

FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER

On this breeze, I send you love



MESSAGE FROM FIRSTLIGHT CEO

Dear friends and supporters of FirstLight,

I hope you are getting the opportunity to benefit from the easing of Covid-19 restrictions currently underway. And let's hope they continue and that we avoid any further pandemic waves.

In this issue, we share some beautiful photographs taken during the recent Mile in Memory walks. 14 walks took place around the country on a virtual basis (due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions) on Father's Day, June 20th; 7 across County Dublin, 2 in County Meath, 1 in each of Counties Kerry, Cork, Limerick, and Monaghan, and 1 in Banbridge, Northern Ireland.

We also share in this issue details of a recent publication, *A Memoir of Life after Loss in a Multiple Pregnancy* which includes contributions by 10 Mums who have experienced multiple pregnancy loss. The contributors hope that this loss memoir will allow the reader to experience the journey of others who have lost a baby or babies in a multiple pregnancy.

One of the authors, Judy Carmody, who lost her twin daughter some 30 years ago refers to the absence of supports at the time. She believes that social media now offers a key benefit in that it allows others to share experiences, especially when it comes to baby loss.

FirstLight has established some closed Facebook groups to enable bereaved parents to talk and link in with other bereaved parents, including those who have lost a baby in a multiple pregnancy. To join these groups visit the FirstLight Facebook page where you can request to join either our Mammies, Daddies, Parents, or all three groups.

Another contributor, Mel Bentley lost her twin daughter Beatrice when she was 4 days old. Mel draws attention to the difficulty that arises when people do not know how to support a family following their loss.

If you are a bereaved parent who has lost your baby in a multiple pregnancy, you may find the experiences described by the contributors are familiar to you and may offer some comfort.

For more information on the *Irish Neonatal Health Alliance* and *Peas in a Pod* the organisations that supported the publication of this Memoir, go to www.inha.ie and [@peasinapodireland](https://www.instagram.com/peasinapodireland).

Thank you for your continued support of FirstLight,
With my best wishes to keep safe and well,

Yours sincerely,
Fionnuala Sheehan,
CEO, FirstLight

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I AM A MOTHER,
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JUST €5 PER
MONTH CAN HELP
PROVIDE
COUNSELLING TO
SUDDENLY
BEREAVED
PARENTS

**National 24-Hour
Helpline
1850 391 391**

FirstLight
Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families

MILE IN MEMORY REMEMBRANCE WALK POEM



On this breeze, I send you love.

Love which is not dimmed by time or diminished by death.

Love so strong, so beautiful that it makes the shedding of a million salty tears worthwhile.

Love which is immeasurable, indescribable.

Love which fills my broken heart.

On this breeze, I send you gratitude.

I send thanks for your life, far too brief but infinite in its impact on mine.

I send thanks for what you have taught me, for the strength you have made me discover in myself.

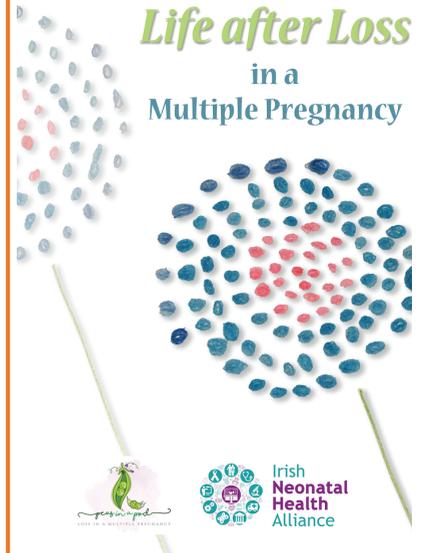
On this breeze, I send you a promise.

A promise to remember you always, a promise to count you always, a promise to hold you close in the twinkling of a starry sky, in the beat of a butterfly's wing, in the lapping of salty foam along the shore.

