

Discovering Hope

*Sharing the Journey
of Healing
After Miscarriage, Stillbirth
or Infant Loss*

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Introduction

We wait with hope

And we ache with hope

We hold on with hope

We let go with hope

- ***With Hope***, Steven Curtis Chapman

Going back to that place, to that day in my memory, is never an easy thing to do. It is full of tragedy, sadness, pain and loss. It is a horrible day. Once in a while I catch myself revisiting the scene, wishing it weren't a part of me, wishing my life didn't include something like that. But it does include it, it is a part of me, it's some of what makes me who I am today.

I'm talking about the day we found out our second son had died. 37&1/2 weeks in utero and suddenly gone. Big, strong, healthy and active up to that point, then still and quiet - he wasn't with us anymore.

Our hopes and dreams for him were shattered, our family felt incomplete, the sadness and missing him began immediately. My heart broke in a million pieces - one huge piece would always be gone, waiting, longing for a presence that would never be a part of my life - not this life anyways.

Caleb Joshua Freedom Sklar was born on May 21, 2003. There were no newborn cries or flashes of cameras, just silence and such a heavy sadness in the room. There were no baby gifts, just tears. There were no congratulations, just "I'm so sorry." There were no last-minute preparations for bringing the baby home, just the knowledge there was so much to let go of.

Underneath it all there was this deep, indescribable bond of love for my child. Though I wasn't going to meet him, I was still going to love him. Over time I came to understand what that meant for me - to love and be a mother to a child who had died. I constantly tried to figure out how to do that, what that looked like.

I found the first year was the hardest, but after the one-year milestone, the grief seemed to lift at a greater pace, and I could see past the present more clearly to the future, and it was still a good sight in the midst of all the confusion.

This book is written to bring you hope, encouragement and resources to help you in your journey of healing. A child has lived and this same child has died. I am so sorry for your loss and I understand your pain. You are not alone NOW, you have never BEEN alone, and you will never BE alone. God is your constant companion. The hardest truth is you may never know why your little one is not with you. The good news is you will see your child again one day. It's OK to feel angry and confused and utterly sad, but please don't feel alone.

I found my greatest source of help and support in other women who had also lost a child, and their willingness to share with me and pray with me. My hope is that my words will help you in some way as we look at some of the issues surrounding the death of your child.

God bless you as you journey toward healing,

Anna

Caleb's Story

For You have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life. - Psalm 56:13

May of 2003 was the hardest month of my life. I don't know why God delivered me from death, and not my son, or why my feet didn't stumble, why I didn't lose my faith in God, except that I may walk before Him in the light of life, that I may live my life in its fullness - as it was meant to be lived. I think part of this full life is sharing my story.

My story is also Caleb's story. Caleb Joshua Freedom Sklar is my middle son, and he lives in heaven and in the hearts of all who know and love him. He was stillborn on May 21, 2003, just 8 days before his scheduled c-section date. There were no warnings beforehand and no conclusions afterward.

During the week before Caleb was born, I felt something was not quite right and his movements slowed down a lot. The doctor checked his heartbeat which was still strong, and everyone told me he was just saving his energy for the "big move". I still felt him move a little, so I ignored my worries and prayed a lot. It was so close to the due date, everything was all ready for him, how could anything go wrong now?

I woke up on May 19th and knew I had to check his heartbeat again, something was VERY wrong. Josiah, my oldest son, and I went to a walk-in clinic. Josiah was 21 months old at the time. We left my husband, Josh, at home to get some sleep. He'd come home late the night before from a job interview in Seattle.

The clinic doctor couldn't find a heartbeat but told me not to worry, his equipment wasn't the greatest, and sent me to the hospital. I left Josiah with Josh and went by myself. Five nurses and doctors and an ultrasound later, it was confirmed that Caleb has passed. In that instant God picked me up, held me in His arms and didn't put me down again until after the funeral. Then He held my hand and never let go. He walked with me through the grief that came after. His grace, strength, love and peace met with me in my darkest time.

That short time of truth in the hospital is a blur for me, I remember lots of hushed tones, worried faces, denial from me, staring out the window pleading with God to make it alright, and then this huge feeling of consuming grief that would eventually spill over into every part of my life. But the grief became less consuming over time and other, better things replaced its intensity.

I remember a wonderful nurse who took me into an empty room and held me while I cried. She told me we are all given no more than we can handle and that I was going to be OK one day. I remember calling Josh from a private spot in the nurse's station, telling the man I love that his son had died before ever meeting him. I remember I couldn't get home fast enough to hold him and Josiah. I remember walking down our driveway, watching Josh run to meet me, and me saying over and over "I'm so sorry". Josh immediately alleviated any thoughts I had that this was my fault, though I'd have to learn that for myself too. We proceeded to call family and friends, and wait for them to rally to our side - which they did as soon as humanly possible.

Then it was time to go back to the hospital and deliver Caleb. I was advised to try to deliver him naturally instead of going through with the c-section. I said I'd give it a try, and after 14

hours of labour and lots of epidural, Caleb was born at 2:45am on May 21st.

His birth was far from the joyous occasion it should have been. Such a sad stillness hung in the air when Caleb was born, and we knew we would still have to wait to meet him, he still wasn't with us.

Josh was amazing, and so strong. Family and friends surrounded us during our time in the hospital. At one point there were about 10 people in my room - an amazing feat because of the SARS scare - God snuck them all in - I was only supposed to have Josh with me.

Caleb stayed in our room with us for a few hours after he was born. We were able to hold him, and let others hold him if they chose - for some it was too hard and that was OK with us. We snapped a few pictures, prayed and said our goodbyes in the privacy of our hospital room. We soaked up all we could about him - he looked just like his big brother, he had Josh's toes, and the Collier cleft chin (from my side of the family). He was a big boy (8lbs 1oz.), and looked very strong and serious. We caught just a glimpse of him as he was on this earth.

Then the people from the funeral home arrived. One of the hardest things we had to do was place Caleb in the arms of the wonderful woman who helped us through all the "arrangements" of the next couple of days. It was worse than the burial - maybe because we could visualize handing him over, surrendering him to another, watching our hopes and dreams disappear down the hallway in the arms of someone else. We physically gave him over that day, but then we had to start the long process of handing him over in a spiritual and emotional sense.

That was May 21, 2003. As Caleb had already arrived at the final destination of his journey - his heavenly home, so now we began our journey of grief and healing as a family, together with our oldest son, Josiah David.

In The Hospital

There is no despair so absolute as that which comes with the first moments of our first great sorrow, when we have not yet known what it is to have suffered and be healed, to have despaired and have recovered hope. - George Eliot

Some of you may not have to experience a hospital visit as you start your journey of grief. I want to share our experience with you because we were treated so well by our doctors and the hospital staff. I hope your experience is similar, and if not our story may give you ideas for a more meaningful hospital visit.

Our Story

When Josh and I arrived at the hospital we were given the room that was farthest away from the noise of the delivery ward and the nursery. I didn't go anywhere near the nursery during my hospital stay, but Josh stopped in there a few times. I knew exactly where he'd been when he came into our room with tears in his eyes. Already we were grieving in different ways. Although I didn't understand what he was doing, I did understand that it seemed to help him.

The nurses hung a heart-shaped sun catcher outside our room - a signal to the staff that our baby had died, that our circumstances were different than those of the other filled rooms on the delivery ward, and that we needed special care and concern from them.

I remember a few nurses who stopped in just to check on us, to share similar stories, and even to share faith with us - to let us know they were praying for us and that our tiny Caleb was already in a wonderful place beyond this world.

I don't remember a lot of the next 24 hours - the epidural makes things a little fuzzy for me. We had to choose how to deliver Caleb. I was scheduled to have a c-section with him the following week, but the doctor recommended that I try to deliver him naturally instead. I remember being induced at 9am, waiting through a long labour, being ready to push just after midnight, and delivering Caleb at 2:45am. I remember holding him, watching as a few others held him, and trying to absorb everything I could about him before I had to say goodbye. He lay in a bassinet in the room with us, though we didn't sleep much, it was a precious night together. Our only night with him - it was very bittersweet. I would try to sleep, then wake up suddenly and reach for him, knowing it would be time to say goodbye very soon.

There were no answers when Caleb was born. He appeared healthy, big and strong. The doctors asked if we wanted an autopsy to try and discover more about the reasons for his death, but we just couldn't bring ourselves to do it. The placenta was later tested for Group B Strep and the test came back positive - so infection is a possibility, but not a certainty. I had too much amniotic fluid for a while during pregnancy, but then the fluid levels seemed to balance on their own. That may have something to do with his death. Caleb's heartbeat was strong just a few days before he died, so there are not real conclusions, just guesses.

There are some hard decisions to make concerning your baby and how best to handle the situation. These choices are so personal and will be different for everyone. I hope you have peace whatever you choose to do, and I hope you do find answers.

I pray you make it through your hospital stay surrounded by people who will love you, comfort you, counsel you, console you and care for you as you struggle to make some very hard choices. Peace be with you, dear one, as you take the first steps on your journey of healing.

Note: I wanted to include a section on the physical after-effects of the loss, but I am so under-qualified to speak about this. Please remember to discuss this with your doctors and nurses, so that you know what to expect once you leave the hospital, or do an online search - there is such a vast wealth of information out there for you.

These are a few ideas to help you grab whatever meaning you can from your hospital stay:

- Share the news with a couple of close friends or family members, then ask them to make the rest of the calls.
- Ask for a hospital room that is farthest away from the noise of the delivery ward and the nursery. Bring soothing music, headphones, anything that will help ease your heart even a slight bit, create a more peaceful atmosphere and take away some of the delivery ward noises you may not want to hear at this time.
- Name your child if you want to.
- Our hospital gave us a birth certificate and we asked them to put a label on his bassinet that told his name, weight, etc. just like other children born in the hospital.
- Hold your baby and say hello and goodbye - learn all you can about them - Caleb was a BIG boy, he had Josh's toes, my cleft chin, he looked so serious, and he had the same black curly hair as his big brother Josiah. It may be hard to see your baby - they may not look anything like you imagined. And it may be hard to hold your baby - they will be so still and quiet, not at all the experience you imagined. Even though this may be the hardest thing you'll ever do, it is worth it to have those moments with them.
- Take pictures or ask the hospital staff to take them.
- Ask the hospital staff for a lock of hair, an ink stamp or plaster imprint of handprints or footprints.
- Let other children hold the baby, as well as other family members, if that's OK with you and with them.
- Ask for referrals to funeral homes that have proven themselves to do a good job in similar situations and are sensitive to the many issues of the death of a baby.
- Start a special baby book - the funeral home provided one for us and it was very meaningful for me to fill that out, just as I filled out a baby book for Josiah, though the pages were a little different.

The Funeral or Memorial Service

...the visitation is the social release of the body, the funeral service is the spiritual release, and the burial is the physical release. - Ed Vining

At this point, I'd love to try and help you get through the "arrangements" of putting your child to rest here on this earth, no matter how far along you were in your pregnancy.

If your baby was very small, if you were only a few weeks along in your pregnancy, you can still have a special service for your child. This could be done in the privacy of your own home, or a place that has certain meaning for you. Choose a way to acknowledge the life of your tiny one - a friend of mine chose to unravel a blanket she had started making for the baby. Find more *Ideas for Honouring the Life of Your Baby* on page __ of this book. Also, many funeral homes have candlelight services or special bereavement services that are open to everyone. You could contact them and attend one of these events in memory of your baby.

If your pregnancy was farther along, you may choose to have a funeral or memorial service before cremation or burial. It is true - no one should ever have to bury a child. If you feel like you cannot think through the events of the next few days, please allow yourself the freedom of letting others do it for you. It's OK to do that, it doesn't mean you are any less of a mother, it just means you are using all your emotions and energy to simply put one foot in front of the other right now. I found that I felt numb for the first little while after Caleb's death, but I also wanted to honour him at his funeral.

Our Story

When our Caleb died, I remember reading in the pamphlets I was given that parents should not bring young children into situations where there will be a lot of crying, emotion, etc. Yet I couldn't imagine Josiah (who was about 21 months old at the time) not being at his brother's funeral, I couldn't imagine keeping him from any of the too-few things we got to do as a family. So we chose to bring him with us, to include him, to let him be a part of the grieving and the healing, hoping it would help him to understand and heal in some way. He made people smile at the funeral, his life and laughter eased so much of the sadness and heavy feeling of death. He danced as the music played, he crawled from one person's lap to another, comforting and bringing joy as he went along his merry way, hugging each one. You know your children and whether or not they can handle the situation. Family members offered to take him into the foyer if he got rowdy, but he never did. (If you knew Josiah you'd know that this in itself is amazing!). I think he needed to be there just as much as we did.

Many people were blessed at Caleb's funeral, including us. It was a time to acknowledge his tiny life, celebrate him as a person, and share him with those who had been waiting for nine months to welcome him and love him.

One friend wrote this about the service:

"...definitely angels all around that day...As I looked around that church I saw so many people in tears, especially women, and I'm sure there were many there who have gone through a similar experience."

You may never know the full impact that your baby's life will have on the lives of others - God may use your baby's service to bring a lot of healing to an unknown number of people who have experienced a similar loss that was never recognized.

I look forward to sharing more about *Discovering God's Purposes for Your Child* in another chapter of this book.

Caleb was buried in the same plot as his great-grandpa Sklar. This gave us a lot of peace as we laid him to rest. We felt like we could, in a way, see with our eyes that he was already with others who would take very good care of him. He was not alone. Though it was very hard to leave the cemetery that day, and it's still hard to visit his grave site, we know he is not really there. We try our best to focus on his eternal home, and how beautiful a place that must be. This helps us focus our hearts on hope on our journey of healing.

Picture of Caleb's Stone

These are just a few suggestions that might help you plan your baby's Funeral or Memorial Service:

- Publish a birth/death announcement in the newspaper and keep a clipping in a special place.
- Ask friends or family members (including other children if that's OK with you) to sing, preach, or speak at the funeral - make it as personal as possible.
- Allow for donations to a specific cause or charity that is important to you and your family.
- Choose a scripture passage that is special to you and brings you hope. We read John 14:1-4 at Caleb's funeral: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." We tried to bring hope to the people who attended Caleb's funeral, and the greatest hope we could share was the hope found in Jesus and heaven. Find other scripture verses on page ___ of this book.
- Celebrate the life of your child - tell what you DID know about the baby, or how your life has already been impacted by them, or share a funny/special story about the pregnancy.
- Try to look at hope during the service.
- Some people may not be able to come because it is too overwhelming for them, or there is too much pain involved. Try not to be upset and let everyone make their own choices about this sensitive issue. Grief looks very different in each of our lives.
- Place sentimental items in the baby's casket - things you were saving for them, or gifts from family members/friends.

- Pick songs for the service that were special to you during your pregnancy - our choice was *I Can Only Imagine* by Mercy Me. When I was pregnant with Caleb, I was brought to tears every time I heard this song. I understood why (I don't usually cry very much) after his death. This song still speaks deeply to my heart.
- Choose a meaningful inscription for your baby's tombstone if you are going to have one. We chose to have "Surrounded by Glory" inscribed on Caleb's tombstone (another inspiration from the song *I Can Only Imagine* - it tells of being surrounded by glory once we arrive in heaven) . This inscription is a constant reminder to us of his heavenly home.

Caleb's Song

Mother? Father?

I just wanted you to know

That I'm fine...yes, so fine.

I am safe and warm in Heaven.

Jesus holds me in His arms.

His voice is song, His eyes are kind.

It seems I could not stay;

I just had to leave

To see my Heavenly Father's face.

Jesus tells me that you miss me

And your hearts are aching...

How I wish you felt His Great Embrace.

Do you know that He rocks me Like you
would do?

And His kisses are soft and sweet...

He sings in my ear

And snuggles me near,

In tenderness so complete.

I did not have the chance to learn

Just who of you was who...

I needed just a little more time.

The low voice, was that you, Dad?

I know yours, Mom, it's higher!

I would have learned it well in time.

There's so much I would say

If I only knew the words

And could make my awkward mouth

Shape the sound.

But I have not learned to speak...

Although you'd think I'd pick up some

With such a noisy family around!

I want you to know how I'm feeling.

Even though I'm in Paradise.

I miss you...

I miss you.

I will never forget you...

Thank you for my life.

Thank you for my life,

For I took so long to grow.

Thank you for your love.

He promised you would love me...

I feel how you love me...

But now I live with Him above.

I never had the chance

To say I love YOU,

So hear me pray it now, hear me say...

"Dear Father, Dear Mother,

And little Big Brother,

I love you,

I'll love you always."

- Adele Simmons, May 2003

This was written by a good friend of ours, she handed it to us at Caleb's funeral, then she sang *His Eye in on the Sparrow* at the service. (Find her story in the ***Fellow Travelers on the Journey*** section of this book.)

Home-Coming

The most beautiful things in life cannot be seen or touched. They must be felt with the heart. - Helen Keller

If your baby was further along in pregnancy and you experienced a hospital stay, then your journey will also bring you back home. It is such a confusing time and nothing is the way it is supposed to be. Your house may look so different to you because you expected such different things from your homecoming. There may be such a stillness and quietness, and depending on your personality and the way you grieve you may enjoy the quiet or want to run screaming from it. You may want to pack the baby's things away immediately or leave them as is for a time. There is no right or wrong way to handle your homecoming. Let yourself experience the situation however you need to, whether you are soothed by inviting people over to fill your house or by seeking your solitude for a time. Maybe you'll find yourself decluttering like crazy, or re-decorating a little to change your scenery. You will process your homecoming differently than anyone else. Feel free to do just that as you journey home to heal.

