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 Alexandra's
HOUSE

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From The Founder

My Dear Friends,

If you are like me, you have a sense that time is moving way too fast and that there is too little of it anymore. As such, I have postponed writing because I think: What do I have to say that is worthy of your precious time? I am no one of fame or influence, yet knowing that, my calling is to this very special work called Alexandra's House and you deserve regular updates.

One thing I do know is that while the experiences here with families carrying their terminally ill babies to term, and to families with normally progressing pregnancies or infants at home whose lives end unexpectedly from a variety of causes, beyond the sorrow, this is, at its summit, a journey of love. This is what is being built here: A Culture of Love. Who better to express this than those who have walked this path? For this issue we asked some of our parents to share their insights. What is it like to have a new baby after a past loss? What they have to say is worthy of our time.

Toward the end of 2010, eleven of our mothers were pregnant again. These times are a mixture of wonder and anxiety, not joy, until the moment that pink, robust, crying baby is alive in their arms. Our Mothers talk about how the innocence bubble surrounding pregnancy has burst and never again will they assume a future pregnancy will go well. They talk about being part of a hidden community. One mother wrote in her blog: "Today I am thinking of the

continues on page 2

Lucy Mai Nguyen, January 19, 2011
7 lbs 2 oz, 18 in



Wonder Of Newborn

By Leah Nguyen

One mother I know says modern birthing is too easy today. You go in for your induction, get an IV, have some contractions, get an epidural, and out pops a thriving newborn in a few hours with little real labor or effort. She wonders if having a baby should be so easy. Shouldn't there be some difficulty in being born into the world? Isn't childbirth supposed to be a momentous event accompanied by sweat, blood and tears?

Being a mom of eight children, I have been blessed with the experience of labor and delivery many times, and the moment I held each one of my cherished babies in my arms will always be engraved on my memory. The birth of my firstborn, accompanied by a very long and arduous labor, and my only son, the birth of my little girl who struggled for breath and had to spend her first two days in the NICU, the birth of my daughter who had anencephaly – we rejoiced that she was born alive and spent sev-

continues on page 2

eral hours with us before dying in our arms. And I remember with aching arms the birth of my stillborn baby, whose cord failed to sustain her tender life. Yet babies born in tragedy cannot rival the wonder of a healthy baby.

Our most recent delivery began routinely, with a scheduled induction, IV pitocin, walking the halls and breathing through the contractions. The contractions increased in frequency, bringing a familiar pain and an anxiety less familiar to routine deliveries. Will my baby be healthy? The sonograms, the non-stress tests, the frequent checkups, the sleepless nights, the fervent prayers and the anxious grandparents have filled a nine month pregnancy that felt like nine years. The wondering why we are putting ourselves through this again ends at this moment: the moment of birth. As I push through the insistent contractions, little Lucy is born into the world, her eyes wide open. Gazing into her face as she cries piercingly, I marvel at her pink skin, her bright eyes, her soft head of hair and the dynamic personality I see as I look into her face. How is it possible we have a healthy newborn? God is so good!

Even now as I look into her sleeping face I marvel: how do we each come to be, and why are some of us destined to live longer lives than others? As a mother, I want each one of my children to live a long, healthy, pain-free life, but I know this is unrealistic. Life, long or short, easy or difficult, painful or comfortable, is a gift most acutely realized at those essential moments: birth and death. I am thankful for each moment, each life I have been blessed to share with each one of my children.

"club" I have joined. We don't have a name or a slogan or a secret handshake. When you see us, we look like ordinary people. To be a member is to pay a great price. All the members of this club have lost a child. This experience is like no other. To me it has been like walking around for my whole life not knowing I needed glasses. At once when I was a member, nothing looked the same. I am ashamed to say that many times I wished for these glasses to be taken from me, ashamed because I wouldn't trade the beauty I have experienced for anything, ashamed because I feel honored to have had time with my miracle, my son. And although it's a club I pray would have no new members, it's a bit lonely to be part of this small minority. We make others feel uncomfortable with our tears, with our very presence. What they don't understand is that our tears aren't always of sadness and pain. I know I am blessed to be a member and sometimes I cry because the beauty of my blessing is just too much to be contained."

Blessed John Paul wrote that suffering transforms hearts into vessels of love and that love calls us to serve. This too is reflected in our families' stories. Thank you for sharing your hearts in service to Alexandra's House with your unique contributions to this ministry, for together, we are helping to cultivate, in time and for eternity, the greatest of all gifts: love.

