

Honored Babies

learning to live with a broken heart...

a collection of women's stories

*miscarriage
ectopic pregnancy
pregnancy termination
stillbirth
neonatal death
infant death*

written, compiled, & edited by

PAULA LONG

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Kadin Scott William Long, Born Still July 29, 1998... and mom.
Photo by Grandpa Tommy. Artwork by Claudeen Chisolm.

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In Memory

*My son Kadin Scott William Long
Born Still July 29, 1998*

and my four miscarried babies

*Baby Long, July 2, 2000 at 5½ weeks
Baby Long, September 1, 1994 at 12 weeks
Baby Long, July 1, 1992 at 6 weeks
Baby Long, November 26, 1987 at 6 weeks*

For

*Scott, Alexandria and Me...
Because we live. And love.*

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About Honored Babies

Begun in early 1999, Honored Babies is an online support and resource organization dedicated to women who have experienced the death of their babies. We support women through any death of a baby: miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, pregnancy termination, stillbirth, neonatal death, and/or infant death.

How Honored Babies Got Started

As I began to read, I found something missing in both books and stories online: the “entire story.” Without that, I couldn’t find the connection to other women I so craved. I had found hundreds of paragraphs reflecting a moment in time, but it simply wasn’t enough because those few words simply didn’t allow me to have that connection. Here I was, smack dab in the midst of *it*, and I needed some help from other women who had experienced what I was experiencing, at each and every moment. And, I needed to “hear” the experience sometimes at 3 am, five days in a row, not at once-a-month support group meetings. I decided to write the book I so needed. First, I thought about sharing only my story, but then I realized that my story alone would not provide to others varying experiences or any other view but my own. As I began to work on the site, I had only the book in mind. In the midst of designing and writing the code, I felt an intense need to offer a Memorial and Support Group. So, I did. And thus, Honored Babies, the book and web site, was born. Creating Honored Babies was a way for me to connect with others in the loneliness of my grief. It allowed me to connect to other women, and it allowed me an outlet during the endless nights when sleep would not come. It has since grown and evolved into a place of warmth and comfort to many.

Support & Resources

Currently, we offer the following support lists:

- *Mothers*
- *Grandmothers*
- *Fathers*
- *Siblings*
- *PAL (Pregnancy After Loss)*
- *SpiritChild (Support for Lesbians)*
- *GD (Grief Discussion)*

- *New Baby-SPAL Baby (those with a living child after a loss or losses)*

We offer a Writing Center for those who would like to share their writings: Articles, Poetry, and Reflections.

A comprehensive Resource Center offers:

- *Grief Support (online & physical bereavement groups and a father's resource area)*
- *Suicide Prevention*
- *Personal Memorial Pages*
- *Publications*
- *Medical/Scientific Information*
- *Free Web Site Hosts & Graphics (to help families build their own Memorial sites)*
- *more*

One of the most heart-wrenching and heart-warming areas on the site is the Memorials. Over 3,500 babies are currently memorialized.

The Book... Continued

And finally, the reason I started Honored Babies: this book. Because babies will continue to die, mothers will continue to need to tell their stories, and those grieving will continue to need to connect with others, my work will continue through a series of additional volumes. For those interested in learning more about the submission process along with all the other support and resources available, please visit the Honored Babies web site.

www.HonoredBabies.org

Acknowledgements

For all the hundreds of thousands of women and their families across the world, most of who have suffered in silence. For those women who were able to share their stories. And, for those who weren't.

There are so many people I wish to thank for their support, love, nurturing, and caring:

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Heather Sawyer for being an incredible friend. Cindy Gay who really knows how to *listen*, is teaching me how to take my stand, and is truly interested in who I am. Pauline, Andrew, and Melanie Davis, who never forgets me or my family.

Lisa Thun, who created the most beautiful Keepsake Box and Grief Journals for grieving families, and who hand-crafted the most beautiful journal for me to remember Kadin by.

The AP-Moms, SAH-AP, and ICAN email list members who grieved with me and who supported me in so many invaluable ways, including creating with their hearts and their hands two beautiful quilts to remember and honor Kadin. Peggy Groner and Lisa Bouchard for piecing together and finishing those beautiful quilts; they are truly works of art.

Katie Allison Granju for honoring Kadin in the dedication of your book *Attachment Parenting, Instinctive Care for Your Baby and Young Child*. Karen and Javier Henderson, for providing the cyperspace for Honored Babies.

Janice Berry, Jan Hunt, Jay Cox, Maggie Canaday ("I love you!"), Marti Grahl, Noel-Marie, Tana, "LLL Barbara," Donna, Michelle Brotman, Britta Wolfe, Terri Bryant, and so many others whose

names I cannot list due to space, for doing so much and well, just for being you...

The Honored Babies Volunteers, who have passed out flyers and participated in fundraisers.

The people who did, said, or wrote cruel or hurtful things, because in doing so, you turned on my strength.

Claudeen Chisolm for taking a photograph of Kadin and me and creating a beautiful work of art and presenting it as a gift (it is the image I used on the cover). Steph Smith, for taking Kadin's names and turning them into a beautiful gift and for your dedication to helping hurting moms with your Heritage Bracelets.

My mom and dad, who have shared their pain and hurt and allowed mine and my families to be.

Jackie. You know why.

Alexandria and Scott. Your support, encouragement, and patience have been invaluable. I love you so much my heart hurts.

Thank you to all the women and men who have written, emailed, or called to share your stories, your babies, your lives...

And finally, thank you to all the women who have visited Honored Babies and found a home for a while. You have encouraged me to continue to provide support and resources for you and your journeys.

Introduction

I wanted so desperately to find even just one other woman who tried to dig up her baby from his grave... just one other woman who was filled with anger, abandonment and isolation... just one other woman who, well... fought to get through this journey from hell and who refused to bury her child a second time, with her silence.

I found more than one. This book is those women's stories.

An asterisk (*) in the following stories indicates a change of name, place, or event. These changes are to protect the lives of the women who are sharing their stories.

My mom and I have talked a lot about this because her generation and my grandmother's generation were very closeted. There was this idea, and maybe it's something Freudian. I don't know, but it was you pick up the bootstraps and go on. And you don't talk about the dead child, and you don't name it, and you don't tell other children about it, you just get over it. My mom says a lot that my generation is the first generation that will not be closeted, we will not shut up about it. ...being cheated out of my son's life; I will just not let that happen.

Kara L. C. Jones

November 21, 2001 on the KUOW radio interview show
"The Human Condition" on national public radio 94.9 in Seattle, Washington.

www.kuow.org/HumanCondition_011129.asp (4:32)

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learning to live with a broken heart...

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Emily and Briana: Lost Love
A Personal Story of Loss and Heartache

Ginny King

Just after John and I were married in September of 1993, I found out that we were expecting. We were thrilled! I wanted to be a mother more than anything. In August of 1994, that dream was fulfilled when Alicia was born. After the first baby anxieties settled down, we decided to try again. Once again, I got pregnant right away. I couldn't believe how lucky we were. We were going to have another beautiful baby! I went to the doctor for a routine ultrasound only to discover that the baby had stopped developing around two months gestation. I couldn't believe it. My pregnancy with Alicia had been so uneventful, except for extreme morning sickness. How could this be happening? What had I done wrong? No one seemed to have the answers I so desperately needed. My heart was breaking, and it seemed no one cared. The doctors just kept saying, "Sometimes these things happen" and "Maybe it was for the best." How can the loss of your baby be for the best? I wanted to scream. Inside, I was scared that I would never be able to have another baby, even though the doctors kept saying I could. After all, if they didn't know what had caused the death of this baby, how could they tell me I was ok to have more? I was so scared.

Alicia started having medical problems. She had Reflux Apnea. It was a very scary year. It took her a year (and four days in the intensive care unit at the local hospital) to outgrow her Reflux. She had just started to be a healthy baby when I found out I was pregnant with Ashley. I was so scared throughout my pregnancy with her. I was afraid I would lose her like I did the last baby. I tried to do everything right with her. Thankfully, on March 24, 1996, she was born a healthy baby. After she came home, I was still scared with her. I was afraid she would develop the Reflux like her sister. I was afraid she would die in the middle of the night when I wasn't with her. I checked on her all the time. I know I drove John crazy with all my worrying. Thankfully, he was very understanding.

I started to settle down into a routine with the girls. Life was good. Everything seemed to be running smoothly. However, I felt as if something was missing. The girls were getting older and I missed

having a baby around the house. I also missed being pregnant. I loved being pregnant, watching my belly grow and knowing that there was a new life inside of me. John and I decided to try again.

I found out a few months later that I was pregnant once again. Just two weeks after finding out, I started spotting. I went to the doctor with a heavy heart that day. I just knew something was very wrong. The doctor looked and looked for a heartbeat on the ultrasound but found none. I remember feeling like I was dreaming. This couldn't be happening, not again. Not twice, not to me. It had to be a mistake. The doctors had said the first time was a fluke, it wouldn't happen again, but here I was going through it again. For weeks, all I could do was cry. My world was caving in on me. After the loss of this baby, all I could think about was trying again. I wanted, no *needed*, another baby. Someone to hold in my arms and protect. I felt like I had already let two of my children down when I couldn't protect them from my own body. I felt so guilty for the loss of them.

Then another miracle happened. In October of 1999, I found out I was pregnant again, and this time it was twins! I told John by surprising him with a card on the day of my doctor appointment. Inside the card I wrote, "How about a boy, or maybe a girl, or maybe one of each!" I will never forget the look on his face. It took a couple of minutes for it to sink in, but when it did, he was so excited. I vowed that this time I was going to do things differently. I wouldn't let my body betray me again. I had finally been diagnosed with an incompetent cervix. I was considered high risk because of the diagnoses and because it would be a multiple birth. I was sent to a specialist. What a time I had getting an appointment to see him! It seemed everyone was aiming for the millennium baby. Everyone that is, except me.

There were so many women in his office waiting to see him every time I went for an appointment. There were times I didn't think I would ever get in to see him. At this time, I was working at the local truck stop as a cashier. It was pretty easy work. I spent a lot of time on my feet, but that didn't bother me; I loved it. My life seemed to finally be going the right way. I had a job I loved, two healthy girls at home, a loving husband, and two more miracles on the way. I was very scared at first, not wanting to get too attached to the babies—after all I had already lost two, I didn't want to love these babies and lose them too. I thought it would be too much to handle. But, then I finally gave in

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and accepted it. I loved them. I knew I really always had, I just couldn't *say* that I did. Within days of finding out that I was pregnant, I was in maternity clothes. My belly was growing so fast. I couldn't believe it. I loved shopping for new maternity clothes.

Then the trouble started. My doctor wanted me to cut my hours at work down to only 20 hours a week instead of 40, but my boss had other ideas. She decided to increase my hours instead in an effort, I think, to make me quit. I was then working almost 60 hours a week. I couldn't believe what she was doing to me. I was furious. When the doctor found out what was going on, he decided it was time for me to go on maternity leave. I was to start my maternity leave the week before Christmas, which meant in three weeks I could actually get some rest. The next week I ended up with pneumonia. I was so sick and so tired. Even just trying to walk seemed to take everything out of me. I couldn't get in to my OB, so I had to make an appointment with my regular physician. He prescribed an antibiotic and a few days off work. I went to let my boss know that I would be taking a few days off. She then informed me that if I turned in my doctor's slip, she would find a reason to terminate me. I couldn't believe it! She was breaking the law, but there was nothing I could do. She said she would just tell the labor board that she fired me for being "no call no show," which *never* happened. She said she was going to dummy a couple of schedules and say that I was supposed to work and never showed. It would be my word against hers. I was floored. Needless to say, I never turned in that doctor slip. I wish I had. Maybe things would have turned out differently.

I took my antibiotic just as the doctor said I should, three times a day. The day after I saw my doctor for the prescription, he called me. I was told to stop taking the medicine he gave me immediately because it could be harmful to the babies. He said he forgot that I was pregnant. How can you forget your patient is pregnant when they look like they have a basketball in their shirt?! By this time I was huge, not like I was only two weeks along or anything. According to the OB, I was about 15 weeks along, though I looked more like 30 weeks. I stopped the medication right away. He said I should talk to my OB and explain what happened so they could do tests to make sure the babies were ok. I called my OB that day. He said everything should be fine because I had only taken three doses of the medicine. He didn't have any openings in his appointment book to schedule for an

ultrasound. I was worried, but he made me feel better about it. He made it sound like I was just overreacting.

