

A Grandmother's Grief

The journey to acceptance of the unacceptable



by
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Introduction

When my daughter told me years ago that she was pregnant for her first child, my excitement was beyond belief... I was giddy with joy! The responsibility this new role would create in my life was impossible to imagine. In a few months I would welcome my first grandchild. The mystery and wonder of life began to unfold as I stood witness to the changes in my daughter's life.

My burning question was: What does being a grandmother mean to me? The answer came easily and simply – Unconditional Love.

My dear grandchild...

- 🕒 I promise to love you forever.
- 🕒 I promise to take your side.
- 🕒 I promise to guide you in your own way.
- 🕒 I promise to spend a lot of time getting to know you.
- 🕒 I promise to be proud of everything you do.
- 🕒 I promise to be respectful of you, your mom and your dad.
- 🕒 I'll love you forever and ever.

On June 29, 2004, my first grandchild, Luther Leger Hutton died... he was 20 weeks old. What promises could I make to him now...

I offer this story to you as a way of building support for your loss. There is no magic solution in dealing with the loss of a child... all there is truly is love and trust. I share my experiences and hope that in some small way you may find comfort and direction. The most difficult part of this story is the realization that grieving is a solitary journey.

If you are reading this story because of your own loss, I offer blessings to you as you reflect on your needs and build the strength to accept support. Always remember you are loving and loved.

Chapter 1

Acknowledging My Need for Support

On the evening of June 29, 2004 I received a distressing call from my daughter, one I would never wish for others. Her darling five month old son, Luther Leger Hutton had died. As I listened to her cries of helplessness and despair I felt something inside of me freeze up. I can only describe it as terror. "How can my grandson be dead?" I asked myself. "Why couldn't I follow my earlier instincts and travel immediately to the hospital when she first contacted me..." and then what?

I believe everything happens for a reason. I believe everything is Divinely Guided, yet since his death, I have been challenged to believe these truths. Perhaps there is just no understanding the way of the universe and all that is ordained within it. I know I must trust his soul journey required this experience, and yet, there is this pain within my heart which will live there the rest of my life.

I watched my daughter and her husband as they moved from one level of grieving to another and I cried inside, wishing to have my daughter back... the fun-loving excited mother of Luther. I know she is gone and I weep for her at times. The woman she has become, through this experience, is loving and compassionate, and yet the evidence of the longing for her son lives behind her eyes and within her heart.

When a child dies the order of life is confused. The levels of self-criticism and judgement increase. After all, we are the parents and grandparents... we're supposed to protect the child at all costs. Our experience, however, removed that option. Luther was taken from my daughter's arms by the medical workers alive and hungry, and was returned to her bloody and dead. There is no justice for the feelings this brings up. My anger, despair and guilt paralyzes me.

How does one move on after losing a child? There have been many books written on this subject and groups like The Compassionate Friends network provide support for the grieving parents. I believe it is important to find a way of speaking your truth about loss and accepting support through the grieving process.

As a grieving grandmother, I realized there was limited understanding of the pain losing a grandchild creates. I felt alone, frozen in my feelings and unsupported, after all, it wasn't my child who had died. How does one express the grief of losing one's grandchild and witnessing the devastation the journey has on one's own child and oneself? The layers of

grief for me were so deep and hidden I had trouble releasing them. For me, writing this story is a useful vehicle for healing and releasing.

In the early days of Luther's death, I walked around in a fugue, afraid to expose my feelings for fear it might diminish those of my daughter and her husband. The feeling of disconnection created by this experience lingers. The greatest disappointment was the realization no one understood or could understand what was happening to me.

Shortly after the funeral, one friend said: "I'm so glad you're back from your daughter's, I've missed you and needed you." Comments like this made me question what kind of relationships I had set up with my friends and family. I was the one who always took care of others and now, in my greatest time of need, I felt alone and abandoned.

For weeks, I patiently awaited a card or a call from my brothers. Yes, I'd received a few short emails early on which seemed so impersonal. I became angry and hurt when I realized there were no calls coming – I was on my own to deal with this and it was silly of me to expect any kind of support and understanding from them.

Why contact with my brothers was important escapes me, yet I focused all of my disappointment and lack of support on this part of the story. I think it's important for you to understand I grew up the oldest of 13 children - 7 brothers and 5 sisters. Had the expectations of being the oldest sister been high? I would say so, yes...

I wrestled with this dilemma for many weeks and finally found the courage to call each of them to express my need for their support. They were shocked that I needed them, surprised as well that an email didn't cut it. I patiently shared my feelings with them, all the while taking care of them rather than screaming my truth.

One brother truthfully said: "Well I never met the child so it didn't really mean anything to me." These words have lived with me these many years as evidence of the way disconnection is justified. How often when we hear news of someone's passing do we say something similar? "I never met them..." yet we may know their relatives intimately. Do we let our busy lives overtake us and keep us separate from the pain others are feeling? Perhaps we do hide away inside our busy lives with work and immediate family... That's ok in one way and yet when someone close to you is hurting, where is the compassion to take a few moments to express condolences of one kind or another?

There is no right answer for this one. However, in writing this story I am making a stand for acknowledging the pain your loved ones feel during a loss, whether you have met them or not. Is there still some anger in this piece – I'll say yes there is. And, it is OK

for me to be angry. However, I am also angry at myself for setting up my life to appear strong enough to do it alone. Is there forgiveness? Yes, and it is still OK for me to be angry.

I am the Diva of “Doing it Alone”. I’m sure you can recognize yourself in this as well. There is no license on this one unfortunately. Perhaps bringing awareness to it will help provide you with the support you need in moving forward through your life.

Having the courage to call and speak to my brothers about my need was very freeing. Did things change between us? Yes in some ways and No in others. After all, we are all living our individual lives and working through life challenges in the best way we can.

Am I writing this to make those I love wrong for their way of supporting me? No, I am writing this as a reminder to myself to ask for what I need or at the very least know it’s ok to feel my feelings and express them.

Nothing about this story is meant to judge others or play the victim – it is simply time for a story about the journey of a grandmother’s grief to be written. This is my own life story. I offer it to you in the hopes you can find the courage in your journey to reach out to others for support and to understand the support your loved ones may need in their time of grieving.

Chapter 2

My story

My daughter called me at 6:30 pm June 29, 2004 to tell me her baby boy, Luther, was in trouble. She was overwhelmed and in despair. She was preparing to travel by ferry from Nanaimo to Horseshoe Bay so she could meet the air ambulance at Vancouver Children's Hospital. She asked would I come pick her up at the ferry... of course I said yes. I decided to go out and buy something to eat. I walked around the city trying to make sense of what was happening, believing, once they were here at the hospital things would be ok. When I returned home 20 minutes later, I received the call - he was gone. In less than 3 hours he was gone and my daughter was left holding her dead child unable to let him go.

When I called the hospital to talk with my daughter, the attending nurse asked me if she was prone to "hysteria". Was she kidding me? Earlier that afternoon, she had taken her healthy child for his check up with the pediatrician, and now, was holding his cold body in her arms. What were they thinking?

Thus began my journey into guilt. Why didn't I rush to take the 7:00 ferry to the Nanaimo hospital right when she first called me – I could have been there for her? Why didn't God protect this child? Why couldn't I have seen this coming?

