

# FAMILY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME



Social Work Department  
Royal Children's Hospital

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2008

A warm welcome to the April newsletter of the Family Bereavement Support Programme. Through the newsletters and the groups of the Programme we hope that you will find information, encouragement and connection with others to help sustain you as you grieve for and love your child.

## *Something I've Never Felt Before: fathers and their grief*

The parents who joined the April group were welcomed. As the group's time together began we acknowledged the courage that it can take to return through the *front doors* of this Hospital. Whether, as for several parents in the group, this was for the first time or as for others it was well beyond this, the significance of parents' actions and this place are recognised.

Parents are encouraged to think of the group as their group and *to use* it however they feel would be helpful. This may be through listening, talking, questioning, challenging or sharing stories. We hope that the group offers a supported opportunity to learn from one another, explore the aftermath of grief and find ways of living with loss. Parents are invited to come to the group as occasionally or

regularly as they find supportive. Sometimes there may be experiences, questions or concerns that parents would want to talk about away from the group. This could be with a trusted family member, friend or support person. Jane and Vivienne (Bateman, Bereavement Services Coordinator, RCH) are able to talk more privately with parents. Parents who do not come to the groups are also most welcome to contact Vivienne or Jane through the Social Work Department on 03 9345 6111. During the group Jane takes notes without names to help form the newsletter. The newsletter is a resource for families and those who accompany them as they grieve.

Parents in the April group included the parents of babies, young children and adolescents, parents who

had been living with grief for several months and those who had been journeying with grief for over two years. The group was joined by Mr. Greg Roberts, Counsellor and Educator at HOPE Bereavement Care. HOPE which is based in the Barwon Region is auspiced through SIDS and Kids Victoria. HOPE provides a range of support services for those affected by the sudden or unexpected death of a baby, child or adolescent (under the age of 18 years). Services include counselling, resource material and a 24 hour crisis telephone service. HOPE's telephone number is 5226 7269.

Weaving together his professional and personal experiences, Greg shared with the group some thoughts and observations about fathers who are grieving. Greg also discussed with the group insights, that he has learnt over time, about the grief that comes for those who love them from a child's death.

### ***Working Backwards: a story of love, grief groups and going on***

In preparing for the evening Greg had been wondering how best to begin and guide the discussion. "How to start"? Greg decided that he would "put out some ideas" and see what would "unfold from there". "My story", Greg hoped could act as "a springboard to discussion". To do this Greg thought that he would "*work backwards* from today".

A day which was for him "a bit of a different day". Before the group Greg had been at the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement and had been leading some training there. Greg noted "I'm in a place (teaching others about loss and

grief) I wouldn't have expected that I'd be". As he drove towards the Hospital Greg felt "emotionally and physically stirred up... (I) was back before my daughter died... the feeling of what it was like to come back through those doors and to walk around... I came a bit earlier so that I could have a bit of a wander... through the front doors I was lost for a few seconds... it was thirteen years ago (yet) still familiar... There was an urge to go to level 7 the cardiac area... Though I didn't know the room number I knew where it was (the room his daughter Madeleine (Maddi) had been in), 7 west... so it feels ok but a little weird back here... all of it washing over me". Many parents, we imagine, will relate to Greg's response to returning to the Hospital. Importantly, Greg said at this point "I'm still here and functioning, (in) the first few years I would have doubted I'd be ok". He then went on to share a little more of his story. Greg and Jeanette's daughter Madeline their first child was born on the 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1995. It had been a "blissful pregnancy". Madeleine was born in Geelong Hospital. Several hours after her birth she started having "blue turns". At 48 hours after her birth the family was told that Madeleine had Down Syndrome and cardiac problems. "Things went down hill rapidly, she got sicker and sicker and was rushed to RCH. She had heart surgery and she wasn't well... she was in ICU and then out again" Greg explained. During that time "we lived in here, it's weird, it's a weird world (the Hospital) shut off from the rest of the world". On the 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1995 aged 25 days Madeleine died. The family's life path changed. Although at the time of Madeleine's death Greg and Jeanette were living in Barwon Heads they decided that they would bury Madeleine in Ballarat. Jeanette and Greg had come from that area and knew that there "would always be ties to there".

