

# The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation

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## E-Haven Newsletter from griefHaven

Where Hope Resides®

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E-Haven™  
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### The Silent Loss: When A Child Is Stillborn



By Cindy Kludt Spock

*My* name is Cindy Kludt Spock, and 22 years ago my husband, John Spock, and I lost our first beautiful daughter. Katie Kludt Spock was stillborn in our home after a long and intense labor. I am a marriage and family therapist, and I specialize in supporting parents who have lost a child due to stillbirth. I am sharing my story, which has taken me to the depths of sorrow and despair and to the heights of joy and meaning, in hopes that somewhere in my story you will find hope, because when all is said and done, my journey has resulted in a quiet, gentle peace that has become the pinnacle of my life.

When I went into labor those 22 years ago, John and I were excited. Not only were we having our first child, but we were committed to having a natural home birth with friends gathered around to love and welcome our new baby into this world. We had chosen a mid-wife who came highly recommended by others who had used her in the past and who had wonderful home birthing experiences with her.

Our friends were gathered in our home taking turns sitting with us and going on food runs to feed everyone. But soon the excitement started to dim. My labor was drag-

ging on and on. Everyone was exhausted, and I actually fell asleep when my labor seemed to have stopped.

Later, when I awoke in the dark in our bedroom, I found myself alone, and I had the most marvelous and perplexing experience. It felt like there was a glow in the room, and I felt safe and very much loved. I knew it was time for Katie to be birthed, and this feeling of love made me think that everything was going to be all right. I went out into the living room and announced to everyone that the baby was ready to be born.

Katie came into this world surrounded by love, but she didn't make a sound. As her mother, I knew something was wrong. As I looked at my mid-wife, she just sat there and seemed to be in some kind of shock, so I began administering CPR on my own baby. But it was to no avail. The autopsy would later reveal that Katie had died of beta strep, which is known as a Group B streptococcal infection, a serious bacterial infection that is the leading cause of death and disability in newborns.

After returning home from the hospital, I fell into a deep, dark place that I honestly didn't think I would ever come out of. I did not believe then that I would ever be able to return to a life that held any sense of meaning or joy. I was filled with guilt and self-hate because I blamed myself for having a home birth. I blamed myself for not knowing my baby was in distress, and I blamed myself for stopping the CPR on Katie, believing that if I had kept breathing for her, she would have lived. I believed then that we *should* have been taken to the hospital and that I should have insisted that we go. I blamed myself for Katie's death.

I spent the first three months alone in our house, not talking to my family or friends. I couldn't bear to see anyone that I knew. I didn't want to see that look of pity in their eyes. I avoided places where I knew I'd run into

"Katie came into this world surrounded by love . . ."

someone I knew. I single-handedly put in a new kitchen floor, drinking alcohol the entire time. I was beside myself with grief. I didn't know what to do, or who to turn to for help. I knew my family was hurting, too. My mother had died six months before, and my father was already grieving over her, so Katie dying was a double loss for my entire family. They had all put a lot of energy and hopeful anticipation into this child coming.

After the first three months, I picked myself up and went back to seeing clients, but still had very few and superficial interactions with friends and family. Whenever someone saw me, they had already forgotten that Katie died, or if they did mention her and I started crying, they immediately changed the subject and became very uncomfortable. The only person I could really talk to was my husband.

**"It became clear that a 'stillbirth' was, to most people, not a real child."**

Over time, I realized that if I were going to tell someone about Katie, it was better not to mention that she was a stillbirth. Rather, I quickly learned that people responded with compassion if I simply said that my baby had died. It became clear that a "stillbirth" was, to most people, not a real child. People related to a "baby" dying, but a stillbirth was like a phantom loss. No one seemed to take it seriously or to understand how deep of a loss it was for me. I must admit that now whenever I talk to anyone about writing a book about the loss of a stillborn baby, more often than not, women start telling me their own experiences, or experiences of friends and family. Many start to cry when they realize that I will listen and understand how deep of a loss it is for them.