Our Story

I felt so empty as I walked out of the hospital. There was no baby carrier with us, the car ride was so quiet and our apartment was full of sympathy cards instead of baby gifts. This was NOT what we had planned, Caleb wasn't even supposed to be born yet. My c-section date was still a week away. And here we were, faced with the task of putting away all the baby things instead of using them to care for our tiny Caleb.

We only stayed home long enough to see through Caleb's memorial service. Josh's mom cared for Josiah during the few days between Caleb's birth and funeral, and then for another night or two while we rested and packed a few things. A friend had offered us his family's cottage for a week and we jumped at the chance to get away and be alone with Josiah, enjoy his presence, and try to get ourselves together before we had to figure out the next step for our little family.

Our situation was unique. In many ways we were forced to move ahead. We moved out of our apartment just a month after Caleb's birth, the only job we could find was at a children's camp 5 hours north of where we were living. Everything went into storage or got shoved into our car. We didn't have a choice but to pack away Caleb's things.

I would like to share with you one special choice we made during the packing process. A friend of mine offered to take Caleb's things and pass them along to someone who was in need. I saw an opportunity to give meaning to Caleb's life. I donated everything that was given to me specially for Caleb. I kept a lot of our baby things, not thinking too much about the future, but knowing we still wanted more children. The snugly and clothes I bought just for Caleb, the double stroller we were given to cart two little ones around, and many other items were passed along in hopes that Caleb's life would touch someone else's life in a wonderful way. The items were much appreciated, and this helped us on our journey home.

The Grieving Process

In the storms of life, sometimes God calms the storm...sometimes He calms His child. - Craig Groeschel

Our Story

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. - Romans 8:26

I had never really known grief until my Caleb passed away. My life had brought sadness, regret, and hurt, but never the deep-down-in-my-bones feeling that came with grief. I have learned much about this aspect of human nature since May of 2003.

At first my grief seemed all-consuming, overwhelming, almost like I was suffocating at times. I would be crying, sobbing from deep in my soul one minute, then laughing hysterically the next minute. It was such a roller-coaster ride at first, and there was such intensity in my emotions. This was new to me, I don't usually cry much, I tend to bottle my emotions up inside, or write them out into words to express myself.

One thing I learned immediately was that grief looks different in each of our lives. My emotions seemed so opposite to my husband's emotions at times. I was never very angry about Caleb's death, but my husband experienced this emotion so deeply sometimes, and had many "words" with God. I encourage you to try to let yourself and others grieve in their own way. Their healing may need different emotions or actions than yours. The main thing is to let yourself be who you are, feel what you feel and heal how you heal. (Find great resources for grief in fathering, grief in marriage, and grief over the loss of a baby on page ___ of this book).

Another healing factor of my grief was the acceptance of Caleb's life, and the acknowledgement that a PERSON very dear to my heart had passed away. I think often times, because our babies came and went so quickly through this world, it is hard to realize the truth that their lives are still very significant, their impact is still very great, and our love for them is still very strong. It was so strange to me sometimes that I could feel such grief for someone I had never known very well. But I knew Caleb the best of anyone, I am his mother, and his life is very dear to my heart and always will be, no matter how short it turned out to be. After the first few weeks my grief changed into something that seemed more manageable. I was getting through the days a little better, I was a little more focused on tasks or topics of conversation, and I was starting to see through the fog of my confusion just a little bit better.

From then on, my state of mind seemed to continuously improve, even if only slightly, from week to week and month to month. I found a great lifting in my spirits after passing the one-year milestone.

Still to this day there are times when I find myself in such a grumpy mood and I don't have the slightest idea what's wrong, then after a while I realize that I just really miss Caleb that day. Initially this happened around the 21st of each month, since that was the anniversary of his passing.

If you find that your grief is not improving, and that you are increasingly depressed, or that oth-

ers are increasingly concerned for your well-being, please seek help through a counsellor. On two occasions my husband and my mother encouraged me to talk to a counsellor because they were worried about my state of mind. I didn't question their opinions, they know me the best, and they arranged the appointments for me. I followed through in seeing the counsellors and was reassured I was doing OK. This also eased the minds and hearts of my family - so it was good all around.

During one of my counselling sessions, I learned that grief can come in and out of our lives like waves. Sometimes the storm is raging and the waves are high, relentless, pounding at us with such heavy force. Other times the waves are calm and gentle, lapping at us with a serene comfort. Whatever you're experiencing at this moment, the storms will pass, and though they may come again, the waves will get smaller and smaller, and will subside to rolling touches on the shore, making the sand smooth to walk on.

As you journey through your grief, know that God is sharing the path with you. He knows your deepest emotions, He understands the hurt, and He wants to help you heal. He will be your faithful companion in the hours, days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

My husband, Josh, provided this reference to the *Stages of the Grieving Process* by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

Stage 1. Denial

- ⊗ We deny that the loss has occurred.
- ⊗ We ignore the signs of the loss.

We begin to use:

- ⊗ Magical thinking **believing** by magic this loss will go away
- ⊗ Excessive fantasy **believing** nothing is wrong; this loss is just imagined; when I wake up everything will be OK.
- ⊗ Regression **believing** that if we act childlike and want others to reassure us that nothing is wrong.
- ⊗ Withdrawal **believing** we can avoid facing the loss and avoid those people who confront us with the truth.
- ⊗ Rejection **believing** we can reject the truth and those who bring us the news of our loss to avoid facing the loss.

Stage 2. Bargaining

- ⊗ We bargain or strike a deal with God, ourselves
- ⊗ We bargain or strike a deal with God, ourselves, or others to make the loss go away
- ⊗ We bargain or strike a deal with God, ourselves, or others to make the loss go away.

- ⊗ We promise to do anything to make this loss go away.
- ⊗ We agree to take extreme measures in order to make this loss disappear.
- ⊗ We lack confidence in our attempts to deal with the loss, looking elsewhere for answers.

We begin to:

- ⊗ Shop around **believing** we look for the "right" agent with the "cure" for our loss.
- ⊗ Gamble **believing** we can take chances on "cures" for our loss.
- ⊗ Take risks **believing** we can put ourselves in jeopardy financially, emotionally, and physically to get to an answer or "cure" for our loss.
- ⊗ Sacrifice **believing** in our pursuit of a "cure" to change the loss we can ignore our real needs.

Stage 3. Anger

- ⊗ We become angry with God, with ourselves, or with others over our loss.
- ⊗ We become outraged and incensed over the steps that must be taken to overcome our loss.

We pick out "scapegoats" on which to vent our anger, e.g., the doctors, hospitals, clerks, helping agencies, rehabilitation specialists, etc.

We begin to use:

- ⊗ Self-blaming **believing** we should blame ourselves for this loss.
- ⊗ Switching blame **believing** we should blame others for this loss.
- ⊗ Blaming the victim **believing** we should blame the victim for leaving us.
- ⊗ Aggressive anger **believing** we have a right to vent our blame and rage aggressively on the closest target.
- ⊗ Resentment **believing** our hurt and pain is justified to turn into resentment toward involved in our loss event including the victim.
- ⊗ Anger is a normal stage. It must be expressed and resolved; if it is suppressed and held in, it will become "**Anger in**" leading to a maladaptive condition of depression that drains our emotional energy.

Stage 4. Despair

- ⊗ We become overwhelmed by the anguish, pain, and hurt of our loss; we are thrown into the depths of our emotional response.
- ⊗ We can begin to have uncontrollable spells of crying, sobbing, and weeping.
- ⊗ We can begin to go into spells of deep silence, morose thinking, and deep melancholy.

We can begin to experience:

- ⊗ Guilt **believing** we are responsible for our loss. Remorse **believing** we should feel sorry for our real or perceived "bad past," deeds for which this loss is some form of retribution or punishment. Loss of hope **believing** that because the news of our loss becomes so overwhelming

that we have no hope of being able to return to the calm and order our life held prior to the loss. Loss of faith and trust **believing** that because of this loss we can no longer trust our belief in the goodness and mercy of God and mankind.

- ⊗ We need support to assist us in gaining the objectivity to reframe and regroup our lives. If we are not able to work through our despair, we risk experiencing events such as mental illness, divorce/separation, suicide, inability to cope with the aftermath of our loss, rejection of the family member who has experienced the loss, and detachment, poor bonding, or unhealthy interaction with the parties involved in our loss.

Stage 5. Acceptance

We begin to reach a level of awareness and understanding of the nature of our loss.

We can now:

- ⊗ Describe the terms and conditions involved in our loss.
- ⊗ Fully describe the risks and limitations involved in the treatment or rehabilitation for the loss involved.
- ⊗ Cope with our loss.
- ⊗ Test the concepts and alternatives available to us in dealing with this loss.
- ⊗ Handle the information surrounding this loss in a more appropriate way.

We begin to use:

- ⊗ Rational thinking **believing** we are able to refute our irrational beliefs or fantasy thinking in order to address our loss from a rational perspective.
- ⊗ Adaptive behaviour **believing** we can begin to adjust our lives to incorporate the changes necessary after our loss.
- ⊗ Appropriate emotion **believing** we begin to express our emotional responses freely and are better able to verbalize the pain, hurt, and suffering we have experienced.
- ⊗ Patience and self-understanding **believing** we can recognize that it takes time to adjust to the loss and give ourselves time to "deal" with it. We set a realistic time frame in which to learn to cope with our changed lives.
- ⊗ Self-confidence **believing**, as we begin to sort things out and recognize the stages of loss as natural and expected that we gain the confidence needed for personal growth.

We can be growing in acceptance and still experience denial, bargaining, anger, and despair.

To come to full acceptance we need support to gain objectivity and clarity of thinking. It is often useful to gain such assistance from those who have experienced a similar loss. For example, groups of parents who have experienced the death of a child or who have had a child with a developmental disability.

Peer support from strangers is often the best way for a person to deal with the grieving process.

I also found some helpful, sensitive insights specific to *Pregnancy and Newborn Loss* on the *March of Dimes* website: <http://www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/572.asp>. The wonderful web pages I found here were entitled:

- *What Is Grief?*
- *How Do Men and Women Grieve Differently?*
- *How Can You Deal With Your Grief?*
- *How Do You Deal With Your Family and Friends While You're Grieving?*

I encourage you to print them off, read through them, and let the information help you heal.

Your Support Network

What an argument in favour of social connections is the observation that by communicating our grief we have less, and by communicating our pleasure we have more. - Sir Fulke Greville

I hope God surrounds you with those you feel comfortable with and who know you well, and maybe some new faces who understand your loss and can help you get through it.

If your husband or partner is not ready to talk or listen about grief, make sure you have SOMEONE in your life to share and be honest with, to cry and scream with if you have to.

Do you have any family members or friends you can turn to? Recognize the people in your life that want to help in positive ways - whether it be cooking a meal for you, doing errands, watching your other children for a while, or just keeping you company as you grieve your baby. Try to tune into your needs and let others help you do the things that are overwhelming for you right now.

When Caleb died I found it so hard to get through the daily "stuff" in caring for my toddler. It was exhausting just getting off the couch at times, such a test of will some days, yet it kept me going. I needed to keep as much of the normal routines in my life as I could. The constancy and certainty of mealtimes, bedtimes, bath times, etc. helped me focus ahead, get through another day, week, month. So there were some things I relied on, that I NEEDED to do myself, and there were other things I gladly accepted help in doing. Try to see the difference between the two, keep your focus on the tasks that you want to keep for yourself and let other tasks go with the help of your support network, so you aren't in danger of hiding from your grief.

Here is a helpful article written for the Dec '09/Jan '10 issue of the *Mom's Moments* newsletter. Feel free to print it out for your support network if they aren't sure how to help you in your grief.

It is often very difficult to know how to minister to the needs of a grieving mother who has lost her child. There are no magic words to take away the pain of such a loss, and many find it overwhelming just to look into the face of such suffering. Here are a few suggestions from a mother who has walked this path more than once.

- *Don't allow the fear of saying or doing the wrong thing keep you from reaching out in love. There are no perfect words. A simple "I'm sorry" and a hug can go a long way.*
- *Acknowledge the baby. Refer to the child by name. It is often a blessing to a grieving heart to hear her child's name spoken. Do not think that talking about him/her will bring the mother more pain. The memory of her baby is always on her mind. Sharing can be a comfort. Be willing to listen. She may need to tell her story over and over again.*
- *Those who are grieving are not always able to ask for help. Instead of saying, "Let me know if you need anything," just do something for the mother and her family. Be available, but also be willing to give space when needed. Bring a meal. Offer to watch the other children for awhile. Come over and sit with her, offering a listening ear.*
- *Realize that your friend has been forever changed by the loss of her baby. Don't expect her*

to be exactly the same. And please realize that grief has its own time table. Allow her the time she needs, and remain supportive. Everyone grieves differently. Don't judge her choices or her "performance". She may not react the same way that you think you would.

- *Avoid clichés such as "You can have more children" or "This was God's will". Even words meant to comfort can actually sting a grieving heart like salt poured into an open wound.*

Kelly Gerken
Deshler, Ohio

Kelly is the founder of Sufficient Grace Ministries for Women, Inc. She reaches out to offer comfort and hope to grieving mothers and families through her blog: <http://sufficientgrace-kelly.blogspot.com> and her website: www.sufficientgrace.net.

Kelly and her husband, Tim, are the parents of five children: two boys who walk this earth with them and twin daughters and a son who are perfecting their dance in heaven.

If you don't have anyone in your life that you can turn to, there are many churches that offer free counselling (I saw two wonderful counsellors during the first year of grieving after Caleb), or there might be support groups in your community. Contact your local hospital or doctors to see what is available to you. Also find many books, websites and organizations listed in the **Resources** section of this book.

The one person who can be a constant support, if you let Him, is your Heavenly Father. God is ALWAYS there and can handle ANY emotions you have - He knows you, knows your baby, knows your life and circumstances and knows what can help the most. His answer might come in something as simple as a line in a card or song lyrics, or in conversation with someone. It might not happen right away, but He WILL answer. Pray to Him, and then look for Him in the midst of your confusion, anger, doubt, regret, sadness, and pain as you continue on your journey.

Marriage on the Journey

Grief and sadness knits two hearts in closer bonds than happiness ever can; and common sufferings are far stronger than common joys. - Alphonse de Lamartine

The loss of a child can be very hard on a marriage, no matter how young the child may have been. There is an emptiness and confusion that lingers long after the loss. These emotions can play out in many different ways, depending on your personalities. There could be anger, sadness, loneliness, distraction, depression, or a whole host of other emotions.

Grief and loss can bring a couple together or it can tear them apart. I think the key to moving on with your partner is in showing compassion and understanding. Let them grieve in their own ways (as a man/woman as well as an individual). Men and women grieve differently and individual people grieve differently. Background, religion, support network and life circumstances influence the reaction a person has when a loss like this occurs. Try to look past any reactions you may not like or understand, and try to remember the good about the partner you have. You are both on the same team, working towards the same thing - to grieve, heal and keep going - together. (Read some wonderful information at the March of Dimes website: <http://www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/572.asp> - click on *How Do Men and Women Grieve Differently?* Also find many helpful items listed in the **Resources** section of this book.

If you are really having trouble in your relationship and are feeling overwhelmed, there are many counsellors or pastors that are willing to help. Josh and I both needed a counsellor in our loss. Sometimes the grief and the differences in how you grieve can be too much for the two of you to handle on your own. And there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Our Story

When Caleb died I remember how much Josh and I pulled together in the initial loss. Josh was amazing, strong, and even funny sometimes - he even made me laugh a little. One thing that really stands out for me is that he never blamed me. There were many times when I had to deal with strong feelings that Caleb's death was my fault. He lived in my body so I felt responsible for whatever it was that happened to him (we never discovered any definite conclusions about his death). I would play the circumstances leading up to Caleb's stillbirth over and over in my mind, wondering what I had done wrong. Josh would reassure me every time that it was not my fault. I really needed that, I relied on that, and it helped me so much.

We did really well the first couple of months. Life kept us busy and we had no choice but to keep up with all that was happening. The crash came for us about two or three months after the fact. We started fighting, we were frustrated and irritable, and we started turning away from each other instead of towards each other. This was when the hard work of rebuilding our relationship began. We were different, the loss had changed us, and we needed to learn to be there for each other and love each other after the loss. There were different, newer aspects of our personalities to explore and reconcile in the wake of Caleb's death. He has brought out so much good in us, and with that also came some bad.

It would take months of rebuilding to get to a point where we were OK. But those months were

not horrible, just hard. I'm so glad we worked through it all together and joined with each other in the journey of healing. Our relationship is much stronger because of all the growth we experienced, we didn't ask for it, or plan on it, but this was our life and Caleb's death brought a whole different dimension to our relationship. We have a deeper love for each other, a deeper trust in God, and a deeper understanding of the hurt of others.

Eventually we were able to use our experiences to help MANY people on the journey. Hopefully as you are reading this we are helping you as well.

Your Other Children

When the heart grieves over what it has lost, the spirit rejoices over what it has left. - Sufi Epigram

Your children have also experienced a loss and will be able to help you in their own way, as well as needing help from you. Be as open and honest as you can with your other children so the whole family can acknowledge the loss of one of its members and heal as a family. Try not to exclude them from loss, but gauge what you feel comfortable in telling them and share in healing THEM as well. No matter how young your other children are they will sense that something is wrong. If they are VERY young, tell them as soon as you feel comfortable. Remember, we all grieve differently, and the same is true for your other children.

