From a world of silence, perhaps even told to forget...
To a conversation slowly beginning between two moms, maybe even a picture shared...
To now, stories shared in support groups, on a blog, on Facebook, on Instagram, on Twitter, and all the other social media outlets, to hundreds, thousands, ...
With one thing in common, our love and our grief for our babies in heaven.

Remembering Our Babies at Christmas

 chapters celebrated Christmas by remembering little ones in heaven. Some held Christmas Candlelight Ceremonies honoring babies, and others, like —Chicagoland, remembered the lives of their babies with a special tree decorating at the local zoo, hanging ornaments in memory of each little baby. More special ceremonies are shared throughout the newsletter.
March/April Topic
SIDS: Healthy Baby to Empty Arms
Deadline: January 31, 2018

May/June Topic
Mother’s Day/Father’s Day
Deadline: March 30, 2018

Stories, poems, thoughts, and/or feelings regarding these topics are welcome. Submissions must be received by the deadline to be considered for publication in the newsletter. Unfortunately, there is not enough room to include all submissions. Choices will be left to the discretion of the editors. Please see page two of the newsletter for the appropriate address to send your submissions. Any submission printed in our newsletter will also be posted to our website indefinitely unless we receive notice in writing that you are only granting permission for your submission to appear in the printed version of the newsletter. Because our newsletters are posted online, please understand that your name will likely be attached to your submission when searched on the Internet.

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Letters to the Editor should be sent to jennifer@mend.org. All letters submitted to the editor are subject to be published in future issues, both in the print version and online, unless a letter’s author expressly requests that it not be published.

Birthday Tributes: M.E.N.D. publishes heavenly birthday tributes in the corresponding newsletter. Tributes must be submitted via the online form at www.mend.org.

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My baby, Jonathan, was stillborn in 1995, when the Internet was just starting. It was years before Facebook, Instagram, and the like were introduced. When Jonathan died, we didn’t even own a personal computer—hardly anyone did. So, my only support system was my wonderful family and a few close friends. Several months after our loss, we purchased a computer, but it sat unused in the corner of our bedroom for weeks. I’m not even sure why we bought it. We eventually decided to “join the Internet,” obtained an email account and dared to surf the World Wide Web. Yet, I didn’t know what exactly I was surfing for. I had heard of chat rooms, but had also been warned of the potential dangers of virtual strangers learning too much about you. So, I stayed away from those ominous places.

Virtual Friendships

I then learned of something called a Listserv, which was an electronic mailing service that allowed people to communicate about specific topics via email. The Listserv I joined was called Infanlos. I spent hours and hours communicating with the members of this group. I read their woes, cried with them, and over time became comfortable enough to share my own intimate feelings. They were complete strangers, yet we all became fast friends due to the unique bond we shared as mommies with empty arms.

I finally felt I had connected with people who truly got me. They understood me, and I understood them. Though my family was as loving and supportive as they could possibly be, I needed to talk to others who had walked the same lonely journey of losing a baby. It was then that I understood my secret thoughts and feelings were a normal part of this type of loss. I realized I wasn’t the only woman who felt a literal ache in the crook of her arm. I wasn’t the only mom who had gotten out of bed to feed her crying baby, only to horrifically remember her baby was dead and couldn’t possibly be crying in the middle of the night. I learned the sensations I continued to feel in my womb for months were called “phantom kicks.” Mainly, I learned I was not alone.

After a few months of communicating with these new virtual friends, I learned I was seemingly a minority with a supportive and loving family. Both my family and my husband Byron’s family deeply grieved with us (and still do after all these years). Sadly, I became aware many grieving moms did not have this same type of compassionate support from their families. Many women on this group were grieving alone and felt miserably isolated by those around them. As a result, their mental and physical health were failing, their marriages were suffering, and some could hardly hold down their household responsibilities. I began to realize if I, even with the love lavished upon me by my family, felt alone, then these moms who didn’t have a support system must have felt as though they were dying—and quite possibly wanted to die.

Seeing the Need for Something Different

So, I decided as great as this Internet group was, there was a need to organize a face-to-face group. This is hugely what prompted me to start M.E.N.D. a year after Jonathan’s death. The Listserv gave me insight into the sorrow of others and the bravery to openly share my story with people I didn’t know. Several months later, M.E.N.D. hosted its first support group. Today, 21 years later, more than 880 families have attended one of our support groups in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. Many more families have attended a support group hosted by one of our chapters. To compare the benefits of virtual sharing vs. in-person sharing is of personal opinion. Sometimes people feel safer sharing and saying things behind

(Continued on page 20)
The M.E.N.D.—Houston 12th Annual Christmas Candlelight Ceremony was beautiful and a wonderful way to remember the lives of babies gone too soon. It was the perfect way to include our heavenly babies in our Christmas season festivities. They are still our family and still loved by us, so we honor and remember them at Christmas and always.

Kara Wilkerson spoke about her daughter, Catherine, and shared their story. Julie Hicks remembered her grandbaby as she shared her gift of song with us, and we worshipped the Lord. I am thankful for all the volunteers who helped put this together: Stefanie and Greg Miller, Kara and Charlie Wilkerson, Leslie Roberts, Kessi and David Wilhite, Amanda Harrison, Jennie Middleton, Faith Story, Candi Witt and Kimberly Adams (who visited us from Denver!). Without you this event would have never been possible. We also want to thank everyone who sponsored our Christmas ceremony and who purchased raffle tickets. Because of you, we were able to help offset some of the cost of the ceremony. We are thankful M.E.N.D. provides all of our services and ceremonies at no cost to our families.

