

Donnali  
fifield's  
Ground  
Breaking  
Work

Am I A  
Mother?  
by Cathy  
Fritea

# A Different Kind of Parenting

And mor e...

A 'zine for Parents  
whose children have died

The Dr eaded  
HalIMar k  
Holidays

Be Str ong  
for your wife:  
Looking at  
Gender  
Segregation

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## Note from the Editor

Spring has sprung, and we now face the dreaded Mother's Day and Father's Day. For some of us, the dread is slightly relieved as we are able to have the loving touch of our surviving children. But all of us know that on days like these, the children who are no longer with us are missed terribly.

My husband and I have not had another child since the death of our only son Dakota three years ago. I find that while we are functioning more as time passes, the holidays are still very difficult. My husband has two grown children from his first marriage. His daughter is about to have her first child. And I have so many complicated feelings about it all. At times I am down right jealous that my husband still gets to be a parent. At other times I feel plain old left out because this new addition to our family is not really my grandchild, not blood related, you know? My husband is dangling between pride at being a grandfather and serious twinges of ache for his own dead son. It makes Mother's Day and Father's Day very complicated for all of us.

Since it has all become so complicated for me, I've engaged a few others to contribute this issue just to give everyone some more diversity in perspective here! Cathy Fritea offers us "Am I a Mother?" and Falcao Borgen offers "Be Strong for your Wife" both of which have opened my eyes in so many different ways. We also have some information about the groundbreaking work Donnali Fifield is doing in the Grief Therapy revolution. Very interesting works! Hope you find something here to help you through the "Days"!

Miracles to you...  
Kara L.C. Jones, Editor

If you know of a grief resource for parents, a quote that inspires you on those dark, painful nights, or have a short poem you've written in memory of your child, write to us. We'd like to hear from you.

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## *Be Strong for your Wife*

By Falcao Borgen

You need to be strong for your wife.

What have you decided to do with the remains?

Well, talk it over with your wife, but be gentle, we don't want to upset her.

Here fill out these forms and here is the number for the funeral home. You'll need to make arrangements with them alone.

Here is a collection of lovely urns to choose from, and how is your wife doing. We feel so deeply for her.

Oh, your wife lost the baby?

I am so sorry for her!

Can you give me her email address so I can send her my condolences?

We have a women's group for mothers who have lost their babies. Be sure to let her know she's always welcome.

We want your wife to teach a grief seminar at our Grief & Support Conference for Mothers.

We are going to interview your wife for NPR about the death of your son, but you can wait here in the lobby till we are done.

Oh you're just the dad

Oh you're just a man

Don't you know your place?

Go to the back of the bus boy, you don't belong here

I am a dad

I am a man

I am alone

I am hurting

I am broken

I miss my son

Why will you not grant me the right  
to give voice to my grief?

I bleed on the inside

I am a human being,

remember?!?

Every time you deny my grief

another piece of my heart joins my son in death.

### *Editor's Note:*

*I have long believed that segregation is segregation regardless of whether it is racial or gender based. While I am a "feminist," I believe the "women's movement" has fallen severely short of its aims because we have now created all these "women only" events, workshops, conferences, and more. Separate but equal didn't work for the civil rights fight, so why should we call it "victory" now? As the mother of a dead son, I stood by and watched as my own husband was systematically segregated out of the grieving process. We had many similar things happen to us as Falcao has written about here. If you segregate dads out of the grieving process, the distance between mom and dad grows larger and larger till we end up with this current statistic: 80% of couples break up after the death of a child. How can we stand by and let loss upon loss happen in this culture?*

## *Am I a Mother?*

**By Cathy Fritea**

In short, yes. But in March 1998, I don't think I knew how to answer that question until I received a gift in the mail. I opened the mailbox a day before Mother's Day and I could tell by the envelope that it was a sappy Hallmark. But, it wasn't my birthday. I headed up my long driveway and slowly started opening the card. "To a Special Mom on Mother's Day." My heart stopped for a moment as my hand quivered along the edge of the card. A happy tear dropped onto the words that read, "You are the best mom Daniel could ever have." A tailspin of emotions led to a very proud sensation. It was that moment that I realized I am a mother. Somebody else realized it to. She did the same for my husband on Father's Day.

Daniel Ethan was stillborn on March 14, 1998. He was my first-born son and at 41 ½ weeks pregnant, I could have never been prepared for what was about to happen to my life. You spend all of your pregnancy preparing. First, your diet changes and you become much more aware of smoky rooms and speeding cars. Cautious is an understatement for the way I handled my first pregnancy. Everything by the book! I had a new library in my house from conception to raising toddlers. Halfway through my pregnancy we found out we were having a boy. After that, Daniel was very much a part of our lives. But, nothing prepared us for saying Good-bye before we could say hello. We actually found out about his passing on Friday the 13th. After seventeen hours of anguish, Daniel was brought from what should have been his safe haven into our lives in silence. I thank God we were able to spend some time with Daniel and touch his beautiful face. A few days later, with empty arms, a bleeding heart, and breasts leaking of milk that was meant to nourish my baby, I went home.

