

'Good Grief Club' author shares process of healing after loss of child



By submission

Stealing the show as young models last year were siblings of children in families served by the Share perinatal support program at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove. The children's annual stint on the runway is part of a professionally produced show featuring adult models.

ADVERTISEMENT

By Renee Tomell

Downers Grove Reporter

NEW! Thu Mar 05, 2009, 10:38 AM CST

Downers Grove, IL -

Share is the group that helped Monica Novak heal from her stillborn daughter's death, and share is what she does in her first book, "The Good Grief Club."

She will sign copies at the Share luncheon and fashion show benefit she co-chairs this weekend, donating all the profits back to the chapter based at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove.

"One million families in this country lose a baby in miscarriage, stillbirth or infant death annually," said the Bolingbrook resident, who lost her daughter, Miranda, 13 years ago. "We began that process of trying to say goodbye to a baby that we hadn't gotten a chance to say hello to and had already bonded with. Her 2-year-old sister was excited about being a big sister. It was just devastating to find out we were not bringing that baby home. The people in our lives didn't understand the depth of our pain.

"We were told about the Share support group meeting scheduled three weeks later," she added. "Al and I went. It was a difficult and emotional night for us, but we came away feeling somebody understood."

She praises the compassion of Pat Vaci of Downers Grove, coordinator of the hospital's chapter since its start in 1988. The program is an off-shoot of the national organization.

"When we started at Good Samaritan, we extended what Share does," said Vaci, a nurse. "Initially, the program addressed bereaved parents. We found there was also support needed for families dealing with high-risk pregnancies, premature babies or babies with special needs, so we included all those kind of situations."

Bereaved parents meet from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. each second Thursday.

"Anybody from surrounding communities is welcome to come to this free support group," Novak said, calling it "the club that nobody wanted to join."

Novak, who after several months continued attending on her own, developed a strong bond with some of the others in the group.

"I started to make friendships," she said. "For some reason, I clicked with these six women. Our losses were all very different: One had had recurrent miscarriages; a few of us had lost babies to stillbirth; a few had delivered premature babies who were too young to live; one had lost twins; and one had lost triplets."

When the Share meeting ended, the seven realized they didn't want to go home yet.

"We knew it was good for our soul," Novak said. "We went to the Omega Restaurant on Ogden in Downers Grove. That is where our friendship really blossomed. We could talk more intimately and start to laugh about some things. Before, we thought we would never laugh again and never be happy again. We were starting to heal and starting to laugh and smile about some things. The Omega became our little club."

Novak started writing the book years ago, to reach out to grieving parents and to relatives and friends unsure how to help.

"Friends, family, co-workers wanted to be there for us and didn't know how, and didn't know why we were still grieving a year later," she said. "I thought it would be just my story in the book, but these six women had become ingrained in my life. It was about the seven of us and our friendship and how our friendship had carried us through the darkest days of our lives (to) find a healing place and learn to trust life and enjoy life again, to take those risks to have the families that we so deeply wanted."

Because men grieve differently than women, she hopes fathers also will read the book to help them better communicate with their partners. Copies are available at www.thegoodgriefclub.com or amazon.com.

"This story is for anybody who has been through this or is on the outside looking in and wants to help a family," she said.

Novak also hopes the book will raise awareness of the invaluable services provided by Share for families experiencing difficult pregnancies or loss.

Vaci said a variety of help is available. As coordinator, she sees patients individually to offer support and match them to proper resources. She works with a chaplain and social worker, and the group has trained parents to provide peer support. Diversional activities are offered to mothers on bed rest.

"It's unique to each person," Vaci said of the chapter. "What one person needs is not what every person needs. We try to tailor-make it to that particular person. Every family has different needs."

To support the work of the chapter, the public is invited to this weekend's benefit luncheon co-chaired by Novak and Vaci. A highlight will be the professionally produced fashion show of Von Maur apparel, and a favorite segment will feature siblings of children in families served by the Share program or kids themselves cared for at Good Samaritan.

Novak's two youngest daughters will be models, as will one family's 5-year-old twins who were born prematurely and spent weeks in the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit.

"They are bouncing, healthy and vibrant," Novak said. "It's amazing to see what journey they have gone through."

If you go

What: The annual Friends of Share Benefit Luncheon and Fashion Show: Share Our Vision.

When: Social hour begins at 11 a.m. Saturday, March 7.

Where: Ashton Place, 341 W. 75th St., Willowbrook.

Info: Tickets cost \$75, \$35 for children. Contact Pat.Vaci@advocatehealth.com or (630) 275-1520 to learn more about Share and purchase luncheon or Grand Raffle tickets.

Raffle buzz: In addition to 80 silent auction items and the raffle of lavish gift baskets, three prizes are featured in the Grand Raffle, including a time-share stay in Mexico and flat-screen TV. The buzz is about the shopping and skin care package at Neiman Marcus, offering a \$500 gift certificate to the winner, plus \$50 gift certificates to 10

of her friends, with all 11 invited to a breakfast and personalized skin care clinic.

Related Stories

Comments (0)

Login or register to post a comment:

Login

Username:

Password:

[Forgot password](#)

Register

Email:

First Name:

Last Name:

I agree to the [terms of use](#)

I am over 13 years of age

NOTE: Your inbox must accept emails from "no-reply@gatehousemedia.com"

WEB BROWSING REDEFINED  FIREFOX