please say their names

by susan whitmore

"The mention of my child's name may bring tears to my eyes—but it never fails to bring music to my ears.

Please don't keep me from hearing the beautiful music. It soothes my broken heart and fills my soul with love."

-Nancy Williams

Ask yourself, "If I did not have a name, how would I identify myself? If I had no name, who would I be?"

Naming a child is one of the important choices new parents make. Parents often choose a name which would describe a child's possible character, relate to perceived destinies in life, honor family relatives, or designate something spiritual or meaningful. In other words, a child's name is significant. For parents whose child has died, the name remains an ever important connection to that child.

Don Bernstein, Professor of Psychology at Fairleigh Dickson University, studied long-term effects of losing a child. He says, "It was discovered that all parents eventually develop a primary and fundamental need to talk about what they remember about their child. They develop an intense desire or need to have others understand their reactions. This is not only how they remember, it is also how they confront the reality of what has happened to them."

And in her book, *When the Bough Breaks*, Dr. Judith Bernstein says, "Mention the child's name. It won't remind parents of their



loss. They haven't forgotten!" Forgotten? No, we never, ever forget. How could we? They are our children forever more.

A person's name is a direct link to that individual—a personal identity given to each one of us. In a way, it becomes a sacred identity we carry with us throughout our lives. It is how we refer to ourselves, connect with one another, and reference others in conversation. A person's name conjures up thoughts, emotions, and memories simply by being spoken.

When a parent's child dies, most people will, eventually, for various reasons, stop saying the child's name; they think it will remind the parents of their loss; they don't want to upset the parents; they don't know what to say; they aren't sure if it is okay to



Public Education About Grief = More Love and Compassion For All

We hope you are finding ways to appreciate those things in life that come with summer. For griefHaven, we have been doing quite a bit of traveling, speaking engagements, workshops, and creating new support tools.

In June, Wendell and I traveled to Buffalo, New York where I gave an all-day presentation at the Roswell Park Cancer Institute conference. My audience was professionals who deal with grief every day in their careers. I covered the latest

information on grief, the grieving brain, what they could do to better support grieving parents and siblings, and how griefHaven would help them do just that.

Susan and Wendell at

Roswell Conference

At the end of June, we traveled to Tampa, Florida where I presented two workshops at the Bereaved Parents of the USA's yearly conference. Both events in New York and Florida were beautiful, informative, and rewarding.

My presentation to the Mary Crest Manor in Culver City, California provided updated grief information to the staff, as well as materials they will continue to use when working with grieving parents.

To see photos of all three events, check out page 5 of this newsletter.

We remain committed to educating the general public about the loss of a child and sibling. Put more simply, understanding and educating people about grief equals more love and compassion in this world, a goal we are passionate about.



bring up the child's name; they themselves would rather not remember because it's too awkward or hurts too much; or, they feel they have no *new* memories to share.

A loving neighbor and friend said after reading our list of what to say and not say when a child dies, "I've been doing everything wrong, and I am so sorry. I have been purposefully NOT saying Erika's name because I didn't want to upset you or remind you." This same approach is mistakenly taken by so many because they simply don't understand.

For nearly all parents, the mention of our child's name and the memories you can share are an immediate, gratifying connection to our

child. Just the sound of our child's name is soothing and comforting, yet it may be so rarely spoken that, when it is, we might appear momentarily taken aback, though we are actually quite pleased.

After our child has died, more than ever we want to say their names to you, and we want to hear you saying their names—not because we are in denial that they died, but because they did die, and we want you to help us keep them alive in our hearts and in yours. They died, but we are still their parents, we deeply and

profoundly love them, and they remain part of our lives.

When our child dies, so do all future experiences with them that we would otherwise be sharing during the course of normal, social conversations. We aren't able to chime into a conversation about current

events involving our child, so we chime in with memories—to be a part of the conversation and to keep them in our lives.

