

In the  
Tender  
Stages

Review:  
Stillborn  
by DeFrain

and more...

# Different Kind of Parenting:

A 'zine for Parents  
whose children have died

A Need  
to Glean  
Meaning

Doing the  
Baby Shower  
Thing...Ugh!

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## Notes from the Editor

Summer has arrived here in the northern hemisphere, and it is a complicated season for me. This is the third summer without my son, and I keep seeing little ones with water wings on, learning to swim, screeching joyously when their little toes hit the cold water under the warm sun. And I ache.

Yet at the same time, my best friend, a local friend, and my stepdaughter are all pregnant and expecting healthy, successful deliveries in the Fall. They are at the height of planning baby showers and doing the nesting thing. So how do I make all these paradoxes live together in my heart and mind?

It's difficult. I see the sun and ache. My friends and stepdaughter see the sun and plan. And I am in a position where I have to learn how to fully express my experience without denying them the fullness of their experiences, too. I think this is the crucial point at which a bereaved parent becomes closeted and begins to live in silence with whatever pain still resonates from the deaths of their own children.

I'm trying to stop that from happening in my own life. Trying instead to create an outlet here where those of the same experience can express the fullness of these paradoxes without worries of stepping on the hopes and plans of others, without instilling fears where there need not be fears, while honoring the lives and deaths of our children and the continued impact of our life-after-death survival.

Maybe the censorship of my conversations around those who have not lived after the death of a child is inevitable. But I firmly believe that this particular censorship does not have to mean silence. So here I am again, running my mouth to you, dear reader, hoping there is something here to help in some small way for whatever your current experience is.

My heart to you all as we get through the long days of summer!  
Kara L.C. Jones, Editor@KotaPress.com

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## *In the Tender Stages*

By Kara L.C. Jones

Although I am now three years out from my son's death date, I still remember being so very tender about \*everything\* in those early days of grief. I remember because I am still tender in some spots! It's difficult in those early days to know how to explain your raging, bereaved-parent-feelings and difficult for others to know how to support us.

I remember several things that masqueraded as "support" but came off as terribly hurtful. These kinds of hurts will vary for all of us, but I'll share the specifics of my memories here.

Example: A friend's mother sent me a note and said, "Sorry you miscarried. Thinking of you. We just returned from a great visit with our grandchildren..." Hello?!

Let me tell you that one way you can support bereaved parents is to find out the **specific** details of the child's death and then refer to those details **specifically**!!! My son was not miscarried, he was stillborn. It might seem like a little mistake if you've never lost a child yourself, but if you are a bereaved parent, then it is an \*important\* detail that shows if people really care or not. In my interpretation of her note, she didn't really care enough to find out the truth about what happened to us. Our son was something she could just gloss over, not bother to mention his name, not bother to find out how he died. It was insulting.

Then, let me also tell you that another way you provide support is to just "be with" the bereaved parent in the loss of their child. DO NOT try to assuage your fears of death by immediately throwing your healthy children and/or grandchildren in the faces of the bereaved parents. I understand that maybe my friend's mother was trying to emphasize the living or the possibility of my someday-chance of having other kids by referring in her sympathy card to her own living, healthy, toddler grandchildren. But HELLOOOOO!!!???? How exactly is a bereaved parent suppose to react to comments like this? Is it the dream of the "support" person that the bereaved parents will breakdown and say something like, "Oh yes, your precious grandchildren, you are so lucky, how wonderful you could spend time with them when I'm so unlucky that I could only hold my dead child, cremate, and put his sticky ashes in an urn. It's so good you had a nice visit with your grandchildren." HELLO!?

Let me try to explain it even more clearly: If you are a support person for a bereaved parent, anything in your life gets put on the shelf outside the door for now. You can pick it up on the way out, you can fill in the bereaved parent at a later date, and you should be willing to do that if you are putting yourself in the position of "support." You can just be there, hold a hand, give a hug, listen to the ranting, make them something to eat, ask open ended questions about the child and the events that have just occurred. Don't try to fix it. Don't offer advice. Don't, don't, don't offer platitudes like "It was God's will" NOR "You're young, you can try again" etc.. None of those is helpful!

If you still don't get the picture, then I offer this metaphor. Imagine the bereaved parent as a hand that has been smashed with a hammer— crushed bones, swollen, bleeding, limp and in terrible pain. Treat that parent as tenderly and with as much care as you would treat that crushed hand. For I tell you truly, that the tender stages feel very much like that and everything hurts. Be most careful with the bereaved during this time because whatever you do will be remembered!