*On this breeze, I send you Love.
Forever and always My Love.*

NEW BOOKLET ON LIFE AFTER LOSS IN A MULTIPLE PREGNANCY

A Memoir of
Life after Loss
in a
Multiple Pregnancy



The Irish Neonatal Health Alliance have partnered with the charity Peas in a Pod: Loss in a multiple pregnancy, to produce a new booklet titled *A Memoir of Life after Loss in a Multiple Pregnancy*. The booklet is a collection of 10 short stories written by bereaved parents about life after loss of their baby or babies.

Speaking about the launch of the booklet Peas in a Pod founder Niamh Connolly said "We hope that the booklet will provide comfort to bereaved parents but also an awareness raising tool about what life after loss can be like for bereaved parents".

Peas in a Pod: Loss in a Multiple Pregnancy was set up by a group of bereaved parents in Ireland who lost a baby (babies) in a multiple pregnancy. It acts as an awareness and advocacy group.

You can download a copy of *A Memoir of Life after Loss in a Multiple Pregnancy* from the Irish Neonatal Health Alliance www.inha.ie

14 VIRTUAL MILE IN MEMORY REMEMBRANCE WALKS FOR FATHER'S DAY 2021



BEREAVED DADS: THE BRAVEST, BEST KIND OF DAD WE WISH HE NEVER HAD TO BE



I want to point out something I've realized that I think might go unnoticed by most of society: Bereaved dads are brave dads. The bravest dads. We talk a lot about what bereaved moms go through and how fierce they are as mothers. But the dads undoubtedly deserve more recognition than they get.

The bereaved dads I know are truly incredible. They help the bereaved moms pick up the pieces of a life ravaged by grief, while simultaneously grieving themselves. They put on strong faces as they tell loved ones the news their partner may not be able to get off her lips. They go before her, preparing the way for her to cautiously re-enter social environments, setting expectations and cautioning others of what she can and cannot handle.

They break down and get vulnerable with her when she needs to know she's not the only one grieving. They give her space to grieve harder because it was her body that carried this child. Bereaved dads generally have to return to work sooner. They become masters of compartmentalization so they can competently do their jobs during the day and do the work of grieving when it feels safe to go there. They field endless questions of "how is your wife/partner doing?" for months after the loss, and answer them graciously despite the nagging voice in their heads saying "what about me?" If we moms feel the pressure to "get over it," the dads feel it a hundredfold.

Bereaved dads are brave dads. They talk about their son or daughter as a member of their family, even in a society that would rather pretend infant loss doesn't exist. They tattoo his name on their bodies, or they plant a tree in her honor. They run races and make charitable donations in their child's name. They plan funerals, they visit gravesites, they put away the baby items spread throughout the house. They close the door on the nursery, filled with all the gear they wrestled to assemble in the preceding days. Oh that "some assembly required" was the hardest part of their fatherhood. Bereaved dads are brave dads.

These brave dads boldly jump into subsequent attempts to conceive and if they are so blessed, subsequent pregnancies, despite the fear of losing another and the fear of how their partner will cope. They deliver the news that's hard to hear – news of friends' new pregnancies and healthy babies, when they feel like it may never happen for them. They come up with caring ways to respond to "why us" all the hundreds of times it's asked. They tell the grieving moms and grieving grandparents: 'it will be okay, we will find a way forward', even when they are not sure they believe it themselves. Bereaved dads are brave dads, and we should celebrate that bravery every day, and especially this Father's Day.

Is there a bereaved dad in your life? I invite you to remind him often that he is the bravest, the best, kind of dad. The bravest, best kind of dad we wish he never had to be.

About the Author



Elizabeth Yassenoff lives in Granville, Ohio with her husband, 3-year-old daughter, infant son, dogs Maggie and Brig and cat Cato. Her firstborn son, Jacob Dale, passed away three hours after birth due to unexpected complications during labour. Elizabeth is a Certified International Health Coach.

She graduated from the Institute for Integrative Nutrition (IIN) in January 2018, after finding more joy and balance in her life through working with a health coach herself. Elizabeth writes for Still Standing Magazine and on her blog to honor her son, Jacob.

