



griefHaven Newsletter

Where Hope Resides

"I would rather have one rose and a kind word from a friend
while I'm here than a whole truckload at my funeral."

THE GIFT

by Marc & Violet Klaas, Polly's Dad and Mom

Life

In our cocoon, life was perfect. Or so it seemed. Then suddenly and without warning, one night it all came unraveled. For sixty-five days thereafter we endured our own personal 9/11, only the twin towers wouldn't collapse for another seven years and eleven months. Contrary to the declaration that kidnapping is a parent's worst nightmare, we became unknowing witnesses to the unspeakable acts of nightmares that we did not yet realize had occurred. That we ultimately emerged with reason, sanity and purpose is a testament to love, sacrifice and the unpredictable nature of life itself.

Let's back up for a minute. After a decade of sputters and starts, the three of us were com-



Violet, Marc and Polly Klaas

other and me in the middle. We would watch *The Simpsons* and laugh hysterically. Violet would take Polly shopping and teach her about fashion and style. I taught her how to swim and play baseball. We were planning the future.

Polly, our twelve-year-old daughter, lived with her mom, Eve, 30 miles north in Petaluma, but spent weekends and holidays with us. After a decade, Polly seemed comfortable living in both places. Honestly, as time passed, she felt more comfortable here than there because we provided stability.

I volunteered at Polly's school as a teacher's aid from the time she was in kindergarten until she entered middle school, when it wasn't cool any longer. Polly was a good student—she played the piano and clarinet, and she loved performing on the stage. She took pride in her accomplishments and was working very hard to overcome her shy nature. Polly also had fears. She slept with a nightlight on and with her door ajar to lessen her fear of

the "boogeyman" and the dark.

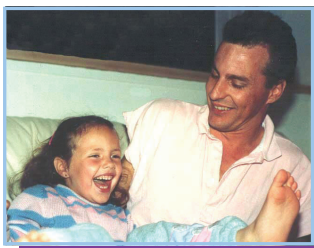
Polly was a beautiful girl, and like all beautiful girls, she attracted the attention of others. Beauty that attracts the attention of the right people can be rewarded with happiness, fame or fortune. But beauty that attracts the attention of the wrong people can be maimed, murdered or otherwise victimized.

In celebration of the car rental franchise I had just acquired, the three of us, along with one of Polly's girlfriends, went to Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm in March 1993. We awoke at 5:00 A.M. and drove down Interstate 5, the highway that intersects California like an asphalt plumb line. By noon we were exploring Knott's Berry Farm. Within fifteen min-

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utes, Polly and her friend had disappeared around a theme park intersection in their quest of discovery. Thirty desperate minutes later, we finally located the girls. They were giggling hysterically as they enjoyed the kind of spinning ride that appeals only to children with very settled stomachs. We told them that if they left our

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ing together as a family unit. We laughed, played and vacationed together. We worked, planned and faced adversity together. We would often sit on the couch on Sunday evenings, Violet on one side, Polly on the

Two Brothers and A Wedding

by Erika French, John's & Mike's Mom

On January 17, 2005, my son, John Stark, died in a car accident. Our lives were turned upside-down as we quickly realized that life would never be the same.

Also deeply devastated by John's death was his brother, Mike. Losing his beloved brother rocked his world, and we were all inconsolable for a long time. We worked hard as a family to rebuild our lives and eventually began to come out of the fog to see the possibilities that lay before us. It hasn't been easy by any means, but our lives are becoming more meaningful and joyful.

Every parent's fear is that their child will be forgotten as time moves onward. So it was for me when, on December 9, 2006,

GROWING



IDEAS

Mike got married. I wondered how I could endure what should be the happiest of all occasions without John. True

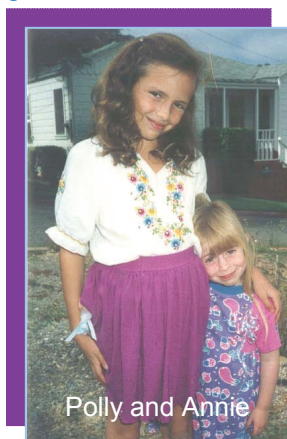


to form, Mike made sure that John would not be forgotten. Mike did a beautiful tribute, making sure that John was an integral part of his wedding.

Mike did not have a best man. He said that no one but his brother could ever be his best man. So Mike symbolically created a special place for John. Where John would have been standing as Mike's best man was a table—on that table Mike placed a rose and a small silver charm of John's face that I always carry with me. In the program Mike wrote, "Best man reserved in memory of John Stark."

After the wedding, rather than having someone escort out the maid of honor, Mike had her carry the rose. Without saying a word, Mike let everyone know that there was someone who should have been there for the wedding—his brother, John—and he was not going to ever let him be forgotten.

