesus rocks me to sleep every night and while He does it, He tells me all about you. I know tulips are your favorite flower and that every spring you fill the house with fresh ones because they remind you of me. I know you wear my birthstone on your finger since I'm not there to hold your hand. I know you became aware of my presence one warm October day, and that it made your favorite season of the year taste sweeter, smell lovelier. I know you think about me every single day. And I know you couldn't love me more than you already do.

You wonder what I would look like if I were down there with you. Well, I can tell you that I've got your eyes and Daddy's nose. My hair is thicker than my thighs and my chubby fingers complement my chunky cheeks.

I wish I could tell you what it sounds like when I cry, but I've never cried up here, Mama. Because this place, well, it's heaven. And even though you can't hear me, I still call you "Mama".

I have lots of friends who are missed by their mamas, too. I wish you could meet them—their mamas, that is. I bet you would like them as much as I like my friends. You could talk about us—your babies in heaven—and cry together. Maybe then you wouldn't feel so alone.

When you are missing me, remember my heartbeat, Mama. It beat because of you. And it beat for you. And when you are sad because you can no longer hear it, I want you to imagine it beating to the rhythm of angels singing. Because that's what it does now. It beats right along with the songs of the angels, and it's really beautiful, Mama.

I've never felt your arms around me, Mama, but I have always felt your love.

I felt it as I grew in the sacred space of your womb. And I felt it when your heart shattered after the doctors told you that I wouldn't grow for much longer.

And I feel it now. When you say my name. When your gaze turns toward the sky, your eyes searching for a sign that I'm up here. That I'm safe. That I'm loved.

And I feel it when you send me balloons every year on my birthday. I want you to know that I've kept every single one because they don't deflate up here. They've been filled with your love and we both know that will never run out.

I see you cry for me, Mama. And I understand why. You miss me because you love me so much. But I want you to smile for me too, Mama, because I'm really, really happy up here.

I want you to know my life is perfect up here, Mama.

And one day, yours will be perfect too. Because someday you'll be up here with me, Mama. I can't wait for you to meet Jesus. I can't wait for you to see how good my life has been. And I can't wait to see the smile on your face when you finally hear me call you "Mama".

Love,
Your baby in Heaven

To The Invisible Mother on Mother's Day

Written by Meg Walker on April 30, 2021, on TheMorning (<https://www.themorning.com/blog/invisible-mother>).

Hey Mama,

Yes, you. Mama. That's what you are. You know that, right?

You, the one who carried life inside of her, but who now have had to say goodbye, going back home to an empty house with an empty nursery and an empty registry. You, who advocated for herself and her baby, wishing more than anything to be able to give up anything so that her child could have a place to grow and thrive and live in this world. You, whose heart broke open wide for the tiniest of persons whose name and story you'll always remember, even if no one else does. You're a mom. You know that, right?

Your motherhood may be invisible to the outside world, but it's there.

And I see you in it - wondering where you fit in between the categories. Wrestling with your new identity, having brought a soul into the world, only now to have empty arms. Wondering, who am I?

I see you. I see you straddling your friend groups, no longer sure that you fit in either place. Sure, you don't need a babysitter for a girls' night out, but you also have an unshakable feeling that you should be at home caring for someone - and your clothes don't quite fit right anymore either. Yeah, you can share in the pregnancy advice-giving and the labor storytelling, but you're not really invited to playdates, and your heart still aches that you don't know what it's like to rock your little one to sleep.

I see you. I see you in how disorienting it is that your arms ache for someone and in the way you can't go into that one room in your house and how it's just deafeningly quiet there, anyway. In the ways your perspective on work has shifted and yet you feel aimless and direction-less and tired. Sure, you're not up nursing a baby all night long but you're up not nursing a baby all night long. I don't know what's worse.

But I see you.

I see you in your strength as you remember what your body went through from the moment of conception 'til the moment your baby left your body - too soon, or maybe, too late. But either way, not here anymore. I see the way you fought for just a moment, an hour, a day longer than you were even prepared for based on odds. I see the way, in your bravery, you continued to put one foot after the other as you left that ultrasound room and that doctor's office and that hospital, courageously facing the next thing. I see the way you writhed in pain at home and the way your body shed blood and tears for your little one -- your little one who made a space bigger in your heart in the moments you knew about them in quicker time than anyone else ever has. And the way that you captured the essence of sacrifice and tenderness and compassion and strength... because of course you did.

Because you're a mom.

