Organization exists to help grieving parents

submitted photo

Candy and Steve McVicar's baby, Garce, was stillborn on Dec. 20, 2001. The McVicars started the Missing GRACE organization to help others cope with similar losses.

A journey from pain to GRACE

by Delores Topliff

In December 2001, at 33 weeks of pregnancy, Candy and Stephen McVicar eagerly awaited their baby. The room was decorated and ready. But the baby became less active and Candy was concerned. She made seven visits to four doctors in two weeks, but no one sensed danger. Then a radiologist explained a devastating ultrasound: "As you can see we are looking at the heart chamber and there is no heartbeat; your baby is dead."

When the doctor left the room, a tech added, "You have to go to the hospital now to take care of 'it.'"

"It?" Candy screamed as her worst nightmare began. Instead of bringing home their cherished daughter, the McVicars faced a funeral and unthinkable pain and loss.

The problem was a velamentous cord, attached at the placenta's side rather than its center. An autopsy revealed their daughter was perfectly healthy. They named her Grace. If she had been delivered early, she could have lived.

Today more couples than ever encounter difficulty conceiving or carrying pregnancies. Every day 70 American babies are born dead. Devastated parents feel the ache of empty arms.

One out of 115 pregnancies ends in stillbirth; 15 percent of pregnancies miscarry. Of 26,000 women experiencing loss yearly, two-thirds never know why their baby died. Another 6.1 million Americans (one in six couples) suffer infertility. Until causes are known and cures found, these parents just hope "someone" will be there for them.

That someone is the Missing GRACE Organization, an international parent bereavement foundation bringing support and hope to couples facing loss.

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Candy released a dolphin baloon on Grace's first birthday.

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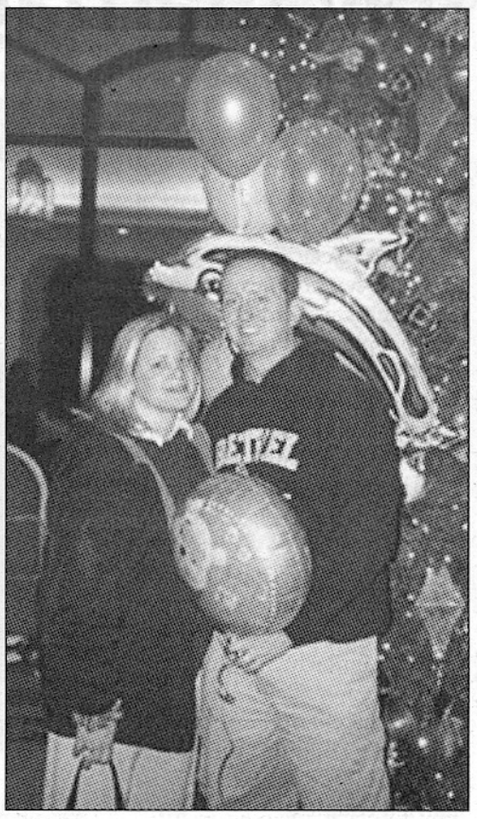
The tree under which the McVicars buried Grace.



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On what would have been Grace's first birthday, the McVicars celebrated by releasing baloons in her memory.

People don't always know how to comfort. The McVicars heard well-meaning but hurtful words: "Maybe God needed another sweet angel," or, "She's better off in heaven."

"Not when my milk is letting out," Candy wept, "and my shirt is wet." Their faith was severely tested. Candy suffered insomnia. For eight months she met with a support group of others who had lost babies. She found solace online 10-14 hours a day, journaled and created www.MissingGRACE.com.

Once the Web page was posted, Candy received 30 to 40 e-mails daily from bereaved moms. She met Dr. Jason Collins, founder of the Pregnancy Institute, who explained the cord problem, telling her Grace's death wasn't her fault. The McVicars began helping hurting couples. Candy gathered resources, committing herself to bringing positive change to medical communities through stillbirth awareness and prevention programs. The Missing GRACE Organization was formed initially to bring support to parents of stillborns.

In 2001, Candy organized the first G.R.A.C.E. Conference for parents to Grieve, Restore, Arise, Commemorate and Educate. Eighty-five doctors and nurses attended. Forty couples shared their stories; six families had lost babies through cord accidents. Now the conference includes additional painful issues. None are "easy" topics, but problems don't go away by ignoring them.

The 2nd annual G.R.A.C.E. Conference, "On The Journey: Pregnancy, Infant Loss, Infertility and Adoption," will be held at First Covenant Church, Minneapolis, March 26 and 27. Powerful messages will be delivered by national speakers: Jason Collins, M.D., OB/GYN, founder of the Pregnancy Institute; Sherokee Ilse, author of Empty Arms; Jon and Sylvia Van Regenmorter, directors of Stepping Stones, authors of "Dear God Why Can't We Have a Baby" and "When the Cradle is Empty"; Richard K. Olsen, president of the National Stillbirth Society; and Candy and Stephen McVicar.

Attendees will choose from 17 different classes during breakout sessions and glean from 30 exhibitors representing adoption agencies, holistic health providers, bookstores and advocacy/support groups. Partners in this conference include the Pregnancy Institute and the Center for Reproductive Medicine.

Candy shared her compelling story live March 8, on WCCO's "Pat Miles Show," with Dr. Collins joining the discussion by phone from New Orleans, as people called in with questions.

Candy and Stephen McVicar are healing by serving. One day they hope to have or adopt a child of their own. In the meantime, God is helping them to travel their remarkable journey from pain to GRACE.

ACTION BOX

For more information, contact Candy McVicar, founder and executive director of The Missing GRACE Org., P.O. Box 1625, Maple Grove, MN 55311. Phone (763) 497-0709. E-mail: mcvicar@mninter.net. For conference information, visit www.MissingGRACE.com, or www.MissingGRACE.org.