UNITE, Inc.
GRIEF SUPPORT AFTER MISCARRIAGE, STILLBIRTH AND INFANT DEATH

Spring 2025

Vol. 42, no. 2

UNITE Notes

P.O. Box 21715, Philadelphia, PA 19346,
www.unitegriefsupport.org, 484-758-0002

Healing And Remembering

Because we have loved, we must grieve. Moving through grief takes time, and time seems like such an enemy when our grief is new. But healing comes, one step at a time, although we often feel no progress is being made.

As we heal, we begin to realize that recovery doesn't mean forgetting. The strong pain fades, but the precious memories of our child remain in special ways. We can acknowledge the special place that child has in our heart, along with all the other special people in our life.

Janis Keyser
UNITE Notes, Spring 1986, Vol. 5 No. 3

Newsletter Editor Needed

I first joined UNITE in 1998 after my twin boys, Eric and Joshua, died at just three weeks old. The UNITE newsletter was a continuous source of comfort over the years, arriving quarterly in my mailbox. I love the newsletter because it gives us the chance to share our children with each other in writing. It has been an honor to share my sons with all of you…and a privilege to have known your children, as well.

As I wrote in the last edition, after almost 20 years of working on the newsletter, I have decided to step down as editor. This will be my last edition. While I really enjoy being a part of the newsletter, I believe it's time to move on and bring in younger, fresher eyes with newer ideas to improve the newsletter. To date, no one has volunteered to be our new editor, which means the newsletter will be paused until a new editor comes along.

If anyone is interested in taking over the newsletter, please reach out to me at newsletter@unitegriefsupport.org so we can work through the transition. If someone wants to step up now, with my assistance, they would be able to get the Summer edition out on time and without missing a beat. It doesn't take much time. I would say approximately 10 hours, give or take, to get an edition out. There are four editions a year, one for each quarter. Of course, whoever takes over can choose the number of editions to put out per year and make any changes deemed necessary, for improvement. Just because I am stepping down as the editor does not mean I will walk away. I will gladly stay onboard to guide the new editor(s) with the transition and assist in any capacity until he/she is comfortable moving forward without me.

Being the editor of *UNITE Notes* has been a major part of my grief journey. While it has been very rewarding to comfort those in need, it is the best job I wish I never had. It would be wonderful if there were no need for newsletters like ours. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your grief journey and thank you for helping me through mine.

Theresa Fisher

Mommy to
My Two Angel Babies
Eric Joseph and Joshua Ian
7/12/98 to 8/4/98
And
My Two Rainbow Babies
Jessica Erin and Abigail Rose

Professionally Speaking…..

By Denise M. Paul MA, CT, CPLC

Journey of Mourning

I often refer to the mourning process as a "grief journey." The image of a journey suggests that there may be twists and turns, roadblocks, and detours. However, I've learned from other grieving parents that as the months and years pass, there will be fewer and less severe problems on the journey. The good days will eventually outnumber the bad ones. I'd like to share with you the grief journey of another type of mother.

In 2018, an orca whale named Tahlequah did something that fascinated the scientists who research marine mammals. In the past, when an orca whale delivered a stillborn baby, researchers have witnessed mother whales carrying their dead babies briefly, for parts of a day. But Tahlequah pushed her dead calf around the Puget Sound in Washington state for 1,000 miles and 17 days before letting go! The death of the 20 year old whale's baby was thought to be emotionally hard on her. This moving story made headlines around the world when researchers spotted Tahlequah with about six other female orcas gathered around her in a tight-knit circle, in what seemed to be a ritual of ceremony.

Weeks later, a post from a whale research center stated, "Her tour of grief is now over, and her behavior is remarkably frisky."

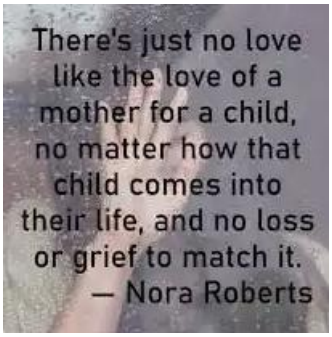
According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the species is in imminent threat of extinction because it is rare for a newborn calf to live long after birth.

As a grief therapist who has worked with hundreds of grieving human mothers, I was struck by the instinctual connection that an orca whale has to her baby. The instinct to care for their young is a primal, inherent tendency that humans share with mammals. When a baby is stillborn, almost all mothers want to spend time holding their baby. Some mothers even take the opportunity to "mother" their babies by washing and dressing them. Just as the orca whale held onto her baby calf for 17 days, mothers often hold onto their deceased babies for a couple of days in the hospital before giving them up.