Visit http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/Sibling_Loss_Final.pdf - page 4. You'll find a very useful chart that outlines the different attributes of grief for the different ages of a child, from infant to teen years. And here is a webpage that offers ideas for helping your other children understand: http://www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/572_42497.asp. Also find some wonderful children's books concerning death in the Resources section of this book.

Our Story

Our oldest son, Josiah, experienced his little brother's death when he was about 21 months old. Except for the few days he spent with his Grandma while we were in the hospital and arranging the funeral, he was with us 24/7 and witnessed our tears, our sadness and our hurt. I'm sure he noticed the issues of death in his own way and hurt in his own way. He would amaze me with his insight, even at such a young age.

Josiah was there at the funeral and internment. For a long time afterwards, every time we would drive by a cemetery, he would say *Caleb?* And every time we visit his gravesite Josiah loves to play with the pinecones that are always scattered around. At first he just loved to bring a few home in the car, and now he loves to decorate Caleb's stone with pinecones.

The hospital hung a beautiful heart-shaped sun catcher outside our room while I was delivering Caleb - a sign to all the staff that the baby delivered here would be stillborn. Then they gave us the sun catcher to take home. A few months after Caleb's death, Josiah noticed it hanging in our window and said *Caleb* - I was amazed he would remember such a thing, and associate them even months later.

During the months that followed Caleb's death, Josiah would occasionally find me in my bedroom, crying, and I would tell him *Mommy misses Caleb* and sometimes we'd look at his memory box - Josiah would ask 2-year-old questions and he'd hug me and kiss me - it really helped both of us in the healing process.

A bond has formed between your other children and your baby. I could already tell that our baby, Caleb, loved his big brother, Josiah, very much. Caleb would respond to Josiah's cries, his laughs, his voice, and he would constantly kick Josiah when he was sitting on my lap. And Josiah was very excited about Caleb's arrival. He used to kiss my tummy and say *Baby* and he saw all the baby equipment set up around the house. Though he was not even two years old he would go to the baby swing and push it back and forth to practice. After Caleb's death, Josiah

continued to kiss my tummy and about 2 months afterward he came up to kiss my tummy and noticed *Baby Gone*.

I've tried my best to honour the brotherly bond between Josiah and Caleb. I've tried to be open with Josiah in hopes of helping him heal, not to depress him. I tell Josiah about Caleb's beautiful home, we dream about what Caleb is seeing and doing in heaven, and we talk about what we look forward to doing with him one day (Josiah wants to wrestle his little brother and see how strong he is).

I wrote this truth in an email to a friend a few months after Caleb's death, "*Josiah is growing more and more each day, and continues to be my greatest helper in healing and looking to what is ahead!*"

To this day, Josiah is still very open about his heavenly brother. All of his teachers at school know about Caleb, he even mentioned it to a friend at church the other day. Josiah noticed a family with 3 babies and said, "We had 3 babies in our family too, but one of them died." At first this used to just floor me and I had no idea how to react, but over time I've learned to smile and agree, and move on to the next subject, even though my heart jumps down my throat every time.

Our other son, Elijah, is now 3 years old and we are very open with him about Caleb as well. He is a very different personality, doesn't ask any of the questions Josiah did, and just seems to understand that Caleb lives way up in the sky with God.

Your other children will heal from the loss in their own ways. Their honesty may cut straight to the core of your being at times. Their questions, reflections and thoughts may make you reach deep inside yourself to find strength and love you never know you had. Though it may always be hard to go there, to reach that far, it's worth the effort in helping every one of your family members to walk through their own journeys of healing.

A Grandmother's Story

My Mum's version of CALEB'S STORY - from a Grandmother's heart.

The voice on the other end of the line was my daughter, Karen.

“Mum, Anna's baby died. Caleb died!”

The red heart hung from the doorway outside my daughter's hospital room. A sign that the baby about to be born had already died.

God give me strength.

Anna was in bed, talking, trying her best to smile and accept what was about to happen.

All I could do was wait.

I rubbed her legs as she shook with the medication she had been given.

We talked with an ever growing procession of friends and family who had come to support her and Josh and take care of Josiah.

Tried to sing hymns. Nothing would come to mind.

Feeling so useless.

Then sitting for an eternity in the waiting room.

The moment came. After wanting the wait to be over the nurse brought no relief.

I knew the worst was to come.

We walked into Anna's room.

There she was in bed, trying to look brave.

Josh by her side, sitting on the bed.

She looked so tired and so heartbroken.

In her arms she held her newborn son.

“Mum, this our new baby boy, Caleb”

It was the worst thing I have ever done.

The worst sight I have ever seen.

The saddest feeling.

The most agonizing pain.

Seeing her and Josh and Caleb.

I fought back the tears that had welled inside.

She passed him to me.

My new grandson.

A child I would never get to know here on Earth.

The times I talked to him in his mother's womb now gone.

Only emptiness and sadness remained.

I held him for the first and last time.

Stroked his tiny face.

Soaked in every moment.

Then I passed him to his other grandma.

I knew she was feeling the same pain and I grieved for her too.

I said a silent prayer that we would all get through this horrible experience.

The next few days I was numb.

There were things to do and people to call.

The day of the funeral arrived.

Anna had a long delivery and was supposed to still be in the hospital resting. Instead she was in the washroom at the church preparing to bury her son.

She put on the sweater I had brought. She didn't have any clothes that fit except maternity.

I went in to the family room to see Caleb one last time.

I knew he wasn't there, just his body.

I knew he was with the Lord in a better place but that brought little comfort right now.

He was wearing the outfit Josh had bought the day before.

Wrapped in a blanket.

I kissed his tiny face and said "Goodbye".

There were 350 or more people there.

People who loved Anna and Josh and Josiah and had looked forward to loving Caleb too.

I knew the Lord would use our grief to bring others to Christ.

That all those people there were touched somehow by this tiny child.

They would remember when times in their lives got tough.

They would seek God's face.

Lives would be changed and Caleb's purpose fulfilled.

This tiny boy would lead them.

We prayed, we sang.

Anna and Josh both said beautiful things about their baby boy.

Adele sang "The Sparrow" and they played "I Can Only Imagine".

We gathered at the grave sight.

"This isn't the way it's supposed to be".

I clung hold of a dear friend and stood by my family.

Caleb was buried with his great-granddad but we all knew that they were both already

"Surrounded by Glory"

I picture him walking quietly and peacefully with another man, maybe his great granddad, maybe Jesus, talking and laughing.

He's all grown up with long wavy hair and a smile that would melt everyone's heart.

Perfect and complete.

I'm grateful to God for giving me that vision.

It brings some comfort now and I look forward to the day when I will see him running up to greet me with that big smile.

I can only imagine.

Gran

Reach Out to God Instead of Turning From Him

Stand still and whisper God's name, and listen. He is nearer than you think. - Max Lucado

When Caleb died, I don't remember feeling much anger, just a lot of confusion. I lived my life in such a daze for a long time, feeling so lost, not understanding the death of my baby, or the reasons for it, I was confused about this God I had vowed to love and serve for the rest of my life. There were so many questions I needed to be answered, so much pain to deal with, and my whole view of Christianity, God and faith was shaken to the core.

I had a choice in my initial grief - the same choice you have right now - to reach out to God and allow Him to help you heal, or to turn from Him in your confusion and pain. Though you do not understand the loss, you can understand your Heavenly Father wants to comfort you. He loves you, in spite of any negative feelings you might have towards Him right now.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. - Psalm 139:13

Be honest with God about whatever emotions you are having. He made you who you are, He knew every second of your life before time began, He knows you better than anyone else, He knows all your thoughts and feelings, and He can handle every single one of them. Talk to Him, question Him, yell at Him, but don't turn away from Him. Don't abandon your faith, it is the one thing that will carry you through your grief.

This is an article I wrote for a newsletter in May 2008:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. - Matthew 5:4

We have all experienced sadness or grief in our lives - whether it's losing a friend or family member, or living with unrealized dreams and ambitions, or regretting decisions and experiences from our past. Life certainly isn't easy and hard times are inevitable. It is normal to mourn, but there is hope for us in this verse. There is a promise from Almighty God, and He CANNOT break a promise. God doesn't say we will understand. He doesn't say we will never be angry and confused.

He simply says we will be comforted.

What has that comfort looked like in your life? It might be hard to see, you might have to search for it. It might be hidden in a special card, the chorus of a song, a conversation with a friend, or a passage of scripture. When our middle son was stillborn five years ago, I found comfort in the passing of time - each day was easier than the last. God gives us His promise, He can be trusted, and you WILL find comfort.

At Caleb's funeral a wonderful friend said something extremely impacting to me. She reminded me that God had also experienced the death of a child - His Son, Jesus. I knew she was right, but it took me a while to process this thought and let it settle in my heart. The circumstances of Christ's death were very different, but the truth in her words has stayed with me these past few years. God knows my grief, He knows your grief, and He understands what it's like to have a child die way before their time.

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." - Matthew 3:17

There is no doubt God loves His Son. How much more intense is the grief of God in knowing

He could have stopped Jesus' death at any moment? I cannot possibly comprehend the implications of THAT truth.

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. - Matthew 28:20b

Your Heavenly Father will help you along as you reach out to Him. It's not all up to you, He'll meet you where you're at. There is no doubt that He will find a way to show you His love, He knows what speaks to your heart.

He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds. - Psalm 147:3

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. - Psalm 23:4

The only thing you have to do is be open to seeing it. That might take time and we all move at a different pace. He knows that, and He'll wait. He really does love you, and loves your child as well, more than you can imagine. I'm sorry for your pain, I know it well, and though I will never understand why any of us have to endure the loss, I do understand that God does not leave us alone on the journey of healing. I will continue on the path God has laid out for me, trying my best to seek His face with whatever comes, reaching out to Him instead of turning from Him.

Making Sense of Your Loss

Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. - John H. Sammie, 1887

Trust

How did I make sense of my loss? I learned a whole new level of trust. Something deeper than anything else - God is always asking us to trust Him - and sometimes I have trouble with even the small things, so I definitely wasn't good at trusting Him with something THIS BIG - the life of my child. I had all these hopes and dreams for Caleb - none of them will be realized.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. - Proverbs 3:5

Much easier said than done in this case! I totally understand if you have feelings of helplessness and lack of control. God places children in our lives so we can care for them and be responsible for them - why would He allow that to be taken away? It would be much easier to understand why He'd withhold something that would be harmful to us, but a child? It actually DOESN'T make any sense. I've had to let go of so many of my questions that were eating me up inside in order to continue on my journey of healing.

The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know Your name will trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You. - Psalm 9:9-10

There is a promise in this verse that we WILL trust God. I have no doubt He will help us to trust as we walk this journey. Our part is making the conscious choice to trust...not an easy one in the least. I don't know how many times I heard this gentle whisper of God's voice in my soul, asking me to trust Him. Some days it was impossible, but the whisper remained, I knew there was great love and comfort waiting for me in the choice to trust. Time was a great healer for me and over time I realized I didn't have to agree or understand Caleb's death, I just had to trust God and leave it in His big, strong, capable hands.

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to Him in song. - Psalm 28:7

Obey (Submit) - these words have the same meaning.

Take My Hand and Walk - The Kry

*I know there are times
your dreams turn to dust
you wonder as you cry
why it has to hurt so much
give Me all your sadness
someday you will know the reason why
with a child-like heart*

simply put your hope in Me

*Take My hand and walk where I lead
keep your eyes on Me alone
don't you say why were
the old days better
just because you're
scared of the unknown
take My hand and walk*

*Don't live in the past
cause yesterday's gone
wishing memories would last
you're afraid to carry on
you don't know what's comin'
but you know the one who holds tomorrow
I will be your guide
take you through the night
if you keep your eyes on Me*

*Just like a child
holdings daddy's hand
don't let go of mine
you know you can't stand
on your own*

- Words by Jean-Luc Lajoie and Yves Lajoie

- Music by Jean-Luc Lajoie

I have a memory to share with you...Some good friends gave us the use of their family cottage after Caleb died so that we could get away and spend some quality time with Josiah. I remember standing on the dock about a week or so after Caleb's death, looking at the dark water below, and the beautiful blues and whites in the sky above. I remember wanting desperately to be with Caleb, longing for heaven, feeling so empty inside.

God spoke to my heart on that dock. He asked me to keep going with the life He'd given me. He asked me to keep my eyes focused on Him, to remember all He'd given me to do in being a wife to Josh and a mother to Josiah. He reminded me of all the reasons I had to praise Him, all the blessings He'd already given me. Praise was the last thing I wanted to do, but I knew that for now, just choosing to focus on the things I DID have in my life, instead of what I DIDN'T have was a key factor in my journey of healing.

Once again, it has to be conscious choice to dwell on the things in your life that bring you joy. Never stop asking God for your dreams and desires. Some He'll give to you freely, some He'll withhold for a time, and for whatever reason some will never be a part of your life.

As I stood on the dock that day, I made a choice. Here's a poem I wrote that captures the moment:

I stood on the edge	One step at a time
The edge of my mind	One day at a time
The edge of my past	One life at a time
The edge of my future	I stood on the edge
The edge of my existence	And saw us
The edge of my faith	United
The edge of me	Soon
I stood on the edge	Forever
I saw my son	And Ever
I saw my God	Amen
I saw myself	
I stood on the edge	
I chose to live	
I chose to love	
I chose to believe	
I chose to walk	
Forward	

I envisioned myself reaching my hand out to God, walking off the dock, away from the dark water, towards the life He'd given me, leaving the rest with Him to sort out, not yet trusting, but just leaning on my faith to continue me on the journey, one step at a time.

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere... - Psalm 84:10a

Even with the loss and the sadness and the grief, it's still better to be living in the centre of God's will than outside His perfect will. I don't have to agree with what God is doing, or allowing in my life at any given time, but I do have to accept His sovereignty - He knows what He is doing, and allowing, and there's a reason, though I may only catch a glimpse of it here on earth.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God. - Psalm 42:11

There are so many promises in the Bible. This verse really impacted me when I was pregnant, and I came to understand why after Caleb died. It is another promise from God and He is good at following through on His promises. This verse says we WILL praise God.

I AM able to praise God for Caleb and the love I will always have for him as well as the special place he holds in our family and in our hearts. My son's death will never make sense to me, but trusting God's love for me, and choosing to submit to His will DOES make sense on the long journey of healing.

Keeping it Real

Though we know God is not to blame for any death, so many times it seems that He turns a blind eye by allowing His permissive will to occur. He stands dead-centre when we are looking for a target. I'm convinced that God loves us so much that He is willing to take the blame, to absorb our anger when we need a punching bag. I think He would rather have us yelling at Him than not speaking at all. - Leslie Williams

It's a hard shake of reality to lose a child. The world is sometimes such a broken, ugly place full of the most painful experiences and emotions. Being a Christian doesn't always shield me from the hurt, but it sure does help me get through it.

Following Christ, being a Christian, doesn't mean you have to have a smile plastered on your face no matter what, and it doesn't mean you don't feel things deeply. Christ was never afraid to let others know about his feelings. He experienced some of the deepest human feelings during his 33 years of life:

- Jesus experienced great anger in the temple when he discovered people were treating it as a marketplace. - Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17
- Jesus experienced great sadness as he wept for Jerusalem and the hardships he knew were coming for the people of the great city. - Mathew 23:37-39, Luke 13:34-35
- Jesus experienced great sorrow over the death of his friend Lazarus. - John 11:32-36
- Jesus experienced a great struggle with following the will of God just before his arrest. - Matthew 26:36-46

Don't be afraid to come to God with your deepest feelings. He knows them well. He can handle them all.

A good friend of mine wrote a *Mom's Moments* newsletter article in October 2008 and she gave me permission to reprint it for this book:

The Happy Christian?

Do you ever get the impression that Christians are supposed to be happy all the time, but wonder what's wrong with you because you know that when reality hits, you're not smiling all the time? Well I truly believe that the "Happy Christian" is really a myth... Christians aren't obligated to be smiling all the time... if we are, we aren't truly being real.

The problem is that people use two very different words interchangeably: joy and happiness.

Happiness is circumstantial. We all experience happy moments: our wedding day, the birth of a child, their first steps or graduation, promotions at work, dream-like vacations, or even the day to day reminders that life is good... the sweet words of a loved one, relaxing outside under a perfect blue sky... you can make a mental list of those moments that have brought you happiness. Unfortunately they don't last forever. We cannot escape times of sadness, disappointment and deep pain. They are a reality in all of our lives. Ecclesiastes 3:4 assures us that there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh."

Now for that second word: **joy**. What makes it different? In short, joy defies its circumstances.

It is to be noted that joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) which we possess once we accept Christ as our Saviour. In essence, happiness is a response to externals, whereas true joy is a response to what's inside... the security in our salvation through Christ and the peace of knowing that God is active in our daily lives. Even though I may be facing uncertainty, exhaustion, discouragement or sadness, deep down knowing that I have a God who is bigger than my circumstances, a God who loves me and is powerful enough to carry me through gives me peace, hope, and ultimately joy. I often find myself recalling Philippians 4:6—check it out!

Fleeting moments of happiness may come at various points in our lives, but inner joy flows only from Christ. Times of sorrow will come... but seek Him to get you through, as He is our joy. The following verses remind us that God never leaves us despite the tough days... May they give you a taste of joy regardless of what you may be facing...

Isaiah 40:25-31; 41:10; 49:13; Psalm 103:2-5; Jeremiah 29:11-14; 32:17. - Melanie Heffern

He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be shaken. - Psalms 62:6

These words spoke to me at the hospital, as the ultrasound technician left the room. She had just confirmed my worst fear that Caleb had really died. These words of scripture jumped straight into my head and heart from somewhere deep in my soul. I grabbed hold of them and held on for dear life as I got dressed and walked towards the nurse's station to call Josh.