I asked about scheduling me for my routine ultrasound anyway and he said he couldn't get me in until January 10, 2000. He was hoping most of the mothers that were due around that time would have delivered. That would have put me about halfway through the pregnancy. I could handle that, so I set up the appointment.

Maternity leave was great. I got to spend Christmas with my family, and I finally got to rest. I didn't realize until the second day of my leave just how tired and run down I really was. I'm surprised I went on as long as I did working all those hours. Sleeping at night was a new experience. I had been working third shift, so I had gotten used to sleeping during the day. To be up all day with Alicia and Ashley was wonderful. I loved playing games with them and just talking to them. Seeing the world through their eyes was so unique. I was mommy again and not just some woman that came to the house every morning, took them to school, then slept all day until daddy got home.

John and I were looking forward to the millennium celebration. We weren't going to be drinking or anything to bring in the New Year, but this would be the first New Year we would get to bring in together. We watched movies, talked about the babies and what we had planned for them. We looked over a few more names. We had two girls names picked out, but not knowing the sex of the babies, we needed to pick out two boys names. We never did agree on the boys names that night.

On January 2, I woke up with a terrible backache. I tried to think back to what I had been doing the night before, thinking that I had strained a muscle. I couldn't think of anything and just chalked it up to pregnancy pains. I knew from my other pregnancies that muscles loosened up and became sore just from the strain of carrying a baby, and here I was carrying two babies, so why wouldn't the pains come sooner. The pain seemed to peak at times and become tolerable at other times, but I just thought it was muscle spasms. Again, no big deal. I went to the truck stop to visit a very good friend and co-worker Sue. We got to talking, and I told her about the backache. She didn't seem too worried about it but suggested that I see my doctor the following day if the backache continued. I promised I would, then went home to bed. By morning I was almost in tears from the pain. I

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told my husband that I would call the doctor as soon as his office opened. He agreed that I should, considering I kept him up all night moaning in my sleep. I went to the bathroom just as he was getting ready to leave and saw blood. Not a lot, not even enough to cause concern—I had spotted with Alicia and she was fine—but still, I felt uneasy about it. The spotting, along with the pain, made me think something could be wrong. I decided that I wouldn't call my doctor, I would be waiting at his office when he arrived. I knew it wouldn't be easy for them to turn me away if I were standing right there.

I tried to act normal as I got the girls ready for school. I dropped them off and immediately headed for the OB's office. I told the receptionist what my symptoms were, and told her I needed to see the doctor. By this time, I was crying because I hurt so bad. She talked to the doctor, and he saw me, but only for the briefest of seconds. He sent me downstairs to the emergency room, saying he would follow me in a few minutes. He wanted me seen right away. That really scared me, especially when he asked me if I would like a wheel chair. I told him that I would walk. I walked downstairs to find that he had already called to let them know I was on my way. When I got there, they ushered me into a room and ordered me to change into a gown. All I could do was cry. I was only 17 weeks; why was this happening? I had lost my other babies well before this point, and I was in my second trimester. I was scared to death.

I knew by the way the nurses were moving that something was dreadfully wrong. I begged the first nurse I saw to please call my husband. I gave her the number, and she promised to call. My OB came in and checked me. That's when he said the most heartbreaking words I have ever heard. He said, "I'm so sorry, but you are going to have these babies now, there's nothing we can do to stop it, and at 17 weeks, they will have almost no chance of survival." Time seemed to stop.

The next thing I remember, I was pushing. I only had to push once. I saw the smallest baby I had ever seen, but no one would give her to me. I wanted to see her, hold her, touch her. I saw them take this piece of me—this baby of mine—and put her in a small pink tub. The OB said, "I'm sorry, but this one is already gone." I begged the nurse to let me see her, but all she said was that I didn't want to see her like that. That's when I asked if she was a boy or a girl. When the nurse said she was a girl, I knew what her name would be—that was

my Briana Nicole. Briana, they said, had died within the last hour. I cried so hard for her and prayed that her brother or sister would be ok. I had to bring at least one of them home.

A few minutes later I pushed again and the doctor announced I had another girl. Her name was Emily Marie. His voice was so hollow. I pleaded with him to please tell me she was alive. He said yes, but barely. *No!* Not Emily, too. They rushed Emily out of my room so fast that I didn't even get to see her, and that's all I wanted. I wanted to let her know that I was there. Then I remembered Briana, and I asked the nurse again if I could see her. I just kept thinking she was too big for 17 weeks. How can she be that big? The nurse told me it was my imagination, but I knew better. She couldn't have been a 17 week baby, there was just no way. I couldn't think about that anymore, I would deal with that later, I needed to see Emily. I begged and cried.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, they took me to Emily. She had so many tubes and wires coming from her, but she was alive. That's what mattered, that she was alive. I longed to hold her or even touch her, but the doctors and nurses were too busy working on her to let me hold her. They had called for the rescue helicopter to take her to the trauma hospital about an hour away. The helicopter was there, they were just waiting for Emily to stabilize so they could fly her out. I vaguely remember signing some kind of form so she could make the trip. Everything was such a blur. I was so happy that Emily was alive, and yet I was devastated that Briana was gone. I watched as the doctors worked on Emily. I kept telling her to fight. I needed her home with me. My heart felt like it was being squeezed right out of my chest. What would I do if I lost Emily, too? No, I couldn't think about that. Emily was going to be ok because she had to be. Suddenly, alarms started going off, people were yelling, and they were pushing me out of the room, telling me I had to leave, that I didn't need to see what was going on. That was my baby, I *did* need to see what was going on. They threatened to sedate me if I didn't go.

I was escorted back to the room I was in when I delivered. The reminders were all still there. The blood was still on the sheets, and the baby blankets and hats were still lying on the counter. It was all too much. I just couldn't take anymore. John still hadn't arrived and I pleaded again with the nurse to please call him and let him know I needed him. I felt so alone and helpless. I wanted to be in the room

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with Emily, I wanted to hold Briana, I wanted Briana to still be alive, and Emily to be ok. I wanted them both back inside me where I knew they would be safe.

I begged to see Briana, only to be told again that I didn't want to see her because it would be too painful. I didn't need to *see* her, I needed to *hold* her. I had already seen her as they whisked her out of my room in that awful pail. They treated her like she was garbage, something to be thrown away, not loved and needed. When they wouldn't let me see Briana, I begged to be back with Emily. Again, I was denied. I was told I was too upset to see her.

Yes, I was upset! I had just lost one daughter and another was hanging on to life by the tiniest thread. The nurse told me to wait for the doctor because he would tell me what was going on. He came in a few moments later. He said that Emily had stopped breathing. I said, "But she's breathing now, and she'll be ok, right?" He said, "No, I'm sorry, we lost her." My world collapsed. I don't remember what was said after that. I think I went into shock. I just wanted to die, too. I wanted to be with them. I had failed again. My body had failed again.

I remember the doctor wanted to give me some medicine, but I told him no. I didn't want anything that would make me feel better. I had to have done something wrong to lose both of them, so I deserved to feel all this pain. I deserved the pain and more. I didn't deserve to go home and raise the two girls that were still alive. I must be a bad mother, otherwise why would this happen? The doctor wanted to admit me for the night, but I just couldn't stay there. I had to go home.

I signed myself out of the hospital and drove home. I must have blacked out though, because I don't remember the drive home. I felt so numb. How was I going to tell John? How was I going to explain it to the girls? They wanted their baby sisters to come home so bad. They were so excited. What was this going to do to them? Were they next? Was John next? The next thing I remember was a knock at my door. I opened it to find my friend Carrie on the other side. She knew right away that something was wrong. She asked me what happened, and that's when it all came pouring back. I told her everything. She called my aunt for me who came right over. My aunt Candie called my grandma Sally. Candie picked the girls up from school. We then cried and talked and waited for John to get home.

When John finally did get home, I was so angry. I asked him why he never came to the hospital. I felt like he had abandoned me when I needed him most. I didn't think he cared at all about me or the twins. How could he just not show up? He said his boss never gave him a message about the hospital calling. Then I got mad at his boss. Why wouldn't he give John the message? What if it had been his wife? His children? John went to work the following day and asked his boss why he hadn't delivered the message. He said he had never gotten a phone call from the hospital. They had never called!! I couldn't believe it! Why would that nurse lie to me?? Why didn't she call?? She knew I was in labor, she knew the girls had died! That nurse hadn't even tried to get a hold of John. That was just plain cruel. How could she do that? I needed him there with me and she didn't even care. She decided that I could handle it alone. It wasn't up to her to decide whether or not I needed John. She would have wanted her husband there if it had been her in my place. I was so confused. Nothing made sense. My world seemed to be spinning out of control.

I was bleeding really heavy and Carrie begged me to return to the hospital. I just couldn't. Not there. I finally did agree to go back the next day. I needed to find out about the twins and arrange for their funeral. I wanted them buried together in the same casket. They were conceived together, developed together, born together, and even died to stay together. I couldn't bury them apart. They needed to be together in life and in death. That much I knew I had to do for them.

I went to the hospital the next day only to find that they had "taken care of it" after I had left. They didn't know what I wanted done, so they treated them as a miscarriage. How could they do that? Emily lived for 47 minutes! That's not a miscarriage! That's a baby! My daughter! Briana may have been stillborn, but she was Emily's sister. How could they do that to them? I was so hurt and angry. They took the one thing I could do for my daughters away from me. For that I could never forgive them. I was devastated. How could perfect strangers know what I wanted with my babies?

I didn't know what to do. All I could do was cry. I didn't want to get out of bed anymore, I didn't even want to live anymore. I'm not sure I wanted to die, I just didn't want to go on like everything was ok. Nothing was ok and it probably never would be again. I had no idea what the hospital had done with my babies. I wanted them home with me, forever. I wanted to watch them grow. Even though I knew

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they were gone, I still felt pregnant. I tried to tell myself it was all a bad dream, I would wake up any minute to find that I was still pregnant and that the girls were still ok.

I went home feeling nothing. I mean nothing. No pain, no sadness, no happiness. Nothing. Everything seemed empty. I think I may have been in shock. Who wouldn't be after everything that had happened in just two days? My whole life seemed to be moving in slow motion. Nothing made sense. I couldn't cry anymore, I couldn't *feel* anymore. I got home only to find a house full of reminders: new outfits I bought for the twins to come home in, baby toys that would never be played with, dreams shattered. Memories seemed to be everywhere. I couldn't fit into my regular clothes, so I still had to wear my maternity clothes. How fair was that? The clothes I was so excited to buy and wear were now like a stake being driven into my heart. I couldn't get away from it. I wanted to run, but where could I go? I still looked pregnant, I still felt pregnant, but there was nothing left. When the twins died, it was like they took my soul with them. All I could do was lay in my room and sleep and cry. I didn't want to eat. I didn't want to go anywhere. I just wanted to waste away slowly, in my room, by myself.

About a week after losing the twins, I got a phone call from my OB's office. It was the nurse reminding me that I had an ultrasound appointment scheduled for the next day. I was angry that she had called me. How could she not know that the babies were gone? Was she trying to torment me? Wasn't I going through enough? That was the first time I had to explain that the babies were gone. Of course she apologized, but it was too late. The damage was done. All I could think was what if... *what if* the ultrasound had been done sooner, *what if* I had gone to the hospital a day earlier, *what if* I hadn't taken that medication? The what ifs went on and on. I questioned everything. My whole life was one big question after another. I felt so alone and scared. I blamed myself because I thought I deserved this fate. I had to have done something wrong somewhere. What was it? How could I find out? Would I keep losing babies until I righted my wrong?

About two weeks after I lost the twins, John and I got our income tax return. I bought a computer; I had always wanted one, and I thought if I bought one I would have an excuse to be alone. I could lose myself online and not have to think about what I was going through. What a perfect way to forget, by talking to other people who

were happy and didn't know me or what I was going through. The first day I was online, I decided to just browse around. I accidentally found a chat room that was set up to talk about the loss of children. I went in just to look, but the people were so friendly that I soon found myself talking. I was very careful about the things I said at first. I just knew if I opened up completely, they would know that I had caused my babies to die and they would blame me as much as I blamed myself. Surprisingly, that didn't happen. They supported me and told me it *wasn't* my fault. They were so nice, but the chat room wasn't open *all the time*, and I was on the computer *all the time*. What could I do if I needed someone in the middle of the night? Things were really hard for me. I needed to talk, but when the chat room was closed, there wasn't anyone that would understand. I decided to do a little looking around, just to see what was out there that dealt with babies and their deaths. I wanted and needed to talk to others that felt the way I did, and I needed them at all hours, not just during the business day.