"That first year after Madeleine died" Greg observed,



“is a blur, it’s still a blur... I could pick out a few things... two to three weeks later we came up to see someone in Genetics for me. The key thing as a dad for me was that I was very focused on my wife and worried for her... I was numb... odd and it was all difficult”. As a male Greg reflected “I was brought up believing you don’t show feelings much. That’s a fairly typical background”. Greg shared with parents in the group some more about his background and how that has influenced *where* he is today. Having left school at 15, Greg at the time of Maddi’s birth and death had done a range of things. He was in part time in work as a Tai Chi instructor and had also been a potter. After Maddi had died Greg “threw himself” into the massage therapy course that he had been doing before she was born. “I quickly got back into the massage course... (there) it was not a comfortable subject (Maddi’s death and Greg’s grief) to talk about, they sent flowers... and physically I was back there but it was awkward. I wasn’t approached with *how are you?*... I wasn’t worried about that but it was really at odds with how I was travelling”.

In those early days after Maddi had died, Greg and Jeanette were not strongly connected with support groups. They had spent some time with SANDS and with a support group in the Programme that now Greg works in. Thirteen years ago in parent support groups of ten or eleven parents Greg commented that he may have been “the only male... the only bloke... In the discussion I was aware I can’t say what *I’m sitting with* because I’m the only man here”. From his time and experiences since then Greg has heard how “other fathers have a similar experience”. “It can be very difficult being the only father, the only male in a group” he said. This is in contrast to the April RCH group where there were a number of fathers and several fathers who had come on their own.

Greg then recounted to the group an early very personal and powerful experience following being in a local support group. After the group “I had a sense of being overwhelmed, tense, I couldn’t open my mouth... I started to shake, to have a physical response, there were tears, there was a knowing and not knowing why. It was frightening for my wife, what would she do? Call an ambulance, the doctor, she was asking me I didn’t know how to respond”. Looking back at this extremely unsettling episode Greg feels that it was from a “build up from not expressing things a lot, I couldn’t have changed things... I had to ride it out”. This episode highlights the strength of grief and its unpredictability. Perhaps it also serves to remind us of the unintended impact of being with others who are grieving. An impact that we usually mention each month and suggest that parents be aware of and take care with.



Highlighting a theme that will be picked up in the May group and was mentioned by other parents later in the discussion. Greg described how after Maddi’s death “our goals changed, having goals seemed a load of crap, we drifted along- that’s not a bad thing”. Greg later remarked “we don’t plan. Maybe we look 3 to 6 months in advance but we don’t hang onto it like we use to. Maddi taught us that. We live in the moment, we go with the flow. It’s smaller base if it feels right and good I do it. I now have less tolerance for situations... I don’t want to keep bashing my head. When you’re grieving you need something that pulls you through... it’s back to basics”.

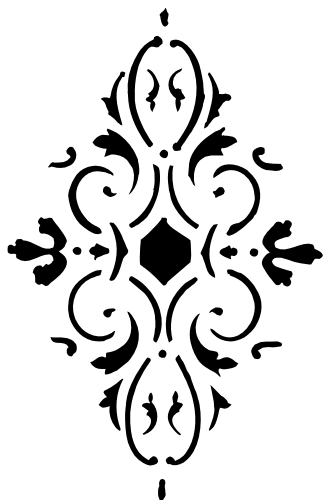
As Greg’s journey with grief continued he had begun work at a community health centre, then in aged care

and later with people with disabilities. He realised that he was “almost a social worker so I decided that I may as well study it. Greg now has an honours degree in social work. His honours’ research study focused on men in a rural area and their grief. “I’d always had an interest in men’s health and how men deal with things” Greg explained. Part of this he feels came from his family background. Greg’s older brother committed suicide when he was 25 years old and Greg was 11 years old. For Greg the question was “what would it be that could take someone to that point where there are no other options”?

