

LIFE

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Section E



Jennifer Lamphere stares at several of the baskets with which she is hoping to heal families who have lost infants before and shortly after birth through the Gracie's Hope and Heart program, named for the daughter Lamphere and her husband, Eric, lost two years ago, five days after she was born. An image of Eric and Jennifer looking at Gracie is displayed in an album at the bottom of the photograph.

Striving past grief

Paducah couple hopes to spread message of national organization

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Her name was Gracie. Jennifer and Eric Lamphere lost their daughter just five days after she was born as a result of a complete placental abruption at 34 weeks of gestation. Their grief was overwhelming, but they are not alone. And after connecting to another couple who lost their very own Grace, the Lampheres have found a way to educate and hopefully prevent others from going through the same loss.

Just a few months after they lost their daughter in 2009, Jennifer Lamphere's mother was looking online for a Christmas gift for her daughter and son-in-law. She stumbled upon Missing GRACE, a foundation striving to offer support and resources for pregnancy or infant loss, infertility and adoption. Jennifer Lamphere called the contact number and found an ally.

Candy McVicar of Albertville, Minn., started the Missing GRACE (grieve, restore, arise, commemorate and educate) after her daughter was stillborn because of umbilical cord issues. McVicar said her main goal with the foundation is to educate parents as well as health care professionals in knowing what to do when they suspect something might be wrong with a pregnancy. McVicar said there are 30,000 stillbirths reported in the nation annually. She suspects, due to under-reporting, the number could be closer to 40,000. McVicar's doctors told her, during an ultrasound, that there was nothing to worry about. After her daughter died, McVicar

requested her chart, and after some obstacles, she received it. One of her doctors had noticed an inconsistency, but another had crossed it off the chart. "I had many doctors tell me that my daughter did not have to die," McVicar said.

She teaches parents to be persistent in talking to medical staff about their pregnancy throughout. The first goal is to lessen the number of stillbirths and infant deaths. If the unthinkable does happen, McVicar wants to change the way the parents and the public perceive grief. Parents who lose a child have limited time with their son or daughter, she said. She wants those parents to have the unique grieving opportunity they need. It's not like any other friend or family member dying, McVicar said. It's a grief like nothing else.

"Don't force your opinion of grief on others," she said. Jennifer Lamphere is now a leader of one of only three physical support groups in the nation. Two of them are in McVicar's home state of Minnesota.

Paducah is the only location outside Minnesota where families can meet in person to discuss their loss and work toward supporting each other. So far the meetings are slow-going, but a recent breakthrough keeps Lamphere optimistic. Saint Francis Medical Center in Cape Girardeau, Mo. just signed a contract with Missing GRACE to provide crisis care support for families who have a stillbirth or infant death. Jennifer Lamphere said they have not yet made contracts with any Paducah hospitals, but they are constantly



A Christmas ornament showing Gracie Lamphere with angel's wings is shown Tuesday at the home of her parents, Eric and Jennifer Lamphere, in Paducah. Gracie died just five days after her birth about two years ago, and Jennifer has started a program to give supply baskets to families who lost an infant before and shortly after birth.

working on making that connection.

As part of the crisis care team, Jennifer Lamphere is on call 24 hours a day. Many of her crisis care teammates are people whose lives have been affected by pregnancy or infant loss. It's not just mothers, she said. It's aunts, grandmothers and fathers. The team brings in a comfort basket filled with handmaid garments, candles and other mementos to help honor the lost child.

Jennifer Lamphere said one important aspect of the crisis

care team's work is photography. She, as well as her peers, have been trained in professional still photography and videography to help the parents remember the child they lost. McVicar said photography of a deceased infant might seem unorthodox, but it's important for families to remember and commemorate their lost child.

"Many parents will not photograph their baby," McVicar said. "They won't be able to remember their details very well. As they fade in their memory, those pho-

tos and videos are considered priceless."

Jennifer Lamphere said she is in constant need of volunteers. Even if a volunteer can't be constantly on call, they could mow a lawn, cook a meal, or babysit other children while parents are out. Any assistance is welcome to grieve, restore, arise, commemorate and educate families about their options when they need help most.

For more information, go to hopeandheartssun.org/Kentucky.