7 Things I’ve Learned Since the Loss of My Child

By Angela Miller

Child loss is a loss like no other. One often misunderstood by many. If you love a bereaved parent or know someone who does, remember that even his or her “good” days are harder than you could ever imagine. Compassion and love, not advice, are needed. If you’d like an inside look into why the loss of a child is a grief that lasts forever, here is what I’ve learned in my seven years of trekking through the unimaginable.

1. Love Never Dies
There will never come a day, hour, minute or second I stop loving or thinking about my son. Just as parents of living children unconditionally love their children always and forever, so do bereaved parents. I want to say and hear his name just the same as non-bereaved parents do. I want to speak about my deceased children as normally and naturally as you speak of your living ones.

I love my child just as much as you love yours— the only difference is mine lives in heaven and talking about him is unfortunately quite taboo in our culture. I hope to change that. Our culture isn’t so great about hearing about children gone too soon, but that doesn’t stop me from saying my son’s name and sharing his love and light everywhere I go. Just because it might make you uncomfortable, doesn’t make him matter any less. My son’s life was cut irreversibly short, but his love lives on forever. And ever.

2. Bereaved Parents Share an Unspeakable Bond
In my seven years navigating the world as a bereaved parent, I am continually struck by the power of the bond between bereaved parents. Strangers become kindreds in mere seconds— a look, a glance, a knowing of the heart connects us, even if we’ve never met before. No matter our circumstances, who we are, or how different we are, there is no greater bond than the connection between parents who understand the agony of enduring the death of a child. It’s a pain we suffer for a lifetime, and unfortunately only those who have walked the path of child loss understand the depth and breadth of both the pain and the love we carry.

3. I will grieve for a lifetime
Period. The end. There is no “moving on,” or “getting over it”. There is no bow, no fix, no solution to my heartache. There is no end to the ways I will grieve and for how long I will grieve. There is no glue for my broken heart, no elixir for my pain, no going back in time. For as long as I breathe, I will grieve and ache and love my son with all my heart and soul. There will never come a time where I won’t think about who my son would be, what he would look like, and how he would be woven perfectly into the tapestry of my family. I wish people could understand that grief lasts forever because love lasts forever; that the loss of a child is not one finite event, it is a continuous loss that unfolds minute by minute over the course of a lifetime. Every missed birthday, holiday, milestone— should-be back-to-school school years and graduations; weddings that will never be; grandchildren that should have been but will never be born— an entire generation of people are irrevocably altered forever.

This is why grief lasts forever. The ripple effect lasts forever. The bleeding never stops.
4. It’s a club I can never leave, but is filled with the most shining souls I have ever known
This crappy club called child loss is a club I never wanted to join, and one I can never leave, yet is filled with some of the best people I’ve ever known. And yet we all wish we could jump ship— that we could have met another way— any other way but this. Alas, these shining souls are the most beautiful, compassionate, grounded, loving, movers, shakers and healers I have ever had the honor of knowing. They are life-changers, game-changers, relentless survivors and thrivers. Warrior moms and dads who redefine the word brave. Every day loss parents move mountains in honor of their children gone too soon. They start movements, change laws, spearhead crusades of tireless activism. Why? In the hope that even just one parent could be spared from joining the club. If you’ve ever wondered who some of the greatest world changers are, hang out with a few bereaved parents and watch how they live, see what they do in a day, a week, a lifetime. Watch how they alchemize their grief into a force to be reckoned with, watch how they turn tragedy into transformation, loss into legacy.

5. The empty chair/room/space never becomes less empty
Empty chair, empty room, empty space in every family picture. Empty, vacant, forever gone for this lifetime. Empty spaces that should be full, everywhere we go. There is and will always be a missing space in our lives, our families, a forever-hole-in-our-hearts. Time does not make the space less empty. Neither do platitudes, clichés or well-wishes for us to “move on,” or “stop dwelling,” from well intentioned friends or family. Nothing does. No matter how you look at it, empty is still empty. Missing is still missing. Gone is still gone. The problem is nothing can fill it. Minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, month after month, year after heartbreaking year the empty space remains.
The empty space of our missing child(ren) lasts a lifetime. And so we rightfully miss them forever. Help us by holding the space of that truth for us.