THE GIFT (Continued from Page 1)



Polly and Annie

sight during the remainder of the long weekend, we would immediately return to the Bay Area. We proceeded to have a marvelous long weekend in sunny Southern California.

We phoned Polly on those evenings that she was not with us, or she would phone us. Sometimes there was very little to talk about, but we did it anyway. I called her at 6:00 P.M. on Friday, October 1, 1993. Polly was happy and excited. She was preparing to host a slumber party with two of her girlfriends. The next day she was going to stay with us while Eve went on a job interview in Monterey. I told her I loved her and then hung up the phone. After that, Polly was no more.

Death

The ringing phone woke Violet at 11:30 P.M. that night. She answered and then pushed the receiver away with a horrified look on her face. The alarm in Violet's

voice broke my slumber, so I took the phone and was told that, "Polly was kidnapped, and the police don't want a distraught father coming to Petaluma to trample evidence." The caller was Polly's estranged stepfather. We spent the rest of the night confirming the dreaded message and coming to terms with our total disbelief. At 6:00 A.M. the next morning, KCBS News Radio confirmed that "Polly Klaas was kidnapped from her bedroom in Petaluma at approximately 10:30 P.M. the night before."

It's funny how we respond to trauma. As alarming as the initial phone call was, it was the news report that exposed the significance of what had happened. We then began the incredibly difficult task of calling our families, one after another, to inform them that our child had been kidnapped. I remember that one of my three sisters responded like Violet. I could almost see her pushing the phone away in disgust and disbelief. Another sister whimpered quietly. My third sister said, "Don't do anything until I get there." After she arrived thirty minutes later, the three of us drove to Petaluma and did not return to our condo until the hideous truth was finally revealed.

We had stepped out of a life that would never be revisited. We could not predict the anguish or the alien environment that awaited us in Petaluma because a user manual for responding to tragedy does not exist. The scene was revealed like an episodic cop show. The

police were pacing purposefully in Polly's yard, which was surrounded by yellow crime scene tape. We crossed over that barrier as television news crews, neighbors and curiosity seekers milled around its perimeter. We were told that the kidnapper had a beard. Everybody with a beard was an immediate suspect. We were also told that Polly's last words, as she was being stolen into the night, were, "Please don't hurt my mother and sister."

After a second sleepless night without resolution in a small, crowded motel room, I stepped out into the early morning darkness. I crossed the street, walked to the middle of an empty supermarket

“A user manual for responding to tragedy does not exist.”

parking lot, got down on my knees and screamed at God. Violet came shortly thereafter and quietly led me back to the motel. It only got worse from there.

Violet and I became objects of curiosity to the public in a frightening and surrealistic dream. Everybody watched, but nobody could relate as the minutes passed into hours, the hours into days, the days into weeks and the weeks into months. Fear controlled our emotions, and hunger and insomnia, our physical well-being. We lost touch with reason, we lost weight, we became wan. Two constants guided us: Whenever I fell, Violet would lift me up; when she could not go on, I would lead

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In Loving Memory:

Zackary Harrison Woolf
by Graham & Jennifer Woolf



The Feelings of a Father Seven Years Later

Zackary Harrison Woolf. What's behind that name? We wanted a strong name. We always felt that a big, powerful name would be helpful in the future—that Zack could be anything he wanted to be. We felt that if he wanted to become the president, then at least his name should sound presidential. Harrison also sounded presidential. It could have been his first name, but we didn't want him being teased and called Harry Woolf. We also liked the name Chase, but we nixed that one for the same reason. The name Harrison came from Jennifer's mother, Helen, whose life was also cut short. We decided on the "k" in Zackary since it was different. Jennifer wanted to name him Oliver, but I was always reminded of Oliver Twist. Our younger daughter,

Olivia, got the name instead. And we named our older daughter Zoe after Zack because, in the Greek language, it means life. We didn't realize our son would be so ill, and, in retrospect, we were happy that at least his name sounded of greatness.

Zack was very well-traveled for a little boy. We took him to Hawaii where we played in the waves off Maui. I remember him splashing and smiling and having a great time. His favorite hat was a navy blue baseball hat with the word "Gap" on it. We had a cartoon drawing made of the three of us on a trip to Santa Barbara, and I had the word "Gap" changed to "TIGER," as in Tiger Woolf. It still hangs in our home. We took Zack to Toronto to see his grandparents. I was glad that my father had a chance to meet Zack, since he died himself only three months prior to Zack.

I'm a physician. It's difficult being a physician with a sick child. You can anticipate the problems that will occur, but you're still never ready for the inevitable. Zack was born with a rare disease called Alagille's syndrome, which affects the heart and liver. Both organs were severely affected. Alagille's occurs in 1 out of every 100,000 births. It can be genetic, but Zack's type was a sporadic mutation, which meant that it occurred by chance. Both Jennifer and I were tested, and nei-

ther of us had the mutation.

