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A Father's Love

St. Norbert College

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- Home -

GO

- Magazine
- Love abounds
- Soul mates
- More than a photo
- Love is patient, love is kind
- Words from life
- Forever more
- Building on a mission for peace and justice
- Running the pilgrim path
- Shooting for glory
- President's message
- Subscribe
- Archive

-
- E-newsletter
 - Television Show
 - Press Releases



How Many Children Do You Have?

By Jeff Kratz '92, Dean of Academics, Lincoln College-Normal

Reflections for Samantha Grace Kratz

Amidst his grief at the loss of an unborn baby, Jeff Kratz '92 found consolation in the realization that this, his fourth child, would always be

numbered precious among his daughters.

Kratz, now academic dean at Lincoln College-Normal, is the nephew of the Rev. Conrad J. Kratz, O.Praem., '70, director of the Norbertine Center for Spirituality. Fr. Conrad appears in this reflection, addressed to friends and family, where he is named as Jeff's Uncle Jerry.

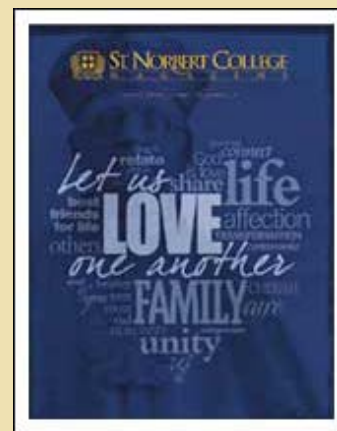
I was not prepared for the phone call that I received just after 2 p.m. at work.

Stephanie had gone to the Maternal Fetal Diagnostic Center in Peoria for what I had thought was a routine ultrasound. I didn't go with her; there was no need to. It was a regular ultrasound; it was our fourth child; nothing was wrong with the pregnancy. I had gone to most if not all doctor's appointments with the other kids, but there did not seem to be a need to attend this one. In fact, I had not attended any of the appointments that Stephanie and Samantha had had.

When Margaret at Lincoln College's front desk finally hunted me down after my 1 p.m. class to tell me I had an emergency phone call from Peoria, I knew what had happened. There was no heartbeat with the baby. I didn't even have to wait for the call from Stephanie. I just knew. For a regular ultrasound, there would be no need for an emergency phone call.

Then Stephanie called me and confirmed my fears. There was no heartbeat. There was no heartbeat.

I found someone to drive me to Peoria as soon as I got off the phone. The doctor and nurse in Peoria were wonderful. They talked with us and I know that they had tried to comfort Stephanie as much as possible before I got there.



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[Too 'Old School' for our own good?](#)

President Tom Kunkel challenges colleges and universities to embrace new ways of delivering higher education.



[A new face in the cafe](#)

Steve Pyne (Dining Services), who has Down syndrome, was profiled in this recent article in the student newspaper, the St. Norbert Times.



[La Perichole](#)

St. Norbert College Magazine dropped in on a rehearsal for this three-act operetta production, to be staged on campus.



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A gallery of images from a trip that connected a child in Kenya with his sponsors in the United

In the course of our conversation with them, our doctor said that we had to think about how we would handle this theologically, emotionally and philosophically. Then, he said that we had to think about the social implications of our loss as well. I asked him what he meant. He asked how, in casual conversation with people that we may meet, we would respond to the question, "How many children do you have?"

How many children do you have? A simple question that I would ask someone I had just met. How would I answer it now?

How many children do I have? I have three, I thought to myself. I had three before I got Stephanie's phone call and still had three after Stephanie's phone call. But, after seeing Stephanie, hearing Dr. Leonard's question and driving back to Bloomington from Peoria, I realized I was wrong. I realized that, before Stephanie's phone call, I had had four children and that after Stephanie's call I still had four children.

I had fallen into a trap. The father of an unborn child is not as attached to the child as is the mother. The father doesn't carry the child. The father doesn't nourish the child before it is born. The father can't protect the unborn child like the mother. The father is not as emotionally connected to the baby as the mother is. All of these social beliefs – beliefs that I found I had held – are wrong.

I ache to hold my daughter. I ache to feed Samantha a bottle. I yearn to wrap my arms around her and protect her from the cruel world she was going to be born into. I never thought I would say this, even after having three beautiful children, but I want to change her first diaper. I am jealous of the time Stephanie had with her. Samantha was on this earth for only five short months and Stephanie got to take her everywhere.

After long conversations with Stephanie over the course of the labor, delivery and recovery, I have come to realize that our distress is equal. I may not have physically carried her, but I was equally attached to her.

When I was talking to Uncle Jerry on the phone after I found out the terrible news, I told him I was so sorry for Stephanie. I was sad for Emily, Laurel and Josh. He told me: "That is because you love, guy. And that is a wonderful thing." After I hung up the phone, I realized he was right. I love my wife and my children. All of them. I realized I was not just sad for Stephanie and the kids. I was mourning not only the loss of a daughter that I thought I did not know, but the loss of a daughter that I loved.

Grief and sadness can only occur if you lose someone you love. I carried Samantha for five months, just as Stephanie did. I carried her spirit in the bottom of my heart. I was connected to her, just as much as Stephanie was.

She may not have ever taken a breath of air, but I knew her. She may not have ever looked at me eye to eye and told me "NO," but I knew her personality. She will never scream at me to stop teasing her, but I can hear her voice in my head even as I speak. She will never jump on top of me with her brother and sisters during our nightly wrestling sessions, as Stephanie sits by and says, "I can't believe you can let them do that to you," but I can feel her. She was a part of me.

How many children do you have? I have four. I knew Samantha. I would have called her Sammy (Samantha Grace Kratz when I wanted

States.



