

WISCONSIN PERSPECTIVES

THE CHRISTOPHER TREE

By Cathi Lammert

On Dec. 4, the first anniversary of Christopher's death, we gathered with loving members of both sides of our families at our church for a Mass that was to honor Christopher. After church we adjourned to our home for a delicious brunch that everyone helped prepare. It was very comforting to be with our family on this day as we remembered our precious son.

To our surprise, we were given a very special gift of a small blue spruce tree by my family. We were so touched by this endearing gift; it was a gift that would allow us to continually commemorate Christopher. It was a remembrance of him that we could see everyday.

Immediately, we had to find just the right spot for our tree, so we walked around the yard and all decided it would look best in one corner of our front yard. Later that cold winter day and with a great deal of tenderness, we planted our little spruce. After the blue spruce was in its chosen place, it seemed that something was missing. After all, this was

the beginning of the Christmas season. So we decided to decorate the tree with brightly shining white lights that would symbolize his purity and presence.

Somehow, this little blue spruce brought us peace. It acknowledged our love for Christopher as we began the Christmas season. And so it became a tradition we looked forward to during our anniversary time.

Each year we would adorn the tree with simple white lights and remember our son and brother. As the years passed, many people referred to the little blue spruce as the Christopher Tree.

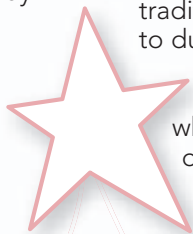
In the summer of 1989, we built a new home and moved a few miles away.

In our closing contract with the new owners of our former home, we stated that the blue spruce in the front yard would be transplanted to the Lammert's new residence in the fall.

Someone buying a home may balk at such a request, but there was no protest from the buyers of our home.

In early fall, I contacted a landscaping company and requested

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AVOID USING COUGH SUPPRESSANTS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

By Ralph A. Franciosi, MD – Dr. Franciosi is program director of Perinatal and Infant Pathology at Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin, a professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin and serves as the medical advisor to the Infant Death Center of Wisconsin.

Cold and flu season is here and the recent voluntary recall of infant and toddler over-the-counter cold medicines has many parents wondering how to care for their children when they are sick. In January 2007, the Centers for Disease Control issued a warning advising families to stop giving cough and cold medicine to infants and toddlers younger than age 2. In October 2007, manufacturers voluntarily withdrew their infant cold and cough medicines following reports by the Food and Drug Administration that indicated some medicines had serious side effects, including death in patients ages 6 and younger.

Since 1997, the Infant Death Center of Wisconsin has provided guidance to families encouraging them to avoid cough suppressants. Our research efforts are directed toward understanding what makes an infant vulnerable and defining the critical developmental window after birth. These studies are very complex and will take years to complete. In the meantime, we encourage a practical approach for reducing risk factors associated with sudden infant death syndrome. One potential risk factor is the use of cough suppressants.

In 1985, A. Kahn, MD, and his colleagues at University Hospital in Belgium, wrote an article about the adverse effects of medications containing phenothiazine on infants. The article stated a therapeutic dose can change an infant’s sleep characteristics and result in central, obstructive apnea. They recommended central nervous system depressants be avoided in infants younger than age 1. Apparently in Europe, this medication frequently is prescribed.

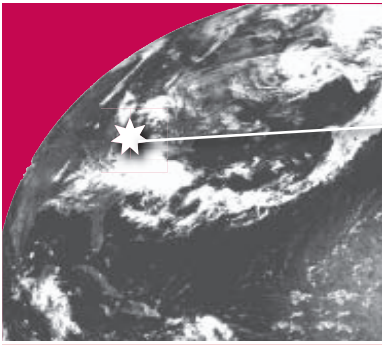
The Committee on Drugs of the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended drugs used to suppress a cough

be avoided in children, especially infants. Their statement noted numerous over-the-counter cough and cold medications are available and most cough suppressants contain a mixture of dextromethorphan or codeine, antihistamine, decongestant and expectorant in elixirs that contain alcohol. The dextromethorphan and codeine are thought to act directly on the central control of coughing in the brain stem and have the same potential to affect infants’ sleep characteristics as central nervous system depressants. To avoid potential risks, we encourage families to safely dispose of any infant cold and cough medications they have in their homes.