Life will inevitably bring us times of suffering and trials, but it will also bring us times of happiness and victory. Underneath it all there is one thing that will never change - God. He is the Rock where we can firmly plant our feet in the storms. The wind and the waves cannot shake us from His firm foundation. Whether you find yourself kneeling on the Rock drenched in the rain of your tears, or standing tall with sunshine and a smile of your face, you can find joy on your journey if you keep your feet on the Rock.

Discovering God's Purposes

God has a bottle and a book for His people's tears. What was sown as a tear will come up as a pearl.

- Matthew Henry

When Caleb passed, people would tell me how God's purposes for his life had already been fulfilled, and his time on this earth, though incredibly short, was done. One of the hardest things I had to deal with was giving over what I had intended Caleb to be in my life, Josh's life, Josiah's life, and the lives of family members.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. - Jeremiah 29:11

So what about Caleb's hope and future? I can tell you right now that my middle son's hope and future are not what I thought they would be. He was supposed to fill our days with many wonderful memories for many years to come. He was supposed to play with his older brother, splash in the bath, run through the mud and puddles in cute rubber boots, and I was supposed to have many tickle fights with him. I was supposed to read him lots of stories from his Baby Bible, and teach him *Jesus Loves Me*. I was supposed to be there as he took his first steps, experienced his first day of school, played lots of sports, married the woman of his dreams and became a parent himself. These were all the things I hoped for Caleb's future. Why didn't it happen this way? The hard truth is that I will never understand. I'm sorry I don't have the answers that I know you are looking for. Those answers wait in a place far beyond this one. One day it will all make perfect sense, though I know that sometimes that doesn't seem good enough.

For now, I hold onto this thought: God has His perfect plans for us all, and God's plans for Caleb ARE being fulfilled, though they are vastly different from my plans. The hard part is opening myself up to what God intended Caleb to be, to open my heart and see through God's eyes to what Caleb HAS done instead of what he HASN'T done through my eyes. I have a responsibility to search for them just as I do for my other two boys. I will be getting to know Caleb all my life as God unfolds to me what he IS in our lives, not what he was SUPPOSED TO BE. Caleb's time on earth was MUCH shorter than I ever imagined, but his life will still be all that God intended, as long as I am open to being a vessel through which His purposes can be fulfilled for my tiny boy.

About six weeks after Caleb's death I started making a list. This list helped me focus on God's purposes and plans for Caleb instead of constantly thinking about the unfairness of his death. I'll share with you some of the highlights of my special list:

- There were people at Caleb's funeral who never go to church or go to a church where they cannot hear the gospel - THEY HEARD THE GOSPEL ON MAY 23rd, 2003.
- Many women have opened up to me about their own loss of a child. Caleb's funeral brought closure and healing in a lot of women's lives and also a chance to just remember their own baby and know they are safe in heaven and are cared for by Jesus and they WILL see them one day or see them again.

- A woman shared with me that she had a very similar experience to ours, and they actually buried their son on the exact same date as we buried Caleb, 16 years earlier.
- A woman shared with me she lost twins at 7 months in utero from abuse from her husband. I gave her one of my "The Gift" plaques and she hung it where she can see it every day as she sews.
- Josh shared Caleb's story with the staff at camp.
- As far as I can tell - so many family and friends thinking about heaven now, feeling like a piece of them is already there. Caleb has brought them closer to God and reminded us all of the glory of heaven.
- Josh shared Caleb's story again at camp - this time with the whole camp - about 30 people.
- Found out that a good friend just lost her daughter - very similar circumstances. I was able to TRULY reach out to her in her grief and loss, though just through email. She has shared and I have shared - beautiful connecting moments. I have been able to pray with tears and DEPTH for her, I can feel her pain and I can come before God on her behalf. (Read some of our correspondence in another chapter of this book - **Subsequent Pregnancy Correspondence - Emails From the Heart**).
- Seen a real depth to many family members that I've never seen before. They are also adopting some of their own special ways to remember Caleb - a Christmas ornament on the memory tree at church every year, balloon launches of their own on his birthday - their souls have truly touched and loved and grieved my son.
- Josh and his brother have spoken about Caleb in numerous sermons and talks and many people have been touched by their words.
- The thought of Caleb's presence in heaven is very comforting for family members and friends when others pass away.

God DOES have purpose for your little one, though it is NOT your purpose. God intended life just as you do, but definitely not in the same way. I have found life for Caleb in all the people he's already reached out to in their grief and all those who love him - he lives in their hearts.

I encourage you to make a list something like this one, so you can see meaning in your baby's life and find some hope amidst the sadness of your journey of grief.

Ideas for Honouring the Life of Your Child

Perhaps our eyes need to be washed by our tears once in a while, so that we can see Life with a clearer view again. - Alex Tan

Our babies have come and gone much too quickly through our lives, yet we will always have a memory of them, a place in our heart for them, and a love for them that is very strong. At times it was frustrating for me because I didn't know how to express my love for Caleb. He was not there to hug and kiss or experience my love for him in tangible, visible ways. Instead of trying to contain it or minimize it, I found other ways to show my love for Caleb and honour his life. The greatest way I accomplished this was to spread my love for Caleb around to Josh and Josiah, to let them in and share that special piece of my heart with them, as well as other family members, friends and other little ones in my life. There have been many other things we have done to honour Caleb, acknowledge his memory and bless others as we discover more and more ways God will use Caleb in this world. Some of the things we have done would never have been a thought if not for Caleb.

Here are a few ideas of how to honour your child, if you are searching for a ways to express your love for them in tangible ways:

- Sponsor a needy child through World Vision (www.worldvision.org) or Compassion International (www.compassion.com).
- Plant a tree or a garden and watch it grow as you care for it (this is a great idea for helping children heal from the loss of a sibling).
- Make a donation to an organization or a project that plans to print names on bricks, plaques, etc. - you could place your child's name here or Baby (___).
- The Gideons take In Memory Of... donations and print Bibles to hand out.
- My devotional basket (which contains a Bible, prayer books, and a journal) is one that we received just after Caleb's death - it was originally filled with beautiful flowers.
- In lieu of starting RESPs or saving for your child's future education, consider setting up savings bonds or a trust fund that can be used by someone who cannot pay for themselves.
- Donate the baby items you purchased or were given specially for your baby to a pregnancy care centre or a shelter for abused women.
- Build or purchase a memory box - if you have an artistic friend or a friend who is skilled at carpentry, ask them to contribute. Josh made a memory box with his grandfather and a good friend of ours painted beautiful pictures on it for us. About a year after Caleb's death we filled the box with some special items to remember him.
- Discover how your local hospital cares for women who have similar experiences and contribute to their efforts. During our hospital stay, the nurses hung a heart-shaped sun catcher outside our door as a signal for the staff of what was happening in the room. The staff made sure we were treated with much sensitivity and care while we were experienc-

ing Caleb's stillbirth. The sun catcher came home with us and hangs in our window.

- Research how you can help organizations in their efforts to comfort others in the loss of a baby. For example, www.calebministries.org has a program called the P.A.T. Ministry (Providing a Treasure) that requires blankets, bonnets and gowns to be sewn and materials donated to make these special treasure boxes. I'm just using this organization as an example because the name is so fitting for me. There are many others out there.
- Many funeral homes and organizations have special events or bereavement services to remember loved ones. There are open to everyone.

Please email me at discoveringhope@ymail.com with any other ideas you might have - I'd love to keep growing this list and finding more ideas to honour our children on the journey.

Remembering Your Little One at Special Occasions

Those we love never die, for as long as we live and remember, they are with us. - Helen Steiner Rice

Please know that it's OK to include your child as you celebrate special occasions without their presence. No matter how small or how short the time they were with us, they are still an important part of our lives and our families. It's also OK if it's too hard to remember them at birthdays, Christmas, etc. Everyone grieves differently and every family grieves differently.

I'd like to share with you how we have chosen to remember Caleb at special times of the year and I encourage you to find ideas that fit with you and your family.

- At Christmastime we participate in Operation Shoebox by Samaritan's Purse (www.samritanspurse.org) - This organization sends shoeboxes full of gifts to various parts of the world so needy children everywhere receive something for Christmas. We put together three boxes as we have three boys - our oldest and our youngest sons help to fill a box each, and we put together another one in Caleb's absence.
- Another Christmas tradition is to buy an ornament for each of the kids in the family, so they will have many ornaments to take with them when they leave home and put up their own tree in the future. We buy an ornament for Caleb through a worthy cause (Memory Tree at church, Reading Tree (a book is bought for a needy child as a Christmas present in lieu of an ornament), etc.
- For Caleb's birthday our family participates in balloon launches. We pick a beautiful spot to release a balloon and watch it soar to the heavens as we sing Happy Birthday and say a few words to Caleb if our heart desires. I wrote a blog about our balloon launch of 2007:

In the May 2007 issue of the newsletter, I wrote about our wee son, Caleb, who was stillborn in 2003. I shared with you our new family tradition, "On May 21st, we visit a playground, and take with us a helium balloon. We say a special prayer and we all grab hold of the balloon's string. Then we sing Happy Birthday, and we let the balloon go. We watch as it soars higher and higher, until we can't see it anymore, and we envision a balloon that reaches all the way to heaven, to our tiny Caleb, on his birthday."

Well...it's been a month since our balloon launch, and I think I'm ready to share a little about it. On May 21st of this year, we were driving back home from a visit with my family (Josh had gone away to BC for some leadership training, and I will travel great distances for some help with my two little men when their daddy's away!) We stopped at a beautiful town, Parry Sound. We thought there was no chance of finding a helium balloon on Victoria Day - all the shops were closed. But God knows...and the dollar store in the mall was open, and had a wonderful selection of balloons, and a helium tank standing beside them, ready to make some memories for our family on this unique day. I said 'Thank you God', smiled, and asked my oldest son to pick whatever balloon he wanted for his brother. He picked a red one (his favourite colour), with four smiley faces on it ('How fitting!', I thought, because Caleb would have been four that day). We walked out of the store, my son proceeded to let go of the balloon (not the launch we were

hoping for!), we headed back into the store for another balloon, I held it tight, and away we went to the playground. We sat on the bleachers, sang Happy Birthday, kissed the balloon, and we all let go of it at the same time. We watched it soar, we thought of Caleb, we smiled a little and cried a little, then we played and played with the two boys God has given us to raise. My heart grows every time I talk about Caleb, or write about him. I miss him so much, I know I always will, that feeling never lessens, and that's OK with me. It means that I'm his mommy and I love him. And I'm glad for our tradition, and red balloons with smiley faces...

There are so many ideas out there if you search for them, or you could start your own unique ways of including your child in special occasions. Please email me at discovering-hope@ymail.com with any other ideas you might have. I'd love to keep growing this list and finding more ways to remember our little ones at special occasions on the journey of healing.

Heaven

I can only imagine what it will be like, when I walk by Your side...

I can only imagine, what my eyes will see, when Your Face is before me!

I can only imagine. I can only imagine.

Surrounded by Your Glory, what will my heart feel?

Will I dance for you, Jesus? Or in awe of You, be still?

Will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall?

Will I sing 'Hallelujah!?' Will I be able to speak at all?

I can only imagine! I can only imagine!

I can only imagine, when that day comes, when I find myself standing in the Son!

I can only imagine, when all I will do, is forever, forever worship You!

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I can tell you right now that I don't know much about heaven except that it is a place beyond imagination. It is paradise, and I am looking forward to spending my forever there with God and with those I love. The Bible doesn't give many clues as to what heaven is like. Personally, I think this is because there are no words to describe it. So I have to say this section of the book is based primarily on personal reflections, experiences, and conversations with other people that have given me comfort these past few years.

Here are just two of the Bible verses that give us a glimpse of heaven:

Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place - Deuteronomy 26:15a

(This is Moses advising the Israelites what to pray to God)

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be where I am. - John 14:2-3 (This is Jesus talking to His disciples.)

These few words tell us that heaven is God's home, His dwelling place, and that heaven is holy. That means it is a place that is without sin or sadness. It is a perfect place. And so it has to be if God is to live there.

Also, there are many rooms in God's house, many spots for people to come and stay awhile. Heaven is not a temporary place, it is a forever place. Jesus Himself prepared your baby's spot. Imagine your child living somewhere that Jesus has made specially for them. Jesus loves us so much that He died for us, so imagine what your baby's dwelling place would be like if the Son of God designed it. God knows all of us inside out, He knows our likes and dislikes, our favourite colours, our favourite views. The Bible says that Jesus "prepares a place for you" (John 14:2), and that means he is excited about it, anticipating the time we will meet Him there, waiting for us to join Him. We are welcome house guests of Jesus.

The most beautiful aspect of heaven is the presence of Jesus, and those who dwell in heaven experience His presence all the time. I think that must be the greatest part of living in heaven - **being with Jesus.**

I am simply trying to paint the tiniest part of a picture of what it must be like to live in heaven.

My mind cannot grasp the beauty that must abound there.

Josh and I wrote this just after we delivered Caleb, for his funeral bulletin:

Ask us what we see...

We see our beautiful boy at home in heaven.

We see him singing and dancing with the angels.

We see him walking the golden streets with grace and ease.

We see him waiting for us to join him there.

We see him free.

Ask me what I see...

I see my home in heaven.

I see angels singing, angels dancing.

I see golden streets and glorious mansions.

I see rooms prepared for me and you.

But most of all, I see Jesus welcoming me home, feel

His arms around me, and I am safe as I wait for you.

When I was pregnant with Caleb there was a song on the radio that moved me to tears almost every time I heard it played. The song ***I Can Only Imagine*** by *Mercy Me* painted such a beautiful picture of a world beyond this one. Life was tough for us during the time Caleb was growing in my womb, and the song was a good reminder of what is to come. Of course at the time I didn't know things were about to get even tougher, and that the song would come to mean so much more for me. I believe God was preparing my heart for Caleb's death, even though the thought never crossed my mind before it actually happened.

After Caleb died, I thought about heaven ALOT. Other people would tell me their thoughts on heaven and what they thought Caleb was doing there, what it would be like to reunite with him one day, and what his heavenly home must look like. There's no possible way we can fathom an inkling of the beauty and majesty of God's dwelling place, but I think if you ask Him to give you a glimpse of your child's life as it is now in heaven, a comforting vision of your child in glory, He will reach out to you in your grief and speak to your heart like only He can.

I'd love to share with you some of the pictures of my child that I carry around in my heart, snapshots of Caleb's life in heaven. I see my Lord and Saviour, my best friend, the one who loved me enough to die for me - I see Him rocking Caleb to sleep, I see Caleb's angelic babysitters caring for him with nothing but the characteristics of God - love, compassion, gentleness, kindness, patience and self-control. His friends also have these same qualities and Caleb enjoys playing with them. Some of his friends may be other children who have gone on to heaven shortly before or after birth. There is only unconditional love and acceptance in all the relationships in heaven. There is no hurt or rejection, and no one is left out.

I see Caleb as a baby dancing to the music of heaven and sleeping in absolute comfort, I see him

as a boy climbing the tallest trees and swimming in the bluest water, and I see him as a man talking with friends and excelling in the job he fulfills in heaven. I wonder about the colours he must see - they must be brighter and more vivid than any of the colours of our prettiest rainbows! What about the amazing people he's meeting - who is your favourite Biblical character? Imagine them having conversations with Noah, Ruth, Samson, David, Esther, Daniel, etc.

Of course, you'd rather have your baby with you. There is no question of that, and I am not trying to minimize that desire - I know it well, I experience it every day. But I can think of no better place for your baby to be if not with you.

I have a special vision that always cheers me up when I miss Caleb most. When my time on earth is done and I move on to join Caleb in heaven, I just know he's going to pick me up in his arms and swing me around, and tell me he loves me and he's been waiting for me, happy and content in his heavenly home. I look forward to watching all three of my boys wrestle when we are all united in heaven. And the thought of Josh meeting another one of his sons just warms my heart every time. All in God's perfect timing.

About three years after Caleb died, I finally grabbed hold of a wonderful truth that had taken a while to sink in and really speak to my heart. I am not permanently separated from Caleb, but our meeting will be prolonged for a longer period of time than I originally thought. A normal pregnancy lasts 40 weeks, but sometimes I still feel pregnant with Caleb, in the sense that I am still waiting. It's not that I will never meet him, hold him, or hear him talk and laugh, it's just that I have to wait much longer than I thought I would. We will have a reunion one day, my son and I. How glorious it will be, there will be a lot of catching up to do. It is one of the things I look forward to at the end of my journey.

The Bridge to Heaven

Jesus said that those who mourn, those who are poor and persecuted and have nothing are happy! How could he say such things? Only in light of another kingdom, another world, another way of seeing this world. He came to bring life - another kind of life altogether. And it is in terms of that life that we must learn to look at our suffering I have found it possible, when I see suffering from that perspective, wholeheartedly to accept it. But it takes a steady fixing of my gaze on the cross.

If the cross is the place where the worst thing that could happen happened, it is also the place where the best thing that could happen happened. Ultimate hatred and ultimate love met on those two crosspieces of wood. Suffering and love were brought into harmony. - Elisabeth Elliot

In this book there is a real focus on the hope of heaven. I reflect on the heavenly experiences of our babies - about the joy and love they live in every day and about meeting them there one day. Heaven is the home of God. He lives there with Jesus and all those who believe in Him. There is room for EVERYONE in heaven, regardless of background, and God wants you to spend your eternity with Him, He wants you to join Him in His heavenly home and live there with Him forever. In case you are doubtful about where you are headed for eternity, here's a short and sweet explanation taken from the NIV Bible of how you can be certain.