A while back, several parents whose children had died and who were in a support group together went on a retreat. It was a time where they could be themselves, say their children's names, and not worry about others' reactions of painful and maddening silence or discomfort—both hurtful to a grieving parent. They reveled in how freely they could talk about their children to one another, and how often talking about their children naturally came into their conversation.

After dinner one evening, plates were passed around for dessert, and, as a gesture of love

Cichae

from the chef, written in dark chocolate on each mother's plate was her child's name. These mothers were filled with feelings of warmth, surprise, and comfort. One mother commented, "It was so wonderful seeing her name in someone else's handwriting." They all cherished the moment, yet realized how they

longed for that to be the norm.

From the very beginning, we wonder how we will survive such a thing as the death of our child. We grow, over the days and months, to accept our new lives, and we work very hard to see sunshine in the shadows. We treasure friendship and shared memories of our children now more than ever. Without others in our lives now—loving us, guiding us, encouraging us, remembering our children—we wonder if we could keep going.

Yes, true friendship at this time becomes more important than ever before. And, if you knew our child, your memories are like treasure troves of the finest jewels hidden away inside of you that can only be enjoyed when

you open up and say the words—when you say their names, when you share the stories we didn't know, when you listen to us tell the stories you didn't know, and when you freely allow us to talk about them whenever and wherever.

Nothing will bring them back. But saying their names and sharing their memories will keep them alive and engender warmth and gratitude from their parents.

Sadly, parents tell us, "Eventually we find ourselves making the world a place

where we can accept not only our child's death, but also our friends' silence. We feel we have no choice." It doesn't have to be that way!

That is why we are sharing with you our deep longing, our deep desire, for one thing you can do to help: Please, say their names, and say their names again!

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please say their names

author unknown

The time of concern is over.

No longer are we asked how we're doing.

Seldom are the names of our children mentioned to us.

For most, the drama is over.

There are exceptions: close and compassionate friends, sensitive and loving family. Still look, still ask, still listen.
Thank God for them.

What can be said, you ask?
Please say their names to us.
Love does not die.
Their names are written on our lives.
The sound of their voices replays within our minds.
You may feel they are dead.
We feel they are dead, and still they live.
They ghost-walk our souls, beckoning in future welcome.

You say they were our children.
We say they are.
Please say their names to us.
It hurts to bury their memories in silence.
What they were in flesh is no longer with us.
What they are in spirit stirs within us always.

Please understand we cannot forget.
We would not even if we could.
We know that you cannot know.
Yesterday we were like you.
We do not ask you to walk this road.
The ascent is steep and the burden heavy.
We walk it not by choice.

What we have lost you cannot feel.
What we have gained, you may not see.
Please say their names, for they are alive.
We will meet them again, although in many ways we've never parted.
Their spirits play light songs, appear in sunrises and sunsets.
They are real and shadow; they were and are.

Please say their names to us, and say their names again. They are our children, and we love them as we always did. More each day.

Please, say their names!

a gift that keeps on giving

by susan whitmore

As always, we are dedicated to letting you know when we find something special we feel you will appreciate. Here is something wonderful for anyone.

I was recently in Tampa, Florida leading two workshops for grieving parents and siblings, where I met Ruth Foss. Ruth provides something special and unique. Read below, and you'll see how you can turn your photographs into just about anything you want. We took Erika's photo and had buttons, a calendar, and items made for us and for gifts...our calendar is sitting right here.

And...these make wonderful gifts!



turning jpgs into something special

by ruth foss

Where are your photographs? In a shoebox, camera, or closet? Or perhaps they are on a flash drive, memory card, computer, cell phone, or even under the bed. The list is as long as the imagination.

And, how do you share your photos? I remember sitting on the couch with my Nana and her photo albums as she told the stories of her youth, her family and friends, the places they visited, and the things she did. We laughed, cried, pondered, and never grew tired of hearing the stories. I wish I knew now what I knew then. These stories can never be passed down to my children because we never thought to write them down for others to tell!

