

Newsletter



May 2010

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From The Founder

Dear Friends,

Recently, Kathy Sexton, one of our volunteers, and I traveled to Topeka for a very festive reason; a baby shower (a "sprinkle" as older sister, Anna, called it!) for Megan and Thad's unborn baby, due soon. The happy occasion was that Baby H is healthy! Aside from Anna, Megan and Thad experienced multiple miscarriages and then mid-term with another pregnancy, a little girl, they learned she had a lethal syndrome. With this particular disorder, babies usually succumb in utero by 24 weeks. This came to pass for them too. Their fears for future children were not about conceiving, but being able to carry to term without complications. So, the celebration at the "sprinkle" was not, as you can imagine, just about the unborn baby boy or girl. What a great day.

For a few months we have been following a family from Manhattan, KS. Their prenatal care is with a high-risk group in Kansas City, so every two weeks this couple, along with their two toddlers and unborn baby boy, stay at Alexandra's House overnight and then we go, all together, for their appointments. This mother has done such extensive research, trying to both inform and prepare herself for a serious outcome. I see this in her - as I see in our other couples - how well they parent these fragile little ones, long before they are born. Specialists say there is only a 10% chance of

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Joan and Martha: They're at it Again!

Through the turbulent economic times of 2008 and 2009 emerged two women with the purest of hearts and an unshakable goal of raising funds to help sustain Alexandra's House. Joan Brisimitzakis and Martha Hubbard's single-mindedness produced the Friends of Alexandra and a fundraising gala was born.

We reported to you last year about the great success of the first annual Bow Ties for Babies and the second annual event is set for September 11. The team is busily at work again (they really never stopped) with the anticipation of exceeding last year's goal. They ask you to invite your family, friends, church groups, anyone you can, to join them for a really wonderful evening with an even greater purpose.

For more information, call 816-931-5378.



Anna and newborn baby sister Elizabeth

May is For Mothers

At Alexandra's House, we celebrate Mothers every moment but especially in May. So, to all mothers, we wish you the biggest, best, most lovely Mother's Day, every day of the month!

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!



Baby Frankie

Baby Frankie

In Honor of Nicole

Nicole, you have probably never mothered with the intensity and purity and love that you have this past year through your selfless work with other bereaved mothers on Saturdays at Alexandra's House. This is a little tribute to you and to Frankie.

them delivering a healthy baby and that he may have lethal or at least, significant birth defects. As with all babies, the further the pregnancy advances and baby grows, more and more can be determined by Sonography. During testing today, oh happy day, the doctors were able to rule out the fatal anomalies. Imagine the relief! Time will tell the final diagnosis but to mom and dad, anything else is, to them, just fine. This is really, really good news!

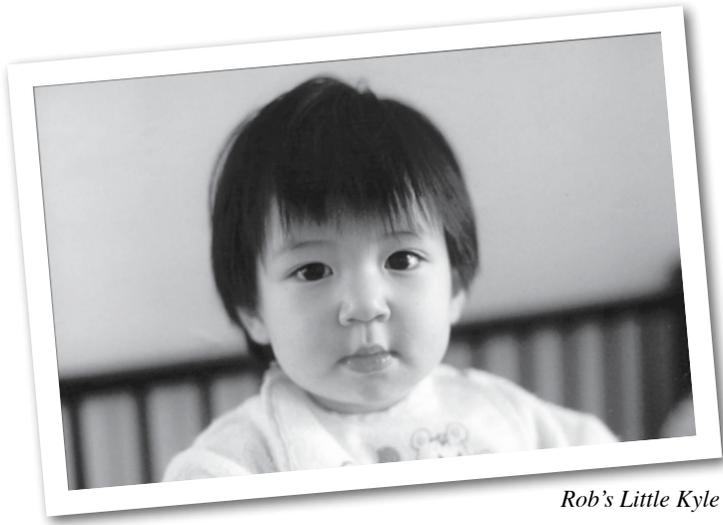
I share these two little stories to show you that there is great joy too in the work of Alexandra's House! Yes, lots of tears are shed within these walls and beyond, but even in those very trying moments, there is also joy and laughter. We are privileged to attend the births of healthy babies after losses, babies' baptisms or dedication ceremonies, first birthday parties, and other celebrations, with our Alexandra's House families.

