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the children leave, because I won't return to this empty house, not for anything. Another snowy, difficult day faces me, and I dread another long, exhausting trek to the shopping mall. The weather keeps friends at home, friends who would come to me if they could, so I must find my way alone. The sun is shining today and it helps, but the fog is always with me, weighing me down, keeping my mind muddled. Moving constantly from store to store, I must keep moving, but slowly, very slowly.

I'm buying things today, a few things that please me. Clothes that appeal to me, things I wouldn't have bought two weeks ago. Once the purchase is made, it's forgotten; and by the time I enter the next store, I won't remember what I've bought a few moments before. Going home this day, there is the same intolerable exhaustion and blisters on both my feet. Loneliness and desolation surround me. I don't know when I've ever felt so totally alone or so in need.

God has always been my rock. Only now do I realize how many times a day I reached out to Him with all problems great and small. And I find myself doing it now, a creature of habit. But each time I wonder at my stupidity, at how I can expect God to help me with petty problems when He wouldn't even save my baby's life. I'm lost and alone with no God that I feel I can call on, and I miss Him terribly.

The Third Week

Each day I drive the children to school, then head out to visit friends or meet someone at home. Always when the car is headed toward the empty house, the tears flow and I cry for the baby who won't be there with me. Driving is a crying time.

There are lots of friends, someone each day to talk with, to cry with, to keep me distracted from the pain. I need people, schedule them carefully into each moment when the house is empty. I won't be home alone after driving the children to school, won't re-enter the house alone.

Then comes the day when I arrive home alone. My friend is late and I don't know if I can go in without her. There has to be a first; I will force myself to make it today. Strange how the house mirrors the feelings of those inside. And today the house cries with me, each empty room, one after another. I know he's not here, but I look in every corner to convince myself I'm really alone. I walk through the house crying before his pictures, talking to him, believing, actually believing I will see him come running in-

to the room. After 10 tearful minutes a quiet calm settles over me. So he's dead. I know he is. I saw his body without life, and I'm aware of the autopsy and all that implies. He is dead, but it doesn't matter because I believe in miracles, and I can get him back. I know he's coming back. So I can smile through the tears because he's not lost forever. He can't be.

I'm not inclined to move or change anything that belonged to Alex. Only his little brown coat is removed from the entry closet to wash and lay away. A dozen times a day, I'd come upon it unexpectedly, a pain I couldn't handle. But I don't launder it when I realize that it smells like him. For several weeks I will save the coat, carefully tucked away, picking it up each day to savor the smell and remember the baby that belonged to it. But the day would come when the smell of him had dissipated and that remembrance would be lost forever.

This night I'm engrossed in a favorite TV show. For one short hour the reality of life is put away from me and I relax just a bit. Releasing the grief makes me vulnerable to taking it up again. And when the hour is finished it's upon me before I know it. I've let my guard down and am unprepared. The TV blares. The familiar words overtake my entire being. "Parents, it's late. Do you know where your children are?"

Pictures flash through my mind. I see my three other children tucked safely in their beds, and Alex lying cold and alone in his grave. Oh no, I can't stand it. Memories begin to flood over me and I see every detail of a visit just a month before to a doctor in Chicago. I see Alexander's sweet angel face, feel him, experience the realness of him. I want to stop the images, block it all out, but it's no use. It's upon me and I must see it, feel it. In bed the agony overtakes me and I can't stop the crying. A couple of hours pass, sobbing, sobbing, till I'm exhausted from it and can drift away into sleep. I will fight the memories, avoid them as long as I can. I'm too afraid of the pain.

The Fourth Week

Choices. My mind cannot handle choices or decisions. Bombardment by more than one simple thought makes me too nervous to cope. My intellect is already on overload assimilating death and grief. Planning a meal is a total impossibility. Guests for dinner one evening; my friends know that I'm in trouble and offer to bring the food, but I decline the offer. "Just tell me what to serve and what to buy from the grocery." Incredible the