



Loss of Parent - Vanessa

I have been blessed to have one of the greatest mom's ever. Her name was Bernadine, but everyone knew her as Bernie. She was very loving and loved by all. We were best friends from the moment I was born. Even in high school, friends were always amazed at how close we were. We would do something dumb and they would ask me, "Are you going to tell your mom?" My answer was always, "Yes!" She knew the first time I had sex, tried drugs, pretty much everything. I know it's hard to believe, but I can't remember ever having an argument with her. My father was killed in an accident when I was in my early 20's. Mom stayed single the rest of her life.

When I got married and moved 150 miles away, it wasn't very long before I moved her near us. She functioned very well in a nursing home. Although she faced many health challenges, heart disease, lung disease and finally dementia, she met them head-on with a great attitude and never let them get her down.

My husband and I drove out here (to Colorado) almost five years ago on vacation with the intent of staying six days, and ended up staying three weeks. In those three weeks, we bought a house, joined a gym, found Flatirons Church, and a nursing home for mom. We moved here October 13th, 2006. Mom was so excited to come with us.

A couple of weeks after we arrived in Colorado, her health began to decline. I freaked out immediately when the doctor asked if he could call Hospice. He said not to worry; that she just might need a little extra care. Hospice came and informed me that my Mother was going to die in two weeks, which she did to the day. I was in shock and replied, "No, you must be mistaken, not my mom! She's just having a bad day!" My husband's family was going to fly out here for Thanksgiving from Illinois. I begged him not to let them come, as I would need his support. He replied, "What do you want me to do, reschedule them?" "Yes!" I said, as I cannot reschedule death. They came anyway. I didn't know anyone out here as we had only been here less than a month. I needed support as mom was declining every day. One desperate night, I couldn't take it anymore so I called my oldest and dearest friend from Illinois, Linda. She was on a plane the next day. The nursing facility and Hospice were great letting me stay in mom's room 24 hours a day, which I did for the last five days of her life. Linda stayed in a nearby hotel at night and with mom and me during the day.

Mom died on Thanksgiving morning. I hate to say this, but I still don't like Thanksgiving. If she would have lived a couple more days, we would have celebrated her 81st birthday. I was now officially an orphan. I stayed at the hotel that night with Linda, as I couldn't go home to a house full of people.

A few days later, I watched them load mom into the belly of the same plane I was on to take her back to Illinois where she was buried next to my dad. Since most of my family is dysfunctional and I have divorced myself from them, there was a very private, small gathering with myself and four other women...best funeral ever! We held hands and prayed and said great things about mom.

The next two years are pretty blurry. I went through two grief support groups with Hospice, and later a couple through Flatirons. I also had counseling with a local therapist. Before that, I was a mess. Christmas came and pretty much sucked that year. Randy's family came out once again against my wishes. I pretty much stayed in my bedroom the entire holiday season. It used to be one of my favorite holidays to spend with mom.

One of my dogs had a leg amputated soon after, which resulted in more stress. I wasn't sleeping very well, heck, I wasn't doing anything well. I would drink at night to help numb the pain. Sometimes, even my prescription sleeping meds wouldn't help. About five months after my mom died, I was very depressed and not eating. I took some sleeping pills in the afternoon to try to help me sleep so I wouldn't have to be awake to feel the pain. I washed them down with a couple of glasses of wine. This went on most of the afternoon and into the evening.

I was on the phone late with a very dear friend of mine that's like a sister to me, another Linda, this one from California. After talking for almost an hour, Linda thought I was just getting ready to sleep as I was getting very groggy and my speech was getting slurred, so we hung up. Later, when my husband couldn't wake me up, he thought the worst. He didn't know who I had been talking to, so he hit redial on my phone and reached Linda. They both were very afraid for me and ended up calling 911. Being a gun owner didn't put my husband's fears at rest, either. I ended up in the psychiatric ward at a hospital, as they thought I might have been trying to commit suicide, which I was not. I just needed to escape and not feel pain. Those 48 hours were not my two favorite days. I was so mad at my husband, Linda, and everyone there, too. "I told them it was very insulting that they would think I would try to kill myself with just a few pills, as I know it takes much more than a few to end a life." I also informed them that the so-called "food" that they were trying to feed people was mostly crap with very little nutritional value. How on earth do they expect people to get better when they're not even nourishing our bodies? They were very glad to get rid of me, I'm sure. I'm now very thankful to my husband and my very dear friend, Linda, as they were doing what anyone would do for someone they loved.