These things came to mind as I drove throughout the city today and found my soul stirred by the beauty of spring. It, of course, parallels for us the Resurrection and new life. But the height of joy in the Resurrection must be related to the degree in which one is willing to surrender to the Cross-, I think. This is the truth I witness with our families, who have endured the agony of losing a baby to death. Through their suffering, they express a deeper appreciation of life, and those around them, and the little things melt away.

And very soon, not a year after, but maybe just hours or weeks after their baby has died, I hear from the lips of my mothers and fathers: "How can we help another family in our situation?" This is where I hear, in my heart, the words over and over again that real love calls us into the service of others. This is to me, in flesh, what we love in the poignant symbolism of spring - renewing life after the desolation of winter. And after this past long and difficult winter we all endured, I suspect we all are even more appreciative of the renewal of the earth this year. Joy!

God bless you all.

Your Patti



Rob's Little Kyle

A Letter From a Father

Dear Alexandra's House,

I grew up in an emotional desert. Both my parents were shy, introverted people who got married and moved to Rome from the South of Italy. Both probably were not very gifted in terms of communicating feelings, offering warmth and love and the like. I do not remember my mother touching me. My father was a Philosophy teacher in a very exclusive and expensive Roman High School, which probably matches with my mother's personality. They are excellent people and I know that they love me their own way.

I enrolled in Medical School, feeling a bit like Jesus on the Cross: thirsty... not for souls like Him, only for some human contact, at least. I was an excellent student, but I did not know how to relate to people in pain. No medical student knows until he/she gets there.

I had a younger brother, 21 years old. Shortly after my graduation from med school, he contracted meningitis and died in my teaching hospital, in my department, treated by my colleagues.

I was 600 Km away, serving in the Air Force as a Medical Officer, so I never understood what happened exactly, and never saw my brother alive again.

I suspect my colleagues probably misdiagnosed him. He was admitted to a General Surgery department, to be examined the following day. Unfortunately, he went into a coma the same night and died three days later.

Before you ask, lawyers win only in US, often, and in the TV shows, always. In the rest of the world: do not even try.

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Ascension Stewardship Day Benefits Bereaved Parents

Students from Ascension School along with their parent advisor Teresa Clune volunteered at Alexandra's House on Wednesday, April 14, as part of Ascension's seventh and eighth grade Stewardship Day. The students included: Peyton Clune, Molly Schmidt, Madison Schaller, and Jill Petersen.

Jill Pulliam, Mother Coordinator of Champs Wee Care Packages, a highly successful Alexandra's House program, and Kathy Tarbe, our administrator, worked alongside the girls as they packed an astounding 60 gift boxes. They will be distributed to hospitals and given to parents who experience perinatal loss from any cause.

This program has become so very popular with nursing staff as well as the parents who receive them. Recently, at one of our Fourth Saturdays at Alexandra's House, the bereaved parents' group for those with unexpected losses, a mother who had received a Wee Care Package after her baby was stillborn, said, "You can't imagine how much receiving this gift meant to us." Not only was she able to create memories by using the items in the gift box, she was also able to find out how to locate a support group.

It is very time intensive to package and deliver these products so the help of these precious students is so deeply appreciated. Of interest, in 2009, 142 were distributed to area hospitals.

While here, the students listened attentively as Jill spoke with them about her experience in carrying her baby boy, Champ, to term, even though she learned in her first trimester, that Champ had anencephaly. Ann Petersen, with Ascension, had a similar experience with one of her babies, and stopped by briefly to share her testimony as well. Both women told the girls that even though there were sad moments, they both found great meaning and joy in their journeys.

Thanks, Ladies!



Ascension Students



Marita's Footprint

Marita's Flowers

*By Christine Henderson
Basehor, KS*

After our daughter Marita died recently, I was trying to figure out a way to honor our little girl. Well, all little girls love flowers and also, as if in confirmation, my cousin told me, "Marita would have loved flowers." Thus, Marita's Flowers was born.

During the summer months when my "gigantic" flower-bed is in bloom, I will sell cut flowers at the Leavenworth Farmer's Market and other bouquets by special order. But, I was trying to figure out how to do flowers the rest of the year. I found a flower wholesaler from whom I could purchase flowers, but knew that I would be unable to afford to always have flowers in stock to do bouquets. (Though when my own flowers are in bloom I will be able to.) Then a friend suggested I pick certain days to sell bouquets including holidays and holy days. So that is what I am doing!

