

Angel Whispers

WINTER, 2016

*Angel Whispers
Newsletter is a resource
for parents who have lost
a baby during pregnancy
or shortly after birth.*

*Meetings are held in
Sherwood Park and Fort
Saskatchewan.*

*For meeting information,
or to receive our
newsletter or a special
care package, please call
780.998.5595,
ext. 225.*

*You can also reach us by
email at
angelwhispers@
familiesfirstsociety.ca
or visit our website at
www.angelwhispers.ca/
angelwhispers.*



Families First Society
FORT SASKATCHEWAN
www.familiesfirstsociety.ca

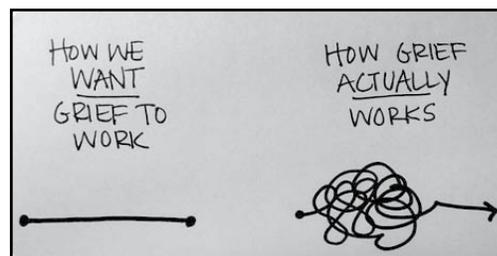
#thisisourvillage

Holiday Wishes to all of our Angel Whispers Families,

The holiday season is quickly approaching, and the closer it gets, the more the anticipation of the impending holiday may intensify the emotions of grief. Grief at any time of the year is a complicated journey filled with emotional turmoil and a longing for our deeply loved baby that we wished for, hoped for and dreamed of. Grief at Christmas can be even more challenging, as it's a time of year we look forward to celebrating with loved ones. When your most cherished loved one, your precious child has died, it can feel too painful to imagine celebrating the holidays without them.

The journey through grief is difficult to understand, there is no 'how to' manual that accompanies a loss to provide us with an expected timeline of the grief journey we experience. Much of our journey is influenced by our instinctual need to grieve and mourn. Grief is the price we pay for love, when we love deeply, we will grieve deeply. Our journey is complicated by societal expectations that our grief has a time limit, that we 'should' experience an orderly and quick transition through the 'stages of grief' and that we 'should' return to 'normal'.

I am here to reassure you that this is not the reality of grief... the reality is that grief is anything but a linear process. How we would like it to look or how society expects it to look and how it actually looks are much different. Grief looks more like this...



And even though grief can feel very messy and overwhelming, I want to reassure you that it's possible to understand your grief, have hope in knowing that with time and the hard work of mourning that the intensity of the emotions will soften. To be able to heal you do need to fully experience the grief journey. Have hope in knowing that it's possible to heal your heart while keeping your little one's memory tucked safely within your heart.

This newsletter focuses on helping you to understand your grief, helping you to discover your new normal in life while helping you to get through the holidays... one day at a time, just like the grief journey. The only way to the other side is through... one day at a time. Sometimes it's one moment at a time, one breath at a time. We are here to walk with you through this grief journey... to provide you with the hope that your tomorrows will be filled with more joys and less sorrows than today. To help you to honour the memory of your sweet baby forever and always.

To help you better understand this journey through grief, we are offering an **Understanding your Grief** 6-week workshop starting in January. More information can be found on pages 13 and 14 of this newsletter.

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

My wish for you and your loved ones is a holiday season filled with peace, hope and love. May you feel the love of your sweet angel babies with you in every moment you spend alone or share with loved ones this Christmas. And may the New Year bring you endless love, moments of laughter and cherished memories.

With love and understanding,

Lori-Ann

Lori-Ann Huot
Program Coordinator
Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support
Program
(780)998-5595 ext. 225
angelwhispers@familiesfirstsociety.ca



Little Snowdrop

~ Author Unknown ~

*The world may never notice
If a Snowdrop doesn't bloom,
or even pause to wonder
if the petals fall too soon.
But every life that ever forms,
or ever comes to be,
touches the world
in some small way
for all eternity.*

*The little one we long for
was swiftly here and gone.*

*But the love
that was then planted
is a light that still shines on.
And though our arms are empty,
our hearts know what to do.
Every beating of our hearts
says of our love for you.*

The Month Before Christmas

Shared by: Julie Aspinall

*'Twas the month before Christmas and I dreaded the days,
That I knew I was facing, the holiday craze.
The stores were all filled with holiday lights,
In hopes of drawing customers by day and by night.
As others were making their holiday plans,
My heart was breaking, I couldn't understand.
I had lost my child a few years before,
And I knew what my holiday had in store.
When out of nowhere, there arose such a sound,
I sprang to my feet and was looking around,
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash
The sight that I saw took my breath away,
And my tears turned to smiles in the light of the day.
When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a cluster of butterflies fluttering near.
With beauty and grace they performed a dance,
I knew in a moment this wasn't by chance.
The hope that they gave me was a sign from above,
That my child was still near me and that I was loved.
The message they brought was my holiday gift,
And I cried when I saw them in spite of myself.
As I knelt closer to get a better view,
One allowed me to pet it, as if it knew -
That I needed the touch of its fragile wings,
To help me get through the holiday scene.
In the days that followed I carried the thought,
Of the message the butterflies left in my heart -
That no matter what happens or what days lie ahead,
Our children are with us - they're not really dead.
Yes, the message of the butterflies still rings in my ears,
A message of hope - a message so dear.
And I imagined they sang as they flew out of sight,
'To all bereaved parents - We love you tonight!'*

Visit us on Facebook!

Facebook is a fast and easy way for us to send out meeting reminders and notifications about our healing hands workshops, as well as what is new in our community.