[A father's love](#)

Jeff Kratz '92 offers a unique perspective on a father's love.



[Words from life](#)

The poetry of **Ken Zahorski** (English, Emeritus) deals with fathers and sons, phases of life and familiar figures remembered across the years.



[World view](#)

Grazia Villarroel (Political Science) speaks with **Dean Michael Marsden** on international issues and educational opportunities.



[Man of property](#)

Joe Jones '12 sits down with **Mike Dauplaise '84** to discuss an education in entrepreneurship and the launch of Jones' third business. He is 21 years old.



[Dick Bennett on Gary Grzesk](#)

The basketball legend remembers his years presiding over the storied defensive career of Grzesk, current coach of the Green Knight men.



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to drive home a point). I look out at everyone in the church and I see her. I think about those of us who could only be here in spirit and I feel her. Emily, Laurel and Josh remind me of Stephanie, as I am sure they remind Stephanie of me. So I knew Samantha. And to see her, I need only look at her mother, her sisters and her brother. I need only to look out at all of you.

Because I carried Samantha in my heart with Stephanie, because I knew Samantha and because I love Samantha, I can say that the hardest thing I have ever had to do was watch her lifeless body be born.

When Dr. Wellman handed Samantha to Stephanie, I knew I wouldn't need to hold her. I couldn't hold her. I thought about all the opportunities of life this precious little girl had been denied. The gift of life had been taken from her. I didn't need to hold her. She was my daughter whether I held her or not.

And I knew that I was already and would always be holding her in my heart – next to Emily, Laurel and Joshua. In my heart I am hugging her, comforting her, wrestling with her, teasing her, watching her grow up and listening to her speak to me. In my heart, my whole family is holding her.

That night was a pain beyond any other measure of pain I have ever felt. As I drove home at 2:30 in the morning, our wedding kept popping into my head. During the ceremony, Uncle Jerry asked, "Will you accept children lovingly from God?" I had answered repeatedly in my mind, yes.

My pain began to be soothed when I got home and went to bed. I opened my Bible and read and re-read Psalm 23 until I fell asleep. I was surprised at how peaceful and comforting the words were when I read them. I was equally surprised at how blunt and hard the words can be when the Bible is dropped on your head by your 2-year-old son at 5 a.m.: a son who had no real concept of what was happening.

As the day progressed and I talked with and played with Emily, Laurel and Josh, I was put even more at ease. My children, I realized, give me strength. I have come to the realization that my children have taught me more than I may have taught them.

My children have taught me patience. They have given me glimpses of wisdom beyond their years. They have taught me honesty. They have taught me how to pray. They have taught me how to cope with pain. They have taught me laughter and a joy like I have never known. They have taught me that I am a man with faults and frailties, just as they have faults and frailties. I have discovered myself in them and someday they will discover themselves in me.

How many children do I have? I have four. Samantha has taught me that the issues I teach in my philosophy class are not abstract, but real-world concerns that impact real people. She has taught me more about Stephanie than I thought was possible after 10 years of marriage. She has shown me more about myself than I knew was there.

Samantha has taught me humility before God and others. She has taught me to never take life for granted; that each life is special and deserves our attention. She has taught me interconnectedness with all other people; that I have friends and family more numerous than I previously thought.

She has reminded me that God sends us help in familiar forms. Our labor and delivery nurse Kelly was from De Pere, with family who had attended St. Norbert College.

She has taught me that I do not “own my life” but am a “steward of the life” that God has given me – a quote in the St. Francis Hospital elevator that I repeatedly read as I went to Stephanie’s hospital room. She has taught me to love even those people you think you do not know – because, in reality, we do know them.

This unborn five-month-old child has reminded me how to pray. Samantha Grace has restored my faith in the comforting words of Scripture. Truly, as it says in Psalms 8:3, “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you have fashioned praise.” Christ said, “Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Though my pain runs deep, though I do not understand why this child – my child – had to go now, though I will not have a picture of Samantha to put on the mantel next to her sisters and brother, I find a small measure of comfort in the knowledge that she was called to Christ and, as the picture on the memorial table suggests, is cradled in his arms. Stephanie and I have talked about the fact that we feel we should be the ones to have the chance to comfort her. And I wish we had. But Christ comforts all of us – and Samantha has reminded me of that.

The night we told the kids that the new baby had died and would not be coming, they were sad but soon went on with their lives. Stephanie and I called family to tell them the horrible news. As I talked with Dad, Stephanie was passing by Emily’s room. Emily was in her room with the door closed having what Stephanie thought was a prayer service for Samantha. She overheard Emily saying, in what Stephanie said was the tone of a homily, “The new baby is safe in the sky with Jesus.” Uncle Jerry, when he heard the story, said that it was Samantha speaking to us through our oldest daughter. I believe he is right. “Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

I will never forget Samantha Grace. My fourth child who taught me more in five days than I have ever taught all of my students combined in 11 years of teaching. Stephanie worries that we will forget her. She worries that the slow march of time will cause her to fade from our memory.

But I know Stephanie better than that. She could no more forget our child than she could forget a line from “Star Wars.” Stephanie, do not worry that we never met her and think because of that you will forget her. I have realized that I knew her, that I love her, and that I carry her equally within my heart with the rest of our children. And I know you do, too. If I could never forget her (and I forget a lot), you certainly won’t. She is a part of you, just as she is a part of me.

So ask me. How many children do you have? We have four. Emily Ann Kratz. Laurel Katherine Kratz. Joshua Norbert Kratz. And Samantha Grace Kratz – who someday, we are all going to meet face to face, in the comfort of Christ’s arms.

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