You can hold your head high this Mother's Day. You can recognize that mothering for some involves diapers and discipline but for all involves a fullness in your heart that is unmatched. You can acknowledge that your home is quiet (too quiet!) while also acknowledging that you bore a home, a space for nurture -- in your womb and your heart. You can embrace the tension that is mothering -- all the joys and all the hardships -- because you've experienced them too.

We all know the strength of motherhood. The endurance, the patience, the compassion, the love. You embody them all.

To the Invisible Mom on Mother's Day, know this -

This day is for you, too.

I love you. I see you. You are not alone.

xo,

Your mom friend

In the trenches

Raising my glass to you this Mother's Day



Aceptando Tu Título de Mamá o Papá

Para esta edición, contamos con un invitado que nos brinda nuestro artículo destacado. Becky Johnston se desempeña como subdirectora del capítulo de M.E.N.D. - Medio de Michigan. Es madre de Abigail Marie, Baby "Darth" y Baby "Nugget".

Mama, aun una mamá invisible. Empecé a referirme así porque no tengo hijos vivos. Después de años de luchar contra la infertilidad, mi esposo y yo finalmente descubrimos que íbamos a tener un bebé en el otoño de 2016. En marzo de 2017, nuestra primera hija, a la que llamamos Abigail Marie, nació a las 21 semanas de gestación debido a cuello uterino incompetente. Demasiada joven para sobrevivir, murió siete minutos después. Durante los siguientes dos años, seguimos intentando tener más hijos, pero nuestros dos embarazos posteriores terminaron en abortos espontáneos e involuntarios prematuros. Nuestro viaje hacia la paternidad fue largo y estuvo lleno de más valles que cumbres, y terminó sin niños en brazos. ¿Cómo puedo abrazar el título de Mamá cuando mis hijos no están aquí conmigo?

Como padres de pérdidas, nuestras vidas se dividen rápidamente en un antes y un después. Nuestros mundos ya no tienen sentido, pero buscamos encontrar significado y propósito en las breves vidas de nuestros bebés. Recurrimos a nuestras aldeas de apoyo, y nuestra gente de apoyo bien intencionada nos mira, tratando de encontrar las palabras adecuadas para expresar su dolor y tristeza sobre algo que no pueden imaginar. Las palabras correctas son imposibles, pero he descubierto que si acepto mi título, mi pueblo sabrá que, aunque mis bebés no están aquí conmigo, sigo siendo mamá.

Un lugar donde he abrazado mi título es en las redes sociales. Cada año, en el cumpleaños de mi hija Abigail, le escribo una carta diciéndole lo que significa para mí, qué lecciones he aprendido de su fallecimiento o expresándole mi dolor y gratitud por su breve vida. Siempre firmo mis cartas "mami" o, más recientemente, debido a la edad que tendría, "mamá". Elijo adoptar este título en un foro público para ayudar a romper el estigma del aborto espontáneo e involuntario, la pérdida de embarazos y la pérdida de bebés, para ayudar a otros padres de pérdidas a darse permiso para abrazar sus títulos también.

Otra área que he adoptado como "mamá" es la de las oportunidades que tengo para incluir a mis bebés. Cuando enviamos tarjetas de Navidad, quiero reconocer a mis bebés. No tenemos la oportunidad de compartir fotografías familiares de nuestros hijos en crecimiento, como hacen muchos, pero quiero honrar sus breves vidas y el impacto que han tenido

en la nuestra. Una solución simple pero significativa que he adoptado es firmar nuestros nombres e incluir tres perforadores en forma de estrella para representar a nuestros bebés. Nuevamente, le estamos dando a nuestra red de apoyo la señal de que somos una familia y recordamos a nuestros bebés siempre, y nos damos permiso para celebrar nuestra paternidad, aunque parezca diferente a la norma.

Créame, no siempre es fácil aceptar este título. Recientemente, estuve en una función de trabajo durante la cual jugamos un juego de formación de equipos. El facilitador leyó en voz alta las categorías que mis colegas y yo habíamos escrito para describirnos a nosotros mismos, y teníamos que ponernos de pie si la descripción se aplicaba a nosotros. El objetivo era comenzar con una categoría que fuera lo suficientemente amplia como para incluir a todos en la sala, una categoría ligeramente más pequeña que incluyera a algunos en la sala y una categoría muy específica que solo incluyera a la persona que lo escribió.

