

WHEN YOU LOSE AN ONLY CHILD

The loss of an only child is neither greater nor less than the loss of one of many children. However, the loss of an only child is experienced differently. It is different because you lose your parenthood, which is such a large part of the life of any parent.

1. With the death of an only child, you lose the one person who could use all of the love you had to give every hour of every day.

a. One of the secrets of parenthood is that from birth, children teach us that we have a greater capacity for unselfish love than we thought possible.

b. When your only child dies, you may feel that you are drowning in the parental love your heart continues to generate for the child you have lost.

2. With the death of an only child, you lose so much of your own future that was tied to your child's future.

a. The first day of school

b. Sports

c. Learning to drive

d. A first crush, a first date, a first heartbreak

e. High school

f. College

g. Career

h. Marriage

i. Children, grandchildren, great grandchildren

Your only child lost all of this from his or her future. And so did you.

3. With the death of an only child, you suffer many tiny losses that cause pain only another grieving parent can comprehend.

a. You have lost the joy of checking the cereal aisle to see if Cocoa Puffs are on sale,

b. You have lost the reason to keep up with the top ten hits on the pop music charts.

c. You have lost the joy of caring what prize is in a box of Cracker Jacks.

d. You have lost the joy of getting up early on a Saturday morning for kids soccer, basketball or bowling.

e. You have lost the reason to hope for a December snow.

f. You have lost the person who thought you made the best cocoa on a cool December evening.

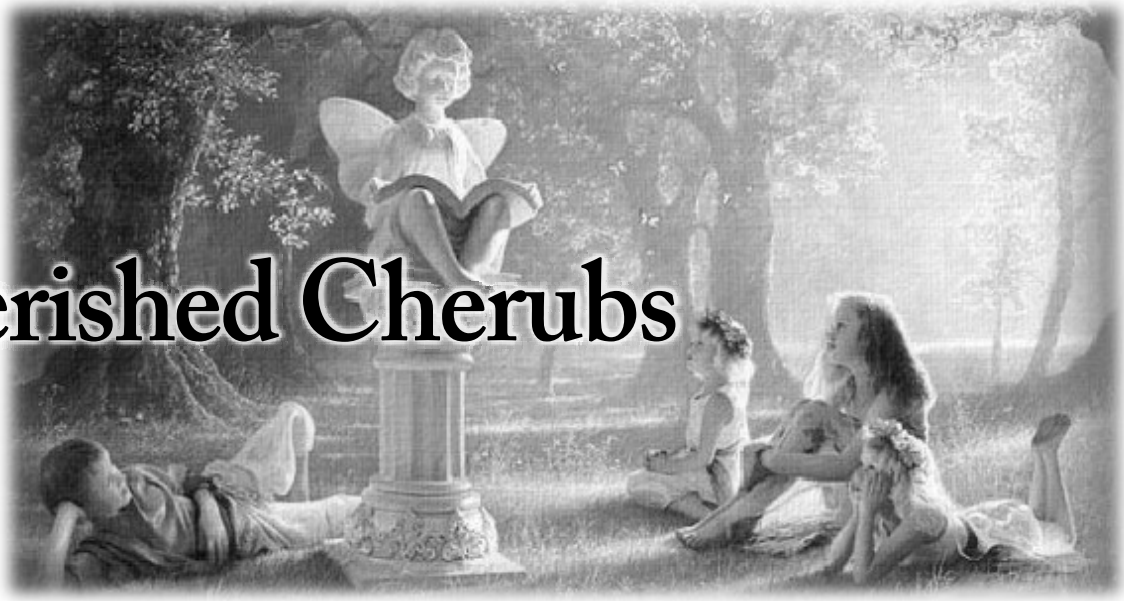
g. For me, I lost a gentle, kind, generous child who loved, watched for, and shared beautiful sunsets.

The loss of an only child is a devastating loss. Your child has lost his or her life. And you have lost an important piece of your own life, your parenthood. The Compassionate Friends chapter near you is there to help you acknowledge and grieve these losses by sharing your pain with others who have known their own pain.

by Bill Snapp, Atlanta (Tucker) TCF USA

In Memory of his son Billy Snapp 6/23/81 - 2/25/96

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Cherished Cherubs

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Bereaved Parents of the USA, Baltimore Metropolitan Area Chapter

Unlike parents who have had an older child die, our memories are few, and for some parents even nonexistent. Those of us who have had a baby die have found it common for some people not to recognize the loss as being as tragic as the death of an older child. Maybe it is just as tragic, maybe it isn't. For most parents who have lost a baby, the tragedy is felt intensely as can be.

For many parents who lose a baby, there is nothing else with which to compare their loss. It is just like we who have lost a child (no matter the age) feel that no one can understand the way we feel unless they too have had a child die.

Those of us who have not had an older child have nothing else to compare the death of our baby with, just as those who have had an older child die cannot completely understand our feelings upon the death of a baby.

The death of an infant is oftentimes considered "unfortunate" but so many feel that it can be remedied with the birth of another child. Some people find it difficult to understand the love, hope and the future that has been lost with the death of a "much looked forward to" baby.

In my own situation, I found that the words of consolation most often given to me are things like, "You're young, you can have other babies" or "It is better you were never able to hold her and love her." or things like "It's over with, forget it, put it all behind you."

The truth of the matter for me, at least, was yes, I could have more babies, but it did not matter how many children I could have in the future, I still had lost Jessica. She was the baby daughter I had wanted and tried to have for eight years. Upon her death, all my hopes and dreams and my happiness were gone. The daughter I had looked so forward to holding and loving and spending time with was gone. Yes, since her death I have been blessed with the birth of two children, a son and another daughter. I give thanks daily for their health and loving presence. But, just as another child could never take their place, neither have they replaced Jessica. Was it really better that I never got to hold her? I think not. If only I had been able to hold that blessed little angel in my arms, if only for one short moment, I would be better able to cope with my loss. If I had been able to see her (even though she was already dead) I would have had a memory to hold onto the rest of my life.

Learn to love her? I already loved her. I knew her. I knew that she would become quiet and still when I spoke softly to her. I knew she would react with somewhat violent kicking when surrounded by loud noises. I knew her while she was yet inside me. She was real. I loved her.

I cannot forget her. I never want to. I still wonder what she would have grown to look like. Would she have been fair and active like my son, Justin, or would she have been dark and quietly composed like Ashlee? I think about these things even after four years. I expect to think about them for the rest of my life. I wonder what it would have been like with three children to love. I wonder. I guess for a parent whose baby dies, the wonderings are the worst. We just do not know. We have no memories to cherish. I am not trying to make a comparison with the death of a child who lived to be older. I cannot compare things which I do not know about. I just know that a parent who has a baby die feels grief and loss and pain and hurt.

To grieve is to grieve, to feel pain and loss is to feel pain and loss, to miss a child is to miss a child. Of course, there are, as in everything, various degrees of feeling and to each parent his or her child was special and the feelings still go deep and the loss is still felt no matter what age a child dies.

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