A couple of times each month, I am going to send out an email saying when I will have flowers available. These will be fresh bouquets with flowers that I purchase from a wholesaler or freshly cut from my garden. The flowers will be of my own choosing, but I guarantee they will be beautiful! They will be available for pick up from my home or after a weekday Mass. (Henderson's attend Blessed Sacrament in Kansas City, KS) To assure freshness, it will usually only be one or two days that the flowers can be picked up. So that I don't end up with too many or too few flowers, please email/call me with orders at least two days before the flowers are ready for pickup.

To contact Christine:
KansasFarm@gmail.com
913-724-2678

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From this moment on, I was on a free fall in the dark. I could not practice medicine anymore, developed panic attacks, and a generalized anxiety disorder. After a large number of therapists, medications, and much more, I now lead an almost normal life. It was ultimately determined that something was awry with my neurotransmitters.

My wife Winnie is from Singapore. We were pen pals for six to eight years before we met for the first time. We traveled back and forth between Europe and the East, until we got married. The company for whom my wife worked in Singapore offered her a position in their New York office, so we moved to the United States.

Even though I was not in the best health I never doubted I could pass the ECFMG, the license board to practice Medicine here. I never passed. After five failures, I realized either I did my best or my worst. The score was always the same.

I went to Medical Assistant School and worked for Dermatologists for five years.

Then, my son was born. He is the light of my world, the sun in my sky, the love of my life.

Like many interracial babies, Kyle was incredibly beautiful from birth to three. Any trip to the local Mall, there would be a line of perfect strangers shaking my hand and patting my back.

I left the Medical field and entered a computer school. I would stay home with Kyle during the day. My wife kept her full time job and I would attend the classes at night.

Taking care of Kyle full time was the best period of my life. Now he still calls me "mom" at times.

Problems started to appear when Kyle joined the school system. From pre-school until fifth grade last year, he was the loveliest and most gentle soul in the world, but then he would suddenly transform into a highly asocial and untreatable subject for his peers and teachers.

From being slightly disruptive in day care, it escalated to punching classmates, attacking a few teachers, kicking the principal in the shin and scratching the therapist in the face. My wife and I could not believe the school reports until it started to carry over at the house, when his

angst and frustration, accumulated but never released, would suddenly explode at night. During the meltdowns, we had to lie on top of him, to hold him and make sure he would not hurt himself and us.

We saw every possible therapist. Nobody could help us much in terms of a diagnosis. They put him on Seroquel and the symptoms improved a bit.

Finally, last summer, the chromosomal study revealed the diagnosis: triple sexual chromosomal, Klinefelter syndrome. Social anxiety is one of the characteristics.

Some considerations were in order:

Kyle did not inherit the anxiety from me (medically confirmed), and that made me feel so less guilty.

A touch of egoism on my side? I said to myself, “good, I will be able to take care of him longer” which is fine, for me, but I do not know for him.

God was giving us the honor of one of His Crosses, which does not happen too often to people.

I became a daily Mass attendant, still am, and am very devoted to the Blessed Mother. The Rosary is always in my pocket and the Brown Scapular around my neck.

Kyle is extremely intelligent and asks many questions about his future life. I know he would like to ask even more, so I try to let him understand that the door to my room is always open, just in case. For example, he knows how important children are to my wife and me, and he often mentions his plans for his future. Sooner or later, we will need to tell him that Klinefelter patients are sterile. When this time comes, I will explain to him that not all biological products are your sons and daughters; that maybe, there will be a woman who will need his help. Surely he will understand, but I know he will suffer.

Then I came across Alexandra’s House on the Internet; I will use you as another example for him. There are many ways to be a parent.

God Bless,

Rob



Alan and Emily Grant

Nothing Trivial About This Event!

January 30th, Good Shepherd Parish in Shawnee hosted Trivia Night, sponsored by their Family Ties Group — Families Tied Together Through Adoption and Infertility. Since its inception four years ago, Trivia Night is a FUNdraiser for a selected charity and the Good Shepherd community. As the theme was “Tune Into Trivia”, the parish community center was “jamming” with over 400 players and nearly 30 volunteers. During play, 51 tables of eight tried to come up with the answers to such questions as “What was the most watched worldwide TV event on Sept. 6, 1997?” “On what part of the body will you find a lunula?” “How many Supreme Court Justices are Catholic?” “What animal has four knees?”

The night rocked on with more questions, a group sing-along and a game of “Old School, New School.” For this contest, one member from each table stood and answered questions regarding when particular songs were released. They showed their response by waving their Bic lighter (Old School) or cell phone (New School).

