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# LAMENTATIONS

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## **Am I Still A Parent?**

By Pat Akery, TCF Medford

With Mother's Day and Father's Day just around the corner, we are again facing some days that may be difficult for some of us. The reminders of these two special days are everywhere, so we couldn't avoid them even if we wanted to. It may be my imagination, but it seems as well that during this time of year we are more likely to be asked questions like: "Do you have any children?" or, "How many children do you have?" What happens in the pit of your stomach when someone you have recently met asks you these questions - the same questions that gave you such feelings of pride to answer before your child died? Do you stumble over your words as most of us have (or still do from time to time)? Do you feel as if you have to say more than you want to? Or do you feel as if you aren't saying enough? If you have another child, he may ask you, as he works through his own grief, "Am I still a brother?" Does this kind of question prompt you to ask, "Am I still a parent?" How do we make it through Mother's Day and Father's Day with difficult questions such as these and all the emotions we are feeling in our grief?

All I can suggest are a few things that have worked for me. I think that it helps to realize that many of us have strong feelings we have attached to Mother's Day and Father's Day stemming from our past experiences – some perhaps even bittersweet - that were created well before our children died. Many of us have also established some traditions associated with these days that we may feel we must continue. Things are different now. We are doing critically important work. We are - even when it doesn't feel like it - doing the most difficult work we will ever do - grief recovery work. At times it takes all the energy we have and goes wanting for more. Pay attention to your energy levels. Make sure you get enough sleep and not too much. If you are not sleeping enough, try to take naps as you need them if possible. If you are sleeping too much, try to increase your physical activity. Make changes slowly and carefully in both your amount of exercise and your diet if necessary. Many of us don't eat healthfully early in our grief recovery. We usually eat too little early on and many of us tend to eat too much later. Be sure to seek the advice of a doctor regularly, especially if you have any health concerns. But even if you don't, you should still seek advice because we tend to neglect our health more than we think we do when we grieve. Even small changes in our health can make a noticeable difference in our mental state.

Beyond your physical well-being you should look critically at the traditions and obligations you have established. Obviously, the ones you truly want to do you should do, but others you may want to change or eliminate. Your healing and recovery is the most important work you have to do. Do only what makes sense and don't hesitate to ask others for help when you need it. Also, ask other TCF members, who may be further into their grief recovery, how they handle specific situations that might be troublesome for you.

Prepare ahead of time for the questions that might trip you up. Know that it is perfectly okay to give different answers to different people to the same question. Even questions as simple as "How many children do you have?" results in my answering differently depending on who asks. Frankly, some people matter more in my life than others. Those that matter more, get more complete answers, those that matter less, get less complete answers. The most important thing is that I decide ahead of time how I will answer. It makes the answering much easier. I give varying answers to these kinds of questions without any feelings of guilt, or any sense that I am not telling the truth. The important thing is that I am telling the truth. It's just that I don't feel an obligation to share with everyone I meet that my son, Bobby, has died. Even if Bobby were my only son, I would answer the question "Am I still a parent?" the same way I would answer my son Jimmy's question "Am I still a brother?" Yes, of course! I come to this answer quite easily by thinking of how I view my relationship to my father. Though my father died some years ago, I am still my father's daughter and I always will be. I will always be the parent of both my sons - Bobby and Jimmy. And Jimmy will always be Bobby's brother. Death does not, no matter what else we may think, change our precious relationship to our parents, our children, or even to any of those who we love.

I am still a parent!

