

Happy Mother's Day!  
May 8



Happy Father's Day!  
June 19

*A refuge for unborn-newborn babies and little children who will die and those who love them*

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2016

## EDITORIAL

At the end of last year, in Addenbrooke's hospital in the city of Cambridge in the UK, a 74-minute old baby girl made medical – and national – history. Her name was Hope. At 13 weeks *in utero*, Hope had been diagnosed with anencephaly. In the UK, most of these babies are aborted in the first trimester after anomaly screening. Her parents, Drew and Emma, chose a very different path.

It came out of their own generosity as a family, because all of them are signed-up for organ donation with the NHS. Seeing their little girl as intimately part of their family, they made the courageous decision that her healthy kidneys and liver would be donated after her death to those waiting desperately for such transplants. The hospital agreed and helped them plan and prepare. Hope made it to birth, weighing in at a tiny 2lb 13 ounces. After she passed, her kidneys were immediately transplanted into an adult patient. The cells from her liver will enable up to 5 adult patients live long enough to receive liver transplants.

One little life given, 6 lives saved, and how many other lives filled with restored hope and joy? How many more ripples of generosity will spread out through this one magnificent decision? How many people have been strangely touched by this news-story with a difference? How many may be inspired to do the same in similar circumstances? The effects of Hope's short life are truly incalculable. Rightly, did Drew, Hope's father, feel a certain pride in his daughter. As he said so truly: 'She only lived for 74 minutes but she has achieved more than some people do in a lifetime'.

In life, length of days are not what counts most of all. In this issue, we will present the experiences of fathers, who like Drew, have sought to draw meaning and fruit from the ardors of their parenting. Their voices are not always heard in what can too often become a 'woman's-only' territory, but they speak powerfully and should be heard.

--H.M. Stroh

## *A Dad's Perspective*

Caitlyn Grace is our second child. During the twenty second week of pregnancy, my wife and I were told that our daughter had Turner's Syndrome and a large cystic hygroma. The perinatologist told us that termination would be the preferred course of action. However, like Caitlyn, we chose to fight for her life. Our quest for like-minded physicians and support, led us into the wonderful doors of Alexandra's House. Caitlyn went to her Heavenly home on January 13<sup>th</sup> 2009 at twenty-six weeks gestation.



I know every individual is different, but here is my opinion...

I wanted someone to encourage me to fight for my child, fight for my wife's health, spiritual, mental and physical. I needed people to stand with me. I needed to know that I did everything humanly possible for my child and wife.

I needed people to see my child as a person, not a problem. I gravitated towards those who loved her as much as I did. I needed a hug. Lots of hugs. I needed information. I wanted to know what

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## *A Dad's Perspective (cont'd.)*

our child was going through, what Megan was going through and I didn't need it sugar-coated.

I needed a doctor who would fight with me. I needed a doctor who saw our child, flawed through medical eyes, but perfect and whole through His eyes. I needed the truth on what to expect, good and bad.

I needed someone to call about making funeral arrangements. I needed the options, then I needed to hand off my credit card to someone else, because no one is strong enough to say the words, "I need to make funeral arrangement for my daughter."

I needed friends and families who didn't ask if we needed food, a babysitter, or a guy to watch the game with when my wife went to sleep at 7pm, but they just showed up to do it.

I would tell them my favorite time to break down was 10 minutes after my wife went to sleep.

I would tell them to enjoy every moment with their child, while in utero and after birth.

I would tell them to take pictures of everything and be unashamed.

I would tell them that even after my child had passed, all I wanted to do was hold her. Look at her tiny hands. Kiss her precious head.

I would tell them that whatever feelings they are feeling, it's okay.

I would encourage them to pray for their wife and child. I would encourage them to be as honest and open with their wife as possible.

I would tell them that their heart will tell them when to be strong, to be a rock, but also when to break down.

I needed someone to tell me that when you walk around the Labor & Delivery floor, 99.9% of the people are smiling and over the moon. I needed someone to tell me that while it might sound selfish, seeing someone happy or telling you congrats, feels like a punch in the gut. Smile anyway and tell them thank you and congrats.

I would tell them that it will get better.

But you'll never forget.

I would tell them to celebrate their child's birthday.

I would tell them in their darkest hours to remember that God is good. All the time.

Alexandra's House helped our family with all of these needs. For that, you have our heartfelt love and gratitude. I still think about Caitlyn daily, and with that, I thank God for you and the love and services you provided.

—Thad Halstead, Caitlyn's Dad.



