

SPIRITUAL MOTHERING

J O U R N A L

• Dedicated to Our Ultimate Goal: an Ever Advancing Civilization •

Volume 7

Number 1

Spring



"In my presence among you there is a wisdom. In my
absence there is yet another wisdom."

- Bahá'u'lláh

Editor's Corner



The Journal this season takes a very gentle look at what it's like "When Children Die." Most of us have not experienced the loss of a child, but is there a parent that doesn't think about the possibility? And well that we should, for in realizing that our children are but briefly entrusted to us, and could be gathered back to their heavenly home at any moment, we become more aware and grateful for the time they do spend with us. Let's make the very most of these precious days with our little ones, for they, like their parents, are from the very moment of birth, hastening back to their Creator.

On another note, I must say you all really came through: the response to the questionnaire was overwhelming. Thank you!!! One popular suggestion was that we change our name to *Spiritual Parenting*. Though the Journal is for both parents, we've used the word "Mothering" feeling that this term implies a quality of nurturing, closeness and caring which is missing from the rather generic term, "Parenting." We have felt that mothering is something that fathers can (and should) do too, and that it has more to do with character than with gender. But on the practical level, it can't be denied that some men feel excluded by the current title. We are considering a change (after I use up the SMJ letterhead!). Any comments? One anonymous respondent suggested *National Inspirer* as our new title. (By the way, who are you?? - I want you on the SMJ staff!!)

And just what *is* Spiritual Mothering Journal, wrote one midwife from Australia? Our reply: "SMJ affirms that children are spiritual beings, that parents have a noble task and a lofty station, and that we can INDEED raise a new humanity!! We believe in loving our children and we have a lot of fun writing about it."

"Fun" may not best describe the gathering together of this particular issue of SMJ, but it was surely tender and beautiful. I'm grateful for those contributors who opened their hearts to share their stories which have, in turn, opened mine.

With love,

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Spiritual Mothering*, a Journal for Mothers and Fathers, is to recognize and promote the unique role of mothering and fathering in the development of a peaceful humanity; to foster and uphold the family as an integral part of future world peace; to provide an informative publication and supportive services aimed at assisting parent and child to advance spiritually.

The opinions expressed in letters, features, book reviews and advertising may not necessarily reflect the views of the editor and staff.

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Letters to the Editor



Dear Rene,

I would like to make a comment about how to help young children pray and meditate. In my experience, one has to keep in mind that children have short attention spans; but a watching adult can catch moments for prayer with children. "Thank you, God, for pretty flowers," "sunsets," "friends," etc. For the most part, faith is caught, not taught. If both parents are agreeing and if it is your practice to spend time with God, children can catch your moods also.

Ruth Willstead
Tiskilwa, Illinois

Dear Spiritual Mothering,

From all indications, this is the Journal I'd wish my mother had. It's the one I'd wish every family had on the good ol' coffee table. Bravo.

Dusty Johnson Jr.
West Sedona, Arizona

Ed. Note: Thank you, Dusty. But then, why didn't you subscribe?

Dear Rene,

Thank you for the marvelous new issue of "Spiritual Mothering." Each issue seems to get better than the one before. The Karen Karima Rivers article on "The Effects of TV" [Fall '86] is simply beautiful - a powerful and convincing statement on the dangers of TV. I have observed directly in my own children so much of what she writes - the deterioration of behavior after watching TV, the "sensory overload," the way it competes with more positive behaviors (development of imagination, family communication and activity), the quiet time it intrudes on.

Your article, "No Strangers", is also very special, and I couldn't agree more with what you write. I feel one usually gets what one looks for. If one believes people are basically good at heart and the earth is a gift, one will be given goodness in life. Years ago I wrote a poem you might enjoy:

Bag Lady

Give me my bag
That I may roam
The whole wide world
My new-found home.
Stripped of my things
I'd like to be
Without my house
And housework-free.
Uncluttered now
In empty space
I sweep the world
A friendly place.

Together with you I believe in the dream of the world as a friendly place.

Carol Ordal
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Dear SMJ,

My eldest child is blind and I'm always on the look-out for other parents of blind children to exchange information and experiences. I also have experience with nursing a cleft-lip baby which I would be happy to share.

Victoria Jungwirth
Pembine, Wisconsin

Dear Editor,

One receives the impression that your publication is run by, mainly, Bahá'ís who are trying to reach other Bahá'ís. If this be true, you are certainly doing a fine job. Your articles are interesting, and their depth comparable to *Mothering* and magazines of that caliber.

If, however, you wish to reach others more than a little, it follows that it is only fair to include more of other valid and valuable teachings than simply those of the Bahá'í Faith. While I, as a Catholic, have no complaints about reading quotes from Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, I feel that your publication comes across as specifically Bahá'í. It all depends on who you are trying to reach.

For me, such quotes as, "Let the little children come

to me, and do not hinder them, for unto such as these belongs the Kingdom of Heaven." (Jesus Christ) ... never grow old, and would be perfectly at home with your articles. After all, we all serve the one true God.

June Schulte
Jericho Center, Vermont

Ed. Note: Your last line really does fully express what we, the staff of SMJ, believe. And because we also believe that the raising of children is one of the noblest ways of serving that one God, it is our hope to reach all parents of all faiths, cultures and creeds. The Bahá'í Faith embraces the truth of all the world's great religions, and if the Journal does not reflect this, it can only be attributed to our newness, as our circle of contributors is just now beginning to grow and diversify. We have our sights set on a publication that will openly demonstrate unity in diversity and the oneness of all humankind.

Dear Rene,

I read your article in the Winter issue with deepest respect and a kindred heart: I think you'll really like [our book] *Conscious Conception* after reading your version of mystery and metaphor. I also really liked Julie Pascoe's article "We Are Family." It was very familiar. She eloquently shared some subtle insights in a healing way. Great issue, all in all.

Jeannine Parvati Baker
Sevier, Utah

Dear Rene,

Thank you for the wonderful article, "No Strangers" in the Fall issue. Your feelings are mine exactly. Ever since my daughter was born a little over three years ago, I have tried to perpetuate in her the ideas of trust, harmony and faith in mankind; also that "what we put out comes back to us," so if we consistently put out love and kindness, sharing and friendship, it will only come back to us.

What I have been given is a child so filled with light radiating from her that she delights and captivates all those who come in contact with her, strangers and family alike, despite warnings from an occasional grandparent or friend that "she's too friendly; it's not safe." I don't agree, and I feel completely blessed that God has given me this beautiful child. I intend to let her live in her magical little world as long as possible and to nourish her innocence and purity of soul. I speak here for all the children, all those beautiful souls who are here for the purpose of carrying the dream.

And last but not least, I thank you for your beautiful publication which gives me nourishment and strength in my role as a mother and as a spiritual being.

Dodie Neale
Gordonsville, Virginia

Dear Rene,

I wanted very much to contribute to SMJ for the spring issue on the death of children because I wanted to relate my own experience in some way. Our first child, Scott, died at the age of four weeks in 1983 and I was hoping I could write a tribute to him. However, I am not one of the talented when it comes to writing, and such a tribute had to be exceptional. In contemplating the perfect tribute, I have let the deadline date pass and still have no article to submit.

There are two things that keep popping into my thoughts as I have wondered what I might be able to convey through an article. One is a prayer by 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. It is only one of many Bahá'í prayers that have helped me, but it is my favorite. The other is a short phrase for which there is no known author. I think it may have special meaning for other mothers and fathers who have lost babies: "The baby which I had and will never have and will always have."

We now have a beautiful, healthy 22-month-old daughter, and another baby is due to arrive in seven weeks. Thank you for your lovely and inspirational publication!

Valerie Sims
Spring, Texas

* O beloved child!

Praise be to God that thou hast entered the divine Kingdom while of tender age and that thou hast received a share of the manifold bounties of the Lord of Hosts. I supplicate the Almighty that thou mayest be reared in the bosom of the love of God and attain maturity with utmost love and ecstasy.

May the glory of the Most Glorious rest upon thee!

Dear Spiritual Mothering,

This is my favorite magazine. It's like one gigantic personal letter from people I don't even know, yet we are all striving for the same goal. I really feel SMJ has a bright and wonderful future. Its time has come and it certainly has filled a vacuum in my life where I needed support. I feel very fortunate to know about SMJ and really feel that the Journal arrives full of love and positive focus and energy. You're on the right course. Thank you.

Cindie Wisting Gunter
Ocean City, New Jersey

Dear SMJ,

SJM helps me stay centered on what's important. Even though it's a journal about spirituality and mothering, it really gives so much more. I read it from cover to cover even though I am not a mother in the traditional sense.