Muchos de mis compañeros de trabajo utilizaron "Soy mamá" como segunda categoría. Cuando escuché por primera vez al facilitador leer esa descripción en voz alta, dudé en permanecer de pie. Los pensamientos de pánico pasaron por mi mente: ¿tendré que explicar por qué mis hijos no aparecen conmigo en las fotos o por qué nunca tengo que tomarme un tiempo libre para cuidarlos? La facilitadora, que resulta ser otra madre que perdió su bebe, se dio cuenta y me animó a permanecer de pie. Una y otra vez, mientras el juego continuaba y ella leía "Soy mamá" o incluso "Soy mamá de tres", yo permanecía de pie. Pero esa semilla de duda y síndrome del impostor cruzó por mi mente, porque tenía que tomar la decisión de abrazar mi título de manera tan pública.

Como padres de pérdidas, sopesamos esas decisiones cuidadosamente: consideramos a nuestra audiencia. Si conozco a alguien nuevo, ¿me preguntarán si tengo hijos? Y si es así, ¿cómo responderé? ¿Entenderán si elijo utilizar el título de mamá para describirme? ¿Qué pasa si dicen algo insensible? Debemos ser amables con nosotros mismos en estas circunstancias. A veces tendrá que proteger su corazón cuando no está preparado para responder esas preguntas. Decidir si aceptar o no el título de mamá o papá es una elección personal, y

su(s) bebé(s) no se lo reprocharán.

Soy maestra de preescolar. Probablemente semanalmente, un estudiante me llama por error "mamá" (¡e incluso "abuela" o "nana" una o dos veces!). En los primeros meses y años después de la pérdida de Abigail, hacía una mueca de dolor cuando escuchaba esa palabra, aunque sabía que era un error honesto e inocente. Me tomó tiempo y replanteamiento de mis pensamientos aceptar el título de mamá; y verdaderamente, en boca de los

bebés, tal vez que me llamen "mamá" sea un pequeño recordatorio de un guiño divino de parte de mi propio trío celestial.

Eres mamá, mami. Eres papá, papi. Usted no está solo. Ya sea que elija aceptar esos títulos y cómo lo haga, sepa que su(s) bebé(s) lo ama(n) incondicionalmente y que sus compañeros padres de perdidas lo ven y lo apoyan. Les deseo a todos un amable Día de la Madre y del Padre.

In Loving Memory

Riley and Parker Davis

November 14, 2006

Premature birth

Given by parents Rob and Cheryl Davis and siblings Annalise and Owen

Paislee Ann Frette

April 4-5, 2012

Wolf-Hirschhorn Syndrome

Parents: Brent and Courtney Frette

Little sister: Colbie

Given by

Grandparents James and LuAnn Junkin

Serenity Harrison

Miscarried December 3, 2009

Given by

parents Curt and Jennifer Harrison and siblings Levi, Ziva, Evie and Liv

Ethan Alexander Kozar

March 29 – April 2, 2020

SIDS

Parents: Katelynn and Ryan Kozar

Given by Grandma Jane

and Grandpa Dan Squires

Jackson Glen and Tyler Ray Light

February 23, 2009

Premature birth

Given by parents Kirk and Diana Light and siblings Brayden and Lexi

Sophia Rose McGhee

Stillborn March 29, 2010, at 33 weeks

Unknown cause

Baby McGhee #1

Miscarried July 2002

Baby McGhee #3

Miscarried January 2009

Baby McGhee #4

Miscarried April 2009

Parents: Matt and Stacy McGhee

Given by Grandmother Sheri Vigil

Abigail Marie Papendick

March 3-4, 2017

Baby "Darth" Papendick

September 6, 2018

Baby "Nugget" Papendick

December 27, 2019

Given by parents Becky Johnston and Brian Papendick

Mindy and Maggie Smith

Stillborn November 4, 1997

TTTS and Polyhydramnios

Given by

Parents Karla and Scott Smith

and siblings Travis and Julia

Mollie Walker

Parents: Meredith and Damian Walker

Given by Anonymous

Gifts of Support:

Second Baptist Church, Springfield, MO

William Turner

Gwen George

Sherry and Johnny Baker

Electrical Consultants, Inc.

Sow a Few Seeds

Jenco Real Estate, Inc.