I watched as my heart began to shut down and the robot emerged. I began to walk through the experience – focusing on the doing pieces. Whatever was requested I would fulfill to the best of my abilities, forsaking my feelings as I moved through the hours and days leading up to the funeral, and the years beyond. Yes, one takes comfort in one's work as a means of staying grounded to life and I am thankful for that gift; however, in the "doing" times it is also easy to abandon oneself to the needs of others. I, of course, was really good at doing that.

Chapter 3

Standing beside the “Family”

Thirty-six hours after Luther died my daughter and her husband asked me to arrange the funeral and their wedding. Yes, a funeral and they wanted to officially get married. They had been building a life together for 8 years and decided before they buried their son, they would make a special commitment to him and each other.

My daughter said: “Mom, we’ll always remember this day forever... I’d like to remember it as the day we became a family rather than the day we buried our child.” With that wisdom, I walked down the hill hand in hand with my daughter and her husband, and announced their wishes.

As the mother of the bride, I felt robbed of the joy of celebrating a special day with my daughter. As the grandmother, I could understand and was proud of the desire to declare their intention of staying together as a family. It was an amazing request – one I had to convey to the family and orchestrate – two events which would take place on the same day. Yes, on the same day – 5 days after Luther’s death.

I am organized and can delegate really well – so I went into overdrive, assigning tasks for the wedding to various individuals and taking responsibility for the funeral arrangements myself. The cooperation of the family was great and, in very short order everyone took responsibility for their part, reporting back on their progress. I was doing well; I was in that “doing” place which kept me safe from my feelings.

The day finally arrived. Events in the morning triggered deep emotions leaving me distraught and feeling unsupported. Luckily my mother and one sister had traveled to be here and I was able, for the first time in my adult life, to go to my mother and allow her to hold me and let my immediate feelings of overwhelm and defeat overtake me. It was a relief to have her support in that moment. It helped me find the strength to put my armor or mask back on and get through the day.

During the course of the ceremonies, I felt “nothing”. I was spent. There was no room for the correct feelings, there was only room to hold myself together and hold the space for my family to feel safe and supported.

The days that followed were very difficult. I watched my daughter struggle emotionally and physically, feeling helpless to do or say anything to comfort her. She was inconsolable during those early weeks.

After Luther died I lost the playful part of me. I felt misunderstood by others, unable to express what I needed or how they could help. I felt like a failure – the more vulnerable I felt the less supported I felt. The more vulnerable I became, the more I judged myself.

I asked myself over and over... “Will I give myself permission to have needs? Will I express those needs? What will the next stage look like for me?”

I’d been really good at holding on to the “mother” pattern. Always taking care of everyone and forsaking my own needs. Now as the grandmother I’d taken on the needs of my daughter and her child... her grief ahead of my own.

I received advice from a friend: After her husband died she resolved to “stay busy”. She said keeping busy took her mind off everything. She would feel so bad he wasn’t there to enjoy life together. During the lonely times, she’d remind herself – “You’re doing fine by yourself.” She’d wake each day and remind herself: OK there’s nothing I can do about this it’s beyond my control, so step into this day with openness to possibilities. Some days I could follow this advice, others days were more difficult...

Others encouraged me to:

- ⌚ Give my energy back to the ones around me ...
- ⌚ Look out and say – it is beautiful out there...
- ⌚ You can’t go to that place – the little darling isn’t here...
- ⌚ Shift your thinking – go to “do”...
- ⌚ Life is good - let’s move on...
- ⌚ That’s why you’re here – to be of support to others...

After all this talk I felt so dragged out. Once again I felt I was doing it wrong. Fatigue set in. Was I tired because of all the support I was giving to others in their grief at the expense of my own? Perhaps that was the clue... I’d been running away from my grief and feelings by jumping into other people’s stories. It was safer that way. Focusing outside of myself kept me from feeling anything.

I’m always there for others...who’s there for me?

I realized no one could be there for me unless I felt strong enough to trust that they were there for me without judgement. Yet, betrayal issues would show up and I was afraid to trust that I would be supported fully. I felt no one could understand. I felt alone and isolated. The permission to feel my feelings was a challenge. Could I be vulnerable and still be accepted? There were times when I have felt judged and criticized for my

feelings. I was searching for the understanding of what was and tried to find the courage to be in the moment. These feelings continue and I accept the truth... grieving is personal and there is no one who will understand or support me in a way that could take away the pain. The pain of loss endures.

Chapter 4

Accepting What Is

One morning, shortly after the funeral ceremony, my daughter came to me and said: “We’re packing up the car and leaving on a trip for a month or more, depending on how things go. Don’t blame my husband if I don’t come back alive.” Was she being dramatic or simply stating her true feelings? She was in her truth – she felt there was nothing to live for. Was I scared? Oh yes. Did that fear go away? No, I’ve just learned how to be with it, without allowing it to have any power over me.

Did my daughter die or take her life? In a physical sense, no, however in an emotional sense, yes. Emotionally she died and came back changed forever. Can I console her in her times of need? Sometimes... however, what words can I offer when I am so frozen in my own feelings? There were times we would sit beside each other crying.... no words could be spoken... we understood each other in these moments of despair.

One day I received a distressing call – your daughter tried to hang herself today and I am concerned about her. The person calling was very dramatic about what was happening without any evidence to back up her story. She wanted me to rush in and rescue my daughter and prevent her from doing something terrible. My response was: “I’ll talk to my daughter myself to figure out what is happening.” I believed my daughter was strong enough to look after herself and wanted to hold her able to find a way through her feelings, knowing I was supporting her. So, did she try to hang herself? Yes. Did she go through with it? No.

Why would she go through the action and stop herself? She told me later: “As I thought about what I was thinking of doing, I realized it would add more pain to your life and I love you too much to put you through what I am going through mom.”

How does one tell their child how deeply these words impact on you? Would I be selfish in thanking her for realizing the pain she would create? What could I say to her that would express my relief in hearing those words? I said: “Thank you for staying.”

Chapter 5

How Can I Support You

Was there a time I worried my daughter would die from her grief? Yes. Do I still? Sometimes, yes. Will she? I guess I can honestly say I have no answer for that one. I can be philosophical and say we all die at some point; however, the death I've witnessed in her emotional state has been enough.

Is she coping with her pain? Yes.

Is she receiving support for her grief? Yes.

In her own way she has found the courage to be in her grief without it consuming her completely. Is she a strong woman? Yes. Unfortunately, the strength and courage she possesses can sometimes feel burdensome. As Mother Theresa once said; "I know God won't give me anything I can't handle. I just wish he didn't trust me so much."

Does she allow herself the space to feel her feelings? Yes. Does she get the support from family and friends that she really needs? No. None of us can truly know what to say or do; and yet, I've come to understand, the best support I can give is my love and honesty about my own feelings.

When Luther first died, I was terrified to be honest about my feelings for fear of taking something away from my daughter's grief. As the time has passed, my grief and the love I have for my grandson has become a consolation for her. We can share our feelings of longing for that joyful little baby and the stories of his short life.