The other amazing occurrence was that a group of female orcas gathered around the grieving mother, offering her support and comfort. Isn't that what human women do when one of their friends or family members lose a baby?

The mother orca returned to her usual behavior once her period of mourning was over. Tahlequah seemed to process her grief in a very efficient way, only needing less than 3 weeks to return to her usual behavior. Human mothers, on the other hand, may take months or even years to return to what looks like "normal" behavior after losing a baby.

This remarkable behavior observed in Tahlequah resonates deeply with human grief practices. The instinct to care for one's offspring transcends species, showcasing the profound emotional bonds and rituals that manifest in the mourning process. Just as Tahlequah displayed an extraordinary act of carrying her deceased calf, human mothers similarly engage in intimate and tender practices with their stillborn babies. This maternal behavior underscores the universal nature of grief and the innate need for connection and closure during such heartbreaking times.



Farewell Theresa

I have worked as Theresa's assistant editor of UNITE for the past two years. Working with her has been a pleasure. She is extremely capable, dedicated, and creative. I wish her good health, happiness, and relaxation in the future.

Laurie Holper

Thank you, Laurie

I had been the sole Editor of the *UNITE Notes* for years when Laurie Holper stepped up to assist me. She was a God send when she volunteered to help proof-read and write articles. I really needed Laurie's help and we worked well together. The articles she wrote were always insightful and very helpful to our members. I will miss working with Laurie.

Theresa Fisher

Heaven's Rocking Chair

Ron Tranmer

Are there rocking chairs in Heaven
Where little babies go?
Do the angels hold you closely
And rock you to and fro?

Do they talk silly baby talk
To get a smile or two,
And sing the sleepy lullabies
I used to sing to you?

My heart is aching for you,
My angel child so dear.
You brought such joy into my life,
The short time you were here.

I know you're in a happy place,
And in God's loving care.
I dream each night I'm rocking you
In Heaven's rocking chair.

Pregnancy Decisions Following Infant Loss

Laurie Holper

Parents who experienced a miscarriage or an infant death may feel ambivalent about another pregnancy. Due to the loss of their baby, couples may deal with various emotions when deciding to become pregnant again. They may feel hopeful and excited when thinking about a future pregnancy. These positive feelings may also lead to feelings of guilt because they are now contemplating another baby. Will this mean they will forget about the baby they just lost? They may also experience fear that something could happen to the next baby.

It is perfectly normal to have conflicting emotions. Hopefully, the parents will realize that this would be a different pregnancy with a different child. Both children would be important to them, and they could certainly love them both.

Speaking with their doctor may help to alleviate some of their fears. They may explore their feelings, medical history, and potential risks. It may be suggested that the parents do not rush into another pregnancy too soon. They need to take the time to grieve and heal. The doctor may work with them to develop a plan for the subsequent pregnancy. This may include good prenatal care, increased monitoring of the fetus, and support for managing their anxiety.

Deciding to try for another pregnancy after losing a baby is a very personal decision. There is no right or wrong time, and these factors should be considered - physical recovery, emotional readiness, the partner's feelings, and medical advice.

Deciding not to have a baby after the loss of a baby is a difficult and personal decision, as well. This decision may be influenced by the couple's relationship, the health of the mother, and the family dynamics.

There is no correct answer to the question of whether or not to have another baby. Hopefully, the partners will agree, and the final decision will be the right one for them.

My Therapeutic Art

Amy Gardner

In my continued journey of grief, I lean on art making as a therapeutic outlet of support. I started making memorial suncatchers after I lost my son (Jan. 2023). I have also made and gifted a few to friends and family. I am trying to fundraise at the moment. Hopefully, I'll be able to expand my mission and start an official non-profit/website to make these. I may give them as gifts or allow people to request them at no cost. I am hoping many people would like to have them in remembrance of their lost baby and, if applicable, also other types of loss/grief.

I have attached a few pictures as an example of the suncatchers. They are all different, each one unique, just like people, and just like the loves we've lost and the grief we carry (similar and different at the same time).
If you would like to request one, please feel comfortable to reach out to me at *amyegardner@gmail.com*. I would be honored to make one for you.

Healing Power of the Pen

Alice J. Wisler

The first year after the death of a child is like having the worst noise possible running through your head each day and night. There is no way to turn the horrendous sounds off because there is no off button.