Parishioners Larry and Kristi Livingston chaired this year’s event with Alexandra’s House being the designated charity.

Alexandra’s House hosted a table of competitors. Knowing this was a madcap event, our most spontaneous volunteer

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Emily Grant and her hilariously funny husband Alan led the team. Emily is an attorney teaching first year law students at KU and Alan is a professor at Baker University in the Business/Economics Department. Joining them were Michael Lynch, Travis Bowman, Kevin & Donna McCarthy, John and Eric Tomasic. Emily also made a brief presentation about her experiences as an Alexandra's House volunteer.

Reporting on their experiences, Emily said: "We all had a fantastic time! This was total chaos -- pink wigs and KISS costumes and loud music and The Blues Brothers. Oh, the only other "detail" is that we got 70 out of the 80 questions correct." Everyone thought the event was extremely well organized and lots of fun.

Midway through the evening, "baskets" — or rather drums, tambourines and such — were passed for a free-will offering to benefit Alexandra's House and the Good Shepherd community.

At the end of the evening, when all of the scores were tallied, the winning table belonged to the sponsored charity. (Way to go, team!) Cash prizes were awarded to Alexandra's House for first place, followed by Terry and Bonny Parsons' table taking second. Third place went to a table sponsored by Donna Kelsey from Wyandotte Pregnancy Center (last year's charity recipient and winning table). All three winning tables generously donated their prize money back to the event.

Thank you to all who made this event such a success and for each one's generosity to us. Special blessings to you, Family Ties Group and Good Shepherd Parish, and a really warm hug to the Grants and their incredibly talented team. Great job!



Looking Back: Mallory's Life

By Mommy Amy Fordham

Two years. Not a long time, in the scheme of time. However, in our family's world, it feels like 50 years, sometimes 100. You see, two years ago today is when we found out there was a good chance that our unborn child would not live.

We were in for our 19-week ultrasound. After years of infertility, we were so excited, as was our 6 _ year old Megan. She wanted a sister, and to be honest, I want another girl. Byron wanted a boy, of course, but all we really wanted was a healthy baby. God had another plan.

We had one of the last appointments of the day. I was very well acquainted with the ultrasound room at my doctor's office - nothing romantic in the way we got pregnant! The ultrasound tech looked and looked. Of course, the usual, "I think it is a girl (YAY!) but I am not 100% sure." Then silence. More quiet, and more measuring, and quiet. Then, "I will go get the doctor. Be right back". That is never good. The doctor came in. More quiet. Argh.

I was so not feeling the way I was supposed to. I was supposed to be laughing and joking, and HAPPY it was a girl! I was nervous, scared and freaking out inside. My mom was there. It was Friday, Sept.7, 2007. I will never forget that day, and I hate it now always. The doctor mentioned that the baby's legs and arms were not quite up to the 19 - week mark, about 1.5 weeks off. I did not think too much of it. Ultrasounds are not 100% right. She wanted me to see a perinatologist.

We saw Dr. Gibbs and a wonderful genetic counselor named Susan at St. Luke's. We heard the usual "termination is an option". I think they have to tell everyone that. Being Catholic, there was no way that would ever be an option for us. We told them that, and blessedly, it was never brought up again. They were respectful and helpful. We will always remember and appreciate that. He looked and looked too. She was measuring about 2 weeks behind in the arms and legs, and had problems measuring the head and chest. He could not diagnose what was wrong by the ultrasound alone, so asked if we wanted an amnio. I was terrified. I had heard bad things about them, but I am Type A, and I could not take the unknowing, so we agreed.

We had to wait almost a month to get the results back (they were thinking Trisomy 13-18), because they had to "regrow" the cells a few times, due to the lack of extra fluid. We went back on October 15 and saw Dr Gray this time. He was awesome too. I could not be a doctor and have to talk to patients about things like this. He was caring, yet professional. It made it a little bit easier.

Mallory Grace (the name we chose) was still fighting! She had not gotten any smaller or bigger, and he was optimistic that she had stayed the same. He thought that might be a good sign. The amnio was inconclusive. It was not any Trisomy, and the types of dwarfism they test for all came back negative too. I would love any type of child. A disability meant nothing to us.

We left that day in a little better mood. I still was not feeling her move, but since she was on the smaller side, that was normal, the doctor said. We made an appointment

for the Tuesday after Thanksgiving and went on our way, planning for the holidays. I was hoping that all of our prayers were paying off. We enjoyed a nice Thanksgiving with my family, and I went shopping the day after, as usual.