Date: *January 15, 2009*

Height: *11.5 in.*

Weight: *2 lbs. 12 oz.*

*Caitlyn Grace Halstead*

The **Mothers of Alexandra's House** cordially invite you to our  
**1st Annual "Remembering Our Babies" Ceremony**

**October 8th, 2016**

6—8 pm

Loose Park Garden Shelter

51st and Wornall, KC, MO

To register your baby/babies and RSVP, email

[weremember@alexandrashouse.com](mailto:weremember@alexandrashouse.com)

Please RSVP by Sept. 1st, 2016

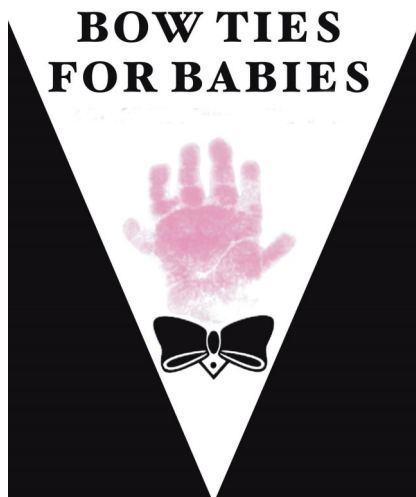
For further questions contact [kay\\_kremer@yahoo.com](mailto:kay_kremer@yahoo.com)

In recognition of **Pregnancy & Infant Loss Awareness Month**, the **Mothers of Alexandra's House** welcome the public to a free Candle Light Ceremony. Names of each baby will be read aloud and light refreshments will be provided.

Come honor your baby/babies by bringing a picture or memento to share on the Remembrance Table during the ceremony. We hope to offer a healing experience and support to anyone experiencing the loss of pregnancy or infant death.

Our babies' memories will live on forever....

## ***BOW TIES FOR BABIES GALA***



**Save the Date!**

**Friday, October 14, 2016**

Dinner with Silent and Live Auction at the  
Grand Street Cafe, Plaza, Kansas City, MO.

Corporate sponsorships welcome, as well as donations  
for the auctions.

If you would like to help with the planning of the  
event, please contact Joan Brisimitzakis at [brisim@att.net](mailto:brisim@att.net) or call [816-931-2539](tel:816-931-2539).

## *The Things Your Kids Teach You: Gabriella and Her Dad, Wes Runnebaum*

Wes Runnebaum and his wife, Adrienne, had no idea what their experience of parenthood had in store for them. As he says himself, looking back: 'when you envision the future, usually the bumps in the road are not as easy to see as the bright horizon. It was always my thought that you would find the person you wanted to marry, create your own life together and have kids. It seemed like it was that simple.' They found out, quite early on in Adrienne's second pregnancy (the first had ended in early miscarriage), that their little girl, whom they had named Gabriella, had multiple issues and a prognosis they feared. At the 20 weeks check-up, there was no heartbeat. Adrienne delivered Gabriella in the hospital and it was there that they felt compelled to reach out for help. Wes confesses that they were not generally 'the kind of people who ask for help'.

They had hesitated to call Alexandra's House during the pregnancy, but they did now. Once Patti showed up at the hospital, Wes recalls, 'things immediately were different. She made us feel at ease and was more than willing to help in any capacity that we needed.' It would take a long time for Wes to understand what all this meant. Meanwhile, Gabriella was laid to rest in the Infant de Prague section of Resurrection Cemetery in Lenexa, Kansas in December 2010, her short journey over.



Wes is very frank about admitting that in their experience, his and Adrienne's grieving process was very different. It often is. He writes: 'As a father it was tough to be helpless but as a person who does not express emotions, I internalized everything and probably was not emotionally available for my wife. My wife was struggling with the emotional aspect of having delivered a child and I dealt with it by keeping busy. It wasn't until we started to visit Alexandra's House and see the other side of Patti's work that I began to talk about the loss and it felt good. Good for me and good for my wife who needed it as well.'

This emotional breakthrough enabled them to think about having another child, and a healthy boy was born to them in 2012 whom they called Noah James. For Wes, this joy of fatherhood was felt particularly deeply. 'It was the most amazing experience and the ability to leave the hospital with a child closed that circle for us.'

In Wes' life, both his sad and his joyful experience of being a dad fit together somehow. 'Having a strong example of a great father, I had always looked to becoming a dad for the first time as something that would be so special. That was the case in so many ways and in so many ways that I had not expected. Gabriella taught me so many things about myself and about my wife that it made me that much more appreciative when we finally had our son. Being a father is such an incredible experience and I have always heard parents talking about how each of your kids teaches you something different about yourself. Even though we only have one child with us, they have both taught us many important life lessons.'

As Wes recounts it, one of the most important things to come of this story is that he met Patti and Alexandra's House. He came from a place where he never had had to seek out help, to share his emotional burdens with others, and he admits that it took him a long time to understand the ability to help someone the way that Patti helped them in that most excruciatingly difficult moment of their marriage and family life. But now he does understand this solidarity at a deep level, and he considers himself to have been lucky enough to help pay it forward in different ways to other families that may be in the same boat as they were. He uses the word 'lucky': for him, it is a kind of privilege to be able to offer friendship and support to those who shoulder other such burdens.



And that way, too, he remembers his daughter – and knows that without her, all this would not have been possible. The journey of his family life has been anything but simple, as he once thought, but it has been a truly humane one, made richer and deeper by the fleetingly lovely presence of his daughter.