Find our Angel Whispers Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/angelwhispersbabylosssupport>

Add the Angel Whispers Program Coordinator, Lori-Ann, on facebook, you can find her as **Lori-Ann AngelWhispers**.

The Night Before Christmas

Shared by: Janet Gilmour

*It's the night before Christmas,
we're all filled with joy,
except when we think of you,
little boy.*

*The stockings are hung by the
chimney with care,
and in our hearts it's as if you
were here.*

*My children are sleeping, in
their bedrooms they lay,
but we're still filled with grief
for our baby that died.*

*You see, this Christmas you
would have been two,*

*But every Christmas I know
we'll miss you.*

*As I wrap up the presents my
thought are on you,
and what we'd have bought if
you were here, too.*

*A car, a ball, a red fire truck
or maybe a rabbit's foot to
bring you good luck*

*The tree is all trimmed with
bright coloured balls,
and decorations hang on all of
the walls.*

*It looks so pretty - - I wonder if
you see*

*Your Christmas ball we've hung
on the tree.*

*I made it for you before you
were here,*

*Not knowing I'd hang it with
eyes filled with tears.*

*Tomorrow is Christmas; I'll try
not to be sad;*

*I'll count all my blessings and
try to be glad,*

*You've not a part of our future -
- you were a part of our past
and someday I know we'll be
together at last.*

Upcoming Meetings:

Baby Loss Support Group - Open to any family that has been devastated by the loss of a baby to miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death. Meetings are held from 7-9 p.m. at Strathcona County FCSS Offices - 401 Festival Lane. Registration is required.

- December 4, 2016
- January 8, 2017
- February 5, 2017
- March 5, 2017

Miscarriage Support Group - These meetings are open to any family that have experienced the loss of a baby to miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy or blighted ovum. Meetings are held from 7-9 p.m. at Families First Society - 9901-90 Street Fort Saskatchewan. Registration is required.

- December 12, 2016
- January 16, 2017
- February 13, 2017
- March 13, 2017

Subsequent Pregnancy Support Group - These meetings are open to any family that is considering the possibility of trying again or for families that are anxiously expecting after experiencing a previous loss. Meetings are from 7-9 p.m. Contact Lori-Ann for meeting location. Registration is required.

- December 11, 2016
- January 15, 2017
- February 12, 2017
- March 12, 2017

Healing Hands - Healing Hands is an afternoon devoted to creative healing. These workshops have been held monthly for the past few years with the exception of the summer months. Moving forward, we have decided to offer Healing Hands quarterly and focus on offering a special heartfelt project 4 times per year. Registration is required for Healing Hands. To register, contact Lori-Ann @ (780)998-5595 ext 225. Upcoming dates:

- December 10, 2016
- March 18, 2017

Location and project details will be announced closer to each scheduled date. Stay tuned to Facebook or the Angel Whispers website www.angelwhispers.ca/angelwhispers

Workshops will either be held at the Family Community Support Services offices in Sherwood Park or at the Families First Society offices in Fort Saskatchewan.

Understanding your Grief Workshop
Thursdays 6:30-8:30pm

- January 19, 2017
- January 26, 2017
- February 2, 2017
- February 9, 2017
- February 16, 2017
- February 23, 2017

This is a pre-registered 6 week program, more details available on pages 13 and 14 of this newsletter.

**For all meetings and workshops please contact Lori-Ann to register
(780) 998-5595 ext. 225 or .**

Donations

AngelWhispers accepts donations. A \$10 donation will sponsor a care package for an Angel Whispers family.

*Donations can be made through the CanadaHelps website -
www.canadahelps.org*

Find us under Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society, find Angel Whispers under Fund Designation.

On the Journey to Healing: Embracing the Ten Essential Touchstones

Alan Wolfelt, PhD, writer, counselor, funeral director and Grief Specialist, provides ten touchstones for your grief that will help you listen to your heart and bring it into harmony with your head. He writes: Listening to your heart is also essential on the journey to healing. My years of learning from my own losses, as well as the losses of those who have trusted me to walk with them, have taught me that an open heart that is grieving is a "well of reception;" it is moved entirely by what it has perceived. Authentic mourning is an opportunity to embrace that open heart in ways that allow for and encourage our healing.

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

*"The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness."
—John Muir*

I recently wrote a book called *Understanding Your Grief*. Indeed, one of the most important things I do in my ministry to grieving people is provide information that helps them (and you!) integrate loss into their lives. What's more, I strive to help them understand and avoid some of the unnecessary pain sometimes caused by well-intentioned but misinformed friends, family members, and even some professional counselors. These people sometimes perpetuate grief misconceptions, proffer misguided advice and impose unrealistic and inappropriate expectations on the mourner. Though they do not do this knowingly, they in effect try to pull mourners off the path toward healing. But there is a paradox in the concept of "understanding" grief. Yes, when the timing seems right and mourners are open to learning from those who have walked the path of loss before them, I try my best to provide information and education that helps them understand and affirm what they are experiencing. However, sometimes it is the very need to totally understand the experience of grief that can get you in trouble. For as someone once astutely observed, "Mystery is not something to be explained, it is something to be pondered."

Sometimes we simply cannot understand the death of someone we have loved so deeply. We cannot understand it now, and we will not understand it ever. I certainly couldn't understand why the doctors couldn't cure my dad's melanoma. I thought, "After all, it's only skin cancer." I didn't understand,

I protested!