In 2001, after completing his course, Greg was working at Bethany Family Services, Geelong, on a men and family relationships programme. During this period with the worker from what was then the Barwon Paediatric Bereavement Programme (now Hope Bereavement Care) he set up “a dad’s group”. Greg was “very keen” to do this. The group was open to any fathers whose child had died from any cause. There was “no structure and that’s important”. “Conversation drifts around footy and cars and might just gently touch on the subject of grief” Greg commented. Many times in the group “the fathers didn’t talk about their grief or their child or particularly about how they’re travelling”. Over the years Greg has heard how fathers “didn’t find it helped to be put on the spot to tell their story, they’re not comfortable”. (This may apply to mothers too!) Similar to his own experience Greg had also heard from other fathers “how if I’m the only man in a group I can’t bring things up because of where I am (i.e. amongst women)”. Some of the feedback about the groups Greg received from fathers was that it was “bloody fantastic but they may not know why”. Significantly what Greg and others have seen is that at

about 18 months following their child’s death, fathers are “really struggling... it’s worst than earlier... (but) if you see that that’s happened to others (maybe) it’s not such a slap in the face”. Greg saw how “it kept happening, a delayed feeling of grief really hitting”. Greg firmly believes that “if support is there early maybe you wouldn’t hit the wall... maybe you’d be connected and could talk”. He also emphasized that he “really admired the people” who had come to that group and this evening’s Hospital group who were more recently bereaved.

With the Fathers’ Group Greg has learnt how often fathers would be sitting in the car (outside the meeting place) and find it “too hard to get in the door”. If no



one comes to a group “that’s ok” but Greg maintains (as the FBSP does) that it is essential to provide such opportunities. Many times fathers, Greg suggested, confront a stereo type view of grief support group that it might “be all incense and herbal tea”. This can be off putting and usually not how groups are! With the men’s group, Greg recounted at one time “there was some community education

funding to produce a booklet (Men Grieve Too)... There are about 5 stories in all. A book that’s not full of advice, not telling you what to do but a book that says you are not on your own... it’s readable, there was a real need... we’ve had reprints. It’s (the book) a way to reach out to dads that they’re comfortable with... to suit how they were and for mums to get insight into men. The book could be used for a story that might help to pull you out of that spot, that sadness”. We were to speak more about the book later in the group.

As the discussion unfolded Greg explained how he “was really drawn to grief and loss” in his working

life. His current position at HOPE enables this to happen. From professional and personal experiences Greg has seen how “poorly understood grief and loss is, but particularly when a child dies... it’s one of the most difficult life experiences you could ever come across. It seems worst than a partner, it calls into question everything about what is stable in life”. Curiously as Greg noted the psychological scales which measure stress and distress often don’t include the impact of a child’s death. To conclude this point of the group Greg reflected “it’s a hard road to travel and there’s no point anyone telling you otherwise.”

### ***Men, Women – Fathers, Mothers: different and the same***

Greg then asked the group if there was anything from what he’d shared that “rings true for other people”. In response a mother said that her husband had read ‘Men Grieve Too’. She said **“he wanted to have those feelings too. It’s harder to be sad, it’s easier to be angry and frustrated... I can’t explain the workings of a man’s mind, a man can’t explain a women’s”**. A father responded **“I read the book, it did help, often people ask how’s your wife? I’m left out... (The book) helped me to get through... There are learnings... We’re different... (Now) we worry less maybe its better, we go day by day, don’t have too many plans but you still do worry”**. Thoughts that also connected with Greg’s earlier comments.