My journey to healing has been very long and very hard. Not a day goes by that I don't think of my mom. And yes, I was very angry at God for a short time. I can now remember mom with more smiles than tears. I know that she is home with God and that I will be with her again.

Loss of Spouse - Rosalie

My name is Rosalie and I lost John, my husband of 19 years, to a motorcycle accident on October 14, 2009. John and I have one daughter together, Jessica, and I have 2 other daughters, Jennifer and Cheryl, that John also loved as his own.

John and I met while working at Rocky Flats. I know I can't speak for him, but we had often said it was "love at first sight". Once we met, there was no turning back. I knew we were destined to be together. John was the most compassionate, caring, loving man I have ever met. I think Jessi and I had him wrapped around our little finger and there wasn't anything he wouldn't do for us. He'd bring me my cup of coffee every morning, scrape my windows and warm my car every winter and even iron for me if I was running

late. All those things that seemed so small at the time mean so much to me now. John and I loved music and going to concerts – you should have heard us singing in the car! Like most couples, we had “a song”, but we took it even further. We had songs for every season of our marriage. We were coming into a time in our life we were looking forward to. As much as we love our children, we were not afraid of an empty nest.

Although John’s accident happened on Wednesday, October 14, I believe God was preparing me for what was to come. The weekend before the accident, John and I had tested our “freedom wings” and decided on a last minute weekend to Vail. We had no plans but just to relax and enjoy a weekend ALONE! On that Saturday night John was snoring so I nudged him and asked him to roll over. He grumbled a bit but did as I asked and within a few seconds he was sound asleep again. I rolled in towards him and started to put my arm around him when I heard in my head or I thought in my head that said, “Remember what it feels like to touch him, remember how he feels.” I remember opening my eyes and I shook my head and thought, “Why did I think that?” I pushed it out of my head and fell asleep myself. Now when I think back I think it was God speaking to me that night.

Four days later, the day of the accident, it started out a little chaotic. John worked at the University of Colorado as a Construction Project Manager and had left for work about an hour before me. As I was leaving for work my car stalled about 10 feet onto the street. I panicked and did the only thing I knew to do, I called John. He told me to calm down, put the car in neutral and try to move it off the street. I did as he said and described what the car had done. He figured it might need a new battery and that’s exactly what it was. When he got home from work he went to the auto part store and got the battery and went on to say he got new wipers and filled the windshield fluid so “I wouldn’t have to worry.”

For October, the weather was beautiful that day, 75 degrees and perfect for a motorcycle ride. John said since the weather was so nice that when he finished working on the car he was going for a motorcycle ride, so I decided I’d start some Christmas shopping when I got off work. I went to the mall but once I got there I found I wasn’t much in the mood for shopping after all so I headed home. I was a few blocks from home when John and I crossed paths, we waved to each other and that’s the last time I saw him. When I got home I went into the bedroom to change clothes and thought I would sneak in a nap before John got home.

At about 8 pm, I woke up and it was dark and the first thing I thought was WOW, I must have slept right thru the motorcycle pulling into the garage. I went into the kitchen and living room to find the whole house was dark. I called out for him and got no answer. I went to the garage to find the motorcycle wasn’t there. I instantly got a knot in my stomach. John was never gone for too long or ventured too far, so worst case scenario was that he ran into someone at the grocery store and lost track of time. I waited for a bit then I called his cell phone. There was no answer and I thought, “Well, if he’s on his bike he can’t hear the phone”, so I tried to stay calm and waited about 20 minutes and called again. That was the first of maybe 40 times I called his phone that night. By now it was probably 9:30 pm and it was cold outside. I remember I started to pace. I couldn’t think of anyone to call or I couldn’t even think of a place to go looking for him because John wasn’t the type of guy that hung out with buddies and he wasn’t one to go the bar, he was a family man and a homebody. I continued to pace and I couldn’t tell you how many times I looked out the front door hoping I would get a glimpse of him coming up the street. By around 10 pm, I knew something was wrong. I sat at the edge of the bed and started to pray and when I look back now I think I maybe started to go into shock mode.