## *Doing the baby shower thing...ugh!*

**By Kara L.C. Jones**

Yeah, okay, eventually bereaved parents will have to come to terms with other babies in the family, friends' pregnancies, and the dreaded baby shower thing. I'm not saying that you'll be ready for any of that in the first month or year or three years even. I'm not saying you'll ever be ready to deal with it if you have had to endure the death of your own baby. But I am saying that eventually we all come to face it and must decide how to handle it for ourselves.

Again all I can offer is my own personal experience. I'm sure you have your own "war stories" from dealing with these issues. And I have to say that for a full three years after my son's death, I simply did not deal with these issues at all. I didn't go to family holidays, I didn't have any friends who were pregnant, and I stayed away from any work situation where a baby shower might come into play.

But now, in the third year, I have at least four friends and one stepdaughter who are all pregnant. So whatever I didn't want to face in those three years past, has all come to visit me with a very loud banging on my front door. And it isn't the kind of knocking you can sleep through. You have to answer or it will just seep through the windows and drain pipes. I have to deal with it.

I guess first I have to say that my reactions to subsequent pregnancies after the death of a baby are *\*totally\** different than my reactions to friends and relatives who still get to be naïve about pregnancy and birthing. When it is a family who has already lost a child, I know their terror, I share their hopes and prayers, and I am able to celebrate and breathe sighs of relief when the child is born healthy and alive.

But when it is a naïve family— even one who was with us through the death of our child— my reactions are so different. I run the gamut of fear, jealousy, anger, sadness, some joy and hope. It has nothing, for the most part to do with them— it has everything to do with me. *Even when it's a family who was with us through the death of our son*, they don't understand on a reality level what my reality is like. And I can no longer understand their reality. They may have fears, too, and some of those shadow issues that come with becoming a parent. But they can still revel in pure hope and happiness and excitement about a baby shower and diaper service and day care and on and on and on.

All I think when I am around this is: You should wait to see if you get to bring a baby home or if you will just get a jar of cremated ashes like we did. It's awful. I can't say that outloud to anyone. I would never want to hurt them that way nor to impose my fears upon them. But that's the truth about what I experience in these situations. So what am I going to do about it now that I have to actually face it with friends and family?

Well, I try to not run and hide. Sometimes I still do. I try to censor myself— making certain that have outlets for the honesty of my feelings in places like this, so that I don't become closeted or completely silent. I try to open my heart to that child and let him/her know that we love him/her very much, now, no matter what happens, and that s/he is so wanted and loved. I try to live out all the paradoxes that my life has become.

And I tell myself that I don't have to have all the answers nor be totally healed in order to witness the safe arrival of another child into this world. I deal — and *\*know\** that to love another is in no way a betrayal of my own precious son.

## *A Need to Glean Meaning*

**By Kara L.C. Jones**

At some point on this journey of grief, I came to decide that there had to be some larger meaning to my son's death. It couldn't possibly be pointless, because if it was, I would just dive head long into the ocean and never surface again. There had to be some meaning.

This is not to say that I made this decision consciously. It was a very unconscious thing actually. For the most part, I just needed something to do with all the energy and love I had been ready to pour into the raising of my son. I now had no outlet for the time, money, love, and energy I would have spent on my son. And I was drowning in all that was unvented!

So my husband Hawk and I started KotaPress. I had written a few poems and a little story called Mrs. Duck and The Woman. We decided we would publish these works ourselves. Maybe we'd even start a website to try and do some outreach to other parents. Soon we were publishing other authors, running monthly issues of our online Journals, teaching at conferences about the healing power of art.

I began to meet people who would say things like, "Your work is amazing" or "You've created an amazing legacy for your child" or "How do you do it all?". It's hard to find responses to all that. I really didn't plan any of this. It happened pretty organically. And Hawk and I have grown with it.

But looking at all of it with the view of over three years behind us (our whole lives ahead of us), I realized that we had created a meaning and reason for our son's life and death. Not that we wouldn't ditch this in exchange for having our son back—in a heartbeat I'd do that. But we don't have that choice. So to survive, we created some purpose and meaning out of this insane event.

A woman recently wrote to me and said she had told her aunt whose son had died that she was so sorry for that tragic event. Her aunt responded, "No. The tragedy would have been to never have had him at all."

In the early days of my loss, I would have scoffed at that and just screamed to have my son back. But now? Well, now, I get it. Now I realize that I *did* birth my son, I do have my son with me every single day. This creation, this press, this work, gives my life meaning, gives me a connection back to the world at large and a continued connection with my son, gives me the chance to say my son's name everyday when I answer the phone saying, "Hi, you've reached the home of Kota."