Parents spoke more about the impact of the death of their child on their hearts and minds. **“With your first child you have a euphoria... then (after the loved child dies) I don’t know how to describe it, it’s hard I try to be happy and positive but it’s hard”** a mother shared. One father said **“your life stops”** and

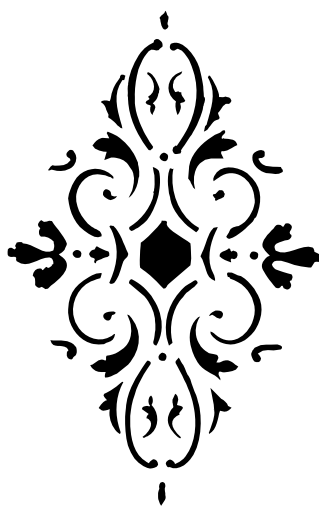
one mother said **“I can’t do anything normal... it’s like I’m lazy... others don’t understand we were desperate to save her. Life is not as beautiful as it was before, there’s a big gap... everything is different. (To keep going) I think she is back, others may think it’s ridiculous but it helps me... (it) helps me to be busy”**.

As thoughts turned more to gender differences in grief, Greg told the group how he has noticed that “girls growing up talk more with their feelings mixed in with experiences, but not boys and blokes. We get by ok but something like this (a child’s death and intense grief) is really challenging”. Greg remarked that “it’s not that men can’t talk or express what it’s

like for them but that they need an opportunity to”. It appears that with how males and females are brought up and how they are socialized, talking in a support group can be difficult. Men aren’t used to it. Greg thinks that frequently men struggle with how to do it “in a way that’s ok, (they) didn’t want to look like idiots in front of others”? There is also for fathers that sense of “making it right... seeing that others are ok and trying to fix it”.

Greg reflected on how men often are not thought of as grieving and how men can react to being overlooked. There were nods of agreement in the group. He heard that in response to *the-how’s-your-wife* question some people say *she is shit* and *I’m shit house too*.

During the evening’s discussion Greg suggested something that “is important... don’t let anyone tell you how you should be or what to do, no one should boss you around including me”. He believes strongly that in grief “there are really only two rules... that something shouldn’t hurt you or shouldn’t hurt others”. “Men and women in grief” Greg encouraged



“need to do what they need to do. Sometimes saying you have to get in touch with feelings is rubbish... the feelings are there. In the early days if you are just getting out of bed doing one activity, cleaning your teeth, getting dressed... you’re doing bloody well” Greg observed.

In exploring how group members *are doing* at this time a father shared how he “**overextends**” himself at work so that he will be home late. “**I’m resurrecting my life... my work time has increased, I drive home in the dark so I pass the childcare centre in the dark... I avoid the memories**”. Another father added “**I’m back at work. I hate to be there but after the first hour in I crank up. I have brothers but only one brother has asked me how I am, I don’t know if he really wanted to know. At work there are two ladies who talk, maybe it was too soon, I want to talk. Maybe I’m more like a girl.**”

Greg stressed to the father and to the group that “talking doesn’t mean you’re less or more of a man it’s just a variation”. To illustrate his thoughts Greg shared a story about Stan Alves the football coach and patron of HOPE Bereavement Care. Mr. Alves’ young son was killed in an accident with a train. He wanted “to attend support groups and to talk where his wife felt differently and you can’t get much more of a man than an AFL coach”. In replying to this a father shared “**grief had hit me like a hammer, I felt like crap, I went to a group at SIDS and Kids, the fathers’ group... it was one to one but it was great and I’ve**

**been on their fishing days. Otherwise no one asks me how I am. I’ve seen the social worker here (the Hospital) and that was good”.**



From all he has witnessed, heard, studied and lived Greg has found “mums and dads have a lot in common in their grief”. But we noted too as individual human beings there will be differences. No two people are identical. Greg hopes that “one day people would get to the point where they didn’t talk about men and women in grief but rather just grief”.

### *Always A Parent*

**“How will I fill the space? We’re grieving as parents but very differently. He could look at the photographs I can’t go there, I’m too upset. It’s ticking over... there are happy memories and the relationship continues. It’s strange he’s almost bigger than he was now, he’s a part of our lives”**, a parent pondered with the group and as she did, highlighted the curious mix of her son’s absence and presence.