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M.E.N.D. Holiday Ornament Exchange
Organized by our Kimberly Waeger
Mommy to Anderson and Baby Boy Waeger
M.E.N.D. Online Support Group Director

Our 3rd annual M.E.N.D. Holiday Ornament Exchange joined together 80 M.E.N.D. families across the United States from Washington, Oklahoma, Texas, New Jersey, Georgia, New York and even military families stationed abroad! We remembered 115 babies this holiday. Each family was randomly assigned a family to spend time remembering - crafting or purchasing an ornament in their honor. The ornament was then sent to that family as gift to remember their child during this holiday season. It's amazing to see families and how they each take time to remember another family's baby while honoring their own - to see this tradition grow each year and how families truly come together shows just how strong we are as a community and how each of our children has forever changed us, shaped our future and left a lasting legacy. I'm honored to organize this exchange each year and pray that this tradition and these ornaments bring joy during a time of year that can be difficult to navigate. I look forward to opening our ornament in memory of our boys on Christmas morning. Thank you to all the families who participated this year!
M.E.N.D. OUTREACH

ON SOCIAL MEDIA
We shared on our M.E.N.D. Facebook page tips for surviving the holidays. Follow “Mommies Enduring Neonatal Death (MEND)” on Facebook and @m.e.n.d.1996 on Instagram for more tips, words of comfort and announcements.

IN THE NEWS
A special THANK YOU to KBTX of Bryan, Texas, for sharing information about the M.E.N.D.—Bryan/College Station Christmas Candlelight Ceremony so local families would be aware of the event and welcome to attend.

IN THE NEWS
Rebekah Mitchell was recently interviewed by Legacy.com for the article “Grief After Pregnancy and Infant Loss - You’re Not Alone According to M.E.N.D.” To read the full article, visit www.mend.org to find the link.

PROVIDING COMFORT
M.E.N.D. provides training to hospital staff on how to help families during their time of loss. Since our last newsletter, Rebekah Mitchell presented to medical professionals at Medical Center of Lewisville, Medical City of Las Colinas and Methodist Dallas Medical Center, and Jennie Drude presented to the Texas Women’s University - College of Nursing.
Birthday Tributes

Happy 2nd Birthday, Emma!
Emma, we love and miss you so much. You will always be our perfect, beautiful baby girl. Your life was brief, but the impact you’ve made is grand. Just remember, you are our sunshine.

Love,
Mommy, Daddy, Autumn and Jameson

Emma Ray Lynn Lewis
January 27—February 7, 2016
Sepsis
Parents: Jacob and Kayla Lewis
Siblings: Autumn and Jameson

Happy 3rd Birthday, James!
James, our baby boy, we miss you so much every day! I can’t believe it has been three years since you left us. Life has never been the same without you. Heaven will hold you before we do and keep you safe until we come home to you.

Always in our hearts with love,
Mom, Dad, Robert, big brother Joseph and baby brother Christian

James Andrew Osorio
Stillborn January 3, 2015
Cord accident
Also remembering
Baby Ashcraft
Miscarried August 24, 2015, at 11 weeks
Unknown cause
Parents: Josue Osorio and Carmina Guzman
Siblings: Joseph and Christian

Happy 2nd Birthday, Charlie and Hudson!
Our sweet boys, we think of you every day, and how things should be. You are in our hearts, and we will always miss you. Until we are reunited again, look over us. Happy 2nd birthday, our sweet boys.

With all our love,
Mommy and Daddy

Charles Arturo Aguirre
Hudson Raul Aguirre
January 12, 2016
Twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome
Parents: Nick and Cassandra Aguirre

Happy 8th Birthday, Michael!
Happy birthday, sweet boy! We can’t believe you have been gone for eight years. You would be a big second grade boy. Julianne and you would be at the same school. She would have been so excited to show off her big brother to all her friends. We would have loved to see you and your cousin together at school performances. Evelyn would have loved to go to your baseball games. She loves pointing at the pictures of you and saying "Baby. I wanna hold baby." We love you and miss you so much, sweet boy. We will never stop wishing you were here with us. We will hold you in heaven!

Michael Noah Wheeler
Stillborn January 27, 2010, at 24 weeks
Unknown cause

Happy 3rd Birthday, Everly!
Oh precious baby! We miss you so much. We were so excited we were having twins. We imagined seeing you two side-by-side and laugh at all the trouble you would get into. We thought about you two starting school together and just the special bond you two would have. We were heartbroken when we found out your heart stopped beating. We love you and wish you were here. Evelyn and you would have so much fun together. I try to take comfort in knowing you will always be a part of Evelyn. We will hold you in heaven!

Everly Hope Wheeler
January 2015
Vanishing twin syndrome
Also remembering
Baby Wheeler
Miscarried March 2009, at 8 weeks
Abigail Mercy Wheeler
Miscarried June 3, 2014, at 14 weeks
Cystic hygroma
Parents: Jim and Larissa Wheeler
Sisters: Julianne and Evelyn (Everly’s twin)

Happy 1st Birthday, Stink!
Mom and I love you to the moon and back. We are so sad we can’t hold and kiss you. I want you to know you are in a better place. I want to hold and kiss you.

Jolie Felder
Miscarried February 12, 2017
Parents: Ryan and Julia Felder
Happy 3rd Birthday, Hannah!
Carrying you and knowing you will always be the highlight of our lives. Our diva, and our light. 178 days will never be enough, but thank you for showing us the most perfect, unselfish love. Everything...it was all for you. We see you in the butterflies, the corals and the silver turned to gold. Refined and solidified. We are so lucky to have been - to be - your family, and will honor and take good care of your precious legacy. Skyler still talks about you every day! Have a grand 3rd celebration in heaven, little one!