I wrote through that noise. I wrote from the heavy bag of emotions bereaved parents must carry—anger, guilt, sorrow and confusion, all the "what ifs" and "how comes" and "whys."

I wrote of longing for a blond-haired boy with blue eyes whose laughter brightened hospital rooms. A quiet spot under weeping willows at a local park is where I carried my pen, journal and pain. As I wrote over the course of many months, I was, although I didn't realize it at the time, providing therapy for myself.

Some days when the weather did not permit a trip to the park and my body and mind harbored excruciating pain, I shut myself in a room, away from my other children and husband. I'd grab my journal and let the experiences of the day, and my feelings, freely emerge onto each white page. Grammar didn't matter; penmanship went out the window. These aren't a concern when you are writing to survive.

Writing the heartache, complete and honest, is a way of healing. Our cry is, "Help me with this pain!" We find ourselves lamenting as King David did in Psalm 13:2, "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?" David wrote many of his psalms starting with anger and agony and gradually, ending with hope.

Writing can do that for us. We enter into our devastation, get a good grip on what our struggles are and something about seeing them on paper causes us to realize the pain is not only within us anymore. It is shared, even if only on a sheet of notebook paper. It is documented and the more we write, the better we are able to understand and deal with our intense sorrow.

Some people think only the creative types write, when in reality, writing through the pain is available to anyone who has suffered the loss of a child. "I don't have time," many say. "What will I write?" others wonder. The blank page scares some because they think they have to fill it with something profound.

But just writing a memory of your child or a few lines about how you felt after he died is a notable start. If we think of writing as a private endeavor and an effective tool, not a paper to be graded by a high school English teacher, we will conquer many of the doubts about our ability. In time, we will see that writing helps us become better in tune with our feelings and thoughts. It clarifies our lives and gives us understanding.

Other reasons to take the time to write are:

- To experience personal growth.
- To leave a legacy or a keepsake so that there will be recordings of what and who our child was.
- To demonstrate a way of cherishing our child.
- To feel a connection to our child as we remember the things we shared here on earth.

We also are honoring our grief, our pain and what has happened to us. We are validating its existence. As studies have shown, writing is healthy for our minds and bodies.

Professor James Pennebaker claims that writing actually helps the physical body when the writer is able to open up, by sharing deep feelings on paper over a period of time. In his study, half a group of students at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, wrote their heartfelt thoughts and feelings about a stressful event from their lives; the other half wrote about superficial topics. Each group wrote for twenty minutes a day, for four consecutive days.

Before writing and immediately after writing, blood pressure and heart rates were tested and a galvanic skin response was done. Six weeks later, the students had their blood tested again.

The group that had written about trivial topics showed no sign of changes. But the group that had poured their pain onto paper, claimed writing had actually calmed them. Their skin was drier after writing and both heart rate and blood pressure had decreased. Their blood work even showed an increase in lymphocytes, the white blood cells that work to keep the immune system healthy.

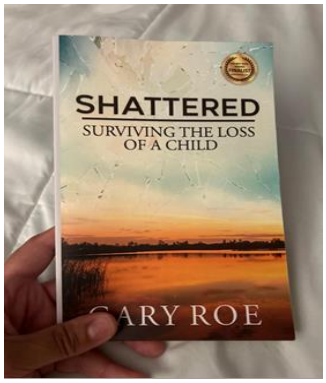
Writing through the heartache of losing a child is some of the best therapy I have found on this journey. I didn't know how helpful it was, I just knew I needed to organize my thoughts and get them out on paper. Now, four years since my four-year-old son Daniel's death, I see that when all the evidence is presented, there is no reason not to write. It causes dim skies to light up when not only the pain, but also the love and cherished memories, are recorded.

http://www.geocities.com/griefhope.index.html
(used with permission from the author)

Theresa's thoughts: *Shortly after my boys died, I started a journal. Each new passage began with "Dear Eric and Joshua" and ended with "Love, Mommy XOXO." In the beginning, I wrote to them every day. I would tell them how my day went and how much I missed them. I told them when I was having a bad day and when I was having a good day. In the beginning, my pain was very raw and very apparent in my writings. As time went on, things improved, and I didn't feel a need to write every day. Instead I started writing on special occasions such as birthdays, holidays, anniversaries and rainbow baby birthdays. The last couple years, I haven't written at all. But I do, on occasion, go back to my journals to read them to remind myself how much I have healed over the years. My writings remind me how far I have come. If it weren't for my writings, I wouldn't be where I am today. So, to reiterate what Alice Wisler states above, it is very healing to put your thoughts to paper. For what it's worth, I strongly encourage everyone to do so.*