Weekly rituals such as buying fresh flowers for visiting the cemetery each Sunday and then journaling the experience, were spoken of by group members to illustrate the relationship continuing. But its *‘form’* is not as parents would ever have imagined. One of the many helpful comments that Greg made during the evening linked with the time and attention given to grieving and the child who has died. Greg talked with the group about how if Madeleine was alive he “would be spending time with her so I feel ok about the time I spend thinking about her or doing things for her like attending a memorial service”. Greg continued by saying “if she was alive I’d be tending to her. She’s part of my life”.

### *Questions of the Heart*

Through our discussion earlier about social interactions, thoughts moved later to supermarket checkouts!! “In supermarkets people ask you how you are... do you really want to know? Overtime you

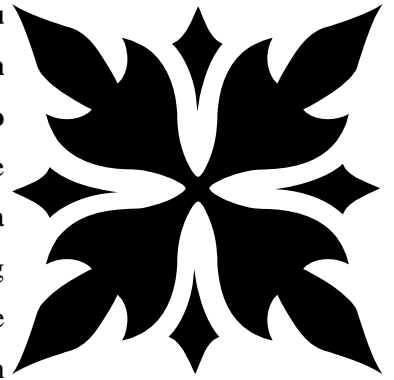
learn ways to ignore it” Greg commented. A father remarked that he usually says **“I’m not too good my daughter passed away. That’s the reality I’m not trying to shock anyone I’m just trying to talk honestly”**. A mother suggested that with the question, **“how are you?... really people don’t expect much of an answer... it’s cheap conversation”**. At this time in her journey with grief she has *a conversation in her head* as to what to say **“I want to be honest and not hide”**. But she thinks of her context. Another mother in the group reflected that in social exchanges **“I appreciate the sorry, it breaks my heart, I cry but I like to talk”**. **“How you going Mum?”** was how a father greeted his wife each evening. **“Mum”** that word is a precious word as is the reply **“how are you Dad?”** Such *snippets* and exchanges remind us that parents are always parents. You can never be an ‘unparent’.

That other question was explored once more. How many children do you have? Greg has come to say “I have 2 children (he now has a son aged 11) only one is living”. Frequently people will change the subject but Greg has *worked out* over time who he can be “honest with” and who he can’t. Likewise a mother explained that being in the nursing profession and in her particular specialty of the nursing profession it might be not helpful to other people to hear that she has had a child die. **“I have to be able to manage myself professionally... not hit people over the head. I think you can be thoughtful but not brutally honest”**. As is often said in the group the situation and how parents feel at the time will influence their reply. Fifteen months since her daughter’s death after a long illness she has concluded **“I didn’t want to cry every time I spoke... (grief) is extremely insular I can mostly understand my own pain, my own grief not others... the family all spins off into different directions. They have different levels of skills to**

**deal with grief... you can’t talk to each other it’s too painful”**. “There are experiences as a couple”, Greg observed, “there are ones that are your own as well”. “No matter how close it’s still different (for each person)... it’s big emotional stuff you need to be mindful of yourself of the issues around communication and that you are around for each other” he said. In thinking further about the *couple relationship* a father spoke of his experiences. **“We rely on each other, we support each other but it puts a strain on a relationship... you have to make the effort otherwise there’s a huge gap... it’s a long road for the rest of my life, (name of his daughter) is getting me through the day. At work they’ve forgotten what you’ve been through they think you’ve healed”**. Linking with notions about what is shared and what is distinctive in each parents’ role, a mother noted that her partner’s experience was not the same as hers **“when you look after someone for 24 hours a day... it’s intimate”**. To this another mother replied that during her daughter’s illness **“I had to be strong for myself and use my daughter’s strength to be positive”**. There was a sense now of drawing on her spirit to keep going.

There are all sorts of needs, situations and concerns in grief. During the group’s conversation the comment was made **“it (grief) can feel marginalised as a dad there are differences and complexities”**. Grief can be overlooked not just in work places but in families. For example a step parent’s grief and loss can go unrecognised.