**May your Mother's Day bring you nothing but special memories.**

## **Grief Grafts**

**Greg and Marilane Kerstien's son, Gregory (10-24-81), died from an auto accident, 5-2-03.**

Marilane describes Gregory:

*He was 6' 4" tall, blonde, blue eyes and weighed 230 pounds and very good-looking!!! He was our Sunshine!!!*

*Gregory was a very positive child made A's and B's in school. He loved people and was very happy, always smiling, very outgoing, very close to both sets of grandparents. He was a Pike at the Murray State. He has always worked and enjoyed working very much. He was on his way to work at O Charleys in Paducah, Ky, when he was killed,. May 2; the time was 3:11 that afternoon.*

*He loved playing golf, played football in high school, played baseball and loved all sports. He and his brother Blake were very close and had a great relationship. We are a very loving family. Love Marilane*

**Gregory's symbol is sunshine.**

**Sherron Westerfield Twitchell's son, Rick Stepp (6-2-62), was killed by a drunk driver, 6-7-92.**

#### **TAKING THINGS FOR GRANTED**

*Last winter, as I walked along a Florida beach listening to the roaring surf and screeching seagulls, my thoughts drifted back over my life and many of the things **I took for granted**. Things that seemed insignificant then, but which I now saw with the stark clarity reserved for hindsight.*

*I thought about that winter more than 40 years ago when I was pregnant with my son. Unlike so many young women today, I never questioned the care I received at the clinic on the base where my Marine husband was stationed. **I took for granted** that each one of the continually rotating obstetricians who saw me knew what was best for both me and our unborn baby.*

*Yet, in a very few years I would learn that many other military wives who were pregnant during that period routinely were given a medication called thalidomide. We had all **assumed** that our babies would have ten fingers and ten toes and be wailing little bundles of energy. Fortunately, my son, Rick, was one of the lucky ones.*

*Over the next decade I saw to it that my little boy had the necessary inoculations, took his vitamins, had naps, wore corrective shoes for his inherited flat feet, ate his vegetables, and was in bed by 8:30 p.m. I read bedtime stories to encourage his budding imagination and love of books. I taught him to look under rocks for interesting creepy crawlies and to look up for rainbows and shooting stars. I considered it my duty to show him how to blow bubbles, whistle, tie shoestrings, tell time, and spit watermelon seeds. **I took for granted** that all this was important in the development of his character.*

*Later, in the dark early Sunday morning hours, I helped 11-year old Ricky roll newspapers for his route in our apartment complex. And when I walked in the shadows as he made his rounds on collection night, **I took for granted** that I was safe. After all, I was a*

mother going about the business of protecting and guiding my only child. I was impervious to danger.

During his junior high school days, I endured drum lessons and seemingly incessant practice on everything that would resonate. **I took for granted** that by his marching with the band, I would not have to worry about Rick's being injured while playing football. My Gemini boy could not be in two places at once, no matter how hard he tried.

At 15 Rick enrolled in Driver's Ed. He loved the class and easily earned A's. He could hardly wait to be 16 and get his driver's permit. **I took for granted** that my instructions, combined with Driver's Ed. would insure that my son would be a safe driver. I would not have to worry about his being on the road.

After high school, Rick went into the Air Force. He loved his job as a dietary technician at the base hospital in Spokane, WA. Although he worked erratic shifts and long hours, **I took for granted** that his military experience was providing Rick with the discipline and learning opportunities he would draw on later to be a successful and productive civilian.

Rick was tall and gangly with my freckles sprinkled generously across his nose and on his arms. But the gold flecks in his hazel eyes were all his. No one on either side of his family had such striking eyes. He laughed easily and had a knack for making others join in his enthusiasm for life. **I took for granted** that Rick would have no difficulty finding a suitable young lady to love him and be the mother of the children he often said he hoped to have.

Ah, yes, grandchildren. I was only 20 when Rick was born so I was not exactly eager to become a grandmother. Nevertheless, there were times I would look at him or his photographs and smile to myself thinking that somewhere out in the universe there were two tiny angels waiting for the right moment to be born. One was a little elfin boy with large luminous eyes, delicious tiny fingers and sugar toes, and a laugh that would invite everyone to hold him. The other was a strawberry blond giggle of a girl with my blue eyes and freckles, and a love of mischief that I would encourage. Of course, I could not be sure when, but **I took for granted** that one day I would hold them in my arms and bask in the joy of being their Nana.