Hannah Addelyn Crow  
Stillborn February 11, 2015  
Complications of HELLP Syndrome; Placental and Umbilical Cord Anomalies

Happy 2nd Birthday, Willow!
Willow, our larger than life, Pink Polka Dot, Elephant Princess. Thank you for being our Joy! We are so glad you came, even though you could not stay. A lot of sunshine, on the cloudy days. A bright pop of confidence and courage when we all think we’ve had enough. Through you, we learned how fierce and strong we are. How to make a difference, stand tall and keep going. Please know your life and death were not in vain, sweet girl, and those tiny hand and foot prints will forever leave their marks. The Anchor Holds.
I hope your sister is chasing after you. Enjoy being 2!

Willow Meredith Crow  
Stillborn January 28, 2016  
Chorioamnionitis and Fetal Hydrops  
Parents: Joey and Kristin Crow  
Brother: Skyler Andrew

Happy 1st Birthday, Charlotte!  
Happy 5th Birthday, Henry!
We love you, Charlotte and Henry! We miss you every day! We wish you were here to complete our family circle as you were meant to be here with us on earth! We survive each day for our babies in heaven knowing we can meet them again in the most wonderful place. The most amazing treasure is waiting for us in the arms of Jesus!

Charlotte Winifred Hazlewood  
January 23-28, 2017  
SUIDS  
Henry Michael Hazlewood  
Stillborn March 2, 2013  
Parents: Mike and Becky Hazlewood  
Siblings: Hannah, Lilly, Phoebe, Mimi, Emmogene and Charlie

Happy 3rd Birthday, Cora!
Happy 3rd heavenly birthday to our sunshine, Cora Anne. It’s hard to believe it’s been three years since we held you in our arms. We miss you more each day. Our family has grown stronger in so many ways; you changed our lives forever. You made Daddy and me better parents to your sister, Briehn. We long to hold your sweet hand again when we are reunited in heaven. Please continue to keep watch over us. We love and miss you lots!

Love,  
Mommy, Daddy and Briehn

Cora Anne Watts  
Stillborn February 10, 2015  
Cord accident  
Parents: Alan and Kenzie Watts  
Little sister: Briehn

Happy 3rd Birthday, Helen!
Three years ago you made us parents for the first time, and we felt a love we had never known before. Your memory is a steady heartbeat in our family. Your short life was a gift we never knew we needed, sweet baby. We miss you every single day and often wonder who you would have been. Sit a while with Grandpa this year on your special day; he’s new there, and he’ll take good care of you for us. We hope to honor you in all we do every year until we’re with you again.

Love always,  
Momma and Daddy

Helen Jeannette Fisher-Hattey  
February 12, 2015  
Turner Syndrome  
Parents: Eric Hattey and Jessica Fisher-Hattey  
Little Sister: Judy Lucille

Happy 2nd Birthday, Ava bear!
Happy 2nd birthday to our sweet precious, Ava Faith Jacobs! May this birthday wish reach you to the heavens above, Ava bear. We love and miss you so very much! You are our sunshine, sweet angel, our only sunshine. On this day, February 23, we celebrate and honor you, our beloved angel. We send you all our love, hugs and kisses! Love you always, sweet angel,  
Daddy, Mommy, James Louis, Breanna and Samantha

Ava Faith Jacobs  
Stillborn February 23, 2016  
Parents: James and Melissa Jacobs  
Siblings: James III, Breanna and Samantha
Happy 8th Birthday, Hudson!

Precious Hudson, happy 8th birthday! We miss you so much! Your little sister talks to your little brother about you all the time. You will never be forgotten! We love you, and we know you are having an amazing birthday!

Love,
Mom, Dad, Presley and Grayson

Hudson Parker Jones
January 9, 2010
Lower bladder obstruction
Parents: Travis and Jennifer Jones
Siblings: Presley and Grayson

Happy 1st Birthday, Mila!

Baby Mila, even though you were only the size of a poppy seed, you changed my world forever. I think of you day and night. I want to thank you for helping me become a better person. I hope when you look down you are proud to call me your mommy. I love you always and forever.

Mommy

Mila Garcia
Miscarried February 16, 2017
Mommy: Silvia Garcia

Happy 2nd Birthday, Bradley!

To our sweet baby Bradley, we miss you more as each day passes. On what would be your 2nd birthday here on earth, we imagine what your voice would sound like, what kind of personality you would have, and how big you would be. We send our love to you every single day, and can’t wait to see you again.

Love forever and always,
Mommy, Daddy, and big sister Mikayla

Bradley James Alexander Lipka
February 10, 2016
Unknown cause
Parents: Justin Lipka and Victoria Coats
Big sister: Mikayla

Happy 2nd Birthday, Julia!

Sweet Julia, happy 2nd birthday in heaven! We miss you so very much, but we know you couldn’t be any happier than in Jesus’s arms. Love you always, baby girl!

Mommy, Daddy, Andrew and Michael

Julia Mtendere Ozinga
Miscarried January 1, 2016
Parents: Isaac and Laura Ozinga
Brothers: Andrew and Michael

Happy 1st Birthday, Ema!

Happy birthday to our beautiful princess, Ema Alice Morales.

Ema Alice Morales
January 10, 2017
Anencephaly
Parents: Wilfredo and Juana Morales
Big brother: Aiden

Happy 10th Birthday, Dharma Lucille!

I can’t believe you would be 10 years old. Ten years ago I heard you cry. Ten years ago you squeezed my finger. Ten years ago you burped. Ten years ago you made me a mom. Ten years ago I had to say “Good-bye” to you. Ten years ago my heart broke. I am thankful that God fulfilled His promise, and He removed my sackcloth of mourning and clothed me with JOY.

"That’s why I know, yes, Oh! I know Hallelujah, I just love her so"
-Ray Charles

Dharma Lucille Drude
March 31-April 1, 2008
Anencephaly

Happy 4th Birthday, Stella Darling!

FOUR! You would be 4! I miss your sweet face. Your perfect little hands and feet. You looked just like your older siblings. Max and Molli were so excited to meet you and have you be their little sister. I’m sure you are chowing down on a funnel cake at this very moment.