My family hurt for me, but I felt I could not ask for compassion or support. I was ashamed. I felt that they blamed me for her death too. This was absolutely not the case, but in my grief, I became somewhat paranoid and projected all my own feelings on to everyone else. I also missed my mother terribly. The one person I knew I could go to for unconditional love and understanding had died, and, as I now look back, I'm sure I was also grieving for her.

I became obsessed with getting pregnant again, and since I had such an awful infection and had to be treated with massive antibiotics, I was fearful that the infection had made me infertile. I went from almost catatonic-like depression to fits of anger and rage. I'd go to the grocery store and stare at the shelves, completely forgetting what I was there to get. I dreaded seeing a child or a baby and would refuse to visit any babies my friends had. I actually lost several friendships because of that.

Three things happened that started me on my way to healing my grief (which I examine in detail in my book). The first thing that happened was that the therapist I was seeing suggested that I talk to a young Catholic priest she knew, for she felt that the intense guilt I was feeling could be understood and helped by this priest. So I met with him, even though I was not Catholic. This was a pivotal experience for me because the priest held out such compassion, love, and

hope. I had never experienced someone so egoless in my entire life, and I started to believe that I could be forgiven.

The second thing was that a friend found a neo-natal loss support group for me in the area where we lived. The leader of the group was a nurse who had also had a stillborn, a son. Being around these parents who had similar losses was the first time that I had my intense grief acknowledged without judgment and with much compassion. There was a lot of crying, laughing, and sharing at these meetings, and John went with me, so we were able to grieve together.

The third thing was that I had a couple of very personal spiritual experiences. With these, I came to believe that the glow and love I had felt right before Katie was born wasn't about reassurance that Katie was going to be born and everything was going to be all right, but rather it was a loving presence that was there to give me all the love that I would be needing in order to deal with her death. I must tell you that, even with these very special experiences, it still took me years to feel at peace with Katie's death. And, I don't want to imply that one needs to become spiritual in order to heal. I want to emphasize that this was simply MY experience and how I came to find my own way.

I knew that it was best to wait a year or so before I got pregnant again, and I also knew that I wasn't finished grieving. Yet, I was already 38-years-old and did not feel like I had a lot of time to wait. Within 18 months, I had given birth to fraternal twins, Andy and Molly, who were born in a hospital.

We were thrilled and very happy to have twins, but



you can imagine how much time it took to care for two babies. The end result was that my grief over Katie's death was pushed underground, yet my feelings were always there, just under the surface

where I kept them at bay. At the time, I didn't realize that keeping my grief underground so I could cope with being a new mother was, in truth, permeating many other aspects of our lives as a family; this did take its toll.

Throughout the years, I still had so many questions that I kept to myself. Why did Katie die? Who was to blame for this tragedy? Why do babies die anyway? Was there a reason or purpose for a little baby to die? I was desperate to find answers to those questions to help me with my pain and guilt. I can now see that I wanted and needed so desperately to figure it out because, if I were able to find real answers to those questions, then that meant that I could be in control from now on and make sure "that" never happened again. This was even true for me if the answer turned out to be that

it was my fault. Yet those were and still remain unanswered questions, for there are some questions that simply do not come with answers, and learning to live life without knowing is what we sometimes must do. And that is exactly what I eventually learned—to go on in life and accept that there will never be the kind of answers that I wanted to those questions—to learn to live my life knowing that control is simply an illusion.

Throughout my years as a therapist, I have heard story after story of how a stillbirth of a child has impacted the children who are born after. Looking back, I can see my own thinking, “Since Katie was a girl, and Molly, my new daughter, is a girl, Molly will be my replacement for Katie.” Of course I didn’t do this consciously, but as Molly got older, I could see how it was all playing out. Today, I am amazed that I wasn’t able to see it more clearly, but then perhaps it was another one of my coping skills so that I could go on in life.

Growing up, Molly was fiercely competitive with her twin brother, Andy. She was constantly bullying her way between Andy and me. I’d hug Andy, and Molly would come and place herself between us. She openly voiced her opinion that I loved Andy more than her.