Joanne Jacobs
Portland, Oregon



New on Earth

Arin Yarr Nur	September 13, 1986
San Dimas, California	
Caleb Crispin Perdue	Donovick October 18, 1986
Binghamton, New York	
Halley Sophia Baker	October 30, 1986
Sevier, Utah	
Emma Louise Swadley	November 17, 1986
Marquette, Michigan	
Shanti Khadem Bles	November 18, 1986
Montgomery Creek, California	
Nadine Bahia Sabet-Sharghi	November 27, 1986
Indianapolis, Indiana	
Joseph Aaron Gordon	November 28, 1986
Chevy Chase, Maryland	
Micah Jamal Streiff	December 6, 1986
Dalton, Georgia	
Kari Lynn Frey	December 7, 1986
Rolling Meadows, Illinois	
Asiyih Lua Modarai	December 8, 1986
Tolcdo, Ohio	
Clarity Ceresse Wyland	December 12, 1986
Milwaukee, Wisconsin	
Amber Ann Belden	December 15, 1986
Waterloo, Iowa	
Melody Joy Lockwood	December 23, 1986
Marquette, Michigan	
Monet Rose Richter	December 28, 1986
Redland, Oregon	
Adrian Myles Baker Bush	January 8, 1987
Marquette, Michigan	
Zachariah Kerns Eggers	January 9, 1987
Haines, Oregon	
Stephanie Mojdeh Stoakley	February 12, 1987
Glendale Heights, Illinois	

Every child is potentially
the light of the world

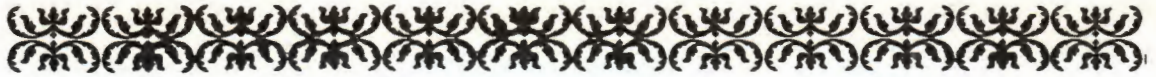


*This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Mary Jane Sires, and her son, Jacob Siemens.*



"We all come from God, and unto Him do we return."

January 17, 1987



Love is What They Came For

by Rene Knight-Weiler

In talking with those whose children or spouses have recently died, what one often hears most clearly are the regrets, the "should haves," the "if only's," in short - the guilt. It's the lingering feeling that "I never showed them the kind of love they deserved. I took them for granted."

And how strange and sad that often we treat our most precious loved ones, our immediate family, with less love, respect and kindness than we do some casual acquaintance. We wouldn't be "caught dead" screaming uncontrollably at a neighbor, or giving a childish "silent treatment" to the grocery clerk. Somehow, with outsiders, we manage to remain civil, dignified and respectful, even through our anger. But when it comes to family, forget it . . . no restraints, anything goes. Or, on the other end of the spectrum, we simply fail to demonstrate our love and gratitude as those feelings become obscured by more "pressing" concerns on a day to day level.

Most of us have moments of clarity when we fully appreciate how dear our families are, but in between those moments we walk through a cloud of forgetfulness. We take these people for granted, for they are always there. Is there any way to rise above that terrible human condition of "not knowing what we've got 'til

it's gone?"

Each night presents one of those moments of clarity. The children leave us. We see them asleep on their pillows, their faces angelic, their bodies so vulnerable, their little souls held tenderly in the hands of God. They're in a different place. And we look down on that child, after stroking back the hair from her face and we feel that strange, lovely, painful concoction of emotions: love, gratitude, guilt over angry words that day, regret, hope for a better tomorrow. And in the light of that small, innocent face, the whole day - indeed, our whole life - is put in perspective.

But then the next day comes, other expressions cross the child's visage and our own, and we step right back into those same forgetful, hung-up, unliving, unloving ways of being together. It's a habit.

I'm qualified to discuss these matters. I'm a pro. I've put in many a year honing my skill at criticism, and it's my family that serves as the stone on which that skill is sharpened. I know 'Abdu'l-Bahá said something quite beautiful about ignoring the nine bad qualities and praising the single good one, but I must be some kind of spiritual dyslexic for I seem to have reversed that lesson.

But suddenly I'm realizing there isn't time

to go on indulging in stupid behavior. It's time to retire that feeling of the earlier years that says, "I've got plenty of time to work on that; I'll get to it sooner or later." You start waking up some mornings with the realization that your kids are growing up and moving out alarmingly fast, and for the first time ever, you know you *don't* have the rest of your life "to work on that." You have only a little time, and it has to be *now* if it's going to make any difference to the children.

As I see my kids beginning to adopt my faulty patterns, as I see others around me being unexpectedly taken from their family's embrace, I am struck with the understanding that today is the day to leave criticizing and complaining behind. These patterns are life-denying. They are not what we're about. Families were not

created to serve as a forum for all forms of immaturity. We are created for happiness and our families are the ultimate gift. Bahá'u'lláh writes that the sea of joy is *yearning* to attain our presence. Why do we refuse it?

"You have your brush, you have your colors. You paint paradise, then in you go," wrote Nikos Kazantzakis. It can be that simple. In this darkly grimacing world, my home can resound with laughter and shine out like a smile. And maybe tonight, when I look upon a tender sleeping face, that strange concoction of feelings will no longer contain regret.

It's time to pour on the love. Because today they are *here* - my son, my daughter, my husband. Who knows about tomorrow, but today they are here, and love is what they came for. ♥



Features



Grief and the Loss of a Child

by Donna Sires

Three years ago a close friend suffered a stillbirth. At the time, I felt incredibly helpless and couldn't understand why her sorrow went on and on. Then, two years later, I too delivered a stillborn and witnessed for myself how little people understand the grieving process.

Grief is much more than a single, intense emotion. It is a series of emotions which last from six months to a year or more. Yet our society allows for about two weeks to mourn. After that we're somehow supposed to pull ourselves together and carry on. After Ezekiel's death, I was not prepared for the intensity of my own feelings, not to mention other people's reactions and awkwardness. I soon found myself face to face with people who didn't know what to do or say and often well-meaning remarks wounded deeply.

Although grief is often talked about, it is misunderstood and frequently goes unrecognized. There are about five stages in the grieving process. They don't necessarily follow an exact order, and some may be entirely omitted. Generally, the first stage is **SHOCK, DENIAL, NUMBNESS, HELPLESSNESS**

When I was five-and-a-half months pregnant I no longer felt the baby moving and went in for an ultrasound test. When I was told our baby had died, I was stunned that this

could happen to us. Before the subsequent induction of labor, I felt a horrible mistake had been made and that the doctor was unwittingly giving me an abortion. There was a frantic moment before the IV was put in when I fully expected to hear a heartbeat. After that point when once again there was none, I knew it was true that the baby had died. I rationalized how it was "meant to be," how I had been abnormally sick throughout the pregnancy, how the baby was in a "better" place. I felt so in control of my emotions.

It wasn't until a few days later when my husband brought home the tiny walnut casket he had made that the reality of our loss hit me. I felt so helpless. The control which I had felt was actually just shock and numbness, which soon gave way to wrenching pain. All I wanted was my baby back.

ANGER, BARGAINING

When my friend Carolee had a stillbirth, I was quite taken aback by how angry she was. Time and again she would repeat, "Why did it happen? There are close calls every day and babies make it through. Why did my little girl die?" It is also common for people to bargain with God and the doctors or to be angry at the person who died.

After about four months I felt confident



Peg O'Conner

that I had bypassed this stage. I wasn't angry at God. I didn't blame the doctors. I certainly wasn't angry at the baby. Then I realized I was furious at certain people around me for things they had said. One friend called when we got home from the hospital to offer condolences, then shared the "good news" that she was pregnant. It was like a slap in the face. Later, I ran into another friend who casually asked how I was doing. When I replied it was a hard time because my due date was coming up she said, "Due date, what do you mean 'due date'?" You're going to have to be more specific." I was crushed. So many people treated us as if nothing had happened or simply passed off our sorrow by saying things like: "Aren't you glad he's with God?" "It's a good thing it happened now and not when he was a month or two old;" "You're young, you can always have more children." (If someone's spouse died, would they say, "Oh well, you can always remarry"? We could have 20 more children and still feel the gap left by Ezekiel.)

GUILT

Many people, after the death of a child, embark on a frantic search for reasons why. Rarely is an answer found, but somehow there's

that lingering feeling that we're personally responsible. I will forever carry with me questions about the supposedly "safe" cold medication I took and wonder if I should have rested more instead of trying to do so much. I haven't talked to one bereaved parent who doesn't feel guilty. Some eventually resolve it, others never find the answers they're looking for.

DEPRESSION, PHYSICAL EFFECTS, LETHARGY/HYPERACTIVITY

This is the stage where one truly understands where the term "broken heart" came from. My chest felt so heavy it was hard to breathe and my heart physically ached. I literally could not move. My interest in life and work was gone and seemed to take forever to regain — nearly costing me my job as an art director. I accomplished nothing for months and felt ill and listless. Every quarter while preparing SMJ, when I came to the "New on Earth" page, I would wonder how many had newly ascended from this earth. Others I have talked with have had opposite reactions and immersed themselves in work. Some people overeat, and some eat nothing at all.

ACCEPTANCE AND RECOVERY

It truly takes close to a year to feel functional again. One never forgets, and the pain never goes away; the bereaved just learn to live with it and accept it. Time heals, but it doesn't take away. Today, on the first anniversary of Ezekiel's birth/death, we ordered his headstone and took flowers to his gravesite. It was also the first time I was able to go to the cemetery and not cry. It's not that it's less painful, for the pain is as acute as if it happened yesterday — and the details as vivid. I'm just able to be more content with the things I cannot change.