"Just a few more weary days and then, I’ll fly away To a land where joys will never end, I’ll fly away"
-Carl Sumpter

Stella Darling Drude
January 23, 2014
Anencephaly

Happy 3rd Birthday, Liza Belle!

You, sweet girl, would be 3! I miss your sweet face. You would be my busy bee. Playing in my make-up, painting Daddy’s toes, and I’m sure….driving me a bit crazy. I am so thankful I was able to be your mother, even if it was just for a little bit. I wish you were here to drive me crazy.

"Oh, oh, oh, oh, Hangin' tough,
Oh, oh, oh, oh, Hangin' tough
Oh, oh, oh, oh, Just hangin' tough"
-NKOTB

Liza Belle Drude
February 23, 2015
Unknown cause
Parents: Jason and Jennie Drude
Siblings: Max, Molli and Milo
M.E.N.D.—Chicagoland Tree Decorating

We had a beautiful day for our 3rd Annual M.E.N.D.—Chicagoland Tree Decorating at the Brookfield Zoo lights display. It was a beautiful way to honor and remember every M.E.N.D.—Chicagoland baby. They are forever in our hearts. A special thank you to Kirsten and Michael Fumagalli and Eric and Becky Luedke for all of their time and effort in making this tree so beautiful and meaningful!

M.E.N.D.—NW Washington Christmas Candlelight Ceremony

Thank you to all who volunteered their time and effort for our 7th Annual Christmas Candlelight Ceremony. It was a beautiful evening filled with love and hope. A special thank you to Keldy Spainhour for sharing her heartbreak and love for her baby, Kadence. We hope your Christmas was filled with hope and love, and that however you remember your baby, know that we remember with you.
In Loving Memory

Thank YOU for your support

Andrew Robert Bateman
Stillborn October 7, 2014
Unknown cause
Given by parents Tim and Laura Bateman
and siblings Leah, Hannah and Noah

Harper Bren Cantrell
July 18, 2017
Given by parents Ricky and Kim Cantrell

Abigail Grace Crump
July 1, 2003
Trisomy 18
Given by parents Gerald and Jaimie Crump
and little sisters Cami and Karli

Brooke Sophia Daily
Stillborn March 11, 2010
Vasa Previa
Given by parents Jeremy and Lisa Daily
and sisters Sarah and Savannah

Sophie Jane Darnell
Stillborn May 28, 2013
Unknown cause
Parents: Tommy and Brea Darnell
Siblings: Luke and Piper
Given by Great-Aunt Jeany Martin

Cherry Blossom Davis
Miscarried July 24, 2013
Given by parents Shawn and Kathi Davis

Caroline Elizabeth Ann Davis
December 29, 2012—March 27, 2013
Trisomy 13
Given by parents Kenneth and Gabrielle Davis
and siblings Cody, Owen, Claire, Kate, Nathan, Jacob and Cole

Riley and Parker Davis
November 14, 2006
Precmature
Given by parents Rob and Cheryl Davis
and little sister Annalise

Dharma Lucille Drude
March 31-April 1, 2008
Anencephaly

Stella Darling Drude
January 23, 2014
Anencephaly

Liza Belle Drude
February 23, 2015
Unknown cause
Given by parents Jason and Jennie Drude
and siblings Max, Molli and Milo
Grandma Marilyn Branson
Cousin Chris King
Tammy Phares

Caleb Scott Fann
December 1, 2003, at 32 weeks
PPROM

Baby August Fann
Miscarried August 13, 2004, at 8 weeks
Given by parents Jonathan and Heather Fann
and little sister Madison Grace

Logan Wayne Fish
September 17, 2002
Skeletal Dysplasia

Paislee Ann Frette
April 4-5, 2012
Wolf-Hirschhorn Syndrome
Parents: Brent and Courtney Frette
Little sister: Colbie
Given by Grandparents James and LuAnn Junkin

Airrington Hope Fumagalli
Stillborn December 22, 2013
Unknown cause

Jakaebi Michael Fumagalli
November 21, 2011
Ectopic pregnancy
Parents: Michael and Kirsten Fumagalli
Brothers: Gable and Maverick
Given by Papa Mark and Nonnie Maureen Fumagalli

Henry Michael Hazlewood
Stillborn March 2, 2013
Given by parents Michael and Becky Hazlewood
and siblings Hannah, Lilly, Phoebe, Mimi, Emmagene and Charlie

Ted Herzog
April 12, 1952—January 11, 2017
Given by George and Tari Steberl

Kaiya Dawn Johnson
October 23, 2009
PPROM

Ellianna Grace Kundomal
Miscarried July 2010
Antiphospholipid Antibody Syndrome
Given by mommy Kali Kundomal

Khloe Jean Lanicke
September 5—October 15, 2017
SIDS
Given by mommy Brittany Lanicke

Thank YOU for your support

M.E.N.D. gratefully acknowledges these gifts of love given in memory of a baby, relative, friend, or given by someone just wanting to help.
These donations help us to continue M.E.N.D.'s mission by providing this newsletter and other services to bereaved parents free of charge. For more information on how you can support M.E.N.D., please see page 22.
I will permanently bear the mark of a woman who has lost her child.

Many of us are walking here--

in the grocery store,
at the neighborhood barbeque,
at the movies.

We walk without necessarily recognizing each other,
side by side

and a million miles apart

I Will Carry You:
The Sacred Dance of Grief and Joy

By Angie Smith
Houston

M.E.N.D. — Houston is excited about 2018 and the doors the Lord is continuing to open. This year we will focus on working with funeral homes as well as speaking at churches and women’s events.