I bent over backward to make sure she knew I loved both of them equally. Molly and I eventually became extremely close. During her teen years, there was much drama and acting out behavior on her part. I was constantly worried about her and was forever vigilant, hovering over her to make sure nothing bad happened. I wasn’t about to have another child die—and was extremely overprotective.

I remember so clearly when it became obvious that I had to let Molly go. I was driving both of us crazy, and my overprotectiveness was not serving any positive purpose; rather, it was driving a wedge between us. Short of locking Molly up in her bedroom, I suddenly realized that I only thought I was protecting and controlling Molly’s life. **I only thought I was making sure she never died.** In reality, I had no real control over what ultimately happened in her life. As difficult and frightening as it was, I emotionally released her, and when I did, a miracle occurred: I also released my guilt over what happened to Katie, for if I had no real control over Molly, then I also had no real control over Katie’s death.

Not surprisingly, Molly stopped acting out. Years later, Molly shared with me (not in these exact words) that there was no way she could compete with Katie, yet she had spent years trying. She felt that Katie was my perfect daughter, and how could she possibly compete against perfection? How could she compete with someone she didn’t even know, but who clearly had my complete and unconditional love? All of that grief and sorrow I thought I had so

precisely kept underground had been a part of our everyday lives all along, and instead of me dealing with it head on, it had its way in all of our lives without anyone knowing.

Maggie, my friend from England, wrote her story for my e-Newsletter a while back. Maggie’s mother had had a stillborn child when Maggie was a young girl. After the stillborn, Maggie lost her mother, but she didn’t lose her mother to death—she lost her mother to grief—the grief of the tiny baby who died so young. Maggie lost the happy-go-lucky mother she had been before the stillborn, and that mother never appeared again. One loss not lovingly dealt with leads to so many other losses that do eventually have to be dealt with.

In my therapeutic practice, I have had many women, and some men, come to me for therapy about one specific issue, only to discover that there was a loss in their past that had never been openly dealt with, had been pushed underground—losses such as past abortions, miscarriages, hidden stillborns, newborn deaths, etc.

When I know that the issue is grief and loss, I

then know how to assist them in dealing with the painful emotions of that loss. For that is what grief work is—feeling the pain of the loss. Everyone grieves differently and in their own way and at their own pace. Some people feel enormous sadness, mixed with anger and fear. Others don’t seem to have any emotions and will deny having any. The important thing is not to judge or resist whatever is happening. Most of the grief work I do revolves around letting go of any resistance. When the pain is so intense, as it is in the death of a child, the tendency is to not want to feel it, and it is also the tendency of loved ones around to shield us from having to feel such a terrible pain as the loss of a beloved child. This is also seen with doctors prescribing sedatives and antidepressants for grief. Without having a lengthy discussion about the pros and cons of medication (I believe medication **can** be used as an adjunct support during the grieving process), suffice it to say that what I do is help the griever go toward the pain, not away from it, since the latter is another form of resistance. When allowed to fully FEEL the emotions of loss and simultaneously have the compassionate support that is needed, along with healthy education of what grief is, then there is a better chance that healing will take place.

I encourage everyone to reach out and ask for the support that you need to fully walk the journey toward healing. Do not allow anyone else to dictate how it should look, for everyone is unique and different. In the



Me with Molly and Andy

early part of your grieving, allow only those with whom you feel safe to be with you, and reach out to what you intuitively know to be love while being gentle with yourself. Grieving takes time and courage. Please give it to yourself.

I love organizations like *griefHaven* because they are giving grief the attention that it deserves. Things are changing because of this raising of consciousness about what grief really is, how long it takes, how one loss triggers another, how losses stay with us, how we don't get "cured," and how it actually lives with us and remains a part of our lives forever. That doesn't mean life will be bad. Rather, it means quite the opposite. In dealing with grief and actually letting it take you to the places you need to go, you eventually learn how to incorporate the loss into your life in a loving and healthy way. You need to do that, since everything that happens to you in life becomes the sum part of who you are today. If one aspect isn't dealt with, especially as important as the grief that follows the death of a child, then that aspect of your life remains unhealed and affects everything else, whether you know it or not.