Do I hold back on my feelings? Yes. I've felt it would be wrong to show my daughter the depth of my emotions because I know she knows it already; and it would add another burden to her grief that would be unfair to her.

I remember telling her: "I just want my daughter back." And she replied: "Mom she's gone and I'm it now." Do we have a strong relationship? Oh yes. Do I still wish I could take the pain away? Every day...

The feelings of powerlessness can overwhelm me at times. No matter how much I love her there is nothing I can do to help. When I ask her what I can do, she answers: "Bring my baby back." I can bring him back in memories we share and the love I have for him, but her arms will still be empty, longing for the weight of his little body pressed against hers.

One day, in the early days of our loss, I received two calls from my son-in-law and son saying – she is not going to make it without you. You don't have to do anything... just be here... and I was... and still am...

Chapter 6

Life moves on – I feel lost

It has been a solitary journey, especially given the fact I have trouble describing what I've been dealing with and unable to understand it for myself as well.

The grieving has been difficult – there is no denying that. I really try hard to stay positive and in the present... some days it is really difficult. I think part of the emotion at Luther's loss comes up because I feel so powerless to do anything about it. There's nothing I can say or do that will make a difference. He is no longer here and that's all there is. Life does move forward after death and it sometimes seems unfair. When our grieving is so intense it seems unfair that others continue on with their plans and celebrations while we hold the pain of our loss.

Our second daughter was married one month after Luther's death. It was a wonderful event. I was determined to enjoy myself and really give them the gift of my love, presence and support. I went into overdrive, ignoring my own needs, over functioning to stay true to my word and closing off my feelings. Sometimes, we have no other choice – because life goes on.

I returned to my work and my clients were relieved I was back. My work is one area of my life that grounds me and keeps me focused. I am very thankful for that gift. When all else fails, I can return to my work, knowing I have a place where I can make a difference.

In the first few weeks after Luther's death there was a lot of support which I was thankful for, however, as the months and years have passed by, the understanding for the continued support has been lost.

In the first few months following Luther's death, my loneliness and disconnection to myself and others began to grow. Why couldn't my family and friends understand what I was feeling? Why couldn't they be more compassionate about what was happening in my life? Why couldn't they just call and say: "Hi, just thinking of you..."

I could rationalize it all – they were busy living their lives – yet I felt unsettled. What's wrong with this picture? I have needs and they are left unsupported. My husband was wrapped up in his own grief and survival, so there was very little support possible because the burden we both felt was so great.

My family and friends were working through their own stories and expecting me to be present with them as they worked through things. I questioned: What about me? When will they see my needs?

I came to understand no one could see my needs unless I saw them myself. I began to prioritize my needs and realized it would take some effort for me to be open and honest about what I needed. Could I trust those I love to understand my disappointments without feeling judged?

I am a loving Grandmother. I wanted to believe I had done something wrong– that I could have saved Luther if only... again, taking my responsibility for healing the world so deep into my core, that my grandson's death was my fault – the “if only's” were drowning me. Luther's life and death were out of my control. My job was to be a witness to love and accept the process.

Chapter 7

Dealing with the Silence

After three months of waiting to hear from my brothers, I decided to make a call to each of them expressing my need for their support. They just didn't know how much I was hurting. Each brother in turn had a different response:

- ⌚ “I didn't know you were that close to him...”
- ⌚ “I'm sorry I just didn't think...”
- ⌚ “I just didn't know what to say, so I decided to do nothing...”
- ⌚ “Well I sent an email as soon as I heard – I'm the good brother for sure... the others...”
- ⌚ “We sent a card to your daughter. We thought that was enough...”
- ⌚ “Didn't you get my email?”
- ⌚ “I was hurting for you and didn't know how to express it to you.”

One of my brothers had experienced the loss of twins that he and his wife were scheduled to adopt. Surely he'll call because he would understand. Nothing – no contact. When I called him on it, he had no excuse other than he was giving me time... time for what?

There were a lot of excuses for their lack of communication. However, the bottom line for me was the feeling they had failed me. In my time of need, they were silent.

I wanted to scream at them all... “What about just being there for me? I'm your sister... I'm hurting... I'm witnessing my daughter go through hell... I need your support...” I know I did say some of these things in a soft and supportive way to take care of them – so they wouldn't judge me or feel judged. Yet the energy of judgement was present – they had failed me. As I reflect back, I know they were confused about my need for their support and I am thankful they were there to listen.

As Luther's first birthday drew near, I decided it would be a good idea to travel and be with my sisters and mother for support. While out for a walk on the frozen lake with them, I felt the disconnection seeping in. Could I let myself feel my feelings and be supported? I trusted and allowed myself to open up. As I opened to my sorrow and allowed the tears to flow, my one sister looked at me confused. “What's the matter?” She asked. I told her: “Luther would be one year old today” She looked at me, and walked on... she didn't understand. How could she? This type of grief was out of her experience.

I questioned myself. What did I have to do to be heard? I wanted to shout out to them...
”I’m here because I need you to hold me and tell me everything will be ok. I need you to understand that I am here instead of at home celebrating Luther’s first birthday with my daughter. Why can’t you understand what I’m going through? “

They couldn’t understand how difficult it was for me to meet my new infant niece and witness the joy they all felt in her presence. They didn’t notice how much I struggled to be excited to meet the child who was eight months younger than Luther. A child Luther would never get to play with. The dream of his lost life unraveled. I wanted them to acknowledge my pain and just say something comforting to me.

We were all disconnected in that moment – afraid to be real... worried we’d say the wrong thing and open a wound. How can a wound that is always present hurt any more than it does? Through avoidance, my loss was more painful. Many years later, one of my sisters, who by then was a grandmother, called me: “I’m so sorry Liz, I just didn’t understand.”

I learned a valuable thing about my siblings through this journey. They, like so many of us, are emotionally crippled by grief and loss. We are all so afraid it will knock on our door that we avoid the subject altogether. Leave me to my life and keep your experience private. It was like the experience of loss was a plague and had to be put aside for fear of contamination.

I know as you read this, dear siblings, you will recognize yourself and may take a second look at yourself. Know that in writing this experience my intention is to shed light on the subject of support rather than pass judgement on the lack of it. I thank you for being who you are and even though I was unable to express my needs, you did provide me with the experience I needed to tell this story. Any wisdom this experience will provide others as they look for ways of supporting people they love is a blessing.

Chapter 8

Sharing my Sorrow

A few months after Luther died I decided to send out the following email

Sharing our Sorrow was sent to all of my family, friend and clients. It was a way of making peace with what is... It was a way of reaching out and receiving support... It was a way of communicating and sharing the memories of a precious little boy's life...

August 2004

Our darling grandson Luther died on June 29, 2004 at the age of 4 months and 20 days. The sorrow and devastation that his death has created is at times seemingly unbearable for all of us... and yet... life goes on.

I know that I will always be his grandmother and he holds a special place in my heart forever.

I have tried to make sense of this event and truthfully, my beliefs have been challenged. How does one reconcile the short life of a beautiful little boy?

Where does one find comfort in such a tragedy... Why do some babies come into our lives and stay for such a short time?

This wonderful little boy, Luther Leger Hutton, son of Vanessa and Darren, arrived February 9, 2004 and experienced his lifetime adventure the way it was meant to be.