We are also starting a bear ministry of providing teddy bears for families in the hospital who lose a baby. The bear will be something they can include in pictures with their baby, as well as use in future family photos. We know nothing can take the place of holding your own baby in your arms, but holding a bear while leaving the hospital may provide some comfort while coping with the commonly felt “empty arm syndrome.”

If you would like to help with the bear program or know of churches or women’s events we could share our mission with, please contact Stormy at stormym@mend.org.

Stormy Mitchell

SW Missouri

Our chapter ended the year with a beautiful Christmas Candlelight Ceremony helping families remember their babies during the holiday season. We are thankful to all the volunteers and sponsors who help us provide a special time of remembrance for these families. We are already scheduling events for next year’s remembrance ceremonies, and look forward to supporting hurting families.

Our chapter will continue to provide a safe place to grieve the losses of our babies through our support groups and Facebook group. Please feel free to join us the first Thursday of each month at Project H.O.P.E. (details on page 23) or find our link to our Facebook page on www.mend.org.

Kathryn Gold

NW Washington

M.E.N.D. — NW Washington welcomed 10 new families into our chapter in the year 2017. We are grateful the Lord led them to us, and we pray for all the new families who will join us this year. Thank you to all who donated their time and money to continue to help our chapter. We could not do this for our community without you. We look forward to all this year has already begun to offer our chapter with new opportunities to reach out in our community. Please be in prayer with us as we continue to reach hurting families in the area.

Stacy McGhee
Chicagoland

M.E.N.D. — Chicagoland began the holiday season decorating the M.E.N.D. Christmas tree with ornaments honoring and remembering every M.E.N.D. Chicagoland baby. We hoped as families saw the tree during the holidays they were reminded their babies are thought of, loved and treasured during the holiday season and throughout the year. As we enter 2018, we will continue to love, comfort and support these families, as well as the new families who join us.

Sara Hintz

Tulsa

M.E.N.D. — Tulsa was blessed to hold a beautiful Christmas Candlelight Ceremony for the sixth year for families with little ones in heaven. We are so thankful our chapter is able to hold special ceremonies like this to help families love and remember their babies during difficult seasons. We look forward to seeing God's plans unfold for our chapter in 2018 in ministering and supporting grieving families.

Lisa Daily

Bryan/College Station

M.E.N.D. — Bryan/College Station wants to thank everyone who made a pledge in December to donate to our chapter! The donations we received helped us end the year with all of our expenses covered.

I am looking forward to 2018 to see what God has in store for us. We will continue to work hard to reach the hurting families of Brazos County.

Jennie Drude

Thank you to all who donated to M.E.N.D. — Bryan/College Station to reach our goal in December!
How to Share Our Story

From our Facebook Community
Compiled by Jennifer Harrison
Mommy to Serenity
M.E.N.D. Newsletter Editor

The question many of us pour over inside our minds: “Do I share? Do I tell them about my child in heaven? Do I show them my pictures or tell them about the 4, 8 or 12 weeks I was able to carry my baby? Do I take the chance? Or just act as if nothing ever happened, keeping it to myself...protecting myself?”

Whether we are sharing our love and our grief for our babies in person or on social media, we all battle through those questions. The majority of the time, we have those hesitations because of the uncertainty of how others will react. Will there be awkward silence? Will there be painful comments posted by someone hiding behind a keyboard? Or will they show us love through kind words and reactions?

Recently I asked the question on each of our Facebook chapter pages about lessons learned from sharing grief face-to-face and on social media. Each avenue has its good points and bad points, as shared in the following:

Face-to-Face: Sometimes it’s a close friend or family member, or maybe a stranger in the grocery store, or an acquaintance at work. Sometimes we create our own spaces to share, such as attending a M.E.N.D. support group.

Positive
♥ Builds stronger, deeper friendships
♥ Glory shared that it opened doors for others who have suffered in silence to share
♥ New and/or closer friendships are made after meeting someone who has “been there” or understands
♥ The “safe” person to talk to at the work place helps remove the isolation and loneliness there. This person helped Rachel connect with other moms with similar losses
♥ Face-to-face reveals where people stand on grief, so as Anita experienced, she knows which ones to turn to “who have experienced this and understand the loss,” versus those “who see it more as a brief medical event which I should be over by now”

♥ Emotions can be seen, felt: According to Stormy, a sad emoji posted online is nothing compared to the pain and love seen in someone’s eyes, nods of understanding, and the gentle tear rolling down their cheek
♥ M.E.N.D. support groups and other support groups:
♥ At support groups, the “elephant in the room” went away, according to Amy, since we are there for the same reason
♥ These are safe environments for everyone to share, not just moms. Kathryn learned how men and women grieve differently by hearing from daddies, and how she could help her husband support her better

Social Media: Social media is a tool. Sometimes tools are used to build things, but some are used to tear things down, according to Kristian, which required her to thicken up her skin a little, but also made her a better advocate.

Positive
♥ Audience
♥ We all know the statistics, but actually seeing those say “Here I am. I am 1 in 4,” speaks volumes
♥ A way to connect to others who understand, who have faced the same heartache, who recognize these lives matter, and that we would never have met in our own circles of family and friends
♥ We know who our audience is because of our friends list, so we can control what we share without fear because they already know our story
♥ Connected to other support: it also helped some to find M.E.N.D.
♥ Communicate in a different way:
♥ Online community makes the unspeakable speakable
♥ Kristian found the right words do not come to mind when with people, so social media allowed her to express feelings when she does find the right words, or say thank you to let someone know how much their actions meant
♥ Social media helped some to realize people do care, but they don’t know how to help, react, what to say, etc. When Glory shared her pain, reminders, love or anniversaries, friends were able to easily respond with support
♥ Mercy stated she learned more on social media and found it was easier for her to “talk” about her loss. Some people may never share verbally about their loss, but will sometimes share by text or social media
Face-to-Face:
Negative
🎀 Still seen as taboo or uncomfortable
🎀 People try to change the subject because they don’t want to talk about it
🎀 Awkwardness grows because people think of it as a “taboo” subject, they don’t understand and/or don’t know how to respond
🎀 Catrina (and many others of us) do not always share face-to-face with strangers because she knows they are just making conversation, so seeing them not care might hurt more