The last time I visited with my son was on a chilly April day in 1991. I was in Houston, Texas, on business so Rick and I got together for a few hours. We drove around the budding countryside, stopped for more snacks than we needed, and talked animatedly of the many things we were going to do together someday. He picked wild flowers for me and I gave him gas money. We held hands and **took for granted** that we had all the time in the world. I was busy with a job that sent me traveling frequently to interesting places. He had spent the past three years of his young life providing 24-hour care to a sick and dying father, as well as his grandfather.

At home again in Sarasota, Florida, I wrote letters to Rick when I got around to it and called even less frequently. Sure, I thought about him every day and wrote many letters to him in my mind that somehow never made it onto paper. But **I took for granted** that we would get caught up on everything when at last the hectic pace of my life slowed a little and when Rick was not so caught up in trying to settle the estates of both his father and grandfather.

*I guess **my son took for granted** that he was safe as he drove home in the right lane at 2:30 in the morning on February 17, 1992. I was asleep in my bed 1,200 miles away, possibly anticipating that morning would come too soon, just like all the other Monday mornings, and dreaming that just maybe that week I would get caught up on my phone calls and letters.*

*So often I have wondered if my son **also took for granted** that the headlights of the 18-wheeler barreling down on his car would stop glaring in his rear view mirror when the truck logically moved to the center lane or to the far left lane where a truck going 70 miles per hour belongs. Why else would Rick have continued to slow down as he approached the exit near his home?*

*My son's fiancé died upon impact when their car was crushed under the weight of the fully loaded tractor-trailer. Rick suffered third and fourth degree burns over 95% of his beautiful body, yet miraculously kicked his way out of that inferno. For 112 days he valiantly fought to live. I was there with him from the second day to his last.*

*Rick could not speak because of a tracheotomy. Although stitches held together remnants of eyelids, I was certain he watched me through tiny spaces between those stitches. In an attempt to "give him good pictures" in his mind, I spoke to him of happier times, past and future, ever mindful of the tone of my voice. Similarly, I read to him of great adventures and exotic places. When stress constricted my throat, I played books on tape for him. I did not miss an opportunity to touch him or to kiss the only skin I could see through the mummy-like bandages that skin being his now grown "sugar toes." I told him every hour that I loved him and said how proud I was to be his mother.*

*During those days Rick was in intensive care at the burn unit in Houston, I resolved **never again to take anything for granted**. From one minute to the next, I rode an emotional roller coaster that took me plummeting from the highs of incredible optimism into the depths of despair and back again.*

*For thirteen years now I have struggled to come to terms with his death and the emptiness of my new life without my son. Often I reflect over all the things Rick taught me, his family, and the friends who loved him during those 112 days with which he blessed us. I am grateful to have spent another of my birthdays with him, one more Easter, Mother's Day, and his 30th birthday on June 2. His death five days later left me numb, exhausted and hollow.*

*No longer do I procrastinate telling someone I care about that I am thinking of them or that I love them. I write letters more frequently and promptly answer the ones I receive. I make time to enjoy the world around me. There is no job, no activity so important that I cannot find time to nurture myself and those I care about.*

*There will be no grandbabies for me now, no son to look after me when I am 107 and no longer getting around as well as I would like.*

*I wish there were some way I could reach out today and impress upon just one young mother that **there are no guarantees in life**. I would tell her **not to take for granted** a future with her child, and to love her baby as much as she possibly can today. For this instant, this one, this... is all anyone ever has. I would tell her: give your best today. You'll have fewer regrets tomorrow.*

## EPILOGUE

*The police at the scene forgot to test the truck driver for substance abuse, precluding felony charges. Our investigation, however, revealed that he was known to always carry a thermos of bourbon and cola when he was on the road. He was a man who thought he could "handle" his drinking. The trucker pled guilty to two counts of misdemeanor negligent homicide and was sentenced to 2 years of probation, 300 hours of community service in emergency rooms, and a \$1,500 fine (which was paid to the county). He retained his driver's license.*

*RICHARD MAXWELL STEPP*

*Born June 2, 1962*

*A Gift From God*

*Returned to God June 7, 1992*

**Rick's symbols are a rainbow and Pink Panther.**

**Paul & Claudia Grammatico's son, Paulie (4-20-73), died from an auto accident, 5-16-99.**

Claudia tells of the great news about her song to Paulie, "The Gift of Life:"