After wondering whether it would be *helpful or not* to



the group to share this particular aspect of his journey, Greg talked about time and grief. This was done in the spirit of honesty and encouragement. Greg said that he felt within himself at five years that “emotionally and physically things had changed”. But five years may seem like forever to some parents right now. “Things shifted” Greg went on to say “in some way... I think about Madeleine... the thought makes me feel warm and smile. There’s more of a balance it’s not just the pain... its odd point is feeling good that’s how we’ll be I figure”. Greg also emphasized that parents “shouldn’t beat themselves up if they’re traveling well. We have a right to travel well”.

In focusing more on what feels supportive in grief a mother talked about how she was thinking of her grief and events during her daughter’s illnesses as trauma. She had sought psychological assistance with her grieving. She commented **“its exhausting going through grief in a structured way, it challenges my thinking but once you know what you want you go for it, I have to be proactive... my life will get better”**. The mother also told the group now that through general practitioners parents can be referred to counselling that will be funded through Medicare. Parents should speak with their doctor about this service. Connecting with the topic of counselling, Greg described how at one time a counsellor he had seen would be “pushing (him) to do something around self care. It all seemed too hard, too big but he made it small like suggesting a five minute walk on a beach”. Greg has learnt how “it is important to talk to people you trust who understand you”. Greg believes that “you may hear something that one suggestion may work... you try it out”.

To end this summary of the evening’s discussion we’ll call once more on some thoughts and words of group members. A mother said **“I feel her spirit”** and her


partner then continued **“she’s teaching me things and I have a pride in that. I am so grateful I had a beautiful daughter I am grateful for that opportunity. Her things I keep them close, I kiss the photo hello”**. Reminding us of the children’s legacy a mother said **“in his 22 months of life he had more impact than some people do in an 80 year lifetime”**.

The Missing, Remembering and Loving Continues...

We gave a ‘vote’ of sincere thanks to Greg for his time with the group and for the depth of the observations and knowledge he shared. In little groups dotted through the room parents shared more of their experiences and their children’s stories over supper.



We have been asked to include this notice about a new support group for families touched by miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death auspiced by Bonnie Babes. Please call Kerry, the group’s co coordinator for further information about the group.



**BONNIE BABES FOUNDATION**  
BABY LIFE SAVERS

**GRIEF COUNSELLING SUPPORT GROUP**

A new support group is being held in Werribee for family members who have lost a baby due to miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death. This support group will allow people to RELATE to other families with similar situations. Past or present experiences are welcome.

Tea, coffee & biscuits will be supplied.

**TIME: 1:30pm – 2:30pm**

**WHEN: 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of each month**

**WHERE: The Wyndham City Salvation Army  
211 Watton St, Werribee. 3030**

**CONTACT: Kerry on 0407 809 256**

Supported by the Bonnie Babes Foundation  
PO Box 407, Canterbury, VIC. 3126  
Ph: 03 9803 1800  
[enquiry@bbf.org.au](mailto:enquiry@bbf.org.au)  
[www.bbf.org.au](http://www.bbf.org.au)



# *Straight from the Heart*



In 'Remembering But Going On' Mrs. Vicki Manton (Joshua's mother) recounts some of her and her family's experiences since Joshua's death in 1993. The unfolding changes, responses and the love that are recorded will touch and encourage others. We imagine that families, who like the Mantons through their grief have grown in strength and compassion will appreciate Vicki's words.

Thank you, Vicki for sharing with us 'Remembering But Going On'.

## **In Memory and Tribute to Joshua Manton (12/03/88 – 08/09/93)**

For Joshua-

The FBSP newsletter has been a part of our lives now for fourteen and a half years since the death of our 5 ½-year-old son, Joshua who died of meningitis in 1993. For me they are a confirmation that our loss is not forgotten and a tie to the place where our son died. For my husband they are a source of pain and I try to remove them from the mail before he sees them. This month's (February, March) themes and ideas had great resonance for me as I am struggling with the idea that Joshua would have been 20 this month and we would have begun to plan for his 21<sup>st</sup> next year. I spent much of the week of his birthday considering many of the topics of the newsletter not the least of which was the way we changed as individuals and as a family after he died.