Social Media:
Negative
🎀 Freedom to say anything…unfortunately.
🎀 Hurtful words written by people who hide behind the computer screen
🎀 Shaming and negativity start to creep in
🎀 Pictures become blocked and/or reported because someone felt uncomfortable

Overall, sharing your grief, whether face-to-face or on social media, not only gives you a chance to grieve, but it also gives others permission to grieve for their own losses, as Jessica found. It validated their feelings they had experienced, whether the loss happened 2 weeks ago, 2 months ago, 2 years ago or 2 decades ago, and share their own ways they dealt with the grief. Ana stated that sharing about her baby gave an outlet for pain and for love, and removed the isolation of grief as she made new lifelong friends helping her keep moving forward. It revealed that she was “not the only one hurting,” and her “story can be an encouragement to others” as through sharing grief.

No matter how we choose to share, we all know grief waits. It will be there, waiting to be released. So find an outlet that works best for you, whether you need to sit down with the cup of coffee and a friend, call someone on the phone from your bed in your PJs because that’s the most you can do at that point, attend a M.E.N.D. or similar support group, or jump online to share with friends and family or find people or groups who have also been there and understand your need to share. Sometimes we just need to say what we are feeling. Sometimes we just need to know we are normal. Sometimes we just need to say our baby’s name when no one else does. And it’s all okay.

M.E.N.D.—Bryan/College Station Christmas Candlelight Ceremony

We had a wonderful Candlelight Christmas Ceremony! We were honored to have Kessi Wilhite of M.E.N.D.—Houston share with us her journey through grief. The "One-a-Chord" singers and instrumentalist from Texas A&M blessed us with beautiful music.
Our 8th Annual Christmas Candlelight Ceremony was a beautiful time to honor our babies in heaven. We had 92 in attendance remembering 26 babies. Reverend Hosea Bilyeu and his family blessed us with their musical and speaking talents. We were also blessed again this year to have beautiful handmade ornaments made by Patricia Irvin and Patty Marshall. Thank you to our sponsors for making the event possible: Second Baptist Church, On Angels’ Wings, Red Crow Marketing, Patricia Irvin, Patty Marshall, Jon and Heather Fann, and Greg and Kathryn Gold.

M.E.N.D. — SW Missouri
Christmas Candlelight Ceremony

M.E.N.D. — Tulsa recently held our 6th Annual Christmas Candlelight Ceremony. It was a beautiful and meaningful time of remembrance for more than 30 attendees. Thank you to Marcie Nienhuis, Kristina and Brian Cobler, Cat Markham, and David Graves for all their hard work with set up/clean up, and sound. Thank you to Mary Clare Mansfield for organizing all of our desserts and refreshments. Additionally, thank you to Jeromye Jackson for his inspirational message and beautiful music. The ceremony was made possible by our generous sponsors and volunteers. Thank you to Anthem Church, Merritt’s Bakery, Sam’s Club, The Vintage Pearl, Michele Wilson Properties, Owasso Realtor, Brian and Kristina Cobler, Jeremy and Lisa Daily, Jeromye and Angi Jackson, and Seth and Marcie Nienhuis.
M.E.N.D. — Dallas/Fort Worth

Christmas Candlelight Ceremony

The M.E.N.D. Christmas Candlelight Ceremonies are always wonderfully bittersweet evenings, as we take a pause from the holiday busyness and acknowledge our sweet babies who died too soon. The Dallas/Fort Worth’s 21st M.E.N.D. Christmas Candlelight Ceremony was held on Thursday, December 7, 2017, in Irving, Texas. Rebekah Mitchell, the Founder and President of M.E.N.D., delivered the inspirational message, reminding the families that God is our refuge in times of suffering. Liz Walker, DaLana Barsanti and Courtney Frette blessed the audience with their beautiful songs of hope.

M.E.N.D. — Dallas/Fort Worth

Star Wars Fundraiser

We had a fun and unique fundraiser on December 14, as we hosted a movie premier for the newest Star Wars movie, The Last Jedi. Thank you to our sponsors, Garabedian Properties, Dentistry of Las Colinas, and The Pistana Group. Proceeds from the event went toward the maintenance and upkeep of our Garden of Hope in Irving, Texas.

“Hope is not lost today….It is found.” Leia
Many know our Chapter Directors facilitate our support groups and hold ceremonies, see us on our Facebook page, and maybe hear about visiting with other families, but sometimes they are called to help in other ways, such as helping a family prepare to say “hello” and “goodbye” to their new baby. Below is an interview with Jennie Drude, Chapter Director of Bryan/College Station, and her experiences in helping these families.

What do you do for M.E.N.D.?
Jennie Drude: I am the Chapter Director of Bryan/College Station, which includes facilitating monthly support groups, hospital trainings, visiting new moms, taking care of memory boxes, social media, PR for the area, and relationships with the bereavement coordinators.

How long have you been a part of M.E.N.D.?
JD: I first visited M.E.N.D. in May 2008 at the Houston chapter after my first baby died due to anencephaly, and then held my first support group as the Chapter Director for Bryan/College Station in March 2010.

How did you find M.E.N.D.?
JD: I remembered getting a brochure from the “I’m so sorry packet” from the hospital, but, like many of us do in our grief, I threw it all away. Later when I googled infant loss support group Houston, Texas, I recognized the M.E.N.D. angel logo from the bereavement packets I had been given at the hospital.