I found a whole list of support groups, and I knew choosing would be hard. I decided to look around in some of them to see what I could find. I must have checked out a hundred sites. Nothing *felt* right. Maybe it was me, maybe I just wasn't ready for the help. It was all still so raw. Then I found one that really caught my attention. I read and found that the founder had a lot of the same feelings I did. The opening page tore at my heart, it was then that I knew Honored Babies was the right site for me, but at the same time, I was leery. How could this site help me? I decided to add Emily and Briana to the site's Memorial page. I also decided I would try the support group. What did I have to lose? I could always unsubscribe if I didn't like it. I wrote my first hello. I was a bit nervous introducing myself. What a response I got. It seemed as if everyone said hello at the same time and everyone let me know that they were there for me day or night. There was no time limit on my grief and now there would be no time limit on when I could talk about it. Trying to explain everything that happened was really hard. Once again, I only gave out a few sketchy details, afraid of what the reaction might be. I had a lot of questions when I first joined. Would these women really understand how I felt? Would they really be there whenever I needed them? Could I tell them everything, or would they blame me? Would they really care? The first few posts seemed genuine, but how do you know for sure? I

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watched as others posted, I answered a few, but just couldn't bring myself to tell the whole story. It would take too long and it was just too painful.

My heart still felt as if it were literally breaking in half, and the pain in my chest wouldn't go away. There were days I was afraid I was having a heart attack. I refused to go to the doctor, feeling that if I were having a heart attack, it was what I deserved, and if it killed me, so be it. I would join Emily and Briana then. I couldn't bring myself to actually do anything to harm myself. Suicide wasn't something I could even contemplate. However, if I died of natural causes, then so be it. I thought Alicia and Ashley would be better off without a mother like me anyway. At least their daddy could protect them. I couldn't. After all, how could I protect them when I couldn't even protect the babies that weren't even born yet?

The women on this new list welcomed me with open arms and hearts. They made me feel like I belonged. No one judged me. They listened to me and they really cared. Talking seemed to help. They were there for me every step of the way. Like the day I told my mother-in-law about losing the twins. I couldn't tell her right away, but when I did, all she said was, "Good. You didn't need more children. What would I do with them?" I was floored! *What would I do with them?* I would love them. I would take care of them. I would hold them and never let them go. How could she ask such a terrible thing? I was so angry I kicked her out of my house. I told her not to come back until she could act like an adult. All she could say to me was that she didn't consider Emily and Briana to be her grandchildren because after all, she never got to see them. I told her that if Emily and Briana weren't her grandchildren, then Alicia and Ashley weren't either, and she didn't need to bother coming to see them. I was so angry, but most of all I was hurt. Why was she treating me like this? She had always said I was the daughter she never had. She had never been like this before. When I had my first miscarriage she had been so supportive, why was she turning on me now when I needed her the most? She kept telling me to calm down. *How could I calm down?* The one person I thought would understand had left me to deal with it alone. My real mother couldn't care less if I was even on the same planet as her, but I thought my mother-in-law was different. She had let me down. I don't know if I will ever be able to talk to her and share with her like I did before. I trusted her, and she betrayed that

trust. All I hear from her now is that I need to get over it. I'll never get over it, and I'll never forget them, which is what I truly think she wants me to do.

Shortly after joining the Honored Babies support list, I saw a lot of posts about memorial services. I knew that's what I wanted to do. I didn't think I would ever be able to have a funeral for them, so I needed to do this. I invited a few friends and family. I went the day of the memorial and picked up two dozen white and pink balloons. I also bought some tiny bears and gift bags. I put two bears in each bag and attached a card to each. The cards read:

In loving memory of Emily and Briana King
January 3, 2000

We released the balloons, read some poems, and I handed out the bears. As the balloons floated away, my mother-in-law decided it was her job to inform everyone of how high they were and how far they had floated. I was so upset. She was acting so childish. How could she do this to me? This day was hard enough without her acting like that. I cried and finally I had had enough. I yelled at her to shut up. I didn't need to hear about the balloons. To me, those balloons were taking with them the last pieces of my heart. Those balloons represented my babies. I could never forgive her now. Even if she didn't want to believe the twins existed, other people did believe it and were there to grieve with us.

I hired a lawyer a couple of weeks after the nurse called me for my ultrasound. I was so upset that she had done that. She had to have known that the babies were gone. I felt so betrayed by my doctor, the hospital, and everyone else involved. I knew I had to do something. I wanted my babies back. They deserved to be buried here in their own sacred spot where I could visit them. I needed them near me. I had no idea where they were or even where to begin searching for them. My lawyer assured me that he would find them and bring them home to me. We knew that they were cremated, but we had no idea where they were buried. True to his word, our attorney found them, but our fight wasn't over yet. There was all kind of legal red tape to go through. The girls were buried in a mass grave in another town. Our lawyer went to court for us too many times to count. It wasn't just *my* babies' graves we were digging up, there were the other babies buried there in the *mass grave*. The judge had to be very careful about the

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laws. I didn't care about the laws. I wanted my babies back, *my* babies whom should never have been buried there in the first place. What about my rights as a parent? Nobody cared about that when they chose to make my decisions for me. Yes, I was in shock, and yes, I left the hospital without making any arrangements, but those were still my girls!

Finally, after months of heartbreaks and setbacks, we were able to convince the judge that exhuming the girls was the right thing to do. They belonged close to us, not buried somewhere that no one could get to. The judge ruled in our favor, and ruled that the hospital would have to pay for the cost of exhuming them. Then the lawyer for the hospital made arrangements with my attorney to pay for the headstone and reburial costs as well. I couldn't believe it; their lawyer actually *offered* to help. All he could say was that his client wanted to try to rectify the situation. They were not going to admit that they had done anything wrong, but they didn't want bad publicity for not offering something. It took a couple of weeks to finalize the papers, but as soon as they were final, we set a date for the exhumation.

That day was so hard. I was nervous all the way there. What would happen? Would they change their minds once we got there? Was this the wrong thing to do? Should I just let the girls rest where they were? I couldn't answer any of these questions. John and I talked and cried during the trip. I told him my fears, and he offered to turn the car around and head back home. I couldn't do that either. I needed to be there. We were finally going to get to bring them home. My emotions were everywhere. I was excited, scared, worried, sad—everything all at once. By the time we got to the cemetery, I was a complete mess. The workers had already started digging when we got there. There was a huge hole in the ground. Finally they came to the vault. They opened it, and I thought I would lose it. All I could do was cry. I saw all these tiny urns just stacked in there. It was awful. These were children, and it looked like they were just thrown in there like toxic waste. The workers started piling the urns up on the grass. They just looked at the nameplates on them, and if they didn't say 'King,' they were tossed aside. I couldn't believe how cold they were.

Finally they found Emily. I know it was Emily because the urn read 'Baby King B' and Emily was second born. It took them a few more minutes to find Briana. The girls had been separated during the burial process. I then knew that what I was doing was right. My girls

didn't deserve to be treated like that. We loved them. We didn't discard them. They needed to be remembered, not forgotten. They needed to be home. I asked if we could just take their urns and go, but I was told no. I was floored! What did he mean no? They were my children, I wanted to bring them home. I didn't want to stay and watch what they were doing anymore. I couldn't handle it. I finally found my voice and asked them why. That's when I was told that some tests would have to be done to make sure that these were the right two babies. How could they be the wrong babies? The urns both had our last name on them. It was then that I was told that there had been mistakes made before with urns not being labeled right. It was awful. We had come all that way just to wait even longer. I was assured that the tests wouldn't take long, only a couple of weeks. Not long? After all we had been through a couple of weeks seemed like an eternity.

A few days later I got a phone call. Everything was ok; they had gotten the right babies. The girls would be coming home! I couldn't believe it. Finally, my wait was over.

John and I decided to have a small service for them. I called my pastor and he agreed to do it. We were having the ceremony outside on some property that my in-laws own. We would bury the girls on the property where we hoped to build a house one day soon. I warned my mother-in-law not to act up while we were there. She was very upset that John and I were doing anything for the girls. To her, the girls didn't even exist. I was so upset with her for that. It hurt me more than I can say. When the service started, I picked up the twins' urns and looked at my mother-in-law. I handed the urns to her and said, "Here, here they are, do you believe they are real now?" I was so angry. John told his mother not to say anything, and he tried to calm me down. I would have none of it; it was like I *wanted* to fight with her. I wanted her to understand. I wanted her to hurt as much as she had hurt me.

After the ceremony, we released balloons and read more poems. My mother-in-law was told before the service not to say anything about the balloons. She said she wouldn't, and thankfully, she kept quiet. It wasn't until later that I learned John had told his mother that he couldn't control what I would do if she acted up this time. Because she was asked to watch our two living girls during the service, I think that kept her busy enough to leave me alone.

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All that was left to do after the memorial service was to get the girls a headstone. I wasn't ready for that chore and put it off for months. Then I decided I wanted to get it for them for their birthday. I went to the funeral home and picked out what I wanted and the funeral director told me I could have any design on it I wanted. I had a postcard that I bought before I lost the twins; I had planned on ordering more and using them as birth announcements. The picture on the card was of two angels dropping hearts over the side of a cloud. I handed the post card to the funeral director and he told me that he would have his artists work on something similar, but due to copyrights, it couldn't be exact. I said that was fine. He wouldn't let me order the stone until the drawing was done because he wanted to make sure the picture was what I wanted first. It took about a week for the drawings to come back. The first one they showed me was the one I wanted. It was perfect. I couldn't wait to share the picture with my newfound friends at Honored Babies. Those mothers were so supportive. I wanted them involved every step of the way. Everyone seemed so thrilled with the drawing. I knew I had made the right choice. The only problem now was coming up with the \$400 to pay for the headstone. I had to pay for it initially, and then the hospital would reimburse me for the final costs. I knew I wouldn't be able to order it, much less have it, by the twins' first birthday, and that upset me a great deal. I would have to wait until our income tax came back in February.

In the meantime, I planned a small birthday party for them. This would have been their first birthday, and I had to do something for them. I ordered a pink and purple cake with Minnie Mouse and small balloons on top. When I went to pick it up, it wasn't right. I had ordered a small round cake and this was a square sheet cake. There were only going to be a few of us there and I knew a large cake would go to waste. I had invited my aunt, my grandmother, and my dearest friend Sue. Sue and I worked together at the truck stop and she had been there for me since the day I found out I was pregnant with the girls. The "party" didn't go quite as planned. Sue had to work, and my grandmother wasn't feeling well and wouldn't make it. I tried calling my aunt but didn't get an answer at her house. No one showed. I was upset, but at the same time, it was a blessing. It was just John and the girls and I. That was so nice. We lit the candles and the girls blew them out. They knew the cake was for their sisters. I'm not sure they

really understood, but they seemed to. It was all very nice. I don't know if we will have a cake and stuff every year, but I just felt like I needed to this year. With everything that had happened, I wanted everyone to remember that they were still a part of me. I wanted them to know that I would never forget them. I would never go on with my life and pretend that they weren't a part of it. It was also a celebration about how far we had all come in the last year.

Finally it was tax time. As soon as the refund check arrived, I went to the funeral home. I finally got to order the headstone! It would be at least four weeks before it came in. That was only two weeks ago. I am still waiting for the headstone. When it does arrive, it will be placed on the twins' new gravesite. I look forward to that day with both happiness and dread. It feels like the end, but I know it is just the beginning. I will finally have a place of honor for my children. A place that I can go to talk to them and a place that I can make beautiful just for them. I plan on decorating it for every holiday. I feel that by decorating it, I will be keeping their memory alive.

I will forever miss Emily and Briana, but I will never forget them. They are a part of me. Not a day goes by that I don't think of them. I don't cry for them as much as I used to, but that doesn't mean I don't still ache for them. I would give anything to have them here with me right now. I have a hole in my heart that will never mend, but instead of crying for what will never be, I try to cherish what I had. I had six months with my girls. It was six months of my life that I would never trade. I never got to hold my babies in my arms, but I will hold them in my heart forever.