From the moment of his birth, he experienced the joy of unconditional love and touched so many hearts. Yes, there were challenges and many hurdles for him to overcome, and as he grew, his story filled us all with such hope.

In his short time here, he experienced great love from his mom and dad and extended family. He also experienced pain and suffering as his little heart was healing after heart surgery. Being 10 weeks premature also gave him the challenge of learning how to breathe with lungs and airways that wanted to do a bigger job than they were able to do. He would sometimes struggle for breath and yet every time, he would recover, take a breath and smile... Filling our hearts with so much joy...

So what was the purpose of all of this...?

Vanessa, Darren and I would watch him looking upwards and we'd say - "he's talking to the angels..." Yes he was... He was teaching them what this human experience is all about... He was learning the last pieces of the human experience to become an angel himself.

When I think of his journey and the emptiness that I sometimes feel in missing him, I remember that we have another wonderful little angel to help guide our path...

Love Liz

Luther's First Birthday arrived. Yes, one can say it's just another day, as a way of releasing oneself from the grieving, and yet I knew, it's a milestone that was important for me to acknowledge.

For 20 weeks, this little boy lived and gave me so much joy. I held him in my arms and felt so content – it was a very special time in my life – the honour of sharing such intimacy with my daughter in the early stages of her son's life. The sadness of such an abrupt end lingers – there is nothing one can do or say that can make it easier – nothing that makes any sense.

A few days after Luther was born, I wrote him a letter and a collage of photos showing all the dreams I held for him. I decided to destroy them after his first birthday. As I think back on that day I was certain it would provide a release and now all I can think about is the precious vision that was taken away...of the wisdom lost in those pages. They live on in my heart.

Chapter 9

How many grandchildren do I have?

At Luther's funeral I was asked how many grandchildren I had: "One, I said..." "Oh!" she said..." Yes, Luther was my first grandchild. He has been followed by two brothers and several cousins and I'm sure they will be followed by many more delightful children as the years pass.

Luther's position in my life as my first grandchild will always remain, for there is never a day that passes without my remembering his loving touch on my heart as I held him. There is a special place tucked deep inside that belongs only to him.

As the years pass, I've been faced with the question: How many grandchildren do you have? or How many children does my daughter have? Do I lie and leave Luther out of the numbers to save the pain of telling the story? I have sometimes left him out and felt so very guilty about it and then immediately corrected myself and included him.

At first I felt ashamed that my heart was broken by Luther's death. I wanted to "get on with it" and be ok with the loss, forget about it all and just be the grandmother to my surviving grandchildren without the shadow of my love for Luther being present. However, I've come to understand that my experience as a grandmother has been created through Luther – he was the first one to open the door in my life and in my heart to the "grandmother" and I am so very thankful for that.

Soon after Luther's death, my daughter announced she was pregnant. I was so stressed worrying about her physical health and how she was coping with Luther's loss that I had barely given myself permission to be happy about the baby we would welcome into our lives in a few months. I realized I had to hold the space of health and well-being for mother and child as the next stage of life unfolded.

Over the years I have anticipated the birth of Luther's siblings and cousins with joy. Yet, Luther's imprint on my heart continues to press itself upon me... remembering how precious it was to hold him in my arms, to hear him laugh, to look into his eyes and see the love and anticipation present. These visions linger... forever.

I have become hyper vigilant as a grandmother. As time passes, I am becoming more relaxed. However, whenever a bump or scrape or possible fall might occur, I find myself taking on the worry that I've done something wrong. I didn't protect them... it's my fault if something happens. Truthfully, I am feeling exhausted from this... I know if I

continue with this habit of worry it is unhealthy for me. Thankfully I am reminded by my children to “relax” – He/she is fine... He/she can do it... It’s OK... He/she was quick; none of us could have caught him/her in time. Phrases given to comfort me – sometimes they do and other times ...

I am training myself to step back and be more relaxed. I am a hands-on grandmother and enjoy my grandchildren so much. I watch myself ready to jump when they are wobbly on their feet as they begin to walk and climb... My body is slowing down and perhaps that is a good thing...

I know my role as the grandmother is to cherish and love my darling grandchildren. I look forward to each stage of their journey with excitement and awe. They are precious souls who have come to our family to share unconditional love and I know they are divinely protected by our little Luther and for that I am thankful.

Chapter 10

Who is to Blame?

In a recent conversation with my mother, I shared the news of another grandchild expected this year. She said, “That will make 10 great grandchildren.” I said: “Mom, if you included Luther it would be 11.” She gave no response. What do I expect her to say? I know she understands loss, and yet she is of the old school... these things are never discussed. I guess, for me, the old school theories fail to provide the support I need.

As a result of losing Luther, I have become tuned in to other women who have lost their child and have noticed, no matter how many years have passed for them, they all share the same look in their eyes as my daughter. Because of these experiences I know she is OK and doing her life the best way she can. It gives me comfort to know what I witness is “normal” in the grieving process... or is it the “living” process?

I remember having a conversation many years ago with my grandmother-in-law. She told me her first child, a girl, had died and said: “We don’t discuss it.” I noticed a distant look in her eyes. She never did share what happened. Later that evening I discovered the “Marriage Guidelines” booklet on the bedside table. I realized she would have been given it at the time of her wedding in 1920. In it there was a passage about the loss of a child. It was written that when a child dies it is because the parents did something against God. I was appalled by this. After more than 60 years, she still held herself responsible, through God’s eyes for her child’s death.

Is that why my mother puts Luther’s death aside? Perhaps that’s why many of us do because losing a child is the unnatural order of life so somehow something or someone is to blame. Well, as the grandmother, I was certainly willing to take it on. And, I’m sure my daughter and her husband took it on as well... What about the doctors, nurses, care givers? What about the Divine plan?

In such a tragedy, it is easy to place the blame on yourself or the parents, the grandmother, the doctor or others who in their own way feel the burden of guilt of their silence. Yet, each of us comes to understand there is no easing of the grief by blaming. What occurred is tragic. We hope through our experience other families will be spared the heartbreak of losing a child through medical malpractice and have a full and happy life with them.

Every life has a purpose and, although it is challenging to understand Luther's life purpose, I do in my own way look for the evidence that his presence made a difference and still does, which is one of the reasons I decided to share my story.

Chapter 11

Finding a Way to Support Myself

I have so much I want to talk about and yet at another level everything is silence. In this chapter I will share my journal entries – however incoherent – and support and notes received from friends. I have attempted to separate the journal entries to indicate the various issues/struggles that came up for me. During my deepest struggle with grief – there was support present... I was often blind to it.

As I prepared to go to a meeting one night, my husband asked me – why are you going? Does this relationship take care of you? My answer was no, yet there I was getting ready to head out the door... totally unconscious about what was happening to me.

A few months after Luther's death, I had an unusual spiritual experience. While doing yoga, I experienced a spontaneous Kundalini Awakening which created an immense surge of energy through my whole body causing many physical conditions which have taken many years to resolve. I could go into detail about this condition, however, I mention it here as a reminder to be very kind and gentle with yourself during those early days of grieving. If I had been mindful of how depleted I was, I believe none of this would have occurred.