I'm not saying that we all glean meaning from creating small presses. I *am* saying that we all find ways to channel the love and energy we have for our child. Or at least, those of us who are lucky enough to find support for our ideas, feelings, and outlets—we find ways. I'm saying that support people in our lives should be helping us by letting us go in whatever directions we feel will bring meaning to our rage and anger. I'm saying that even if we still think that the deaths of our children are senseless, we find some way to reconnect and gain a purpose of raising awareness or kindness or compassion in the world. We find some way to survive. And hopefully become willing to help other bereaved parents survive, too.

And maybe, just maybe, in that survival, we find something that approaches a meaning, or at the very least, something larger than the rage the engulfs us in those first days of grief.

## Book Reviews

By Kara L.C. Jones

***Stillborn: The Invisible Death***, ISBN 0-669-11354-9, by John DeFrain with Leona Martens, Jan Stork, Warren Stork, From the University of Nebraska & Lexington Books

FABULOUS BOOK!!!! Had the good fortune to meet John DeFrain at the MISS conference this year, and I have to tell you that this book is the literary manifestation of the man I met-- to a T! This is a stunning collection because it is so thorough and inclusive of many points of view, but also because it was written and compiled in the early 1980s!!! Based on this work, I cannot imagine \*why\* the support system for bereaved parents in this country sucks so badly! I would venture to say support still sucks because this book is \*not\* mandatory reading for every doctor, nurse, care giver, social worker, family member on the planet!!!! IT SHOULD BE!

It's difficult in this little review to tell you everything that's here in this book. I encourage you to get a copy and read it-- trust me. But I will say a few things. One, this book is a compilation of interviews with 350 bereaved parents across the U.S.. The interviews were thorough and let the parents address anything and everything you can think of-- anything and everything that you have experienced if you are a bereaved parent yourself. DeFrain is true to his mission and represents every voice here. No one is left out. Every point of view is expressed.

The other amazing thing is that DeFrain is obviously here. I mean he obviously read and heard the interviews with these parents and was \*affected\* by that on an emotional level. But his academic stance does not get in the way or try to hide any of that. He facilitates the reality of these bereaved parents without canceling out their experience through the use of that academic or clinical speak you sometimes find in other books. This is not to say he hasn't presented a work that isn't worthy of inclusion in any academic or medical setting! I'll say again that anyone who has or might have contact with bereaved parents should be required to read this book!

There is an amazing section included here for addressing surviving siblings. I have seen more and more children's books coming onto the market to address grief, but this book by DeFrain shares an insider view of several hundred families and how they have coped with stillbirth. I think this is an invaluable discussion of sibling grief. There is information here about how "it is almost normal to go a bit crazy" after a stillbirth and there is validation for how "very few people [who haven't experienced stillbirth firsthand] have any idea how long it takes to recover from this crisis." DeFrain talks about all kinds of coping techniques including enduring bitterness, ambivalence during a subsequent pregnancy and more. And he addresses these issues directly without \*WITHOUT\* without judgment. He simply shows what all of us go through but rarely find safe space in which to discuss or acknowledge.

There is also an amazing transcript in the back of the book that will give you a real feel for what a support group - a good one - functions like. And there is a sample questionnaire that you can fill out just as the 350 parent contributors filled out for this book. And there is soooooo much more! I literally have about 100 out of 245 pages marked in one way or another. There just isn't any way for me to incorporate everything here without going into a lengthy discussion. So let me just share the following quote from the book and tell you to GET THIS BOOK AND READ IT!!!

*"Most family members who do not talk about the baby, we presume, avoid doing so because death makes them feel uncomfortable. In general, we believe that this is a dreadful mistake. A conspiracy of silence envelops the grieving parents and makes it more difficult for them to heal rather than less. We have heard hundreds of parents talk bitterly of this conspiracy. A baby may be dead, but the fact that the baby once lived is much more important and must be recognized by remembering and talking."*

## *Memorials*

For Dakota Jones, born and died March 11, 1999 at 4:47 p.m. I miss you so much!  
For Blake, Katie H's beloved son...  
For Isabel, Therese's beloved daughter and first born...  
For Nora Elizabeth, Christine's beloved daughter...  
For Camille, Richard & Sharons' beloved daughter...  
For Joel, Nancy's beloved son...  
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.

## *Submission Guidelines*

If you know of a grief resource for parents, a quote that inspires you on those dark, painful nights, or have a one page article about grief & healing, or a short poem you've written in memory of your child, write to us. We'd like to hear from you. Send your work via email—cut and paste directly into the email, please. No attachments will be opened. Include a few lines of a bio along with your submission, too. And in the subject line of you're your email, please type, "Different Kind of Parenting Submission."

Email: [info@kotapress.com](mailto:info@kotapress.com)  
URL: [www.KotaPress.com](http://www.KotaPress.com)  
Phone: 206-251-6706

## *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. Session 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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