I was sitting on the edge of the bed when at 11:15 pm the doorbell rang. I shot up and with a fleeting thought I prayed, “Please tell me he is alive and in the hospital, please God let it be that. “ I opened the door to find two police officers and a woman who was a Weld County victim’s advocate. Try as hard as I

can, I can't remember what they said. Everything seemed to go in slow motion and I remember wanting to get sick. I couldn't breathe and yet there were no tears and I wondered why. Well, it didn't take long and the tears wouldn't stop. I remember telling them I can't tell Jessica, who's going to tell Jessica? Next I remember rambling phone numbers to the police and before long, my house was filled with family and friends. Later the police had left but the victim's advocate stayed with us until morning.

Everyone had questions, and the only answer we got was that John was traveling north on Foothills Highway just west of Longmont. A young family from New York was on their way to visit friends in Lyons when they hit an animal on the road and went back to find it. They didn't find anything and when turning to go back, the driver made a second U turn which was right in front of John. The time had been 7:55 pm. I'll be honest with you, even at that moment, I had compassion for the other family and could only imagine what they were going thru.

The morning brought new complications: John's mom. How do we tell her and who's going to tell her? John was an only child whose father had passed away in 1982, so John was her life and she lived and breathed on his every word. She adored him. We sat at the kitchen table and formed a plan as to who would go and how they would tell her. I don't remember who or how it was done, I just know it happened. At the time she was suffering with an aggressive form of bladder cancer and had been scheduled for surgery that very Friday, so her health was fragile. She came and stayed with us for a few days but with all the people coming over and all the commotion, it was just all too overwhelming for her. She wanted to go home and she promised us she would be okay and assured us she was just 20 minutes away. She went home and 2 days later while we talked on the phone she said she wasn't feeling good and thought she should go to the hospital, so my brother took her. We later got a call telling us she had suffered a slight heart attack. The doctors called it Grieving Wives Syndrome. She ended up staying in the hospital for two weeks and missed all John's services. She was devastated.

About three months later, the Boulder County's DA's office was taking the defendant to court. He was being charged and later found guilty of careless driving resulting in death. The maximum for that offence could have been 1 year in jail and 2 years' probation. On the last day of the trial, the judge allowed us to make a victim's statement to the defendant. I chose my best friend and her husband, my brother, my girls and myself. We all had prepared statements, yet nobody had shared with each other what their statement was going to be. As everyone's statements were being made, it didn't take long to see we were all on the same page. We were all speaking as if we were speaking for John. Someone spoke of John's great love, compassion and faith and his love for art and music. Another said John wouldn't harbor any resentment and would have said, "Hey man, it's okay, it was an accident." We even asked the judge to not give him any jail time because "John wouldn't want him to spend even one night away from his family."

I don't think I could have been more proud of Jessica that day. Jessica told of her love for her dad, her best friend. She told what a good cook he was and how he would hover over us when we were sick. How she wished he could be there for her graduation, her wedding and the birth of her children. I turned to the defendant and his wife and told them I forgave him for the accident and that I hoped this experience wouldn't destroy them. I told them to love and support each other. We all spoke from our heart that morning. I think you could have heard a pin drop in that courtroom as we all read our statements. I was later told there wasn't a dry eye in that courtroom. There were observers, attorneys and their assistants that were wiping away tears as they listened. It even took the Boulder County DA a moment to compose and had to clear her throat before she could speak. Next, the judge spoke. He stated he came in that day "dreading it like crazy" because he worried that our loss must still be very fresh and any sentencing wouldn't or couldn't match the pain and loss we had experienced. He went on to say that listening to everyone beautifully tell their stories about John, he knew what an amazing influence he was and that "the acorns fell not far from the tree." He also said that, "in his 25 years on the bench, he had never seen such a

broad and decent expression of love and forgiveness.” The judge gave the defendant 2 years’ probation, 200 hours of community service and a fine. When all things were final, the judge said he needed a break and that court would resume in 15 minutes. We were finished so as we walked out, many people walked out with us. Complete strangers came up to us and gave us hugs. One said, with tears in her eyes, her heart had changed when she had seen what true forgiveness looked like. Another woman said she had been angry for years about an accident that took her sisters’ life and wanted now to forgive and let go. It was God working that day. Thank you, God!