I sometimes think it happened to stop me from the 'doing' pieces for a while. It is hard to explain what had happened to me. Yet through it I continued to do my life, abandoning myself for what I thought others needed – still unaware of my own needs.

In early January following Luther's death, I declared to my husband... I just wish this year was over already – I was in so much fear for the future. He was shocked – I had a real melt down that night – I cried a lot – I was going through the dark side of the soul in order to be open to the divine messages to come.

Taking care of myself during this grieving process has been the most challenging part of the journey. I've had to recognize the limitations of others and reach out for my support in new ways. My anger at my family and friends for their lack of understanding my feelings and needs has held me back from my own grieving process. It was easier to be angry at others than to take a stand for myself and ask for what I needed. I was focusing on what was missing... no calls, no cards, no contact... it was difficult. Thankfully I did find a system of support that helped me understand the journey was mine and I had to be the director of it.

FRIENDS REACH OUT

Through discussions with friends, I was encouraged to remember...

- ⌚ People make it all about them when someone dies.
- ⌚ All your emotions are understandable.
- ⌚ Ask people to be patient with you.
- ⌚ You're on auto pilot, try to relax.
- ⌚ Acknowledge how you feel right now.
- ⌚ You are strong – you're incredible – there's a lot of emotion going on. Trust it.
- ⌚ What could you do better to get your needs met by brothers and sisters?
- ⌚ Remember others are thinking about themselves – they don't know how to support you.
- ⌚ Help others by going to them - so they can feel better and support you better
- ⌚ Remember you have to ask for help.

One friend told me, after her nephew's death, she realized how important it was to be with people she loved. His death changed her life for the better, forcing her to reach out to others who were also grieving. They shared a common need for support.

I received this note from a loving friend and as I read it I felt her tenderness and love surround me with hope:

Thinking of you

Respect you

Love you

Trust how you show up

Don't be anything but what you are... Love You

MY JOURNAL ENTRIES:

I share these thoughts in the hopes the reader will recognize themselves in the grieving process and allow their journal process to be a support.

I wrote in my journal for many years, unraveling my feelings and finding a way to release the feelings and uncertainties. I hope these notes provide some support for you as you read them.

I am too far away from my own story – I am discouraged with myself for losing ground in my life.

Can I be a demand without being judged?

*When Liz is vulnerable – she is perceived as needy and negative.
It's OK to be supported unconditionally.*

Disposable soul issue – loss shows up and society says move on. This particular issue has plagued me...the clichés get bandied about – empty and meaningless at times. I am aware of how easy it is to say “Sorry for your loss” and then move into the immediate response... “He/she is in a better place” ... “These things happen for a reason” ... Why do dead children become so invisible?

A friend asked me today “Why play solitaire with your life?” How could I reply with all the personal judgements running in my brain? Liz, you're such a drama queen – get over it already

Maybe I'm afraid to move into my life again. There's a sense of failure. My daughter will grieve this loss forever and there is nothing I can do to make it better. She and I discussed how difficult it is to think of moving forward with the emptiness caused by Luther's death.

I was encouraged, by a counselor, to follow the grieving process as a way of moving forward: Elizabeth Kubler Ross's model: Denial, Bargaining, Depression, Anger, Acceptance... All well and good, however I notice I just keep recycling through the first three stages and wonder, will I find my way to Anger? What will it look like? Right now, Acceptance seems impossible to me...

How can I give myself permission to reach out to others when I am such a drama queen? They just won't understand and they'll judge me. After all it's only my grandson who died – not like it was my own child. Oh how little they understand... when the grandchild dies – a part of our own child dies too.

The months after Luther died, there was never any time for me to be with my feelings – now I feel out of control.

I feel I need to exit for a while. Am I talking about just walking away – becoming anonymous for a while – pretend none of this happened... there is a sense of freedom that emerges for a few seconds and then the trauma returns.

I feel I've lost my faith. I'm angry at god/universe/spirit for all this. There are too many unanswered questions and I am left mute once again.

I know it's the “find compassion for Liz” time. I grieve the loss of my daughter and her happy zest for life – I hope it will return one day – how selfish am I?

My husband and I cried together last night. Through all of these months of grieving I felt so alone – where was he... why was I lying in my bed crying while he slept... did he feel anything? Will we ever be normal again?

I find it difficult to be mentally present when I'm physically drained. It has taken me years to appreciate the level of physical exhaustion I feel. Only recently, over seven years later, am I giving myself permission to take sleeping aids so I can get some rest...

One day I decided to write this list to set a focus for myself:

- ✓ *Find clarity about myself and my needs*
- ✓ *Why do I believe: I've had no time to sit down for "me"*
- ✓ *There's no breathing space – where can I find it*
- ✓ *What I need to do is connect to myself then I need to reach out and connect with others.*
- ✓ *Find out the difference between being in need vs being needy...*

One friend said... I've watched you change in the most difficult time of your life – you came through with shining colours, 8 years later I say... Bull Shit... 10 years later I say ... Maybe. I feel I am still hiding my emotions – after all it's been so long can't the story be over now? I am reminded of the pain each time someone asks, once again: How many grandchildren do you have? Each time the story begins anew.

Chapter 12

It's been...

I wanted to record a few specific thoughts I had during various milestones in the process of grieving. This chapter provides a timeline for the some specific moments and the progression through the years.

It's been four days...

I will myself to be or do in each moment.

I felt like I had crazy glue on all my parts to keep me together.

I had two big melt downs after Luther died. The rest of the time I was this tight composed person – unable to openly grieve without feeling that I'd be taking anything away from his parents.

It's been seventeen days...

It's been seventeen days since Luther died. Even writing this statement feels unreal.

It's been a month...

How do I begin to express all that has happened in the last month– I've been asked if I've recorded my experiences... a strange question to be asked at the time given I was frozen in my emotions. Today is the first day I've had to consider giving myself a voice for anything. When I reach out to close friends and family members all I want to do it cry.

It's been seven weeks...

Seven weeks ago today Luther died. At this time on June 29th he was fighting for breath and support...at 9:06 pm he died.

It's been forty-nine days...

The Buddhists say on the 49th day the body is burned and all attachments to the individual are released so that the soul can reincarnate. Do I believe this? I'm conflicted – what do I believe – what does it matter?

It's been two months...

On my daughter's 31st birthday, I went to my friend's wedding. The reason I was able to attend was Luther's death. I was unable to follow-through with my original plans... so I went to my friend's wedding. Weeks later I felt angry that I'd been there instead of at my

daughter's celebrating her birthday and watching her holding her baby. How can I explain what it feels like to lose a grandchild, when my focus is on someone else's joy.

It's been three months...

I think how easy it is to blame myself for the way things happen to others, and yet, the truth is we are all here to do the best we can in each moment. The important thing is to come from the heart in all things and to trust the process no matter what. I find it hard to follow this truth when I think of Luther's death and how difficult it is for my daughter and her husband. The pain is so intense at times – yet as my mom says – life goes on... easy to say when you've never lost a child... grieving for a child is just so different... can't anyone see that...

The First Christmas...

The first Christmas since Luther's death – my daughter asked not to have Christmas for them - it's too hard. I feel like I'm betraying them and Luther by feeling excited about the holiday.