Jennifer and I were both in denial. For the surgery Zack required, we took him to San Francisco to the world's top heart surgeon. We always felt that we would give him the best we had to offer. He always gave us the best he had. He was the strongest little guy you ever saw. He sailed through the surgery, but developed a viral infection and never recovered.

I think of Zack every day. Sometimes it's because a patient has his name, or I hear a mother calling after her son. That sometimes is the hardest thing to hear, because we know that our little boy will never be running in the park. We do hope that he is running around somewhere and doing everything an eight-year-old boy should be doing. I look at our two beautiful daughters and think what a great time they would have had with their big brother who would have always been there to look after them. I know that he is looking after them now. Whenever something good happens to our family, we always say that Zack made it happen. We are always looking for more good things, like Zack. Zack will always be my brave, little hero.

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You Asked ...

Q We recently lost our son when a drunk driver hit and killed him. Our son was in college getting his degree in environmental engineering because he so loved the environment. I have so much rage and anger, and I can't seem to get out of it. I know it's destructive and not helping me or those I love. What do you suggest I do to deal with this intense anger?

A I consulted a number of people about how I might advise you in dealing with your situation and your anger. Everyone naturally felt a sense of anger and rage, like you, that such a senseless death would ever happen.

Anger and rage are normal reactions to the careless death of your son by a drunk driver. These feelings test one's faith in the goodness of life. They may be directed at the drunk driver who killed your son, whether with or



with Dr. Roger Dafter

without remorse. For people of faith, they may feel anger at God for allowing so much pain and anguish. Anger and rage may also be directed at yourself or others close to you as part of a guilt reaction for not saving the life of your child, as if there were some way you or others could have stopped your son from driving that day.

In grief, we have a choice to work with such painful emotions as part of a healing process, or, alternately, to engage with them in a destructive fashion. Getting over anger and rage is a slow process that entails hard work. As with other emotions that are part of the grief process, feeling the anger and rage, expressing it fully to those who care about us, and better understanding it helps us start the healing process.

Rage is a primitive emotion in which we want to destroy and harm another. It comes from deep

within our gut and from the reptilian part of our brain which creates the impulse to attack and destroy others in self-defense for the purpose of survival. When a child is lost in a senseless death, you naturally may feel attacked and want to attack back. Rage is adaptive when one is under *immediate life-threatening attack*. However, in the grieving situation, it is not healthy to act on rage, nor to be stuck in it, because the emotion does not fit the context of *being directly under attack*. And it will not get your child back.

Being stuck in rage and anger makes it difficult to heal. It may be easy to lash out at others as if they were attacking or not understanding you. Bitterness and a withdrawal from life can ensue. This is a destructive way of dealing with these emotions. To heal, the need is to first freely express the rage to others who

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I believe that God puts us where we are supposed to be. The circumstances are often incomprehensible, but somehow we manage. We may not understand, we may never know why, and we may not be happy about it, but we persevere.

For my dear friend, Lupe, perseverance has been one baby step at a time. You see, her beloved daughter, Yesenia, passed away on May 20, 2006, from a short battle with bone cancer, leaving Yesenia's 3-year-old son to be adopted by Lupe and her husband.

Everything happened so quickly. The cancer was diagnosed less than four weeks earlier, and the doctors assured the family that if they "did their job," they could save Yesenia. We knew cancer could be fatal, yet none of us really believed that she would die. However, as life often does, everything took a fast and furious turn.

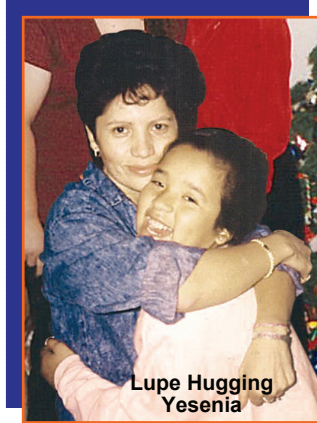
And so begins my story.

Lupe is our precious nanny and a dear friend. From the moment we met, I knew she was meant to be part of our family, although I wasn't so sure Lupe was quite as comfortable with the idea. Though she is always very nice, polite, and friendly, she is a very private person. For my part, I tend to wear my heart on my sleeve, and it took some time for Lupe to realize that I genuinely cared about her. I had no idea the impact Lupe and Yesenia would eventually have on our lives.