Well, up to now you might be saying you haven’t heard any protest yet. Well, my protest comes when I see couples walking together hand in hand, hugging or kissing. I get angry when I wish for what we had and I dream of what could have been. I long for John’s hugs and kisses and I long for his companionship. Still I wait for one of his many phone calls he’d make to me “just because” he’d say. I still want my happily ever after and still I want to grow old with my husband. John was the love of my life and I miss him every day.

Soon after the accident, I had remembered reading a quote by St. Augustine that says, “Resentment is like taking poison and hoping the other person dies.” I know I didn’t want to live a life with resentment or bitterness. I’m not saying every minute of every day I’ve been forgiving and understanding. I still have days that I’m angry that John is gone, like when the garbage disposal won’t work, my basement floods or my car breaks down. I want to cry, scream and yell and it would feel so good to break something. But those moments have gotten fewer and shorter with time. I have learned to become more independent or maybe just more resourceful. One thing I know for sure, I thank God and my grief workshop for my healing.

Well, the first spring after the accident, when I would see motorcycles and their riders, I never felt fear or hatred towards motorcycles. What I felt was anger that I didn’t have John to ride with, so I’d throw myself a pity party. Finally one day my friend asked, “Rosalie why don’t you ride?” I thought for a while and told her John had taught me how to ride but I didn’t have a license. Before I knew it we were looking for a motorcycle safety class to take and I put the word out that I was looking for my own bike. Some people looked at me like I was crazy, but most were amazed at how brave they thought I was. I got a lot of “good for you Rosalie”. Even my dad said, “Rosalie you can’t live in fear, just be careful.”

It wasn’t long after John’s accident that I remembered the voice in my head that night in Vail, “Remember what it feels like to touch him, remember how he feels.”

Now, I have a new song in this season of my life.

Psalm 30:11-12

¹¹ You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;

You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,

¹² To the end that *my* glory may sing praise to You and not be silent.

O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

Suicide - Michelle

Friday May 29, 2009 was a beautiful day to start the summer. Jenna, my daughter, was 16 at the time. She called from her best friend Haley's house to ask if she could spend the night and to let me know that they were going to come by later and get Jenna's things. Summer break had just started the day before, and the girls were excited for the first weekend of summer.

My 22 year old son, Jon, came over to the house to cook out and watch the Nuggets play the Lakers in the final clincher game of the play-offs. Jon and his girlfriend had broken up several weeks prior, and he was totally heartbroken. He and I spent quite a bit of time together in May – Jon needed “mommy time” while he got over what turned out to be a pretty awful break-up. That night, Jon and I made a quick trip to the grocery store to pick up a few things to grill. We ran into the attendance counselor while we were at the store; she had worked at the middle school that Jon had attended years ago. Ms. Amey and I had gotten to know each other quite well during Jon's middle school tenure. She was amazing with the kids and had a special fondness for Jon and his crew. The three of us stood in front of the paper towel section for so long that we decided to invite Ms. Amey to join us at the house for dinner. We ate outside on the back patio, drank wine, and talked and reminisced for hours. I lived one block south of the middle school and two blocks north of the high school. Our house was the “Grand Central Station” of Broomfield and known as the house on the bike path with the “beautiful patio with curtains and flowers.”

Ms. Amey was a native of Germany who had lived in the US for many years at that point. My dad's family is German. He and I were taking a trip to Germany for the first time in less than three weeks to meet family I had tracked down over the internet and because my Dad and I had been planning this trip to Germany for months, it was so exciting to get the “inside scoop” on Germany from Ms. Amey. Jon had an innate curiosity for life and a genuine inquisitiveness that let him get away with asking questions most people thought but didn't verbalize. During our conversation that night with Ms. Amey, Jon asked questions like, “Do you think the family we haven't met in Germany were Nazis?”, “Were your family or friends Nazis?”, and “What was it like growing up in Germany for you and your parents?” We had a delightful evening talking about life and catching up.

At 10:30pm, Jon and I walked Ms. Amey out to her car at the same time that Jenna and Haley pulled into the driveway. Both of the girls remembered Ms. Amey from their days in middle school and had a fun chat before she headed home. I went inside started to clean up while Jenna gathered her things to spend the night. Jon stayed outside talking to Haley until they left for the night.