When Joshua died I was three months pregnant with our 5<sup>th</sup> child Jacob who also has a younger sister Aimee now. I remember in the weeks immediately after Joshua died having a panic attack about how we could create a cohesive family from the damaged members who had experienced Joshua's loss and the baby I carried who had never known him. I was afraid they would feel excluded, like a person sitting at a dinner table listening to every one else talk about people and events they knew nothing about. We made a conscious effort to make Joshua as real to Aimee and Jacob as he was to us. We bought a wooden chest and put his favourite toys, things he collected like rocks and feathers, clothes he liked, the newspaper and TV articles from when he died and the cards and letters we received at the time into it. Anyone is welcome to visit Joshua by going through the box. We continue to add to it things we find about the house, letters the children write to him and cards for his anniversary or birthday. Jacob likes to put football cards in the box. I liken this to my friend whose grandparents live in Holland. Just because she doesn't see them doesn't make them less real to her.

We plan to all be available on the anniversary of Joshua's death and his birthday. Initially this was because we were pretty useless for any thing on these days any way and found comfort in being together but as Jacob and Aimee grew older it became about doing Joshua things-playing football finding an aeroplane museum to wander through or going to a place he loved.

Aimee and Jacob both write to their brother and include him in any family tree or history for school because he is as real to them as he is to the rest of us they miss him and all that might have been as keenly as we do. While this has caused them pain it has also ensured that they never feel excluded or separate from that part of our lives, from the rest of the family.

I divide my life into before and after Joshua died. We are all irrevocably changed by his loss but we are stronger in many ways and our experience of losing Joshua have impacted on our capacity to talk to and relate to other people who have suffered such loss. I am a nurse and the empathy that I can offer to patients and their families is of greater value than the sympathy I could offer before. This is true of our three older children as well.

Because Joshua would have been 20 I felt his absence much more keenly this year. There was a feeling of being overwhelmed that I had not experienced in years and sobbing that was of itself overwhelming. I sat and reflected on the past 14 years and the milestones and hurdles we have overcome. The sight of Joshua's friends growing older and doing things he would have been doing, growing to be a man. I have three older children who are now 22 and 21 and are all at least six foot tall. When I see them together it is easy to picture Joshua as tall standing with them.

We have developed many strategies along the way to help us cope with the stress, anger and grief. We have a louver cupboard door that my husband smashed in the days immediately after Joshua died, such was his anguish. We repaired it and it is a reminder. A memorial and a symbol that we are still here. A friend of mine bought us a pile of dishes from the op shop and advised us to feel free to smash them, said it was cathartic, and it was. I learned that if you cry in the shower you won't get red eyes and no one else will be upset by your distress. My children, all of them sense when we are struggling and make a coffee or stop mid stride for a cuddle before quietly going on their way. We are mutually supporting because it is a pain shared.

One of our greatest challenges was what to say when we were asked how many children we have. I say 6. Always 6. Joshua is my son and will always be my son. If they ask ages I tell them the ages of the first three and then that Joshua was born 20 months after his sisters and the age of Jacob and Aimee. Rarely do I have to explain further. It is a decision I made early not to give up my son to make others comfortable.

My brother, who I love dearly, sat me down 12 months after Joshua died and said he was worried we weren't over it yet. What do you say to that? I will always miss my son and feel cheated by the absence of the extraordinary person he would have been. But he will always be my son and I nurture his memory just as lovingly and faithfully as I nurture his brothers and sisters as they grow.

# *Straight from the Heart Continued*

In remembrance, celebration and love we are honoured to include *Abby in* Straight from the Heart. Written for Abby by her mother Ms. Sue Robson to commemorate Abby's lifetime, it is a beautiful statement of treasured thoughts.