Recovery is a slow process, needing time, understanding and a lot of support. It is important to remember that no two people grieve alike, and this can be very trying in a marriage. My husband recovered more quickly than I did, and there were many times I felt he was insensitive and I was going crazy. Yet, what pulled me through this past year was my husband's constant love and patience, close friends who offered so much support, and prayer. I will always carry a tremendous amount of love for the people who called, sent cards, books, and flowers, and offered prayers and support. All this helps so much in recovery.

Grieving is a very natural consequence of loss. I know many parents, including myself, who have a positive, healthy attitude towards life after death and do not fear their own death. When a child dies the intensity of grief often comes as a surprise to them since they are so assured of their child's spiritual well-being. However, the focus is on their *own* loss. Parents don't want to hear about how glad they *should* feel for their child's spiritual station or another person's feelings about life after death. I'm just now beginning to be able to think about where Ezekiel's soul is and feel good about it. Before now the pain of our loss was too great to think of him not here with us.

Grief is a complex set of emotions which only time makes better. If you know someone whose baby or child has died, the best thing you can do for them is to be patient and let them talk. You may hear the same stories and questions for months. Don't tell them it was meant to be, the baby is in a better place, it's time to get back on their feet, or that they can have another child. The best thing you can say is that you're sorry. Send cards or flowers. Call and check in. Remember anniversaries and reminder dates. Be supportive and noncritical. Don't forget them. ♥



The Child in My Heart

by Tim Reed Horn

"Do you have any children?"

A common enough question to ask a young couple who've been married three years. Not necessarily such an easy question to answer.

I'm a mother, although I have no diapers or sleepless nights or Mother's Day presents to show for it. Less than a year ago, we lost a baby. I was only six weeks pregnant; we hadn't even yet told our families. But we knew the baby was there, and we prayed and planned, giggled and grew together as a couple, looking forward to welcoming our third member.

But our baby never made it to this world. She bypassed this life and went straight to the Abhá Kingdom (I think of the baby as a girl — whom I've named "Mercy," because the miscarriage happened around the Nineteen-Day Feast of Mercy).

We received a tremendous amount of support and prayers during that difficult time — from both family and friends.

But some of the greatest comfort came from the Bahá'í Writings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives the following loving consolation to parents who lose young children, which I feel includes unborn babies:

"... The inscrutable divine wisdom underlies such heart-rending occurrences. It is as if a kind gardener transfers a fresh and tender shrub from a narrow place to a vast region. This transference is not the cause of the withering, the waning or the destruction of that shrub, nay rather it makes it grow and thrive, acquire freshness and delicacy and attain verdure and fruition ..."

(Bahá'í World Faith, p. 379)

Hey! Our baby is *growing* and *thriving* in the next world! How can I think of the miscarriage as an ending? God transferred her to where she needed to be! Although I grieved for our loss, how can I feel guilt or emptiness? And how can I ever forget her?

Mercy is often in my thoughts and prayers. And when, God willing, we do have children, they'll know about their older sister. She's a part of our family, after all.

I realize this isn't a "normal" thing to do — people just don't *talk* about miscarried babies as if they were real people. But they are! They have souls and, however brief their stay, they



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"It is as if a kind gardener
transferreth a fresh and tender
shrub from a confined place to a
wide open area. This transfer is
not the cause of the withering of
that shrub . . . nay, on the contrary,
it maketh it to grow and thrive."

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá

did pass through this life.

Won't our family be enriched by thinking about and praying for the family member who made it into the next world first? And what a wonderful way for our children to begin understanding life after death, by praying for their older sister and learning what the Holy Writings say about the next world. Death will not be so frightening; the next world will not

seem so foreign, so forbidding — after all, that's where big sister is growing up!

Yes, I have a child. She doesn't demand the full-time attention children in this world do, and I'll never get to enjoy her jabbering and sweet silliness. But I still cuddle her in my heart and remember her in my prayers. And I still love her. ♥

What Children Want to Learn About Death

by Christopher Jay Johnson Ph.D.

As parents, we need not ask ourselves if children should receive death education. Instead, we can ask how much education are they receiving, and is the information reliable? Children confront death daily — in nature, the family itself, and the media. Yet as they confront it, how is it explained? Do parents say the dog has been “put to sleep?” Only to wake up later? Or do we explain what being “put to sleep” means? Be careful how you explain the difference between sleep and death; otherwise, you run the risk of causing a pathological dread of bedtime. Remember this classic prayer?

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Death education begins at birth. Perceptions of death are built on little prayers that are learned. Death education comes from things said or left to our imagination. We are educated through life experiences — a dying uncle, brother, or even a pet. As a child, I can remember the above prayer being taught to me so that I could say it night after night. After hearing it and learning it, I can recall how scared I got thinking of the possibility of not waking up. I sure was relieved to see the

sunlight peak through the curtains in the morning. I used to say to myself, “I made it through the night; I’m alive.” Yet this prayer, which has alarmed thousands of children through the years, is still a popular nursery prayer in America today. Associating death with sleep is not new, nor is it confined to prayers alone. Such associations, which can trigger misunderstanding or denial of death, are popular among a number of people. For example, parents may describe a dead aunt as “asleep.” Many undertakers contribute to this association between death and sleep by labeling a room in their funeral home as a “slumber room.” Death is not slumbering, it is final, permanent, everlasting.

We live in a death denying society. Parents are products of this deathless culture. Thus, we are socialized to believe that death is a taboo subject. In turn we rear our children with similar faulty thinking. We don’t realize that denial or delay in discussing death makes it likely that our kids will be told by the wrong person in the wrong way.

How parents approach the topic is significant. Discuss the subject calmly, gently, and lovingly; the tone of voice conveys deep concern. Although what is said or not said is critical, *how* it is said has the greatest impact on

whether children develop needless fears, or accept within their capacity, the finality of death.

First, stop and listen to your kids. Their thoughts, feelings, and fears can be detected. "Will Joey (the brother) someday come back to life?" "Will he wake up?" "Did God take Joey?" "Am I a sissy if I cry?" These are direct questions children ask. The point is, children need to ask questions, to talk. Respect each child's unique way of responding to death. Their personalities and temperaments differ. Hence, their reactions will differ.

Children also vary in their levels of maturity and abilities to either reason or fantasize. Do not try to precisely fit your youngster's perception of death into a fixed category. Earl Grollman, in his book, *Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child*, gives the following general guidelines.

Stage One: Preschool Age

A preschool child may not believe death is permanent. Death is like sleep: you are not asleep, later you will awaken. Since death is perceived as temporary, your child may not comprehend the sadness around him. After all, "If Joey is still there in the casket, won't he come back to us again?"

Stage Two: Ages five to nine

In mid-childhood youngsters are more capable of comprehending the meaning of physical death because of their developing life experiences. At this stage, kids often neither deny nor fully accept the universality of death. A compromise is made. Death is "real" but only to others, namely, the elderly.

Stage Three: Ages nine, ten and thereafter

At this stage most youngsters formulate realistic concepts of the permanence of death based upon biological observation. Death is the physiological end of life. Death is dead — it's final, universal.

I was once asked to a home where a boy's father had just died of cancer. When the boy



Peg O'Conner

returned home, he was told the sad news. Casually he said, "Oh, he died," then a pause: "Is it all right if I go play with Joe?" I considered the boy to be insensitive and thought, "Didn't he really love his dad?" It was not until later that I realized that death does not immediately impact the minds and hearts of survivors — it sometimes takes time.

Losing a family member is like losing a part of your personality — part of yourself. A child's emotional reaction to this loss will range from anger to guilt. Permit him or her to express feelings in a climate of warmth and acceptance. We don't ask the child to replace that valuable part of themselves but to try to adapt to the change and go on with life.

Parents should take care not to offer more information than the child requests. For example, a satisfactory response to the question, "What is death?" should not be an extensive theological treatise, but a simple statement, "a person stops breathing. The body is still, quiet, peaceful." Too many parents project their own death anxieties upon kids. If you are in doubt,

simply ask, "Just what is it you want to know?" When parents over-answer it often reflects their own anxieties about death. Also, try to avoid abstract answers, they make a child confused.

I recommend telling the child that a loved one died of a specific disease (e.g., cancer) rather than because "he was sick." Sickness rarely leads to death except among the critically ill. Parents can create unnecessary fears of being sick by such comments. Your child may think that he or she is going to die every time illness sets in. Also, remember people do not die of old age, they die from diseases, accidents or disasters. One parent told his child, "Grandpa died of old age." The result was the child did not want to be old. Another boy was told God wanted his brother because "He was lonely," hence this child began resenting God for taking his only brother. After all, God isn't the only one who is lonely; this boy was lonely too. This child would stop saying prayers to such a selfish Deity. He discovered convenient ways of staying away from religious services. Family counseling was needed to undo the damage done by a simple statement.