*Delisco WON Wayne Newton's \$\$\$\$ Million Dollar Las Vegas Contract on TV tonight!!! I Knew He Would Win! One song he sang in the finale, "I am Not Worthy," he wrote of his experience as a Foster Child. He performed the song last month at the concert he gave the boys at mercyFirst-St Mary's campus.*

*I am so proud that he sang "The Gift of Life" song on stage with the boys choir a few weeks back. The choir just recorded "The Gift of Life" and "Las Offrendas" and Delisco is excited to hear their rendition!*

*I am proud to say that Delisco called me on Easter Sunday and said he would do what he could to promote "The Gift of Life" and "It's A Miracle Song" that he recorded for me on my CD. He listened to my story and my broken heart and responded by learning my songs and putting his energy into the words and music.*

*My Son Paul has life after life in these songs as do all donor hero's and recipients. Delisco always believed in my songs and my mission to help save lives through "the Gift of Song." Last year at this time he sang my hymn at St Patrick's Cathedral, and at North Shore on Donate Life Day.*

*This year his name is in lights at Vegas. All of you who have been on my journey can validate how this wonderful happening is 'A Miracle'. My Angel, Paulie, is rooting from heaven and Blessings were bestowed on Delisco for all that he has done to help others. To Give is what Life is all about. I am on for the ride with The Entertainer! Yeah!*

*Peace, Claudia*

A later email from Claudia:

*I am speaking at a program for **Donate Life Day**. Paul's heart recipient is speaking, and the boys' choir from mercyFirst-St Mary's will be singing my song "The Gift of Life." The boys' singing is A Miracle! These abused, neglected and abandoned children just recorded my song. The boys and girls range in age 13-18. The choir made a CD, and also did my song in Spanish. The CD is dedicated to Paul. It is the first CD in the 150 year old history of this agency.*

*May 7, my song will be sung at St Patrick's Cathedral at the Remember & Rejoice Celebration. The cantor of St Pats will sing the song. She is a bone marrow recipient. Over 15,000 people will be in attendance.*

**Paul's symbol is a butterfly.**

**Glen and Sandy Blanks' daughter, Tabitha Hendrickson (7-20-84), died, 3-28-00.**

*Thank you so very much for thinking of us. I knew that you would not forget. It really does not feel like it has been 5 yrs. I still miss her terribly. I guess I always will. Sometimes I feel like she is right beside me. When I used to take her to her doctor's appointments, when I was driving and would have my hand on the middle console, she would not say a word, just reach over and place her hand on mine. Sometimes I still feel that when I am going or coming from work. I know she is always with me, that's what gets me through the day.*

*People think we are crazy because we feel the presence of our child. That's because they do not understand what pain we have gone through. I had someone tell me that they knew how I felt when Tabitha died. I asked them if they had lost a child and they said no. So how could they know what it felt like? Sure they felt the pain of the fact that she was gone. But until it is happening to you, they could never truly understand how it feels. How you feel so lost and incomplete without them. My own mother-in-law told me a year after she died, that I needed to get over it. How can people be so cruel? When your child never had the chance to live a normal life. To grow up and experience all the little things that we take for granted. When you watch them put your child in the ground and you will never see them again. The words I hated the most were, she is in a better place and it is all for the best. Why is it for the best? Even after five years, I still have so many questions. WHY.....*

*On many occasions, I have heard her call to me in the middle of the night. I would be in a deep sleep and wake up because she called to me, and my first reaction was to jump up and run to her. Then I would realize, where am I running. I talk to her a lot. I used to go to the cemetery every day and twice a day on the weekends. Now I cannot bear to go there anymore. I sit on my back patio and look at the stars at night and talk to her. I know that she can hear me and I get a calm feeling when I do it.*