I'm not really a religious person so turning to God wasn't something I was comfortable with. I just can't understand how a supposedly superior being could be so cruel. I do believe that my babies still live, just not in the spiritual sense. I believe they live through me, through my love for them, through my memories. I believe they live because I choose to share them with others and because I choose to allow myself to remember them every day.

I do plan on having other children, though I don't know when. I'm scared to try again. John and I have only tried once since losing the twins. I got pregnant right away, only to watch my HCG levels drop. We have no answers as to what happened this time. I don't know if I will ever have another baby. I want another child more than anything, but I'm just not sure it's going to happen for me. Hearing of

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others who are pregnant is still very painful. I have a hard time looking at pregnant women or even going by the baby section in a department store. A cousin of mine had a baby girl just a couple of months after I lost the twins. I have only seen her or the baby once. She doesn't know what to say to me, and seeing the baby is too hard, too painful. It's hard to look at her and not see the twins. When I look at her I see what could have been, what should have been.

I still don't sleep or eat like I should. I'm lucky to sleep four hours a night now. Some nights I don't sleep at all, going for days with no sleep until it all catches up with me and I just drop. Through it all John has been very supportive, taking the girls to the park to play, or to the store with him so I can sleep on those days when it's just too hard to get out of bed. Most of the time, I feel so isolated and alone. I know there are others out there who have lost a baby, but it's not something people are willing to talk about. I need and want to talk about the twins and my other babies. The only safe place I have found to do that is through the Internet and Honored Babies. Maybe it is just easier for people to talk about it when they aren't looking you in the eye. I don't know. Most of my friends and family who were here for me in the beginning have moved on. They no longer want to hear about it. When friends I haven't seen in a long time ask about the twins and I tell them, they immediately apologize and change the subject. That's very hard. They look at me like I'm from another planet or something. I'm not, I'm here, I'm real, I'm hurting! I just want to scream, "It's ok to talk about it, it's ok for me to cry. Ask me questions, just listen, anything, just don't turn away and pretend it didn't happen."

I hope to have the twins' headstone in the next week or two. I don't know how I will handle that. I am glad that they will finally have a place where they belong now. Decorating their grave will keep me busy and keep their memory alive. I miss them so much it hurts. If I could only hold them. Just once. I would give anything to have them back. I know that will never happen. I hope the lawsuit will be over soon and that the doctors and hospital will learn that they can't treat patients like numbers. We are real people and need to be treated that way. The lawsuit isn't about the money—money won't bring my babies back—but maybe by going through their pocketbooks, they will learn not to do this again.

Gone, But Not Forgotten

Heather Sawyer

I was shopping with a friend at a local grocery store, talking about our lives, having an ordinary day. I was the single mom of an 11 month old boy Clayton, living with a roommate in a suburb of Reno. I had a boyfriend, although we were not serious at the time.

I don't know what inspired me to buy a pregnancy test; I had only stopped birth control less than a month before. I was practicing the rhythm method, of which I didn't have too much knowledge but thought I could figure out.

When I got home and took the test, a faint line appeared, indicating that I was pregnant. The emotion that filled my body was joy and bewilderment. I loved children; I wanted a lot of children. I was not quite sure that I was prepared for another pregnancy though.

Over the course of the next few months, I became more and more comfortable with the thought of having a child. My boyfriend and I became engaged, moved into a house, and began our lives together. I had my concerns but overall was becoming more and more excited to meet my new little one.

The day my daughter was born was amazing. When she was delivered, I looked at the wrong angle. I thought she was a boy, and said so in a rather depressed tone of voice. When the doctor told me she was a girl, I was ecstatic. I was crying tears of joy; I was so happy to finally have the little girl I had always dreamed of. I couldn't wait until her sweet sixteen when I could present her with the ring my mother gave me at that age. Thoughts of hair ribbons and Barbie dolls consumed my mind. I named her Gabriella Heather, following my family's tradition of using the mother's first name as the daughter's middle name. October 29, 1997 was now a day I would never forget. It wouldn't be the only one.

At that time, my fiancé was having trouble holding down a job, and because I needed to provide for my kids, I only took two weeks of maternity leave. I missed them so much while I was working, but I

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honestly believed I was doing the right thing. I ended up regretting this decision as I missed so much of my daughter's life.

Gabriella was a happy baby. She started crawling at four and a half months. We called her La-La because my oldest son could not manage her whole name. She had other nicknames: *Pumpkin* because she was born so close to Halloween; *Tomato* because she would get bright red when she would cry; and *Pooh Bear* for her favorite toy. Oh the pooh bear! If you pushed his nose, it would giggle and say "Ooh, honey." I put it in the crib with Gabriella, and she would repeatedly hit its nose. She would then bust up laughing!

My fiancé and I were married in March. Gabriella was there. And because she was a very petite girl, she wore the same dress to our wedding that she wore home from the hospital. I will never forget how beautiful she looked that day.

I have no strong religious belief. I guess I would be considered very "eclectic," taking pieces from different journeys of life. I don't know if I believe in premonitions or psychic abilities, but I do know this: I always worried that something would happen to Gabriella. The feeling was a vague nagging in the back of my mind. I was constantly waking her up to check her breathing. I was always afraid that one time everything would not be ok. From the day she was born, I knew I would be attending her funeral.

I ended up working graveyard shift in a casino, making it even more difficult for me to spend time with my kids. If I wasn't at work, I was sleeping. On September 16, 1998, I had an even longer day. I couldn't get home until after 10:00 am because I needed to renew my gaming card, which is a requirement for casino workers. I remember getting off early that night and playing a couple of hands of blackjack while waiting for the police station to open so I could get my gaming card. I will forever wonder "what if" I had gone home instead.

I came home, and my husband opened the locked door for me. It was obvious he was half asleep. I sat down on the couch and explained to him I needed the car that day. Clayton was running around being his usual active self. I then realized that Gabriella was not awake yet, which was very unusual, so I went up to check on her.

As I walked into the room, fear encompassed my body. She was not in her bed. We had moved her to a toddler bed only two nights previously. I had wanted to keep her in my bed, where she would be safe and comforted all night, but with a WIC nurse coming by, we

thought moving her to her own bed would “look better.” I looked all around, and that is when I noticed the blanket sticking up between the bed and the wall. I walked over and saw her arm. As I picked her up, she was stiff and cold.

And that is where my nightmare began.

I ran with her into the hallway and immediately began CPR. I screamed at my husband to call the paramedics. As I breathed into her tiny nose and mouth, the air struck her vocal chords. The tiniest noise sounded and hope once again filled me. “One-and-two-and-three-and-four-and-five” I repeated as I pushed my fingers on her chest. The paramedics needed me to bring her downstairs by the phone. Her mouth was shut and would not open. I continued the CPR anyway, although in my heart I knew she was gone. The paramedics came, and they cut her precious nightgown. They attached electrodes as if they were going to attempt to revive her. I assumed my miracle was coming. But they didn’t. They pronounced her dead without even attempting. In hindsight, they had every reason for not trying. She was dead. Her body was stiff. There was no going back.

I remember calling my mother after they said there was nothing they could do. All I could say was “Mom, I need you here. Gabriella died.” For years following Gabriella’s death, I wondered how those words may have felt to my mother. Only through long conversations and displayed understanding on the part of my mother did I realize it was ok; there was no need to go on regretting the words spoken during a moment of emotional turmoil.

The police showed up, and my house was soon swarming with strangers. Someone told me to calm down. I can’t imagine who that was, and I don’t think I would want to know. I mean, how could any rational person expect a mother to “calm down” when her child was lying dead on the floor? Only time has let me realize that the people in attendance were disturbed by the situation too, although none of them could have known what I felt. I was offered the chance to tell my daughter good-bye, and I kissed the shell that once contained her spirit. People pushed me outside. I ended up on the steps next to a chaplain. He started talking to me about heaven, and how children are innocent and that she is in a happy place, a better place. I stared at the overcast skies, not really paying to much attention to what he was saying. I closed my eyes, and the image of an angel floating upwards drifted across my shut eyelids. I had no idea what was happening to

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me. I was sick, sick to my stomach. Why *my* daughter? Why do babies have to die? I needed to vomit.

The day's events are still fuzzy to me, and I have difficulty in remembering their order. I remember a representative from Child Protective Services coming to the home. I trembled as they stripped my son naked to check for bruises. As they started questioning me about my living habits, I soon realized that I was guilty until proven innocent—these people were treating me as a suspect in my daughter's death. I tried to reassure myself that these people were just trying to do their job, but it was of little solace. They asked me why the sheets were not on my son's bed. I explained that he often ripped the sheets off at night as he did not like sleeping with blankets or sheets. They said they noticed there were no sheets on the bed in the master bedroom; I told them I had no idea why. We had sheets; perhaps my husband was going to do laundry. I don't know. I was getting very agitated. My daughter was dead and all these people wanted to talk about was my fucking linen.

After a while, we were told we needed to go down to the police station. I don't think there was an ounce of energy left in me to know whether I could protest, and I willingly went in the detective's car with my husband. My mother took my son and drove over to my friend Cynthia's house so that he could be with family and friends during what had to be a confusing time for such a young child. The detectives questioned my husband and I separately, leaving a chaplain in the room with me when I wasn't being questioned. A fucking chaplain—there to reassure me that my daughter was in God's hands. Whatever. I was praying that this was some sort of nightmare. It was a nightmare, but a real life nightmare. The detectives asked me if my husband killed her; they asked me if he was capable of smothering her. I told them I thought my husband was a jerk, but there was no way he was capable of killing my daughter.

Three hours later, when the questioning was "done for now," the detectives asked us what we wanted to do. *I don't know—fucking die—what the hell was I supposed to say!* I asked them if they could take me to a friend's house. My best friend Bob had his phone disconnected, and I needed to talk to him. They took me to his apartment and dropped my husband and I off. Bob also worked a graveyard shift and was in the back bedroom sleeping. I walked to the bedroom, sat next to him, and simply said, "My baby died." I started bawling. He held me and

let me cry. I explained what I thought happened. All I know is that the solace I found in his arms was such a comfort after the disturbing questioning by the police detectives.

The next three days were hell. Child Protective Services came in and stripped my son naked to check for any “suspicious” marks. They tried to remove him from my home by telling my mom not to let me have him. I finally made it back to our cold, lonely apartment. My in-laws were in town now and staying in our house. God how I hated my mother-in-law. The last person I needed to see at this time—such a controlling bitch who did her best to make her son the martyr. Every word out of her mouth was “Dan is so upset. Dan is having a hard time.” I wanted her to fuck off. I was falling apart but felt like the only sane person in the house, so I shelved my feelings as best I could so that I could take care of my precious son—the innocent one in this situation.

I called my mom when we got home. I asked her to please bring Clayton over so that I may see him. That is when I heard the most hurtful bullshit of the day. CPS had informed my mother that my son was *not* allowed to stay with me and should remain in her custody. They never talked to me to inform me of these instructions. I promptly demanded that my mother bring him back and she had no problem with this. I lost one child; I wasn’t about to lose another. I was upset that these people had no concern for my pain. How could they hurt me like this? I remember them earlier asking me if he should stay with someone else since I was “so upset,” and I told them then that I wanted him with me. They kept telling me that the only reason they wanted Clayton somewhere else was “for my own good.” I called CPS and informed them that my son was back in my custody and would remain there barring a court order. They seem startled—how dare I, I suppose. But fuck them. He is *my* son and there was *no evidence* that he was in any danger. I don’t know why this agency couldn’t understand that the one thing I wanted the most was to hold my son in my arms and protect him like I couldn’t protect my daughter.

I saw the police a *lot* over the next few days. Chaplains, detectives, and social workers surrounded us and our lives. The first copy of the 911 tape wasn’t clear. Detectives knocked on the door again and said that my husband stated in his phone call that Gabriella had suffocated and wanted to know how he knew that. Upon further clarification of

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the tape, they were able to hear my voice in the background telling him that I felt she had suffocated. While this process was emotionally grueling, I know why they had to talk to him about that. Of course, this is when my in-laws and husband combined forces to act like total assholes. They argued with the police, edging towards the state of uncooperative. I was very nervous that their cockiness was going to end up making us look suspicious. I wished so bad that they would go away; hell, just get the fuck out of my house at least!