There are most likely thousands of stories like ours that occurred during a time when there was virtually no loving kindness available to women and men who had stillbirths.

My own mother and mother-in-law had a stillborn child, which I knew nothing about until Katie died. How could such a thing happen to my own mother and mother-in-law and I knew nothing about it? This is why: twenty-two years ago they let me see Katie in the emergency room after they tried to save her. They let us be alone with her for only five minutes! We did not know that we could have asked for more time—we didn't even think of it. We were in shock! There were no pictures taken and no words of encouragement. It was as if it never happened. And over seventy years ago, after my mother-in-law had a stillborn in a hospital, the doctor came in and told her to just go home and get pregnant again. She didn't get to see her little baby, she wasn't told anything about him or why he died, there were no words of "I'm sorry," no support groups available, and no one to talk to, period. It was simply swept under the carpet and never spoken of again. It was as if someone had gone to the store, purchased something, lost it along the way, and could just go back and get another one. That is how it was treated. And that was shameful.

Today, things are changing. In many hospitals they will take a photo of your baby. Some will help the parents take a photo of them holding the baby. In New York, they are trying to pass a law that allows the parents to have a birth certificate for a stillborn. We are raising our consciousness about death, grief, and the aftermath of trauma, for the deaths of all children are considered catastrophic trauma.

There is still much work to be done. My friend, Dana, lost her baby son, Rowan, when he was nine days old. Dana and I have had talks about "moving forward" and dis-identifying from being a wounded mom who has lost a

child. But, it's one thing to intellectualize about where we are years later, and it's another thing when we feel the intense pain over that loss that is triggered by another loss, a memory, a piece of music, something in a movie, a simple line in a book, or so many other unexpected things. The triggers can come from anywhere at any time and the sadness returns for a while. But that's really all right. Let it be there. Don't resist or judge yourself. It is very normal.

I describe this pain I feel today as a bittersweet pain. It's different from years ago, but can still grab me at times quite unexpectedly. In an odd sort of way, the memory of Katie's death and the years following bring almost a feeling of safety and comfort. And I know some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. I can talk about her without crying, although it took me ten years to be able to do that. I can honestly say that I don't blame myself anymore for her death. I know now that no amount of CPR could have made her breathe. I have forgiven myself for wanting a special birth for her. My heart was in the right place, and I know that is true. I don't ask all those questions any longer. I have a good life, three beautiful children; two who are alive and with me on earth today, and one who is with me always in spirit, alive and well within my heart.

Today I think about that young woman I was when Katie died, and my wiser, older self feels so much compassion for her. I have learned much about life and embracing all of its joys, and I have also learned much about embracing all of its sorrow. It's all part of life and equally important.

As Melody Beattie writes in her book *The Grief Club*, losing a child makes us a member of a very special club. The membership dues to this club are the highest anyone will ever have to pay. I belong. Because of Katie's death, I belong. And because I belong to this special club, there is an understanding and a bond that draws us all together. So, to all you special parents, I know how courageous you have been, because I have had to be also, and I love and respect us all for it.

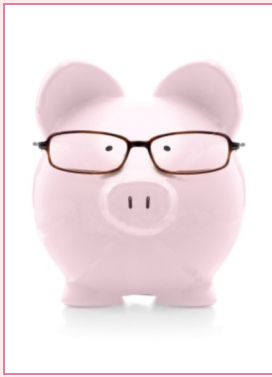
*Cindy Kludt is a Marriage and Family Therapist, life coach, and author of "The Silent Loss; A Mother's Journey from Grief to Spiritual Awakening."*

*To order *The Silent Loss; A Mother's Journey from Grief to Spiritual Awakening*, visit the *griefHaven* website.*

*To contact Cindy Kludt, you may reach her at  
www.TheSilentLoss.com  
(310) 890-9831.*