I believe we all want to preserve our memories, but where and how do we start? I am an independent Creative Memories consultant and have spent the past seven years helping others answer that question. I want to help you.

Four years ago, my great-niece, Riley, was born and sent home with the sad words no parent ever wants to hear: *she won't live long.* I felt I had to do something to memorialize her, so I took her photos and created calendars, photo books, and more for family and friends. I thought, "At least I can share in the struggles, sadness, and happiness of her life."

Although we received such terrible news those four years ago, Riley beat the odds and will be celebrating her fourth birthday this year! Creating the memory projects made me realize that what began as a way to help my family had turned into a full-blown passion! That is when I decided to become a Creative Memories consultant, With each item I create, I am blessed to hear the stories of the person whose photos I am working with, then making a unique one-of-a-kind gift for his or her loved ones. This, for me, is truly a blessing.

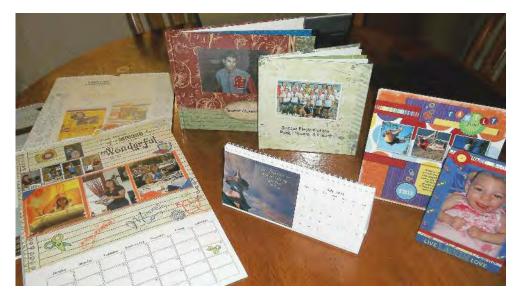
Here are just a few of the items we can create together:

- photo albums
- calendars
- cards
- invitations
- mugs
- mouse pads
- photo panels

Each item memorializes a special person and celebrates that person's life. Some are happy, some are sad, and some simply say, "Remember when?" No matter the

emotions they evoke, our photos and the stories behind them deserve to be remembered for generations to come.





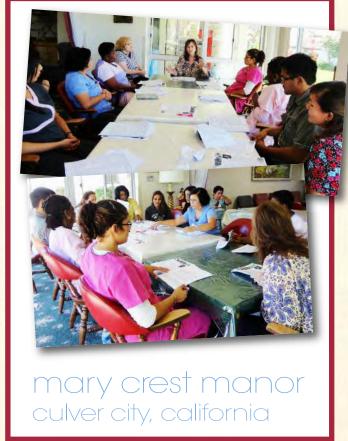
To learn more, see examples, or speak with me, please visit: www.mycmsite.com/ruthfoss and click on "my files," call (813) 766-6311, or email me directly at rfosscmc@aol.com. I will also give 10% of anything ordered to griefHaven, as I am deeply moved by the support griefHaven provides grieving parents and siblings.

You can also check out www.digital.creativememories.com for all the projects that are available for you to do on your own or that I can do for you.

griefHaven goes on the road providing education, support, and hope







WE ARE NOW ACCEPTING ARTICLES FOR OUR 2013 PARENT JOURNEY NEWSLETTERS!

share your thoughts, wisdom, and heart while honoring your child.

Please contact us at griefHaven by email, letter, or phone

We would love to hear from parents, siblings, family members, and specialists.

Would you like to contribute to a future newsletter?

Do you have an idea of something griefHaven can do or provide that will help others on their grief journey?

Do you know someone who would like to contribute?

Or, would you just like to share something with us privately?

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Parents, please remember that we would love to have sibling stories, poetry, artwork, or anything else a brother or sister would like to share in our Sibling Voice newsletter. Any age is great!

www.griefHaven.org



Anyone can afford to have this special tribute book, as griefHaven is offering each book at cost. What a special way to honor your child. You can see some of the many ways the Living Library can honor a parent's child or a brother or sister's sibling—go to www.griefHaven.org and click on the Living Library link.





Follow us to find out what we are doing, where we will be when, and the exciting and interesting things happening at griefHaven.

PLUS: Share your child with the world by adding your child's photo at facebook.com/griefHaven