

Moments Held

Documentary Photographs

Todd Hochberg

In our culture, photographs build and pass on our family histories and legacies. When a baby dies, the natural order of this history and legacy is upset by an awful disruption of life assumptions.

Whether their baby dies early or late in pregnancy or shortly after birth, parents embark on a unique path of grief. They have strong emotional ties to their baby through many months of pregnancy or even through long held hopes and dreams, but have few tangible mementos that would affirm this child's existence and significance. Parents often feel disoriented as they struggle to cope with their grief, integrate their loss and reconstruct their changed lives. Relatives, friends, and community members are also challenged with how to offer support, some unable to grasp the fullness of the experience.

Meeting these challenges, my documentary photographs are made in hospitals for grieving parents in the precious short time they have with their dying or stillborn baby. These images serve as a gentle link to memories and feelings; offer an illustrated narrative for themselves and those they choose to share it with; play a significant role in helping parents grieve and heal; and help parents to find the treasure in their adversity. Like any photographs their meaning evolves and changes over time.

While making meaningful photographs for grieving parents I strive to be fully available, mindful for each moment and attentively supportive as their experience unfolds. As parents engage and soak up this emotional time, that very flow carries me along. Rooms often become very small as they fill with family, yet instead of feeling confined there exists for me, through intense human connection, an expansiveness and sense of oneness, of spirit.

The Documentary form appropriately mirrors the unfolding experience in an effort to make tangible without intrusion. My photographs are made without electronic flash and are not staged or posed. Evidence of

and connection to relationships between parents and their baby, other family members and caregivers are what tend to be most important for parents when they view the photographs. Religious rituals and those innovated by parents are also elucidated. As an affirmation of a beloved baby these photographs finally and effectively contribute to a legacy, a family's story, and to family history.

"I was aware of Todd's soft unobtrusive presence as he photographed our family those 6 hours in the hospital. We received a full album of intimate photos. I wept and gasped at their beauty. I am reminded of my love for her [Ava Lyn], her softness, her innocence, our loss, yet our hope, and her sweet memory. She will never be forgotten..." - Pam

"Losing my daughter [Ainsley] is a horror that I relive over and over; the true miracle is Todd's photographs transport me from sorrow so deep to joy beyond belief..." - Mim

"We saw our time with our son [Joshua] laid before our eyes. It's as if the [photographs] spoke to us saying, 'It was real. You did hold him. You did kiss him. You are a family. ...I felt such a sense of peace.'" - Lynda

It is with deep gratitude I give thanks to the families who generously agreed to share their photographs in this exhibition to help educate, validate and heal others. To all the bereaved families I have photographed, I sit with a full heart for the gift you have given me in the privilege of being with you and your baby or child. Your love, courage and truth and the memory of your children endure. I also thank the many compassionate caregivers I have worked beside for their trust and guidance and to the institutions that have provided me access and in some cases funding to continue my work with families.

Dedicated in loving memory to my mother, Phyllis Hochberg, whose lifelong passion was that of a nurturing and protective mother. I love you, mom.

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Todd Hochberg is a documentary photographer. Working in conjunction with hospital bereavement programs, palliative care programs, hospices and directly with individuals, he makes documentary photographs and legacy video for individuals and families struggling with a serious illness or grieving the death of a loved one. His Touching Souls Bereavement Photography has supported parents as they say goodbye to their children and babies, since 1997. His bereavement photographs are part of the permanent collection of the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography. He has received an International Center of Photography Infinity Award nomination for 2001, was a finalist in the W. Eugene Smith Grant Competition in Humanistic Photography for 2003 and received the MISS Foundation Phoenix Humanitarian Award for 2007. His Legacy work has been exhibited at the Voices Gallery at the University of Michigan Medical Center in 2006. Hochberg's work has been featured in Life magazine, Photo District News, the Chicago Sun-Times, the Santa Fe Center for Photography web journal, the Association for Death Education and Counseling's journal The Forum, NHPCO's Children's Project on Palliative/Hospice Services Pediatric Palliative Care Newsletter and in ATRIUM -The Report of the Northwestern Medical Humanities and Bioethics Program Issue 5 2008. Todd presents to a variety of professional groups nationally and locally.