While the use of over-the-counter infant and child cough and cold medications is not recommended, there are alternative ways to care for your child. Parents can try saltwater nose drops or spray, using a bulb syringe in infants and helping older children to blow their nose; run a humidifier or vaporizer in the bedroom; provide your child with plenty of fluids and help him or her sleep more upright. Regular acetaminophen (the medication in Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (in Motrin® and Advil®) are safe and can help your child feel better while his or her body’s immune system fights the infection.

In addition, the Back to Sleep Campaign also is an attempt to reduce risk factors – prone sleeping and using a soft sleep surface. Other known risk factors are maternal smoking and infant exposure to second hand smoke. Because these risk factors seem to increase the incidence of SIDS, we encourage parents to protect their infants from exposure to the effects of smoking, both before and after birth.

To help avoid potential risks to infants, we will continue to update you on risk factors. Your physician also is a valuable resource. ↩



The Christopher Tree from space.

PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

The Christopher Tree *continued from Page 1*

that the blue spruce be transplanted. I did not give an explanation of the significance of the tree and the man to whom I spoke asked no questions. He agreed to move the tree sometime in the near future. When I turned the page of the calendar to the month of November, I thought surely the blue spruce would be moved soon. I couldn't imagine a holiday season without it.

I should not have been surprised that on Nov. 30, the anniversary of Christopher's fifth birthday, I received a phone call from the gentleman from the landscaping company saying, "I will be transplanting the blue spruce sometime this week." His timing was incredible! I was really excited because I knew the Christopher Tree finally was coming home. Within that week, on Dec. 4, the fifth anniversary of Christopher's death, there was an unexpected, strong knock at our front door. It was the gentleman from the landscaping company. I couldn't believe he was really here at our new home on this special day. Together we picked just the right spot for the blue spruce.

When he finished transplanting the tree, I invited him to come into the house. I shared with him the significance of the week and his timing, explained how much the blue spruce meant to us and described our tradition of decorating the tree in memory of Christopher. He was so very touched by our story. When I asked him how much I owed him, he said, "I can't charge you a cent; it has been a gift to hear your story. I'm glad I could do that for you."

That evening, Shaun, Heather, Megan, Shannon, Chuck and I were elated. We decorated our little blue spruce, our Christopher Tree and remembered. The tree standing alone in our unlandscaped yard symbolized Christopher's role in our family, apart yet together. It glowed as Christopher himself seemed to welcome our friends and family into our home for that Christmas season, as well as every one since then. Once

again, he guided us home and gave us a focus for our family. That very first year in our new home, we knew Christopher was still very much a part of our lives, and we felt his presence in a very endearing and special way.

Over the years, the Christopher Tree has brought our family great comfort during the Christopher days and the holiday season. We continue to decorate the tree in our son's memory. Our grown children call us to ask, "Did Dad get the tree done?" My husband, Chuck, is very particular in his placement of the lights and it takes several hours to adorn the tree as it now stands more than 15 feet tall. This year, in 2006, he gingerly placed 3,500 white lights on it. As neighbors, family and friends, who now know the Christopher Tree story, turn the corner to our street, they often smile and sometimes shed a few tears when they see the glistening tree, as it is one of the most beautiful trees around. My son-in-law, David, jokes and tells me you can see the Christopher Tree from space.

This year also was a very special year as our oldest son, Shaun, got married in May. When the photographer arrived at our home, Shaun shared with her that he wanted to include Christopher, his little and only brother who died, somehow in the pictures. We had no idea he was thinking about this. After they talked about the options, it was determined the best place for all the groom pictures was right in front of the Christopher Tree. The pictures were really special, and Christopher was included in our very happy and quite memorable day. ↩

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EXCERPTS FROM WHAT HAPPENS AFTER CHRISTMAS?