Shattered
Surviving The Loss Of A Child

Gary Roe



Message from Theresa: *I found this review on Facebook. There was no name attached to give proper credit. When I read this review, I decided to use it since it is very appropriate for UNITE members. Full disclosure, I haven't had time to read the book myself but I have put it on my To Read list and will get to reading it soon.*

Vantage View (Facebook Post dated May 26)

I won't pretend this was an easy read. Some nights, I could only manage a few pages before needing to set it down, my vision blurred with tears for strangers whose stories had suddenly become so intimate to me. Yet in this tender exploration of devastating loss, Roe accomplishes something remarkable: he creates a pathway through the wilderness of grief.

There are some books that you read, and others that read you. Gary Roe's "Shattered" belongs firmly in the second category. As I turned each page, I felt a sacred witnessing of grief's rawest form – the unimaginable pain of losing a child.

When I closed "Shattered," I sat in silence for a long while. Though I haven't experienced this particular loss, Roe's wisdom transcends specific grief to speak universal truths about human resilience. His words create sacred space for the heartbroken while offering practical handles to grasp when the world has turned upside down.

For anyone walking through the valley of child loss, this book feels less like reading and more like being accompanied by someone who understands. And for those of us who know and love the grieving, it offers invaluable insights into how we might better walk alongside them – not with perfect words, but with perfect presence.

In our culture that so often turns away from profound grief, "Shattered" dares to look directly at it, and in doing so, illuminates the enduring power of love that survives even death itself.

Seven Profound Lessons from "Shattered"

1. *Grief Has No Timeline*
Roe gently dismantles the myth that grief follows a predictable pattern or schedule. When he writes, "Your heart will heal on its own schedule, not anyone else's," I found myself nodding, remembering how society often expects the bereaved to "move on" when they've barely begun to process their loss. This permission to grieve at your own pace feels like a hand holding yours in the darkness.

2. *Your Child's Life Matters More Than Their Death*
One passage that pierced my heart was Roe's insistence that "Your child's life always trumps their death." He encourages parents to honor their child's memory not just through mourning, but by celebrating who they were – their quirks, dreams, and the unique ways they changed the world. This shift in perspective doesn't diminish the loss but adds meaning to it.

3. *Grief Transforms Rather Than Ends*
"You don't get over this loss. You learn to carry it," Roe writes with unflinching honesty. This recognition that grief becomes integrated into who we are rather than something we overcome felt revolutionary. It acknowledges the permanence of love even as it transforms.

4. *Connection Is Vital to Healing*
The book emphasizes how isolation compounds suffering. Roe's guidance on finding understanding companions who can simply be present without trying to "fix" your pain resonated deeply. His practical advice on building a supportive community acknowledges that while grief is personal, we weren't meant to bear it alone.

5. *Self-Care Isn't Selfish*
I wept reading accounts of parents who felt guilty for experiencing moments of joy after loss. Roe compassionately insists that caring for yourself honors your child: "Your child would want you to live, not just exist." This permission to find small pleasures becomes an act of courage rather than betrayal.

6. *Making Meaning Matters*
"Your pain can have purpose," Roe suggests, showing how many bereaved parents eventually find ways to honor their children through foundations, advocacy, or simply extending compassion to others who suffer. This isn't presented as an expectation but as a possibility that has helped many find footing on shifting ground.

7. *Hope Is Possible*
The most profound gift of this book is the authentic hope it offers – not the hollow cheerfulness that dismisses pain, but the hard-won conviction that light can eventually return. "Hope doesn't mean forgetting," Roe writes. "It means remembering in a way that brings life."

Spring 2025 Donations

We Are So Grateful for Donations Given Throughout the Year

Marissa Litman
Linda Clark
Karen Binns
Kristina Przitulsky
Bryan Sternlieb - In Memory of Paige
Debbie and Stephen Bernstein - in Memory of Maya Dylan Sklar

Butterfly Wall

Laura, Rick, Molly, and Katie - In Memory of Siena Elsie Santarelli

UNITE offers a number of services to grieving parents and their caregivers including the following:

Peer to Peer Grief Support Groups
* Literature
* Educational Programs
* Training Workshops
* Group Development Assistance

Without Your Most Generous Donations, UNITE Would Not Be Able To Continue These Services

News

Mailing Address and Phone Number

Please note our new mailing address:
P.O. Box 21715, Philadelphia, PA 19346

Phone Number

Please note our new phone number:
484-758-0002

Safe Arrivals

We would love to hear about your safe arrival so we all can celebrate in your joy. So we can put it in the newsletter, please send information on your new bundle of joy to newsletter@unitegriefsupport.org .
.