First Assembly Church, St Peters, MO

GoodCoin Giving Fund (Walgreens)

Texas Instruments Foundation

Village Real Estate Services, The Village Real

Estate Advised Fund of The Community

foundation of Middle Tennessee

M.E.N.D. gratefully acknowledges these gifts of love given in memory of a baby, relative, friend or given by someone just wanting to help. These donations help us to continue M.E.N.D.'s mission by providing this magazine and other services to bereaved parents free of charge. For more information on how you can support M.E.N.D., please see the "About M.E.N.D." section in the back of this magazine.

A Quiet Grief: Desiring to be Called Mommy

It is just another Sunday to her
She quickly takes her seat
She sees families gathered around her
She quietly begins to weep

Everywhere she looks is a trigger
There are children all around
She bows her head in shame and despair
Wanting to sink into the ground

"You're like their second momma"
She hears so many say
But in her heart she is grieving
There's no one to celebrate her today

She yearns for a child to call her own
She longs to hear laughter
as children play
Her desire is to be called "Momma"
And have a reason to celebrate this day

Another Mother's Day will come and go
She'll place a smile upon her face
She'll pray earnestly and sincerely
For God to give her grace

She hears Him whisper softly
"My child, I see your grief.
Keep holding to My promises
And I will bring you peace."

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M.E.N.D. CHAPTER UPDATES

Chicagoland

M.E.N.D. - Chicagoland continues to support grieving Mommies and families through our monthly support groups. We enjoyed walking together for the M.E.N.D.ing Miles Virtual 5K to remember our babies the weekend before Mother's Day. Thanks to everyone who joined us as we do not grieve alone and to everyone who shared the virtual 5K to others. We are grateful for all who registered, contributed and donated to continue the mission of M.E.N.D. to provide comfort and resources in the Chicagoland area.

This time of year can be difficult as the world celebrates mothers and fathers, and we deeply miss our babies. We wish you a gentle Bereaved Mother's Day, Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Becky



NW Washington

Thank you to all who registered for the M.E.N.D.ing Miles Virtual 5K! M.E.N.D.-Northwest Washington gathered to walk, taking steps for those who never did. Be sure to watch our Facebook group or website for opportunities like this to gather in memory of our babies.



We lift prayers for a peaceful Mother's Day and Father's Day as we honor you and remember our babies.

Katherine

Greater Houston Area

We are in the planning stages for the Remembrance Walk Saturday October 12 and Christmas Candlelight Ceremony. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer, we would love for you to join our team. Contact me at nikisha@mend.org for more details.

Thank you to those who have purchased and participated in the M.E.N.D.ing Miles Virtual 5K. These fundraisers help provide the funds for our events and support groups.

Our support group meets the 2nd Thursday of each month, and we would like to meet more of our local families. Also, we'd love for you to join our M.E.N.D.-Greater Houston Facebook group so you can stay up to date with our support group information, ceremonies and events. You can join here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/MENDGreaterHouston>

Nikisha



Southwest Missouri

M.E.N.D.-SW Missouri is always so thankful for the opportunity to "take steps for those who never did" through the M.E.N.D.ing Miles Virtual 5K. We met at a park for families to walk and at a local cemetery where our M.E.N.D. bench is located. It was a special time to remember our babies.

Our local hospital is having a special gathering for families with babies in heaven in June, and we are thankful for the opportunity to share about M.E.N.D. with families at this event. While it hurts our hearts knowing families are in need of our services, we are thankful we can be there to comfort them just as others did for us.

Jennifer



National Online Support

We are so sorry for the loss of your baby. Please join us on the 3rd Thursday of the month via Zoom for our online support group. We pray you'll find hope and comfort in our loss community.

Mallory



Pregnancy and Parenting After Loss Support

M.E.N.D. - Pregnancy and Parenting After Loss Support Group is for parents who are pregnant after a loss or who are considering trying to conceive again after a loss. Our support groups meet via Zoom at 7:30-8:30 PM CST on the 4th Tuesday of the month.

Marisa



M.E.N.D. en Español

El Día de las Madres puede ser un día difícil para la mayoría de nosotras en nuestro duelo. Aunque algunas de nosotras podemos aprovechar ese día para recordar a nuestros bebés y sus legados, algunas están de luto por la pérdida de su bebé. Recuerden que nuestro grupo de Facebook M.E.N.D.- español existe para brindarles un espacio seguro para conectarse con otras mamás y compartir sobre sus bebés de manera libre y abierta. También, si necesita un poco de apoyo individualmente, estaré encantada de chatear a través de Facebook Messenger, mensaje de texto, por teléfono o correo electrónico en jessica@mend.org. Espero que pasen un día lleno de paz y tranquilidad.