After Yesenia passed away, Lupe came to be with us full time. I grieved for her and with her and somehow knew in my heart that what Lupe needed most was someone to just listen. Never mind that I had heard the details many times, I felt in my heart that it was therapeutic for her to talk and tell the same stories over and over, however many times she needed. And so I learned to listen. Yet, I knew Lupe needed more. So I began doing research as to what might be out there that would help. That is

when I discovered *griefHaven*. I called Susan Whitmore, who gave me the valuable advice, "Keep listening, and don't abandon Lupe, for this is a lifelong process." Susan validated my intuition, so I continued to listen and talk with Lupe about Yesenia. I felt helpless, yet compelled to do something more. I knew I couldn't "fix" anything, but I was determined to do whatever I could to help my dear friend.

During my research, I also discovered the *Compassionate Friends* organization.



Lupe Hugging
Yesenia

Both group leaders suggested that it might help if I accompanied Lupe to the meetings. I suggested this to Lupe, and so we went.

My only purpose for going to the meetings was to support Lupe. Or so I thought. That is why my own reaction at that first meeting shocked me. I felt like a voyeur. I felt I had no right to invade this cocoon of grief, listening to others share such depth of sorrow and healing—watching how their stories comforted one another. I felt as though I were intruding into very

private places as each parent shared their pain—a pain that was and is incomprehensible to me. But they welcomed me into the group with open arms.

Throughout that first meeting, I had this feeling that time had stopped. "This couldn't happen to these people. It couldn't be real," I thought. It felt like a bad dream. I cried with them and for them. Then it was Lupe's turn to speak. I was sure she would pass, but she spoke, and I cried even more. I was so proud of her. I knew it took everything she had within her to speak. At that moment, I knew one day Lupe would heal.

What I've learned from this process with Lupe has indelibly changed me forever. I thought I was going to help my friend, and in the process of doing so, I have helped myself. I've learned that everyone must grieve in their own way—and whatever form that takes is okay. I've learned there is no schedule. I know time doesn't stop, and, in hindsight, I am grateful, because time is both friend and foe in the grieving process. It crawls at an excruciatingly slow pace in the beginning, but ultimately it is the one true friend, for it allows us to find our way to smooth the jagged edges of our broken hearts. I now know that the death of a child is a "lifelong journey," and the hole left in the hearts of grieving parents never fully heals. Each parent is changed forever.

Lupe is in the beginning of her journey, and I know she has many days when she doesn't think she'll ever get to a place of peace. Her pain is so raw, and her heart is so broken. She has a long way to go before the jagged edges begin to smooth, but she is willing to do whatever is necessary, and, in time, I have faith that she will find her way and rebuild her life.

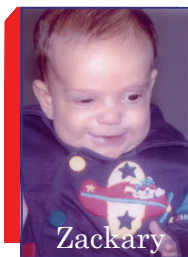
As for me, I've stopped questioning why God put me in the midst of such pain, realizing I may never know. But I believe that He puts us where we

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In Loving Memory: Zackary (Continued from Page 3)

The Feelings of a Mother Seven Years Later

June 7, 2007, marks seven years since my little Zack left this world for what I have to believe—for my sanity if nothing else—is a better place. A day does not go by that I don't think about Zack and how much I love and cherish him. We talk about him often, and there are photos of him all over the house. It's not a picture "shrine" or anything like that, just special photos of our beautiful son, nestled in with the rest of our family. Zack is one of our children, and he will always be part of the photos that fill our shelves. I don't care if people come into our home and can't figure out who the little boy is in the photo. Let them ask, and I will be proud and honored to tell them he is one of my three



Zackary

children.

Just to give you a little history, Zack now has two sisters, Zoe and Olivia. They were not yet born when Zack was alive. However, they know all about their big brother. We celebrate his birthday every year by letting balloons fly up to him, and we visit him throughout the year at the cemetery with flowers and other things. Zoe and Olivia often talk about Zack as if he were away on a trip, and that's the way we like it. He will always be part of our family unit. Whenever there is a happy occasion that we are celebrating, Zack is always missed.

When Zack first died, I felt like my

heart was bleeding. Graham and I were grieving in very different ways, but, at the same time, we bonded and became forever closer. It was as if our grief had sealed us together. After seven years, I believe we are both still grieving in our own ways and always will.

Although Zack was only with us for eleven months, there were expressions, such as a pout on his face, that will never leave me. One in particular that I think of daily is when I am putting on my makeup. Zack loved to sit on the counter and watch me. When I was all done, Zack would give me a smile of acknowledgement. It was as if he were saying, "Wow mom! That makeup you just put on makes you look so pretty!" His angelic

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NO MORE. BUT WHY?

by Susan Whitmore, Erika's Mom

“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

—Dalai Lama

I hear it regularly. It's one of the most difficult things for parents to understand and accept. Everyone seems to try and make sense of it. I've even asked those who have done it to me, “why?” Yet, it still permeates our lives and leaves us questioning, “why?”

What is it? It is the seeming lack of willingness by those who love and care for us to give us the support and love we need after our child has died. That has us baffled.