It's been five months...

Luther died 5 months ago. Now he's been gone longer than we had him with us. There's a real sadness about that, and yet, there's nothing to be done about it.

I'm asked by my spiritual healer and counselors to let him go and I honestly have no idea what that means. I look at his picture and see him as a little angel taking on God's work. Is that letting go? I hear his little voice: "Yes!"

I watch myself as I look at other boys and young men, and wish I could watch him grow up into a strong man. This is the hardest part for me to be able to accept. All the lost hopes and dreams are forever present.

In many respects I know that we were given a gift of his presence for the time he was here. I know that his time with us was precious – for that I am truly thankful.

It's been six months...

I miss Luther terribly. I have no idea how my daughter and her husband are coping. It hurts for me and I often find myself in a fugue unable to figure out what is going on around me. There seem to be so many demands on me and I'm trying to meet them all, and yet, there's no way for me to even connect to what they are. It's so incredible to realize that at moments I just don't give a damn about anything.

It's been seven months...

I start to pressure myself to get going – get on with it – at other times I have no interest in moving my mind, body or spirit – nothing matters – I pretend it all matters and yet in truth, what’s the point. It’s all so hard to figure out – I wonder when I’ll feel like I’m back at it. Or if I even want to be....

Its’ been eight months...

I have a lot of anger at myself. Why do I hold myself responsible for Luther’s death? It’s totally unfair to have done that, yet there’s this part that says I’m supposed to. Could I really do anything to control Luther’s passing or living? Will any of it ever make sense – probably never. All I can do is accept it as it is.

It’s been nine months...

My husband came home – I could tell he was tired. I finished up my writing and left the room to give him some space. He came to me and said “I’m worried about you Liz”. I thought “Why” I had had a full day and just wanted to chill out. He said “I wonder if you’re avoiding me”. I realized that since Luther died I had become very lonely in my relationship with my husband. Every night I would listen to him sleeping as I tossed and turned trying to fall asleep – really unclear about what was wrong – why couldn’t I engage with him – Where had I gone?

It’s been ten months...

There’s a part of me that wants to scream at my husband... see me... hear me... be with me. We are both lost in our own feelings of grief, unable to reach out to each other. I put my attention on work... He puts his attention on work... We walk by each other...

It’s been one year...

Luther, I’ve been told it’s time to let you go to the angels– it’s been a year after all... Feeling these strong emotions tonight has been a hard thing to do. I thought if I could hold off feeling then you’d be free – I guess holding back my feelings has enslaved us both in one way or another...

It’s been two years...

Luther died June 29, 2004 – in many ways I stopped being in my life – I postponed my work in many areas – I am still working through some of my issues around his loss – so many lost dreams...

It’s been two and a half years...

I've thought about stress lately and know that I am dealing with a heavy burden and my body is reacting to it. I'm out of balance physically and there's a part of me that would just like to sleep, sleep, sleep...

It's been three years...

My daughter called last night – she is processing her anger which is very good. I wish there was something I could do to make the journey easier – I know I am doing the best I can – that's all I can ask of myself.

It's been three and a half years...

The emotions of Luther's loss are present and I expect they'll always be there so I shall relax about it – feeling my feelings is what I need to give myself permission to do right now.

It's been almost four years...

I feel it is time for resolution and completion. A friend suggested I write Luther a letter... it has helped... My fear and my longing for a different outcome have relaxed...

It's been five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten years...

As each day passes, the number of years increase... I have come to acceptance of Luther's passing. I still miss him and send him love every day. I often feel his presence around me which is and will always be a great comfort...

Chapter 13

Releasing and Forgiving

They say time heals... well I guess time passes... with it comes the understanding that life presents us with many challenges and joys. Being able to acknowledge my grief and joy have been the important parts of this story.

It has taken many years to accept losing Luther and, during these years, I have been blessed to welcome other grandchildren. They are the shining beacons within my heart that keep me on purpose. They call me “Gran Gran” and I know that name represents a special bond we all share that can never be broken. A bond which began with Luther’s birth and will always be present. My fears of loss have started to subside, however, I notice I am still hyper vigilant when the little ones are around. I have learned to accept this reaction as a part of my “being” and remind myself to trust all is well.

Do I believe everything happens for a reason... yes

Does Luther’s death make sense to me now... no – perhaps one day...

Does Luther’s life make sense to me now... yes

Two images and quotes that bring me comfort:

“When a child is born, so is a grandmother” is inscribed on a photo frame I have in my office displaying a picture of me holding Luther.

I have another photo of him on the last day I spent with him with the quote *“Share the Joy”*...

I cherish my life as the grandmother and have come to accept I am a different grandmother to my grandchildren as a result of this loss. I accept there will be times when my memories of precious moments shared with Luther will surface and it’s ok to feel my feelings. It takes nothing away from the moment. It is a reminder of the strength of a grandmother’s love and compassion... I love you forever Luther.

Over the years, I’ve been able to remind my daughter of how wonderful she and her husband were as parents to Luther. We had very precious times together during those short months.

Luther was beginning to really respond to his physical environment and there was so much joy in his eyes. I'll never forget the time I played with him the Sunday before he died. It was a special moment we shared.

I'm so thankful I could be there to witness his life in ways few people did. It really was an honour to be asked to babysit. I was reminded that it is evidence of how much my daughter and her husband trusted me. I am so thankful for that trust and for the precious time shared with Luther.

On June 29th Luther died and everything changed...

My husband and I began the swirl of – what now... what next?

We had bought our retirement home near to our daughter the year before and, after Luther died, the discussion of how to make things better began:

We'll relocate immediately to the area.

He'll continue to work at his job and commute home on the weekends

I'd build my business in the new location

We'd do whatever it took to make things work.

We were obviously in a desperate place... unable to be clear about our place in this story. The pain of watching our daughter struggle with Luther's loss was too great – my own grief was too great – making any changes was unthinkable at this point.

After a few weeks of deliberation, it became clear we were pushing on a door that was meant to stay closed. We were unhappy and it reflected in various physical injuries we were both suffering. Spirit was giving us the clear message – stay on your own journey, there's nothing you can do to change things. Uprooting yourself serves no purpose in the long run. We postponed our relocation until my husband's retirement the following summer and moved a few weeks after our second grandson Luther's little brother was born.

Accepting each moment and building to Forgiveness is the challenge following such a deep loss... I stood witness to myself as I struggled, questioned and accepted each step of the journey.

Learning how to be of support to my daughter has been the most trying part of this journey. I wanted to make everything better... my desperation clicked in and, as I reflect upon it, I can see there were days I was reaching out to her so I could feel better. It happened and there are times I feel embarrassed and disappointed in myself... I needed

the connection to confirm my decision to postpone the move was the right one, yet I swirled in the disconnection to the present.

During the months following Luther's death there was a 19 day gap with no communication with my daughter. I was feeling really worried that she wasn't answering the phone or returning my calls. In fact I heard myself say "I'm pissed off" several times and then I'd wonder why I had a bladder infection – better that it showed up there than in others areas of my body. The Anger stage had begun... finally.