I have found that sometimes it is in staying open to the mystery and recognizing that we don't understand and can't control everything that surrounds us that understanding eventually comes. In fact, perhaps it is "standing under" the mysterious experience of death that provides us with a unique perspective: We are not above or bigger than death. Maybe only after exhausting the search for understanding why someone we love died can we discover a newly defined "why" for our own life.

In my experience, "understanding" comes when we surrender, surrender our need to compare our grief (it's not a competition); surrender our self-critical judgments (we need to be self-compassionate); and surrender our need to completely understand (we never will). The grief that touches our souls has its own voice and should not be comprised by our need for comparison, judgment, or even complete understanding. Please note that surrender is not the same as resignation. Actually, surrendering to the unknowable mystery is a courageous choice, an act of faith, a trust in God and in our self! We can only hold this mystery in our hearts and surround ourselves with love.

Think of our grief as a wilderness—a vast, mountainous, inhospitable forest. You are in the wilderness now. You are in the midst of unfamiliar and often brutal surroundings. You are cold and tired. Yet you must journey through this wilderness. To find your way out, you must become acquainted with its terrain and learn to follow the

sometimes hard-to-find trail that leads to healing.

In the wilderness of your grief, the touchstones are your trail markers. They are the signs that let you know you are on the right path. When you learn to identify and rely on the touchstones, you will not get lost in your journey, even though the trail will often be arduous and you may at times feel hopeless.

And even when you've become a master journeyer, and you know well the terrain of your grief, you will at times feel like you are backtracking and being ravaged by the forces around you. This, too, is the nature of grief. Complete mastery of a wilderness is not possible. Just as we cannot control the winds and the storms and the beasts in nature, we can never have total dominion over our grief.

But, if you do your work of mourning, if you become an intrepid traveler on your journey, if you strive to achieve these ten touchstones, I promise you that you will find your way out of the wilderness of your grief and you will learn to make the most of the rest of your precious life.

Having hope and healing your heart

Hope is an equally important foundation on the journey to healing. Hope is an expectation of a good that is yet to be. It is an expression of the present alive with a sense of the possible. It is a belief that healing can and will occur. In honoring the 10 touchstones (or in helping others honor the 10 touchstones), you are making an effort to

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

find hope for continued life. Through deliberate mourning, you yourself can be the purveyor of your hope. You create hope in yourself by actively mourning the death and setting your intention to healing.

When you feel hopeless (and you probably will at times), you can also reach out to others for hope. Spend time in the company of people who affirm your needs to mourn yet at the same time give you hope for healing. People who are empathetic, non-judgmental, good listeners and who model positive, optimistic ways of being in the world will be your best grief companions. They will help re-supply you with hope when your stores are running low. They will help you build divine momentum toward your eventual exodus from the wilderness of your grief.

Listening to your heart is also essential on the journey to healing. My years of learning from my own losses, as well as the losses of those who have trusted me to walk with them, have taught me that an open heart that is grieving is a “well of reception;” it is moved entirely by what it has perceived. Authentic mourning is an opportunity to embrace that open heart in ways that allow for and encourage our healing.

Perhaps the most important truth I have learned is that healing in grief is heart-based, not head-based. Modern therapies sometimes separate the head from the heart; it’s as if we should somehow separate the head from the heart: it’s as if we should somehow be able to rationally think through our grief. I heartily disagree! Carl Jung taught us years ago that every psychological struggle is ultimately a matter of spirituality. I encourage you to think, yes, but more important, to feel with your heart and your soul.

Did you know that the word courage comes from the Old French word for heart (Coeur)? Your courage grows for those things in life that impact you deeply. The death of someone you treasure opens, or engages, your heart. Now you must take your heart, which has been engaged, and muster

the courage to encounter the 10 essential touchstones. Courage can also be defined as the ability to do what one believes is right, despite the fact that others may strongly and persuasively disagree. If you authentically mourn, some may try to shame you. So, go forth with courage.

I invite you to go to that spiritual place inside yourself and, transcending our mourning-avoidant society and even your own personal inhibitions about grief, enter deeply into the journey. In many ways the path of the heart is an individual exploration into the wilderness, along unmarked and unlit paths. Helping others in grief sheds some light on their paths and keeps them from stumbling.

The Ten Touchstones

In *Understanding Your Grief*, I describe 10 “touchstones” that are es-

sential physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual signs for mourners to seek out on their journey through grief.

Touchstone One: *Open to the presence of your loss.*

Touchstone Two: *Dispel misconceptions about grief.*

Touchstone Three: *Embrace the uniqueness of your grief.*

Touchstone Four: *Explore what you might experience*

Touchstone Five: *Recognize you are not crazy*

Touchstone Six: *Understand the six needs of mourning*

Touchstone Seven: *Nurture yourself.*

Touchstone Eight: *Reach out for help.*

Touchstone Nine: *Seek reconciliation, not resolution*

Touchstone Ten: *Appreciate your transformation.*

About Dr. Alan Wolfelt



Author, educator, and grief counselor Dr. Alan Wolfelt is known across North America for his inspirational teaching gifts. His compassionate messages about healing in grief—based on his

own personal losses as well as his experience supporting children, teens, adults, and families over the last three decades—speak not only to the intellect but to the hearts of all who hear him. Perhaps best known for his model of “companioning” versus “treating” mourners, Dr. Wolfelt is committed to helping people mourn well so they can live well and love well. Founder and Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition, Dr. Wolfelt presents numerous educational workshops each year for hospices, hospitals, schools, universities, funeral homes, community groups, and a variety of other organizations. He also teaches the 4-day trainings described on this website in beautiful Fort Collins, Colorado.

