Journaling Through Grief: Finding your Relief Valve

By Amy Lyon

The mind really can be like a steel trap. Our thoughts and feelings swirl around inside our heads without an outlet, causing a buildup of pressure and grief – especially in a situation as devastating as the loss of a loved one.

But there is a relief valve: Putting your thoughts on paper.

Journaling is a form of self-expression that comes with no rules, boundaries or expectations that anyone else will ever read what you write. But by getting those thoughts out of your head and onto paper, you open your mind to valuable insight and healing.

How journaling has helped me
When my daughter, Isabelle, passed away in 2007, I had gallons of guilt stored up inside of me. I shouldn’t have brought her to daycare that day. I shouldn’t have put her in that outfit. I should have told her I loved her one more time …

I let the guilt simmer up there for a day or two before I opened my notebook, cranked that valve wide open and let my feelings spill onto the blank pages. In the beginning, there were only words: “devastated,” “shattered,” “depressed,” and frequently the question, “Why?” But then came the sentences: “I feel like there’s an empty void inside me that will never be filled …” And eventually there were paragraphs.

As I scribbled on the pages, not caring about the legibility of my writing, I felt the pressure ease out of my head and felt the constraints loosen around my chest. I allowed myself the time I needed to feel sad or angry or lost without apologizing for those feelings. Instead, I encouraged them. Armed with my pen and paper, I had a newfound weapon to help me stand up against the loneliness of grief.

Time has passed – four-and-a-half years – and the sharp edges of loss have softened a bit for me, but I continue to write in a journal. Sometimes I incorporate photos or drawings into the pages when words are hard to find. My entries have changed as my journey has changed, but the benefits remain the same.

I often write before bed, taking 15 minutes or so to clear the clutter from my head. Other times I give myself a writing prompt to help me reach deeper into the moments I treasure the most.

Getting started
Finding a journal in which to record my thoughts is my favorite part. Barnes and Noble has an incredible selection, but a simple notebook will do...
the trick if you want to get started right away. The only rule is that you refrain from judging the words you choose to use. Write freely. This journal is for you, not for an audience.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. Write one word for the most prevalent emotion you feel right now, then write a brief paragraph describing the details of that emotion to someone who has never experienced it before.
2. Heaven’s Mailbox: Write a letter addressed to your child. You can write about your day, share a favorite memory about him or her, or tell your child the things you miss most.
3. Letter Poem – Write the letters of your child’s name vertically on your journal page, then write a word or sentence using that first letter.
4. Timed Writing – Set a timer for eight minutes and write continuously about the day you found the best outfit or toy for your baby.
5. Treasured Moment – Recall a treasured moment. Draw lines to divide your paper into five sections labeled “Hear,” “See,” “Smell,” “Taste” and “Feel.” Close your eyes and focus on one sense at a time. When you’re ready, write down words and sentences related to that sense.

Whether you’ve just experienced your loss or you’re 10, 15, 20 or more years out, journaling can act as the relief valve to help release some of the burden that often weighs so heavily on our minds as we continue to move along in our journeys.

Amy Lyon is the author of “Only God Knows Why: A Mother’s Memoir of Death and Rebirth.” She lives in Prior Lake, Minnesota with her husband Chad, son Wyatt, and angel in Heaven Isabelle. [www.amylyon.com](http://www.amylyon.com)
I REMEMBER YOU

The world may never notice
If a rosebud doesn’t bloom:
Or even pause to wonder if the petals fall too soon.

But every life that ever forms,
Or ever comes to be
Touches the World in some small way
For all eternity.

The little ones we longed for
Were swiftly here and gone.
But the love that was then planted
Is a light that still shines on.

And though our arms are empty,
Our hearts know what to do
Every beating of my heart says
“I Remember You”
~Author unknown

Monthly Infant Loss Groups

Listed below are regular meeting times in each region. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. Please call to confirm time and location. Family members and friends are encouraged and welcome to attend.

Eastern Region
St. Louis

3rd Monday of the month
at 7pm
SDS Resources’ office
1120 S. 6th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104
Call Lori at 314-822-2323 or 1-800-421-3511

Western Region
Kansas City

4th Wednesday of the month
at 6pm
Call Pete at 816-569-6956
for group location

South Central/SWest Region—Springfield area

Call Sara at 573-364-5900

If you want to connect with others who have experienced the sudden death of a baby, please consider joining our Yahoo group. This internet support group is open only to families involved with SIDS Resources—no one else has access to this discussion board. You may share something about your child, your experience, or ask questions. Please email Sara at stamburro@sidsresources.org and request to participate in the Yahoo group.
Thank You

to all who hosted 3rd party events to benefit SIDS Resources in 2013

Ava Brown Memorial 5K
Sarah and Robby Brown

Party with a Purpose
Colleen and Bob Weber
In memory of Christopher Weber

Lola’s IDEA Foundation Golf Tournament
Kevin and Dionne Terrell
In memory of Lola Terrell

Olivia Schultz Memorial Golf Tournament
Debbie and Steve Schultz
In memory of Olivia Schultz

SIDS Horse Ride
In memory of Cash Thomas
Son of Whitney Hill and Jesse Thomas
Grandson of Gaela Fisher
Event organized by Bob and Angie Williams

“Team Hi 5” 5K
In memory of Brian Dean Moore
Justin Schooley and Corey Moore

Swing Away SIDS Softball Tournament
Kurt Dunn

MADD-SAAC 5K
Amanda Pickman
In memory of Madden Pickman and Isaac Marischler
Regional Activities

for SIDS Resources’ detailed event information, visit [www.sidsresources.org](http://www.sidsresources.org) and click on “get involved”, then “upcoming events”

**Eastern Region**
St. Louis

**Western Region**
Kansas City

**South Central/SWWest Region**
– Springfield

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**Sat. & Sun., April 5th & 6th**
**GO St. Louis**
Family Fitness Weekend
SIDS Resources will one of the charity recipients.
Click for more info.: [http://www.sidsresources.org/?page_id=1654](http://www.sidsresources.org/?page_id=1654)

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**Jake’s Chicken and Beer Dance**
Saturday, April 12th
6pm-12am
Germantown American Legion
Germantown, IL

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**Western Region**

**7th Annual Tee it up for SIDS**
Sunday, May 18th
Swope Memorial Golf Course
Kansas City, MO

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**A Divine Run 5K Walk/Run**
Saturday, July 19th
Kansas Speedway
Kansas City, KS
Click for more info.: [www.divinerun.com](http://www.divinerun.com)

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If you wish to host any events, please contact Sara Tamburrino at 573-364-5900 or stamburrino@sidsresources.org

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**North Central**
Jefferson City/Columbia

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**5th Annual Ava Brown Memorial 5K Run/Walk**
Saturday, April 12th, 9am
Memorial Park
Jefferson City, MO
This publication is published quarterly—Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. We won’t be mailing the updates, however all updates are available on-line, or we can email it to you, which helps us realize significant cost savings.

If you don’t have internet access or email, please contact your Program Coordinator and we’ll work to make other arrangements. We appreciate your understanding.

If for any reason you would like to be removed from this mailing, please call 1-800-421-3511 or email Lori at lbehrens@sidsresources.org