The majority of families who find M.E.N.D. for support find us after their loss, but recently you helped some families in a different way. Tell us about it.
JD: I went for several years without ever meeting a local mom who had a baby with anencephaly. Then, a mom contacted me from a suggestion from two M.E.N.D. moms in her church and her maternal fetal medicine doctor. She figured it was a God-thing that we needed to meet. Since then, any time there is a mom whose baby is diagnosed with fatal anomaly, and she chooses to carry to term, the doctor provides my name and number. If they call me, I will walk with them through the whole pregnancy. I’ve done that three times now, specifically anencephaly.

What all do you mean by “you walk with them?” What do you do to help these families?
JD: First I usually meet them for coffee or tacos, because everybody loves Torchy’s. I show them my photo album, tell them my story, and usually they have a lot of questions for me. Sometimes they have done research; sometimes they haven’t. I offer to help any way I can. I have gone to doctors’ appointments, hospitals, and even the palliative care meetings. I help with planning things, including the funerals and memorial services if needed.

What happens at the palliative care meetings?
JD: That’s where the patient meets with whoever the bereavement coordinator is, fetal medicine doctor, OBGYN, neonatologist, director of women’s services, basically any medical person is there, and we go over a game plan, birth plan, organ donations, etc. I will talk to the family and get their wishes for their baby, and then call all the funeral homes to find the most cost efficient way to meet their needs.

Usually I attend these meetings as a a representative of M.E.N.D. and as support to the family. When I go, I arrive early to provide a folder to everyone at the meeting. In this folder I include information on anencephaly, latest research, and a short letter for health care providers on how to care for families like us...to make them informed of what to say and when to say it. I try to have them read it and ask me questions before they talk to the patient.

What is the toughest part for you in all this?
JD: Calling the funeral homes. Trying to explain to the funeral homes, that

"Jennie was a beautiful friend during Hannah Grace’s time in the womb, her birth, and her passing. Her compassion, knowledge, and presence made all the difference, not just to me, but to my family and friends as well. She answered so many questions in the most loving way. I am so grateful she was willing to come alongside us and share her story and wisdom with us. Her daughters' legacies live on every time she helps another family going through a similar journey."

-Jennifer Perez, Mommy to Hannah Grace
“There is something wrong with your baby, so we need to refer you to the high-risk doctor.” Hearing these words at a 12-week ultrasound was the beginning of how my life began to change. At another appointment a few weeks later, during the ultrasound I was given the diagnosis. With what felt like the coldest voice, the doctor said, “Your baby has anencephaly, and it’s not compatible with life.”

Everything stood still. I could hear my heart beat. I remember her speaking, but I was in such shock I couldn’t respond. I do remember clearly her saying the best thing would be to terminate as I wouldn’t even make it to 16 weeks. But terminating was never an option for me. I decided only God could make that decision. My goal was to try to make it full-term.

As I was leaving my 16-week follow-up appointment with the high risk doctor, I was crying when I ran into a genetics counselor. As I was telling her my story, she said, “Here, give Jennie a call. She’ll know how to guide you.”

I remember entering her phone number and praying for answers, for help, for hope, since all I had heard was negative. When Jennie returned my call, she shared with me how she had been down the same road twice. I was sure God put her in my path to help me find some needed peace. I always felt alone. No matter to whom I spoke, no one could understand. My family was supportive, but they didn’t totally understand. Jennie understood since she had been there, twice.

Jennie helped us in so many ways. She helped me switch from my uncomfortable and discouraging doctors to an amazing team of doctors and staff who had worked with cases like mine before, and treated me with respect and like a “normal” pregnant woman. Jennie accompanied us to many appointments, including ultrasounds and doctors’ conferences, to provide not just moral support but to ask the necessary questions. Jennie also helped us through the most difficult task of this journey: Funeral homes. No parent should have to make these calls. I am sure this must have brought back many hurtful memories, but she did it to help us.

At 40 weeks, Gabriella made her grand entrance. She was born sleeping. I cannot imagine not having Jennie there that special day. Seeing the love Jennie has for my daughter, how she held her ... she did not see a dead baby, but a tiny person who left an imprint in many lives. Jennie not only guided me when I felt blind and alone, she helped me emotionally, physically, psychologically, but most importantly, she gave us love during this whole process. Gabriella’s journey ended smoothly because of all the help Jennie gave. I will never be able to repay everything she did for me, my baby and my family. Thank you for all you did for us. I not only made a new friend during a difficult time; we share a bond no one can break! "

By Yessica Sotomayor
Mommy to Gabriella
M.E.N.D.—Houston

More than Support

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Mi bebé, Jonathan, fue nacido sin vida en 1995, cuando el Internet estaba empezando. Fue años antes de que Facebook, Instagram y similares fueron introducidas. Cuando Jonathán murió, aún no poseíamos una computadora personal, casi nadie tenía uno. Así que, mi único sistema de apoyo fue mi familia maravillosa y unos pocos amigos cercanos. Varios meses después de nuestra pérdida, compramos una computadora, pero se sentó sin usar en la esquina de nuestra habitación por semanas. No sé aún por qué lo compramos. Finalmente decidimos “unirnos al Internet,” obtener una cuenta de correo electrónico y nos atrevimos a navegar El Mundo del Web. Sin embargo, no sabía lo que estábamos navegando exactamente. Había oído hablar de salas de chat, pero también había advertido de los peligros potenciales de los extraños virtuales aprendiendo demasiada información acerca de uno mismo. Por lo tanto, me quedé lejos de esos lugares ominosos.

Amistades virtuales

Luego me enteré de algo llamado el Listserv, que era un servicio de correo electrónico que permitía comunicar sobre temas específicos a través de correo electrónico. El Listserv que me ingresé fue llamado Infanlos. Pasé horas y horas de comunicación con los miembros de este grupo. Leí sus llantos, lloré con ellos y con el tiempo me sentí suficientemente cómoda como para compartir mis sentimientos íntimos. Eran desconocidos, pero todas nos hicimos amigos rápidamente debido al único vínculo que compartimos como mamas con brazos vacíos.