Dr. Wolfelt is a popular media

resource who regularly provides his expertise to many top-tier television shows, newspapers, and magazines. Recipient of the Association for Death Education and Counseling’s Death Educator Award, Dr. Wolfelt is also a faculty member of the University of Colorado Medical School’s Department of Family Medicine.

“Mourning in our culture isn’t always easy. Normal thoughts and feelings connected to loss are typically seen as unnecessary and even shameful. Instead of encouraging mourners to express themselves, our culture’s unstated rules would have them avoid their hurt and ‘be strong.’

“But grief is not a disease. Instead, it is the normal, healthy process of embracing the mystery of the death of someone loved. If mourners see themselves as active participants in their healing, they will experience a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in life.

To learn more about Dr. Wolfelt and his Centre for Loss and his extensive Resource Library, visit <http://www.centerforloss.com/>

Coping Through The Holidays After The Loss Of Your Baby

by: Lori-Ann Huot

The holidays are a difficult time of the year when you are grieving. When you have lost a baby, the thought of celebrating Christmas, especially if your loss is recent, is too much to bear for many families. Holidays are meant to be shared with loved ones, and yet when a loved one as significant as your baby is missing, it can be too difficult to imagine a Christmas without them.

For some, skipping Christmas may feel like to best option, although there are many things to be considered when making a decision to not celebrate the holidays:

- Express how you are feeling to your family, explain that it's too difficult to face the usual traditions and that you're hoping that next year may be easier.
- Be gentle with yourself, remember that it's ok to experience moments of joy and happiness. Don't feel guilty if you find yourself smiling or laughing. You are not disrespecting your baby by allowing yourself to enjoy life.
- Decline invitations – no explanation is necessary, friends and family will understand.
- Make shopping easy – consider online shopping for those that you need to buy gifts for and avoid the holiday bustle of the stores.
- Find a balance between staying busy and having time to yourself – try to plan a few activities that you enjoy. Grief can be very lonely, try not to add to those feelings of loneliness by isolating yourself.
- Take a vacation – a trip away may be the best way to remove yourself from the traditions that are too difficult to face. You may want to travel away as a couple or perhaps consider inviting family to join you. Consider a travel destination where Christmas isn't celebrated. If a vacation isn't possible, consider taking on a project around your home to keep you busy.
- Do something special to remember your baby, continue reading for

ideas on honoring your baby.

- If you chose to attend holiday gatherings, the following suggestions may make the experience easier to tolerate:
- Know your limits – if you feel as though you will feel more stress than enjoyment, decline the invitation. Do consider however if attending events with friends and family may help to take your mind of things for a short time.
- Make a plan in advance – if you are attending a holiday gathering, find a quiet place to spend a few moments alone if you need to. Plan an excuse to use in case you feel overwhelmed and need to leave.
- Share your feelings with friends and family – your loved ones will know best how to support you if you can express to them what you need.
- Not everyone understands what you are going through, you may hear comments that are hurtful or insensitive. Know that most often these people make comments with the best of intentions, but without them understanding exactly what you are going through it's hard for them to know the right things to say. Often times they will say nothing as they are concerned that they may upset you, when in reality they are worried about being uncomfortable by you being upset. What you need to express to them is that you want desperately to talk about your baby and hear your baby's name.
- Reach out to others that understand – it helps to talk to someone that can truly understand what you are going through. Connect with other baby loss families through support groups or in online chat groups. If your faith is important to you, attend extra services. Don't be afraid to ask for help from a counselor or mental health professional.

The other way to cope with the holidays, instead of skipping Christmas,

may be to start some new holiday traditions.

As you journey through your grief, your needs may change. You may try something one year and decide to change it and try something new the next year. With time you may even decide to renew old traditions. Most importantly do what feels right to you and allows you to honor your baby and incorporate your baby's memory into your new reality. Here are some ideas for honoring your baby's memory at Christmas:

- Ornaments – have an ornament engraved with your baby's name on it, add a new ornament each year in memory of your baby. I invite you to attend our annual Christmas healing hands workshop on Saturday December 13th from 1-3pm where you can make an ornament in memory of your baby.
- Dedicate a tree specifically to your baby – I did this several years ago in memory of my angels, Loren and Brooklynn. Every year I decorate my angel tree to honor my babies, and each year I add a new ornament that I make or buy for them. Consider having a theme to your tree: angels, butterflies, dragonflies or something meaningful to you. Tie ribbons on your tree, blue for boys, pink for girls or white if you don't know the gender of your baby. Search the internet for baby loss awareness ornaments.
- Hang a stocking for you baby – write a letter to your baby and tuck it inside the stocking, invite loved ones to do the same. Add a new note each year and save them to read every year. Consider a Random Acts of Kindness stocking.
- Buy a gift in memory of your baby that you can donate to a local hospital or needy child – buy an age appropriate gift for the age your baby would be. This can become an annual tradition. Include

Continued on page 9

Continued from page 8

a note that the gift is being given in memory of your baby.