## *Mary Bernadette Miller and Alexandra's House*

Dick Miller has been a supporter of Alexandra's House ever since its foundation and is a dear friend of Patti's. He and his wife Bernadette purchased the home in which Alexandra's House now resides. All of us owe to them a great debt of gratitude and recognition.

But how were they drawn to such a mission in the first place? With 9 adult children and 30 grandchildren, they are kept extremely busy and are very involved in the lives of their cherished family and their community.

The answer to that question takes us back a long way in their life, almost 56 years ago, when Dick and Bernadette had already had four children and were expecting their fifth. There was no sophisticated prenatal technology in those days, no ultra-sounds or fetal monitors. And, so when their baby daughter Mary Bernadette was born, they were immediately faced with the awful prospect of losing her too soon. She died within hours after birth. They had no warning and no indication that this would occur.

She was 'such a beautiful baby' as Dick describes her all those years later, and clearly this little one made a special place in his heart. Being Catholic, they had a priest present so Mary Bernadette was baptized and confirmed before she went to the Lord.

Those were the days, too, when there was less understanding of the parents' needs in all of this, less understanding of their desire to express tenderness: his wife, Bernadette, never saw her daughter and was never given the opportunity to hold her. Alone, Dick was with her during her short life.

But their faith gave them real hope. They told their four children, anxiously awaiting their bringing home a baby sister, that they instead had a saint in the family. 'We always referred to her as St. Mary Bernadette' Dick writes. Even now (some 50 years later) at every family meal even if it's just the two of them, they start their grace saying; "St. Mary Bernadette, our little sister pray for us".

This was a huge loss and they think about her every day, even at the passage of decades. But it's a wound that they've allowed to be healed. Dick says that Mary Bernadette's passing has still a tremendous impact on the whole family and in a very positive way. For some, the loss of a child is the cause of deep-seated anger: anger at self, at others, at God even. Dick's response was qualitatively different. He writes 'we were not angry with God and we did not believe that God was no longer a loving caring God. Mary Bernadette's passing made us realize each day how precious the gift of life is, and that we were put here for a purpose, which is to spend our lives doing God's work, assisting those less fortunate.'

How precious life is and how purposeful: what extraordinary human and spiritual values to draw from such great sorrow. Mary Bernadette had a very, very short life; but her life and her mission, Dick believes, were more than fulfilled when she was baptized and confirmed.

And we could truly add that her life and her mission reached a culminating point decades later when Dick and Bernadette gave to Patti the home on W 39<sup>th</sup> Terrace in Kansas City where the mission now resides.

## *Tough Love: Jeremy Foster's Experience of Being a Dad*



Jeremy Foster is typical of many Dads. As a dad, he often feels like it is his responsibility to help his two boys (Mason (4) and Everett (1)) to be tough. While Mom and Gramma are trying to protect them, he lets them go a little further, hoping that even a fall will build the kind of resilient character that will help them thrive years from now in the "real" world beyond the home.

A couple years back in 2013, when Mason was only two, Jeremy and his wife, Tracy, experienced the biggest heartache and challenge of their adult lives. This trial, he acknowledges, 'made us tougher, but ironically, what got us through was not our toughness, but rather a perspective of hope and the

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warmth of community.' At the 20-week mark of their pregnancy, the couple learned they were expecting identical girl twins. However, almost at the same moment, they learned the unimaginable news that both their unborn babies had died, probably within the previous 24 hours.

The girls had Twin-to-Twin Transfusion Syndrome. From this sad event followed a very personal and dramatic journey of faith.

Jeremy writes:

"We were definitely rocked by the news. Tracy had felt kicking just the day before. What followed were moments, and even days, of shock, depression, and spontaneous crying. It was surreal. At the same time, God gave us 'peace that surpasses understanding'. We had so much, that we might normally take for granted, to be thankful for, such as our health, our friends and family. We were reminded that it was God who formed these girls in the womb, that he knew them intimately, and that he had numbered their days.

Given the stage of our pregnancy, the next step was to actually go to the hospital and induce labor. Two days later, Tracy delivered Mara Lee and Joy Lynn. The girls' middle names are ours

(Jeremy Lee and Tracy Lynn), because they are part of us and we are part of them. They were beautiful. While the whole situation still feels unreal, God has given us such great love for them and they have touched our lives in a profound way."

Jeremy teaches his boys to be tough, but he has also learned, through fathering his daughters for so short a time, the power and value of gentleness, of a love that is as strong and as supple as steel. Not long ago a friend asked him whether he grew in 2013. His reply: "For the first time in years, I was able to answer confidently 'yes'" and he adds "what was humbling was that this growth was not through anything I did intentionally" but occurred "through circumstances I couldn't control, a tragedy and the greatest loss of my, until then, pretty easy life." He believes that this human and spiritual growth and the rich values that he learned about living in community with others and trusting God through good times and bad, are among the best lessons he can teach his sons.



*Alexandra's House*

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