Finalmente sentí que había conectado con personas que realmente me entendían. Me comprendían y yo los comprendía a ellos. Aunque mi familia era amorosa y llena de apoyo de lo más posible, necesitaba hablar con otras personas que habían caminado el mismo viaje solitario de perder a un bebé. Fue entonces que comprendí que mis pensamientos y sentimientos secretos eran normales de este tipo de pérdida. Me di cuenta que no era la única mujer que sentía un dolor literal en la tutela de su brazo. Yo no.
Isaac and Laura Ozinga of Seabrook, Texas, along with big brother Andrew, joyfully announce the arrival of Michael Patrick Lee, born February 21, 2017, measuring 8 lbs., 6 oz., and 20 inches long.

The family lovingly remembers Julia Mtendere, miscarried January 1, 2016.

Subsequent Births

Isaac and Laura Ozinga of Seabrook, Texas, along with big brother Andrew, joyfully announce the arrival of Michael Patrick Lee, born February 21, 2017, measuring 8 lbs., 6 oz., and 20 inches long.

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"Alégrense con los que están alegres y lloren con los que lloran." Romanos '12:15
Legacy Giving

Losing a child has changed each of our lives forever. We appreciate all financial support of the services our organization gives to bereaved parents—no matter the size of the contribution. However, some of you may have the capacity and desire to give a lifelong gift to Mend.

If you’re interested in creating a legacy gift or endowment in honor of your baby, Mend would be happy to assist you in gathering the necessary information to remember our organization in your will or trust. For more information about legacy giving, please contact Rebekah Mitchell at rebekah@mend.org.
M.E.N.D.—Houston, Texas
Meets the 1st Thursday at 7:00 p.m.
4888 Loop Central Drive, Suite 200,
Houston, TX 77081
Meets the 3rd Thursday at 7:30 p.m.
Lone Star College,
3200 College Park Dr, Room A228,
The Woodlands, Texas 77384
Director: Stormy Mitchell
stormym@mend.org, (281) 374-8528

Subsequent pregnancy group meets every other month
on the 3rd Thursday at 7:30 p.m.,
led by Stormy Mitchell
(stormym@mend.org)

Daddy’s group meets quarterly
on the 3rd Thursday at 7:30 p.m.,
led by Greg Miller
(stephaniem@mend.org)

M.E.N.D.—NW Washington
Meets the 2nd Monday at 6:30 p.m.
Harrison Medical Center/Iris Room
1800 Myhre Rd.
Silverdale, Washington 98383
Director: Stacy McGhee
stacym@mend.org, (360) 662-6161

M.E.N.D.—SW Missouri
Meets the 1st Thursday at 7:00 p.m.
Project H.O.P.E.
1419 S. Enterprise
Springfield, Missouri 65804
Director: Kathryn Gold
kathryn@mend.org, (417) 770-0600

M.E.N.D.—Bryan/College Station
Meets the 2nd Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.
Texas Avenue Baptist Church
1010 University Drive East
College Station, Texas 77840
Director: Jennie Drude
jennie@mend.org, (979) 220-7851

M.E.N.D.—Tulsa, Oklahoma
Meets the 3rd Tuesday at 7:00 p.m.
Canyon Crossing
1651 E Old North Rd.
Sand Springs, Oklahoma 74063
Director: Lisa Daily
lisa@mend.org, (918) 694-4325 (HEAL)

M.E.N.D.—Chicagoland, Illinois
Meets the 1st Tuesday at 7:00 p.m.
St Peter Lutheran Church
202 E Schaumburg Road
Schaumburg, Illinois 60194
Director: Sara Hintz
saraann@mend.org, (630) 267-9134

M.E.N.D.—Austin, Texas
MORE DETAILS COMING SOON!

M.E.N.D. chapter support groups
are held the 2nd Thursday of every month
from 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

Daddies group
meets the 2nd Thursday of March, June, Sept. and Dec.,
from 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.
A time for dads to meet together and discuss topics relevant to them as fathers.
Our moms and dads meet together for introductions before dividing into two groups for discussion.

Subsequent pregnancy group
meets the 4th Tuesday
from 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.
Led by Liz Walker: liz@mend.org
For families who are considering becoming pregnant or are currently pregnant after a loss.

Food and Fellowship
are held the 4th Thursday of every month at 8:00 p.m.
at the Corner Bakery in Southlake Town Center
A time to relax and meet with other M.E.N.D. parents in a social setting.
Contact Brittney Fish:
brittney@mend.org

Infertility group
meets the 3rd Monday
at 7:30 p.m.
Contact Cheryl Davis for group location and information at Cheryl@mend.org
For families experiencing infertility after a loss.
M.E.N.D. Fundraisers

As a non-profit organization, M.E.N.D. is funded solely by private donations and fundraisers. Any assistance you can give us by participating in any or all of these fundraisers is greatly appreciated.

Link your Kroger Plus Card to M.E.N.D. to help provide financial support while you do your regular shopping!

Kroger Grocery stores donate a percentage of all purchase of shoppers in Texas or Louisiana, who have their Kroger Plus Card linked to M.E.N.D.

Visit www.krogercommunityrewards.com to set up your account or to link your card again.
After receiving the email about your account, click on “My Account,” then “Edit Kroger Community Awards.”
Input your Kroger Plus card number.
You’ll see a screen with your information in boxes, and at the bottom right, click on “Community Awards.”
Then enter the M.E.N.D. number, which is 80513.
Once entered, confirm M.E.N.D. is your charity of choice.

This card does need to be linked every year, so make sure to visit www.krogercommunityrewards.com to link it again!