- Make a donation in memory of your baby to a hospital, charity or program designed to help families after the loss of a baby.
- Give your baby a special signature – feel free to sign holiday cards with a designation for your baby like a stamp of an angel or baby feet, it may help you to know that your baby is not being forgotten and being remembered by others.
- Update friends and family by sharing how you are feeling – if you typically send out a letter with holiday cards, let them know how you are coping. It's ok to be honest and to share what you are needing from them.
- If you are inviting family or friends over, display keepsakes for you baby (pictures, scrapbooks, ornaments, etc.).
- Light a candle in memory of your baby.

Whether you decide to skip Christmas, create new holiday traditions or attempt to celebrate Christmas like you have done in years past, I wish you peace, love and hope. May hope for the future and the love of family and friends bring comfort to you this Christmas. Please know that your angel is smiling down on you from above wishing you love and happiness.

Lori-Ann

Angel Whispers is a non-denominational program. However we honor and respect the individual beliefs of our families.

For meeting information, or to receive our newsletter or a special care package, please call 780.998.5595, ext. 225.

Christmas trees are popping up all over town
Once again my heart is torn, I start to feel down
Those trees remind me of the baby I am missing
Chubby little cheeks, a head I should be kissing
My heart is tied in knots, my stomach is quite queasy
Anxiety grips me now, I feel tired, lost, uneasy
I think of all the fun, the time of celebration
The massive Christmas meal and all the kids elation
The family together and the not so empty chairs
The space that is created by my large invisible tears
The silence that is louder than the festive laughs and banter
Feeling I'm the only one who remembers that she matters
Being in a crowded room, overcome with isolation
Wanting to hear her name with urgent desperation
Avoiding a conversation that no one wants to hear
Having to bite my tongue to save the Christmas cheer
I want to let you know Christmas, for me, is an ordeal
Giving me time to grieve would be more than just ideal
Acknowledge I'm not feeling Christmas joy like you
It wouldn't hurt to hear you say you missed my baby too
Forgive me if you could for being kinda grumpy
The lead up to Christmas for me, is emotionally bumpy

Christmas Wish

Author Unknown

The heart of Christmas is hope

We need hope.

We need Christmas!

The New Year gives us time.

We need time to grieve.

But most of all to Heal.

*I wish you the gift of peace from
an aching heart;*

I wish you the gift of strength for the day ~

I wish you the gift of recognition,

I wish you the gift of remembrance,

I wish you the gift of care,

I wish you the gift of belonging,

*These are the gifts I wrap in
prayer;*

And lovingly send your way.

May the memories of this Season

Come on Gentle Wings and

Bring you, your family and friends

Love and Peace.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS FOR BEREAVED PARENTS

I Resolve:

That I will grieve as much and for as long as I feel like grieving, and that I will not let others put a time table on my grief.

That I will grieve in whatever way I feel like grieving, and I will ignore those who try to tell me what I should or should not be feeling and how I should or should not be behaving.

That I will cry whenever and wherever I feel like crying, and that I will not hold back my tears just because someone else feels I should be "brave" or "getting better" or "healing by now."

That I will talk about my baby as often as I want to, and that I will not let others turn me off just because they can't deal with their own feelings.

That I will not expect family and friends to know how I feel, understanding that one who has not lost a child cannot possibly know how I feel.

That I will not blame myself for my baby's death, and I will constantly remind myself that I did the best job I could. But when feelings of guilt are overwhelming, I will remind myself that this is a normal part of the grief process and it will pass.

That I will not be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help if I feel it is necessary.

I will keep the truth in my heart--the truth that my child is always with me in spirit.

That I will try to eat, sleep, and exercise every day in order to give my body strength it will need to help me cope with my grief.

To know that I am not losing my mind and I will remind myself that loss of memory, feelings of disorientation, lack of energy, and a sense of vulnerability are all a normal part of the grief process.

To know that I will heal, even though it will take a long time.

To let myself heal and not feel guilty about not feeling better sooner.

To remind myself that the grief process is circuitous--that is, I will not make steady upward progress. And when I find myself slipping back into the old moods of despair and depression, I will tell myself that "slipping backward" is also a normal part of the mourning process, and that these moods, too, will pass.

To try to be happy about something for some part of every day, knowing that at first, I may have to force myself to think cheerful thoughts so eventually they can become a habit.

That I will reach out at times and try to help someone else, knowing that helping others will help me to get over my depression.

That even though my baby has died, I will opt for life, knowing that is what my child would want me to do.

~Adapted From the Brooksville/Spring Hill FL. TCF Newsletter~



Can You Help?

Contact Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society at
780-998-5595
to donate or volunteer.

Thank You!

- To Cheryl and Simon Budziszyn for selecting Angel Whispers and the Stollery Children's Hospital as beneficiaries of Emily's Legacy Bike Tour! Thank you to everyone who donated to Angel Whispers!
- To Tirsa Smale with Pampered Chef for organizing a fundraiser in support of Angel Whispers. For more information on Pampered Chef, visit www.pamperedchef.biz/tirsa.
- To everyone who attended, supported, volunteered and donated to our recent costume party fundraiser and silent auction.
- To Strathcona County Family and Community Services for the Social Services Grant to help Angel Whispers sustain services to grieving families.
- To the Alberta Government for the Community Initiatives Program Grant to help Angel Whispers sustain services to grieving families.
- To the Swiftsure Foundation for the generous donation which allowed the Angel Whispers Program Coordinator the opportunity to complete her Death and Grief Studies Certification!
- To Strathcona Family and Community Services for allowing us use of their meeting space.
- To Betty Dean for helping with our newsletter!
- To all our Angel Whispers volunteers!
- To Jennifer King from King 's Quilting Queen. Jennifer handcrafts beautiful baby quilts and donates them to Angel Whispers to be given to Angel Whispers families after the birth of their Rainbow Babies. For more information on Jennifer's quilting, please visit her website <http://www.kingsquiltingqueen.com/>.
- To Brenda Chmilar and the Kalyna County Quilters for the generous donation of quilts for our Rainbow babies!
- To all the families who donate to cover the costs for our care packages, birth certificate keepsakes and memory box program.
- To everyone who has donated online through Canada Helps in memory of the sweet babies of our Angel Whispers families.