I was feeling disrespected and taking the lack of communication personally. I knew my daughter didn't want me to keep calling her. She wasn't returning any phone calls and may have felt I was asking too much of her. I called her a few weeks later because I needed to talk – she never called me back – I called because I was sick – she never called me back. I called because I felt guilty... my life was still intact and hers was broken.

I notice when I'm angry I push people away so I don't feel the pain. When I'm angry I fuel the pain and it keeps me separate from those I love. All I want to do is cry – it's so unfair. It was a surprise to realize my daughter was doing the same thing instead of being honest with me about how she felt.

I was returning to my old pattern... I'm wrong yet again – no matter what I do it's the wrong thing. There was very little room in my heart during those moments for self compassion and love – anger was all I seemed able to connect with during those times. People would counsel: Why focus on it – just pretend there's nothing wrong – that works for you doesn't it – UGH!!! No it was making things worse – I felt I was being told to shelve my feelings and my experience.

I realize taking things personally does nothing to support me or keep me on purpose in my own experience. When others are going through their stuff I need to release myself of any responsibility for "being there" for them. Let them find their own way of coping and stop expecting others to understand what I needed.

When my daughter finally called, I felt so embarrassed. I told her the ugly place I went – all because I hadn't heard from her – it was a very powerful lesson for me. I realized I needed to live in a more peaceful and easy reality if I would survive this experience. What I was doing to myself was far from peaceful and easy – it was all a fabrication of my mind. I had decided I was being rejected, disrespected and unappreciated and that's what I saw. There was no evidence to support it, and yet, I really fed the emotions. I released so much anger and I realized I was grieving at a new level.

I had put so much attention on feeling disconnected, yet when I heard her voice my heart filled with love and the connection was there as it always is.

Chapter 14

Angel in Training

I'm trying to decide if I still believe in reincarnation. Why does a soul come for such a short time? As soul, did Luther achieve all he expected this time around? Did he earn his angel wings?

I was told the reason a baby dies young is because, as soul, they are here to experience the human condition as angels in training. Angels need to know what it's like to be human so they take the form of a child to experience all the emotions – joy and suffering, unconditional love and connection; and when their training is complete they leave to join the angels. When my friend shared this lovely parable it brought me a small measure of comfort.

There is a lovely book written: *The Angel with the Golden Glow: A Family's Journey Through Loss and Healing* written by Elissa Al-Chokhachy illustrated by Ulrike Graf which tells the story of two angels who come to a special family. Luther's story is similar to this one. Less than a year after his death, Luther's little brother Lucien was born. He is "The Angel with the Golden Glow" and fills our lives with so much joy.

I take comfort in believing Luther sent his little brother to us to help us heal and move forward without him. I also believe, as soul, he took his exit at the perfect time. I believe he chose to be alive as a premature baby so that his mom, who was critically ill following his birth, would survive and continue her life with us. I also believe he is part of the Divine which guides us each day.

Luther came to me in a vision one night. I had been struggling with letting him go and releasing myself from the grief and sadness. I was just beginning to fall into sleep... I had asked for help in releasing and falling asleep. Shortly after my request I watched as Luther came to me in a dream and reminded me of those moments I witnessed when he struggled... the moments when his parents were afraid... the memories of "he's not a normal baby mom"... it will take some time for him to gain his strength and be like other babies. Although I forgot some of the vision, I do remember his message – "Mom and dad deserve a healthy baby to enjoy an easier time. The grieving will pass – everything will be OK." There was so much shared in that brief vision. For a few brief moments I felt relaxed and found myself able to accept what is. For the briefest of moments... all was well.

There are times when I feel Luther's presence. When his little brother was about to fall backwards down the steps, I witnessed a gentle correction occur that righted the child and prevented the fall. Another time when I was feeling particular sad and alone, the little musical toy I had bought for him began to play.

I do believe angels speak to us in ways we can accept. There have been other signs of his presence and each time I am thankful for the connection.

Chapter 15

Unanswered questions

When I am in my spiritual truth I can embrace the Divine plan, however, when I am in my emotional and physical truth I find it difficult to reconcile life events. It all seems so very unfair. I want to shout out to the universe – stop the suffering and let the babies live. All of this seems very self-centered, yet it is true. As a grandmother, I ask: “Why...”

There is a silence present for the grandmothers still. The secret of our loss is embedded in our hearts. There is no talking about it. By writing this story I am hoping the silence of our pain can be acknowledged and spoken so that the memory of our grandchild can live on within and outside of ourselves without feeling guilty.

- Can I forgive myself for being unable to protect my grandchild?
- Can I forgive myself for being unable to be there for my daughter?
- Can I forgive myself for being needy?
- Can I forgive myself for being unable to express what I needed in the way of support?
- Can I forgive myself for closing off my heart?
- Can I forgive myself for challenging Divine order?
- Can I forgive myself for losing faith?
- Can I believe Luther’s death has meaning in the grand scheme of life?
- Can I trust my grandchildren are healthy and protected?
- Can I hold my grandchildren able to live their lives in love and safety?
- Can I allow myself to relax and trust everything is going to be OK?
- Can I allow myself to enjoy each moment with my grandchildren without worry?

These are all questions I have pondered and will continue to ponder as the years pass. The answer to each is “Yes”; however, I know there will be times when I feel challenged to return to my truth and to trust in the Divine.

At the anniversary of Luther’s birth and death there is a sadness that surfaces. I want to forget this day and all the events leading up to it, and yet, by doing so I would be negating Luther’s precious life. With pleasure comes pain... the joy of his life is the event that leads us to his death. It’s impossible to separate them...

- I am thankful for the gift of being Luther’s grandmother.
- I am thankful for the joy of watching him learn new things.
- I am thankful for the comfort his little body provided me as I held him.

I am thankful for the excitement I witnessed in his eyes as he moved his body for the first time.

I am thankful for witnessing his first success with thumb sucking.

I am thankful for remembering... everything... about Luther.

As painful as it is to miss Luther, I take comfort in knowing there was a special connection. I take comfort in knowing, I am a loving grandmother. I take comfort in knowing more grandchildren are finding their way to me. I take comfort in knowing our little angel Luther is watching over us.

Conclusion

It's been 10 years – a lifetime really...

I'm watching myself waking up to my life. Celebration seems to do that. I realize enjoying the moment is part of the letting go pieces. Celebrating the moment allows me to be present with myself, my husband, my children, my grandchildren, my friends and my life purpose.

I thought letting go meant something so much deeper. Now that I've decided to say my final goodbye to my grief I feel calmer.

My emotions regarding Luther's death seem to surface at the oddest moments of the day. I question myself... was there something I was supposed to notice... to say? It's important for me to stop holding on to feeling responsible... to stop taking things personally for my own sanity if for no other reason.

The energy of "who is to blame" has dissipated. I could tell the stories of the malpractice, the lawyers, the nurses, the whole medical system and its failures, yet what would that serve? All I know is: Luther lived and died... He loved and was loved... He was the first grandchild who defined me at another level of life experience... He is a divine expression of soul...

And so it is...

The last word is from Luther...

On the day I decided to edit and complete this project, Luther gave me a beautiful sign of agreement. I have a Zen clock in my office which has an alarm on it which I never activate... tonight at 9:06 the alarm bells spontaneously rang out... Thank you Luther... I got the message – it is TIME... I love you always and in all ways... forever...