We at *griefHaven* hear the stories of hurt, anger, frustration, and hopelessness parents express when they ask for something specific from those they love, *and those asked just don't do it*. It can be as simple as an email, a phone call, talking about their child when the family gets together, or offering a kind word on a day the parent finds most difficult. Yes, they might do it in the first few months, or even the first year. But after that, as the need for support continues, it simply stops. We remain baffled because our need for love, support, and hope doesn't come with an

“A simple gesture of compassion takes a few minutes.”

expiration tag. Who made the errant “rule” that, after a period of time, a parent no longer needs support? We are not talking about unreasonable requests, but, rather, simple ones that would take an individual just minutes—and yet the impact would be remarkable and enduring. Still, a time comes when there is “no more.”

We have asked people the “why” question and heard varied responses such as, “It's too painful,” “It hurts to see you cry,” “You mean for the rest of your life?” or, “What good does it do to keep opening the wound?” All of these statements have one common thread: *Each one is about the person who would be giving the support and not about the person in need of it.*

Yes, in the initial stages of shock and grief, it's routine to be there for the parents. But it's not over for parents when everyone returns to their normal lives. In fact, it's barely begun. A parent's need for that compassionate remembrance lasts a lifetime.

Words are powerful. I like this quote about an author's writing style: “She makes me feel drunk on her lovely words.” In an instant, words can make or break a

person. You can string words together in such a way as to take the sting out of pain, heal a broken heart, or brighten one's darkness with hope. You can do that and more with words. Powerful things, words.

And that brings

me to a word I love because it says so much within its ten letters. When its true meaning is practiced, lives are changed, hearts are healed, and miracles are manifested. The word is used

freely by many people, yet I wonder how many really understand it. That word is “compassion.”

Compassion. It is said that, “Compassion is a sense of shared suffering combined with a desire to alleviate the suffering of another. Compassionate acts attempt to alleviate that suffering as if it were one's own.”

Often parents ask, “If they care, then why wouldn't they want to help, especially when we've asked for something so simple and specific?” And then I think about what I've asked for from my loved ones. It's been very simple: when we are together, and it comes up, please talk about Erika, or at least don't go silent; also, remember Mother's Day and her birthday. That's it. I figured it out time-wise. Likely, it takes less than 15 minutes a year. So if someone spent 15 minutes a year honoring a few simple requests, that would be, for me, wonderfully uplifting and momentous. For other parents, the outcome would be the same. So why are there those who simply don't do it? *Not knowing what to say or do? Avoiding the pain it brings up in them? Not really wanting to do anything and finding excuses? Feeling that enough time has gone by and we should be healed? Lack of compassion?*

I understand how it can be frightening and tempting when seeing a parent suffering intense pain to shy away from giving ongoing support. It's a scary reminder that a child has died, and sometimes it brings up feelings that you would rather avoid at all costs. Yes, I can “understand,” but I can't ultimately excuse it. You see, I've seen the flip side over and over again where a few minutes of compassion have indelibly changed a life for the better. That alone seems worth putting all other concerns aside. I wonder, too, if those who shy away fully grasp the overall positive impact giving to another has on them—the giver. Because that kind of compassion comes back to the giver ten-fold! It's better than any material investment you

could ever make, because you are investing in a life. So what if you knew that a two-minute phone message, a short email, or a card with a brief note would actually lift a person from darkness to light for a moment, a day, or a year. Would you do it? We regularly hear stories from parents whose lives have been impacted because someone continued to remember them throughout the years. Such an individual never invoked “no more,” and their ongoing compassion changed lives. The opposite is also true. When no one remembers, that parent wonders, “Doesn't anyone care?”

In our hearts, we all know life is truly about supporting and caring for one another. And sometimes all we need is a gentle reminder that practicing compassion is how lives are changed. As the years pass, we parents do learn how to accept the reality that our children have died and are not coming back, and we do start rebuilding our lives. But like any rebuilding process, it takes a team to make it happen. That team is compassion in action.

If you are a parent who hasn't made your specific needs known, please do so by telling your loved ones what you need and what dates are important to you. That helps others support you.

If you are the one being asked to give, and you find yourself resisting, coming up with reasons why you can't, or just not taking those few moments to reach out, won't you look inside and ask yourself what is keeping you from doing so? A simple gesture of compassion takes a few minutes, but the impact on both giver and receiver lasts a lifetime. Where there was pain, there can now be hope. Where there was loneliness, there can now be fellowship. And where there was anger and sorrow, there can now be purpose and joy. *You* have the power to make that happen. You are powerful, your words of comfort and love are powerful, and parents do need you throughout their lives. And, if you aren't sure what a parent needs, ask. They will be forever grateful for your thoughtful compassion.



her forward one step at a time. We were always there for each other. Every day would begin hopefully at 4:00 A.M. and end in despair after 1:00 A.M. the next morning. The two of us were in the middle of a storm with everyone and everything swirling around us—we had no control whatsoever.