We need to gently expose our youngsters to death. Children want to learn about death; they are naturally curious. Too often parents will flush the dead goldfish down the toilet before the children awaken. Some parents bury the dead dog to protect their children from seeing it before they get home from school. Other parents will get a "sitter" to stay with the kids rather than having to expose their "tender hearts" to seeing grandma's corpse in a casket at the funeral home. Instead, we can gently prepare our children to see the dying or dead animal or person. I remember when my father-in-law died. He was a Mason, and most of the family were Bahá'ís. Naturally he wanted a Masonic funeral, with the usual rituals. In addition, he wanted an open casket, followed by cremation. We prepared our nine-year-old

son for the event before he went to it. We told Matt that "Grandpa will be lying in a casket. He will be dressed in a suit and will have his eyes closed. His skin will look pale. You can touch him if you want. His skin will probably feel a little cold." Matt asked a few more questions and we gave him short matter-of-fact answers. Once the family arrived at the funeral home, our son decided to go up to the coffin and see Grandpa. He touched grandpa's hand and did find that it was cold and lifeless. This experience, coupled with his past exposure to grandpa before and after he was ill, have helped him gain a well-rounded attitude about his grandfather's life, terminal sickness, and death. When one of our pets dies, our son or daughter will see it, and may even help bury it. We haven't shielded them from death. My mother-in-law lives with us and has a chronic illness. This situation has helped our family in many ways.

In summary, children want to know about life and death. We can do a lot to help them understand the many dimensions to the dying process by what we say and do. Actually, as I have told my son, humans begin dying at conception — cells develop and die constantly. Thus, as we experience the life cycle, we are experiencing the dying process. How can we help children learn more about dying? One idea is that we can choose healthy reading materials on death like Leo Buscaglias's *Freddie the Leaf*, and many other fine books. Moreover, we can offer explanations of dying and death which are short and exact, answering only the question asked. Who else but parents should educate children to the process of dying, death and life after death? I suggest that we begin today to come to grips with our own mortality. Once we are prepared to die, whenever it's time, we can expose our children to the multi-faceted dying process. ♥

Growing Through Grief

by Kathy Zuiches

Changes are something we all experience in life. From growing up to moving away from home, from marriage to singleness through death or divorce — we all must deal with loss of one kind or another. Even with a positive change, such as a well-deserved promotion, we experience the process of adjustment to the new and letting go of the old. This process is known as grief, and it comes to all of us in different ways.

Over the last year, I have been working through grieving over the death of our baby, William Matthew. Our first child, Bethany, was born in 1980 after many years of prayerful waiting and skilled reconstructive surgery. Our hope for a second pregnancy was the result of a promise received in prayer two years later.

With that hope in our hearts, you can imagine our joy when I became pregnant in the fall of 1984! Bethany was delighted and began making plans for how she would help with the baby.

However, in my second month, our initial joy and fortitude began to be overshadowed by a growing sense of dread. I began bleeding each month, which left me feeling frightened and helpless. The baby was always well after each episode and by the fifth month my condition had stabilized. It was then, during this

time of peace, that our baby was born.

Only 24 weeks into the pregnancy my water broke, and within two days infection had set in resulting in premature delivery. Those first hours in the hospital were agonizing. I felt out of control, like I was falling with nothing to grasp. Never have I appreciated more the prayers of others, as I felt so unable to pray myself. At first, all my husband Bill and I could pray for was that God would spare us from any life-or-death decisions. Although the fear and pain we felt did not go away during those two days, we felt covered with a deep peace and assurance of God's presence.

The night before Matthew's birth, realizing he might not live, I began my grief work — my letting go. The initial shock had passed and I began to have other feelings associated with grief — such as guilt, anger and depression. Prayers had been offered for healing; I even tried to read a bit about premature babies and their care. I was experiencing the denial and bargaining Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross described as part of the emotional stages of those who are faced with their own or a loved one's imminent death.

For a while I didn't even want to give him the special name we had chosen — *Matthew* — "Given of God, a reward and a blessing."

con't on page 33

A Song of Terrible Beauty

by Carol Goodrich

My firstborn child was a son who died three months after his birth. He was born with congenital birth defects and was taken immediately at birth to the University of Washington Hospital in Seattle. He stayed there until he died.

For the first several weeks of his hospitalization I wasn't able to touch him because he was in an incubator. I sat and watched him through the glass and couldn't think above a terrible yearning to hold him. Finally, a month after his birth, I was able to touch him for the first time. There was a rocking chair in the ward and I would rock, holding him as long as the nurses would let me, singing every folk song I knew.

Today, Erin's birth defect can be helped through surgery, but back then it was fatal. The doctors on the ward tried to prepare me for this, but I was unable to accept the fact that he would die. The only thing I could think about were the two hours a day I could spend holding and singing to him.

A week before he died, I picked a violet petunia growing outside the hospital entrance. I spent the visiting day showing Erin this flower. I remember how his eyes widened as he looked at the flower. I felt something had broken through and shattered, for a long and

wonderfilled moment, the stark white hospital room and the pain in it. I felt I had been able to give him something important and this, strangely enough, seemed to bond me to him in the way I had missed at his birth.

His death was the most terrible time of my life. There are no words. I couldn't sleep and I didn't want to be awake. I had no religion then to give me comfort, but I believed in God and I believed in good. I felt strongly that Erin was in the company of angels.

I had nightmares every night after Erin died for several months. The ward where he had lived for three months was for babies with birth defects of all kinds. While I was there, other babies died. Every parent coming to this ward shared a common unspoken aching grief. In the midst of my own heartbreak were other hearts breaking and I knew I would never take life for granted again.

Then one night I had a dream. It is still so clear. I stood in a shining emerald glade and Erin was in my arms. A light surrounded his face and his eyes seemed ancient and knowing. He said to me, "We're going for a little walk together Mother, and then you must let me go."

We walked through this forest where light shimmered on every leaf until we came to a clearing where women were busy washing



clothes in a river. I woke feeling very calm and I knew Erin's spirit had given me the gift of this dream to help comfort and console me. The nightmares stopped after that. I knew Erin would be close to me as my thoughts were of him.

It took a long time for the emotional pain to subside. It takes a long time. Having more children filled the void left by his loss.

Two years after Erin died I became a Bahá'í and through the study of Bahá'í teachings on death found an understanding which allowed me to accept what had happened.

Every sorrow holds within it a hidden gift. To me, this is proof of the mercy of God. My son's death awakened, as pain often does,

feelings in my heart. It ignited a response to suffering. It gave me empathy. The death of a child anywhere is the death of my child.

If a sorrow could be described, I think it must be clear as the finest crystal and shaped as a bell which intones one note so pure and strong that it touches the strings of each heart who can hear it. It is a song of terrible beauty. Who hears it, feels it, and is changed.

My son's death gave me the motivation to do whatever I am able to do in working for the cause of world peace. Since that time, all my feelings about hunger, war and disease merge into one picture of a mother holding her dying child. This clear image cuts through all the rhetoric, argument, and excuse. It makes things very simple: Do your best to love. ♥

An Interview with Claire Newport

by Suzanne Mann of the SMJ staff

Claire Newport is a vigorous retiree who lives in Eugene, Oregon. Claire lives alone and is blind. Last July the youngest of Claire's three sons, Loring, age 39, died in a Seattle hospital after a brief illness. We spoke with Claire about Loring's death.

SMJ: Tell us about Loring's death.

Claire: When my daughter-in-law called me and said he was dying my first reaction was disbelief and denial, but I was soon able to acknowledge the reality of it and travelled with friends to Seattle to visit him in the hospital. We talked of many things at his bedside. I remember saying to him, "It's only your body!" I had a clear sense of his immortality and a firm belief that this separation was brief, that we would be together again.

SMJ: What was your emotional reaction?

Claire: Most of my grief was expressed at the time of that last visit. Tears poured out then, and for the next day or two, then I told myself, "That's enough crying," and began to focus on his life rather than his death, and on how lucky I was to have had all those years to see him mature, develop his potential, and influence the hearts of others.

SMJ: What comparisons can you draw between

your experience as a mother with Loring's death and that of a mother who loses a young child?

Claire: I think it was much easier for me, for a number of reasons. First, life and time prepare you for it by giving you other losses. I had already experienced the loss of my sight, which was a personal death to my old identity and my former world, then the loss of my husband when we divorced, the loss of each of my sons when they left home; John to the army, Reg to the army, then later to their pioneering posts in Africa and Saipan, then Loring.

And when they first left, they all wrote often. Loring would send me tapes of his music and his experiences. He wanted to share it all with me. But as time went by, the letters became less frequent. In the last 15 years I have become accustomed to seeing them only every few years and hearing from them only on occasion. So, even though this sounds harsh, Loring's death had no change in my day-to-day life. That is probably the greatest difference between losing a child as an adult and a child as a child. When your kids are young, you design your life around them and their needs, their schedules, etc., so a child's death leaves a great void in your life. When your children are grown and

gone, you must structure a life without them, therefore their deaths have less impact on you. The other major difference is, again, a function of time. I was able to watch Loring share his music with many people. The vast number of people who knew him and loved him gives me great comfort and satisfaction. The fact that he was able to express his talents and his beliefs through his work gives his life a completeness which is missing in the tragic death of a youngster.

SMJ: What was the most difficult aspect of Loring's death for you to deal with?