By Maureen O'Brien

We certainly can't change the nature of the winter that is upon us. No matter what we do, there will be days with fewer hours of sunlight. It will be cold and the snow and ice may well keep us inside more than we would like. Though none of that can be changed, what we can have complete control over is "slowing down" in mind and body and giving ourselves some time to heal from the pain of loss.

Winter is, in itself, a "slow time." Life seems to come to a halt for awhile; trees are bare and new life is dormant under the snow-covered Earth. There is a quiet that hangs on the air. It can be in the quietness, in this slow-paced expectancy of a spring that will eventually come, that we can begin to open ourselves to the gentle prodding of beginning a new life. But in order to do that, we must indeed "slow down."

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PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

THE HOLIDAYS AND GRIEF

By Jan Borgman

Holidays occur throughout the year. Some holidays hold more meaning and traditions than others. Most of the holidays observed or celebrated within your family may be spaced throughout the year. The grief reactions to them may be a little easier to deal with because they are more spread out. But during this time of the year there seems to be a greater emphasis on the “holiday spirit” and “family gatherings.” It seems that fall and early winter holds more holidays than the other seasons. Your faith tradition or religious beliefs may influence the holidays observed in the coming weeks. During this time of year there is an increased focus on families gathering to celebrate the season or to give thanks for the gift of family and friends. But for those grieving the death of a loved one, the holidays are reminders of what they no longer have – an intact family due to the death of a loved one. In the best of circumstances, the holidays are stressful. Add the death of a loved one and the holidays may feel even more stressful and lonely.

Holiday grief is like herding a flock of geese

The elderly woman sat close to the fire as she adjusted the blanket she had wrapped around herself. It was an unusually cold and blustery night as the north winds howled. Her windows frosted over as the temperature dropped. She was trying to keep herself warm despite the drafts that chilled the lifeless room. This holiday has been difficult for her ever since her husband died. She wished this time of year would “just go away” or better, not occur at all. While others gathered for the holidays, her sadness and aloneness engulfed her. She no longer had family to gather for a holiday meal or to share memories. There seemed to be little comfort in her life.

She seemed lost in her thoughts when suddenly she heard a ruckus outside. She walked to her window, scraped the frost away and to her amazement she noticed a flock of geese on her front lawn. They were forced to land due to the severe weather conditions. She went out and tried to shoo them away, but the more she tried the more disoriented they became. She knew that if they didn't move, they would freeze to death during the night.

Her garage has been empty since she sold her husband's car. She knew it would provide shelter from the brisk north wind. She tried to get them to follow her into her garage but the harder she tried to herd them, the more they disbanded. She knew that she had to get them to shelter for their own safety. She paused a moment and then suddenly she found herself squatting and flapping her arms, and to her surprise they started to follow her into the garage. After the last one was safely in, she shut the door. She stepped back, pleased at what she had done.

She went back inside her small home and huddled closely to the fire, trying to get warm. She silently sat there listening to the geese quiet themselves, and she felt a sense of relief. She knew what it felt like to be disoriented due to unexpected changes in life. She understood all too well how it felt to be alone, scared and out of control. She has felt that way often since she lost the love of her life. As she sat by the fire trying to get warm, she remembered the cold, dark winter nights she had huddled near that fireplace with her family. She could almost hear the laughter from past holidays. She realized she had a faint smile on her face for the first time in months. She felt like she had accomplished something. She felt less alone, warmed by the memories of her loved ones. The loneliness of that holiday night eased a little.