On December 4, 1993, the hideous truth was finally revealed. First, the police told Eve and me that our beloved daughter had been found dead, used and discarded on a trash pile near a freeway off ramp. Eve cried; I didn't. We then told our relatives and the volunteers who had stood by us during the ordeal. Finally, as the media went live with the story, Violet and I gathered our families and returned to Sausalito in a solemn caravan of grief. I thought that I had no tears left, but two hours later a rush of comprehension slammed me like an erupting volcano. The other men in the condo had to restrain me to ensure that my exploding rage and pain did not cascade into a physical and psychological lava flow. Again, emotional awareness lagged behind intellectual understanding.

Recovery

The immediate aftermath of Polly's tragedy was pure torture. It was even worse than not knowing because hope, too, was dead, and we were again faced with choices that life had not prepared us to make. We could have easily succumbed to depression, alcoholism or drug addiction, as crawling into an emotional cave suggested a possible solution. We could have chosen another path that so many before us had taken and turned our backs on the entire ordeal. However, denial was not a viable option for us. Instead, we looked beyond our own agony and decided to fight back against evil. Although time blended, and the days were indistinguish-

“Thirteen years later . . . we take time to appreciate the beautiful things life has to offer.”

able from each other, I remember telling Violet that I would pursue an aggressive child safety agenda if I had to do so living out of a cardboard box by the side of the railroad track. She agreed that we would pursue this mission together, a choice easier said than done.

No longer fearful or stuck in time, anger dominated our emotions as profoundly as uncertainty dominated our future. We were emotionally needy and

overwhelmed with pain. Violet and I were not independently wealthy, and there were forces pulling at us that we did not understand. I sought help in professional counseling, while Violet preferred the counsel of family. I pursued a frantic agenda, trying to use my anger in positive ways, while Violet returned to a job that provided nothing more than a paycheck. The one thing that we agreed upon was that the work we had chosen was helping us in some way to cope with our pain.

We calculated that we had ninety days to achieve any cause-related accomplishments. After that, we would be on borrowed time, as the next cause *du jour* would dominate the news cycle and another victim would grab the headlines. To that end, we did not seriously consider book deals, TV movies or other pop entertainments. Violet could see the vultures circling before we had even cremated our daughter and felt that it was blood money.

“Polly was the most important person who ever touched our lives . . . she provided us with clarity and gave meaning to our lives.”

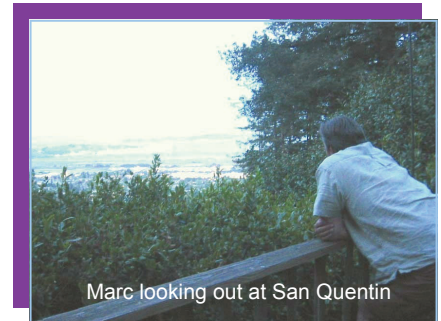
I believed that, if we were going to give meaning to Polly's death, it would require a dedicated pursuit of meaningful legislation.

Life without Polly was alien and strange. We were no longer living in a cocoon. Instead, we were publicly trying to make a difference in the lives of others. It was apparent that little had been done to protect children from the very evil that victimized Polly. It was obvious to both of us that no single approach to the issue would fix the problem. We knew that in order to piece this maddening puzzle together, we would have to take a holistic approach to child safety.

We began with baby steps: I was the front man, giving voice to a joint vision, just as Violet organized, scheduled and helped to make that vision a reality. Where we had been intellectually lazy, we were now precise and confident. Violet and I are convinced that real change requires intelligence, determination and the singular pursuit of a clear vision.

Both of us were working seven days a week and eighteen-hour days. Fortunately, doors opened for us as the public, media and politicians supported, or at least were sympathetic toward, our mission. On September 13, 1994, President Clinton invited us to the White House to

participate in a bill signing. We had worked very hard on the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of



Marc looking out at San Quentin

1994. The largest crime bill in America's history put 100,000 police on the streets, provided \$10 billion for prevention programs and promoted truth in sentencing. Violet had to work, so I attended with my sister. The President invited me on stage and presented me with the pen that he used to sign the new law. It was a huge moment. Afterward, my sister and I, overwhelmed by grief, went back to the hotel and cried for hours.

Conclusion

Thirteen years later, Violet and I no longer work 18-hour days. We are no longer driven by overwhelming anger, and we no longer want to die. Instead, we have re-integrated into society, and we take time to appreciate the beautiful things that life has to offer. Polly was the most important person that ever touched our lives, and she will be sorely missed until we take our dying breaths. When she looked the devil in the eye, faced her own worst fears, and sacrificed her life so that others might live, she provided us with clarity and gave meaning to our lives. She demonstrated a courage and resolve that we can only hope to emulate as we continue our mission to stop crimes against children. Polly's light did not shine for long, but it shined brightly.