Claire: Well, I think all of us expect to die before our children, so that was a bit hard, but I see death as one aspect of God's Will. It must be accepted! Who are we to object? Anger or bitterness seem prideful and inappropriate to me. Another difficult thing for me was responding to others who expressed sympathy or regret. Although I am sure everyone was well-meaning, people put demands on me to

react a certain way. They expected grief and sadness long after I had dealt with it and put it behind me. People's responses were mostly "downers." I would have much preferred positive acknowledgements about his life and their good memories, especially from Bahá'í friends who are told that death is a messenger of joy. There still seems to be a great disparity between what we say we believe and how we act in the face of death.

SMJ: Was there anything in particular that brought you comfort and helped you through your grief?

Claire: Yes. Since I have become blind, I have spent a great deal of time memorizing passages from the Bahá'í Writings. I found that time and time again, when I needed them, passages would come to mind that just fit the bill. This gave me, and continues to give me great comfort and an overwhelming sense of the grace of God. This is the greatest assuredness; God provides for every need. ♥

O thou beloved maid-servant of God, although the loss of a son is indeed heart-breaking and beyond the limits of human endurance, yet one who knoweth and understandeth is assured that the son hath not been lost but, rather, hath stepped from this world into another, and she will find him in the divine realm. That reunion shall be for eternity, while in this world separation is inevitable and bringeth with it a burning grief.

Therefore be thou not disconsolate, do not languish, do not sigh, neither wail nor weep; for agitation and mourning deeply affect his soul in the divine realm.

That beloved child addresseth thee from the hidden world: 'O thou kind Mother, thank divine Providence that I have been freed from a small and gloomy cage and, like the birds of the meadows, have soared to the divine world - a world which is spacious, illumined, and ever gay and jubilant. Therefore, lament not, O Mother, and be not grieved; I am not of the lost, nor have I been obliterated and destroyed. I have shaken off the mortal form and have raised my banner in this spiritual world. Following this separation is everlasting companionship. Thou shalt find me in the heaven of the Lord, immersed in an ocean of light."

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Selections of the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá p. 201

In the Fullness of the Season

by Tara Peyralans

Jacinta walked through the field next to her shamba (farm) heavy with child in her growing belly. Martin was on her back tied to her shoulders with a large cotton cloth as she made her way amongst the cattle to greet me. Life had been good for us both over the past month. Her potatoes, maize and beans had grown, promising a healthy harvest in the weeks to come. The mountain held clouds that continued and enhanced our faith in nature's release of the short rains. The sustainer of life in this African country.

"I am ready," came an unexpected voice as I walked from my house to the garden and saw a woman standing with a small bag in her hand. Jacinta was ready to deliver a new life who would become her mother or father by name and spirit as is the tradition in Kikuyu culture. I drove her to the clinic 8km. down the road where she would have otherwise walked or if she was lucky enough, found a ride in a matatu. She gave birth that night to a daughter named Gathigia and rested in a small room with four other women. The next day her children and I greeted her and the new life she had so recently given birth to. We drank tea together and ate cake sharing it with the other women, two of whom had given birth that morning and the other patiently waiting for her child to

crown. The next day we traveled to Munyu to bring Jacinta and Gathigia home. Upon our return to the shamba they were greeted with smiling faces and helping hands from their family and the local mamas. Jacinta and Gathigia were loved and cared for by all. On this bit of communal land all of the children and families involve themselves with the work and childcare. It was not just Chris and Jacinta who were overjoyed with the arrival of Gathigia but the entire extended family which includes about 15 people.

While visiting their home after some months had passed I was holding Gathigia and Jacinta said to me "Oh Tara, I must show you something." She left the room, returned and said, "Look, now I have a bed for my baby so that I can take her out into the fields when I cultivate." Gathigia was too young to be tied to her mother's back with cloth. In her hands was a large cardboard box filled with blankets and love. A real bed for her daughter and a lovely joyous face revealing her happiness. Much of my time was spent helping Jacinta with her other children, Wangechi and Martin, cooking over an open fire in her mud and wattle cooking hut, laughing, talking and sharing the joy of this new life in her home.

Once again I left this area for over a



month. As is my custom upon arrival back home I ventured off to visit Jacinta. She was in the hospital with Gathigia and was expected to return soon. Two days later I went to see her some 50 miles away at a mission hospital. I arrived in the morning only to see an empty face, for Gathigia had died the night previous. I cried, the sadness was deep, and I was once again confronted with yet another cultural barrier. Was it my place to cry in front of this mother whose sadness was evident but held within the strength of her body and soul. What was my place, did I even belong?

Do the Kikuyu not openly express their sadness as the Luo women do in the western part of Kenya? My mind was full of questions, concerns. Finally, I decided that yes, I did belong, no matter how different our cultures were. I was her friend and I had love and kindness to give.

We returned home mid-afternoon sharing the news with her family and friends and returned the next day to pick up Gathigia's body. Friends and relatives gathered, with the women in one home and the men in another. The women cooked, smiled, prepared tea, laughed, served the men and spent quiet moments with Jacinta who sat on the ground next to her chickens and the many children present. She greeted her friends with a warm heart. Her husband Chris did much the same with the many men who were visiting. The love, kindness, and spiritual renewal that took place carried a quiet beauty that is greater than I have experienced. A simple burial followed where Gathigia was laid in the ground next to the fruitful growth of the coming harvest.

A month later I returned desiring to plant some flower bulbs that were almost ready to bloom. I walked to Jacinta's and together we went to Gathigia's grave, dug a small hole and deposited our gift. We smiled together and talked of the rains that would nourish this new bit of life over a mound of death that had already begun nourishing the soil. Back to the house we went, readying the fire to brew a pot of chai (tea) and began peeling potatoes together. Martin and Wangechi came running in, laughing, playing, and asking for their chai before they left again with the other children to tend the herds, as the day was quickly coming to an end.

The short rains have passed and the long rains are midway through their cycle. Potatoes are being harvested and the beans and maize will be ready soon. There is a great deal of love and energy that is put into the shamba, for in it is the food that gives these people life - but not without the help of the gift that falls from the heavens. Gathigia is gone, buried on the land. The other children continue to play. Jacinta and Chris work in their shamba with the cardboard box that held their third child, empty. Life goes on, happiness revealed. Shauri ya Mungu they say, it is the will of God. ♥

On Mothering



Reunited

by Susanne Coates

Looking back now as an adult, I can see that my mother was very good to me - she rarely spanked; made sure I looked well when going out the door; connected me with friends; enrolled me in ballet, tap dancing, and piano classes; and made regular trips with us to the library, movie theater, and birthday parties. She arranged time with our relatives, baked treats, made crabapple jelly, actively participated in family camping trips and treks out of the city to our farm, and agreed with my father not to smoke in front of us. She helped guide our religious training, first in the United Church of Canada and then in the Bahá'í Faith, and encouraged us to travel and experience and participate in life to the fullest.

Somewhere along the way though, we developed the inability to share our thoughts and feelings, both choosing to withdraw - her not wanting to invade my privacy, me too timid to speak up and too resentful of her inability to magically divine my needs. Perhaps some of it, too, was rooted in the fear she wouldn't always be there to count on, which was born when I was four and she was seriously ill with a pregnancy.

When I was ready for marriage she gave me her blessing, but again we neglected to

share those intimate special moments prior to my leaving home and taking a partner. We stayed in touch regularly, still caring, but not close, until I became a mother myself and began to experience problems in my marriage. As I struggled to share with her some of my pain, it became a bridge between us as she reached to me with pain she had experienced in her marriage. What relief I felt to know I was not alone; to find out my parents had had their share of difficulties too, and had kept together in spite of them; to find that though I'd never really seen them have a fight, they had had them. We began to struggle through the growing pains of a relationship, trying to understand each other, trying to see those problems we had in common and help each other work on them. In many ways she has become my example for my efforts to replace low self-esteem with confidence and ability. She's there when I need her, calls me when I'm hurting, celebrates my joys, and helps pick me up after my defeats. She holds me when I'm depressed and helps to show me the light at the end of the tunnel.

In the past six years, I've had life's range of pain and joy, and through it all she's been there. God has richly blessed me with a friend - my Mom. ♥

On Fathering



From the Foundation Up

by Bill Knight-Weiler

"The primary relationship is between us as parents, and children come to us because of the love we share."

Joyce & Barry Vissell

This little story is about housebuilding - family building - and as with all homes, we need to begin at the bottom with the foundation. The marital relationship is the foundation of the family, and the stronger it is, the longer the home is going to last. There is a clear correlation between the way one enters into and carries out a marriage and the way one raises his children.

We're going to need some financing to get this life-long project going, so if there ever was a time to plan ahead and open an IRA-C (Important Relationship And Children), it's when considering marriage.

As we ponder what form our marriage is to take, we need to ask what makes two people decide to marry? I hope it's not because of a family fortune or a mere physical attraction or infatuation. Unfortunately, many do wed because of intensely romanticized ideas about marriage. I heard that Sleeping Beauty and Prince Charming were recently divorced.