*Gratefully,
Your Patti*

Clabaugh Family



Kami's Story

I have two angel babies in heaven. Their deaths have forever changed my life and who I am as a person, a mother, a daughter, a friend and a wife.

My husband and I decided to start a family and my first pregnancy ended in miscarriage. Fortunately, I became pregnant again. We were ecstatic! Life was good. We found out in November that we were having a little girl whom we named Addison Paige Clabaugh. We were OVERJOYED! We researched everything to make sure that we had the

safest baby items. We even traded in my car for something safer and more kid friendly. We took all of the baby classes for new parents and registered for everything that we needed. Of course, we already had the baby's room ready to go. I woke up the morning of Friday, March 6th, 2009 and recalled that I didn't wake up from the movement of Addison. Later, still feeling no movement, I grew a little concerned and called my doctor. I was sent to the hospital and upon my arrival, they hooked me up to a monitor and that is when our personal hell began. The nurse began searching for Addison's heartbeat. Time went by and she kept searching. Panic set in. Another nurse came in and started searching. NOW, I was frantic. They paged the doctor who came into the room with a look of concern and tears in her eyes. I knew that my worst nightmare was happening. I can't put into words the emotion. I was induced and Addison Paige was delivered on 03/09/09, she weighed 5 lbs 7 ounces and was 19 inches long. She looked like her daddy, yet had my dark wavy hair. She was absolutely beautiful and perfect in every way. Her death was caused by the umbilical cord being wrapped around her neck too tightly. This happens to less than 2% of all babies born. It just doesn't make sense. I just don't understand why God would allow me to carry a baby for 8 months ...time that we bonded with her and planned for her future and fell in love with her only to allow her to be taken away from us. I didn't realize how angry I was at God until I walked into church. I have never stopped praying nor believing in God, but my faith has most definitely been shaken.

My husband and I have gone on to have a healthy son, Evan, who is now approaching his first birthday. Although there is not a day that goes by where I don't think of Addison, I can't fathom life without Evan in it. I still struggle with the heartache from missing Addison, and I have come to terms that I will continue to until I am able to hold her again one day. There, is a phrase that someone shared with me, which sums it up very well: "You don't get over it, you just get through it. You don't get by it, because you can't get around it. It doesn't get better, it just gets different. Everyday, Grief puts on a new face."

As a tribute to Addison, I am talking with a local hospital about the need to start an annual bereavement ceremony. I feel as though it will truly serve a purpose because it will allow us to acknowledge our babies in a healing way and to bond and share with others who have walked a similar path. I feel like this yearly tradition is an opportunity for all of us to come together and share, heal, move and motivate. It allows us to carry on their names and give meaning to the short lives that they held in-utero and/or outside, which to many of us, means the world.



Feller Family

Carrying Gabrielle After Losing Eli

Our son, Eli James, was diagnosed with a lethal skeletal dysplasia in March of 2009. Eli was born two months early after I went into pre-term labor on June 15 and was with us for nearly an hour before God took him home. Our first two pregnancies ended in miscarriage; Eli was our third baby. On February 24th of this year, 3 years after our journey to start a family had begun, God blessed us with a healthy baby girl.

Each time I got pregnant I felt more fear than joy. Even trying to get pregnant again, especially after losing Eli, was stressful. It seemed that each month brought a renewed intensity of grief. We'd been told repeatedly that our chances of having a healthy baby were excellent, but after three devastating losses in a row, it was hard to believe. Yet we continued to trust God and were hopeful that His plans for us included more children. With Gabrielle, our fourth baby, I was guarded just as I had been previously and I was reluctant to bond with her during my pregnancy. Each time we

continues on page 4

continued from page 3

had good news, we celebrated: at 12 weeks when we heard the heartbeat, at 14 weeks when I made it through first trimester and felt the first kicks, at our 20-week ultrasound when we were told our baby was perfectly healthy, and again at our 35-week ultrasound. It was so strange to repeatedly hear good news. But even after our good news at 20 weeks, I still felt jealous of those who had never known the pain we'd experienced. Our innocence bubble had burst long ago and many times I longed to reclaim it. With this fourth pregnancy, I focused on reading childbirth books and preparing myself for labor as much as possible. This seemed to keep my mind occupied so I wouldn't have to think about how hard it would be to meet this next baby after losing Eli.