*ABBY*  
*28-4-1993 8-5-1993*  
*ROBSON*



Abby came into our lives in April of 1993 she unlocked the door to our hearts, settled herself then on the 8th May 1993 she slowly unlocked the door and left us with the most precious memories of those 10 days that only some can imagine.

That part of my heart is hers alone. She will hold the key forever.

We miss what might have been Abbs.

Our love always

Mummy (Sue) Daddy (Brian)  
and Brother (Clayton)



# *Straight from the Heart Continued*

As Mothers' Day approaches we are honoured to be able to include 'Before I Was A Mum' a poem that was sent to us by Lauryn Rose Clarke's mother, Tracey. Tracey was given this poem and she read it at Lauryn's funeral service. As you'll read it is a beautiful reflection on the experiences of motherhood, the joyous, the happy, the worrying and sad. Tracey felt that with Mother's Day *'just around the corner'* such a piece would resonate with many mothers.

We are very honoured to include this poem in the newsletter. It is dedicated to the happy and loving remembrance of:

**Lauryn Rose Clarke**  
**(06/04/01/ - 22/04/07)**

Before I was a Mum  
I never tripped over toys or  
Forgot words to a lullaby.  
I didn't worry whether or not  
My plants were poisonous.  
I never thought about immunisations.

Before I was a Mum I had never been spewed on  
Poo-ed on  
Chewed on  
Wee-d on  
I had complete control of my mind  
And my thoughts  
I slept all night.

Before I was a Mum  
I never held down a screaming child  
So doctors could do tests  
Or give shots.  
I never looked into teary eyes and cried.  
I never got so gloriously happy over a single grin.

Before I was a Mum  
I never sat up late hours at night  
Watching a baby sleep  
I never held a sleeping baby  
Just because I didn't want to put it down.  
I never felt my heart break into a million pieces  
When I couldn't stop the hurt.  
I never knew that something so small  
Could affect my life so much.

I never knew that I could love someone so much.  
I never knew I would love being a Mum.

Before I was a Mum  
I didn't know the feeling of  
Having my heart outside my body  
I didn't know how special it could feel  
To feed a hungry baby  
I didn't know that bond  
Between a mother and her child  
I didn't know that something so small  
Could make me feel so important and happy.

Before I was a Mum  
I had never gotten up in the middle of the night  
Every 10 minutes to make sure all was okay  
I had never known the warmth  
The joy  
The love  
The heartache  
The wonderment or  
The satisfaction of being a Mum.  
I didn't know I was capable of feeling so much  
before I was a Mum.

And now I will never know that these Mum feelings can be more than doubled  
Because my baby will never hold a little bundle of her own.

- Anon

Contributions such as responses and reflections on the groups' themes, poems, letters, songs, quotations from parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters and friends are most welcome in the Newsletters. Share your thoughts, experiences and questions with others who are bereaved.

Please forward them to:

The Editor  
Family Bereavement Support Programme  
Social Work Department  
Royal Children's Hospital  
Flemington Road  
PARKVILLE VIC 3052



*Our letter box needs  
filling up!*

Or email Jane on: [jane.sullivan@rch.org.au](mailto:jane.sullivan@rch.org.au)

The next meeting of the  
Parents' Bereavement Support Group  
will be held on:

**Thursday 15th May**  
7:30 pm – 9:30 pm  
Seminar Room 2, 4th Floor  
Front Entry Building  
Royal Children's Hospital

Our guest for the evening will be [Ms. Leanne Fink, \(a Parent Supporter from SIDS and Kids.\)](#) Through her own experiences and discussions with other parents [Leanne](#) will explore the theme: *'A Change in Priorities- reflections on expectations and a changed life when a child dies'*.

Please join us for the May group.

The newsletter is always a team effort. Thank you to Mr. Greg Roberts, the parents of the Parents' Bereavement Support Group, Carol Quayle, Vivienne Bateman and to our skilled, committed Administration Team- Carly Burnett, Rebecca Welsh and Sam Harris for their work with the newsletter.



Jane Sullivan  
Author & Editor