Lessons about grief

- Initially grief may feel like a harsh, cold winter night. There may be no color, no sense of life and the loneliness may seem unbearable. You may not be able to find comfort in things around you.
- The holidays may seem harder to handle. While others gather to celebrate life and family, you may realize that your life and your family have forever changed. You may want to avoid meeting with family and friends. You may feel overwhelmed by the events associated with the holidays.
- Just when you want to be left alone, something happens to distract you and takes you away from your grief. It may be a new crisis that you must deal with or someone who needs your help. Reaching out to others can help distract you from your grief.
- Trying to shoo your grief away is as difficult as trying to herd a flock of geese. The harder you try to run from your feelings and emotions, the more disorienting the grief will become. You might not be able to think clearly, make decisions or do tasks that used to come easily to you. But entering into the experience, dealing with your grief and becoming one with it may help you feel a sense of control.
- You must face your grief and deal with the pain and emotions that you experience. Sometimes life forces us to slow down in order to deal with the grief.
- By embracing your grief you may find it easier to cope. Be aware of your reactions, feelings and fears.
- Dealing with grief as it surfaces makes it easier to work through it. You may find yourself feeling less isolated and alone as your grief reactions become less intense.
- Sometimes you may find yourself feeling a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction as you harness your energy in other places. Recalling memories and sitting in the silence can bring a sense of peace and calmness.
- Eventually, the grief will ease and you will be able to smile, laugh and enjoy life again. You may not realize it at first, but in time you will feel that you are moving on with your life. The nights will seem less lonely and harsh. The cold north winds will give way to gentle breezes. The frost on your heart will melt as memories of your loved ones warm your inner being.
- Sometimes we need to reach out to others in order to deal with our grief. Asking for or taking offers to help can be very healing. As you move through your grief, you may want to reach out to others in order to help them and yourself.

Lessons about coping with the holidays

- No matter how hard you try, you cannot escape the holiday season. Your grief might make you feel like you can't go on.
- You may feel isolated from your family and friends. As they celebrate the holidays, you may feel a renewed sense of anger or loneliness. The reminders of the season will surround you. While music may fill the air for some, for you it may be an irritant as it reminds you that your holidays are different due to the death of your loved one.
- People may feel like they want to protect you by including you in all their plans so "you won't be alone." Listen to your inner needs and give yourself permission to say "no" when you need to protect yourself.
- Don't be afraid to reach out to others and to allow them to do things for you this holiday season. It might take all your energy just to get through the holidays. Realize that you have options. Take control of the things you can. The holidays are going to take place. How you deal with them is up to you.
- Don't be afraid to change holiday traditions. No matter how hard you try, you will not be able to recreate the tradition due to the death of your loved one. Be creative by starting a new tradition such as changing the usual gathering place, date or menu; picking names instead of buying gifts for everyone or giving gift certificates instead of shopping.
- Anticipation often is worse than the actual event. Discuss your needs and your desires for the holidays. Make a plan that is comfortable for you. Know your options so that you don't feel forced into gatherings and events you are not ready to experience at this time.
- Allow yourself to enjoy and cherish your memories of past holidays. Don't be surprised if you find a "faint smile on your face" as you remember your loved ones. ↵

Reprinted with permission from *Grief Briefs*.

JUST FOR TODAY

By Vicky Tushingham

Just for today, I will try to live through the next 24 hours and not expect to get over my child's death, but instead learn to live with it, just one day at a time.

Just for today, I will remember my child's life, not his death, and bask in the comfort of all those treasured days and moments we shared.

Just for today, I will forgive all the family and friends who didn't help or comfort me the way I need them to. They truly did not know how.

Just for today, I will reach out to comfort a relative or friend of my child, for they are hurting, too, and perhaps we can comfort each other.

Just for today, I will free myself from my self-inflicted burden of guilt, for deep in my heart I know if there was anything I could have done to save my child from death, I would have done it.

Just for today, I will honor my child's memory by doing something with another child because I know that would have made my own child proud.

Just for today, I will offer my hand in friendship to another bereaved parent, for I do know how they feel.

Just for today, when my heart feels like breaking, I will stop and remember that grief is the price we pay for loving and the only reason I hurt is because I had the privilege of loving so much.

Just for today, I will not compare myself with others. I am fortunate to be who I am and to have had my child for as long as I did.