*The only support I got when Tabitha died was from complete strangers. People all around the world comforted me more than my own friends and family. They preferred to forget rather than to remember her life and the joy that she brought to so many people. When I spent years taking her to so many doctors to find out what was wrong with her, people said that they felt sorry for me. You know what, I never felt sorry for having a daughter like her. That little girl taught me more things about life than anyone has ever taught me. They would tell me I was strong. That they could not have done it. I know a lot of people do not want the burden of having a special needs child and put them in places where someone else does all the work. I was asked once if I wanted to put her somewhere and I told them no and not to ever ask me that again. At times, it was hard, but I would not have traded it for the world and I would gladly do it again if I had to.*

*I still have her wheelchair sitting in our garage. I could have given it to any organization, but I wanted a family to have it that desperately needs it and will appreciate it. So one day, I will come across someone that will be so grateful to have it.*

*You have been a wonderful friend. You have never forgotten me and I appreciate that very much.*

The family would like for you to look at Tabitha's website:

<http://www.geocities.com/sblanks0>

**Tabitha's symbol is a butterfly.**

**Floyd and Nadine Corn's son, Bobby (12-17-80), died in an auto accident, 8-22-98.**

Nadine would like to know if any of you have faced the same problem as she:

*You may have already set the topics for the workshops, but I would like to tell you about my situation. Bobby was my baby even though I had another child; Bobby became my world when we finally delivered a baby that lived. I did not handle his death well at the time and I still do not handle it very well. I am on anti-depressants and have been for probably 4-5 years since his death in 1998. I could not handle the reality of never seeing him again and so I tried to run from the truth. We bought 2 houses in a two year period because I could not stay in the home that we lived in with our family. The first house we rented out because I would not move into it and the second house that we bought, Floyd moved us into it with the help of friends while I was at work one day. I would not agree to sell our house we moved from so that started our financial problems. With me not working a full schedule, and 3 houses with payments, insurance etc., things started to go down-hill fast. Then I found out about home shopping networks and internet shopping. I then proceeded to apply for every credit card that I could get and started shopping and buying*

*things for myself, my daughter and friends and co-workers. In 2003 I was maxed out on 8 to 10 credit cards and could not make my payments, and at that time I had to tell my husband about my problem. We took a second mortgage out on the house we live in and had to go on and sell our home where we raised our children. Did I learn my lesson? No, the ink was just barely dry on the papers before I was buying again and it is hard to make people understand how I could buy so much without it bothering me. In 2004 I was maxed out again and behind on the payments and this time it was really hard to get a financial institution to refinance. They wouldn't do a third mortgage, so we had to make one mortgage on our home which put the amount higher than we originally paid for it. We now also have another second mortgage and our finances are managed by Floyd with an allowance given to me for the necessities.*

*My therapist worked with me and increased medications to help control this obsessive compulsive disorder, where I tried to fill the empty place inside me with material things. I would get a high when I was buying things and then the let down was really bad, which made me want to repeat the process. There are all kinds of groups for drug users, alcoholics, but none for people with a spending disorder because my therapist tried to find one for me. I was wondering if any one else has told you of similar situations and how they have handled it?*

*Sincerely hoping to see you at J.I.M.'s conference this year and God bless you for all your dedication to the loss of our children.*

**Bobby's symbols are the Bible, red car, eagle & sunflowers.**

**Larry & Gwen Elrod's son, Scott (5-7-82), died from cancer, 4-4-00.**

Gwen tells of Scott's friend who has also died:

*I know Scott is in Heaven having a wonderful time, it's the ones left behind that are sad! I keep trying to figure out why children die, especially kids like ours! They only wanted to grow up and do good things.*

*Scott had 2 best friends, Troy and Daren. They started playing baseball together when they were 10 years old. They were great friends to Scott when he was battling cancer. They would skip school and come to St. Jude to see him every day when he was an inpatient. They would sneak back into school and never got caught. Then they would be back again that night.*

*Daren was found dead in his bed 3 weeks ago. He was diagnosed with Juvenile Diabetes about 9 months after Scott was diagnosed with cancer. His blood sugar dropped during the night and he went into a coma and died. His 5-year-old son tried to wake him for church and could not get him up. His mother, Wanda, went in to wake him and realized he was dead. He died sometime during the night. They called up at 8:30 to let us know. Needless to say, Larry and I were totally devastated, again.*