Picture with me a bridge that sits atop a wide expanse. This bridge does not meet in the middle, and the gap that exists makes it impossible to jump across. You are on one side of the bridge and God is on the other - you are separated from Him. Mistakes, wrong choices, or sin is what created the gap in the bridge. No matter how many good deeds you do, no matter how much God loves you, the gap remains. Imperfection simply cannot touch perfection. Holiness cannot touch unholiness. You just can't get to God or heaven on your own.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. - Romans 3:23

The good news is that God does not want to stay separated from you, He wants to be in relationship with you, and He has already made a way to reach you. There is someone who can repair your bridge to God, save you from falling through the middle, rescue you from your mistakes, and deliver you from an eternity that is uncertain. That someone is God's Son, Jesus Christ.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. - John 3:16

More than two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ died on the cross for you, for me, for everyone. When Jesus went to the cross He took your sin with Him - as he died, your sin was wiped out, forgiven. And as He rose back to life He showed the world that sin, wrong choices, mistakes don't have to end in death. Jesus gave you a choice. He repaired your bridge and gave you the freedom to experience a wonderful, fulfilling relationship with God that ultimately leads to heaven. All you have to do is accept His gift of reconciliation.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation...God made Him who

had no sin to be sin for us - 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19, 21a

*For Christ died for our sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God.
- 1 Peter 3:18a*

Whoever you are, whatever your past, wherever you are right now, you can take your first steps across the bridge to God and begin your journey of faith - walk, run, skip, jump, cartwheel if you want to! He started walking towards you the moment you were born. Start by talking to God. Let Him know you believe in Jesus and what He did for you at the cross. Don't worry about what words to use in your prayer, or how it may sound to God. God knows you, and all He cares about is that you mean it.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [Jesus] will be saved. - Romans 10:13

That if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. - Romans 10:9

Turn to God, open your heart up to Him, for that is how you find your faith. Faith will help you believe and know the love of God and His Son, Jesus. Then you can be certain that you will spend your forever in heaven, with God and with your baby.

This is only the beginning of your faith journey - I can tell you from personal experience that being in relationship with God is the best thing I've done with my life. I learn more about Him all the time by reading the Bible, praying, and spending time with other Christians. My heavenly Father is my best friend - He is there with me through good times and bad, heartache and joy, triumph and sorrow. He has always been with me, patiently waiting until I was ready to believe in Him, know Him, and share my life with Him. He is the greatest companion on the journey of faith and on the journey of healing.

You might have some questions about this section - email me and I'll try to answer them as best I can.

discoveringhope@ymail.com

Subsequent Pregnancy

If the future seems overwhelming, remember that it comes one moment at a time. - Beth Mende Conny

There will come a very personal and difficult decision some time down the road, or maybe you are facing it right now - whether or not you will try for another baby. I encourage you to really search your heart, talk to your doctor, your spouse, your other children and family members - gather up all the background and information you need and gauge where everyone is at on their own journeys. Especially be honest with yourself and how you are doing. Then you'll be in a much better position to make the decision with your spouse.

Our Story

Our story is different from yours, just as all our stories are different. I share our story with you to give you hope for the journey, and because it is the only story I know well enough to share. I don't know how God will work out His plans for you and your family, but if our story helps in some way, it is worth telling it to you.

How did we decide to try for another baby? Josh and I hoped for another sibling for Josiah and wanted to try one more time before we considered other options like adoption.

Was I nervous and scared through my third pregnancy? YES and YES!! Fear held me back for a long time - we didn't try again for 15 months. My husband was ready before I was, I wasn't sure I could handle the situation of being pregnant after experiencing a stillbirth. But then a funny thing happened - one day I had a vision of a grown-up Caleb and he was pointing a tsk-tsk finger at me, as if he was saying, "Don't blame me if you don't want to try again, don't put that on me, you don't know what God is doing. If you want more kids, you try, don't let ME stop you." Then I pictured myself having to answer to him in heaven. Weird, but it worked! I realized I was using Caleb as an excuse to hold back and there was only one way to face the fear. I was ready to try again. However, we also decided this would be my last pregnancy, whatever happened, whatever the outcome, because it was so hard emotionally.

Our pregnancy with Elijah was uneventful for the most part - we didn't experience any major life changes, and there were many blessings along the way. I prayed for a good, wise doctor so that I could trust her judgement about how to handle different aspects of the pregnancy. I was considered high-risk because of Caleb's stillbirth, and I was cared for very well during my third pregnancy. I had more than the usual number of ultrasounds and doctor visits, my doctor decided to perform a c-section at 37 weeks as an added precaution of repeating our experience with Caleb, and I had many stress tests conducted at the end of the pregnancy. Despite all the wonderful medical care and concern, I was very anxious throughout the pregnancy. I found it hard to enjoy, though I tried my best. I felt like I had been waiting forever to hold another baby of my own, and I couldn't wait for the day my third child was born, and I could hold them in my arms, healthy and whole.

When Elijah was born there were complications. Some babies are born weeks earlier than full term, and they are healthy enough to go home the next day. Elijah was born at just over 37 weeks and his lungs weren't quite developed. He had a small hole in his lung which cause a

pocket of air to form outside his lungs, pushing on his heart and organs. He had to have a chest tube inserted and he was in the NICU for a week. I couldn't hold him for five days, couldn't hardly touch him because of the tubes and the discomfort he was experiencing. My whole body longed to hold my son - I'd been waiting so long, too long, to hold another son. Here he was and I still couldn't hold him. So I prayed, knowing that the lesson in trusting God was not over, would never be over, and I waited for the outcome. I stayed in the hospital for four days as I recovered from the c-section, and I visited Elijah whenever I could. I saw him improve, little by little, and I started to let myself believe I would actually be bringing my little boy home soon. What a glorious day when I put him in his car seat, got in the car with my husband and drove Elijah to his new home. His first full day at home with us was the anniversary of Caleb's funeral two years earlier. Talk about God's perfect timing. I'm still amazed as I write about it.

Subsequent Pregnancy Correspondence - Emails From the Heart

Following are excerpts from a correspondence between myself and a good friend who also experienced a still birth. (Find her story in the *Fellow Travellers on the Journey* section of this book.) The deaths of our second babies happened within a few months of each other and our subsequent pregnancies also happened within a few months of each other, so we were journeying through very similar stages at very similar times. These emails portray so well what was on our hearts during our third pregnancies:

May 13, 2004 - Anna writing to Mary-Catherine around the 1st anniversary of Caleb's death

Hi Mary-Catherine: Thank you so much for your email - I have also been thinking about you, and wondering how you are doing...yes, the beginning of this month was quite challenging, and my mood dropped significantly, but has since improved. I have told people of my struggles, and asked for prayer, and I know God is hearing them!

Yes, we believe Caleb died on the 18th, I found out on the 19th, he was born on the 21st, and his funeral was on the 23rd - so I still wonder how I'll be next week - dreading it somewhat, but trying hard to focus on positive, on God.

I was recently "chatting" on msn with a friend, and was able to form these words to write: I am trying to be submissive to Caleb's death, and God's will, even if I do not agree with it. I do not have to agree with it, but I do have to accept it. So that seems to sum up the past year - in many ways - Josh losing his job, Caleb's death, our move to Sudbury, the change in career for Josh - this has all been a challenge in submissiveness!

We are hoping to travel to see family in a couple of weeks & also visit the cemetery. Caleb's stone looks wonderful - we inscribed *Surrounded by Glory* on it - also significant because the song that helps me so much, and we also played it at his funeral is *I Can Only Imagine* by Mercy Me - I'm sure you've heard it?! In this song it speaks of being surrounded by glory once we arrive in heaven. So Mary-Catherine, I continue to look beyond this world, anticipate meeting my son in my eternal home, and love him with all my heart though I cannot be with him.

Josh & I are getting closer to being open to trying for another pregnancy (Josh more so than me - pregnancy is not my favourite condition & I want to be more prepared mentally and physically to enjoy the process - no matter the outcome!) So we are planning for another go at it in the fall - I'd love your prayers on this one!

One way this month has already been redeemed (as you were hoping for me) - my sister just discovered she is pregnant with her first child! I am an auntie! And so life goes on, this year is another year, filled with new possibilities, and new futures.

Josh continues to seek God's will for employment. Josiah is growing more and more each day, and continues to be my greatest helper in healing and looking to what is ahead!

We just bought a house in Sudbury, a beautiful place with a big yard. So God's will is unveiling for us here in Sudbury & praise Him for all of it!

I hope your heart is good, Mary-Catherine, and you find yourself in a much better place emo-

tionally, spiritually, physically, mentally as each day goes by! Much, much love to you dear lady! Anna

May, 2004 - Mary-Catherine writing to Anna

Dear Anna: Thank you for your e-mail. This past year has been such a whirlwind, I imagine, for you and your family. And like you, I do not necessarily agree with God's will for me (or for my little one), and I know that God is bigger, smarter and really more with it than me.

In reading your e-mail, I too, recognize within me the challenge of "submitting" to God's will. In essence I have lately come back to remembering that I am creature, not Creator. And that means that I don't make the rules. I don't have the responsibility God has in the whole creation thing. My job is to love as I can, as best as I can. In spite of, and within, what happens.

We have struggled with having another child (or not). And what we kept coming back to was our individual and collective desire that our son have a sibling when we leave this planet. I'm 13 weeks along right now in another pregnancy. The experience has been humbling and challenging and healing and uncertain, with my emotions vacillating between hope and dread. Ah. I suspect that is normal for we who have experienced loss of our little ones...I know that this will be my last pregnancy, regardless of what God wants to do with the little one within. So I wake up every day and welcome the little one, pray for health and a long life, and give the little one over to God. And being pregnant reminds me of my time with Catherine, how short it was, how it was difficult to enjoy her while I felt pervasively ill, and how I long to meet her (and will one day).

Anyway, my thoughts are with you this coming week especially. God has great plans for you and your family, Anna. The Creator of the universe has big plans for you! Good ones! May you experience comfort beyond imagining, peace that settles deep into your bones, and a sense of hope for the future that grows brighter each day. With love, Mary-Catherine

June, 2004 - Anna writing to Mary-Catherine

Dear Mary-Catherine: What a blessing you continue to be in my life...praise God for introducing us! I have read your email a few times these past weeks, drawing strength from your support, and from your understanding of my emotions. I must admit, I have not reached out to any support groups or anything of the sort, and when I try to explain my emotions to others who have never experienced the loss of a babe (thank God), it is hard to relate. So thank you for reaching out to me this past month.

I have been lifting you up in prayer for the pregnancy you are going through, for the little one that grows within you. Thank God for your words - for sharing how important it is to you that your son have a sibling, if it be God's will. When I read these words, they pierced my heart - Josh and I long for this also. And though I am so scared, it's almost time for us to try again - another few weeks. I have a feeling Caleb would not be too happy with the knowledge his mother and father were just too afraid to try again. I know he would not be pleased!

And now there's news from my sister that she is also pregnant - about 8 weeks now - already

growing a belly. And I draw more strength from her - my little sis - and the new life growing inside her womb. So even though May started out pretty crappy for me - just reliving so many memories, dates, etc. The month was redeemed with the news of your baby and my sister's baby. I realized life goes on...the cycle continues...and I want to get back in the game.

I have mourned Caleb for a year, and will continue to do so for the rest of my life. But now, in order to honour him, I must keep going. I feel a huge weight lifted in getting past the year milestone, and now I have new memories of May, and they are good ones. So pray for us if you will, as we look towards trying for another baby. As I will pray for you, Mary-Catherine.

Thank you for sharing your news, know that I will be thinking of you and praying for you, and praise God for the blessing of the little one growing inside you, for your baby is proof that life continues, though we never know how God will use that life for His purposes. Thank you for encouraging me in your willingness to put yourself, once again, at God's feet and accept whatever He brings, and enjoy each moment that He gives. Much love to you, Anna

June, 2004 - Mary-Catherine writing to Anna

Dear Anna: Thank you for your kind message. It is comforting to be upheld in prayer, and I thank you. And thank you, too, for sharing how May was for you. I have yet to come up to Catherine's anniversary date, and it is encouraging to read that it is possible to get through the rough stuff and feel a weight unburdening.

I read in your e-mail how you are seeking out life, and wanting to live life to the fullest. God has great plans for you and your family ... and as I know in my own life, God's plans seem unfathomable and perplexing sometimes. And they are consistently better than my own. I will keep you and Josh in prayer as you navigate the waters of wanting another child, and opening that possibility to God.

I'm at 17 weeks, and am working to live this day by day, and will be so relieved when the baby is born healthy and well. Ahhhh.)

My blessings go with you. And God has abundant grace and wonderful surprises just waiting for you. My love, and hopes for good things for you, and my blessings, Mary-Catherine

August, 2004 - Mary-Catherine writing to Anna

I am now in my 24th week and am feeling so much better than either of my other pregnancies... This pregnancy has been a rougher one than I anticipated ... and has given me opportunity to come before God with my doubts and fears and uncertainties and questions. A good place to go, to be sure. And to rework my limited understanding of God ... mostly it is a day to day thing, sometimes a week to week thing, and truthfully, sometimes hour to hour. And I focus on getting through this day/week/trimester, and letting God take care of the details and the outcome. When I remember who I am (creature, not Creator), it is much easier. Easier to let go, and let God.

October, 2004 - Anna writing to Mary-Catherine

How are you doing, Mary-Catherine? I am wondering how the pregnancy is going - hoping and praying all is well. I know you are coming up to your due date soon...I am about 6&1/2 weeks

pregnant myself...so I would love your prayers! My due date is June 4th - just one day later than Caleb's due date...I am hoping that God is working great and joyful things for these next few months - and that next May will be full of rejoicing, and not more sorrow.

I wait, surprisingly peacefully, and lay my heart and soul before my Lord, and see what He has for us...like you, I know He is good no matter what, and that He has plans for us and for the little one inside me. I'll keep you posted! We are doing well, Josiah turned 3 in August, and we took him on his first canoe ride, and his first overnight sleep in a tent - it was so much fun - we threw him a birthday party in the tent - complete with streamers, balloons, noisemakers, presents, etc.! What a constant joy he is to me - he keeps asking me how my baby is doing, and is it big yet? Then he pretends to take it out and hug and kiss it - already I can see how different this pregnancy will be for him, and how much more aware he will be of the changes in me. I am excited for him too.

October, 2004 - Mary-Catherine writing to Anna

Dear Anna: My thoughts and prayers have been with you as you navigate this early pregnancy time. What a blessing for you and Josh. What a gift from God pregnancy is (although mine have felt more like trials by fire!). I'm currently 36 weeks + along and anticipating a c-section in 17 days. It has been a wild ride, this pregnancy, for lots of reasons, mostly because of Catherine's life and death. And the prayers and support of people around me have been such a blessing ... yours included, Anna. I hope to be a clear support to you in your journey, especially over the next number of months. Please keep me posted.

And I am so excited for you and Josh and Josiah. Congratulations! The God who watches over you and me, Anna, has good plans for us. And I hold in prayer before God the little miracle child you carry. May your pregnancy fly by at just the right speed, may your body feel strong, may the babe grow in health and beauty, may Josh and Josiah celebrate the process with you, and most of all, may God bless and keep you and the babe and your wee family. My love to you across the provinces. It is a privilege to know of your new wee one, and to hold you in prayer.
Love, Mary-Catherine

November, 2004 - Anna writing to Mary-Catherine

I am 10 weeks along now - the baby is more than an inch long, and the nausea is already getting better - most days. I know there are many people praying for me, and I am thankful for that - there are many days when I feel I don't have the strength to do this again - just so much uncertainty - and then God asks me once again to leave it all with Him, and that He knows what's best, and that He loves me more than anyone else ever can. I know I am getting through each day of this pregnancy by God's strength alone - I am not relying on my own strength - it would not get me far!

November, 2004 - Mary-Catherine writing to Anna

Dearest Anna: Thank you for your lovely message. My c-section is still ... what, four days away, and I am on proverbial "pins and needles", anxious and worrying, and then remembering that God is bigger than me, has His arm around me (and always has) and has better plans for me than

I know. Reading your e-mail bumped me into the future when the wee one will be in my arms, and I'll come to know more who she/he is. As I read your note about taking each day at a time in your pregnancy, my heart nodded in complete agreement. This is a time for you, as it has been for me, to remember who we are before God. Such a struggle that has been, sometimes for me. Just as for me, I know that God has better plans for you than you do yourself.

And Caleb and Catherine, our wee heavenly babies, are having a blast, in the most loving arms beyond our wildest imaginations. I trust that these wee babes are fret-free, pain-free and love imbued. Kind of what I long for in my own life!

My prayers go with you in your pregnancy. It will be exciting to hear about your progress, and how you move along in this ... both physically, emotionally and spiritually. You are a woman of strong heart, Anna, and I think that the experience of having to give a little one up too early to God is one that tries the strongest of souls. Whatever you need to do to maintain calm, mental health, joy, and to diminish worry and anxiety, I encourage you to do it. God knows your heart and what will strengthen you for the journey. And wahoo! Ten weeks along is wonderful!

Summer 2005 - Mary-Catherine writing to Anna - Elijah is now 2 months old.

How beautiful are your wee ones. I look at your littlest man's face and I wonder about the extra-radiant beauty that I see in him. Does God doubly bless us in the child who follows our "heaven's angel"? Our own little Elizabeth is such a precious soul, and I have wondered why God would have sent her to us ... we certainly would not have met her if Catherine had lived (stopping at two seemed quite enough!).