Just for today, I will accept that I did not die when my child died. My life did go on and I am the only one who can make that life worthwhile once more. ↵

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PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

Excerpts from *What happens after Christmas?*

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We truly can do something with these days after Christmas. They can be quiet times in which we can work at our healing and growth. The healing will never be perfect, and there always will be scars because love has the capacity to leave scars. But the scars can produce a growth beyond just survival.

The growing may be difficult. Indeed, the grieving was and is. But as nature survives the winter and moves into the freshness of a new spring, we, too, can use this time before us to begin to nurture ourselves, listen to our inner yearnings and realize that this is a time to pay attention to ourselves and to the possibility of using the cold and dreary months, as nature does, to begin to heal and grow. Spring always follows winter no matter how harsh that winter was. So, too, can strength follow suffering, if we try to work through the suffering to new life. ✎

Reprinted with permission from *Bereavement Magazine* January/February 1996.

TAKE PART IN THE 2007 WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING

The 11th annual Worldwide Candle Lighting will be held Sunday, Dec. 9, 2007. It also is National Children's Memorial Day. Everyone, in every time zone around the world, is invited to light a candle in honor of all children who have died, that their light always may shine.

As candles go out in one time zone, they will be lit in the next, creating a wave of light that will encircle the globe. Join in the 24-hour memorial by lighting a candle, wherever you are, at 7 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 9.

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

Below are some suggestions you may wish to consider for New Year's resolutions to help you as you enter the coming year.

- Try not to imagine the future – take one day at a time.
- Allow yourself time to cry, alone as well as with your loved ones.
- Don't shut family and friends out from your thoughts and feelings. Share these difficult times.
- Make plans firm enough to support you, but flexible enough to change if they do not feel right as the day or event gets closer.
- Make sure your plans are your own. Do not worry about what others think. You and your family must be comfortable with them.
- Be realistic about your expectations – of yourself, your spouse, other family members and friends.
- Relish good days, don't feel guilty and don't be discouraged because it doesn't last – it will come again and multiply.
- Take care of your health. Eat nutritious foods, get moderate exercise, drink lots of water and rest. Help your mind and body heal.
- Keep a journal to see your progress through grief.
- Do something to help someone else in memory of your child. In doing this, your child will live through you.
- Be kind to yourself – give yourself permission to have quiet time.
- Reach out to others who are grieving, share your feelings and let them share with you.

Save the Date

Family Bereavement Conference 2008, March 28 and 29,
Madison, Wis. Watch your mail for more information.

| DONORS

Naomi Bohman

Ms. Kathleen Condon

Ms. Samantha A. Laskowski

Mr. Frank Mattia

Ms. Laurie Misslich

Ms. Nancy Nawarawong

To make a gift

Children's Hospital and Health System Foundation can assist you if you or your organization would like to donate to the Infant Death Center of Wisconsin. To reach the foundation office, call (414) 266-6100.

Periodically throughout the year, you may receive mailings from the foundation seeking support. Often there is a card enclosed with options for giving. Feel free to check the Infant Death Center as an option, or write in the center if it is not listed on the card.

The center also can be chosen as an option on your United Way designation form. Your support of the program allows us to provide a continuum of services throughout the state.

Many companies provide a match to donations given by their employees. Check with your employer to see if such a program is available to you.

| IN MEMORY OF

The Infant Death Center thanks the following individuals for their generous donations in honor of someone or in memory of a special child.

These donations were received between June 1, 2007, and Sept. 30, 2007.

Baby Boy Albano

Mr. and Mrs. William J. Rebholz

Mildred Rubbert

Dick and Peggy Larsen

Gregory Logothetis

Ms. Gail Buchanan

| IN HONOR OF

Arlene Mann

Ms. Anne M. Harvieux

| Below is a list of Web site links that may be helpful resources to you:

Infant Death Center of Wisconsin, www.idcw.org

Learn about the Infant Death Center and read online articles from *Wisconsin Perspectives* and information about grief, loss and risk reduction.

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, www.chw.org

This site provides an online magazine, information on health and safety, as well as other pertinent information.