I AM A MOTHER, I AM A BEREAVED MOTHER



My child died, and this is my reluctant path. It is not a path of my choice, but it is a path I must walk mindfully and with intention. It is a journey through the darkest night of my soul and it will take time to wind through the places that scare me. Every cell in my body aches and longs to be with my beloved child. On days when grief is loud, I may be impatient, distracted, frustrated, and unfocused. I may get angry more easily, or I may seem hopeless. I will shed many, many, many tears. I won't smile as often as my old self. Smiling hurts now. Almost everything hurts some days, even breathing.

But please, just sit beside me. Say nothing. Do not offer a cure. Or a pill, or a word, or a potion. Witness my suffering. Don't turn away from me. Please be gentle with me. And I will try to be gentle with me too. I will not ever "get over" my child's death so please don't urge me down that path.

Even on days when grief is quiescent when it isn't standing loudly in the foreground, even on days when I am even able to smile again, the pain is just beneath the surface. There are days when I still feel paralyzed. My chest feels the sinking weight of my child's absence and, sometimes, I feel as if I will explode from the grief. Losing my child affects me in so many ways: as a woman, a mother, a human being. It affects every aspect of me: spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. There are days when I barely recognize myself in the mirror anymore.

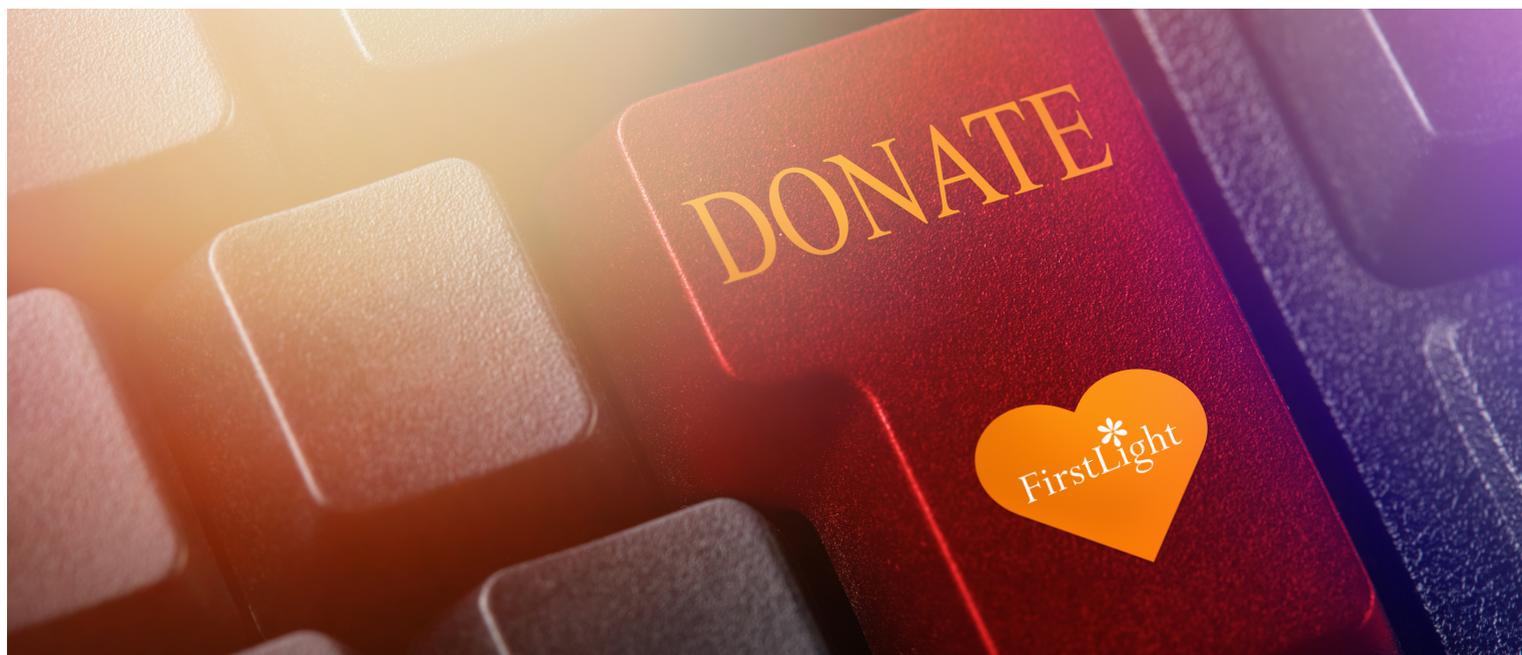
Grief is as personal to me as my fingerprint. Don't tell me how I should or shouldn't be grieving or that I should or shouldn't "feel better by now." Don't tell me what's right or wrong. I'm doing it my way, in my time. If I am to survive this, I must do what is best for me. My understanding of life will change and a different meaning of life will slowly evolve. What I knew to be true or absolute or real or fair about the world has been challenged so I'm finding my way, moment-to-moment in this new place.