We went for our appointment as scheduled. Dr. Gray started scanning and then turned away. Oh no, not good. He knew I wanted an honest answer. No sugarcoating. He had tears in his eyes. I started to freak out. Byron started crying. Dr. Gray said "She is in congestive heart failure. There is water on her brain, and her kidneys are not working. It is only a matter of time now."

After pleading with him that he had made a mistake, I knew in my heart he was right. He hugged me for a while, and tried to comfort me. I composed myself, and asked what we would do next. He said we just had to wait it out. Great. We were on "death-watch" "now. I would go to my OB's office for "heartbeat checks".

Wednesday, December 5th, was our next weekly appointment. She used the Doppler and could not find the heartbeat, so we had an ultrasound. Mallory was gone. I knew it in my heart before we even went there. I knew she passed on Monday, but could not admit it. Call it mother's intuition or whatever. I had been helping at Megan's school Monday at lunchtime. I was talking to Byron on the phone at about 12:15 PM. I felt sick, and had to go outside. I almost threw up, and then got really cold, and I started shaking. I know that is when she passed.

I went to the hospital on Thursday, December 6, 2007 at 8 in the morning. I was lucky. They had just finished a new wing in the hospital. I was the only one on the wing. I did not have to hear or see happy people with their newborns. I was quietly glad for that. I was blessed to have with me a dear friend who had lost 3 babies before me. She was with me the whole time. It helped so much for me to have someone there who knew what I was going through. My mom and Byron were also there. The nurses were awesome. They understood me, and let me yell, and be mad and laugh if I needed to. The mental pain was SO much worse than the physical. I don't have epidurals due to a huge fear of LONG needles (silly, I know) so I was on a morphine drip, but I think my adrenaline was overpowering it, because I felt EVERY pain.

Mallory was tiny and oddly beautiful. She had a very large head, due to the water on the brain. She was born at 7:54 PM on Thursday December 6, 2007. She was 13 3/4 inches long and weighed 1 pound 13 ounces. Her head measured 12 inches. She was perfect to me. We held her for a long time. My brother was there but could not hold her. He was crying too. This perfect angel touched so many.

The next day, Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep Photography took pictures of our family of four. I left the hospital later that day. We held a graveside service a week later. I almost had a nervous breakdown. No parent should have to bury his or her child. It is not natural. We had to. It was a beautiful service. All of my family, Byron's mom and dad, and my church friends were there. It was very cold but sunny. There was snow on the ground. My step dad made the tiny white coffin.

We said goodbye that day, but she lives in my mind and heart every day. I will never forget her. We never could find out what she had. I guess I was the one person in a million that this happens to. We went on to have a healthy baby girl November 28, 2008 named Noelle Grace Robyn. She was perfect too.

I still, 2 years later, have angry outbursts at God. I need to remember that he also suffered the loss of a child. He knows how I am feeling, and I think He would be okay with my periodic tantrums. I know she is an angel for him in heaven, and she watches out for all of us. She is always around me, and I will love her forever. I like to think her life made me a better person; able to help those I know who might have to go through this. It will soon be 2 years, and it is still fresh in my mind. I know with God, I will be fine. Mallory, may God keep you until we meet again, because I know we will. We all love you, angel in Heaven, and miss you always.

Cure' of Ars Mothers of Young Children Gift Gallery

Alexandra's House would like to express our sincere appreciation for the second year to the Mothers of Young Children organization of Cure' of Ars Catholic Church, Leawood, KS for their generous donation to us from the proceeds of their 2009 Gift Gallery. The MOYC group organizes and implements an annual Gift Gallery fundraising event in November connecting a wide variety of vendors and shoppers to kick off the holiday shopping season. The mission of the group is to donate the proceeds to organizations that work to improve the lives of children. We commend these young mothers and their committee members, the vendors, and the many volunteers of this event. Mark your calendars to find this fun shopping event this November!

'Til We Meet Again

It seems since 2008 that we have, in addition to so many babies, lost far too many friends and family members, too.

In early January, we said goodbye to our "Tommy" Thomas F. McGee, Jr., and then on April 6, to Chuck DeAngelo.

Both men served as informal advisors to Alexandra's House but their encouragement and fellowship will be missed the most. It would be nearly impossible to accept these deaths if it weren't for our hope of eternal life and that happy reunion with all those who have trod the path ahead of us. God rest your souls, Tommy and Chuck!