Thank You Hearts of Blue®

Hearts of Blue, our employee-run charity, was originally planned as a one-time 50th anniversary event in 1998. It was so well received, however, that it became an ongoing part of Alberta Blue Cross's community involvement. Today, *Hearts of Blue* is a registered charity operated by our employees and funded through both employee and corporate donations.



Members of *Hearts of Blue* provide help where needed by volunteering their time and donating items such as food, clothing and furniture to dozens of organizations across the province.

Thank you to the Alberta Blue Cross Hearts of Blue Team for the generous donation of Angel Wings and Resources for our care packages!

Rainbow Baby Birth Announcements

Enzo Nicolas Gushta

*Born on October 26, 2016 weighing 6lbs 14oz to loving parents Kira and Mike
Gushta and excited big brother Dominic.
Enzo's siblings in heaven are celebrating his safe arrival!*

Dario Manna

*Born on November 7, 2016 weighing 10lbs 2oz to proud parents Ida and Jeremy Manna and excited big sister Alessia.
Big brother Nicola is celebrating
with the angels.*

We appreciate our Angel Whispers volunteers!

Thank you to our dedicated volunteers who have contributed their time and experiences to helping other bereaved families.

Would you like to help?

We are currently looking for volunteers to help plan and organize upcoming fundraisers. If you would like to volunteer your time to help Angel Whispers raise much needed funds to sustain supports and services to grieving families, please contact Lori-Ann at (780)998-5595 ext. 225 or email - angelwhispers@familiesfirstsociety.ca.

Upcoming Fundraising Opportunities

We are planning the following fundraisers in 2017:

- **Angel Whispers Healing Hearts Paint Night**

This is a healing opportunity for our Angel Whispers families, friends and the community to come together in a creative setting in support of the Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program.

- **Angel Whispers Pub Night Fundraiser and Silent Auction**

We are planning our next Pub Night at the Canadian Brewhouse in Sherwood Park

Stay tuned to our website, www.angelwhispers@familiesfirstsociety.ca for more information on these upcoming fundraisers!

Because the Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program does not receive long term sustainable funding, we rely heavily on fundraisers to sustain our services to grieving families. If you have an idea on a fundraiser for the program or are interested in holding a fundraiser for Angel Whispers, please contact Lori-Ann Huot, Angel Whispers Program Coordinator at (780)998-5595 ext. 225 or email angelwhispes@familiesfirstsociety.ca.

Thank you to those that held fundraisers in 2016 benefiting the AngelWhispers Baby Loss Support Program!

One Christmas Wish

*I guess if I could make just one Christmas wish,
I would wish I could see you.
To hold, to snuggle, to just kiss,
This is something I'd really like to do.
My arms ache for my baby girl,
Who will always remain just that.
To never grow and experience joy,
I wish I knew where you were at.
Why is it God thought he needed you more than I,
And why is it wishes can't come true?
I am just an aching heart who can only ask why,
And a mother who can't let go of you.
Please God grant me this one Christmas wish,
If just for a minute, an hour or a day.
She is someone I really need and miss,
What more must I say?*



Dear Friends;

Our Costume Party Fundraiser and Silent Auction benefiting the Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program was a huge success! The total amount raised was almost \$3000, every penny of which will make a difference in the lives of Angel Whispers families.

It is with a grateful heart that we thank you for helping us support Angel Whispers. By honouring our angels and supporting this event you have helped the program to continue the vital work it does with grieving families and in maintaining the lifeline that it creates for so many.

Thank you for your support in assisting Angel Whispers to continue to provide hope and healing to grieving families both in our community and beyond. For more information on the program, visit the Angel Whispers website –
www.angelwhispers.ca/angelwhispers.

Sincerely,

Lori-Ann Huot

*Program Coordinator
Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program
(780)998-5595 ext 225
angelwhispers@familiesfirstsociety.ca
www.angelwhispers.ca/angelwhispers*

Healing Opportunities

Yoga for Grief Support

Yoga specifically designed for people who have suffered the death of a loved one. Classes involve yoga postures, breathing and meditation along with educational and supportive topics related to bereavement support.

Guided by Sandy Ayre, an Occupational Therapist and Certified Yoga Instructor.

For more information and upcoming class dates, please visit - www.yogaforgriefsupport.com

Pilgrims BriarPatch Centre for Grieving Families

***Expressive Arts for Children** ages 5 to 12 years old who have experienced the death of someone they love. We offer art, music, play, puppetry and drama for our youngest mourners to explore their unique grief journey in a safe and compassionate setting. Our parent/guardian group meets concurrently for other family members.

***Expressive Arts for Teens** ages 13 to 18 years old who have experienced the death of someone they love. We offer art, music, writing and movement for our youth to explore their unique grief journey in a safe and supportive environment. A parent/guardian group meets concurrently for other family members.