There were very few similarities between Eli and Brielle's births; God's hand of protection was certainly upon us that day. Maybe every mom cries upon meeting her newborn baby, but the tears I shed when Gabrielle Sue was placed upon my chest were the culmination of many hopeful years of praying for such a beautiful moment. The joy we have found in having this little girl in our lives is indescribable and certainly much deeper because of everything we'd been through. I've cried just holding her on my lap and looking into her eyes. We are so grateful to God for the blessing He has given us by entrusting Brielle to our care. In the midst of the pain of losing three babies it was hard to believe that it could be worth it all, but now there is no question that it is.

Morris Family



*"Bands of Brothers" Founders
with brother Drew*



Bands of Brothers

Alexandra's House is privileged to have followed the Morris' through their pregnancy with their third baby. Drew was born the first day of April on a gorgeous sun-filled day. He was held and loved by his two older brothers - Dylan and Dawson, 11 and eight, his beaming parents and a host of family and friends.

Throughout the pregnancy we spent lots of time together on the phone, through email, letters, or at Alexandra's House. This pair of brothers was older than many of the other siblings we have served so we listened closely to them and asked lots of questions of them, in order to learn from them and to allow them to express themselves. So open and introspective were they, we asked them if they wanted to tell their own stories to you about what it was like for them to wait for the birth of a baby brother they knew would die. They both enthusiastically said yes.

The Story of Drew Michael Morris

By his big brother, Dylan Timothy Morris (11 years) – April 11, 2011

On August 31, on the way home from football practice, my dad told me that we were going to have another baby in the family. I was so excited and overjoyed. I almost started crying and called Mom and asked her if it was true and she said it was. I was waiting and waiting and waiting for the baby's arrival. I had never heard of Trisomy 18, but then I learned it would break my heart. On November 1, after school, my dad told me we were going to have a little boy. I knew there was something wrong in the car though. I went to guitar lessons thinking everything was fine but I thought and I thought and I thought about it. When I got back to the car I asked my dad what was wrong. He said, "Well, son, we don't know how healthy our baby boy is going to be. He might be so unhealthy that he will die. They think he may have a disease called Trisomy 18." I was so devastated but didn't show it at that time. I told Dad I was okay because I never knew him yet. I wish I could of taken back those words. I thought the doctors were wrong when I got home and

cried in my Mama's arms. I was so sad. At times, I was really angry at God. Now, I know how much peace God has brought us. I stayed home from school for a few days and I went back to school on a Wednesday. I wanted to go to a football game with my friend. When I got home, I saw Mom crying. I asked her, "What's wrong, Mom?" She said, "Well, son, he is not going to be able to stay with us. This Trisomy 18 will cause him to die." I went into my room and cried for three hours. I was angry at God, questioning God and the doctors. I said to myself, "This is not possible, the doctors have to be wrong." I hated those doctors at that time. Then, a few months later, I was glad those doctors told us because we would have been more devastated at the birth of Drew Michael Morris.

Drew brought us a lot of things we could do. We went to Caden's Cubs and Coco Key in honor of Drew. I was so excited for his arrival. I finally had so much peace with God now. We prayed so much. We went to Alexandra's House and Patti helped us a lot.

On April 1, 2011, I was at school and Mom went to the doctor for a check up. My science teacher called me into her room and told me that my needed to talk to me. She told me they were going to have a c-section and that we were going to have Baby Drew today. I was so excited. The hour I had to wait to go to the hospital at school seemed like my whole life. When we got to the hospital, 45 minutes later, my Mom had Baby Drew at 3:38 p.m. I was so excited for one thing. He was ALIVE!!!! I loved him for two hours and twenty-two minutes on earth. My precious baby brother went to Heaven at 6:00 p.m. even. I was so sad and I cried a lot after he died. I thought to myself, "Whenever we have this funeral for him, I will not make it through it, this will just end me." I spent the night at the hospital with my mom to make sure she was okay. Whenever we got out of the hospital, the Wednesday after was the funeral. I cried a lot, but during that funeral I made peace with God. At the cemetery, we let balloons go in honor of Drew. I also said some words by his gravesite. I was so sad, but now I have peace with all of it. We have tons of pictures to remember Drew. Some people might think this was negative, but this was NOT a negative thing in my life or a punishment. Like my mom always says, "Don't cry because it's over; Smile because it happened." I love you, Drew, you will always be in my heart, buddy!