Crisis, Grief and Healing, www.webhealing.com

Find links to a wide range of Web sites including ideas on how to honor your child and articles from grief therapists.

The National SIDS/Infant Death Resource Center, www.sidscenter.com

This site provides access to, "The Death of a Child, the Grief of Parents: A Lifetime Journey," to assist families in their grief as well as other information on sudden infant death. It also provides information on safe sleep and SIDS risk reduction.

The Compassionate Friends, www.compassionatefriends.com

The Compassionate Friends assists families in the positive resolution of grief.

M.I.S.S. Foundation, www.misschildren.org

This site provides support to families and seeks to increase public awareness of and decrease infant mortality.

National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, www.nichd.nih.gov

Provides up-to-date information on the Back to Sleep Campaign, safe sleep environment and federal initiatives to educate the public.

A Place to Remember, www.aplacetoremember.com

This site offers support materials and resources in dealing with a crisis in pregnancy or an infant death.

Safe Kids, www.safekids.org

Safe Kids is dedicated to the prevention of childhood injury. Safety tips are updated regularly.

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, www.cpsc.gov

This site provides information on product recalls and ways to reduce the possibility of injury or death from consumer products. It includes information on throwing a baby safety shower. This site also provides an interactive section for children on safety in the home.

WISCONSIN PERSPECTIVES is the newsletter of the Infant Death Center of Wisconsin. The goal of the newsletter is to promote the statewide exchange of information regarding infant death issues.

The Infant Death Center of Wisconsin is funded by Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin and an MCH Title V Services Block Grant, through the Maternal Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services.

If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, it is because you have been referred to the center at Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin. Contact us at (414) 266-2743 if you wish to be removed from the mailing list. With any questions or comments about the program or newsletter, contact Anne Harvieux, program administrator, at (414) 266-2746 or aharvieux@chw.org.

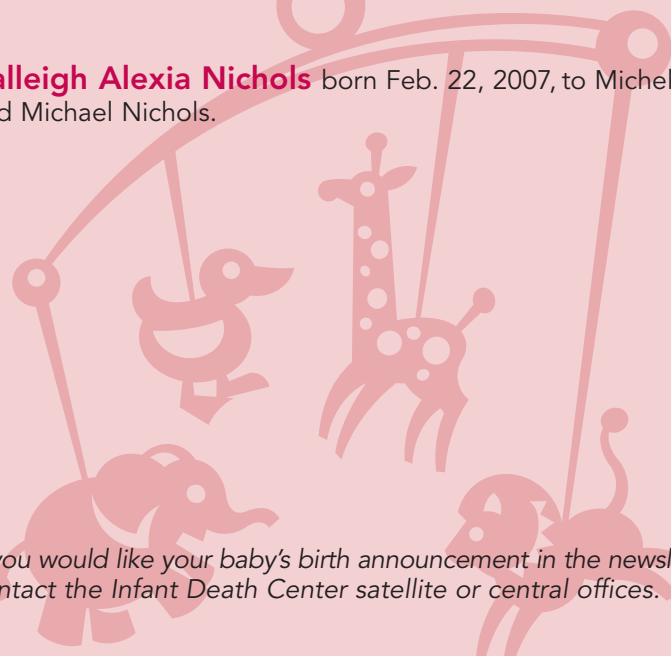
To reach the center and the South/Southeastern regional office, contact Anne Harvieux at (414) 266-2746 or aharvieux@chw.org or Vivian Jackson at (414) 266-2745 or vjackson@chw.org. To reach the satellite center in Northern/Western Wisconsin, contact Dora Gorski at (715) 843-1877 or Dora.gorski@cssw.org. To reach the satellite center in Northeast Wisconsin, contact Anne Harvieux at (414) 266-2746 or aharvieux@chw.org.

NEW ARRIVALS

Congratulations to the following families on their new arrivals.

Calleigh Alexia Nichols born Feb. 22, 2007, to Michelle and Michael Nichols.

If you would like your baby’s birth announcement in the newsletter, contact the Infant Death Center satellite or central offices.



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