Marriage in the Bahá'í Faith is exalted as an expression of divine purpose. Bahá'í Writings on the subject, revealed 125 years ago, are noteworthy: "The marriage of the people of Bahá'í must consist of both physical and spiritual relationship, for both of them are intoxicated with the wine of one cup."

The next stage in home building is the first floor construction: the bringing forth and raising of children. No one builds a foundation and then stops. Marriage becomes synonymous with parenthood, and with the spiritual union of the two, the preparation for parenthood begins when the bride and groom walk down the aisle.

A newborn child reminds me of a newborn marriage. There is much initial elation and celebration; the couple is united by the birth as it is by the wedding ceremony. As the child grows and displays the terrible twos, threes or thirties, the initial sparkle dims. The children are often blamed for cracks in the foundation, while faulty workmanship is really to blame. The cracks may be caused by an inability to communicate or a rigidity of patterned behavior that is too comfortable to want to change. Careful builders will construct an entire house with an eye for permanence.

We'd better check our blueprints; the first page offers instructions for the wedding ceremony. Beware the ceremony full of pomp and circumstantial spirituality. The wedding should be a ground-breaking ceremony of the most profound kind. A cornerstone is being laid here which sets the stage for the entire marriage. The vows should be from the man

and woman's heart, not from a book. A spiritual marriage joins the extended families of the couple, and in turn, their love blesses the creation of a new family. When the perfume of the wedding celebration wears off, couples that have planned and prayed ahead, and committed themselves to working through the tough moments, look each other in the eye and talk. This marriage will go a long way towards producing a spiritual family.

A child can make a strong marriage stronger. It can't solve the problems but it does heighten the sweetness. The mystical nine months of pregnancy, the ultimate spellbinding experience of birth and then the cradling of your baby in your arms can only bring tremendous meaning to the parents, who have prepared for this moment, and who have long been ready to complete the family triangle.

Children carry our torch into the next generation and though they stumble and fall, it is we parents they trust to help them to their feet and relight the flame. Regardless of the

unpleasant situations the children get into, please look into their eyes and don't lose sight of the flame. It will always be there. The same applies to our marriage partner. No problem will be solved if we avert our eyes and walk away.

Our house is nearly complete; now it needs to be maintained. Because of the care you've put into building your home, the rest should be a breeze: family maintenance asks that you simply love to the best of your ability.

Sometimes your children won't be watching your actions, but more often they will watch your marital relationship very closely. What they see should be like an irresistible elixir, one mixed with mostly good, and maybe a little "bad," yet rich and abundant with the attempt to love. The children will learn that a spiritual life is the fruit of a true effort to fulfill and model a promise made years ago. The elixir should be sipped throughout the years as a reminder of the wonderful beginnings of the relationship and of how wonderful it is today. ♥

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On Marriage by Julie Pascoe



Sacrifice Without Joy

Almost three years ago my younger brother, Bob, committed suicide. He was 25 years old. There had been no warning. In the note he left he said that he felt he was the only child out of six who was not successful. The only area of his life he could have been referring to was his lack of an intimate committed relationship. The rest of my siblings and I all had primary loving partnerships.

The loss of my brother was devastating for my parents and to this day they do not visit his grave together. They go often to contemplate his death, but each goes alone and grieves privately. They talk often of their memories of his life, but they do not talk of his death. In the first few months they struggled to find meaning in the event, but none of the answers they contemplated was ever sufficient.

I've spent many hours worrying about the impact of my brother's death on my parents. Generally speaking, they seem to be closer to each other now than I have ever seen them, yet there is a circle drawn around this event that neither wishes to enter into. I've been turning this puzzle over in my mind for these three years, and I am beginning to understand a little bit of the dilemma they face. It is a dilemma that I believe faces my siblings as well.

Several times during a recent trip home I tried to engage members of my family in

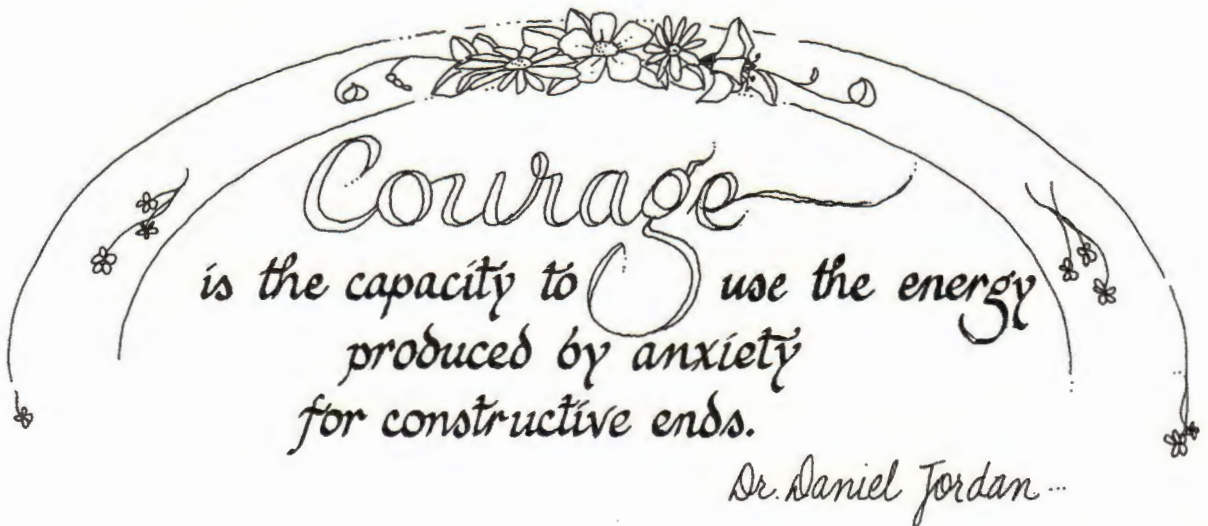
discussions about their relationships and each time I was surprised and disheartened to find a lack of joy in the responses. What I heard instead were stories of compromise. We talked of what had been given up in order to keep families and relationships intact and we talked of trying to protect oneself against compromising too much. In particular I saw the struggles of the women, who are trying to grasp hold of their work in the world beyond their families, and the resentment of the burden of responsibility that the men try to keep hidden from the world. There was joy when we talked of their children, but not of their marriages.

The marriages and partnerships of my family are physical and material unions, not spiritual in nature. They are based on love of each other, exclusive of love of God. In the absence of the spiritual dimension, the purpose of the families is vague and although strong moral imperatives exist, a concrete meaning is non-existent. If they were pressed to come up with a purpose for their lives, I think they would respond that it is to raise their children so they can have a better life than their parents did. The day to day compromises and sacrifices are all offered in the hope that the children will benefit. Unfortunately the children have become the reason for being.

Unfortunately the children have become the reason for being.

Seen in this light it is less of a surprise that my parents cannot come face to face with the meaning of my brother's death. They spent their lives compromising for their children and now one child is dead. The hollowness that is left saddens me deeply. My parents would still say the sacrifices they made were worthwhile and I know they mean that. I am deeply indebted to

them for their sacrifices — they raised me in a manner that allowed me to grasp my current spiritual beliefs and it was at a tremendous cost to both of their creative capacities. My sadness for my parents and siblings is that without a spiritual perspective on their marriages these sacrifices are without joy. My hope for them is that my prayers on their behalf can assist in relieving them of the burden of this dilemma, if not in this world, than in the next. ♥





Last issue we invited reader response to this passage. The following articles are the beginning of a series on this subject.

"Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship."

'Abdu'l-Bahá

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* p. 129)



The Pleasant and the Wise

by Jeanne Fitterer

When I saw the phrase, "Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship," in the last issue of *Spiritual Mothering*, I wondered at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's meaning of hardship. It brought to mind the fact that, indeed, many scriptures carry this same, weighty message:

Those who suffer most, attain to the greatest perfection . . . Men who suffer not, attain no perfection. The plant most pruned by the gardeners is that one which, when summer comes, will have the most beautiful blossoms and abundant fruit.

(*'Abdu'l-Bahá, P.T., p. 50*)

What does this have to do with children? I have been observing families around me for some time, and particularly those who are connected, in some way, with my own children. One family happens to be a church-going family with ten children, two of whom died sudden deaths. The ages range from four to about sixteen. The children begin to work at an early age, doing such jobs as paper routes, babysitting, or working for their dad. They tithe a hefty amount of their earnings to their church in complete respect and obedience. On Saturday mornings (when many children are watching

television or playing) these children are cleaning house and helping their Mom. I stopped in one Saturday morning and felt like I had invaded the Seven Dwarves' cottage. The children were happily absorbed in their jobs and even four-year-old Tom was sitting folding his own clothes. I asked his mother if their children always folded and put away their own clothes. "Yes," she replied, "they must do their chores."

Quite on the other end of the continuum is the nine-year-old girl across the street who is constantly being entertained. On Saturday mornings she is heading for the ski slopes or off on a shopping spree. Then there is the family across town who took their daughter out of school for a year because she couldn't get along with her classmates. Although home schooling is often a positive option for children, the motivation in this situation was clearly to protect their child from the hardships she suffered at school.

