

Twice-Dying: Multiple Loss **Terry-Ann De Filippo**

My baby, Regina lived only a few hours. In a way she and I were lucky as her short life was filled with pain. I could ease my sorrow with the fact that she was no longer suffering. What took me by surprise was the lack of understanding that people showed. Thinks like *you are lucky you didn't get to know and love her!* My mind would cream. *No, I lost a child!*

This was my first experience with death. I felt guilty. It had been a surprise pregnancy and took awhile for me to decide I was happy about it. Did God decide that because of my original thoughts, I didn't deserve my child? Truthfully, I decided *yes*. I stopped going to church and to Bible Study classes; decided that if God was going to test me in this fashion then I wanted no part of him. I was very angry.

Yet I didn't know how to direct this anger, so I directed it towards myself. I carried my child so I must be to blame. I did small things to punish myself but I knew what they were and why I was doing them. Luckily for me, my other two children, my daughter Holly and Angelo still needed me at home. I tried harder to put my life back in order. I knew I was needed and loved by them.

Later, our house was hit by a tornado. Again, nobody really considered it a "loss" as we were not there at the time. We had lousy insurance, and could only get interest rates at high percentages than everyone else. We did most of the work ourselves. I remember wondering HOW I could have done it if I had a baby to take care of too. Then I would feel guilty for even thinking such a thing.

I made sure my children knew I loved and enjoyed them. Skinny Angelo in his big football uniform, little Holly standing next to him, holding his hand. On her head was his football helmet.

A short time later, my father died. My God, he was supposed to be infallible. Holly took his death very hard. I began to realize that you better do the things in life that you do now. You may not get the chance later. Angelo graduated from high school, Holly entered it. I felt so smart. I knew the answers to life—which was loving and enjoying the people you have.

But this terrible, ugly monster, Death, was going to take my beloved 14-year-old Holly. To say her death shattered my world would be an understatement.

Holly woke up with a sore neck and hurting under her arms. We had gone camping so I figured it could be the change in beds. I called the doctor and mentioned that I was concerned about the possibility of meningitis. Later that day I brought Holly into the doctor as she had developed "spots". For some reason when I brought Holly into the doctor, I reminded him that I had already lost one child so please be extra careful with

holly. After being assured that I was just being a panicky mother and that holly only had the flu, I went home, subdued.

That afternoon Holly said she felt she was dying. I told her you sometimes felt like that with the flu. I put cool cloths on her and stroked her head. Holly rapidly became worse. We rushed her to the hospital. My precious holly, the one person in the world who I thought would always be there giving me love, was pronounced dead the next day.

With Regina's and my Father's deaths, I had been able to find some sort of consolation. Not so with Holly's death. Meningitis is treatable is caught in time. I can find no reason why she should have dies.

How do you live without someone who makes your life complete? Your heart feels like it is breaking. You literally can feel it ripping.

I decided to help as many people (including myself) as I could through the first year. If I could not endure the pain at the end of a year, I would commit suicide. This was a great comfort to me as I would only have to endure this pain for a year.

I established a Holly memorial to reward kids for helping others. I wrote a description of Holly and have it to family so that Holly would never be forgotten. I wrote stories for children to try to help them cope with things such as death. I sought professional help. I went to a support group. The first one was not for me. Later my doctor suggested a support group of people who live in Chronic Pain. I was sure that I would not like it.

I cannot begin to tell you how much this group helped me. At first I didn't fell like I belonged. Then slowly I noticed everyone was experiencing the same feelings I was. I heard people telling how they miss the person they used to be. They no longer know who they are or what their purpose in life is. They go through terrible depressions and even consider suicide. Most of all though, they show love and support that carried people through when nothing else can. They make me realize that maybe there is a purpose to my still being alive. Maybe Holly accomplished her mission in life but I have not.

A big comfort to me is the times I can communicate with holly. One time I felt she told me that I had to live. That I could not join her now no matter how much I wanted to. I cannot always communicate with her, but when I really need to, I can. I will never "get over" the loss of Holly, but now I know I can live on. My life will be different than it was before but I can make it.

If I had to pass on one message it would be that by reaching out to help others my pain was eased and that if you are hurting maybe this could help you too. That even if you start off doing it for the "wrong" reasons, you might end up being surprised.