Jon and I were laughing about how he'd been teasing Haley when Jenna texted me to say that she was going to go to the Rockies game the next night with her dad (my ex-husband). An ordinary request under most circumstances, except that he had moved back to Houston three years prior and hadn't been back to Colorado since. Neither Jon nor I had a clue that he was even in town. This news broke open some old wounds for both us that he would plan something with Jenna and exclude Jon - again. I was super angry and didn't notice how deeply upset Jon was until he and I exchanged some heated words. It was awful because Jon and I didn't fight like that and we were both hurt and upset by the turn of events.

I told him to get his stuff and go home. Jon walked out the front door and blew me a kiss before he closed it. He said, “That is the last kiss you'll ever get.” I said, “I don't want your kiss, Jon. I want you to leave.” I walked through the house, dazed, turning out lights. I let the dogs out one final time for the night and then locked up. I went to my room and wondered what had just happened. Jon called, but I declined the

call. I texted him that I didn't have anything else to say and that we would talk in the morning after we calmed down. He called two more times, but I declined both calls. Then he sent a text that said, "You will have something to say if you come to the back patio." As I walked downstairs I heard a loud sound. He shot himself on the back patio.

I screamed, "No, Jon. No, Jon, no, no, no, no." I knew he was dead as I ran to grab my phone and dial 911, but I couldn't believe it. How did this happen? Who was screaming? Why couldn't the 911 operator understand me? I had to repeat my name and address over and over. I was curled in a ball on the rug in front of the open sliding glass door. I couldn't go outside. I couldn't see what I already knew to be true. My son Jon was dead. He had killed himself. How could this have happened?

The police and fire department response took less than five minutes that felt like forever. I could barely speak. I couldn't stop sobbing. Where did he get a gun? We didn't have guns. Why did he get so angry? Our argument didn't make any sense. I told the story over and over again to the detectives at the police station. I couldn't stop sobbing. Did I want something to drink? Really? Would I ever want to eat or drink again? Was my heart still beating? Oh dear Jesus, please let me wake up. How was I going to tell Jenna that her brother was dead?

As I look back over the summer of 2009, it seems so surreal. I buried my son. For the next six months, I felt as though I were watching a movie of my life. My dad and I went on our trip to Germany and took Jenna with us. We were there for two divinely ordered weeks. I went through months and months of a specific intensive therapy called EMDR that was formulated for soldiers who experienced visual imagery trauma. I was surrounded by family and friends. And I started attending Flatirons and came to the Grief Workshop. God wrapped His arms around me and carried me through that time. There is no other reason that I am standing today than Jesus.

I made a decision not to let Jon's last choice – and it *was* a choice – define him or me or Jenna or our love for each other. Suicide is a lot of things, but it isn't the "unforgivable sin." I've read the Bible from cover to cover for myself. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, ALL sin and blasphemy can be forgiven" (Mark 3:28-29). If ALL sin can be forgiven, that includes suicide. PERIOD. Jesus came to Earth and hung out with drunks and prostitutes. There is nothing to biblically support that God throws up His hands and says, "I'm out" when someone is in their darkest, most desperate moment. Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Why would God possibly turn His back on my son, or your loved one, in his or her darkest hour? The answer is that He didn't. God knew from the beginning of time what Jon's choice would be on May 29, 2009. Psalm 139:16 says, "You saw me before I was born. *Every day of my life* was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed" (emphasis *mine*). I believe that God was with Jon and with me and with Jenna that night. He was on the patio with Jon with His arms open wide, ready to bring Jon home. I can't presume to know the heart or salvation of another person, none of us can. But I do know that God pursues us RELENTLESSLY to our very last breath.

God was with me that night – and knew the shock, the desolation and the despair that was to come. I believe He protected Jenna by having her spend the night away that evening. God surrounded Jenna and me with friends, family and circumstances for months, maybe even years, to prepare us for Jon's death. I pray that through your grief journey you will begin to see how God was present with you and with your loved one. You can invite Jesus into that memory and He is faithful to show you where He was and how deeply He loves you.

Shock feels like a hole you can't climb out of, like living in a fog with no real grasp of what is going on. Death stirs up conflicting feelings and leaves us feeling shaky, off-balance, messy, angry and devastated. Jon's death was the darkest night of my soul. I wanted to run away from the horror and pain of his death. As holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom said, "There is no pit so deep that Christ is not deeper still." Grief is the **proof of our love** for those we have lost.