If we continually pamper our children, protect them from the stressors which come their way and don't teach them to cope spiritually with the unfortunate situations that life brings them, I personally feel we are doing them a disservice. Without some 'hardship,' how can children learn self-discipline? If we give in consistently to their daily wants and

desires, how will they learn responsibility and respect? How can we, as parents, expect our children to grow into servants of God by allowing them to always have their own way, fostering their self-will?

Hardship can mean many things to many people. Having to help when children want to play; seeing other children receive expensive gifts at holidays; having to spend extra time on homework in order to do well in school. Perhaps in this way, the later year disappointments won't be such a shock to them. Developing spiritual attributes won't be as difficult and self-discipline will come a little easier.

But all this needs to be done in the ways which will build a lasting relationship with our children. When children see their parents pursue personal pleasure and profit it gives license to self will. When parents are role models of unity and are trying to develop themselves spiritually,

children can be taught how to live through hardships by prayer, consistent support and open communication.

I can only speak to these verses through my own life experiences. Through living a portion of my life based on compulsion and self will, I realized it was time for change. I knew I was past due for becoming a role model for my children, so I painfully began a very practical program of daily living which has led me to a life of contentment amid the haste, the difficulties, the tests: Meditation twice a day on verses from all the great spiritual Giants; repeating the Greatest Name during times of stress and anxiety; putting others first; having weekly contact with friends who are striving to do the same; and finally, spending one-half hour each day reading the scriptures from all religions. ♥



Peg O'Conner

Joy in Hardship

by Pat Savage

It was a beautiful, sunny, and as yet, uncomplicated day. Just me and the kids. We had a young weekend visitor who fed our already energetic spirits. The feeling of "Let's do something *different!*" led us to the attic where we dragged out our six-man tent. We hadn't used it in several years, since my oldest children were wee ones, and I had never done more than keep them out of the way while it was being assembled.

The challenge was set before us in three man-sized bags. In an hour's time we managed to put it up - a wobbly version of itself, threatening to capsize with every little breeze or an unpredicted sneeze.

Our visitor despaired as we kept switching poles and ropes. "It'll never be right!" he repeated. I suggested that my son draw a picture of how he remembered it looking. (No help.) Then, we remembered that there was an entire section on camping in THE WHOLE EARTH CATALOG: maybe a picture of this classic tent would be there. (No luck.) How about one of the LL Bean catalogues? (Uh-uh.) Everyone was in the spirit of creative problem solving. "Maybe Erik, next door, (an ex-boy scout) is home!" (Oh well.)

It took all afternoon. After many adjustments and some improvement, the sight

of the tent still made my husband throw up his hands in utter amazement when he arrived home. He set it right in two minutes, and could have erected it from start to finish in 15.

The point of all this is that it was a very productive and enjoyable afternoon. What we accomplished was a lesson in how to deal creatively and joyfully with a problem. It could have been frustrating. We could have given up. And yet despite our visitor's early skepticism, even he caught the spirit and fun in the challenge. No one was stressed that our efforts provided so many dead ends.

This little story demonstrates that children can do well in the face of difficulty. When I first came across, "Bring them up to work and strive and accustom them to hardship," several years ago, it caused me to pause. At first, it seemed to suggest an unhappy austerity and severity - serious stuff. But soon, I realized this was a culturally conditioned response to the word "hardship." Nothing is more certain in our culture than the presence of trials and yet nothing is less accepted. We generally bemoan the hardship in our lives rather than cultivate the kind of acceptance that Bahiyyah Khanum¹ alludes to: "It is not that we would make the best of things but that we may find in everything, even calamity itself, the germ of

Enduring Wisdom." The attitude we should model for our children is one of faith, patience, hard work and good humor in the face of challenges in our lives. The more we can get into the challenge, the sooner we resolve it.

There is inspiration in an account offered by Jean Liedloff in *THE CONTINUUM CONCEPT*. She tells the story of a group of men, some native South Americans and the others Europeans, who were making a boat out of a Balsa tree. They worked together to fell the tree, to carve it hollow, and then to carry it to water. Hauling the enormous boat presented problems: the boat was dropped, got stuck, was too heavy, awkward, etc. The Europeans got frustrated, angry, cursed and stormed around, exhausting themselves. In contrast, the natives could have been judged to have been at a party. They laughed and joked and generally enjoyed the outing. That this was proceeding with great difficulty presented no problem to their spirits nor did it interfere with their ability to do the job. They had been taught to "work and strive" and to deal positively with hardship.

Teaching our children "to work and strive" and become "accustomed to hardship" can seem anathema in our culture. And yet even the materially endowed child can be given opportunity to work to accomplish desired goals. No matter what the undertaking, the child will encounter difficulties - whether it is building a block tower, writing a story, making a pinewood car, sewing doll clothes, designing a computer game, bringing in wood for the stove, getting dressed to play in the snow - don't worry about fabricating hardships! So often when we see our children having a hard time in their play, we want to eliminate the source of their trials. Yet we must resist the temptation to solve all their problems or avoid problematic situations. Children learn by trying

again and again, and *through* their mistakes.

One additional thought: we should have high expectations of our children in their abilities to act responsibly and helpfully in their family life. My observation has been that children love "grown-up" jobs and do astonishingly well from early on with cutting vegetables, making bread, caring for younger siblings, shovelling snow, organizing their rooms, sorting laundry, making fires. (Doing dishes may be another story!) The "hardships" we make available to them need not be perceived as such. Perhaps choosing a life of service as an adult has its roots in being accustomed to responsibility at an early age.

For me personally, there has been plenty of opportunity for growth in this area. I have observed that failure to deal with a problem in the right way will almost guarantee the opportunity to deal with that problem over and over until I get it right. What comes to mind right now is the almost daily challenge I've had in the last four winters of getting out of my snowy, hilly driveway without the use of four-letter expletives or tears. After all this time, I am accepting the challenge with more spirit and grace. We all shout "Step 1" (backing down the hill), "Step 2" (turning around), "Step 3" (ascending the last hill) and then "Mission accomplished!" as we hit the road.

Still there are many times when my two-year-old has wet socks for the third time in a morning or the older children haven't put away their clothes or whatever it is that gives me trouble keeping an attitude of good cheer and I "blow it." But 'Abdu'l-Bahá has an answer for that too: How do we reach perfection? "Little by little, day by day." ♥

¹ Bahiyyah Khanum is sister to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, an important teacher in the Bahá'í faith.

Growing through grief con't from page 17
How could this child who was about to die be a blessing to anyone? I wanted to keep this child within me safe and alive. But the womb was no longer a safe place, so again I was helpless. I felt violated to have to give birth, knowing that short of a miracle, my child would die.

The feelings of relief and acceptance came for us as the doctors talked with us about the care and respect with which they treat these tiny babies. They encouraged us to name our child and to make him our own as best we could following his birth.

Our joy and victory came, then, in Matthew's birth. A live, healthy baby boy, but not strong enough to live. For the hour he was with us there was delight and celebration in his life. Pictures were taken, which provided Bethany a way of "knowing" her brother and a way of easing the disappointment and loss she felt. We were thankful for such a positive birth experience. It drew me deeper into the loving and knowing God who does accomplish His purpose, keep His promises, and bring victory out of defeat.

But as my life went on without my baby, anger poured into my heart. I felt outraged! "How could God have let this happen!" In my limited understanding, I struggled with the unfairness of Matthew's death. I experienced what I later learned was a common manifestation of grief — the physical sensation of a broken heart. Yet in those times of deepest sorrow and heartache, I was comforted to know that my son was with his Creator. I knew Matthew was content and at peace in God's presence.

The sensitivity of our friends helped me through the many hard times and adjustments we had to make during the year to come. Sometimes my greatest need was to have someone listen to me express my feelings or hold my hand as I cried. Renewing my involvement in the lives of other people's children had a healing effect. I also kept a journal, which helped me express myself freely and allowed me to see how I was growing with God through my grief.

The most victorious day of the year came on February 14, 1986, a year to the day after Matthew's death. Bill and I both expected Valentine's Day to be a time of sad memories; but two days before, a sudden change took place. It came through the thoughtful words of a friend asking if I had considered Bill's and Bethany's needs for that day. I was ashamed to admit I had only thought of how sad I'd be. The Lord then began completing my healing as He made me keenly aware of the blessing I had in my family and the joy I could give them by entering into the fun things they wanted to do. There was no longer any need to dwell on the sadness of the past. I felt like I had graduated. I had worked through my grief and was ready to get on with my life.

What then, could be more of a tribute to Matthew's life than for his family here to celebrate our love for each other on his birth/death day. The truth of 1 Corinthians 1:4 came home to me then. We are comforted, not to be comfortable, but to extend that comfort to others. Through our deepest hurts and trials, we can grow in sensitivity, and in turn, are called to share in the ministry of Christ to others who hurt. ♥

Our Contributors

CAROL GOODRICH, her husband Reed and their three children live in Bellingham, Washington. She is a writer and edits a monthly journal, *Cosmic Glue Review*. She and Reed manage Club Vortex, a no-alcohol dance club for youth.