Our Journey of Healing

If one dream should fall and break into a thousand pieces, never be afraid to pick one of those pieces up and begin again. - Flavia Weedn

When we started our journey of healing there was an overwhelming sense of emptiness and confusion. We were supposed to be holding a new baby boy, welcoming him into our family, watching him grow before our eyes, and making wonderful memories with him. But there was none of that. So we were lost for a long time, and it was compounded by Josh's recent lay-off and having to move. This is an article I wrote in 2006, describing what we were going through in the year following Caleb's death.

THE YEAR OF THE STORM

We moved to Sudbury in a snowstorm. Most of our worldly possessions were packed in a small U-Haul. We towed our '91 Pontiac Tempest behind us, stuffed with clothes and odds and ends. All the moving of the past eight months had forced us to scale down to necessities. We kept only what we needed and what we just couldn't part with. Our son, Josiah, sat in his car seat, oblivious to all the changes, all the turmoil of the year of 2003. He was happy if we were happy, our love was his home.

Eight hours of slippery, slushy, snowy driving conditions allowed us plenty of time to think. The recent events of our life seemed to have passed in a dream world, like everything had happened to someone else and I was just an observer, amazed by what I saw. 'How do they carry on? Why is their marriage still intact? How can their son still be so happy? What awaits them in Sudbury?' It was hard to believe it was my own life I was pondering. We left our family and friends in southern Ontario to pursue a life full of unknowns. How would we survive? Where would Josh work? Would we meet new friends? When would our hearts heal? The only certainty we had was Sudbury was our choice, our hope, our future.

Eight months earlier Josiah was one and a half years old, we were expecting our second son, and Josh was working as a youth pastor. Life was good - busy, but good. Then our world began to change. Josh was laid off unexpectedly. He left one morning for a breakfast meeting with the church leaders, and came home stunned and confused. We thought this was just a bump in the road and that Josh would be back to work in no time. The plus side was the three months of severance pay the church provided for us. We didn't feel much stress at that point and actually enjoyed a lot of quality family time together, and spoiled ourselves as we used up our medical benefits on massages and chiropractic treatments. Josh started working out at the gym two or three hours a day, we took long walks with our son, caught up with friends and family, and went out on dates. We tried to make the most of the gift of family time as Josh searched for another job and we awaited the birth of boy number two.

Three months quickly passed and once again our world turned upside down. It was ten days before my scheduled c-section and Josh had gotten in late the night before from a job interview in Seattle. As I awoke that morning I thought something was wrong, I just felt different. I let Josh sleep, I didn't want to share my unfounded worries, and took Josiah to the medical clinic

with me. This is when time stopped for me, when the dream world began. Numerous doctors, monitors and an ultrasound confirmed my worst fears. Our second son, Caleb Joshua Freedom Sklar, had died in utero.

The next few days were full of hard decisions, tears, and grief as we delivered Caleb and laid him to rest. It is true - no one should ever have to bury a child. I remember I felt as though the world had stopped turning. Suddenly all that we thought our lives would be had changed. For three months we had searched and there was still no job for Josh, and now there was no new baby to bring home.

One interpretation of Josiah's name is "God Has Healed." How amazing it was to be with him as he lived up to his name. Every smile, hug, and kiss from him seemed more precious and we marveled at him as we grieved the loss of Caleb. Josh and I had both lost our foothold on our roles in life, yet Josiah kept us grounded. We were still his parents, we still had a job to do, there was still reason to get up in the morning and grab all we could from the day.

Then came more hard choices. No jobs had opened up for Josh and we had to survive somehow. Where to go? What to do? What now? One opportunity remained, one door was still open. It was a temporary job, just for the summer, and it would mean giving up our apartment and putting most of our things in storage. We would work at a children's camp in northern Ontario for the summer. Josh would be the waterfront director, and I would run the snack shop.

We stuffed what we could into our old car, tied a bag of clothes and a stroller to the roof, and made the five-hour drive north to camp. We hoped the change of scenery and the new people we'd meet would be just what we needed. We were not disappointed. It was a good summer. We were busy, but we were surviving, and we managed to make some good memories as we watched Josiah blossom at the onset of his second birthday. The tiny church near the camp offered to let us stay in their parsonage for the summer. It was an old three-bedroom farmhouse on the lake - a beautiful place to grieve and reflect and find our happiness in what we DID have. There were also more interviews for Josh, and the three of us even made a trip to Maryland, Washington for a prospective job, but still nothing panned out.

The summer ended and we were still searching, still stunned, and still confused. We stuffed our car once again and headed back to southern Ontario for my sister's wedding. Afterwards we stayed with Josh's mom for a few weeks as awaited the outcome of yet another prospective job. That one also fell through, and we were so discouraged. We were down to nothing. No job, no money, no prospects, no future.

We sat down and talked about the next step. We realized the only place we'd seen hope for our little family in the past eight months was in the north. We decided to cling to that, to chase after a future, to live out our hope. That's how we found ourselves buckled into a U-Haul as we headed north to Sudbury.

Now we exist in the future we were chasing, and the hope we saw. Josiah is now four and a half years old, our third son, Elijah, was born May 13th 2005, we own our own home, and Josh is once again a pastor in the church.

The road to Sudbury was much longer than an eight-hour drive in the snow. Some of the bag-

gage we brought was unseen, carried in our hearts, forever a part of us. We're glad we made the trip, despite the storm that brought us here.

Sudbury has been a place of healing for us. We were so broken and tired when we got here, God has renewed and restored us, step by step, in the five years that we have lived here. Sudbury is a mining town and for a long time boasted the tallest smokestack in the world. Decades of mining had taken their toll on Sudbury, and by the 1970's the landscape here was described as similar to the moon - barren, unable to support plant life, and polluting its water systems. It was a place that had been chewed up and spit out in the name of mining.

Years before we moved here we visited good friends in Sudbury, and I remember seeing nothing but black rock and dead trees as we drove into town. I had no desire to live here then! I took Environmental Studies in university, and I remember working through a case study of Sudbury because of its pollution problems. But there was hope for this polluted, broken, hurting city - just like there was hope for us. When we moved here in 2003, the drive into town was much different. I remember seeing tiny green trees sprouting up on the landscape, the rocks had been cleaned somehow, and the lakes in the area were open to residents for enjoyment.

I am a nature-lover and my environment can greatly affect my moods. I really connect with my outdoor surroundings. As I watched Sudbury continue to heal these past five years, I have watched myself and my husband heal. We have grown stronger - in each other and in our faith. Josh is back to work in a full-time pastor position at our church, we live in a wonderful house with a huge yard and lots of nature to enjoy, we've made some great friends, and our boys are happy.

It's been a long road, and our journey will continue until we meet Caleb in heaven one day. How long we're in this city of healing, I don't know, but it's a beautiful place and we'll enjoy it as long as we're here.

Words for the Journey

We can cry with hope

We can say goodbye with hope

'Cause we know our goodbye is not the end, oh no

And we can grieve with hope

'Cause we believe with hope

(There's a place by God's grace)

There's a place where we'll see your face again

We'll see your face again

*- **With Hope**, Steven Curtis Chapman*

Since the idea of this book began in my heart in early 2004, I have heard of many more instances of pregnancy or newborn loss. I have been able to reach out to some, and pray for others. I got serious about finishing this writing project in the spring of 2008, and it is now the spring of 2009. In that time, I have connected with many women who have experienced the loss of a baby, and I've been able to forward this document on to some of them in hopes that it will help in some way. You are not alone in your grief, I am not alone in mine, and I will always wish none of us had to endure the loss. But I am glad for companions on the journey, I am glad to be with you in some small way on your journey, and I hope others will gather around you as you walk, one step at a time, towards healing.

The best companion for the journey is Jesus - He will always be there, reaching out His hand to you, always patient, always helping you along. Even when you don't want His help, when you just want to trail behind on the journey, feeling lost and alone, He's still there - waiting.

Thank you for letting me share the journey of healing with you. May God's peace fall heavy upon you as you navigate the waters of grief. May God's comfort ease the pain. And may God's love shine through the darkness.

I'll end this book with some wonderful words that Josh wrote 5 years after Caleb's death:

I was not sure how long it would take for my life to return to "normal." I had been ready for my life to have a new definition of normal with the addition of a second son; now it was to be a different normal than I had expected, one with out Caleb Joshua Freedom. It took me a while to understand that when a huge thing like this happens in life, we must redefine normal.

5 years from the death of Caleb and of many of my dreams, I have a new normal, and my life goes on. That does not mean that I don't long for the old and anticipated normal. But I do want my new normal not to be overwhelmed by the old normal, so I keep moving ahead. That does not change the fact that there have been times in my life this past five years where there has been a profound sense of something missing. Tonight I put my two sons, Josiah and Elijah to bed in our camper. I tucked them in side by side and the thought burst on me unheeded that I should be tucking in three, not two. I still am a wreck when we visit the grave site and I don't know if I will ever stop being a wreck. I don't think that I want to, truth being told.

The hardest thing that I went through was the creation of the new normal. But I found reasons

to keep going. Mine were different from yours, but find them. These words I write now are out of my experience and though they seem painful, they are not intended to hurt. The loss of a child changed me, created a new normal, and cut me deeply. But I worked through the pain, acknowledge the grief, and found that God gave the strength to move ahead. And in the midst of moving ahead, I have learned to celebrate that which I have, not that which I have lost. This is what I know for sure; these things that I know I have:

I have a wife of grace and beauty and wisdom who carries me even as I carry her.

I have three beautiful sons, who each bring joy to my heart in different ways.

I have two sons here who need me to live life to the fullest.

I have the anticipation of meeting Caleb one day, and what a day it shall be.

I have a just and merciful God who cares for me, for my family, and always will.

I have all that I need, and petty concerns fade more and more as I remember the things I do have, not what I have lost.

The way through this pain was to just keep going...keep journeying through the grief and keep discovering hope.

Anna's Journal Entries to Caleb: 2003 - 2007*January 30, 2003*

Hello Little One!

This is the first time I write to you, though I have already talked to you MANY times and prayed for you and felt you move around inside my tummy. I feel as though I've been gradually getting to know you as you gradually grow inside of me. Every day you are becoming more and more the person God sees you to be, the person He made you to be, even though you are not yet born.

Your daddy and I are very excited that you are now a part of our little family. Your big brother Josiah can't understand yet what is happening, or that he will be a big brother soon, but we are sure he will love having you around, playing with you and loving you. We love you already, You are 22 weeks old inside my tummy - still 18 weeks left until we meet you - we can't wait to hold you and look at you and start life with you. But we know you have to stay in my tummy as long as you can so you grow big and healthy and ready to enter the world. We saw you a couple of weeks ago (on January 13th) when mommy had an ultrasound. The doctors say you are healthy and growing normally and you look great! We got a picture of you sucking your thumb - already! You are about 6 or 7 inches long right now. When you kick inside my tummy you feel bigger than that! Your heartbeat is very strong too.

Your daddy and I and Josiah are very blessed to have you joining the family. We felt like something (or someone) was missing and we knew it was time for another baby. Mommy got pregnant right after we decided to have another baby and you've been growing inside me ever since! You seem to be awake the most at night and love to kick inside mommy as I try to sleep. You also like to kick Josiah when he's sitting on my lap, resting up against you. You are already trying to communicate with him! I know he will love you as soon as he meets you and I know you will love him.

I'll tell you more about us next time, I'm so tired and must sleep. I just wanted to say hello and we love you so much already and feel truly blessed that you are coming into our lives. We thank God we will be the ones to love you and care for you and raise you in His plan for your life. Grow healthy and strong, little one. You are kicking right now! Saying hello back to me! I will sleep now, or at least try! I love you!

Mommy

xoxox

March 16, 2003

Hi little Caleb:

We are visiting friends right now. We are having a wonderful, relaxing time. You have been kicking around inside me ALOT here - I think you like being with friends!

We found out that you are a boy at mommy's second ultrasound (on February 13th) - they could-

n't tell at the first one.

We are so very excited to know more about you - your name is Caleb Joshua Freedom Sklar. Your daddy really wanted to put the name Freedom in your name because we feel so free in God's will and plan for our little family.

You are almost 30 weeks old now inside mommy's tummy and getting bigger all the time! The doctors tell me you are healthy and VERY active - but I already knew that! You love to kick and roll around inside me. I can feel your little elbows and knees now. I love to connect with you that way. Mommy's biggest craving has been chocolate - especially Smarties!!

You are scheduled to arrive in the world about the second or third week of May - just two more months! We can't wait! Mommy is going to have an operation on her tummy so they can bring you into the world - just like with your brother Josiah.

Josiah likes to see mommy's "Baby" and he gives you kisses sometimes - he kisses my tummy. Although it may be different for him and he may have to get used to having you around - I know you two will love each other very much and I hope you will always be good friends.

There are many changes coming into our lives soon - we will probably be moving and daddy may start a new job - we don't know yet. God will show us as we need to know. For now we are getting ready for your arrival - in our home and in our hearts.

I love your daddy very much - he is a very good man and he loves God the most of anyone. He always asks God what we should do next and listens for the answer. He is a very caring man who already loves you very much. He is big and strong and will always protect you the best he can. He will be your best friend if you let him. He has always wanted to be a daddy and is so happy to have you and your brother Josiah. Josiah has taught him a lot about being a daddy and has taught me a lot about being a mommy. Because of your brother we are more ready for you and more relaxed about you.

I love your brother very much. He is full of energy and loves to play. He is very curious and is always exploring the world around him. He is very friendly and very loving - I'm sure he will help you a lot through life. He is just learning to talk and knows a lot of words. We are sure he'll be a good big brother to you.

I must go now, little one. Please know we are so happy you are on your way and we will always love you the best we can and we will always pray for wisdom in being your parents.

Love you,

Mommy

May 13, 2003

Dearest little Caleb:

Last week the doctor told me the day you should arrive in the world - MAY 29th - at 1pm.

Mommy has to have the operation on her tummy so you can come out, that's why we know EXACTLY when you should arrive. Sometimes mommy thinks you will come before that because I have contractions once in a while. But I hope you will wait until you are ALL READY, big and strong and healthy. Mommy has her hospital bag packed, just in case you arrive early. We

have been rearranging our home to get ready for you and we think we are done now! And we have been getting our hearts ready to welcome you into our family. We pray for you and daddy sings to you and I rub my tummy so you can feel me touching you! Josiah still kisses my tummy and he is learning to say your name. He's been practicing swinging your baby swing too. I think he's going to love you! We are all very excited about you! I can't wait to hold you in my arms and touch your tiny cheeks and look into your sleepy eyes and feel your fingers wrap around mine as you sleep. Hurry little one and join us!

We are still waiting to see where daddy will get his next job and where we will move. We hope to move a few weeks after you are born.

All of our family and friends are very excited to meet you as well and they always ask me how you are doing. There will be so many people to love you once you arrive - they are all good people with good hearts. I will always pray that you know the person who loves you most - Jesus. And I pray He will be your best friend all your life and that God will work out His best plan for you and you will live in that plan every day of your life - there is no other way.

Mommy must sleep now little Caleb.

I love you so much,

Mommy

xoxox

May 20, 2003 - I read this entry at Caleb's funeral.

Dearest Caleb Joshua Freedom Sklar:

Today you will be born and today we will say goodbye to you. You have already gone to be with God - I'm not sure when you went home - some time in the last few days. I don't know what happened - maybe we will find that out today too. We are so sad that you have gone, Caleb. We wanted to share our lives with you and watch you grow and love you with our whole hearts. You are our son and always will be. You will always live in our hearts. We will have to wait a little longer to meet you. God is holding you in His big strong hands and Jesus smiles on your beautiful, precious, tiny face.

You hear the angels singing. You are whole before you were ever born. You will never see this world - the beauty that abounds in it. But the only world you will know is the most beautiful because it is God's home.

I don't know if I have the strength to say goodbye to you without ever looking in your eyes or feeling your tiny fingers wrap around mine. God gives us strength for the day. There will be some family here to say goodbye as well.

When they told me yesterday that you had died, when they couldn't find your heartbeat, my whole world changed. It is a much emptier place without you and there will always be a hole where you should have been. Your daddy is so sad, we have both cried so many tears, and there is more to come. Please know we loved you from the start and we wanted you to be part of our little family.

We will tell Josiah about you one day, when he is old enough. And he will be sad too.

We place you in God's hands, little one, and look forward to the day we will meet you in your heavenly home.

Blessings on you angel boy,

I love you,

Mommy

xoxox

THE LORD GIVETH AND THE LORD TAKETH AWAY

BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD Job 1:21b

SHALL WE ACCEPT GOOD FROM GOD,

AND NOT TROUBLE? Job 2:10b

Late June, 2003

I want to use this book to heal now. I may write to you sometimes, all the time, I may write to God or others, I don't know just yet.

I hope you know that I love you to the depths of my being and I miss you so much it hurts. It has been almost a month now since you died, since you left this world and went to your heavenly home.

I am happy you live in paradise and walk in the presence of our Lord and sing and dance with the angels. But I do miss you so much. Your daddy has shed more tears than I have, he is so very sad sometimes and he really misses you and loves you.

There's so much to say already - where do I start? In many ways, I got to hold you for 9 months and feel you kick in my belly. I knew you the best of anyone because we spent every second together for 38 weeks. I was the only home you ever knew here in this world.

I have also realized that there were so many things I intended you to be in my life and daddy's life and your brother Josiah's life - none of these were what God intended you to be in our lives. I must open myself up to what God intended you to be and that is one of the first steps toward healing.

