

Remembering Meg and Noah

*The Alfonsin Family Rebuilds Hope after
Suffering the Loss of Two Children*

Written by Tess Alfonsin
Photography by Suzanne Box



Life as a married couple began much as I had always imagined. I married my college sweetheart and we enjoyed life together without kids for about three years before the call of parenthood began to ring in our ears. We carefully planned how our first child would be welcomed into the world, with our new house and me staying home from teaching for a while. Little did I know the phrase, “We plan, God laughs,” would be a teachable moment not once, but twice, in growing our family.

A Difficult Start

Pregnancy with our first child progressed normally, and I was eagerly anticipating welcoming our firstborn in November 1996. When the first contractions began the night before the baby was due, we were more than ready. The next morning, my pains began to increase and we were asked to go to the hospital. After admittance, I lay on the bed while the nurse hooked my enormous belly to the fetal heart monitor. The longer she struggled to find a heartbeat, the more I panicked. Turning the monitor away from us, she left the room and came back with the doctor.

After what felt like forever, the doctor informed us that there was no heartbeat. In shock, I gave birth in a cloud of disbelief and grief 14 hours later to the most beautiful baby girl I had ever seen. She was born weighing a healthy 9 pounds, 10 ounces, with her umbilical cord wrapped tightly twice around her ankles. Cradling Meg in my arms, I felt a piece of me die. Leaving the hospital, it felt like a cosmic joke being wheeled out with no baby to hold.

Mourning Their Daughter

For the next six months, life was an endless cycle of grief counseling, nightmares, and being holed up in our home. At night, I would wake with pains in my arms that my counselor told me were phantom pains from a baby I was unable to hold. I felt like a prisoner in the home we had so lovingly restored to welcome Meg. Whenever I did venture out to the grocery store or to church, I experienced panic attacks and insensitive comments from well-meaning friends. Slowly, my circle of support dwindled since I turned away from all of my social outlets. I found no solace in church, friends, or even family, and seeing a woman with a baby would send me into uncontrollable sobbing.

A New Blessing

In retrospect, it was a small circle of friends and family, church members, and my counselor who helped pave the road for us to be ready to welcome our second child a year and a half later. Pregnancy after the loss of our daughter was arduous at best, as I panicked at anything I felt was out of the ordinary. Our first son, Ben, was born in 1998 to parents who could not be more proud or thankful for his safe arrival. Although our hearts still ached for Meg, life was golden during the next two years. We spoiled our son with unbounded love, and soon, we began thinking about adding another child to our family.

Hopeful New Beginning

Pregnancy with my third child found me both happy for Ben to have a sibling and frightened once again about every possible thing going wrong. The doctor assured me that everything was progressing as it should be. However, 36 weeks into my pregnancy, I was rushed to the hospital with tremendous pain. The baby was lying transverse, or sideways, and he was quickly delivered via C-section after my water broke spontaneously. Immediately, the doctors whisked Noah away to the ICU and began doing tests on him. Something was not quite right with him and they could not put their finger on it.



Tess and Jose are proud of their strong marriage and family



Nate is the Alfonsin's second oldest son



Tess and Jose have been blessed with three healthy sons, Nate, Sam, and Ben



The Alfonsin's welcomed their oldest son, Ben, in 1998

After two weeks in the hospital and numerous procedures - one major surgery, one spinal tap, and a few EKG's and MRI's thrown in for good measure - we took Noah home praying that what the doctors were warning us about was not true. He was later hospitalized for another month after he stopped breathing at home. During this stay, Noah was diagnosed with epilepsy and failure to thrive. Before he was discharged from the hospital, he underwent another surgery where the surgeon placed a feeding tube in him. His prognosis was grim, and we took him home frightened for the future.

Unbelievable Loss Times Two

For the next few weeks, Noah's health began to spiral downward. He would have as many as 20 or 30 epileptic seizures in one day and was diagnosed with infantile spasms. A traumatic kind of epilepsy, it was heartbreaking to helplessly watch him time after time seize and then cry. We were hopeful when Noah began an experimental drug a few weeks into his diagnosis, but it was short-lived. Then one night around 1 a.m., his fetal heart monitor went off. Rousing myself from sleep, I went to him immediately as I always did. But this time, Noah did not look right. His color was gone and he was rigid. My husband, the paramedics, and the hospital staff were unsuccessful in bringing Noah back.

It seemed a cruel joke that we were in the unenviable position of burying a second child. I immediately shut down and become almost catatonic as the sheet was pulled over our son. God could not be this cruel, could he? Hours turned into days and then into weeks and months as I went about trying to stay sane for Ben. Our church stepped in and provided meals for almost six months. Friends stopped by often, and then little by little, due to lack of interest on my part, they all but disappeared. I found myself in another small support circle, this time even smaller than the first time due to my panic attacks and severe guilt and depression.

A New Blessing

With the aid of very regular counseling sessions, medication for post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression, a strong support system of a few trusted friends and family, and my slowly building faith, I began to pull out of what was the darkest time of my life. During the next few years, we welcomed the safe birth of another son, moved away from the area so fraught with memories, welcomed one last son to the fold, and I began teaching again. I found it invigorating to live in Katy where no one knew my painful past.

It has now been 13 years since our path began with growing our family. I am proud of the person I have become, even more proud of the marriage that we have tended, and over the moon about the three blessings my husband and I fought to have. I have seen my faith falter and be borne again, my friendships crumble and be replaced with new ones, and I look to the future with a greater sense of purpose than ever before. As Rev. Dr. Peter Marshall said, "God will not permit any troubles to come upon us, unless He has a specific plan by which great blessing can come out of the difficulty."
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TESS ALFONSIN is the proud mom of three healthy boys, a wife of 16 years to her best friend, a fifth grade teacher, and a survivor.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We would like to thank Tess Alfonsin for sharing her family's story of hope. If you have an inspirational story you'd like to share, please email editor@katymagazine.com.



Helping Grieving Families

Tips for Friends of Families Grieving the Loss of a Child

- Call, email, and visit them often to let them know they are not alone.
- Don't try to find answers to their grief, but just talk with them.
- Encourage them to heal in any way they choose.
- Listen to them and their grief without trying to change the subject.
- Offer your companionship even if it means just sitting quietly with them.
- Remember and acknowledge their child to help keep their memory alive.
- They are in a fragile emotional state, so keep your words soft.
- Understand if they are not the same person as before.

- Adapted from compassionatefriends-katy.org

Support Group for Katy Area Parents



The Compassionate Friends Katy Chapter meets on the second Tuesday of every month at Kingsland Baptist Church. Visit compassionatefriends-katy.org.



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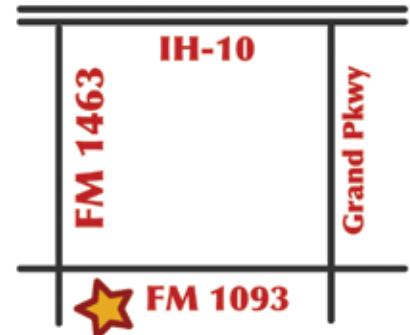
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