*Daren and Troy would still come to see us after Scott's death, they were great kids. Troy is so pitiful; how do you lose both of your best friends?*

*I thought the 5 year anniversary would be better, but it wasn't. It was sadder because of Daren's death.*

**Scott's symbol is the #20- his baseball number.**

**Tammy Papst's son, Steven West (11-12-75), was murdered, 8-1-97.**

Tammy appeared before her son Steven's killer's parole hearing in March, and she found out from a letter she received April 21, that Rumble was denied parole! Another review comes up again in 2007, and Tammy says that she will be there as many times as needed. This was her statement to the parole board:

*I am standing here in front of you on behalf of my family and myself to represent my son Steven West. I do this to honor him and his memory. Seven years and eight months ago, Earl Rumble had admittedly and with intent murdered Steven. That night, Steve's most basic right, his right to life was suddenly, unjustly and violently taken from him.*

*I've survived when I once thought that was impossible. There has been so much devastation since August 1, 1997, at 8:12 AM, when I received that knock on the door telling me that my son Steven had been fatally shot to death. Earl Rumble was sitting on his balcony, with a cordless phone sitting next to him, decided to take matters into his own hands and come down with his .38 semi automatic pistol. Steve was un-armed, and he shot Steve 3 times. The first shot was to his left hand as if Steve was trying to shield the bullet; the second shot thru the chest had pierced his heart and lung and had exited out of his spine, which made Steve immobile. The third shot, the fatal shot was execution style to the back of Steve's head at point blank range. He was found face down. I don't understand what-so-ever how in the heck could that be self-defense??? If only Earl Rumble would have just called 911; why, I will never know. I do know my son would have been alive today. This is the main reason I feel Rumble should not be released, due to the heinous act of his crime.*

*Although thru the devastation, I have become stronger and I decided that I would not become a victim! Instead I have become an advocate for other Parents of Murdered Children survivors. I have voluntarily worked with the Crime Victims Coordinator, in the Saginaw County Prosecutor's Office; I have assisted in coordinating vigils; I have sat with other families during their court proceedings; and have made quite a few trips to Lansing's Capitol. It's amazing how just one voice can make a difference, and my voice will not be silenced! I made that last promise to Steve; I will be his voice for as long as God gives me breath.*

*The pain is invisible to those who can't see the emotional scars that I have endured; its like a terminal illness, I have my ok days as well as my bad days, but the pain is and always will be there until the day they close my casket. There is this overwhelming feeling*

*of loss, the ripping pain of your heart being pulled out of your chest, stomped on and stuffed back in; that is the best way I can describe the pain I have been feeling and the life I have been living. I miss and love Steve so very much, as well as his brothers, Chris, Billy, Brandon, his sister, Sara and all his cousins. There has been a new addition to our family last Monday. We had a beautiful and awesome angel, Reece Christopher, our first grandchild! The first 12 hours of Reece's life was in danger, I'm crying and pleading with God, Oh God, please, not again, and Chris held me and cried, wishing like hell that Steve was there to be able to give the support that we needed and deserved so badly. Steve would have been an awesome uncle to his nephew Reece, but we will make sure that baby Reece will know his Uncle Steve thru pictures and thru our memories of him, for that is all we have left. Chris will be getting married this fall, and again, Steve will not be able to stand up at his brothers wedding. That part of our life, Steve's future, we were looking forward to is now gone.*

*When Earl Rumples was only sentenced to 7 to 15 years, I received a life sentence, a life sentence without my son, Steve. Earl Rumples has not been **remorseful** for taking Steve's life. During Rumples's incarceration, whenever I would see on the MDOC website that Rumples's minimum release date had been extended, I would write to the FIA to get information on why. I found out that Rumples has received major conduct tickets, the most recent ones, March of 2004. Rumples's original release date was for 4/01/2005, but now not till August, that is 4 months added to his sentence because of his behavior, another reason why I feel he should not be released.*

