

## When Remembering Becomes More Sweet Than Bitter . . .

When we go to an "event", meet a noted person or visit a special place, we bring home a remembrance or memento. We find comfort and connectedness in those tangible reminders that evoke special thoughts and feelings. Our senses of sight, touch, hearing and smell link us to each other and to our children. But when our babies have physically departed, our arms ache to hug that sweet precious child. We want to feel baby kisses and to smell sweet baby smells. The loss of these physical connections to my two miscarried babies and to my son who died after thirteen days of life were devastating.

After each miscarriage and our son's death, I remembered each event, each decision, each action or lack of action, almost endlessly. "If only I had . . .", "If I just hadn't . . .", "Why didn't they . . .", "Why couldn't they . . ." — everyone who has experienced a loss knows about those memories. Those memories were so much more bitter than sweet. If I could just go over everything in my mind, I could change the end result. The door between my children and myself had been locked and I checked the lock over and over again. I had to go through this painful time in order to verify and finally accept the loss of my babies.

Some of us have more physical connections to our babies such as photos, clothing or toys than others. Some reminders may be so painful that we must avoid them until we can cope better. We have a video of Michael that I have not ever watched and it's been over 3 years. But remembrances can bring much comfort and solace to ourselves as well as to others whose pain may or may not be visible.

Making a memento or associating an object with the special remembrance of our child(ren) can be healing as well. Anything that results from direct action helps move us toward healing. I felt so helpless, I could not protect my babies and it seemed that nothing I did could save them. So I asked for an angel to wear on a chain. At that time, none seemed available, but at last one was found. Now I want a butterfly and a heart. To me, each represent special qualities of my babies, one for each child lost.

I have been able to make some memories where none may have been. Some are symbolic, like the water globe that I bought that has a Snowbaby (Michael) peering in at 2 penguins (Chris and I) in the globe. He can see us clearly but his image is harder to discern from inside the globe. We are separated by space and perspective. This baby's bright blue eyes are just a little lighter than Michael's were. I have others as well. One has 3 adorable Snowbabies in a boat. The number 3 has special meaning and helps me to remember that even though I saw neither my Elizabeth Anne nor my Christa Michaela, they are as important to me as Michael Scott. So most of my angels on various shelves in various rooms (on top of my computer) are in groups of three.

We have been able to create other special remembrances that have helped us to find comfort and heal. Some may be helpful, some may feel awkward. Here are a few:

- ♥We use a large old toy box that we bought at a garage sale as a memory box for Michael's things that aren't out around the house. It has Humpty Dumpty and Jack 'n Jill decals from the forties.
- ♥Paxton, Michael's teddy bear, who was with him in the hospital, stays on our bed and sleeps with us. When I need an extra hug, Paxton's always available. He often talks to us as Michael or Elizabeth or Christa might have and helps Chris and I resolve "differences" when we need to take ourselves less seriously.
- ♥One of my best Mother's Day presents was a ring with 3 garnet stones (Michael's birthstone).
- ♥We give each other cards on special days, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Birthdays, that have special messages of love from our babies. (Although **one** of us seems to be a little more responsible than the other in this. Can you guess who?)
- ♥We planted daffodil bulbs around Michael's headstone (he shares it with my dad) at the cemetery. We also planted some of the same bulbs at home so we know exactly when to visit to see them in bloom.
- ♥At the cemetery, we brought a ladder and placed choo-choo train wind chimes high in a tree so they could be heard but not seen. At home, we have similar carousel horse wind chimes on the porch. When I hear one, I think of the other.

