

*This is the testimonial from Heather Benton,
Mommy of Elijah Conner Benton of Pearl River, Louisiana.*

Since we lost Elijah, we have desperately tried to preserve the memory and purpose of his short life here on Earth with us. Having lost him at 13 weeks and 4 days of pregnancy, simply validating his life's worth proved to be quite a task to anyone who was not a close friend or family member. By Elijah's due date, we were determined to have him a decent gravesite set up at our family cemetery, and we did that. However nice it might have been, it remained unmarked. That not only left the gravesite looking impersonal, but it made us feel as though we were being impersonal to our son. The son we so loved, and cherished, and wanted.

We are a military family, which as most people know is equivalent to the phrase "overworked and underpaid". We had never dreamed we would be shopping for headstones, instead of layettes. But there we were, surfing the internet, checking out local companies – all with the hopes of finding not only a beautiful headstone to memorialize and honor the life and death of our sweet Elijah, but finding something that we could afford. Finding something affordable proved to be the most difficult, and depressing task since... well, since we lost Elijah. I would find something that seemed just perfect, only to realize we could not afford it, and "financial arrangements" (i.e. a payment plan) do not seem to be the norm in the headstone business.

For a year and a half, we would search, I would get depressed, and I would give up for awhile, only to start the cycle again. I knew that it was unfair, and felt like a horrible mother because my son's gravesite was unidentified. It was bad enough that he was never even recognized as a human being – he has no birth or death certificate. The only medical or legal acknowledgement of our son is classified as a "miscarriage" in my medical records. Not good enough. Not for me, and most definitely, not for my son. I couldn't give up, but daily, I was losing hope... would my son ever have that one little, seemingly insignificant recognition that I so desperately sought for him? I thought not...

Then after much crying, and praying, I started to wonder if there were any organizations or foundations that provided assistance for people in our situation. I wasn't looking for a handout, just some help. That is all I have ever asked for – just a little help. I began my search on the internet looking for *infant memorial financial aide* and to my surprise; I stumbled upon The Connor Kirby Infant Memorial Foundation. I thought it was too good to be true, and actually bookmarked the site for awhile before getting the nerve up to apply for financial aide from them. After all, I had a miscarriage. Would they tell me they couldn't help me, because my child was still unviable at the time of his birth? If they did, surely I wouldn't be able to handle that kind of rejection. I was scared, but on a leap of faith, I filled out the application. Once I submitted it, I put it out of my mind. I don't know how long it was – a week or two, maybe a month or more, but on October 7, 2004 I got an e-mail from Adele Kirby, President of The Connor Kirby Infant Memorial Foundation, letting me know that they WOULD indeed help our family! As I read her e-mail, I laughed (at my fear) and cried (at the unbelievably kind gesture) and was completely, without a doubt astounded at the entire irony of the situation. After all, had I continued to fear the reaction of applying for financial aide for my "miscarriage", I would still be searching and devastated over the results of my search.

Within 24 hours, I had scanned through the many headstones I had looked at over the previous year and bookmarked on my computer, contacted several of them, prayed, talked with my husband, settled on a headstone that we both loved, placed the order, and had been notified by Adele that the payment was on the way to Jones Memorials for my sons beautiful, and long overdue headstone! What a roller coaster ride! But most of all, what a blessing this foundation has been to my family. Finally, my sons name will be forever etched in stone. He will never have a birth certificate, or a death certificate. That will never be legally acknowledged. But with love and compassion of The Connor Kirby Infant Memorial Foundation, he will forever be remembered, and acknowledged in our lives, and many more lives down the road that will see his astonishing headstone and know that yes, yes Elijah Conner Benton did exist, and he was loved.