6. No matter how long it’s been, holidays never become easier without my son
Never, ever. Have you ever wondered why every holiday season is like torture for a bereaved parent? Even if it’s been 5, 10, or 25 years later? It’s because they really, truly are. Imagine if you had to live every holiday without one or more of your precious children. Imagine how that might feel for you. It would be easier to lose an arm, a leg or two— anything — than to live without your flesh and blood, without the beat of your heart. Almost anything would be easier than living without one or more of your precious children. That is why holidays are always and forever hard for bereaved parents. Don’t wonder why or even try to understand. Know you don’t have to understand in order to be a supportive presence. Consider supporting and loving some bereaved parents this holiday season. It will be the best gift you could ever give them.

7. Because I know deep sorrow, I also know unspeakable joy
Though I will grieve the death of my son forever and then some, it does not mean my life is lacking happiness and joy. Quite the contrary, in fact, though it took awhile to get there. It is not either/or, it’s both/and. My life is more rich now. I live from a deeper place. I love deeper still. Because I grieve I also know a joy like no other. The joy I experience now is far deeper and more intense than the joy I experienced before my loss. Such is the alchemy of grief.

Because I’ve clawed my way from the depth of unimaginable pain, suffering and sorrow, again and again— when the joy comes, however and whenever it does— it is a joy that reverberates through every pore of my skin and every bone in my body. I feel all of it, deeply: the love, the grief, the joy, the pain. I embrace and thank every morsel of it. My life now is more rich and vibrant and full, not despite my loss, but because of it. In grief there are gifts, sometimes many. These gifts don’t in any way make it all “worth” it, but I am grateful beyond words for each and every gift that comes my way. I bow my head to each one and say thank you, thank you, thank you. Because there is nothing— and I mean absolutely nothing— I take for granted. Living life in this way gives me greater joy than I’ve ever known possible. I have my son to thank for that. Being his mom is the best gift I’ve ever been given.

Even death can’t take that away.
SIDS and Infant Loss Awareness Month ~ October

**SIDS Resources’ staff were busy during the month of October. Just a few of the activities included:**

- Participation in Wave of Light ceremonies in all regions of the state on October 15th
- Social Media posting all month
- State Wide Child Care Licensing Train the Trainer
- MO Juvenile Justice Association Training
- SIDS Conference in Sikeston MO

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**SIDS Resources will participate in Giving Tuesday on Dec. 1st.**

*Now in its fourth year, #GivingTuesday is a global day of giving fueled by the power of social media and collaboration.*

**We have a day to give Thanks, two days to shop (Black Friday & Cyber Monday) and now a day to Give to your favorite cause. Check out our Facebook page for more information.**
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
NEW Location
Our Lady Lord of Lourdes Parish Center
7204 Forsythe Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63105
Call Dawn at 314-241-SIDS(7437) or 1-800-421-3511

Western Region
Kansas City

4th Wednesday of the month at 6pm
Call Pete at 314-241-SIDS(7437) or 1-800-421-3511 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 Facebook 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 stamburrino@sidsresources.org and request to participate in the Facebook group.

Quarterly Update

Fall 2015

‘Tis a Fearful Thing

‘Tis a fearful thing
to love what death can touch
A fearful thing
to love, to hope, to dream, to be -
to be,
And oh, to lose.
A thing for fools, this,
And a holy thing,
a holy thing to love.
For your life has lived in me,
your laugh once lifted me,
your word was gift to me.
To remember this brings painful joy.
‘Tis a human thing, love, a holy thing,
to love what death has touched.

by Yehuda HaLevi (1075-1141)
Regional Activities

for SIDS Resources’ detailed event information, visit www.sidsresources.org and click on “get involved”, then “upcoming events”

Eastern Region
St. Louis

Sunday, December 13th
Candle Lighting Memorial
Washington University, Brown Lounge, St. Louis, MO 4-6pm
please email Lori at lbehrens@sidsresources.org
for more information or call 800-421-3511

South Central/SWest
Springfield

Western Region
Kansas City

Sunday, December 6th
Candle Lighting Memorial
Angel of Hope
Blanchette Park, St. Charles, MO 7pm
please email Pete at ppotts@sidsresources.org
for more information or call 800-421-3511

North Central
Jefferson City/Columbia

Sunday, December 14th
Virtual Candle Lighting Memorial
hosted by The Compassionate Friends at 7pm
please email Sara at stamburrino@sidsresources.org
for more information call 573-364-5900 to join a SIDS online candle lighting group

Quarterly Update Fall 2015
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This publication is published quarterly—Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. We won’t be mailing the updates, however all updates are available on our website, 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

To access support services for bereaved families, or to schedule a SIDS training for professional and community groups, please call 1-800-421-3511 or contact your regional SIDS Resources’ office.

www.sidsresources.org