There were many days at the beginning, just after we lost you, that I didn't want to get better physically - I just wanted to be with you, in heaven. Then I would look at your daddy and your brother and I knew that I was still blessed, even though I'd lost you. God is still there and He is still good and I can still turn to Him and trust Him.

I've realized how little control I actually have in life. I've realized how short life is and how each minute must be enjoyed to the fullest.

I've been reminded just how precious your brother is and how important a job it is to be his mom.

I have renewed love for your daddy - deeper, stronger, fuller, more intimate love. He is just AMAZING.

And I thank God you have a wonderful home ready for you and that you have already met the Saviour. Heaven seems a lot less far away with you there. Please know I look forward to the day I will hold you in my arms in paradise. Until then I will live to the fullest and love with my whole heart and seek God's will always.

I love you Caleb.

August 30, 2003

Dearest Caleb:

Tonight it is hard. Tonight I miss you more than I can bear. Tonight the confusion is too much, the reality of your death too clear, the pain too sharp. Why aren't you here? Why aren't I holding you in my arms? Why aren't I hearing your giggle, watching you grow, seeing your smile? Why isn't Josiah playing with you? Why aren't you keeping him company in the car? Why didn't you watch him tonight as he danced around before his bath? Why isn't he enjoying your presence, revelling in the audience you should have been? I don't understand. I am at such a loss.

Josh shared his testimony last night at camp. I guess he talked about you. A little girl who heard the story came up to me this morning and said, "I'm sorry your son died." Such pure, honest, innocent sorrow from such a young soul. Her angel must have been standing right beside her, telling her what to say, and as she spoke the words delivered to me straight from heaven, I touched you once again for a brief second. And I miss you, Caleb. Sometimes I long for the sadness to disappear, for the ache to go away, but I know it means I truly did love you, I truly am your mommy. I just have to wait longer than I thought to meet you.

I'm going to speak to a counsellor in about a week and maybe he can help me deal with my sadness a little better. I am not treating your daddy as I should - I don't know everything behind it, I suspect it is a lot of things, but my sadness over you is one, I'm sure.

I love you, angel boy. I wish so desperately that you were here, but if you can't be here than I'm so glad you are in Paradise.

See you later,

Mommy

xoxox

February 4, 2004

Hi littlest one:

I want to write about you more. I've had an idea to make up a little booklet about miscarriage/ stillbirth to give to churches - free material to hand out - then we'll see where that leads. Start with what God puts in my heart first and see where He takes it. There's really not a lot of mate-

rial out there about this issue, especially not Christian material that someone could just grab and bring to someone who needs it. I'd love to reach those who share in the loss when it first strikes, while they gather other resources around them. That takes time. So that's the idea I have.

Maybe asking a couple of other women to share their stories for the booklet because their stories are different from mine - to reach a broader scope of women/men.

We went to the cemetery two days ago and your stone was covered in snow and ice - we couldn't even read it, nor could we find it for the longest time. I will get a special wreath for you so we know where you are. It really reminded me and hit home that you are not there, just your tiny body. You are free.

February 7, 2004

I blurted out the idea of this booklet to Josh and he likes the idea. Lord, may You be honoured and may our little Caleb be honoured. All in Your will. We just heard of a couple in town who lost a baby same as Caleb - it just made me want to reach out. And hearing of them just increased my desire to reach out through the booklet. Even now open the hearts, churches to receive the booklet, Lord. May my vision for the words be Your vision and please may the words be Yours alone. Help me focus and hear Your voice only. This is important, I feel it - please keep me on the straight and narrow. I leave it all in Your hands, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.

February 11, 2004

Yesterday I had a hard time - funny thing - I was doing my books for the business for income tax. Going through the year's receipts - thinking on this day I had no idea we would lose Caleb just a month later. Then after - WOW - I didn't do anything with the business for a month, or WOW - I had to start back too soon - shipping something out just a month after. I went back and forth between pity and amazement at how God kept me going. It was hard to go through the past year and remember all the loss and all the change. Remember how it all changed Josh and I and how we were these past months. OK, then not good, then really not good, then OK again. Hard that just one year ago life was so different and the road we now travel is one we never imagined. Hard to get out of bed this morning. Did not sit to chat with Josh last night or reach out to him as he needs. And I need too. Just went to bed and SLEPT. I still see Caleb everywhere - will it always be this way? At least now I fight the pity and depression, focus my eyes on Josiah and remember what I do have. One child here with me (for a long time I hope) and one in Glory. Still so sad sometimes. Still so hard. Still hurts so much.

August 27, 2005

I love you, little one, and I miss you always. I look forward to seeing you again and watching you play with your brothers. You have another brother now - Elijah Thunder. My 3 boys.

I am writing to say thank you. Thank you for all you have brought to my life - to our lives. Without you there would be no Elijah. I think we would have stopped at two children if you

were here with us, but instead we have three gifts from God. And that's how I see Elijah - as a gift from you and from God. We visited the cemetery a few weeks ago and it was such a healing moment for me to take Elijah there - but your daddy still has a very hard time. I sat and I talked to you, like I always do, knowing that somehow God tells you what my heart says - somehow you hear me. We finally got your memory box all set up and put everything in it. From time to time I will look through and remember. But mostly I just carry you always in my heart and love you with all of me.

See you later angel boy,

Mommy

xoxox

March 8, 2007

My Tiny Man:

I have to grab hold of what God has for you and His plans. Often times they are not the same plans I have. I miss you so much today - it's the time of year - spring has brought two babies to my heart and it is almost spring.

I remember the WAITING, and I still wait for you, dear Caleb - in this life I will always be waiting. For whatever reasons you are not here with me - your life is not what I hoped and planned. I need to open myself up to what God has for you and I know He's nowhere near done with you here on this earth - simply because we are still here - me, your daddy, your brothers and all the people who love you - you still live in our hearts.

This morning I realized that I long to help Josiah and Elijah be all God created them to be - the same MUST be true for you, Caleb. Or I will fail you, myself and the God who made you. Gran and I were talking about this yesterday - why was your life here so short? Why did you have such little time here - and yet your impact could be the biggest one of all, Caleb, I don't know.

You live in HEAVEN, my sweet angel, paradise - you only touched this world for an instant and all from the safety of my womb. At least you tasted chocolate! Sometimes I ponder on all you missed, yet I know you live in a world full of things beyond my comprehension - things I am missing out on for now. I just love you, I just miss you and the ache will never leave, but it will help to open myself up to God's plans for you and see where He leads.

It starts with telling your story. I pray that those who need to know about you will know about you. Let's bring hope, let's bring healing, let's bring love to broken hearts. Let's see what God made you to be. Together, my tiniest one. May God lead and give me each word and may it reach whom He wants it to reach and fulfill His purposes.

I love you with all I am and I give it to God and release you and me from my hopes and plans (once again).

For His glory and His kingdom. Always.

Mommy

Stories From Fellow Travellers on the Journey

The Least of These



The cardiologist walked into the room, glanced at my chart and asked, "So you didn't get an abortion?". As I was 34 weeks pregnant, it seemed an unnecessary question.

For one agonizing night we actually considered it. Twenty-two weeks into my second pregnancy we learned the boy I was carrying had Down Syndrome and a serious heart defect. Though my husband and I detested the idea of abortion, we wondered if we were cruel to let him live. On April 17, 1996 we sat in our living room, numb with shock. "What if sparing him suffering is the only thing we can do for him?" Keith asked our minister, Duke Vipperman, who had come by to talk to us.

"You sound as if you believe it is you who are causing his suffering," Duke replied. Then he explained that we do not *cause* suffering, it just happens.

Those closest to God, who are most at peace, are often those who have suffered the most. "If you try to ease his suffering by denying him life," Duke told us, "you are in essence saying you can do God's job better than God."

For Keith this settled the issue. He had never wanted to abort, but as a physician he wanted to "fix the problem"--to make sure he was doing all he could for our baby.

I knew I could never go through with an abortion, but it was not just because of my moral objections. I had felt him kick. Even though he was small, I sensed him fluttering at only 14 weeks, and he just kept growing more active. I could never abort him. I loved him. He was my son.

Christopher arrived eleven days early on August 6, 1996. Suddenly he was no longer a medical problem but a tiny bundle who breathed a little too fast, and who stared into my eyes with recognition and, I think, love.

His first two weeks were peaceful ones, as he was healthier than we expected, and we learned all the facets of his personality. He enjoyed being cradled and listening to singing, but would kick and scream in indignation if he lost his soother. When our 1 ½ year old daughter Rebecca visited him, she would lean over the bassinet, pat his blond fuzzy head and say, "My baby?". I would nod, and promise that we would take him home soon.

But we couldn't. As his heart began to fail Christopher grew increasingly tired and lost weight instead of gaining it. He was transferred to Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children to await surgery.

During the evening, as I sat alone with him in his room, I would hold him and whisper, "Do you know how much Mommy loves you?". Babies, so tiny and helpless, inspire a purer love than most. It is an unselfish love, since babies--and especially those who are sick--cannot promise anything in return. I am a goal oriented person, yet with Christopher, I learned to sit and just "be". I had no choice. And in the quiet, I sensed God whispering His own unconditional love to me, too. "Thank you, God," I whispered, "for the chance to know this precious boy."

Usually his room was bustling with visiting friends, relatives, and Keith's colleagues. We even held a dedication service there. The event was sombre, for though we were celebrating his life, we all could see how tiny he was for the battle that lay ahead. The doctors gave Christopher a 25% chance of post-operative survival, for he was only 4 ½ pounds.

On the morning of his surgery I was terrified I wouldn't hold him again. "I want so much more for you, honey," I said. "But I am glad to have the chance to love you. No matter what happens, I will see you again."

For five days he recovered well, and the doctors grew optimistic about his chances. But on September 3 Christopher's breathing again grew rapid. That night my mother watched Rebecca, and Keith and I visited him together. "Mommy loves you, sweetheart", I whispered as we left his room. It was 9:30 p.m.

He was only 29 days old when he died later that night.

The number of people at the funeral amazed us. Along with family and friends, many from the hospital attended, too. We asked Duke to talk about the importance of Christopher's life, as we felt so many had discounted him because of his disabilities. "We must not look down on little children, for they are our model of God's kingdom," Duke preached. Jesus Himself chooses to identify with them, for whoever welcomes them, welcomes Him (Matthew 18:5). "Christopher was what we are to be: a little one, utterly dependent on God, struggling against apathy and everything that would deny us the sweetness of life."

The two years since his death have been full ones. I have shed many tears, but I also smile now when I remember him. We have a new baby girl, and Keith is establishing his own paediatric practice. I often think about how different life would be had I aborted him. I would have no memories and no peace. And how do you talk about your pain? People understand my pain when I say I had a baby who died. Would they understand if I had aborted a baby at 4 ½ months? I can visit him at his grave. But most of all, I can look my girls in the eyes and tell them with conviction that I love them unconditionally. And they believe me, for I loved him.

Many may think his was a wasted life. He never came home from the hospital, he never smiled, and he was rarely even awake. But they didn't watch the faces of his grandparents when they held him, the nurses as they watched us, or the people we have comforted since. They do not know how Christopher changed us. And so they cannot see that his life is much more than those 29 days. Recently Rebecca told me not to be sad, because Christopher is in heaven, and he is happy now. I think she is right. And one day we will meet him again, and the blessing that was his life will be complete.

Sheila Wray Gregoire is the mother to four, two in heaven and two on earth. She can be found at www.sheilawraygregoire.com.

Finding Faith in Difficult Times

My husband Daniel & I both grew up in North York, we were just teenagers when we started dating, and we married at age 21. Daniel believed in God (although not a practicing Christian at the time) and I was a self proclaimed atheist.

Daniel had a good job working with race horses on the family farm in Uxbridge, where we eventually moved.

Our family began when our first child Ryan was born; I felt privileged to be able to stay at home with him. The farm was a beautiful place to raise a child, we were surrounded by horses, and Daniel's work was just outside our front door. I recall Daniel walking a horse right up to our living room window for Ryan to see!

When Ryan was 2½ yrs old we had another baby. This time a beautiful little girl we named Jennifer Ashleigh. She had dark hair like Daniel, and she was born on her Grandpa's 50th birthday. It was 1989 and the song "Dream Come True" played over and over in my mind the day after she was born (see right margin).

When Jennifer was just 6 weeks old she began to lose strength. We took her to the doctor who recommended a Neurologist. After 3 weeks of testing they informed us that Daniel and I were both carriers of a matching defective gene for Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), which we had passed on to Jennifer. They told us that Jennifer would only live for 6 months. I hyperventilated in the doctor's office when they said she had what was known as "floppy baby syndrome". Jennifer's muscles would continue to degenerate and she would lose the ability to suck, swallow and eventually breathe.

The disease did not affect Jennifer's brain, she smiled a lot, and was usually quite content and happy (you see - she didn't know that she was supposed to be able to move her limbs). We would keep her in the bath for as long as she liked each day, because it allowed her body to move freely.

Ryan couldn't fully comprehend what was happening (thank goodness), he adored his sister and would lift her hands in the air, and sing to her, "hands up...baby..hands up, gimme your heart..."

At 2 months of age Jennifer was too weak to breastfeed any longer and started bottle feeding, eventually she was fed by tube. I began experiencing major anxiety and panic attacks, Daniel started to drink a lot. My doctor explained that the anxiety was caused by the upset in the "natural order of life" – children usually outlive their parents!

Our family and friends surrounded us offering strength and support! We were blessed with 4 great sisters and 1 wonderful brother between us. Our parents did all they could to help. Daniel's Dad began to plan a children's charity in Jennifer's name so that her memory would live forever (*see right margin for more info on JACC*).

Jennifer died in October '89 at 6 months of age. At her funeral, I asked Daniel to make sure that Jennifer was buried with her blanket wrapped around her. All I could think of was that winter was coming, and it was cold outside. Daniel's Christian family was sure that she was already in

heaven. I needed desperately to find out if God and heaven were real.

The year following Jennifer's death I began a journey of attending church, reading the bible, and I did a study on "Creation vs. Evolution". I started to pray, and God answered my prayers! My life changed so much in that time; without God, I don't know how I would ever have my joy restored, but it was, FULLY!

In 1991 we had another baby girl (Danica); sadly she too had SMA and passed away at 5 ½ months of age. Ryan has been a great blessing to us over the years; he is 20 years old now and healthy as a horse! I jokingly say... "yesterday I laid him in his crib and he was 6 lbs 13 oz... this morning, I woke up and he is 6 ft tall and nearly 200 lbs".

Daniel quit drinking for good 6 years ago, at which time we were both baptized in our new church, together.

Children are indeed a gift from God, they belong to Him and we may have them for a short time or a long time...only He knows. - Mary Clements www.jenash.org

PICTURE?? LOGO??

Mary-Catherine sharing her experience through email to Anna:

I gave birth to our stillborn daughter Catherine on October 3, 2003. I was due to have a c-section just 11 days later. The similarity of your experience around Caleb was both surprising and comforting. Catherine had been in a "frank breech" position for a couple of weeks, and an ultrasound at 35 weeks showed that she was healthy and quite stuck ... her ankles were up around her ears, with her legs stretched out. Consequently I couldn't feel her move (because she couldn't!) for two weeks. When the oby/gyn (at the 37 week appointment) said he couldn't find the heartbeat I didn't know if he was actually looking at the right spot ... as the nurse in the week before hadn't been able to find her heartbeat at first due to her breech position (and the placenta being at the front ... whatever that means!). But he brought in a portable ultrasound machine and confirmed that she had both turned head down (sometime within the week) and no longer had a heartbeat. It has been a long haul since that moment. The last few weeks have been dark times indeed, and only recently have I seen a light (intermittently) through this (long) tunnel of mourning. Having grieved for the death of both my father (when I was 21) and my mother (shortly before we met), the path of grieving seems all too familiar. And I know that it is only by faith that I will come through this a better, stronger and more alive person. Trusting that God has purpose beyond my own is something I cling to, and as yet do not understand (and likely will not understand until I meet God face to face). I know that God's grace is with me now, even when I can't feel it, understand it, or even appreciate it.... the commonality of the experience of losing a little one before/during/shortly after birth is a unique one ... and that connecting with other women/families who have experienced the same can be (and has been for me) a blessing. In the meanwhile, the process of grieving continues ... and I sense week by week that I am coming to new places. Jesus has been kind to me in the journey of grief. I hope that you experience the same kindness and mercy, Anna.

Lizzie's Story

It's Mother's Day as I write this and while the world and my family will celebrate me for being the mommy of two beautiful girls, in my heart I will always be the mommy of three. My eldest daughter Elizabeth was born July 3, 2001 and died hours later on July 4, 2001.

My husband and I ventured into parenthood just as so many others do - happy and naive. We laughed at my morning sickness and were delighted by her strong kicks. Then, in the twenty-third week, tragedy struck unexpectedly.

It was the first long weekend of the summer and we were spending our first night of the season at our cottage. In the early morning hours of that first night there, I awoke suddenly instinctively knowing that "something wasn't right". I called the hospital and was told to get some rest. I called back minutes later insisting that we were on our way to see a doctor. I waited in that rural hospital for an agonizing eight hours before I was sent by ambulance to the nearest hospital with more specialized care. By the time of my arrival there, eleven hours had passed since my initial call and labour was too far progressed. Delivery was imminent.

Five hours later, our Elizabeth Grace was born. She was tiny yet perfect, like a doll but with a strong heartbeat. We questioned why nothing was being done to help her breathe easier but the hospital wasn't equipped to deal with such tiny babies. We had no options other than to keep her comfortable and watch her fade away from us.

