

Mother's Against Drunk Driving - if you drink, don't drive

One small town; three young adults killed by drunk drivers



LISA CARTWRIGHT
Features

On November 2, 1991, Goodwood resident Bev Northeast discovered a message on her answering machine - her son-in-law Gary was killed in a car accident and her daughter Lisa was in serious condition.

By the time she got to the hospital, her daughter had already died and her grandson Matthew, 3, was left an orphan.

Bev's long-time friend and Goodwood resident Jan Harrison attended the funeral and commented to her husband that she didn't know how her friend was able to cope.

Her sons, Todd and Clint, didn't go to the funeral because they were too upset by the death of the woman who had cared for them as children.

Six weeks later, on the way home from Christmas shopping, Clint was killed in a car accident.

In that short period of time, three young adults in one small town were killed by people who were driving while impaired.

Six years later, the grief of losing a child hasn't lessened for either Jan or Bev.

Yet, they agreed to tell their story so people will see what happens when people drink and drive.

A picture of Gary and Lisa sit in a blue and white frame in front of us. The two look completely happy, smiling into the camera. There is a bend in the photograph because Matthew has kept it in his pocket for so many years. A picture of Matthew, now 9, is set up beside his parents.

A picture of 21-year-old Clint also sits in a frame on the table.

Jan remembers the picture was taken after Clint took an acting class. He wanted to be in commercials. She rubs the dust off the only thing she has left of her son.

"The person who kills has all the rights," said Jan. "The court system is basically towards (the) walking, breathing person. The victim is forgotten."

During the trial of the man who killed Gary and Lisa, the fact that two young people were dead and a child was left without a parent was mentioned once and never mentioned again.

"Victims have no rights," Bev said.

And those who are left behind don't have rights either.

"(Matthew) lost his rights to be raised by his parents. He lost the right to know his parents."

Both women are changed as would any parent who has to bury their child.

When you find out your child has been killed "you so desperately want the world

to stop. Life goes on, but it is a changed life," said Jan.

Bev begins to tell the story of the time when one of her daughters saw a caterpillar and started to scream, begging her mother to kill it.

Although she is telling you, she is also re-living the day when Lisa stepped between her mother and the caterpillar, saving it from death.

Jan too, has her stories of her son - entertaining people, working at a local grocery store and playing with children.

An outsider would see two women sharing the accomplishments of their children, but at this table, the accomplishments end.

There is no memory of Clint in his first nation-wide commercial or Lisa getting a job as a teacher.

There will be no new memories created. But Jan and Bev aren't the only ones who feel the loss.

When Matthew was four and a half, he went to Bev and asked her to pull up his sleeve and tickle his arm like his mom used to do.

"He said 'if I close my eyes (real tight) I can pretend you are my real mom.' People have no idea. How can you answer that? That is (a routine) between a mother and a son."

Bev's situation is different because she is raising her daughter's child. She said she is lucky because Lisa kept a journal telling of the dreams and plans she had for her child. But the dreams are one-sided, Gary's dreams for his child are gone.

Clint never had a chance to get married or have a child.

His brother married after Clint's death and he never had a chance to meet his sister-in-law or hold his nephew.

"Todd was (upset) not to have his brother on his side the day his son was born."

Grieving continues

Each person deals with grief differently. There are many stages of grief that a person has to go through and none that can be rushed.

Bev didn't cry for two years. Afraid that if she started she wouldn't be able to stop, Bev spent her time cleaning. Jan was the opposite and cried often.

Both agree that talking helps.

"Many people don't know how to deal with you. They are afraid to mention your (child's) name. (But) we are afraid they have forgotten them," said Bev.

When the two found out their children were dead, they said it felt as their heart had a huge whole in it. While the hole is healing, the ache remains.

Yet they go on. Every day they get up knowing that they will never see either Clint or Lisa and Gary again.

And every day they fight for the rights of victims of impaired crashes so that Lisa, Gary and Clint's death has meaning.

When Matthew was four and a half, he went to Bev and asked her to pull up his sleeve and tickle his arm like his mom used to do.

"He said 'if I close my eyes (real tight) I can pretend you are my real mom?'"

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