

Four Years?
Really?!

On
Film

and more...

Different Kind of Parenting:

A 'zine for Parents
whose children have died

Free
Writing

Call to
Libraries

Kindness
Projects
To Stay
Sane

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Notes from the Editor

Welcome to Volume 3 of our little print zine! While I wish none of you had reason to be here reading this, I am hopeful that maybe this little bitty publication will bring some comfort, solace, meaning, resolve, something to you as you move through life after the death of your child.

We recently curated an art show here on our island, and in the publicity for it, I had to come up with some way to describe why the art involved was important. In thinking about the art for that show and about the creative outlets we've worked on since our son's death, I came to a place of realization. Our grandparents were closeted and silenced about their grief. They were not allowed to give voice to their continued parenthood after the death of a child. And it was awful for them as far as I can tell. And I realized that our KotaPress and this little zine and all the communications I have with other bereaved parents are all about one thing:

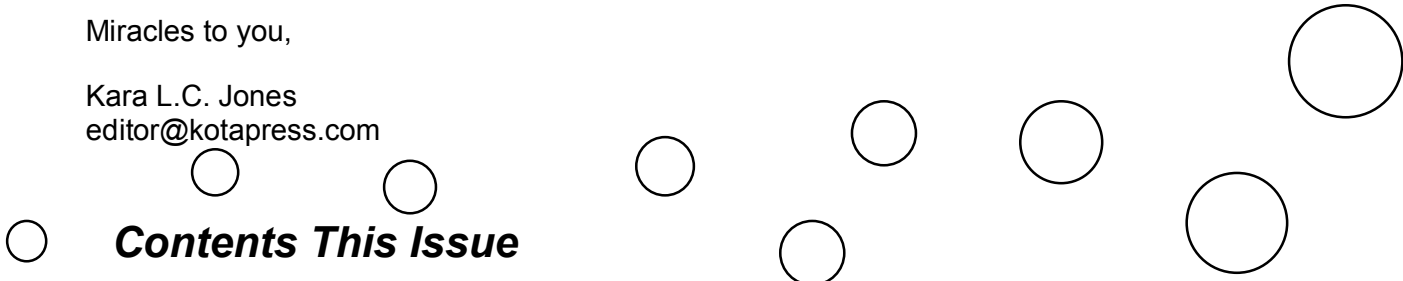
Giving voice to our experiences over long periods of time

If such a thing as "healing" does really exist, I do not think it is about "getting over it" or "shutting up about it" or "moving on" even. I think it is about giving voice to the traumatic experience over and over and over again as time passes. It is about how that voice changes and evolves with time. It is about using that voice as we learn to live life after the deaths of our children.

I hope that in this issue, and in all of them to come, you continue to find a voice here that validates your experiences as a bereaved parent. And I hope you will be in touch with us to contribute works to future issues. Your voices are needed here!

Miracles to you,

Kara L.C. Jones
editor@kotapress.com



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Four Years? Really?!

By Kara L.C. Jones

It is hard to believe that on March 11 of this year, my son Dakota should be celebrating his 4th birthday. Would we be having a Tigger themed party or maybe Mickey Mouse or Buzz Lightyear? How tall would he be? What would his voice sound like? Would he sing silly songs or be sleepy-cranky in the mornings when we would get ready for pre-school? Would he like to swim? Draw pictures? Dream of being a fireman someday?

No, I will never know the answers to any of these questions, and dreaming up answers is often just plain-old-depressing. My Dakota was stillborn at 4:47pm four years ago on a Thursday afternoon. A sunny Thursday afternoon. Can you believe that the sun had the audacity to shine on the day my child died? I can't either. And it will probably shine this year without him, too. It stunk then. It will stink this year. I hate being without my son.

And, at the same time, I have to look at my life and see what it is like since his death. Mind you, I would trade it all in half a heartbeat, but since I can't do that, I feel the need to look at the imprint his short life and quick death have had on me in these four years.

