

Finding Hope and Healing Building Bears for Bereaved Mommies

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Three years ago on Sept 26, 2003 my family experienced the devastating loss of a much loved and anticipated addition to our family.

My nephew Riley Joseph was born still. Riley was perfect aside from the tragic accident that had caused his life to come to an end shortly before birth. At a time when our family should have been celebrating new life and making plans for the future we were preparing for a funeral, picking out the perfect headstone, and mourning a life lost much too soon. Riley was to be the “sunshine after the rain” being predeceased a month and a half prior by our family patriarch Robert James.

Many plans had been made for the day we would bring Riley home. A nursery had been prepared and painted with the perfect colors for a bouncing baby boy, a rocking chair adorned with a teddy bear sat in the corner waiting late night feedings, a crib stood constructed waiting to be filled with the warmth of our tiny baby boy.

For some as their dreams were envisioned they become a reality. The reality for families who experience the loss of a child during pregnancy or shortly after birth is that their dreams are crushed, the future they envisioned is no longer, and they struggle daily with their loss, isolated, and surrounded by the insensitivity of others who do mean well, but do not know how to offer their sympathy in a sensitive, caring, and professional manner.

At the time of my family’s loss we were unable to locate support services within our hospital or community to assist us in incorporating our loss into our life in a healthy manner. We were sent home to “move on” with our life without Riley. Unfortunately this situation has occurred on countless occasions, due to the unavailability of programs and services that support families and assist them to find hope, healing, and new life after their loss.

We were isolated from the same individuals who supported us through the pregnancy; we struggled to “move on” with our life with out Riley, with no support and little understanding available to us.

The first three months preceding the loss of Riley were spent in isolation due to being unable to find support services to assist me to begin to understand and live with my loss. It was at this time I sought out the internet for support and understanding; I meet many wonderful individuals who like me felt compelled

to the internet for support and to share their stories. The mommies I meet changed my life and help me to find hope and healing.

As I began to heal with what should have been Riley's first birthday approaching I felt the need to do more, to give back to the many mommies who supported me through my loss and helped me realize I was not alone. Shortly thereafter I crafted a bear to gift to my sister in memory of Riley. As I crafted my bear I filled it with love and tears with every stitch I sewed. I knew my sister surely would find the love I placed within her bear and hoped she found comfort holding and crying with it, as had I. It was this first bear that was to be the beginning of the organization that has become Bears for Bereaved Mommies.

Since our first bear in September 2004 Bears for Bereaved Mommies has distributed bears to bereaved mommies throughout Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. I often hear from mommies who have received our bears telling me how grateful they are to have received such a thoughtful gift, how our bear offered them a special friend who they could cry with, and how our bear offered them the opportunity to find hope and healing; these things alone make Bears for Bereaved Mommies all worth while.

Bears for Bereaved Mommies is continually developing and expanding to meet the needs of those who experience pregnancy and infant loss find comfort and support and to continue our campaign to raise pregnancy and infant loss awareness.

It is my hope through the work of Bears for Bereaved Mommies, families who experience the loss of a child during pregnancy or shortly after birth will find support services to assist them in incorporating their loss into their life in a healthy manner, so that they may find hope, healing and resolve.

In closing I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who attend our events, those who believed in me and the work I set out to do, to the individuals who support Bears for Bereaved mommies by giving donations, to the woman who devoted their time and skills to building Bears for Bereaved Mommies to what it has become today, and to the Ladies of October 15th. My appreciation to the late Dr. Mary Eileen Travis who encouraged me to continue my work, this is for you.

For more information go to www.bearsforbereavedmommies.org