Molly, Me, John, Andy, and the Dogs



## WITHOUT YOUR SUPPORT, WE WOULD NOT EXIST

A Message from  
Our Founder and President,  
Susan Whitmore, Erika's Mom



I don't like asking for donations. It's uncomfortable, and I worry that someone will get upset and feel, "Geez, we lost our child, and now we are being asked to donate money." Others tell me, "Susan, we want to give to *griefHaven*, and you need to give people the opportunity and let them know you *need* help." Asking for help has always been hard for me. I've been known to wear myself out before asking for help. Wouldn't it be nice if someone came along and said, "Here is all of the money you need to continue providing hope, love, and support to parents when their children die?" Well, a girl can dream! Yet the reality is this: no matter how uncomfortable I might be asking for help, your needs are ultimately more important to me, and fundraising is *the way* we stay alive and provide for you. Period. We don't have government grants and are completely dependent upon private donations. So without fundraising, we would cease to exist. That means that you would not receive these newsletters, *griefHaven.org* would not be there for all of you to fully participate in, and everything we are giving to the tens of thousands of grieving parents and siblings everywhere would no longer be possible. Now THAT would really break my heart. Please know that everything done in our office (which is on our home) is on a volunteer basis—no one receives a salary, and that includes me.

**We Need Your Help:** You will soon receive a beautiful letter in the mail that I know will deeply touch each one of you. Last year, we had a fundraising event at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Beverly Hills, but not this year. Those formal events are beautiful and amazing, yet very expensive to put together, so we are planning on conducting formal fundraising events *every other* year. That means this year we are simply sending everyone on our mailing list a letter asking to help us keep going, to give *us* the resources we need so we may continue creating the resources *you* need—so that many others who will one day need us will also have that "haven of hope" to visit and depend upon. Remember what I always say . . . no amount is too small—it all adds up.

## Check Out These Creative Ideas! What Are Yours?

**Short On Cash?** Because the economy has hit some so hard, we have come up with fun and creative ideas of how you, your family, neighbors, and friends can still help *griefHaven*. Let us know about **your** fundraising event, and we will use your photos and feature your event in one of our upcoming newsletters, as well as honor your children within that article. We will also post your events on our website for everyone to see! So see what you can do to help us help you. Call me directly with any needs you may have at 310-459-1789.



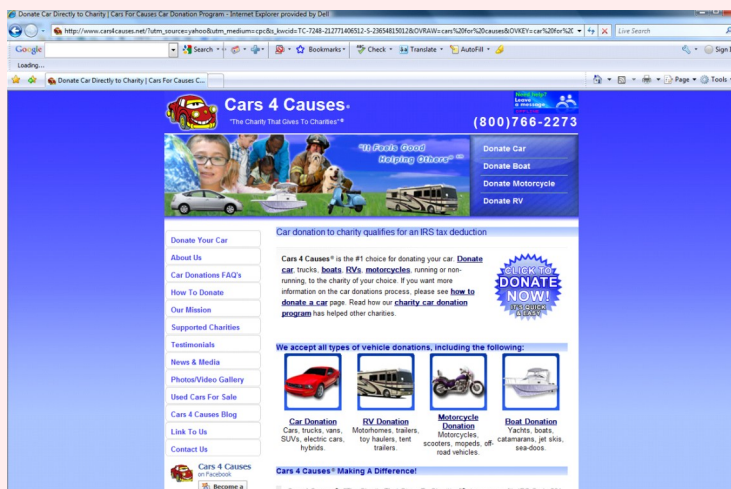
**CAN YOU BAKE?** Make it fun, get together with family, friends, neighbors, and bake up a storm. Then have a bake sale and send the proceeds to *griefHaven*. Your children can get involved, too, in honor of their sibling. Be sure to send some of what you bake to us! I'm serious!

**GOT STUFF HANGING OUT IN YOUR GARAGE?** Have a multi-family garage or yard sale and let everyone know that a portion of the proceeds will be given to *griefHaven* to help parents whose children die. I did that with all of my neighbors when I started the Foundation and raised a lot of the initial money to get *Portraits of Hope* finished and the *griefHaven.org* website launched. It's amazing how much money you can make out of "stuff." And make it even more meaningful by doing it in memory of your beloved child.