Marc's and Violet's daughter, 12-year-old Polly Hannah Klaas, was murdered in 1993 in what turned out to be a high-profile case that circled the globe. Polly's murderer was convicted and awaits his judgment in San Quentin on Death Row. Marc and Violet are the founders of Beyond Missing and Klaas Kids, nonprofit organizations advocating for and providing means to increase child safety through legislation, media, community events, and actual child search and rescues. The Klaas' work has saved thousands of young lives.

are supposed to be, for I, too, am changed forever. I



hug my little boy tighter. I cherish my time with him. I constantly tell him I love him, and I try to say the

important things to my husband, family, friends, and even strangers, because I've come to realize that, if I don't, I may miss my opportunity.

I now better understand what is meant by the words *life is fragile*. It's so fragile that it needs to be handled with loving care. Kindness, love, and compassion are the key notes in what I refer to as the human symphony. If we could all play together, what beautiful music we would make.

To all parents, I extend my deepest sympathy for the loss of your child. Every child is a precious gift from God, and I pray that as time continues, His grace will be sufficient to ease your

pain and bring you peace.

Robin Lichtenstein lives in California with her husband and son. Lupe is a beloved part of their family. Robin did what is rarely done—she immersed herself in Lupe's loss and her new life. The end result is that Robin has gained much more than she could have ever imagined. Her willingness to literally be there with Lupe has changed both their lives for the better.



You Asked ... (Continued from page 3)

love you and who will listen, while gently helping you to redirect your rage.

Feeling and expressing your rage helps you shift from rage into anger. While the purpose of rage is to destroy, the purpose of anger is to right a wrong, and this can engage the upper parts of the brain that help you be more reflective in how you relate to

“Getting over anger and rage is a slow process that entails hard work.”

others. While nothing can be done to bring your child back, your anger can actually be channeled into the constructive action of helping others. This helps us to heal and become more connected to others, rather than isolated and enraged.

One of the most well-known examples of channeling anger is Candy Lighter's reaction to her teenage daughter's death from a drunk driver. She became the founder of *Mothers Against Drunk Drivers* (MADD). This organization has lowered the legal limits of alcohol consumption, raised the age at which young people can drink, and legislated drunk driving laws all over the country. As a result of her actions, thousands of lives have been saved. Her anger provided the fire to create the organization

and the willpower to work tirelessly with many legislatures for decades to save young lives. This is a compassionate use of anger: *the energy and power of the emotions are disconnected from the destructive impulse to harm others by engaging the need to right a wrong*. You do not have to form a national organization such as MADD to direct your feelings of anger into a healing process. Any constructive cause will do, especially if it is somehow related to your child. So you might consider aligning yourself with a cause you feel is worthwhile and that honors your child.

Anger arising from guilt is also a painful part of the grieving process. Few survivors escape some feelings of guilt and regret. “I should have done something” are the words that haunt many. Were angry words exchanged? So many things could have been done differently “if only I had known.” Most people are very creative in finding reasons to feel guilty and thus create anger toward themselves and others.

Such guilt is based on the illusion that we should be all-knowing or all-powerful in stopping bad things in our lives when, in fact, we are limited human beings who in no way have the ability to prevent the tragedies of life, especially the loss of a child. Realizing the illusion embedded in the

guilt can help free us from the anger at ourselves and others. It becomes a step toward forgiving ourselves and others. As part of the process of forgiveness, we learn that tragedies are part of the mystery of life. We might seek out spiritual guidance to help us come to grips with these anguished aspects of life.

We must gradually accept that grief entails seemingly unbearable pain and sadness from loss, including hopelessness, sleep problems, poor appetite, exhaustion, and isolation. We must learn to feel the pain and talk about the sorrow and other intense feelings. And we must find constructive ways to direct these intense emotions. At the same time, we must eat well, exercise, and take care of our physical being. Learn to balance feeling and expressing these intense emotions with taking steps to engage life in a positive manner. This is the beginning of creating your new life . . . with new meaning and purpose.

Roger Dafter, Ph.D. specializes in mind/body medicine and grief. He can be reached in West Los Angeles at 310-472-8100

Send your questions to hope@griefHaven.org



In Loving Memory: Zackary (Continued from page 4)

photograph will always be looking at me on that same counter. That big smile will be one of the memories I will always cherish.

Everything looks wonderful to the outsider who did not know us when Zack was alive. Yet I can honestly say, my life is like a beautiful painted plate, but should you pick up the plate and examine it, you will see a hairline crack that runs right through it. This is the only way I can express my innermost feelings.