My first year of grieving and healing highlighted in me "the need to discover Something More. Each of us has lived lives in which we have been: shocked, starting over, surviving, stumbling, shattered, sensing, and searching for Something More." Jesus is that Something More. He wept with us over our loss. He is holding us, even now, while we mourn. He will wipe our tears and walk with us - carry us - while we mourn. We can choose to be stuck, to stay disheartened and discouraged, to lose ourselves in bitterness, and to remain overwhelmed in our grief. We can try to find comfort and solace in the bottom of a bottle, or in food, or in sex, or work, or somewhere else. But we won't find peace in any of those places. I've looked. But we can trust. Trust Christ to care for us in ways we could never care for ourselves.

Grief From a Mother's Heart - Donna

As I started on this testimony, I realized I am repeating myself at the beginning; the story of our loss hasn't changed yet I have, and continue to, as God strengthens me every day.

We have three beautiful children, Amber our oldest, Cameron our middle son and Colin was our youngest child. Colin the one we didn't plan...the one that was almost not born...the one that we learned after his passing shouldn't have lived as long as he did with the undetected heart valve defect he was born with. We were indeed blessed to have him for 21 years!

In November of 2007, Colin moved into a duplex with his brother, each having their own unit. As a mom, I was concerned about this move; he'd started having seizures a couple of years earlier and it had been a huge fear of mine that he would be alone and not recover. I wanted to put him in a protective bubble, as the doctors still had not found a cause and the seizures could come on at any time. Colin had turned 21 years old that October and hadn't had a seizure in six months and he desired independence and normalcy. What could we do? We prayed for his protection.

Christmas of 2007 was the best ever! There was a peace and calm that surrounded Colin. He was loving, happy and full of anticipation for the upcoming year.

Colin passed January 5th, 2008, eleven days after that wonderful Christmas.

That Saturday night, we returned home around 11:15 pm after spending the night with our grandson at Zoo Lights. I noticed Colin had called us a few moments earlier and was puzzled that he had not tried my cell phone as he always did if he couldn't reach us at home. I tried to call him, there was no answer. At 11:40, my previous fear came to pass as Cameron called frantically telling me upon his return home, he had found Colin dead. He kept saying "Colin is gone, I'm so sorry, Mom, he's gone, he's gone!" Cameron continued to explain he was waiting for the police and paramedics to arrive. I can still hear my scream (the scream that still makes me tremble). The frantic questions: "How? Why? Why was he alone?" started coming. Cameron kept saying he was sorry and that he had tried and tried to revive him but couldn't. Numbness set in - I didn't believe it... after all, Colin ALWAYS survived his seizures. So in my numbness and shock, I packed a small cosmetic bag with my contact solution - I still felt I would be going to the ER and possibly spending the night there, once again. Cameron called about five minutes later, it was confirmed -

Colin was dead! I repeated the words, those words that made no sense to me as I called my friend Robin and my parents. I don't know what I wanted from them, I don't even know why I called...I just wanted prayers, miracles... I just wanted my baby back!

I was numb. We prayed all the way on our drive to our son. We arrived at his duplex to have the police tell us we could not see our son until the coroner arrived. A few minutes later, however, they let Gary go in but not me! I was upset! I was his mom...he needed ME! Moms could "fix" everything! Robin and her family had followed us to the duplex where we waited. I had to wait, wait with a wall standing between me and my son, wait until after 2:30 am to finally see for myself that he indeed was gone. As much as I prayed for him to open his eyes, he didn't. I had that need to see his beautiful eyes one more time. He indeed had a massive seizure he could not recover from. I remember I was crying, but there were no tears! Shock had hit me head on! Tears didn't come for about 24 hours. Cameron followed us home and our daughter Amber joined us a little later - we held each other. I just wanted to feel their warm bodies and keep them close. They said this would bring our family closer together - I yearned for that, trusted that, hungered for that.

Again, after Colin's death, we thought we had it figured out. The good that God would grant us upon Colin's death was family unity, that unity we had longed for so long! Instead, the enemy filled our kids' heads with lies and they in turn withheld their love—love for and from our family was what I craved the most. I now recognize I needed to turn my cravings upward.