*In closing, my family and I would respectfully like to urge the parole board, while making their decision, to have Earl Rumples stay behind bars and finish his maximum sentence.*

*Thank you so much for your time and consideration in this matter.*

**Steven's symbols are wildflowers and a baseball.**

**Philip and Darla Carl's daughter, Miranda Kelly (1-8-85), died in an auto accident, 6-29-03.**

*Miranda died from an automobile accident. We were with her for about 11 hours at the hospital that day while the doctors ran their tests & scans. As we prayed over her at the hospital, we knew the Lord already knew what the outcome was going to be and He is in control. They told us she was brain-dead. Although we miss her very much, we are so thankful He blessed our lives with her for almost 19 years.*

***The Symbols:***

*The **daisy** was chosen by me, my husband, and Jessica because we had a lot of daisies for her funeral. They are bright and cheery and remind us of sunshine and warmth and that is what she brought to us. The **palm tree** was chosen because Miranda talked about when she got her own apartment someday she was going to decorate a room in nothing but palm*

trees. She loved them. When she had her accident she had a large ceramic vase in the trunk of her car. That vase had palm trees all over it. That was her first palm tree decoration. Although her car was in terrible shape the vase had flown out of the trunk of her car and landed in a field with not a crack or scratch on it.

### **Miranda's Memory Hugs:**

Miranda just put the spark into life. She was very loving and giving. She had a contagious smile and her laughter filled the room. She was the type of person that if you were in the room with 500 people, you would definitely know who Miranda Kelly was. Miranda loved life. She loved her dog Bronco. Bronco is a collie and misses her very much. Miranda also loved her sister Jessica. Miranda and Jessica were the best of friends. It was great as a mother and father to watch the two girls become best friends. Miranda was a cheerleader for most her school years, she was part of a competition cheerleading squad that won First place nationally in 2000. She was in gymnastics for several years. She worked part-time as a waitress. She loved working and loved her customers. She would come home from work and tell us stories about her customers. She had her favorite regular customers and loved serving the children. Although we knew she knew a lot of people, we were honored when over 1,000 people came to her visitation. The day that Miranda got her driver's license (age 17) she told us, "although I didn't sign to be a donor, I want you to know if anything ever happens to me I want to be a donor." I was really surprised when she said that, because it wasn't anything we had ever talked about before. So, I sat down with her to talk about it and I will never forget.....this is what she told me. "If someone could see this beautiful world with my eyes, that is what I want. If someone could live longer with something I have and enjoy this world, that is what I want." So, Miranda was a donor. In honor of that I made a quilt square last year for the donor quilt that displays nationally. I put a picture of Miranda on it and embroidered her dates on it along with Miranda Kay Kelly continues to live and give. John 11:25.

My husband (Miranda's step dad) wrote the following poem:

### **In Memory of Miranda Kay Kelly**

Life is too short,  
Yours was so brief  
Now that you're gone,  
It's beyond belief  
We'll miss you so much  
Your kiss and your hug,  
Miranda you're so special  
And so easy to love,  
The years passed so quickly,  
And our lives will too.  
It won't be so long,  
Until we are with you.

Love,  
**Your Father Phil**

*So these are some memories she has left us.*

**Miranda's symbols are a daisy and a palm tree.**

**Joe and Ann Kechter's son, Matt (2-19-83), was killed in the Columbine tragedy, 4-20-99.**

Ann is our keynote speaker at J.I.M.'s Conference this year. She explained how they chose Matt's symbols:

*We are so excited to attend the conference. Thanks so much for asking us! It looks like there will be a lot of wonderful activities that will allow us to share our experiences, but more importantly - to share the memory of our children. You asked us what Matt's symbol is. It is an eagle. Also, I have had a lot of dreams about Matt being on the other side of a door, or walking through a door etc. But it is hard for others to understand why a door would be a symbol for a lost son.*