Home Page Info
www.unitegriefsupport.org

Virtual Butterflies: The donation cost for placing one of these virtual items on the page is $25 and will be in memory of your baby. You may donate through PayPal by clicking on the Buy Now icon. Note: On the PayPal page, where it states, "Instructions to the Merchant," type in your baby's name, etc.

Newsletter Submissions

Please send your original poetry, short stories, articles, and letters to *UNITE Notes* at newsletter@unitegriefsupport.org . The beautiful writings that we receive from UNITE's bereaved parents are what make our newsletter so special. If you have written poems, articles, etc. that you would like to share with other parents, please send them soon. Note that the newsletter is now being uploaded to the UNITE website which allows all who are searching for comfort and support due to the loss of their child(ren) to see your written story.

Acknowledgments

If anyone has not received an acknowledgment for their donation, please contact the boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org, or call the UNITE line at 484-758-0002. Please leave your name, phone number, and the best time to return your call.

Fundraisers Wanted

We are looking for some fresh ideas in fund raising! Do you have an idea to share? We'd love to hear about it. Please contact UNITE at boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org.

Support Groups

For information about the group nearest you, please contact UNITE, Inc. at 484-758-0002 (leave a message), write to UNITE Inc. at P.O. Box 21715, Philadelphia, PA 19346, or email boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org. New members must contact the group coordinator before attending their first meeting. **All UNITE Meetings, except for Riddle Memorial Hospital, are virtual and are by Invitation only. Please call 484-758-0002 if you would like to attend a UNITE Support Group**. UNITE, Inc. does not discriminate on the basis of gender, age, marital status, religious belief, race, sexual orientation or economic status.

Pennsylvania

UNITE Redeemer Health- IN-PERSON
(Formerly Holy Redeemer Hospital)
Huntingdon Valley, PA
Meets 3rd Thursday, 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM
Facilitators:
Denise Zukowski Thomas
Shannon Szrankowski Mumper

UNITE, Lankenau Hospital
Wynnewood, PA
Meets 3rd Tuesday, 8:00 PM - 9:30 PM
Facilitators:
Paris Margaritis
Michele Rafferty

UNITE, Riddle Memorial Hospital – IN-PERSON
Media, PA
Meets 2nd Thursday, 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM
Facilitators:
Regina Fazio
Sheila McCabe

UNITE, Paoli
Facilitators:
Sue McAndrew
Lisa Natalizio

UNITE, Pennsylvania Hospital
Philadelphia, PA
Meets 1st Tuesday, 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Facilitators:
Karen Donnelly
Kelly Colby

UNITE, Chester County Hospital
West Chester, PA
Meets 2nd Monday, 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM
Facilitator:
Ryan Olivere

New Jersey

UNITE, Penn Medicine Princeton Health
Meets 1st Wednesday, 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Facilitator:
Bernadette Flynn-Kelton BSN, RN

UNITE, Virtua at Voorhees
Barry D. Brown Health Education Center
Meets 1st & 3rd Monday 8:30 PM -10:00 PM
Facilitator:
Ann Coyle, RN

Specialty Groups

Subsequent Pregnancy Group
Meets 1st Monday 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Facilitators:
Denise Paul
Sandy Smith

Father's Group, Dads Only
Meets 2nd Tuesday, 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM
Facilitators:
Matthew Sklar
Simon Hindle

Grieving Grandparents Group
Meets 2nd Tuesday of Each Month, 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Facilitators:
Nancy and Steven Sklar

UNITE Parenting After Loss Group
Meets 2nd Wednesday, 7:30 PM – 9:00 PM
Facilitators:
Cathy Plaisted
Hali Sklar

UNITE, Loving Choices (Termination for Medical Reasons)
Meets 4th Monday, 8:00 PM – 9:30 PM
Facilitator:
Ann Coyle

UNITE Notes Staff

Editor: Theresa Fisher
Co-Editor: Laurie Holper

Submissions: We welcome your original poetry and articles. Your contributions are important to UNITE's work of reaching out to bereaved parents. We reserve the right to edit and select from submissions. Please send all submissions to:

UNITE Inc.

P.O. Box 21715

Philadelphia, PA 19346

484-758-0002

or email boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org

UNITE, Inc.

P.O. Box 21715
Philadelphia, PA 19346
www.unitegriefsupport.org