The Story of Drew Michael Morris

By his big brother, Dawson Stephen Morris (8 years) – April 11, 2011

Finding out: When I found out that my mom was pregnant, I was so happy. I imagined it to be a healthy little baby girl. I would love the baby know matter what.

Finding out he was sick: When my dad told me the baby was a sick boy, I was so devastated. I still said I will love him no matter what. I love him so much.

continues on page 6



Heinrich Family

Bella's Legacy & the Joy of Henry

By Mary Heinrich

Jonas and I found out we were expecting almost exactly 10 months after we lost our daughter Bella. While we were elated with the possibilities of what this might bring, we were also filled with fear, anticipation, and anxiety, as we knew we had quite the journey ahead of us. Holding onto hope in the midst of our grief and pain was a challenge, but we knew this was part of the healing process and what it would take for us to be able to experience the joy of a healthy baby.

I was in denial for several months that I was actually pregnant and was so afraid to "jinx it" that we waited as long as we could to share the news with our family and friends. Once I was showing and the news was public knowledge, it started to become a reality. I tried to get through my pregnancy one day, one week, and one month at a time. There were so many times when I wanted to push fast forward, so I really had to concentrate on being present and try to embrace each and every moment. The anxiety did lessen as we passed major milestones - 20 weeks, Bella's birthday, Christmas, 28 weeks (when we lost Bella), but we knew we wouldn't feel complete relief until we had our healthy baby boy in our arms. We waited until the last possible moment to decorate the nursery and have a baby shower, but looking back I am so glad we allowed ourselves to make these happy memories along our journey.

Our day finally came on March 10, 2011... Henry Andrew Heinrich was born via c-section at 10:03 a.m. The moment we heard him crying we were immediately filled with a sense of joy and peace...it was the most in-

continues on page 6

continued from page 5

credible feeling I have ever experienced. He has brought us such healing over the last four weeks and we have experienced love in a way we didn't know was possible. He is truly our miracle and we will be forever grateful for the gift God has given us. "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass; it's about learning to dance in the rain."

Remembering Bella, in honor of her first birthday, we kicked-off a virtual fundraiser to help others who will experience the devastation of the unexpected loss of a baby. One gift Bella provided us was the chance to meet many other parents, who like us, had no idea where to start in the healing process. We quickly learned that so many grieve in silence and feel isolated and alone and are in a "club" that we didn't even know existed. We found comfort in these connections, and wanted to provide others with the resources that helped us the most.

We are so grateful that we were given an opportunity to make memories with BH before saying goodbye. We will always cherish the small things - like photographs and footprints - that we took from our short time with her. Sadly, we have also learned that many parents don't have the resources to make these types of keepsakes, and they leave the hospital empty handed. We found such comfort in Alexandra's House and the Champs Wee Care Packages. They were such a great way to help parents capture precious memories and begin to heal. We were able to raise \$5,000 on Bella's birthday to pay for enough "Empty Cradle, Broken Heart" books to include in all the Champs Wee Care Packages and Footprints from Heaven boxes.

The support we received at Alexandra's House and the comfort we found in "Empty Cradle, Broken Heart" were the first steps in our healing process. We have received such amazing support from our family and friends that we wanted to provide that same gift to others. We are thankful that God allowed us to look at the pain through His eyes and see the purpose that came with it.



Packing of books into the care packages from money raised on Bella's birthday.

continued from page 5

When he was born: I was so happy to see he was alive! Then I didn't want to let go of him. I was so sad when I found out that his heartbeat went down a lot. I still love him so much.

When he died: I was so sad to find out that he was gone. I still said I still love him. I wish he could stay longer. I thought when the other nurse came in to pronounce truly that he was gone, I was hoping that they were wrong, but no. I still thought they were wrong, but he never came back to life.

I still love him.

Dylan and Dawson distributed rubber bracelets. They were blue and inscribed with Drew's name. One of their biggest worries was forgetting Drew as they grow up. As a result, the family has started a new program called "Bands of Brothers". They will make wristbands for future families with the babies' names and words of encouragement. Now little boys with big hearts; Later resilient and compassionate men!



Daddy's Story

April 1, 2011: As I look over a place special to me, an area that once was a lake is now a wildlife refuge, full of life with ducks and geese. It won't be long and they will go and the water will recede and it will sit dormant until next spring. It is going to be the first warm day of spring today and you, Drew, are so full of life. I am so proud of you and cannot wait to see you. The thing that bothers me is that you will probably never get to come here with me. So, every year, on April 1st, I will bring Dylan and Dawson here and we will take turns thinking of things to do in your honor.