CHRISTOPHER JAY JOHNSON, Ph.D. is the Director of the Institute of Gerontology at Northeast Louisiana University. He is the editor of a newly-released book, *Encounters with Eternity: Religious Views of Death and Life After Death*. Chris and his wife have two children and live in Swartz, Louisiana.

KATHY ZUCHES, her husband Bill and their 7-year-old daughter live in Milwaukie, Oregon. She is active in the local Friends Church where she leads Bible study classes for women. Kathy also does freelance writing and seamstressing out of her home.

JEANNE FITTERER, who does calligraphy for SMJ, is an RN and teaches at the University of Oregon School of Nursing. She's been doing extensive research into the subject of toxic waste as it impacts on community health. She and her husband and two girls live in LaGrande, Oregon.

BILL KNIGHT-WEILER, as the Northwest representative for the Institute for Earth Education, conducts numerous workshops on environmental education for children. He has recently completed his second book, and is now involved in some yet-to-be-disclosed project that has he and his wife, Rene, once again competing for computer time. Bill is not quite sure yet about his new-found title as "Keeper of the Magic" for SMJ. He would rather be referred to as "Keeper of the Editor."

TIM REED HORN earned her degree in magazine production journalism. Prior to moving to St. Vincent, West Indies where she and her husband currently reside, she worked as an English teacher in Nigeria

and as a features writer for a daily newspaper in Alaska. And no, her parents were not hoping for a boy; they like the name Tim for a girl and she's grown rather attached to it over the years.

PAT SAVAGE is a freelance writer who lives out in the country near W. Nottingham, New Hampshire with her husband Jack and their four homeschooled children.

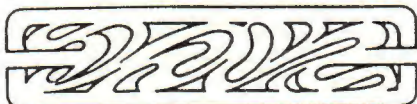
TARA PEYRALANS lives with her husband Jeff in Kenya, Africa where they co-direct the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). Tara is also a photographer and is certified as a teacher, but it's for her beadwork that she's known far and wide. She and Jeff are expecting their first child this spring.

ROBIN ALLEN lives in the small town of Shortsville, New York with her husband Michael and Rover the kitten. She is a graphic artist and illustrator whose work appears frequently in *Brilliant Star* magazine.

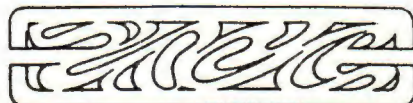
DEBRA COOK works for Clergy & Laity Concerned and was their representative to the Decade of Women conference in Nairobi, Kenya where she found many subjects for her illustrations. Her stunning note cards, graced by drawings similar to the one published here, are available through her at 372 W. 10th Ave., Eugene, Oregon 97401.

THOMAS RUBICK teaches at the University of Oregon in Eugene and is a freelance graphic designer. He has two sons, enjoys Aikido, and has achieved some degree of fame by way of the imaginatively illustrated lunch bags which his son, Cody, carries to school.

SUSANNE COATES works as a secretary in Lakewood, Ohio where she, her husband and their daughter reside. Her mother is Kay Muttart from Toronto, Canada.



WRITER'S GUIDELINES



Please consider writing for S.M.J. We may not pay you in cash, but of gratitude and good feelings you'll get lots. (not to mention fame, prestige and complimentary copies of the Journal.)

Submissions should:

- be 2,000 words or less
- be copied so that you retain the original
- make a strong statement and speak with conviction
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- be motivated by love
- present your religious perspective as openly as you wish
- discuss any subject (relevant to families) which is of deep concern and meaning to you.
- be practical or inspirational or philosophical or academic or humorous or ...

Here are some oft-requested topics to consider:

- peer pressure
- adolescence***
- 2-religion families
- single-parenting
- new traditions & Holy Day observances***
- chastity/sex ed.
- blended families
- spiritual aftermath of divorce, coping
- more from fathers***
- spiritual influences on unborn child
- discipline, discipline, discipline
- working parents/day care kids

SUZANNE MANN lives in Eugene, Oregon with her husband Doug and their son Jason (4). She has her Master's degree in Special Education and is teaching in a progressive early education school.

RENE KNIGHT-WEILER serves as the editor of *Spiritual Mothering* by night and as mother of two by day. She also works part time as a physical therapist, and lives with her family in Sandy, Oregon.

PEG O'CONNOR, whose illustrations grace a number of our articles, lives in Oregon City, Oregon with her husband Wayne and their four daughters.

DONNA SIRES works as a freelance graphic artist, is the art-director for SMJ, and lives in West Linn, Oregon. She is married and the mother of 4 boys, one of whom was stillborn last year. In her "spare" time, Donna enjoys calligraphy, working for world peace, and playing practical jokes on Rene.

JULIE PASCOE is currently a full-time mother (when she's not writing, lecturing, doing workshops, etc., etc.) With her M.Ed. in counseling, she has worked primarily with women around issues of domestic violence. She and her husband Jim conduct family life and couples workshops. They live in Forest Grove, Oregon.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES CONCERNING DEATH

SUPPORT GROUP

Compassionate Friends is a mutual self-help group for bereaved parents who have experienced the loss of a child. For local referrals and assistance call information for your area or contact:

The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

National Headquarters
P.O. Box 1347
Oak Brook, IL 60521
(312) 323-5010

SUGGESTED READING

When Hello Means Goodbye, and Still to be Born. Schwiebert, Pat and Kirk, Paul. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Health Sciences Center, 1981. For price and ordering info contact: Perinatal Loss; 2443 N.E. 20th Ave.; Portland, OR 97212; (503) 284-7426

Unto Him Shall We Return. Selections from the Bahá'í Writings on the Reality and Immortality of the Human Soul. Compiled by Motlagh, Hushidar. For ordering information contact the Bahá'í Publishing Trust; 415 Linden Ave; Wilmette, IL 60091; (312) 869-9039

Surviving Pregnancy Loss. Friedman, Rochille and Gradstein, Bonnie. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1982

Motherhood and Mourning. Pepper, Larry and Knapp, Ronald. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980

Life and Death. Zim, Herbert S. and Bleeker, Sonia. New York: Morrow, 1970.

FOR CHILDREN

Thumpy's Story. Dodge, Nancy. Springfield, IL: Prairie Lark Press, 1984. VERY GOOD BOOK HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH THE DEATH OF A SIBLING OR LOVED ONE. CAN BE READ TO YOUNG CHILDREN AND IS EASILY UNDERSTANDABLE. To order, send \$5.95 per book to Prairie Lark Press; P.O. Box 699-B; Springfield, IL 62705

The Trouble with Thirteen. Miles, Betty. New York: Knopf, 1979

The Bridge to Terabithia. Paterson, Katherine. New York: Crowell, 1977 (good for 10-14 yr. olds)



In Review



Encounters with Eternity: Religious Views of Death and Life after Death.
Philosophical Library, 200 West
57th Street, New York, NY 10019
Cloth edition - \$19.95
Softcover edition - \$12.95

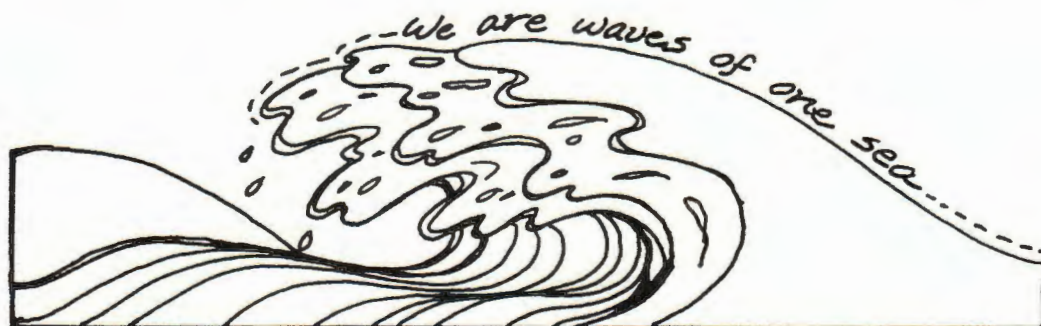
The loss of a loved one is a time of great change as well as a time of great crisis. The loss is even greater when it involves a child. Despite the obviousness of this personal and social phenomenon, it has only been within the last decade that thanatology, the scientific study of death, has been given considerable attention.

Dr. Christopher Jay Johnson, Director of the Institute of Gerontology at Northeast Louisiana University, and Dr. Marsha G. McGee of Texas Christian University, have written a book which offers various views of life after death.

"Encounters with Eternity: Religious

Views of Death and Life After Death," is a book which provides information on the views of 15 different religions concerning death and eternity. The writers include a variety of religious leaders and scholars. David G. Satin, M.D. of Harvard University Medical School, referred to the text as being "a unique and invaluable reference. It offers a ready guide to the expectations and practices that surround the most awesome of human experiences — death. It also gives context to this specific life event."

With the growing interest in the study of death, dying and religion, *Encounters with Eternity* is an excellent sourcebook concerning the various views of death and eternity. The book would serve to be beneficial in offering comfort as well as a knowledge of a hereafter in view of a reunion of families with their children. It is a reference guide as well as a much needed source of information which facilitates a sense of comfort and security.



Peg O'Connor



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