**GOT FACEBOOK, MYSPACE OR LINKED-IN?** Then just mention something about *griefHaven* in some of your postings, and that will help the search engines find us more readily. That means that all of those “out there” searching for some semblance of hope can more readily locate us.

**GOT GOLD?** Gather up all of that old gold you and your friends have sitting around and send it to *griefHaven*. Yes! *griefHaven* then turns that gold into cash to help the Foundation continue its important work. (Don't you wish you had kept those old gold fillings? Who knew?)

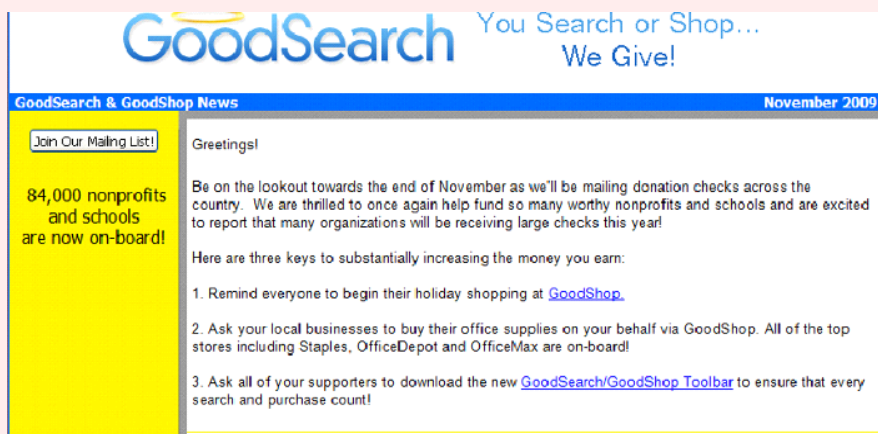


**GOT A CAR, TRUCK, BOAT, RV, MOTORCYCLE?** Do you or anyone you know have an old car, truck, boat, RV or motorcycle ready for donation? It's fully tax deductible if you donate it. If so, contact *Cars 4 Causes* at [www.cars4causes.net](http://www.cars4causes.net), let them know your donation is for *The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation* and the money will be sent to us once the vehicle is sold. Their website is easy to use. You may also call them at (800) 766-2273. We have already received money from two cars that were donated and sold.

**LOVE JEWELRY AT GREAT PRICES?** For beautiful, handmade, one-of-a-kind pieces of jewelry, remember to regularly check the *Susan Elizabeth Design* collection in the *griefHaven* store, and tell all of your friends to shop there, too. Check regularly for sales and new items. 100% of all of the jewelry proceeds are given to *griefHaven* to continue its important work. Or, if you want to pay a lot more, you could shop in one of the very expensive boutiques that sells her pieces and pay at *least* double! Not!



**GOODSEARCH.** And please remember to use *GoodSearch* as your search engine. We just received another notice (below) that we are about to get our SECOND check. That means that some of you are using *GoodSearch*—but not enough of you, since our total searches was only 7,836, which is just a little over \$50. It's a great start, so PLEASE click on the link in *GoodSearch* to make it your **main** search engine. Every single time you use *GoodSearch*, WE receive money. How much easier could it be?



The world of  
*GoodSearch.com*  
is giving back!

**GOODSHOP.** And now there is *GoodShop*! You gotta check this out! Within *GoodSearch* is *GoodShop*. You can purchase airline tickets, car rentals, hotel reservations, everyday household items, gardening items, clothes, shoes, office supplies, and just about anything under the sun. Make sure *The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation* is your organization of choice, and we will receive a percentage of whatever you buy! Stores include *Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Best Buy, Target, Staples, Avon, Banana Republic, Bloomingdales, Ebay, JC Penny, Office Depot, Old Navy, Priceline*, and the list goes on and on. Anything you would buy online, you should check purchasing first through *GoodShop*, naming *The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation* as your organization of choice, and we receive percentages. Again—so easy to do.