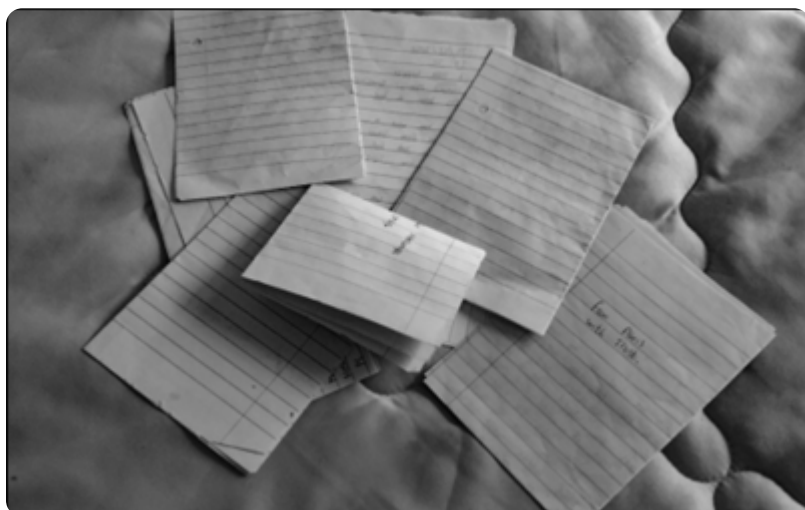




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Advocacy | Stillbirths

Gentle Ways to Honor and Cherish Your Baby's Memory



These letters carry all the love I couldn't give you in life (Credit: Nonkululeko Shibula)

As a mother and a bereaved parent, the journey of love and loss connects in ways words often fail to capture. When my precious baby was stillborn, a piece of my heart was forever changed. Yet, amidst the heartache, I discovered the importance of preserving my baby's memory. This act of remembrance has become a tender way to honour my child, keeping her spirit alive in my daily life. Today, I want to share some of the beautiful and meaningful ways I've found to celebrate and cherish the memory of my angel baby Ntando, hoping they may bring comfort and solace to others walking this path. I hope that not only parents but also researchers, clinicians and policy makers will find this to be a useful resource.

CREATE A MEMORY BOX

A memory box is a special place to gather and keep mementos that remind me of my precious baby. Creating it was the first act I could do in memory of her. I store items like ultrasound **pictures**, letters I wrote to her, her beanie, and other special items in the box. Over time, I can add other small tokens that hold significance. I keep our memory box in a place where only I can find it, for those days when I need to feel close to her.



A single bloom of a gentle reminder that life continues (Credit: Angelica Hill)

PLANT A MEMORIAL GARDEN OR A PLANT

Planting a garden in memory of your baby can be a beautiful and therapeutic way to create a living tribute. Choose plants, flowers, or a tree that hold special meaning to you and your family. Tending to the garden can provide a peaceful space for reflection and a way to connect with your baby's memory. One of the parents in our support groups recently shared a picture of a tree she had planted for her baby. When she went out to hang washing and saw it blooming, she shed a tear.

CELEBRATE SPECIAL DATES

Birthdays, funeral dates, and the last day she stopped breathing used to be dates when I found it hard to even get out of bed. However, as the years go by, the children and I do something special in her memory, like buying a birthday cake or lighting a candle. Marking important dates, such as my baby's birthday, due date, or the anniversary of her passing, is a meaningful way for me to remember her. Lighting a candle or having a family gathering to share memories and feelings offers a sense of connection and continuity. These rituals provide comfort and help keep my baby's memory alive.

CREATE ART

Nobody took a picture of my baby in the hospital, but from my memory as a visual artist, I was able to start a drawing that took almost two years to complete in pencil. I have framed it, and I have since done the same for a parent who shared a picture of her macerated baby; she wanted a pleasant memory of her baby boy. The look on her face when she received the drawing was priceless.

ESTABLISH A CHARITABLE TRADITION

Consider starting a charitable tradition in your baby's name. This could involve donating to a cause that is meaningful to you or participating in charity events. Volunteering can make a positive impact in your baby's name. I established Umzanyana Birth Services in memory of my baby Ntando to make a difference in my community and to let parents know that it's okay to heal in the presence of others.

and support each other in the process. The thought that every day 1 in 4 babies are stillborn and very little is being done about it in our communities drives my efforts.

WRITE LETTERS

Writing letters to my baby has been a healing and personal way for me to express my love and thoughts. I keep these letters in a journal or add them to my memory box. Over time, this collection of letters has become a cherished record of my ongoing relationship with my baby.

PARTICIPATE IN SUPPORT GROUPS

I struggled to find a support group in my neighbourhood, but during my training as a bereavement facilitator, I learned how to start one online and in person, understanding the healing benefits of such [groups](#). There are various types of [support groups internationally](#), each offering different kinds of support. If you're considering starting a support group, [Dodie Graves](#) wrote an excellent handbook on this topic that could be a helpful resource. Bereavement counselors and therapists can incorporate these support group strategies into their practice by guiding clients to either existing groups or helping them establish their own.

PERSONALIZE YOUR HOME

Incorporate elements into your home that remind you of your baby. This could be a special piece of art, a dedicated shelf, or a custom piece of jewelry. These personal touches can be subtle yet significant reminders of your baby's presence in your life. The closest I have come to this is with a necklace locket. During consultations, I have suggested this idea to others and have seen heart-warming results in their private rooms and living spaces such as photo frames.

CREATE A MUSIC PLAYLIST

Music has a unique way of touching our hearts and souls. I've created a playlist of songs that remind me of my baby or that have been meaningful throughout my journey. Listening to this playlist together as a family has helped us feel connected to my baby and find solace in the music. Over the years, I've collected songs that resonate with parents, and you can explore my Spotify playlist from my archives [here](#).

As bereaved parents, we navigate a unique journey filled with both immense love and deep sorrow. It is through remembering and honouring our little ones that we keep their spirits alive in our hearts. Creating spaces for their memories—whether through rituals, keepsakes, or simply sharing their stories—helps us heal and ensures that their brief yet impactful lives are never forgotten. Each act of remembrance is a testament to the enduring bond we share with our babies, affirming their place in our families and our lives.

I HOPE THE LIST OF PRACTICES DESCRIBED ABOVE WILL BE AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE FOR RESEARCHERS, CLINICIANS AND POLICYMAKERS.

For instance, bereavement therapists could integrate these methods into their guidance when supporting families through loss. Researchers focused on grief could include these practices in qualitative studies to further understand their impact on mental health outcomes after stillbirth. And policymakers might consider these approaches when designing programs to support grieving parents, helping to normalize remembrance as a crucial part of post-loss care.

This post from the Stillbirth Advocacy Working Group (SAWG) reflects the perspective of the authors alone; it does not represent the views of the SAWG. The Stillbirth Advocacy Working Group was founded by the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, and is co-chaired by the International Stillbirth Alliance and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Email co-chairs Hannah Blencowe or Susannah Leisher at hannah.blencowe@lshtm.ac.uk or susannah.leisher@hsc.utah.edu to learn more or sign up to join the group by emailing sawg@stillbirthalliance.org

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