I had no choice about the autopsy—it was done without my consent. In fact, the only way I knew it was happening is because the detectives told me they were waiting for the autopsy results to come back. Then the autopsy report showed that we were not at fault. I found little comfort in that. Her cause of death was ruled “positional asphyxia.” In layman’s terms, she slipped between the bed and the wall and suffocated. I never thought a little tiny space could be so dangerous. I wish I had just kept her in bed with me like I wanted to. I wish, I hope, I regret. That is the story of my life now.

My mother and grandfather took care of all the arrangements. I hate that word: *arrangements*. So callus. I spent those days in a daze. It took three days for the coroner to release Gabriella’s body. I was sitting at home the day before the funeral when the phone rang. A man stated he was from the mortuary and needed to speak with my grandfather. I told him I was the baby’s mother, and asked if I could help him. He said, “I think we need to embalm the baby, the fingers are starting to turn...” I cut him off. “You’re right,” I said, “you need to speak with my grandfather.”

The mortician came to be one member of a list of caring, kind people who helped us out. He did not charge for the embalming, saying he “didn’t want to make money off of babies.” The cemetery donated her plot. My mom’s boyfriend Frank talked to his mother (she worked for a funeral home), had the marker custom-designed, and paid for it. Family conducted the service, and complete strangers showed up to sing. I could not believe the amount of kindness shown upon us; maybe this world wasn’t as bad as I once thought.

I don’t remember much about the funeral. There were people singing and people crying and family members giving wonderful words of sympathy. People came from all over. I will never forget the friends from my work. So many of them mourning a little girl they never met. There were cards and flowers and hugs all around. I had a

private viewing and remember seeing my daughter in the princess costume I bought her for Halloween. Ah... forever a princess she would be now. She had a pink bonnet on her head to cover the autopsy scars (I was told) and a wreath of stars that went with her costume. My son went with me to the private viewing; it was very important to me that he saw sister in a state other than dead on our living room floor. I had horrible images of the paramedics cutting her precious nightgown off of her, and I hoped that the few minutes of viewing her beauty would ease some of that for me, and him. I did this without the knowledge or consent of most of the family, including my husband. Most of all, I remember the funeral director carrying the small white casket through the cemetery to her final resting place.

After the funeral we had a gathering at my house. This is where I became really pissed off at my mother-in-law. She threw an absolute fit about having a gathering at the house afterwards because “there wouldn’t be enough food for everyone.” Excuse me? Fuck, I didn’t know people like this actually existed until I met her. *How did you like the funeral? Would you like to try some caviar?* Give me a fucking break.

My Aunt Cheryl came to the funeral and was a nice relief. She filled the air with her beautiful personality and later, at home, she provided some much needed comic relief as she described her three hour drive and the argument she had with her boyfriend, Andy. Oh, there were several people pissed off that I was laughing with her. But you know, until they could tell me that they have seen their own child dead, I didn’t care if they were pissed off.

And Andy was much needed as well. Andy had terminal cancer, hell, Andy had about a dozen different health issues—it was amazing that he was alive. But to see this warm man, his huge heart, and his genuine tears at the post-funeral gathering was a huge comfort to me. He showed me what it was like to choose living instead of dying. Andy died months afterward without knowing how much his presence meant to me that day. I reflect back on his rosy cheeks and absolute love of life when I get down in the dumps and start feeling sorry for myself, and it does pull me out of it.

The turmoil in my life was not lifting. My husband left me two months later. It was for the best as our marriage was not healthy. Actually, it was never healthy. We had a terrible relationship based on each of us wanting to change the other. I thought I could make him a

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compassionate person who cared about people more than things, and he thought he could change me into a person who could put things and him above my children. This existed long before Gabriella died. Her death simply made clearer to me the fact that this man was very shallow and self-centered and found difficulty in putting others before himself. He never allowed me to grieve. If I did try to express feelings of sorrow, he would break down. I would cry, he would cry harder. I would want to take a night off of work, he would quit his job. This caused me to feel like I needed to be the “rock.” If I wasn’t strong for Clayton, who would be? I would shove aside the tears and attend to his needs as best as I could. I had difficulty accepting the fact that I was weak and in pain. I just had no room emotionally to deal with it. I was not allowed. One day, my husband, in a fit of frustration, took my son and kicked him into our sofa. I exploded and demanded him to leave. He did. A “trial separation.” I had difficulty being alone, and he returned home after one week. The day he returned home he asked me to move with him to his parent’s home in Utah. There was no way I wanted to go. He wanted to make love that night—I was not comfortable being intimate with him. The next morning, I returned home to find most of “our” belongings gone and him standing in the living room. He then informed me he was leaving. It was like a huge weight off my shoulders, for I knew that once he left I would *never* take him back. It was still traumatic; in two months time, I went from a family of four to a family of two.

The first thing I learned came to me when visiting the cemetery. My daughter’s headstone had not yet been placed, and I was walking around looking at the other Baby Land gravesites to see what people had chosen for their own children. I was staring at these other markers and they made me realize how lucky I was. Instead of feeling sorrow at only having 10½ months with my daughter, I needed to realize that I had an *entire* 10½ months. Looking at the grave of a child that only lived one month, or one day, or who only had life within his/her mother’s womb gave me an entirely different perspective. I suddenly realized that there were broken-hearted mothers everywhere who would have done anything to have the time with their own children that I had with my daughter.

The cemetery became my home. I would go any chance I could get. I always brought something, a figurine perhaps or maybe some flowers. I don’t know why I went, I still don’t. I “adopted” children

whose gravesites appeared neglected, leaving trinkets behind for them as well. There is a statue at the cemetery known as “the mourning mother.” I would often sit in front of the statue and reflect upon the path I had traveled, and the numbers of women who have traveled a similar path, and the numbers more who would. For I now knew, as long as babies were born, babies would die. Sometimes I would talk to Gabriella, sometimes I would just cry. Sometimes, I would go just because I felt like I “had” to, like this is what mothers do when their children die. At other times, I would go because I needed to. I needed to have my own space, my own time, my own place to mourn my daughter.

I met a man who I believe is my soul mate. From the moment I met Ron, I knew I loved him. We moved in together, and he was a big help to me. The support that he has shown me the past two years is overwhelming and frustrating as well. On special holidays he gets me a gift, something to symbolize Gabriella and the place she has in my heart. Other times, he doesn’t understand why I burst out into tears, why I get angry at others who have children and don’t “love them” the way I feel they should. It took me a long time to realize that no matter how much he loves me, or how good of a person he is, he will never understand the sorrow of a mother’s heart.

We made the decision to move to Denver because I needed to be away from the town in which my daughter’s life ended. I no longer wanted to be “the one with the baby” at work. I was tired of the pity without the understanding from strangers who were just fascinated by the unknown. I needed away from the gravesite, away from the pain. I realized that a tiny hole covered with grass was taking my free time. I was having difficulty moving forward, accepting her death. I was still in denial—expecting my nightmare to come to an end. I felt that perhaps moving would help me realize it never would. As the moving truck left Reno, I made one more stop at her grave. I saw the marker for the first time. Along with the text, there was an angel in the corner.

Our little Pumpkin La-La
Gabriella Heather Robinson
10/29/97 – 09/16/98

It was becoming real now.

I was able to escape for quite a while in Denver. I didn’t have to deal with the reality of Gabriella’s death. I pretended like the pain was

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not there. Somehow, someone else experienced that hurt. It wasn't me. I kept busy. I took a great job doing accounting and absorbed myself in my work.

I purchased a computer and started spending six to eight hours a night on the Internet, most of those hours being spent looking through memorial web sites. My husband grew concerned as I indulged myself in the pain of others. Somehow seeing the memorials to other children gave me a strange sort of comfort. Perhaps it is the feeling that I am not alone. I would drive myself to tears, cry until I lost consciousness. Sleep was no longer a necessity, for sleep just brought dreams. If I could stay awake, even if just reading web pages or playing online games, it was better than facing nightmares of my daughter coming alive and crawling through the dirt at her grave. It was so much better than visions of Gabriella alive and breathing, yet needing to keep it a secret from everyone else for fear they would find out she wasn't really gone and take her away again. If I got three hours of sleep a day, I was doing good.

And then it happened. The beginning of August 1999, I "lost it." I had uncontrollable anxiety attacks.

One moment I would be fine, living life as best as one could in these circumstances. Then overwhelming fears of death and reliving the moments of September 16, 1998 would take over my rational mind. Every time I closed my eyes I had visions of finding my daughter's lifeless body. I pondered life-after-death. I wondered where she was and if she could hear me. I tried prescription medication suggested to me by a well-intentioned family doctor. He explained that depression caused a "chemical imbalance in my brain" and that this magic pill would help me, but it didn't help. It only covered up the pain so I wouldn't face it. I went to therapy. That didn't work either. The therapist that my insurance sent me to was a licensed social worker, a man. I tried very hard to express my feelings and get some "help" that I felt I needed, but that was futile. How could I talk to a *man* about losing my child? He would never understand what a *mother's* pain feels like. As I explained my fears and my pain, he tried to convince me that perhaps I was suicidal. He diagnosed me as suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Well no shit asshole! My daughter is dead, it was a traumatic experience, and I have stress arising from the event. I can't believe it takes a degree to do this work. Finally, I realized that I was not sick; I could not be

diagnosed with a “condition.” I was a mother who had lost her child and nothing in the world could change that. I was grieving.

I dealt with it in not so positive ways. Sometimes I would be sitting alone in a room, trying desperately to find relief from the pain. I would reach out to my husband, but he didn’t know how to “save” me, how to comfort me. I would take razor blades and cut my skin, not wishing to die but hoping that the physical pain would distract from the emotional torture inside of me. I quit my job because work was too much to handle. I was no longer concerned about a company’s financial matters. My daughter was dead. I felt like no one cared, like no one wanted to hear of my precious daughter.

I kept expecting someone to help, to make my pain go away. However, my pain typically increased as I reached out to those closest to me. The first Easter after Gabriella’s death, I found myself in tears as I watched my son hunt for Easter Eggs knowing that Gabriella should be doing this too. My dad saw me in tears and asked me what was wrong. I still remember telling him “I miss her, Dad. I miss Gabriella so much and I wish she was here.” He hugged me, and I was so happy to see some comfort, but there was no comfort to be found in his arms. He explained to me that bad things happen in life, and we move on. She hadn’t been dead six months, yet he felt I should be over it. I went later that day and looked at the refrigerator at his house where magnets held pictures of his grandchildren, nieces, nephews and other special family and friends. Of course there was one missing, one of Gabriella. Like a knife being shoved through my heart I realized that he could forget—out of site and out of mind. Fuck him. I felt as though everyone thought I should get over things and go on with my life. No one could understand that I was a mother. I could not undo the birth of my daughter, just as I could not resurrect her from the dead and bring her home.

I went online where I found support groups. I struggled to find a place where I was comfortable. I learned that there is a lot of different pain associated with different losses. I could not relate to a woman who had a miscarriage. I understood she was hurting, but the loss of an eight week old fetus as opposed to a ten and a half month old baby was nothing to be compared. There was no sanctuary there, no way we could relate. They hated me for experiencing the life of my child before she died, and I hated them for thinking that their pain came even close to mine. Trial and error led me to some good groups

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where people would listen to me as I screamed through the computer, where I could talk about assholes who made insensitive remarks. Women who did not think I was going to hell because I despised pregnant women and newborn babies. People who cared.

Through other women, I began to find strength. I began to feel that perhaps I wasn't alone. For the first time, there were people who wanted to know every detail about Gabriella's life. There were people who would listen when I wanted to cry. These people did not judge me; they were my friends. These people did not tell me to "get over it." They did not put a time limit on my grief. Most of all, these people were not afraid to say my child's name. They allowed me to share my memories and my pain without making me feel ashamed. They showed no signs of discomfort when I would talk about Gabriella. People in my "real life" were not so considerate. They did not appreciate the gift of seeing my daughter's pictures. Vignettes of her life brought pity from them—pity for the poor girl who couldn't move on with her life. It was amazing to me that people I only knew online could be more understanding than those closest to me.