For more information on these children's grief programs, contact Cheryl Salter-Roberts - cherylsr@pilgrimshospice.com or 780.413.9801 ext. #302

Grieving Parents Society of Edmonton annual Candlelight Service

Dec 4th, 2016 - 7pm

Hosana Lutheran Church, 9009-163 St. Edmonton

Family and friends are welcome to attend. Join us in remembering our children as the holiday season approaches. Please bring a picture of your child.

Please join us for our Candlelight Service, coffee, and friendship.

HEARTS Annual Candlelight Memorial Service

December 4th, 2016

A time for sharing your little ones' name and being surrounded by those who care and understand.

Glenwood Memorial Gardens - 52356 Range Road 232, Sherwood Park

For more information, visit - www.heartsbabyloss.ca

Angel Whispers Annual Christmas Healing Hands Workshop

December 10th, 2016 - 1-3pm

FCSS offices - 401 Festival Lane, Sherwood Park

You are invited to join us to make a Christmas ornament in memory of your baby. An opportunity for our families to come together at Christmas to share and honour their precious babies. Families are welcome to attend.

Please RSVP to Lori-Ann with the #'s of adults and children that will be attending - angelwhispers@familiesfirstsociety.ca

ParentCare Candle Light Service

December 15th, 2016 - 7:30pm

Chapel in the Misericordia Hospital

In keeping with what has become a ParentCare tradition, the December meeting will once again be a Candle Light non-denominational service. Before the busy Christmas season begins ParentCare offers each of you an opportunity to pause and remember the babies that live on in our hearts.

If you would like to attend the service please call the answering service

at 780-989-5040 before December 10th and leave the name(s) and colour of candle (pink, blue or white) for your baby(ies) to be remembered or email this information to Patti at Patti.Walker@ahs.ca or Claire at cnlefeb@telusplanet.net.

Angel Whispers 'Understanding Your Grief' 6-week workshop

January 19th - February 23rd, 2017

Thursday's from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Location: Families First offices - 9901-90St. Fort Saskatchewan

Cost \$25, includes the 'Understanding your Grief Workbook'

Limited to 10 participants each session

Topics include:

- dispelling misconceptions about grief
- the uniqueness of your grief
- exploring the feelings of loss
- understanding the needs of mourning
- nurturing yourself
- reaching out for help
- seeking reconciliation not resolution

To register, call (780)998-5595 ext 221

We hope to offer this 6-week workshop three times per year. Upcoming sessions:

May 11 - June 15, 2017

September 7 - October 19, 2017

Suggestions for Honouring Your Baby

A positive way of coping with your loss is to recognize your baby in a very tangible and meaningful way. Listed below are several ways to honour your baby's memory during the holidays and beyond:

1. *Hang a special tree ornament with your baby's name on it.*
2. *Hang a stocking on the mantle and fill it with notes from the family including thoughts and feelings about your baby during the holidays.*
3. *Create a scrapbook in memory of your baby.*
4. *Contact us and we will make a special birth certificate in memory of your baby.*
5. *Purchase a gift for your baby and donate it in his/her memory to your local women's shelter, NICU or your other favorite charity.*
6. *Attend a special Christmas memorial service for families who are grieving during the holidays—more information is listed on our website and in this newsletter. Many services provide special ornaments memorializing your loved one.*
7. *Plant an apple tree or flowering shrub in the spring for your yard that will bloom every year.*
8. *Purchase a yard ornament to place under that tree or shrub.*
9. *Donate a book to Angel Whispers in memory of your baby, to assist other grieving parents. We will place a name plate in the front of the book as a tribute to your baby.*
10. *Have a special stepping stone made for your garden in memory of your baby.*
11. *Buy yourself a special Christmas present available at most gift shops: an angel pin with your baby's birth stone.*
12. *Make a donation to Angel Whispers or your favourite charity in memory of your baby.*



Understanding Your Grief Workshop

A Workshop of the Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program

This is a series of 6 weekly classes to help you to understand your grief.

Topics include:

- Normal emotions of grief
- Myths about grief
- Grief vs. mourning
- Taking care of yourself
- Reaching out for help
- Healing your broken heart

When: **Thursdays**

January 19 to February 23

Where: **Families First Society**

(Pembina Conference Centre)
9901 – 90 Street, Fort Sask

Time: **6:30 - 8:30 pm**

Cost: **\$25 (Includes workbook)**



*Limited to 10 participants.

For more information or to **REGISTER**
please call 780-998-5595 ext. 221.

'NORMAL'

Author unknown

Normal is having tears waiting behind every smile when you realize someone important is missing from all the important events in your family's life.

Normal is feeling like you can't sit another minute without getting up and screaming, because you just don't like to sit through anything.

Normal is not sleeping very well because a thousand what if's and why didn't I's go through your head constantly.

Normal is reliving that day continuously through your eyes and mind, holding your head to make it go away. Normal is having the TV on the minute I walk into the house to have noise, because the silence is deafening. Normal is staring at every child who looks like she is my child's age. And then thinking of the age she would be now and not being able to imagine it. Then wondering why it is even important to imagine it, because it will never happen.

Normal is every happy event in my life always being backed up with sadness lurking close behind, because of the hole in my heart.

Normal is telling the story of your child's death as if it were an everyday, commonplace activity, and then seeing the horror in someone's eyes at how awful it sounds. And yet realizing it has become a part of my 'normal'.

Normal is each year coming up with the difficult task of how to honor your child's memory and her birthday and survive these days. And trying to find the balloon or flag that fits the occasion. Happy Birthday? Not really.