*I am going to bring earth from under my "wisdom" tree. The wisdom tree is the name I gave to our oldest tree we have on our property and it is where my bench is. I sit out there and talk to God and to Matt. Sometimes they answer me back! (But you already know that!)*

**Matt's symbols are an eagle and a door.**

**Tim and Connie Dehner's son, Rob (9-15-79), was killed in an auto accident, 5-19-99.**

Tim wrote: I hope this poem does justice for the parents who are in need of great support. For I know what I do is put words on to paper, though they flow from the heart, they may not express the pain, sorrow, and compassion of the ones whose hearts are hurting. I know what I offer is not much, though, it is all I can offer, my simple words...May some one find a glimmer of hope as they begin this journey. Please let them know they are not alone. For Connie and I it will be 6 years since Rob left us. The pain though not as fresh, is the same as the day he left. It is only God and time that has given us opportunity to heal just a little more. With out friends, family and a Heavenly Father who helped us as we struggled daily with the loss, Connie and I personally have admitted we probably would not have been able to have coped with the loss.

## ***Window at midnight***

*Today started out as the days, weeks, and months before.  
Wondering how I was going to make it through one more.*

*I sit alone gazing out the window at midnight and could  
See a million stars brightly shining in the heavens above.*

*As I set quietly in the still dark of the night I prayed.  
“God, I have a request. None like I ever asked before.*

*I know you do miracles, all I have to do is look around.  
I have one request it’s not hard for someone like you.*

*This one request I ask you for does come from the heart.  
What it is I ask burns within me hotter than any ember.*

*Allow me to gaze upon the face of my child once more.  
Do I ask too much? As a father you alone can understand.*

*What joy could be brought to my burning empty heart?  
Seeing that wonderful smile and the dancing of those eyes.”*

*Just setting here I can see them as clear as the day you left.  
I hugged you and gently kissed you as I said goodbye.*

*Tears flowed from my eyes as a never-ending fountain.  
My mind flooded with emotions and I can’t erase the time.*

*You know my heart it is broken and none who try can repair.  
Time, memories, hope, promise and love may give reprieve.*

*From a prison must make an escape, freedom sweet milky taste.  
Unlock this unwanted door throw open and flee forever more.*

*This unwanted thorn that does pain me so, dear God hear my cry.  
My arms are empty and my heart doth yearn for my precious one.*

*Grant this one request, allow me to have this one chance.  
To look into those eyes and remove the pain that is inside.*

*As I raised my head slowly, eyes still closed, should I dare a look.  
Slowly I opened mine eyes into the heavens I did spy.*

*Slowly I searched the beckoning stars amidst heaven's shadows.  
There among the stars at first I caught but a glimpse.*

*I began to stare. I seen my precious one's face alive before my eyes.  
Tears swelled up in my eyes in joy not sorrow this time.*

*I sat there in wonder as I watched the twinkling of those wonderful eyes.  
That beautiful smile, oh, it is you my precious, precious child.*

*I was caught up in the moment and time escapes me how long I was there.  
All I know is God did hear me, and my request He did grant.*

*As I open my eyes the dim light of morning, new is entering my room.  
As my head lies here in slumber I am not sure of the night's events.*

*Could it be I was dreaming, it all seemed so real, this one thing I can be sure.  
God granted me a moments favor, this much I am sure.*

*Be it a dream or be it not, for a moment I was at peace with myself and the world.*

*In memory of Robert "Robby" Dehner*

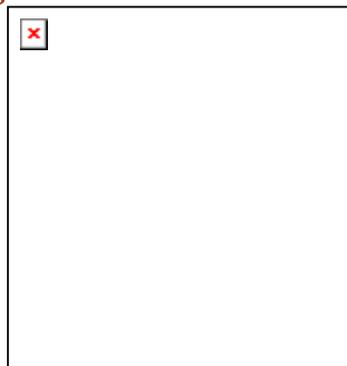
*We will always love you,*

*Mom & Dad*

Author: Tim Dehner

**Robby's symbol is a rose.**

**Because I am so addicted to chocolate, I have had to adopt a 12-Step Program:**



**Never be more than 12 steps away from chocolate.**