The next months were full of shock, sadness, anger and the desire to know and understand why this had happened. I had worked so hard to do everything right. And, with all losses there is always the guilt. As I worked hard on the healing process through sharing, reading, quiet times and writing, I was amazed at my comfort in reading other stories and poems about parents who lost a baby or child. Parents sharing their most intimate thoughts and pouring their pain into words that only another bereaved parent would understand completely. My real healing started when I connected on an Internet site created by Dr. Michael Berman of Yale New Haven Hospital in Connecticut. Dr. Berman practices much more than medicine. He practices spiritual healing through loss by putting into words what very few people can. The first poem I read was entitled "Quiet Time." He wrote about a mother who lost her baby during labor. The poem is only ten lines and I could barely get through the first few. I also met and connected with another mom who lost her baby Stefan and together we would e-mail our thoughts, share poems and stories and encourage each other about our future. I still have not had the opportunity to meet her but she is a gift in my life beyond measure.

Getting through the first year of loss is a journey full of experiences. Trying to maintain the relationships already in your life and thriving on new ones. Hoping your pain will ease and there will be a NORMAL in your life again. Trying to fit in with the same worldviews as everyone else. Until you realize, you are not the same. And that's o.k. My life as a mom to Daniel really made sense as I was driving down an expressway and looked up into the clouds as I passed the exit to where he was buried at The Gates of Heaven. Warmth and

## *Am I a Mother...continued*

peace wrapped me like a soft comforting blanket. I began to notice how beautiful and serene everything was. Daniel was connecting with me just as we had already done. From that day on I began to feel a purpose and strong desire to reach out to others and to help them find peace after loss. I understood the beauty of our lives no matter how short or long. I respect more, I love more and I listen more. There is so much our life has to offer us if we just open our hearts to guidance. I felt so fulfilled that I knew even if I never had any other children, my life was good. I had found my peace through mysterious and profound grief. I had to look deep inside myself and find the purpose and the meaning of all the relationships in my life.

Although I experienced another pregnancy loss seven months after losing Daniel, I now have a beautiful one-year old named Nikolas Vaughn. Nikolas was born with a cyst on his liver and had to undergo a four-hour life threatening operation at The Children's Hospital at Yale in Connecticut when he was two months old. The cyst was benign and today he is a healthy, thriving, miracle baby. He brings joy to my heart everyday and just when I think I can't love him anymore than I do, he wrinkles his nose and reaches out to me muttering Ma..Ma.

In closing, I know how difficult it must be to be on the other end of a tragic loss. To be the family member, friend, clergy or co-worker of someone who has just lost a family member. I believe God instantly gives anyone who is moved by the reality of a tragedy the credentials for grief counseling. Usually, the bereaved person will not want to discuss theology or philosophies right away, they just need another person to be there. All the rest comes in time.

As part of finding purpose after Daniel's death, I established an on-line bereavement and sympathy resource center for anyone experiencing the loss of miscarriage, stillbirth or infant or loss of any kind. Also on the site we offer inspirational angels, poems and books. Hope you will join us at [www.RainbowMaker.org](http://www.RainbowMaker.org)!

### *Reprint Permission*

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### *Editor's Note:*

*For all of us, it is difficult to find purpose and definition after the death of a child. It might seem like an easy answer to dismiss Cathy's ideas based on the fact that she is fortunate to have another child after two losses. But Cathy's belief in purpose and peace in life after the death of a child is born out of the fact she knows how precious and fleeting this life is for all of us. She seems to not take the day to day details for granted, but rather to have found ways to be grateful for who she has become since Daniel's death. I'm proud to say that her book "Tiny Hands Change the World" will be released in paperback from KotaPress in May 2002. We're honored to have played a small part in the legacy Cathy is creating in Daniel's memory.*

## *Donnali Fifield's Ground Breaking Work*

**By Kara L.C. Jones**

Back in the Fall of 2001, I got an email from Donnali Fifield asking if I would take a look at an essay she had written as part of her book "William & Wendell: A Family Remembered" and consider it for publication in our online Loss Journal at KotaPress.com. In December 2001, Donnali's essay "Aggrieved" was published in our Loss Journal, and this May 2002 her afterword "Let the Guinea Pigs Speak" is being published (also in the Loss Journal).

Don't let the titles of these excerpts fool you. While the titles are "catchy" and the idea of guinea pigs talking might solicit a giggle, Donnali's writing is hard core advocacy work that bereaved families have been in need of for a long time. This writing looks "grief professionals" in the face, talks their "professional lingo," and stands in staunch defense of bereaved families who must face the aftermath of life after the deaths of their children.

These writings came from Donnali's personal experience with life after the deaths of her father and her twin boys. She takes a hard look, not always a popular one, at the language of grief therapists, self-help books, and even of family and friends. She shows us how, "... phrases—platitudes—set up overwhelming demands on me to feel, at a time when I was most vulnerable and powerless, that I should be active in patching up my pain." Somehow in that vulnerability Donnali found the strength required to question the "popular" ideas being thrown at her, to ask why there would ever be "closure" when for the rest of her life she will be living without her children. More than that, she made herself learn the language of the grief therapy world in order to counter these ideas on their own turf!