Things that once seemed important to me are barely thoughts any longer. I notice life's suffering more- hungry children, the homeless and the destitute, a mother's harsh voice toward her young child- or an elderly person struggling with the door. There are so many things about the world which I now struggle to understand: Why do children die? There are some questions, I've learned, which are simply unanswerable.

So please don't tell me that "God has a plan" for me. This, my friend, is between me and my God. Those platitudes slip far too easily from the mouths of those who tuck their own child into a safe, warm bed at night: Can you begin to imagine your own child, flesh of your flesh, lying lifeless in a casket, when "goodbye" means you'll never see them on this Earth again? Grieving mothers- and fathers- and grandparents- and siblings won't wake up one day with everything 'okay' and life back to normal. I have a new normal now.

As time passes, I may gain gifts, and treasures, and insights but anything gained was too high a cost when compared to what was lost. Perhaps, one day, when I am very, very old, I will say that time has truly helped to heal my broken heart. But always remember that not a second of any minute of any hour of any day passes when I am not aware of the presence of my child's absence, no matter how many years lurk over my shoulder, don't forget that I have another one, another child, whose absence, like the sky, is spread over everything as C.S. Lewis said ... "My child may have died; but my love - and my motherhood - never will."

Just €5 Per Month Can Help Provide Counselling to Suddenly Bereaved Parents



Thank you for helping us provide professional bereavement support services this year so far to 101 families that lost their child in 2020 and 2021. Regular gifts from friends of FirstLight help us offer timely services to these families, free of charge. They also provide a reliable source of income that allows us to plan ahead with greater confidence and to keep our fundraising costs to a minimum.

Mums, Dads, brothers and sisters are all affected by the sudden death of a child within the family and we provide professional supports to all who require them.

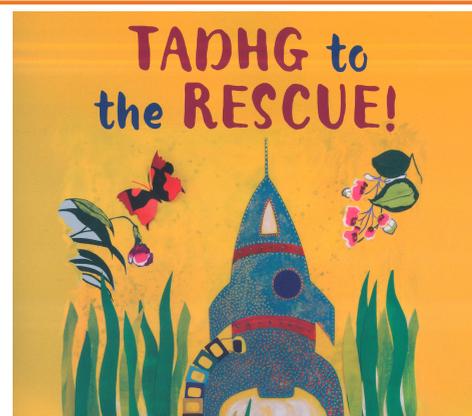
A gift of €5 per month will provide a couple who have lost their child with a counselling session. Your gift of €5 per month, along with that of seven other FirstLight friends, will provide a full cycle of counselling sessions to the couple.

You can create a monthly direct debit donation online now – it just takes a few minutes. You can cancel your donation at any time simply by calling us at 01-8732711 or Emailing info@firstlight.ie.

Copies of *Tadhg to the Rescue* for €10 each with all proceeds going to FirstLight

Kariann and Eoin have very kindly donated 80 copies of *Tadhg to the Rescue* to FirstLight. The book can be purchased for €10 per copy, with all proceeds going directly to FirstLight.

If you would like a copy of *Tadhg to the Rescue*, email info@firstlight.ie or call 01-8732711.



FirstLight

Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families

National 24-Hour Helpline 1850 391 391

Carmichael Centre, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7
Phone: 01-8732711: Website: www.firstlight.ie: Charity No. CHY7716

If you have a newsletter query or a story for inclusion in the newsletter please email info@firstlight.ie