I absorbed myself with making a web site tribute for my daughter. I taught myself HTML and some basic JavaScript, and then I was off. I started connecting with others who had lost children by visiting their web sites. I needed more and more information. I didn't understand why I tortured myself by looking at the web sites honoring deceased children. It broke my heart, each and every story. But there was something I was looking for.

In the Spring of 2000, I found it. I received an email from a lady asking if I could help. A family member of hers had lost a child in a very similar manner, and she desperately needed someone to talk to. I gave her permission to use my email, and was soon in touch with Jenny*. Jenny's son had died when he slipped between the mattress and the footboard. I listened to her story and to her pain. I sobbed as I read the horror of discovering her son's lifeless body and of the trials of the investigation. A sense of relief came over me. I was no longer alone; someone else had lost a child in the same manner. I grieved for Jenny's son, and I cried for Jenny. I was finally out of isolation. Someone else had been there. In this situation.

In January of 2001, I received another letter. This one was from Tammy*. Tammy and her family were in the process of adopting a little boy who was not quite two. He died in the same manner as

Gabriella, by slipping between the mattress and the wall. In not quite two and a half years, I had met only two others who understood the circumstances.

Not only is the manner of deaths similar, but we all share certain feelings. The guilt is strong, the self-blame prevalent. At least for Jenny and I, the police investigation was absolutely torturing. We beat ourselves up enough; we did not need anyone to add to our guilt. Finally, we all share the nightmare of discovering our child dead.

We are all very private when it comes to the details of how our children died. One grows tiresome of the accusatory stares and insensitive questions that occur when discussing these details. I remember one person in particular who approached me shortly after my returning to work, asking me how I was doing. As he told me that the same thing almost happened to his baby, I started to feel comforted that someone else could understand that this could happen. There was no comfort to be found in his voice, however. He explained that his wife was able to hear his baby cry and that his baby was safe. He told me he found it very hard to believe that no one heard my baby cry, "Very, very hard to believe."

I think the hardest part for me in this journey of grief has been my lack of a theological base. I had not been to church for nine years before my daughter died, and I was uncomfortable subscribing to any one theological philosophy and/or belief. I heard others who lost children take solace in the fact that their children were with God and that their babies were watching over them. They would talk about signs their children gave them or wonderful dreams they would have. My life had none of these. I could not believe in a higher power. I felt that any "God" would not force me through this pain. I had no wonderful dreams, only nightmares: tormenting dreams of my daughter in which I would try in vain to get her back. I would dream that she magically came back to me, but I couldn't tell anyone. I would dream of going to the cemetery and finding her alive, walking towards me. And then I would wake up, only to have her not there. I even remembered hearing her cry and getting up to check on her, only to realize that she never lived in the house I now occupied.

To speak with Clayton about his sister was another of the most difficult parts of Gabriella's death. How do you answer questions your child asks when you don't know the answers? I have been very open

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and honest with him about the circumstances of her death and the grief that I feel.

Clayton and I have a relationship where we are always free to express our feelings to each other without hesitation or waiting for an “appropriate time.” When he talks with me, his feelings are acknowledged and validated. In turn, talking with Clayton makes me feel as though I have walked another three miles down this path of life as *my* feelings are acknowledged and validated. He shares memories of his sister when he needs to and has explained all about her to his little brother. Sometimes when I cry, he comes over to me and asks me if I am missing Gabriella. Tears come from the innocent things he has said to me, such as, “Mom, I want a little sister on earth.” When people ask him how many brothers and sisters he has, he includes Gabriella, and if one is really special, he will include the details of her short life and death. I always know if a stranger is worth knowing depending on how they react to him. Those who brush him off or act mortified definitely do not have standing reservations in the life of Heather.

My life has not stopped. I have continued on, although sometimes I don't know how. I have since had another child, Ronnie. My pregnancy was full of fear and hope, for I no longer could be naive. I now know that not all babies are born alive or healthy, and the fear of losing a second child is worse than the reality of losing the first. I hear others speak of relief when they got past the point in their pregnancy or in the baby's infancy when their first child died. But that was 10½ months for me. There were times when I didn't know if we would make it. I was so scared of losing Ronnie also. Even now that he is over a year old I still worry. The fear is never going to go away. There are two truths I know now: a) children die, and b) no one can guarantee you that yours won't.

I am irrational at times when it comes to my living children. I get very little sleep, as I am afraid to sleep when Ronnie is asleep because I don't want to lose him, too. Even as Clayton approaches his fifth birthday, I still check on him throughout the night to make sure he is ok. I can't stand leaving my kids with anyone. If they are not with me, then they are not safe, at least in my mind.

It has been two and a half years since Gabriella died. She is still the first thing I think about in the morning and the last thing I think about at night. Some call this unhealthy. As I approached her fourth

birthday, I wrote a letter of concern to an online group that I am part of which is not related to child loss support. An egotistical twit with no formal education but who had “done a paper on grief in college” (grief concerning the loss of a parent, as I recall) wrote me an email explaining that during the first two years after a death it is ok to feel pain and grief, but if it still continues beyond the third year, it is time to seek professional help. I never replied to this person. To that obnoxious nitwit I say this: Fuck You. I don’t understand what people expect a mother to do. Unless you can bring my dead baby back to life, *nothing* is going to make it better. Catch that? Nothing. I call this grieving. I see little girls and I can only imagine what Gabriella would be like. I wonder what color her hair would have been and what her personality would have been like. I miss what could have been. Every day.

I have a lot of guilt. I feel guilty about the way I was as her mother. I wish I had spent more time with her, hugged her more, and told her I loved her more, although I don’t know if I could have ever done it enough. I hate the fact that I decided to put her in that stupid bed. I am constantly beating myself up over it. I have begged for one more chance; I have promised to never make that decision again. I had her ten months and sixteen days; I wish I could go back to every one of them and truly cherish the moments of her life.

I find myself promising to some unknown entity to do whatever it takes to get her back. I keep thinking, “I have proven now what a good mother I can be, can I please have her back?” Sometimes I wake up and I expect her to be there. I just know this is a bad dream and that it will all be over soon. At other times, I can’t even remember her face. I block the good memories and dwell on the bad. I don’t know why I do this. Is it because when I don’t remember her face, it becomes another person’s life, another person’s nightmare? Perhaps. What I do know is that during the most troublesome times, I cannot change what sticks out in my mind, no matter how hard I try. No matter how much I try to envision her smile, only the image of her stiff leg bent in the air comes to mind. I try to remember nursing her, smelling her, holding her. But I can only recall the cold feeling of her body. My most vivid image is one where she is laying on the floor of my living room, her eyes closed, her body lifeless.

I have learned that I am not alone in my suffering. There are others out there. I have learned not to compare grief because a mother

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can mourn a child lost during the early stages of pregnancy as much as a child lost at seven years old. I have learned that grieving is very individual, that people cope in different ways, at different paces. Most of all, I have learned that a mother's love never dies. I literally get pains in my chest just thinking about my daughter. This is not something I will "get over." I will continue to grieve my little lost baby until the day I die and no words of advice or wisdom are ever going to change that.

About the Author

I was born June 8, 1976 in Millington, Tennessee. I was raised in Reno, Nevada and currently reside in Lakewood, Colorado with my husband Ron and my two earthly children Clayton and Ronnie. I am a stay-at-home homeschooling mom and spend my free time reading or designing web sites. Most of all, I enjoy reaching out to other parents in sorrow and sharing my experiences in hopes to help them know they are not alone. I presented a proclamation to Governor Owens of Colorado in 2001, which he proudly signed, declaring October 15, 2001 Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day. This proclamation was re-signed in 2002, and we hope that it continues to be signed until the Remembrance Day is permanent. With the much appreciated assistance of Representative Mark Cloer, the Colorado Legislature passed similar resolutions. The hope is that this legislation will help create awareness and understanding in the community as a whole, including doctors, police officers, clergy, and friends and family members of mourning families.

Kadin's Story : Love

Paula Long

Daydreams about my future filled an emptiness in my life. I dreamed of my future family, large from many births and adoptions. I fantasized babies leaving the warmth of my womb yet finding a different warmth nestled in my breasts and arms. I felt flooding love for a generation not yet conceived but in my mind.

. . . . [text removed]

That late afternoon, I went into transition. While in this blissful state, I saw the most beautiful figure in my mind's eye. This figure was a girl child; she had shoulder length curled blond hair, looked somewhat angelic, and was within two feet of my eyes. She just stood there looking at me. She never moved a muscle. When I "awoke," I stated to Carol, "This baby is a girl." I had always believed this baby to be a girl, while Carol would shake her head and say, "No Paula, this baby is a boy!" At the time, I had no idea that this figure may have been a premonition of sorts.

After transition, I had absolutely no urge to push. I felt as if I was not in labor at all. I tried to push, but nothing was happening. Again, baby's heart tones were perfect. After a conference with another midwife, we decided that the best thing to do was for me to get some rest and to start contractions again with nipple stimulation after I woke. I slept for hours. When I woke, contractions began again and proceeded intensely. Sometimes, the pain would get so intense that I wanted to just curl up and give up. Kris, to whom I will be forever grateful for her soft voice and deep connection with what I needed, guided me gently and taught me to calm myself. I stayed focused so that I wouldn't lose control, and interestingly, the contractions became less painful. Suddenly, I screamed...

"Take me to the hospital! Now! I want this baby cut out of me! Let them do it! I have to go! I just can't do it any... more..."

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As I leaned over the barstool next to my bed with my screaming eyes reaching to the skies, someone attempted to calm me. It was either my husband Scott or Carol. Someone suggested I get into the shower to help me reclaim my focus. I let myself be led. I knew I had to regain control or my body would take over, and I'd end up in a heap on the floor writhing in pain.

It was dark except for several dark candles flickering. The smell of musk came over me. I leaned over the second barstool as the water hit my back. I hated the shower when the contractions came. The sharp wet needles pierced my skin. It hurt. I laid my head down and the truth came. A single thought came repeatedly from the dark: *My baby's dead. My baby's dead. My baby's dead...* Scott stood in the flamed dark beside me. Wet. He didn't know what I was thinking. I didn't say it out loud. I was scared. He led me out of the shower and dried me off. I had to go to the bathroom. This was worse than the needles (I had earlier learned that I had to stand over the toilet to release so the spasms wouldn't circulate when I bent my pelvis). Another wave hit me. I moved over and leaned onto the bathroom counter... breathe, breathe, breathe... Scott intently whispered, "You can do this. You will do this. This baby will come soon. Tonight. Focus. Stay focused..." His face flickered. I turned toward the source. It was the musk candle, lighting this man's face who would later be told his baby was dead. Something I already knew but didn't dare utter aloud. I buried my head in my chest. I didn't know where else to go.

I returned to my bedside stool. I lowered my torso over it, hung my head toward the ground, and blacked out the existence around me. I don't remember anything else until I heard Carol say, "Paula, we have to go to the hospital. I just cannot find the heartbeat." I looked up into her eyes, straightened my body, and replied, "Let's go. Now." To Scott, I ordered, "Go into the closet and get my red shorts outfit. Get my shoes. They are over there." He complied and got me dressed. I heard Carol on the phone talking to the hospital. Then I heard Scott call his mother and mine. We were ready to go. I climbed into Kris' van and focused on the clock. I hugged a pillow tightly against my swollen belly. Kris would periodically rub my leg and send encouraging words during the unbearable pain. I focused on the fact that when I got to the hospital, I'd demand pain relief. Yes. Drugs. That which I never thought I'd need. Or want. I had to shut out one of the pains. The other, I knew, couldn't be shut out by any drug. I

never uttered a sound. And no one ever uttered what I thought only I knew.

I rolled out of the van and stumbled through the emergency room doors. It was the middle of the night. Around midnight. It was quiet except for a man asking me if I wanted a wheelchair or a stretcher. I couldn't answer as I was leaned up against the wall in agony. I finally muttered, "Wheelchair... I can't be on my back." I closed my eyes and soon I was in a birthing room getting undressed. It was light. Bright. I was helped onto the bed where I said, "Carol, I'm sorry, but I have to..." and to the nurse I pleaded, "I have to have drugs. When can I have them? I need an epidural." She told me I'd have to wait just a little while. They needed to get an ultrasound and get the doctor. "Who was on call?" The nurse told me, "Dr. Arlington*." I felt fear run through me. I'd heard that he was a high intervention OB. No chance for a natural birth for me here. In this hospital. Nor with this doctor. What was I thinking... natural birth? Ha. It was over. I remembered what I knew. What I knew and no one else did.