A basic major premise as I see it in Donnali's works is this: You don't heal from grief after the death of your child. You simply learn ways to be alive while accepting the fact that your child is dead. There is no closure to that process. It doesn't get healed and go away. And yet we live in a culture where the therapists, the books, even our family and friends insist upon having us "get over it" or setting a time limit on grief. \*AND THEN\* they make us feel guilty if we aren't "over it" or are still talking about our children three years (or 30 years) later.

These are realities for most bereaved families I meet. But giving voice to them is not popular nor accepted in grief theory nor in our culture at large. And if you try question a therapist about ideas like "closure" and "healing," they will often switch from their "warm, fuzzy" mode to their academic mode and try to tromp you with the codified language of grief and healing theory. Donnali found strength and voice in her vulnerability, learned their language, and writes some \*POWERFUL\* works here in defense and in advocacy for bereaved people. She proposes new paradigms for letting people grieve in whatever ways they need and want. She proposes that it is wrong for care givers to guilt or shame bereaved people for not finding "closure" and "healing." She validates that grief has long-term effects — grief is indeed about living the *rest of your life* without your loved one who has died. That reality is a fact does not end nor get "resolved." And that's the truth.

If you have ever encountered a therapist or family member who shamed you or made you feel guilty for whatever your bereavement has looked like, I highly recommend that you get a copy of Donnali's book and give the book to them as a present. Bookmark the essays "Aggrieved" & "Let the Guinea Pigs Speak" and then ask them to read carefully.

This is advocacy that is long overdue!

## *Memorials*

For Dakota Jones, born and died March 11, 1999 at 4:47 p.m. I still hate mother's day, Kota. I miss you so much. Kept thinking that as time went by, it would get easier. Guess it is easier to function, but it still sucks to be without you. My heart aches while Hallmark promotes a version of parenthood that seems to not include our family. I love you. So does Daddy. Hope you can still hear us...

For Charles, Katie I's beloved son...

For Daniel, Cathy's beloved son...

For William and Wendell, Donnali's beloved twins...

For Micah, Damary's beloved son...

For Amy Dawn, Jen's beloved daughter and first born...

For Cheyenne, Jo's beloved baby girl...

And for all of our children — who we so dearly miss!

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Make a memorial sponsorship of \$10 to the Mrs. Duck Project, and we'll place a dedication and/or photo in these memorial listings for you. Feel free to call 206-251-6706 or email [info@kotapress.com](mailto:info@kotapress.com) with questions. Send memorial sponsorships to: SeattleMISS Mrs. Duck Project c/o KotaPress, PO Box 514, Vashon, WA 98070.

## *The Dreaded Hallmark Holidays*

When Mother's Day and Father's Day are just too difficult to handle, you might try doing something entirely different. Spend those days writing emails to greeting card companies demanding that they begin carrying Mother's Day and Father's Day cards for bereaved parents, too. Find out if the MISSing Angels bill is being proposed in your state. If so, spend your day writing letters to promote the issuance of Still Birth Certificates rather than Death Certificates for bereaved families. Spend the day writing or scrapbooking or making a memory box for and about your child. Get a stack of "Kindness Cards" from the MISS Foundation, and spend the day doing things for others while handing out the cards. Take a walk in the woods. Go swimming. Throw rocks at the sea side. Take care of you in whatever way you need. It is okay to not feel okay on these made-up holidays!

## *Subscription Information*

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## **KotaPress Mission Statement**

This press was started as a safe haven where we could publish our grief and healing artworks. Since its inception, KotaPress has extended this safe haven to other bereaved parents, artists, and poets around the world. We aim to continue offering a home for artworks created by artists who are on a healing path regardless of the tragedy that put them on the path in the first place.

## **KotaPress Objectives**

We offer both print and electronic media for the display and sale of these artworks. These media include the [www.KotaPress.com](http://www.KotaPress.com), a website outreach offering monthly online Loss, Poetry & Art Journals; the Loss Journal houses "The Dictionary of Loss," Articles, Grief Support Links, and SeattleM.I.S.S. information; an eStore where we retail books, cds, art, and classes.

Our print outreach includes the quarterly 'zine A Different Kind of Parenting: For Parents Whose Children Have died; The Mrs. Duck Project providing free e-copies of the grief support book Mrs. Duck and The Woman to bereaved families around the world; and many print books such as Flash Of Life, Father Son Holy Ghost, Unforeseen, Complexions, Tiny Hands and more.

Additionally, we offer one-on-one sessions to individuals seeking healing or creative consults. Sessions are offered in person at our Vashon Island location, via email, or your location when travel expense provisions are considered. We offer Poetry Therapy, BodyWrites!, Expanding Poetry, Self-Publishing Made Easy, Guerilla Bookmaking workshops, and custom consults for clients wishing to publish books that in some way focus on grief and healing.

**KotaPress PO Box 514, Vashon Island, WA 98070 [www.KotaPress.com](http://www.KotaPress.com)**

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**You will always be a parent.  
Nothing, not even death can change that.  
-Nanna Memoo  
Dakota's Grandma**

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