APPENDIX I

Birth Announcement:

Luther Leger Hutton

Born at 19:03 on February 9, 2004

Delivered 10 weeks premature - 3lbs 1oz or 1410 gms.

I met Luther February 10th at 1:55 am. He looked so much like his dad. His little feet and fingers were so very perfect. He wrapped his little hand tightly around the tip of my baby finger and my heart melted.

He was very tiny, and yet, so very strong. Initially, there were tubes everywhere... he pulled them out – we were so proud of how determined he was to relax and breathe on his own...

I first held him when he was 1 month and 4 days old and weighed 4 lbs. We stared at each other for the whole time I held him. I promised “I’ll love you forever! I’ll be there for you! I’ll believe in you!”

When he was 2 months old, I cradled him in my arms for a whole hour. He had been in hospital following his premature birth and heart surgery, and now he was home and thriving. It was such a joy to hold him and listen to his little grunts as he relaxed into sleep.

I made weekly trips from North Vancouver to Vancouver Island to visit from April 4th to June 26th. It was such a joy to witness my daughter enjoying motherhood and watch my grandson growing and enjoying each moment of his precious life.

On June 29th he was dead... he was 20 weeks old...

We had so little time with him, and yet, his loss has been so difficult to resolve.

APPENDIX II

September 2004 Affirmation

It's OK to Grieve

Loss is always such a difficult experience...

Our darling grandson, Luther died on June 29th, 2004. This has been a devastating loss for all of us as you can well expect.

How does one begin to take the steps to move forward through tragedy? I have been pondering this question and attempting to make sense of this process for the past number of weeks, and realized something... loss is a natural process of life and *It's OK to Grieve*. Once I accepted this truth, I found more comfort and patience within myself.

We have all experienced loss, and as much as one would hope that it would never happen... the truth is that loss is a natural part of the order of life.

We experience loss in all areas of our lives, and yet, we ignore them. What about the loss of an identity? Who am I when someone I love dies? Do I stop being a grandmother? No... I will always be the grandmother. I hold memories of my grandson's precious 4 months of life. I am part of the process of his existence. By denying my role I would be denying him.

The same happens when I lose a career or a relationship. Who am I now that I no longer identify as "worker" or "wife" or "friend". Although this type of loss may seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things, the grieving process still occurs. In denying my role and the richness of the experiences I enjoyed during these periods of my life, I abandon myself and deny a very important part of who I am. Am I ready to accept that I can grieve this loss and be kind and gentle with myself?

~~~~~

Today I...

Allow myself to feel my feelings.  
Treat myself with loving kindness.  
Appreciate the gifts I have shared.  
Reach out to others and share my sorrow.  
Awaken to a new identify with love in my heart.

And so it is...

### APPENDIX III

## Letters to Luther

I was encouraged through counseling and work with a shaman to take steps to resolve my grief through writing letters to Luther. Here are two of the letters I wrote to him.

Letter # 1 – Christmas 2004

*Dear Luther:*

*You would be 10 months old today, Luther. My sadness at your death comes in waves. I've held back the tears these past months but tonight they just stream down... My heart aches wondering how to get beyond this sadness that stays with me. So much sadness and worry leaves me feeling drained. I know I've needed to cry – I was afraid to in case my tears would impact on you in some way, my darling grandson. I did want to believe that you are a sweet angel looking after your mom as she prepared to welcome your little brother Lucien to this world.*

*I miss cradling you and watching you grow and get to know the world. I miss the joy your mom and dad had sharing their life with you. I miss the dreams and all that could have been. I miss your little body cradled in my arms.*

*So many lost dreams...How do I dream for you now? I know your soul's journey was short and actually I thank you for staying as long as you did – knowing the struggles you had in your short life. BUT why couldn't you stay. It feels so selfish of me to miss you. I've been waiting all these months for a sign that all is well and it eludes me.*

*I remember the gleam in your eyes when you and I played together the last time I saw you, we were both filled with such joy. Thankfully, I'll always have that beautiful memory.*

*I held you for ½ hour and then I put you down on your little mat – you played with your little toys and mirror – you'd hit the toys with your hand and look into the mirror and smile. I loved watching you, then I placed my hands against your feet and you pushed off and there was so much excitement in your eyes – you could do it – you could move and feel yourself moving around the mat. It was a crowning moment for me to witness you experiencing your body.*

*How was I to know that would be my last memory of you little darling... I shall cherish it forever. I'm also thankful for the photos your mom took of you talking with me that day. I love those memories too. Thank you for these special gifts.*

*Your loving grandmother, Liz*

Letter #2 – 2009

*Dear Luther*

*When I think of you my heart fills with joy and longing. Joy at the memories I have of our precious time together and longing for the dreams that ended when you died. Many things have changed for all of us that love you, yet some things remain the same.*

*I feel the pressure on my heart where your hand lay as I held you. I feel the sadness at losing you. I feel confused by my spiritual beliefs and wrestle with the conflict between trust and acceptance. I feel consumed with anger at the injustice of your short life.*

*My belief that everything happens for a reason gets lost in the energy of making your death wrong. I know it's supposed to be easy to let go and accept you made the choice as soul to come here and be with us for your short life, and yet, I just wish you could be here with us.*

*You came to me in a dream shortly after you died and told me your mom and dad would have been forced to pull the plug on your life one day.*

*You came to me in another dream and showed me the physical struggles that would have laid ahead if you had survived – neither of these dreams satisfies me and yet at a soul level I feel you were expressing yourself to me.*

*Your death created the space for your brother to be born and for that I am very thankful. I want to believe he is your gift to us and that you provide him with loving guidance. I know there are lots of roads and bridges ahead for him and I am thankful you will be there protecting him. Yes, I know sometimes this protection will look different than I think it will be and I ask for the strength to stand in the journey with guidance and trust.*

*Sometimes when I look at your brother, I see your essence coming through. My spiritual training wants to believe your soul left the physical expression of Luther and came back in the expression of Lucien – yet I know in my heart the two of you are so different and both have a special purpose in this world.*

*Your purpose I believe was to give your mom her life – this sounds a bit dramatic and yet I think your birth gave her a reason to live when she was critically ill.*

*Help me to let go of all my fears of this old story. Help me accept each day and experience life with courage and wisdom.*

*I sometimes see you protecting us...*

*A journey on the highway delayed by a few minutes and we avoided a major vehicle accident.*

*One day when your brother was here playing, he lost his footing and fell backwards, heading over the cement steps – it was like he landed against something – he never hit the ground – he was raised up from behind by an energy I'm certain was yours Luther – such a quick and easy response keeping him from serious harm. Thank you, dear angel for taking care of him.*

*Love Gran Gran*

## About the Author

*Liz Robitaille*  
is the founder of  
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She has worked with clients for over twenty years conducting workshops and coaching.

A teacher, mentor and coach who is passionately committed to her work, Liz offers wisdom and understanding that help each person connect to the richness of their life. She provides tools for self-support that clients can use on a day-to-day basis.

Through Luther's loss, Liz has discovered that navigating through the grieving process is a solitary journey. She openly and lovingly assists her clients through their own grieving process.