Normal is my heart warming and yet sinking at the sight of something special my daughter loved. Thinking how she would love it, but how she is not here to enjoy it.

Normal is having some people afraid to mention my daughter. Normal is making sure that others remember her.

Normal is after the funeral is over everyone else goes on with their lives, but I continue to grieve my loss forever.

Normal is weeks, months, and years after the initial shock, the grieving gets worse sometimes, not better. Normal is not listening to people compare anything in their life to this loss, unless they too have lost a child. NOTHING. Even if your child is in the remotest part of the earth away from you - it doesn't compare. Losing a parent is horrible, but having to bury your own child is unnatural.

Normal is taking pills, and trying not to cry all day, because I know my mental health depends on it.

Normal is realizing I do cry everyday.

Normal is disliking jokes about death or funerals, bodies being referred to as cadavers, when you know they were once someone's loved one.

Normal is being impatient with everything and everyone, but someone stricken with grief over the loss of your child.

Normal is sitting at the computer crying, sharing how you feel with chat buddies who have also lost a child.

Normal is feeling a common bond with friends on the computer in England, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and all over the USA, but yet never having met any of them face to face.

Continued on page 16

'NORMAL' Continued from page 15

Normal is a new friendship with another grieving mother; talking and crying together over our children and our new lives. Normal is not listening to people make excuses for God. "God may have done this because..." I love God, I know that my daughter is in heaven, but hearing people trying to think up excuses as to why sick children were taken from this earth is not appreciated and makes absolutely no sense to this grieving mother.

Normal is being too tired to care if you paid the bills, cleaned the house, did laundry or if there is any food.

Normal is wondering this time whether you are going to say you have two children or one, because you will never see this person again and it is not worth explaining that my child is in heaven. And yet when you say you have one child to avoid that problem, you feel horrible as if you have betrayed your child.

Normal is avoiding McDonald's and Burger King playgrounds because of small, happy children that break your heart when you see them.

Normal is asking God why he took your child's life instead of yours and asking if there even is a God.

Normal is knowing I will never get over this loss, in a day or a million years.

And last of all, Normal is hiding all the things that have become 'normal' for you to feel, so that everyone around you will think that you are 'normal'.

In Memory of our Newly Discovered Angels

*Baby Petitpa
April 2016*

*Maximus Antonio Carulli Pacheco
April 25, 2011*

*Baby Petitpas
May 2005*

*Emma Allison Michelle Carter
May 18, 2016 - July 10, 2016*

*Baby Petitpas
July 2016*

*Benedicta Devlin Sumalinog-Fawcett
August 9, 2016*

*Cooper James McNeil
August 19, 2016*

*Finndley Jude Spiderwick
September 11, 2016*

*Elena Bombino
October 17, 2016*

*Baby Leduc
November 7, 2016*

*Baby Rolf
November 17, 2016*

All angels can be found on our website at www.angelwhispers.ca/angelwhispers

Please call or email us if you would like to submit your baby's name to be remembered. If we have forgotten to remember your baby on this page, or have misspelled your angel's name, please let us know.



Families First Society FORT SASKATCHEWAN

Families First Society is a non profit organization established in 1996. We are directed by a volunteer board and work in partnership with many community agencies to offer a variety of programs and services. Our programs promote positive parenting and early childhood development.

Families First Society offers parent education, programs for young children to learn and play, and family support services, as well as information and referral to other programs and services in the community.

Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society (main office)

9901-90 St. T8L 3T1
or Box 3285 T8L 2T3
Fort Saskatchewan, AB
Parent Link Centre

Phone: 780-998-5595

Fax: 780-998-5503

Angel Whispers was created by three moms in the Edmonton area who experienced the loss of their babies: one shortly after birth, one through miscarriage, and one through still birth.

It is a program of Families First Society of Fort Saskatchewan, a non-profit charity funded primarily through individual donations.

Donations, in memory of your baby, are acknowledged in our newsletter at your request. Charitable donation receipts are issued upon request.

Angel Whispers provides:

- baby loss support group
- Healing Hands groups
- subsequent pregnancy support group
- resource lending library
- quarterly newsletter
- special care packages
- Memory Box program
- one-on-one and email support
- birthcertificate keepsakes

Angel Whispers Care Packages

Angel Whispers sends out care packages to grieving families. Each package includes a special memento and strategies for coping. Birth Certificate keepsakes are also available.

If you would like to receive or send a care package, please call us or email angelwhispers@familiesfirstsociety.ca,

Baby Loss Support Group

Open to any family that has been devastated by the loss of a baby to miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death. Meetings are held from 7:09 p.m. at Strathcona County FCSS Offices - 401 Festival Lane - Registration required.

- December 4, 2016
- January 8, 2017
- February 5, 2017
- March 5, 2017

Miscarriage Support Group

These meetings are open to any family that have experienced the loss of a baby to miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy or blighted ovum. Meetings are held from 7-9 p.m. at Families First Society - 9901-90 Street Fort Saskatchewan. Registration is required.

- December 12, 2016
- January 16, 2017
- February 13, 2017
- March 13, 2017

For meeting information, or to receive our newsletter or a special care package, please call 780.998.5595, ext. 225.

Angel Whispers is a non-denominational program. However we honor and respect the individual beliefs of our families.

For families seeking additional support please see:

<http://www.angelwhispers.ca/angelwhispers/support>