Losing Zack was the ultimate of all experiences. It changed us in every conceivable way. Compared to who we were seven years ago, Graham and I are very different people. This experience caused many things about our lives to change, including our friends. With our values changing, so too did certain friendships. When your child dies, some people become very uncomfortable around you. Early on, it is not noticed, but once a few months have passed, it's as if you have something that might be contagious. Today, we have very little tolerance for people who are not genuine. Those people we knew seven years ago are no longer part of our lives, and we have been led down a very different path since Zack's death. There are people who have come into our lives who have been remarkable. It's as if we have this little tour guide who is always pointing us in the right direction . . . and his name is Zackary Harrison Woolf, our precious angel.



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Your Donations Mean So Much

Our goal is to provide the newsletter, grief pin, website memory page, and as many forms of support as possible to all parents who have lost a child, free of charge. If you would like to help us with this goal, as well as to further the Foundation's support for grieving parents, you may donate by:

- Mailing a check to the address above (please make check to *The EWG Foundation*).
- Going to www.griefHaven.org and clicking on the first page where it says "make a donation."
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- Donating your used car to *Cars For Causes* and naming *The EWG Foundation* as the recipient.

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What's New At griefHaven?

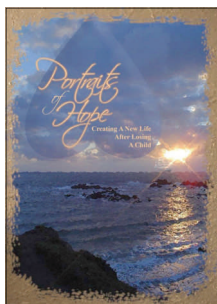
- ☀ → We now have a message board for those who speak Spanish. If you speak Spanish, won't you please share with others on that message board? And please let those you know that it is available to them.
- ☀ → We also have a message board for siblings to be able to share with other siblings who have lost a brother or sister. Please spread the word.
- ☀ → Check out our new *Portraits By Lynn* in the griefHaven Store. These portraits make amazing gifts for you or someone you love.
- ☀ → Wearing a griefHaven t-shirt is like sharing your heart with the world. Check them out in the griefHaven Store. They are truly beautiful!

Did You Know



- ? That you can donate your used car to "Cars for Causes" and name *The EWG Foundation* as the beneficiary? The money goes directly to us, you get a tax write-off, AND you are helping parents and family members all over the world.
- ? That it is a myth that most married couples divorce after the death of a child? In fact, most couples go on to have better and closer marriages than before. Read the details of the study by going to: http://www.healingheart.net/bereaved_parents_&_divorce1.htm.

Read, Listen, Watch—Parents Recommend



Portraits of Hope.

My husband and I watched the DVD last night. I can't express to you how profoundly it affected us. You couldn't have done anything more meaningful. We will treasure it always and share it with special people we know.

I received "Portraits of Hope," and it is validating and inspiring. You are really keeping me going.

I watched the video with my husband last night. It's impressive, profound, and very professional. You did a brilliant job. Congratulations.

As a therapist, I recognize that this video will be helpful whether you're a parent who has suffered the loss of a child or a caregiver wanting to be your best for grief-stricken families. It's filled with gifts of inspiration and knowledge. It's gentle, powerful, heartbreaking and joyful. The parents in *Portraits of Hope* were courageously generous as they opened their hearts and told their stories.

Your video has let me know that I am not

alone, I am not crazy, and it's OK to start feeling a little better sometimes! It gave me the courage to face my fears. You have validated my grief—I now know that losing a child of any age is equally painful.

I was thinking that it would be sad and make us cry, but it wasn't like that. It was so well put together and so informative for friends and family members, and I can't wait to share it with them.

As a chaplain who regularly deals with death, *Portraits of Hope* has . . . helped me

“When you're ready, this film offers the kind of hope that grows your soul.”

better understand a parent's lifelong journey. Our facility is now using it as a way to follow up with parents. There is nothing like your organization anywhere, and I thank you for helping us help others.

It helped me tremendously to watch the video and hear all of those parents express exactly how I've been feeling. It really does help to know we're not alone.

I showed my husband, and we cried and understood each other in a way we never knew before.

I wanted to let you know how helpful it is to share this video with friends who are trying to

understand what I am going through. It's such a relief to have this way of letting my friends know that my feelings and reactions are "normal."

I sometimes think I am going crazy and that I can't do this anymore, and hearing everybody talk about their journey and how they are doing makes me know that I am OK, I am not going crazy, I am not alone, and I am going to make it.

I only wish I had this video in the very beginning, but realize what a blessing it is that I found you when I did.

Our hospital found the video to be one of the greatest support tools we can give to parents experiencing the loss of a child.

. . . when I would read or watch something that touched on the subject of hope or joy, I just could never imagine it being true, but watching your DVD did give me hope. You have all touched me deeply.

. . . the parents represented the whole spectrum of different ways of grieving. Congratulations on creating such a beautiful film.

I have watched it and watched it many times over, and you are right—you do get something new from it every time.

In my family, we have all grieved differently, and watching the video allowed us to accept each other's different ways.