Mommy's Story

At The beginning: As I was sitting in the doctor's office waiting for the results of my pregnancy test to come back, so nervous, I asked myself, "What in the world are we going to do with another baby? I am almost 39, my kids are self sufficient and practically grown?" When the doctor came in with the positive results, I knew right away, the answer was simple... "We are going to love him."

Then on November 1st, as Tim and I looked heartbroken at our little boy on the sonogram and saw so many things wrong with his tiny little body, I asked, "How am I going to handle carrying a baby who is going to die? What are we going to do now?" After getting confirmation that Drew did, in fact, have Trisomy 18 and a fatal diagnosis, Tim and I talked again and the answer was the same... "We are going to love him."

DREW'S POEM

I did not get to bring you home,
or hold you when you cry.
I did not get to sing to you,
not one sweet lullaby.
I did not get to rock you
in the middle of the night.
I did not get to bond with you,
or hold you oh so tight.
I did not get to watch you run,
or walk, or even crawl.
I didn't get to help you up
each time you took a fall.
I did not get to see you smile
or listen to you laugh.
I didn't get to splash you
when you took your nightly bath.
I never got to hear the sweetest words a Mom can hear.
You never got to say, "I love you, Mommy," in my ear.
I did not get to run beside
as you learned to ride a bike.
I did not get to push your swing
or know what things you like.
We did not get to snuggle
when a scary dream you'd had.
I didn't get to cheer you up
on days when you were sad.
I didn't get to kiss your hurt
or take away your pain.
I didn't get to see you play
or dance out in the rain.
I did not get to watch you swim
or take you to a pool.
I didn't get to wave good-bye
and send you off to school.
I didn't get to teach you all the things most Mommies do.
Instead, my precious baby, I'm the one who learned from you.
You taught me how to cherish
every moment, every day.
You taught me how to trust in God.
You taught me how to pray.
You taught me to appreciate
the people that I love.
To never take for granted
The gifts from God above.
I learned so much about you,
I felt you kick and watched you grow.
But the hardest thing I learned from you
was how to let you go.
So, baby Drew, I thank you
for all that you have done.
I learned how much God loves me.
He gave me YOU, my son!

Neitzey Family



My Journey

We lost our son Jayden on March 13, 2009. He was stillborn. He died from a cord accident. I can't even explain the sorrow that we felt.

We faced the grief and then journeyed through it. God gave us the strength to persevere even in the days that I could not get out of bed and did not think that I could make it through another day.

Fourteen months later, we found out that we were expecting again. (We had decided to wait a year before trying again.) Tim and I were overjoyed and even cried when we saw our baby's sonogram! Somehow it still seemed surreal. Our joy quickly turned to fear and anxiety. I was happy to be pregnant again but my joy was guarded. I wanted to go out and shop or call everyone but the thought of something going wrong kept creeping in the back of my mind. I had so much anxiety with every doctor's appointment. I kept having bad thoughts (fear = torment) so I asked friends to pray for me to have peace with this pregnancy.

Somehow having a healthy, living baby seemed like a dream to me. It took me almost 27 weeks before the reality of bringing a baby home hit me. Let's just say it took me this long to find peace. I was so overcome with fear, (I couldn't) enjoy my pregnancy. (It didn't mean that I loved my daughter less.) Sometimes I felt convicted for not being so happy like I was with our first pregnancy. I had simply lost my innocence or purity of having a healthy baby, healthy delivery and getting to go home with my bundle of Joy!

When bitter thoughts would slither in my mind, I always prayed and focused on today and not tomorrow. I always knew that I would never be OK until I held that little baby in my arms.

The many sonograms, doctor visits, non-stress test did not give me peace. I found peace in Christ.

January 31, 2011, I had a scheduled C-Section and delivered a healthy baby girl, Azalia Rose Neitzey. When I heard my baby cry for the first time, I cried. All I wanted to do was hold her tight and give her lots of kisses. She is not a replacement for my angel Jayden but she has replaced the sorrow in my heart.

Children are a gift from the Lord. Everyday with Azalia is a gift from God. I pray that I will be a good steward of the time that I have with her. I feel blessed to be a mommy again!