

Haven for the heart

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By Mark Toszczak, Staff Writer
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GRAHAM — In early 2002, Christie and Darrell Moser were preparing for the birth of their first child. They painted the nursery summer-glow yellow and decorated it in an English cottage style. They went to baby showers, decided on names.

On Feb. 13, 2002, Darrell Kirkpatrick Moser III was born — six pounds, four ounces, 20 1/2 inches long. And stillborn. Dead of a “cord accident.”

“The hurt was so bad that there was actually — you could feel the aching in your chest,” Darrell Moser said.

A few months later, Christie Moser was pregnant again. But on July 17, 2002, they lost the baby to a miscarriage.

Christie Moser is pregnant and due this month, hoping that this time the tears they shed will be tears of joy.

They have used their experiences to help others. Over the past year, the couple has formed a nonprofit organization, Haven of Hope & Healing, to provide support and resources for parents who have lost children to miscarriage, stillbirth and early-infant death.

There is a support group at Alamance Regional Medical Center for parents who have lost children during pregnancy, but going back there to talk about the experience just reminded the Mosers more of the loss — though they plan to deliver their next child at Alamance Regional. Instead, they wanted a place, maybe with a lending library, where people could talk to and listen to others who had experienced similar loss and find books and other resources.

“There is information out there you can get,” Christie Moser said, but “as far as having a person right there in front of your face that you can talk to and relate to ... I wanted to talk about it.”

Haven formed officially in November 2002. Monthly support groups started in August, and the group organized a fund-raising golf tournament this fall and held a memory tree ceremony Dec. 1.

A fledgling organization

How to help

Know someone who's lost an infant to miscarriage, stillbirth or early infant death?

Don't:

- Brush off the loss as not serious by saying things like “You can always have another baby.”
- Withdraw from the person because you're uncomfortable with their grief.
- Moralize or judge.
- Change the subject when the parent starts to talk about the loss.
- Assume you know how the parent is feeling just because you've gone through a loss yourself.

Do

- Offer to listen, and then be available if the parent wants to talk.
- Offer simple expressions of sympathy, such as “I'm sorry.”
- Remember anniversaries, due dates and other significant dates.

The organization meets in donated space in a house owned by Glen Hope Baptist Church in Burlington. At the first support group meeting, just one person showed up. By November, six people were attending, and more than a dozen people gathered for the memory tree ceremony.

Losing a baby can be devastating. Family and friends may unknowingly say things that hurt more than help.

“Family and friends, well meaning, do sometimes say ‘You can have another baby,’ but one baby just does not replace another,” said Carolyn Boyd, senior staff chaplain at Women’s Hospital of Greensboro.

“For the family who was anticipating the baby, for the mom who was delivering the baby, it’s an incredible loss for them,” Boyd said. “They had a future planned with that baby.”

Mac Ernest, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Wake Forest University Health Sciences who specializes in maternal fetal medicine, advises patients not to take ill-considered comments from friends and family personally.

Painful reminders

But even with considerate support, daily life is drenched with images of happy, healthy babies, images that become painful reminders of what might have been.

“Until you’ve lost a baby you don’t realize how many baby pictures there are in advertising, whether it’s print or mass media,” said Diana L. Dell, a physician and professor of obstetrics/gynecology and psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center.

Miscarriages are relatively common. Recognizable miscarriages, where the mother knew she was pregnant when it occurred, happen in 10 to 20 percent of pregnancies, Ernest said.

The combination of constant reminders in advertising and the media, the sight of other babies and young children and hurtful comments from friends and families can sometimes drive grieving parents into isolation. And friends and family members may not be comfortable dealing with the grief.

“I withdrew a lot,” said Christie Moser, whose father had died just two weeks earlier. “I was very depressed. People tend to pull away, too, because they don’t know how to deal with it.”

Want to know more?

Want to contact Haven of Hope & Healing? Call them at (336) 227-8306 or visit them online at .

The Mosers say they leaned on each other and were helped by a strong church family and their faith in God. Though they don’t push religion on people who come to Haven for Hope & Healing, they are willing to share what helped them.

After the death of little Darrell, Christie Moser felt called to do something in his memory, to help people in similar circumstances.

“I feel like the Lord just laid something on my heart to start some kind of a center,” she said. “I wanted to do something in little Darrell’s memory, to help people.”

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