Amazing, courageous people have come into my life since my son's death. Thousands of other bereaved parents. These are not just people who must endure the death of a child, but they also endure so many other things:

- The loss of friends who disappear after the death because of some random hang up like they don't want to think about children dying because then they'd have to face their own mortality or that of their own children. Or that they want the bereaved parents to "get better" or "get over it" and be like they were before the death. Or a million other weird reasons.
- The loss of family who refuse to let the dead child continue as part of the family tree with some recognition of the child on holidays or birth/death dates or everyday. Sometimes family members refuse this because they think it's "crazy" for the parents to remember the child when they should just "get over it" or they do it because they don't want explain death to surviving or subsequent children in the family. Or a million other weird reasons.
- There are often significant financial losses from the sudden expenses of funeral or memorial services, other purchases like urn or casket, burial plot, breast pump (there will be no breast feeding); the loss on the purchases of all the baby items they will never use; and add that to the fragile grief state that often results in the loss of time on the job. And at times, even the loss of a job all together — I blame this on insensitivity in our culture! The performance and perspective of the "worker" will be significantly different after the death of a child, but the "employer" often doesn't care about changes or adjustment periods, only that the performance is different. And so bereaved parents often face financial stresses that they would not have faced if the child had lived.

Bereaved parents endure these things on top of the grief and loss of a child! And the isolation of it all is overwhelming. I had days when I felt it would have been best to drive into a tree and call my life to an end. I have chosen to stay, hang tough these four year

Four years con't...

because of the strength and guidance of so many other bereaved parents. They have shown me the way through the darkest hours, given me support on my lowest days, shared humor with me when I found the energy to finally laugh again, and understood the everyday life of a parent after the death of a child. I am thoroughly grateful for the everyday presence of these other parents in my life — though I do wish we could have all met under different circumstances.

My sense of isolation decreases as I meet these other parents. After the death of a child, your world shrinks to the size of a pea — and that pea is made up of you, your partner (maybe), your grief, and the legacy you want to create to keep your child's name alive. Trying to reach out from that shrunken world takes more energy than most bereaved parents imagine they will ever have again. But my connections with one bereaved parent after another, helped me to re-connect with the world at large. Whether in person or online, through my published works or my handmade artworks, via phone, chat room, or library meeting room — every connection was another pull away from that drive into the tree. Every connection was another chance to share my son's name with another person who could truly appreciate the importance of that legacy.

Our work at KotaPress, with the MISS Foundation, with the National Stillbirth Society — all of that is work driven by mission. I am not doing the meaningless corporate thing. I am not a starving artist for the sake of being chic. All our work is about reconnecting with the world at large while never losing connection with our child who died, about keeping Dakota's name alive. I could never have dreamed of doing work that is this authentic to my heart.

It's a mixed bag of blessings. These are all gifts for which I am grateful. And yet I cannot believe it has been four years. And I still wonder how Kota would have wanted to celebrate his fourth birthday. Still wonder what he would have become as his own person.

On Film

By Kara L.C. Jones

Experiences of miscarriage and stillbirth are finally being given voice on film! There are a couple of films now available that may prove to be **very** helpful for training care givers to be more sensitive to pregnancy and infant loss families and helpful to bereaved families as they look for reflections of others who understand them.

I cannot recommend *Losing Layla* highly enough. It can be hard to get your hands on outside of Australia, but Cinemax has recently aired it here in the U.S. so we should be able to get it through them now. The Cinemax online information about it is at:
http://www.cinemax.com/losing_layla.shtml

Clouds That Touch Us is a film by Lynn Shelton about the reality of miscarriage. While I have a little hesitation about the ending that seems to indicate adoption as a solution to grief, I do think the film as a whole gives voice to some realities people just don't think about! Like how women who miscarry often times give birth — yes, birth! — to baby, cord, and placenta whole and in-tact! There's information at: <http://www.thinksmall.org/clouds>

Kindness Projects To Stay Sane

By Kara L.C. Jones

Kindness Projects were the dream of Joanne Caccitore, founder of the MISS Foundation. She wanted to create a way for us to offer random acts of kindness to others — done in the name and memory of our children who died. It is an amazing way to offer something good in the world *and* to share your child's name with random people. There is full information about Kindness Projects online at the MISS site at www.missfoundation.org if you want to know more about how to get involved.

I wanted offer the connection to Kindness Projects here as a way to stay sane in the face of the insane reality that we live as parents who must endure the rest of our lives without our children. There is so much energy we gave or planned to give to parenting. Love, time, brain power, heart, money, guidance. And when your child dies, you lose the focus and direction for all these things. They still exist within you. In fact, these things now overwhelm you because they seem to have no outlet. And being overwhelmed is frustrating. And the frustration leads to the angries. And those mean angries can be a real pain in the behind as you try to figure out how to live without your kid.

So what do we do with all that?