The week following Colin's death was chaotic, loud, hectic, confusing. However, a few weeks after the chaos, after the visitors, phone calls and cards ended, the silence that remained became deafening. Gary had returned to work a week after Colin's memorial. I was now alone. Nothing seemed real—had the unimaginable really just happened? I kept longing to see Colin standing in front of the refrigerator "grazing" as we called it. I wanted reassurance that all would be well. I wanted to talk about my son, but did not want to bother my friends or bring them down so I isolated myself for the most part. Gary and I were now alone, yearning for sense to come out of this tragedy, wanting to know what our purpose was. The better part of my life was spent taking care of my children, particularly this precious child that God called to him too early. Without my kids around, what do I do? Those first several weeks I remained numb. That numbness turned out to be a blessing as feeling everything was excruciating!

We learned there was a Grief Workshop here and started attending four weeks after Colin's passing. There, we found strength we didn't know we'd ever have. We found comfort, hope, empathy, community and understanding. We found we were not alone. We were asked to facilitate after attending two rounds of the workshop and have been doing so ever since. And the blessings from it have been great.

In the workshop, we learned how to recognize the stages of grief. I discovered, in my case, after shock, the other phases of grief hit me all at once. I realized you can feel guilt, be disorganized all while trying to reorganize and make sense of this new life all at once.

I recall in shock I found it hard to breathe, I was numb, nothing made sense to me as the world spun out of control and I stood in this unimaginable void. In protest, I felt a mom's guilt of not being able to protect my son. I discovered that the woulda, coulda, shoulda's will consume you if you let them. In disorganization, I felt there were no tasks I could complete without total exhaustion. Leaving my bedroom to simply open the blinds was a task I learned to praise myself for. New life began immediately, a new life without my son. A whole new normal had begun.

HERE IS THE TRUTH AS I SEE IT NOW:

Grief and sorrow no longer need to consume my life. I now have some control over that sadness. Don't get me wrong, sadness still comes...but it's not that tsunami that hits you from behind and knocks the wind out of you. It's a quieter sadness, a washing over you that doesn't totally knock you down. Oh, I still have my days, but the recovery time is so much faster now and those moments are shorter and no longer all-consuming.

While praying for God to strengthen my faith and for me to see the path he has planned for me, he made it clear he lights that path one step at a time. I need only to focus on the step I am on and not concern myself with what lies ahead...TRUST that God has it covered.

I ask God to help me to recognize his answers to my own prayers, to hear his voice in all I do and to show me how to distinguish the valuable from the unimportant. I want to believe that God perhaps saw something ahead in Colin's future that may have been terrible and protected my son from it. After all, the love our Heavenly Father has for our children is far greater than the love this mom has...that is overwhelming for me to understand as I can't comprehend a love bigger than a mother for her children!

I used to think if I could understand "why?" tragedies happen, it would help, but when you've lost your child, there is no answer that is reasonable or satisfactory to a parent's heart. Finding out the "whys" will not change that my son died and that acceptance is a part of this grief process. My comfort comes in trusting God, and recognizing what I cannot change.

What is MY PURPOSE now? During the time that has passed since saying goodbye to our son, I have discovered more and more THIS IT IS NOT ABOUT MY PURPOSE BUT GOD'S! I have discovered that sharing my story, volunteering in church ministries, and surrounding myself with those that encourage me spiritually has been wonderful in my own healing. God makes no mistakes. God honors our expression of faith when we say "thank you" through our tears, when our hearts are broken.

With loss comes unexpected blessings. EMPATHY to look at another parent and to say "I really do understand" is a gift that comes only from suffering great loss. And the greatest gift of all, the ULTIMATE PROMISE that we WILL SEE OUR LOVED ONES AGAIN!!

God uses our grief to heal us, strengthen us in our faith, and cause us to grow in our relationship with him and others. I don't want my pain to be wasted or to wallow in it. I want to remember God's words to simply "BE STIILL and know that I am God."

I feel honored to be able to share my story. It is my sincere hope that it in some way helps others. We are on an amazing journey, mapped just for us (I am not sure I love it), but God's with me, with all of us. He has promised to carry us. As one of the songs that was sung at Colin's memorial states..."When the sacred is torn from our lives, we'll be HELD."