Jessica

East Valley, Arizona

M.E.N.D.–East Valley Arizona appreciates all those who participated in March for our Panda Express fundraiser. We are also thankful for all the support in the month of May by participating in our M.E.N.D.ing Miles Virtual 5k on May 11, and The Barro's Pizza in Queen Creek fundraiser on May 14! We are so thankful for all the support and representation for our babies! Make sure to watch our Facebook group for more opportunities! We continue to meet regularly and are here for you!

*Danielle***Columbus, Ohio**

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens." Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV

As spring approaches, we expect rainy and sunny days. Grief is the same way. You expect to have good and bad days. Like the weather, you can expect our support through both sorrow and joy, as you journey toward healing. We appreciate your participation in our M.E.N.D.ing Miles Virtual 5K. As always, let your presence and voice be known at our support groups and private Facebook group to comfort another loss mom. You are NOT alone...you ARE welcome!



If you need M.E.N.D.–Columbus' services or desire to serve, contact me at latrina@mend.org.

*LaTrina***MidMichigan**

M.E.N.D.–MidMichigan is spreading the word about the importance of community in your grief journey. If you know an organization, group or church that would like information about M.E.N.D.–MidMichigan to have to pass along to grieving families, please contact Karen at karen@mend.org. Our heart is for no one in MidMichigan to grieve alone!

*Karen***Men of M.E.N.D.**

Let us come together and talk about our babies. Men of M.E.N.D. holds a Zoom support group every 3rd Monday of the month at 8:00 PM CST. May and June have some of the hardest holidays. I pray you have some comfort and peace.

*Matt***Tulsa, Oklahoma**

M.E.N.D.–Tulsa is moving the day of the month of our support groups from the 3rd Tuesday of the month to the 4th Tuesday of the month beginning May 28. We will meet from 7:00-8:30. Location will remain the same.



We would like to thank Electrical Consultants Inc. (ECI) for their generous donation of \$5,000 to our chapter.

*Cat***"Embracing Your Title..." continued from page 3.**

to remain standing. Over and over, as the game continued and she read "I am a mom," or even, "I am a mom of three," I remained standing. But that seed of doubt and impostor syndrome crossed my mind, because I had to make the decision about whether to embrace my title in such a public way.

As loss parents, we weigh those decisions carefully—we consider our audience. If I am meeting someone new, will they ask me whether I have children? And if so, how will I respond? Will they understand if I choose to use the title of Mom to describe myself? What if they say something insensitive? We must be gentle with ourselves in these circumstances. Sometimes you have to guard your heart when you're not prepared to answer such questions. Deciding whether or how to embrace the title of Mom or Dad is a personal choice, and your baby/babies will not hold it against you.

I am a preschool teacher. Probably on a weekly basis, I get mistakenly called "Mom" (and even "Grandma" or "Nana" a time or two!) by a student. In the first months and years after the loss of Abigail, I would wince when I heard that word—even though I knew it was an honest and innocent mistake. It took time and reframing of my thoughts to embrace the title of Mom; and truly, out of the mouths of babes, maybe being called "Mom" is a God-wink reminder from my own heavenly trio.

You are Mom, Mama, Mommy. You are Dad, Dada, Daddy. You are not alone. Whether and how you choose to embrace those titles, know you are unconditionally loved by your baby/babies, and seen and supported by your fellow loss parents. I wish you a gentle Mother's and Father's Day.



About M.E.N.D.

M.E.N.D. is a Christian nonprofit corporation whose purpose is to reach out to those who have lost a child to miscarriage, stillbirth or infant death and offer a way to share experiences and information through monthly support groups, this magazine, and our website at www.mend.org. For inquiries, subscription requests, deletions, and submissions to the magazine, contact us at:

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Donations make the printing and distribution of this magazine possible. Your tax-deductible contributions are greatly appreciated and should be sent to the address listed above. If your gift is made in memory of a baby, please include that baby's name (if named), date of birth and/or date of death, the parents' names, and the name of the benefactor. You may also include the cause of death (if known).

M.E.N.D. is a member of
First Candle/SIDS Alliance
Pregnancy Loss and Infant Death Alliance



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M.E.N.D. Support Groups in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex

Mommies AND Daddies are welcome at all M.E.N.D. support groups.

Irving Archives Museum, 801 W Irving Blvd, Irving, TX 75060.

For more information, call (972) 506-9000.