- ♥We have a few photos of Michael in various frames around the house. His corner is on the piano in the living room with a collage of his photos. His clown doll is there too.
- ♥The negatives of our few photos of Michael, the original videotape (the copy is at home), his blanket, comb, locks of hair and one of his little socks are safely tucked away in a safe deposit box at the bank. It was hard enough to lose him, I don't want to lose these few physical connections through fire, water damage or whatever else may happen.
- ♥Each night I pray for my babies and talk to each about the day. I call them by name and tell them to look at a beautiful sunset or awesome flower or smell the cleansing rain. I sing my favorite hymns or songs and tell them how much they mean to me and how I want them to hear them. And I pray for them and their soul growth.
- ♥My mother dedicates a Christmas Poinsettia and an Easter Lily to Michael's memory and to my dad's memory each year at her church.
- ♥I carry cards (from bookstores/gift shops) in my wallet that have the meanings of all of our names. Chris carries a small lock of Michael's hair in his wallet. These remind us that he is with us, along with his sisters.
- ♥We donated a copy of *"Our Children Forever"* in memory of our babies to the SHARE Library because it brought so much comfort to me.
- ♥I brought home white sweetheart roses that were on his casket and dried them in silica gel that I bought at a craft store. I save purple statice from different flower arrangements and keep them together.
- ♥In our backyard, we planted a dogwood tree and a redbud tree. The redbud tree didn't grow at first and then 3 branches grew straight and strong from the crown (base). We intertwined the 3 branches and took it as a message of love from our 3 babies.
- ♥Chris' mom and dad donate Michael's Christmas gift to the Ronald McDonald House in San Francisco in his memory. They graciously provided love and support as well as a place to stay after our surgery and during his birth, hospitalization and death.
- ♥Aunt Jan and Uncle Bob named a star after Michael and registered it with the International Star Registry so that we could look up in the sky and see him shining.
- ♥Special friends, like Cathi & Chuck Lammert donate gifts to SHARE in Michael's memory in January/February. This time is so hard because we lost our 3 babies all within one week of each other (Feb. 1, 1991, Feb. 4, 1993 and Feb 8, 1992). They help to ease the pain. Other special friends send a note or acknowledge how hard it is at this time.

There are other ways to remember your child:

- ♥Name your baby. If he/she was lost early' use a name that is gender neutral or use "Baby" with your surname. Have a memorial service and include only those people you are comfortable with or have it just for yourself and you babies.
- ♥Light a candle on special days and let it burn. Blow it out to symbolize letting go and remember its warmth and glow.
- ♥Use arts and crafts to make a memory wreath or a memory quilt. Dates, names, special verses can all be included.
- ♥Say a special prayer at a special time of the day to let your little one know that you love him/her as much now as when they were here.
- ♥Make his/her room into a special retreat for prayer, meditation and spiritual consolation.
- ♥Make plaques with the name(s) of all of your child(ren) and include their meanings or why you chose the name.
- ♥Provide flowers in memory of your baby.
- ♥Start a birthday/anniversary tradition that you feel good about and are comfortable with. If it seems awkward, change it next year or do something different.
- ♥Commission an artist to paint or sketch your child. This can be done without tubes and respirators if he/she was sick. If your baby didn't open his/her eyes, the artist can use parent's eyes for detail. If you weren't able to see your baby, an artist can use parents' baby pictures and features for a portrait. (The National SHARE Office can recommend artists who do this special work.)
- ♥Engrave an ornament, baby spoon, cup or other item with your baby's name.
- ♥Use hospital letter beads to make a necklace or bracelet with all of your children's names.

- ♥If you were not able to obtain a birth certificate, make one with counted cross-stitch or obtain a *Recognition of Life Certificate* from SHARE or other support group.
- ♥Give a gift that you would give to your child on a birthday (or other time) to a child of the same age and sex and who is in need.
- ♥Volunteer to help anywhere. If you are able, volunteer in a crisis nursery or volunteer to hold and rock special babies whose parents cannot meet their needs and/or may have been born addicted.

Let your feelings guide you. Don't think that you have to do any of these in order to remember your child. If you create or have a remembrance and are uncomfortable with it, tuck it away. Your feelings may change. If you cannot bear to have your child's photo displayed, put it in a special place for only you to see. Don't feel that you cannot display your child's picture for fear of offending anyone. Anyone who knows what you have gone through and is caring and compassionate will understand. And if they don't, you can take the time to tell them, or not. Make the remembrances as special as your child. In and of themselves, remembrances mean little. But because they connect you to your baby, they are a very important part of healing and comfort. With them in time, the memories will become more sweet than bitter.

Written by Sue Friedeck, Editor of the SHARE - Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support newsletter.  
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