I laid on my back. Several people were standing over me. Someone moved the ultrasound wand over my belly. There were no voices. And, it was silent. I wanted to remind someone to turn up the volume on the machine because I couldn't hear the swish swish of the heartbeat. I had forgotten. But I remembered.

I sat up. They gave me some kind of drug in my IV. I asked how long it would be before it would be effective. Thirty seconds. Wham. I felt a contraction. They lied to me. I screamed. I wanted pain relief, but instead, I got Stadol. My head felt heavy. My body felt heavy. But I still felt. A lab tech came and took some blood. The doctor came. I laid back down. The ultrasound wand swept over my belly again. This time, I looked at the monitor. I saw a picture. It was my baby's heart. It was still. And, it was quiet in the room. Again.

The anesthesiologist snaked the relief into my back. My body hurt no more.

Everyone was gone. Except the nurse. Stephanie. She looked at me. "Paula, we have to talk."

I slowly turned my head towards her, "Yeah?"

"I think you know, but I have to tell you. There's no heartbeat. Your baby died."

"... I know. I know."

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I closed my eyes. It was dark. Quiet. Still. Forever changed. My life. I hurt but couldn't cry. My mom still hadn't gotten to the hospital yet. And Scott wasn't by my side.

Everyone came back. Scott sat in a chair. Carol sat in a chair. Kris sat on the floor. My other midwife wasn't there. I don't know why. I haven't asked. I laid in the bed, epidural pleasantly doing its job, and me, pissed because I broke a fingernail on the damn hospital bed rail during an earlier contraction. Focused on a fingernail when my life was falling apart.

Stephanie brought pillows in for everyone. And blankets. She was kind. And thoughtful. And she cried.

I looked over at my precious husband and Carol, the woman who'd been my rock for the past two months. My heart ached for them. I couldn't say anything except, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry..."

"Carol, remember when I lost it back at home? When I lost control and asked to be taken to the hospital?"

"Yes."

"Well, it happened because I knew my baby was dead. I couldn't focus on the contractions anymore knowing the truth. I just couldn't do it."

"I know that now. I didn't then. I couldn't believe you were *going there*. I couldn't believe that those words were coming from you."

I looked over at Scott. I've never seen anyone's eyes ever look so empty.

Stephanie began to talk to me about procedures. I'd be giving birth vaginally. [Whoop-de-doo.] I could hold my baby. [Oh my god! How wonderful! Yes, I want to do that! Desperately.] As long as I wanted.

"How long is that? Can others see my baby? My mom is on her way. I want family here." I said I wanted Alexandria to come. Scott, in a panic, said "Absolutely not." She kindly told me that everything was up to me. As long as I wanted. She'd check and see. I could bathe our baby and make hand and footprints. They would take pictures. Scott almost screamed "No!" She brought her protocol book to me. She said that there was no specified time limit. I could release my baby when I was ready to. No time limit. No time limit. No time limit. No time limit. No time limit. No time limit.....

My mother arrived. She came to my bed and said, in a somewhat jovial manner with her hands on her hips, "What? No baby yet?"

“No mom. Not yet. [deep breath] There won't be. The baby died.”

She turned away. I don't know what she thought. I saw her pain though. Seems like all her life's tragedies coursed through her heart that very moment. And nothing probably matched hearing that her own child's child was dead.

. . . . [text removed]

I belonged to several online parenting and birth groups. I hand-wrote a note to all my friends in those groups and to family who had provided such wonderful support during my pregnancy and labor journey. My mother took my note to my home, typed it up for me, and sent the email out. It took me hours to write the note because I wanted it to be both respectful and honoring of Kadin:

Dear Friends:

Our new son, Kadin Scott William Long, was born Wednesday, July 29th at 7:52am. He's 9 lbs., 6 oz. and 21 inches in length. He's beautiful and looks exactly like Alexandria.

I'm not going to go into the details right now, mostly because I don't have the energy, but due to unfortunate circumstances, our son was stillborn.

He was delivered via c-section, and I'll be in the hospital at least until Sunday.

I've had Kadin with me since he was born, and I'll sleep with him tonight before I say my final good-bye.

I'm surrounded by a great number of family and friends who love me and haven't left my side... Most have chosen to see and hold Kadin, which has been an incredible experience for me to witness and share.

As I'm sitting here, Wednesday evening, I desperately want to share with you what happened and is happening, but I just don't have the energy to hand write all that now.

Honored Babies

In the morning, Thursday, Scott and I will talk to Alexandria about Kadin's death.

I know you all are as shocked to hear this, as much as we are here to be experiencing this tragic loss.

Your continued support, love, prayers, and thoughts throughout this journey have been incredible and appreciated, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I know this is not the update you planned on reading—it certainly wasn't what I thought I'd be writing... I'll write more when I get home or shortly thereafter. I'll be busy with memorial and burial arrangements.

Within minutes, people from around the world began to call—most were people I didn't even know. The phone didn't stop ringing for the six days I was in the hospital, and I didn't stop talking or sharing how beautiful Kadin was. Everyone must have thought I was fine, because I sounded fine. I didn't know how else to be because nothing made any sense.

. . . . [text removed]

At 9 am the next morning, I said good-bye for the last time to my son. I called Scott at home and asked if he wanted to see or hold Kadin before I released him. No. I called the nursing staff to come and get him. Quietly, they took him away. I knew where. The mortuary where he would be placed in a cold room. To keep him “fresh” until the service. I didn't want him embalmed, nor did I want an autopsy. *Leave my son's body alone! Please don't cut or mangle my son... he's my sonnnnnn...* As I handed Kadin over, I told him, “I love you,” and my heart broke.

. . . . [text removed]

Maggots crawling in and out of my son's encased body. Ants using the bridge of his nose to change sides. Life forms that existed probably only in my imagination pulled at his baby flesh, munching and exposing his delicate bones. I saw dried blood caked upon open, folded back flesh. I saw his mouth skewed in horror. Gone. Flashed

away because my mind couldn't take it anymore. I knew I was going crazy. No. Was crazy—not going. *Face the music, Paula, your life as you know it is over... you'll be in an institution soon with people leaving you to rot in your urine. It's not right to think about Kadin in the ground, rotting. I'm crazy. Yes. I'm crazy.*

These flashes of horror went on for a few weeks. What a horrible mother I was to allow my son to be eaten by the critters of the underworld. I couldn't save him *then*. I couldn't save him *now*. A woman called—one of my vendors for my online store—and I blurted out to her what I hadn't told *anyone*—my horror flashes. She said to me in the calmest of voices, “Well of course you're having those images. How normal. After all, you *are* his mother.” She didn't think I was crazy or a freak, she thought I was normal. That I was grieving. That's all. I told Scott, and he asked me, “Do you want to know what Kadin really looks like?” *Yes...* “He looks the same as the day we buried him. He's in an airtight container, and it will be a long time before his body begins to decompose.” He spoke to me. About nothing of feelings, but of a factual something he could wrap himself around and share. Those particular daymares stopped as abruptly as they came.

Mindlessly chopping vegetables at the kitchen counter, my body told my mind: *It's time to nurse Kadin. Hurry, it's time.* I threw everything down and shuffle-ran down the hall toward my bedroom, where I collapsed in a heap against the wall, shriveled into the same position that Kadin had curled into in his *safe place* when *he was alive*. I stayed there for hours, staring at the white bumpy wall between huge sobs that brought no tears. My baby wasn't in my bed gently rousing himself from a gentle slumber. *Fuck! He is buried in a caaaaaaasket in the fucking ground. Whyyyyyy?????????.....*

My first day at the grocery store. Why are the lights so damn bright? Go away world and just let me get stuff for my family to eat. I don't want to see anyone... I want to just pick up the lettuce and the bread and the soup and the meat and Go. Perky clerk wanted to know “How are you today?” *I hate you. Shut the hell up. I don't want to talk to you, and I hate that your baby didn't die. I hate you.* “I'm awful. My baby died. Life isn't good.” *Dead silence.* Ha. So ironic that sometimes the topic of death is welcome in such a scene. I paid and left and welcomed the burning sun. It's brightness hurt, and I was glad. I wanted to hurt because the world hadn't stopped to feel my pain.

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. . . . [text removed]

Our lives were empty and meaningless. We lived to escape—everything, including one another. We avoided one another's eyes, bodies, and words. We didn't talk, except to fight. We didn't touch, except on accident. He drank to escape, and I refused to, so I hated him. He supported the abandonment, so I hated him. He wouldn't *talk to me*, so I hated him. He didn't seem to be falling apart, so I hated him. He wanted sex, so I hated him. He went to work and kept on living, so I hated him. *He didn't understand or mourn or fall apart, so I hated him.* It was easy to hate *him* because there was no one else to hate.

For a solid year, we lived like this. Even on the day we placed the headstone on Kadin's grave and the three of us put our hands on it to move it to its place, he didn't touch me. He didn't look at me. I longed for him to touch me, to look at me, to *say something about KADIN and our pain... to acknowledge that this life we'd been living the last year was real and it hurt like hell.*

First the grass, then the dirt. I forgot a shovel, but that's okay; I can do this with my bare hands. Pull the grass with anger. It doesn't come out very easily. Why? What is stopping me? Fear? No. Who cares if someone finds me at 10:30 darkness digging my son up out of the earth's chamber? I'll just dig him up and take him home where at least I can take care of him. I can hold him, and he won't be cold down there. He won't be alone. I have blankets, and besides, Alexandria never got to hold him. She can now. These damn grass roots are thick. Determination is really anger and... well, and more anger. That's all it is. Anger. Anger Energy. I have a lot of that and it's feeding this crazed need to get my son and bring him home where I can protect him. I hit dirt. I'm scared. This isn't right. I can't do this. I'll get locked up for sure, and I can't. I have Alexandria to care for and a life to lead. I am responsible that way. *Flashes of Sanity.* I go home spent. Without my baby.

I want to go to the tippy top of a mountain and bloody scream at the top of my lungs, "*My baby died, and I hurt like hell!*" No one would hear me, but I would have at least gotten to say it out loud. I went to my car many times to do just that. Drive away and not tell anyone. Be irresponsible and tend to my wounds. I didn't want to be responsible

or take care of anyone else or consider anyone else's feelings. I wanted to be selfish, and I wanted others to hurt, too. Who, I had no idea. I just wanted others to hurt... wanted them to feel the pain I was feeling so they might just stop for a moment and touch me. I never felt selfish before; I always was a giver and wanted to do for others. I listened a lot, cared a lot, and it got me *nothing*. No one to come see me. No one to take care of me. I didn't have people like those in the movies do. You know the ones, where the best friend or sister throws open the bedroom curtains in the middle of the day and says, "Get up. I'm taking you out of here now so you can start to live again." But, no one did care about me. No one who was close, that is. No one who could have come over and leased their shoulder to me. Left alone day after day, week after week, month after month, curled up in balls, living daymares, sleeping literally two hours a night, only because I crawled over a ten minute period on the floor to and up the bed. No one knew this because they didn't care. *They couldn't cope* I was told. And I can??? *They don't know what to do or say* I was told. And I do??? *For once in my life, I need someone to come take care of me. To make it better. Just to be there and listen and cry and miss Kadin as much as I do. Doesn't anyone hurt or does he not exist for them?* I cursed them loudly, screamed profanities to the walls. I hit myself, for there was no one else to hit. They were gone.

. . . . [text removed]

Day in and day out, I watched as the family room walls merged with Alexandria's play. I got up. I did chores. I existed. I searched online for answers. I read books, only to throw them down in disgust because I just couldn't take the senselessness of it all and the lack of connection to other women. I functioned quietly while the anger of abandonment and isolation began to grab hold. *Why am I being left alone as if I have some contagious disease? Why am I the only one to speak Kadin's name?* Years later, I still do not have the answers to these questions because I just do not talk to these people about my life anymore. My mother, my father, Scott, and Alexandria are about the only family members who could talk to us about Kadin for the first three years. When I do bring up Kadin, many family members still cut me off once I've spoken his name.