Well, we here at KotaPress have a “Mrs. Duck Philosophy” that's derived from the book *Mrs. Duck and the Woman* where by we offer ideas for things bereaved parents can do in order to keep the memory and name of their dead child alive. Doing things that use up the love and time and money, and give direction to all that seemed lost when your child died. Kindness Projects are manifestations of that philosophy which prompt bereaved parents to do something good for others and to offer an actual card with your child's name on it at the time you do the random act of kindness. It's just a little business card sized card that simply says, “Done in honor and memory of (your child's name here)...”. So pay for someone's coffee one day and leave a card for the cashier to give instead of a receipt when the person comes up to pay. Make toiletry care packages for homeless shelters and include a card with every packet. Make memory boxes and donate them to the maternity ward at your local hospital and include a card in each box. You get the idea.

Why exactly does this keep us sane?

Because we live in a world where there is a lot of pressure from family, friends, and sometimes even medical or mental health “professionals” telling bereaved parents that they must “get over” their child's death, must stop talking about the child, in order to be “normal” again. But those are not sane solutions to the insanity of burying your child! Those ideas closet, isolate, and silence the bereaved. Those ideas do not convey the reality that bereaved parents will never be the “before-death-normal” they once were. Those ideas do not acknowledge that healing (if healing ever really happens) only comes by giving voice to our experiences over long periods of time.

Kindness Projects keep us sane because they let us give voice to the reality that we continue to be parents — that we stay connected with our children even after they are dead — and that our children are a part of our connections back to the world-at-large.

Free Writing

By Kara L.C. Jones

Sometimes it can be difficult to see where we are in our grief after the death of a child. It's hard to see how far we've come, what it all means, and how we are doing as we move back into the world where people may not know we are bereaved.

Journal writing can be very helpful for recording your experiences and for going back to read and review where we are. But so often, I come across parents who are just too tired and overwhelmed by grief and the struggle to get by, to even think about sitting down to write in a journal. So my suggestion is this: Forgetting "journaling" and think 2 sentences a day. Just jot down 2 sentences — it could even be on your wall calendar or desk blotter calendar or in a notebook or dayminder calendar — just jot down 2 sentences about how you are feeling today in terms of your grief and life without your child.

Free write whatever comes to mind. Answer the question, "Where are you today with your grief?" Or write something to your child directly. Or write about how your grief/healing was affected/effected by a song, a letter, a photo, anything. Just 2 sentences.

Then when the year comes to an end, take a look at that calendar. Keep that calendar even after you start next year's calendar. And when you question where you are or how you are doing, take out those writings. Look at the map of your personal grief journey. And like any map, this one is a tool — showing you where you've come from and where you are while at the same time offering some guidance about the path ahead of you, too.

Call To Libraries

By Kara L.C. Jones

In our work at KotaPress, we've been hearing from bereaved parents all over the U.S. and Canada lately who have complaints about the availability of grief support materials for parents after a miscarriage, stillbirth or neo-natal death. So we are making a call to libraries to hear out the requests (and the importance of these requests) from bereaved parents who desperately need to have support materials available.

We are compiling a wish list of books that bereaved parents think should be in every single library on the planet! Once that list is put together, we'll post it in our KotaPress Loss Journal, and we'll email it to as many libraries as we can. We'll also share that list with the MISS Foundation chapters around the globe and urge their members to take the list to their local libraries as well.

So if you are a bereaved parent with ideas for this book list, please be in touch with us via email. We want to know the book title, publisher, date of publication, author, and ISBN number if you have it. And we'd like to know your child's name and birth/death, too. The list we send out to libraries (and post online) will include a page dedicated to the precious children we've lost. Email us at editor@kotapress.com (please include the words "Library Revolution" in the subject line of your email).

Memorials

For Dakota Jones, born & died March 11, 1999 at 4:47 p.m. On this fourth birthday, I miss you more than ever, Kota. With love from your momma, daddy, nanna-memoo, and jiddu.

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 & Sharon's beloved daughter...
For Joel, Nancy's beloved son...
For Charles, Katie's beloved son...
For William and Wendell, Donnali's beloved twins...
For Micah, Damary's beloved son...
For Allen, Laura's beloved son...
For Cheyenne, Jo's beloved baby girl...
And for all of our children — who we so dearly miss!

Make a memorial sponsorship of \$10 to this zine, 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 with questions. Send memorial sponsorships to:

A Different Kind of Parenting, c/o KotaPress, PO Box 514, Vashon Island, 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 URL: 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, 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

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

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