Many of those hours we spent with her remain a blur to me. I don't think I counted her fingers or toes and I'm not even sure I told how much I loved her. I do, however, remember holding her, singing to her and watching her being baptized. I also remember the moment she died. I didn't tell anyone right away that she had passed on. I wasn't ready to give her up. My husband and mom were the first to notice that something was amiss. I confirmed their suspicions and whispered to them, "She's gone."

In the days following her death, we were busy making funeral arrangements and receiving calls from family and friends. Born so prematurely, nobody knew her but us and nobody really knew what to say. It was often uncomfortable on both ends but we were grateful for the consideration. I comforted myself by thinking that she was just too fragile to live in this (at times) harsh world. Nothing else seemed to make sense to me at the time. The well-meaning platitudes certainly didn't help; "It was meant to be", "It was God's will", "You'll have others". Why was it meant to be? Why would God choose my baby? Will I have others and is that even relevant?

Raised in an evangelical home, I didn't want to question God, but I was no longer certain that I wanted to believe in a God who "willed" babies to die. While making the arrangements with our pastor, he assured me that God was more than capable of handling my anger. He and our compassionate funeral director validated my feelings and allowed me to feel cheated and bitter.

Over time, my scattered thoughts have calmed and the raw edges of pain have softened. I don't think God 'willed' my baby to die. I think God in particular never intended babies or any of us to die. But we live in a fallen world, and time and chance can happen to us all. I believe God can help me decide how I'm going to cope with this profound loss and learn about life in the process. I once read a best-seller that likened one's life to a fine tapestry. Beautiful from the front, but a jumbled tangled mess of threads at the back. Perhaps one day I'll be able to look at the beautiful life I've experienced because of the trials I've endured.

About a year after Elizabeth's death, I became pregnant again. It was a difficult journey and paranoia was at every corner. At twenty-three weeks, I went into premature labour once again. What they thought was coincidental in my first pregnancy was now forming a pattern. Our doc-

tors began preparing us for the worst-case scenario but this time we were not going down that path again without a fight. We were determined not to bury another baby.

While I was in the hospital in Trendelenburg position (head down-feet up), Jeff pored over research journals on the internet and found a special pregnancy program. Against medical advice, I was flown to Toronto where I underwent surgery and labour was halted.

I remained on bed rest there for an additional five weeks before I gave birth to a small but healthy baby girl. While other parents around us lamented about having a preemie in the NICU, we rejoiced. We knew Emma would face life-threatening challenges ahead of her and that her hospital stay would be lengthy, but she was alive! We spent every waking moment with her in the hospital for two months until the day came that we could finally take her home. What a blessing it was to take a baby home after all we had been through.

Since then, we've had our third daughter, Brianna. After many consultations, appointments, injections, ultrasounds and even a temporary relocation, she was born a healthy, full-term baby. Because of Elizabeth, we knew I was at risk with Emma and became proactive in fighting for her life. Because of Emma and Brianna, we learned that I have a rare clotting disorder and require blood thinning medication. My blood especially clots during pregnancy which clogs up the placenta and triggers preterm labour. The combined information from all three pregnancies came together to solve the puzzle. Solving this puzzle has potentially saved my life and will almost certainly spare my girls the same heartbreak in their future pregnancies.

As time marches on, as it inevitably does, there isn't a day I don't think about how Elizabeth has touched my life. It's the capacity in which I do this thinking that has changed. In the early days, I'd sob at the thought of all the early memories. Memories of her tiny lifeless body in my arms or the heartwrenching memory of her small white casket being lowered into the earth. How do you say good-bye to your child when you've only just begun to say hello?

There are still painful days, but now when I think of her I often reflect upon how she's changed me as a person. I think I'm a better person for having her in my life. I'm kinder, more compassionate and above all else, humbled by the fragility of life. Every life, no matter how brief has a purpose. Though her time on this earth was short, her legacy will live on in me and those that loved her. Perhaps she accomplished in a few hours what some of us do in a lifetime.

I believe I'm also a better parent because of her. I enjoy my children and try to cherish every crazy, chaotic moment with them. I've also learned the true value of a good friend. I lost a few friends as I grieved but I also gained a few gems. Women I never would have met except that we all belonged to the same unfortunate 'club'. A club that nobody cares to join - the club of lost babies. Together we've laughed, cried and found hope. Together we've found a safe place where we can remember our babies and speak their names. Today is one such baby's birthday. I think of him up there in heaven with Elizabeth and smile at the thought of the two of them orchestrating a 'meeting of their moms'. Though I never met him, he was fundamental in helping me heal. His mom patiently and tenderly guided me through the muddy waters of grief.

Finally, Elizabeth's life has taken away the sting of death for me. I no longer fear death or dying. I anticipate a great reunion with my daughter some day. What a joyous day that will be! For now, one thing is for certain, a piece of my heart will always belong to Elizabeth. She's one of "my girls"; the one who is always missing in family photos and who's name is rarely spoken. So as this Mother's Day draws to a close, I think of all those "invisible mothers" with "invisible children" and whisper a silent prayer for them. I pray that they will make it through another painful day and that they too will find hope and faith in their lives once again.

Books - Find all these titles at www.amazon.ca or www.amazon.com - I haven't read all of these yet...

Grieving the Child I Never Knew - Kathe Winnenberg. A wonderful devotional that helped me in my journey.

Forever Silent and Forever Changed: The Loss of a Baby in Miscarriage, Stillbirth, Early Infancy. A Mother's Experience and Your Personal Journal - Kellie Davis

A Rose in Heaven - A Journey of Hope and Healing For Those Who Have Lost a Baby - Dawn Siegreest Waltman

Empty Arms: Coping with Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Death - Sherokee Ilse

Empty Cradle, Broken Heart: Surviving the Death of Your Baby - Deborah Davis

Empty Arms: Emotional Support for Those Who Have Suffered Miscarriage or Stillbirth - Pam Vredvelt

The Ache for a Child - Debra Bridwell. Pregnancy loss and infertility.

Forever Our Angels - Hannah Stone. Personal stories of miscarriage told by men and women.

Remembering Our Angels - Hannah Stone. Personal stories of miscarriage told by men and women.

Life Touches Life: A Mother's Story of Stillbirth and Healing - Lorraine Ash

Tender Fingerprints - Brad Stetson. A father's story of his son's stillbirth and his own struggle with grief and God.

A Guide For Fathers: When A Baby Dies - Tim Nelson

For Better or Worse: For Couples Whose Child Has Died - Maribeth Wilder Doerr. Helps couples understand the grief process after losing a child, how grief affects their marriage and how to nurture the marriage. Focus is on loss due to miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death.

Forgotten Tears: A Grandmother's Journey Through Grief - Nina Bennett

Safe in the Arms of God - Truth From Heaven About the Death of a Child - John McArthur

Heaven - Joni Erickson Tada

Grief Unseen: Healing Pregnancy Loss Through the Arts - Laura Seftel

A Grief Observed - C.S. Lewis

The God of All Comfort - Hannah Whitall Smith

When Bad Things Happen to Good People - Harold S. Kushner

Where is God When it Hurts? - Philip Yancey

When God Doesn't Make Sense - Dr. James Dobson

Deeper Than Tears - Promises of Comfort and Hope - Countryman, 2001

How Big Is Your Umbrella? - Sheila Wray Gregoire

Children's Books

Mommy Please Don't Cry - Lynda DeYmaz

We Were Gonna Have a Baby, But We Had an Angel Instead - Pat Schwiebert

Thumpy's Story: A Story of Love & Grief Shared by Thumpy the Bunny - Nancy Dodge

Heaven's Brightest Star - Kara M. Glad

Get Sad When Someone Dies - Timothy Shinada-Izotov. Written by a 6-year-old boy and illustrated by his mother

Help ME Say Goodbye: Activities For Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies - Silverman

Lifetimes -Bryan Mellonie

Take a few minutes to search online for MANY resources in these areas:

- Miscarriage
- Stillbirth
- Infant Loss
- Women and Grief
- Men and Grief
- Grandparents and Grief
- Family and Friends Support in Grief
- Physical Effects of Miscarriage, Stillbirth or Infant Loss
- Any Other Topics You Need to Address on Your Journey

Websites & Organizations - These are just a few, there are so many on the internet!

Under the Tree <http://underthetree.blogspot.com> - Posts new questions every month concerning the loss of a baby, and the answers of the readers become a support network. Other resources available here too.

Noah's Place <http://noah.gentlewhisper.com> - Helpful thoughts and ideas for you, your family and friends.

March of Dimes <http://www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/572.asp> - MANY helpful webpages about Pregnancy and Newborn Loss.

Perinatal Bereavement Services of Ontario (PBSO) www.pbso.ca. Support groups, newsletters and events.

Caleb Cares www.calebministries.org - Prayer, scripture, stories of other grieving parents, and treasure boxes full of keepsake items and resources.

Mommies Enduring Neonatal Death www.mend.org - Online forums, newsletters, family memorial webpages, resources, links, keepsake items, and music.

Sufficient Grace Ministries "Comforting others with the comfort we have received" www.sufficientgrace.net - Keepsake items, newsletters and a wonderful blog - <http://sufficientgrace-kelly.blogspot.com>.

SHARE - Pregnancy and Infant Loss, Inc. www.nationalshareoffice.com - Online forums, newsletter and information packages.

Center for Loss in Multiple Births (CLIMB), Inc. www.climb-support.org - Quarterly newsletter & other resources.

SIDS Families www.sidsfamilies.com - Email support groups and many other resources.

The Compassionate Friends "Supporting family after a child dies" www.compassionatefriends.org

The Hope Monument “Sculptures of all sizes to remember our babies”

www.hopemonument.com - Some have also created healing Gardens of Hope that feature a sculpture.

A Place to Remember www.aplacetoremember.com - Online forums, support materials, resources, greeting cards and keepsake items (including a memory box).

Centering Corporation - Your Grief Resource Center www.centering.org - Resources, magazine, cards, & journals.

Silent Grief “A message of hope for the grieving heart” www.silentgrief.com - articles, chat boards and resources.

Scripture For the Journey

Job 1:21b The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Job 2:10b - Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?

Psalms 6:6 - I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.

Psalms 23:1-4 - The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and staff, they comfort me.

Psalms 29:11 - The Lord gives strength to His people; the Lord blesses His people with peace.

Psalms 31:24 - Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.

Psalms 46:10a - Be still and know that I am God.

Isaiah 25:8a - He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all the faces

Isaiah 41:13 - For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear, I will help you.

Isaiah 53:4-5 - Surely [Jesus] took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 65:20a - Never again will there be in it an infant that lives but a few days...(Speaking about the new earth)

Romans 8:35 & 37 - Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Revelation 21:4 - He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Speaking about the new earth)

MORE

Music to Soothe Your Soul on the Journey

I Can Only Imagine - Mercy Me: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV9jiqS-74g>

Take My Hand - The Kry: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QU74WNShZtw>

Third Day - Cry Out to Jesus: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRN_ApWyb94

Held - Natalie Grant: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOufqWodFNo>

It is Well With My Soul - Horatio Spafford: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8_EfDqF7YI&feature=related

His Eye is on the Sparrow - Civilla D. Martin: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWNFSVe8VXA>

Blessed Be Your Name - Matt Redman: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NL3NFhmxQxs>

With Hope - Steven Curtis Chapman: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RC_JOk23aI&feature=related

- This popular Christian singer had an adopted daughter who died on the 5th anniversary of our Caleb's birthday, so this tragedy has a special place in my heart, and I'm so glad Steven Chapman gave us a song that reminds us of the hope we have, even in times of suffering and loss.

My Name—George Canyon: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ff5qJrPT7k>

Lyrics: www.cowboylyrics.com

Poems For The Journey

Do you hear them, Caleb?
 Do you hear the angels sing?
 Do you see Him, Caleb?
 Do you behold the King of Kings?
 Do you walk on them, Caleb?
 Do you tread the streets of gold?
 Do you talk to them, Caleb?
 Do you converse with saints of old?
 Do you bask in it, Caleb?
 Do you grow in the Saviour's love?
 Do you enjoy it, Caleb?
 Do you like your mansion above?
 Do you dance in them, Caleb?
 Do you twirl in rainbow colours?
 Do you know them, Caleb?
 Do you love your heavenly mothers?
 Do you miss me, Caleb?
 Do you long for my embrace?
 Do you remember me, Caleb?
 Do you search for my face?
 Do you wait for me, Caleb?
 Do you wonder where I am?
 Do you know the day is soon, Caleb?
 When I'll hold your tiny hand...

- *Anna Sklar*

Your end was very sudden,
 No time to say goodbye
 You were gone before we realized
 And only God knows why.
 The things we felt so deeply,
 Are the hardest things to say.
 But we your family loved you
 In a very special way.
 Only those who lose
 Are able to tell
 The pain in our hearts
 At not saying farewell.
 A golden heart stopped beating,
 Two busy hands at rest,
 God broke our hearts to prove to us
 He only takes the best.
 If tears could build a stairway
 And heartaches made a lane,
 We'd walk a path to heaven
 And bring you home again.
 Our family chain is broken
 And nothing is the same,
 But as God calls us one by one
 The chain will link again.

- *Anonymous*

Forget Me Not

Our little ones whisper,
 “Forget me not,”
 As their specialness wraps
 Around our aching hearts.

Their short little lives
 Hold meaning and love.
 Their spirits have touched us -
 Each and everyone.

They have left their gifts
 For us to uncover,
 If we open our eyes,
 Our hearts, and our minds.

The road to discovery
 Is hilly, deep, and dark.
 Will we long harbour only the pain
 Or set our wings for the light?

Our lives have been changed,
 Our paths filled with sorrow.
 Yet, their memories embrace u,
 And our love lasts forever.

If we open our hearts,
 Their gifts shall unfold,
 As we
 Forget them not! - *Sherokee Ilse, 1993*

Have Hope

Have hope.
 In this painful time
 Embrace the love in your life.
 Cherish the memories.
 Have hope.
 Say goodbye.
 Remember, let go,
 Yet, hold one.
 Cherish the dreams.
 Have hope.
 Grieve.
 Face the struggle.
 Share your feelings.
 Seek support.
 Have hope.
 Take control.
 Be an advocate.
 Let go of that which
 You can not control.
 Speak up.
 Take hope.
 Look ahead.
 Dream new dreams.
 Make new plans.
 Remember...yet go on.
 Take hope.
 Believe.
 Believe in yourself and your faith.
 Believe in new dreams.
 Believe in hope.
 Take hope. - *Sherokee Ilse, 1995*

God Help Me

God help me.
They say not to blame me.
They say nothing I did could have saved the baby.
God help me.
For my other children, I try to be happy.
Seeing my tears, I can't have them feel any agony.
God help me.
I'm trying not to constantly think that my two should
be three,
Trying to be content, thankful with what God has
given me.
God help me.
I'm trying not to obsess what my baby would be,
Boy or girl, it didn't matter to me.
God help me.
They say nothing I did could have saved the baby,
How could that be? It was inside my own body.
God help me.

- Amanda Woodward

Eternal Love

Did you feel the cuddle of an angel
As you left my sweet embrace?
Did you feel the warm winds of Heaven
Blowing on your tiny face?
Did you close your eyes to Mommy
And awake to Father there?
Did your fingers reach from my face
To touch His face, His beard?
Did you hear the howls of Daddy?
Oh, we wanted you to stay...
You left our laps for a little while
How our hearts hold you each day!
Our love can span the chasm
And reach you where you are
And Heaven, for a moment,
It doesn't seem so far.
Amy Ostertag

I'll Be There

Daddy please don't look so sad,
 Mommy please don't cry,
 Cause I'm in the arms of Jesus and
 He sings me lullabies.
 Please try not to question God,
 Don't think He is unkind.
 Don't think He sent me to you,
 And then He changed His mind.
 You see, I am a special child,
 And I'm needed up above,
 I'm the special gift you gave Him,
 The product of your love.
 I'll always be there with you,
 And watch the sky at night
 Find the brightest star that's gleaming,
 That's my halo's brilliant light.
 You'll see me in the morning frost,
 That mists your windowpane.
 That's me, in the summer showers,
 I'll be dancing in the rain.
 When you feel a gentle breeze,
 From a gentle wind that blows,
 That's me, I'll be there,
 Planting a kiss on your nose.
 When you see a child playing,
 And your heart feels a little tug,
 That's me, I'll be there,
 giving your heart a hug.
 So daddy please don't look so sad,
 Mommy please don't cry.
 I'm in the arms of Jesus and
 He sings me lullabies.
 Author Unknown

If I Could Take...

If I could take a minute
 Out of each and every day
 To hold my child close to my heart
 And kiss his fears away.
 If I could take a minute
 Out of each and every week
 To play with blocks and peek-a-boo, tag,
 Or hide and seek.
 If I could take a minute
 Of any span of time
 I'd never waste a second
 Of the pleasures that were mine.
 If he could crawl upon my knee
 And lay his sleepy head
 Upon my shoulder tenderly
 And dream of gingerbread.
 I'd spend my time in total bliss
 And watch my small son grow
 From babyhood to childhood
 Knowing all there is to know.
 If I could stop my aching heart
 And put my mind to sleep
 if I could stop the flow of tears
 That are always on my cheek.
 I only need a minute Lord
 I know he's safe with you
 But there's something real important
 That I didn't have time to do.
 If you could do it for me Lord
 Here's a message he should know
 Tell him that I love him
 And then I'll let him go.
 Debbie Szaroletta