M.E.N.D. chapter support groups meet the 2nd Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM

Daddies group meets the 2nd Thursday of March, June, Sept. and Dec., at 7:30 PM

Moms and dads meet together for introductions before dividing into two groups.

Rowlett Satellite Chapter

A satellite chapter in Rowlett holds support groups to serve families in the eastern area of the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex.

Support groups are held the 1st Wednesday at 7:00 PM at the Veterans Resource and Outreach Center,
4210 Industrial St, Rowlett, TX 75088.

Visit our Facebook group or email terri@mend.org.

M.E.N.D. Chapter Information

M.E.N.D.–NW Washington

Meets the 4th Tuesday at 6:30 PM

GracePoint Church

8278 WA-303

Bremerton, Washington 98311

Chapter Director: Katherine Sandoval
katherines@mend.org, (360) 662-6161

M.E.N.D.–SW Missouri

Meets the 1st Thursday at 7:00 PM

Project H.O.P.E.

1419 S. Enterprise Ave

Springfield, Missouri 65804

Chapter Director: Jennifer Harrison
jennifer@mend.org, (417) 770-0600

M.E.N.D.–Columbus, Ohio

Meets on the 2nd Monday, at 6:30 PM

Paul Mitchell-The School of Columbus

3000 Morse Road

(Upstairs Conference Room)

Columbus, Ohio 43231

Chapter Director: LaTrina Bray
latrina@mend.org (614) 530-5128

M.E.N.D.–Chicagoland, Illinois

Meets the 1st Tuesday at 7:00 PM

St. Paul Lutheran Church

545 S. Ardmore Ave.

Villa Park, IL 60181

Chapter Director: Becky Luedtke
becky@mend.org, (630) 267-9134

M.E.N.D.–Greater Houston Area

Kingwood Area, Texas:

Meets the 2nd Thursday at 6:30 PM

Lone Star College Kingwood

Classroom Building A (CLA) Rm 113

20000 Kingwood Dr.

Kingwood, TX 77339.

Chapter Director: Nikisha Perry
nikisha@mend.org, (346) 235-4714

COMING SOON:

M.E.N.D.–St. Louis

M.E.N.D.–Tulsa, Oklahoma

MEETING NOW ON THE 4TH TUESDAY!

Meets the 4th Tuesday at 7:00 PM

The Office Tulsa

5401 S Harvard Ave

Tulsa, OK 74135

Chapter Director: Cat Markham
cat@mend.org, (918) 694-4325 (HEAL)

M.E.N.D.–MidMichigan

Meets the 1st Tuesday, at 7:00 PM

Christian Celebration Center

6100 Swede Ave

Midland, MI 48642

Chapter Director: Karen Kilbourn
karen@mend.org, (989) 577-5755

M.E.N.D.–East Valley, Arizona

Meets the 2nd Thursday, at 6:30 PM

Queen Creek Library

Edward Abbey room

21802 S Ellsworth Rd

Queen Creek, Arizona 85142

Chapter Director: Danielle Radler
danielle@mend.org, (602) 699-6228

Online Support

Subsequent pregnancy group

meets the 4th Tuesday

from 7:30 - 8:30 PM via Zoom.

Please visit www.mend.org to join.

Led by Marisa Perry:

marisa@mend.org

For families who are considering becoming pregnant or are currently pregnant after a loss.

M.E.N.D.–

Nationwide Online Support Group

Held the 3rd Thursday at 8:00 PM (CST)

Please visit <https://www.mend.org/virtual-support-group-links>

Chapter Director: Mallory Gallagher
mallory@mend.org

Men of M.E.N.D.

Held the 3rd Monday at 8:00 PM (CST)

to join, contact,

Chapter Director: Matt McGhee

Matt@mend.org

Facebook Group:

www.facebook.com/groups/MENofMEND



The Garden of Hope is a place of peace and solace where families can come for a quiet time of reflection, prayer, or even to celebrate the life of their loved one.

The Garden of Hope was established by M.E.N.D. in 2016, and is located on property of Calvary Church in Irving, Texas.

You can remember your loved one by purchasing a brick in the Garden of Hope. Brick purchases can be made at <https://www.mend.org/garden-of-hope>.

The order deadline for 2024 installation is July 15, 2024. To ensure the bricks are ready for the 2024 Walk to Remember, brick orders will be closed from July 16 – October 4, 2024.



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We pray this
Mother's Day & Father's Day
will be gentle
on your heart.



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