

**My heartfelt thank you to the Connor Kirby memorial fund, its founder Adele Kirby, and especially to the memory of her son, Connor.**

It has sometimes been called a “perversion of nature”. You may ask yourself what I am talking about; I am talking about burying your own child. It is a difficult thing to accept and what parent ever planned for this occasion? Most of us, as parents, care more about our children than life itself; we cannot afford to entertain thoughts of burying our own child. The cycle of life has been jumbled since the death of my son. Life is supposed to be a progression. You’re born, you grow up, you get married, you have children, watch them grow and have families of their own and you eventually die. When your child dies it disturbs the natural order of things in essence stealing your innocence in the belief that nature follows some sort of script. After all we expect our parents to die in our lifetime, it’s difficult, but we have after all, in the back of our minds, been expecting it.

This “perversion of nature” has become part of my life. It reared its ugly head on July 18, 1990 when my firstborn son was stillborn. At the tender age of sixteen my then husband and father of my child and I were financially unable to afford basic living expenses let alone to try and provide a funeral and headstone for our first child.

Over the last nearly 14 years since the burial of my son I have been through a myriad of emotions because of my inability to provide a permanent headstone as a final tribute to my son’s memory.

Guilt has been the predominant and most consuming emotion I have had to deal with. I felt guilt at every turn. I would feel guilty when I would buy a new pair of shoes or even when I would buy a bag of potato chips, I always thought to myself, “I am such a terrible mother, here I am spending money on something that was not necessary to survive, I should take that \$1.79 and save it for a headstone for my son.” Or “why should I have new shoes when my son lies in a cemetery in an unmarked grave”

Fear was another emotion that has been at the top of the list also. One of my biggest fears was that in 100 years my great-great-grandchildren would be researching their family tree and would learn of my son and where he is buried. As they explore they discover that he is in an unmarked grave. I could picture the conversations regarding this discovery, wondering why he was left in that condition. The conversation then turns to what a terrible, cold, and uncaring person I must have been to not care enough to give him a headstone. What a legacy to have left behind.

Guilt and fear are just two of the many emotions the death of my child brought to the forefront. Other emotions have come into play also including pain, denial, shock, anger, and many more. No one except a parent who has lost a child can begin to understand how these emotions affect every aspect of your life, your family life, your relationship, your job, and your future are all affected.

Now that I have received the donated headstone I feel a sense of relief knowing that if something were to happen to me tomorrow and I “left this earth” there would be no

“unfinished business” left behind concerning my firstborn child. Shawn’s headstone has also made me accept some closure. When I saw his headstone it dawned on me that it was the first time ever I had seen his name written by someone other than me. The only place I had ever seen his name was on his death certificate and his COSB (certificate of birth resulting in stillbirth) and that’s it. Even Shawn’s medical records all refer to him as “baby boy” or “male infant” those references seem to minimize how important this child was to my and my family.

A headstone to me is a necessity, a final gift to a loved one that allows them to, for all time, be known and remembered. Thank you for giving a grieving mother a place in the world again. I thank you for giving me the ability to show off his name to the entire world. Proving that no matter how long my son lived, even if only inside of my body that his life had meaning and purpose, proving that he was real, was loved, was cherished, and people cared.

Thank you for giving me back the dignity any grieving parent deserves, you have given me back so much more than that however. You have given me back my son, my memories and a big part of my life.

With heartfelt hugs from one grieving mother to another,  
Angela Farley

Mom to Shawn Christopher Mensing 7/18/90 and 4 miscarried angels (1992(twins), 1996, and 1997)