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I went to the hospital to get our records and the photograph that were taken there. I was shocked when I looked at the photograph. Where did all the blacks and reds and bruises come from? I didn't remember Kadin's face looking like that. Dad took his film to a private lab to get developed because I was fearful something would happen to the film if not professionally developed. When he brought them to me, I had the same reaction: what is all that bruising? Even when I showed them to people who had seen him, no one remembered Kadin's face looking bruised. I surmised it was because all the love we felt masked it. It was almost a year before I learned that that "bruising" was called *levidity* and was a result of the blood pooling to his lowest body part upon his death (he was head down inside of me when he died).

Scott is standing next to the bed. I look up at him as if he were an alien. *He wants to have sex? What??? Why? I don't want to be touched. Perhaps I'll get pregnant, and I can't have that.* For the first time in my life, I'm terrified of becoming pregnant again. I don't ever, ever want to be pregnant again or have another baby. I am never ever going through this again. I don't want him to touch me because I just know he hates me. I know, he just wants sex. To feel better. Well, I don't want him to feel better. I want him to hurt as much as I am.

I sat on the toilet today beating my fists against my thighs. I want some physical pain to distract the hurt. *If I hurt myself, then I'll be punished for not being able to save Kadin. I want so badly to be with him, but I want to be here, too. Here more though. I think. Yes. I deserve the pain. I didn't kill him, did I? Did I? Oh geez, what if I did? What if it's all my damn fault? But, what if he had died during a c/section... I would feel so much guilt for not doing what I knew was right for us. How could I ever have lived with myself if I had allowed someone take over my baby's and my life???*

. . . . [text removed]

I found my grief to be so very physical for me. I felt that I couldn't control it, and since I couldn't, I decided to just let it be. Be what it was. Experience it fully. Embrace it, in a sense. Let it wash over me. Question everything and cry when I needed to. Curl up in a ball and have big pity parties. Scream. I told people the truth. When they took the "two step back," I got angry and told them "It isn't contagious." I refused to shut up and bury Kadin again.

. . . . [text removed]

As time marched forward, the intensity of the daymares, the physical pain and grief, and the questions slowed. As my physical being—perhaps my mind really—allowed pieces of grief to come and go, the issues became less and less. As I allowed each thing to come and I allowed myself to feel each of them, they moved on to someplace else, although something new always took the goneness. Until it was really pretty done. Years later. There were times along the way I hated the goneness. I wanted to feel the pain, because in a way, it made real my connection to Kadin. And although the intensity of it has gone, I still cry softly and quietly. Mostly, the tears, as Alexandria says, are “tears of sadness because Kadin just isn’t here with us physically. But mommy, he’s always here in our hearts, and he always will be. We love him very much.” How right she is.

. . . . [text removed]

I didn’t keep a traditional written journal of my thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences. Much I can recall as if I were experiencing it now. Some I recalled from email conversations I had with people who wanted to hear what I had to say. Below are excerpts of some of those email conversations—those that really key in on my state of mind and what I was experiencing.

[November 1998]

Scott and I ended up having a huge fight this evening. Awful. I got Alexandria one gift, and it was crappy. Didn’t even wrap it. I stood, again, in the pantry, and cried for being such an awful mom...

So many things came up tonight—I talked about how hurt I was, and still am, when Scott blamed me for Kadin’s death. I was so hurt and angry. I told him that maybe Kadin died because he wouldn’t have been a good father to him. I regretted it the minute it came out of my mouth, but I wanted to hurt him so very much. I almost threw a can of beer at him...it was in my hand, my arm was back, but I stopped. I just want to scream. I don’t even know what to do anymore. ...I don’t even know who to talk to when this stuff happens. ...I wanted to go somewhere, but I had absolutely no idea where. So, I didn’t. Poor Alexandria. My heart breaks for her. This was her fu**in’ b-day, for goodness sake. I couldn’t stop myself even when I knew

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how awful it must've been for her hearing me and Scott. When I'm in the middle of all of this, I feel so lost and confused and angry and sad and almost physically torn. Tomorrow, I'll probably be "over it." I really hate this rollercoaster.

I wonder if I'm the only one in the world who does these awful things and feels these awful feelings. Like tonight, I think the feeling I was filled with was *hate*. Towards everything. I don't think I could even classify it as anger—I truly hated Scott. Strong word. I feel guilty, shame... I feel selfish. I feel everything I guess I could probably feel that is negative...

I just want to die sometimes. Just for a little while though. I don't want to die forever, so ...hmmm... that leaves that out. I shouldn't have married Scott, then Kadin wouldn't have died. I shouldn't have gotten married at all. I shouldn't have ever had children. I want this hurt to end. I feel like some sort of wicked psycho-freak right now. All these emotions running rampant inside of me and no place to put them. Well, no place constructive.

I don't know what else to do or say. I don't know anything anymore. ...Like I'll ever have another baby. Ha. Scott and I will probably end up divorced, and all my dreams for Alexandria will be f-ck'd up (my fault), and I'll never get to hold another baby in my arms. I keep feeling walls closing in on me. Sometimes I wish I could escape with drugs or alcohol. I won't, but sometimes I sure wish...

I'm sure I'll get punished for doing what I did tonight. Seems I get punished for everything. I can't do *anything* right. Nothing. I can't even be a good mother anymore. F*ck, I can't even be a good human being. How can I even think of being a good mother. Maybe I should just leave Scott and let him raise Alexandria without me. She'd probably be better off. I'm just a big ol' mess. She doesn't need me.

. . . . [text removed]

[February 1999]

We all feel better physically, but emotionally we were slammed today. My heart hurts soooo much... My sister-in-law had her baby today. She had a boy. Scott and I cried so hard. It's just not fair. I was so afraid she'd have a boy because if he gets her husband's looks (he's my husband's brother), then that means he'll look like my husband,

which means he'll look like Kadin. I am so freaked out right now... can hardly breathe...

I still cry quite a bit, and now especially. My SIL had her baby, a boy. I know nothing about him, not even his name because I just can't know anything right now. It's especially hard since she, who was a *very* dear friend besides being in our family, turned and walked away after Kadin's service, never to be heard from again. Well, except a couple of "Tell Paula I love her's" to Scott when he saw her. I don't understand that kind of "love." ::: sigh :::

. . . . [text removed]

Kadin's first year anniversary. I went alone to the cemetery with a blanket, two candles—one of which was lit at his Memorial Service—a flashlight, and some music. I spread the blanket, laid down next to him, and cried. I talked to him and told him how sorry I was and how much I loved him. I caressed the headstone I had lovingly designed. It had sweetpea flowers etched around the edge. Sweetpeas because Kadin was my baby pea. I touched his handprint, also etched true to size. His handprint... *I'll never get to touch his sweet fingers again.* I knew he died between 8:45 and 9:00 pm, and when all of the sudden, at 8:52 pm, two candles and the flashlight suddenly went out, I knew that he was telling me that that was his moment of death. *He reached out to me!* The second anniversary, I again went alone to the cemetery and again took a blanket and "the Candle." I sat alone with him and shared what the last year had been like. I laughed at the absurdity of it, thinking that if he knew, it's not because I told him on *this day*, but because he has known every step of the way. And, that if he didn't know, he wouldn't know because I was *telling* him. The third anniversary, I went again. Hello. I love you. Not much else. "The Candle" went with me. Life was easier. I had learned to live a little with his physical absence in my life.

My Miscarriages

I experienced disappointment and a great sadness with each of them. My first two miscarriages were very early (both at 6 weeks), and I felt that the egg/sperm connections had just not been made properly. The pregnancy I lost at 12 weeks was very difficult for me because my body showed every sign of my being very pregnant; however, I was

Honored Babies

never truly pregnant; I had what is called a blighted ovum. This was the third baby I didn't have with me before Alexandria arrived. My fourth miscarriage, at five and a half weeks, was two years after Kadin died, two days into his anniversary month. On that day, I wrote:

ravaged

trees hot dripping with sweat
mingling tears amongst their sticky dew

remembering that often their saplings
do not grow

They die

Eaten by birds
ravaged by the sun

Is a tree really a part of my reflection

It is
a part of me
nature

Isn't it supposed to be alive and fulfilling

Not
for me

Everything in my nature

dies

My baby sapling died

this morning

Ravaged by the same nature that burns
off the dew

Picked off as if
nothing
as if
doesn't matter

Does it matter
if do not know

i'll never know

The mother tree bleeds when cut
sap draining out of her heart
her baby died

and again
and again
and again
and again

Looking around
the new comes again
forcing breath to stop
in mother tree

She hates it
but keeps on reaching
toward the same

hot
sticky
mean

sun that takes hers away
because
she has to.

May 2002

The anger has subsided and the intense grief disappeared. It took a long time—a long time of working, talking, sharing and never ever giving up. It took allowing the anger to roll over me and it took me honoring everything I felt. It took making decisions that were difficult: selling the cloth diapers that were to encase Kadin's sweet, soft bottom, dumping several quarts of frozen breastmilk down the drain (that took me four years to do and was only after I had made some soap with it to give as gifts for some women who had been a tremendous help to me with Honored Babies), and allowing his beautiful garden grave to turn back into grass. It has been the hardest time and the hardest work of my life.

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I learned how to answer the questions “How many children do you have?” and “Is she your only child?” and “Is this your second baby?” (in relation to my current pregnancy). I always answer the same: “I have two children; one I am blessed to raise and one who died, my son.” If people take the “two-step” back, I no longer care, for I refuse, oh how I refuse, to be silent about *my children!* Kadin’s life is being honored in my refusal to be silenced, in my work with Honored Babies, and in my family’s love for him.

I’ve summed up the last few years very easily for those who understand what I’m talking about: year one was filled with intense grief, year two was about learning who I am and our family coming back together, year three was about learning to live with Kadin in our lives in a way that was comfortable with us, and year four has been about looking forward to a new baby in our lives. It took Scott and I over two years to learn to truly talk with one another again. We committed to our relationship a long time ago (16 years at Kadin’s death), and one day, we sat down and discussed if we were still as committed. We were and chose to renew our commitment to communicate. In this, the fourth year, we talk freely of our experiences, our heartbreak, our grief, our pain, our agony, our anger. We also talk about the joy and the wonderful gifts that Kadin brought to us. We still cry. We still hurt. And, we still grieve. We have not healed. We just have learned to live with our broken hearts.

Most of the relationships within our families have changed. I’m okay with that, and I’ve learned that it’s really okay not to have, or even want anymore, full-blown emotional involvement with them. My precious family has learned that standing, sometimes alone and without support, can be painful, but that we can do it because we have.

I’ve discovered one of my sisters knows me better than I ever thought she did. On my birthday this year, she gave me a card that reads on the front: “There are really two sides to you... the you that people expect you to be and the you that you really are.” This is something I’ve come to realize over the past year as I was again attempting to understand the abandonment from our many family members. I’ve always been seen as strong and surviving everything. I was expected to be that when Kadin died because it was how others saw me. It’s not who I really was. Not even now. I tell Scott often that I’m not as strong as everyone thinks I am... perhaps the truth is that

I'm not as strong as I wish I were or as I think I am. Life has hurt me. That's the truth in my life. By nature, I'm not cynical, but I sometimes want to give up hope. I fight it constantly because I believe so incredibly much in hope and "good things."

I still cry. I cry because Kadin is dead. I cry because I *still* don't know where the infection came from that killed my son and almost killed me—and I probably never will. I cry because my life didn't work out the way I wanted it to. I cry because Alexandria has endured so much in her young life. I cry because I'm still learning who I am. I cry because people still say cruel things. I cry because I have a new baby growing inside of me, and I live between trust and fear—trust that this baby is a different baby and my body is going through a different pregnancy, and fear that this baby will too die... because I am no longer naive enough to think it couldn't happen to me or it couldn't happen again. I cry, well, because I cry.

I cry because I finally *got it*: life *is* empty and meaningless.

I cry because I knew that all along, but I refused to believe it. Until now. Because life is an empty vessel that I can fill however I like, I feel I've been given a great gift—I can make Kadin's life and death mean anything I want! And, so I have...

. . . . [text removed]

Paula Long, mom to
Baby Long, miscarried November 26, 1987 at 6 weeks,
Baby Long, miscarried July 1, 1992 at 6 weeks,
Baby Long, miscarried September 1, 1994 at 12 weeks,
Alexandria Kaelin Barr Long, born November 20, 1995,
Kadin Scott William Long, born still July 29, 1998,
Baby Long, miscarried July 2, 2000 at 5½ weeks, and
Christian Scott Kadin Long, born September 24, 2002