

Julie & Brad

BY JEANNE LEIFHEIT

May 30, 1995, was one of those picture-perfect spring days that can't wait to burst into summer. It was the first full day of summer vacation, and my son, Jason, and daughter, Julie, had taken full advantage of the opportunity to bond with nature. Julie thoroughly enjoyed gardening and had lovingly set out an array of flower seedlings. She had enjoyed a bike ride in our little village, and she and Jason had laughed and giggled on the trampoline in the back yard. This weekend encompassed some difficult memories for us, so the laughter and ease of the day were a welcome relief. We decided to finish out the day by lounging around and watching a movie.



Without warning Julie suffered a severe asthma attack. She had lived with asthma for years, but it was always easily controlled with her inhaler. I gave her a breathing treatment, but it did not produce the usual instant relief. I called 911, and although the paramedics arrived within minutes, Julie had collapsed and stopped breathing. My efforts of CPR were

futile so the paramedics inserted a breathing tube, and Julie was rushed to the ER. The trauma team was waiting and worked feverishly to save my daughter's life.

As I stood in that hospital corridor, the familiarity closed in on me. I tried to remain calm, but my mind was relentless. "Please, God. Not again. You and I have already been through this."

Just two years earlier on this very weekend, my 15-year-old son, Brad, had been rushed to this ER. He had recently been diagnosed with depression and given an anti-depressant. He was doing well and returning to his hysterically funny self. That particular evening he had taken more than his prescribed medication, saying he just wanted to sleep. I panicked and called 911. In the ER many tests were run, and I was assured he was fine. He had not taken enough medication to harm himself. They would keep him overnight, which was standard protocol. As Brad and I sat in the little exam room waiting to be moved to his room for the night, we were chatting about what plans we had for the weekend. Without warning he suffered a seizure. I screamed and the trauma team flew in and I was ushered out.

As I sat in the tiny waiting room, I knew that God held my trembling heart in the palm of His hand as Isaiah 49:16 promises: *Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.* I knew through my flood of endless tears that God loved my precious family even more than I. But even as the words of that old hymn, "Have no fear little flock," raced through my mind, I did fear what was ahead for us.



After more than an hour, the doctor and chaplain came to talk to me. My brain could not make sense of their utterances, "We are very sorry ... your son suffered a heart attack ... we tried everything we could, even a pacemaker ... we are sorry."

Certainly, they had the wrong room! My Brad was just 15. He

was a football player! He was much stronger than I!

Approaching medical personnel snapped me back to the present. Once Julie was stabilized, she would be airlifted to a Chicago hospital.

By 4:30 a.m. my sister and I made the trek to the city as the helicopter above carried my precious daughter, who was just two weeks away from celebrating her 14th birthday. A brilliant rainbow appeared in the sky. Julie and I collected Noah's Ark trinkets, and I knew the promise that rainbow held. Jeremiah 29:11, one of my favorite Bible verses, assures us: *'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord. 'Plans for good not evil. Plans for a future filled with hope.'* Surely Julie would recover and be back to her old "Jolly Julie" self in no time.

For five long days we kept vigil in the ICU. The doctors painted a grim picture, but I knew Julie was going to be healed — I had seen my rainbow. I even told our Pastor that he didn't need to write a sermon for Sunday; Julie's healing would make a great sermon.

Ironically, it was during Sunday's sermon that Julie's life on this earth ended.

Only God can take an awful situation and work His good to make it awe-filled. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28). Shortly after Brad's death, I received a letter from one of his classmates.

She had been contemplating suicide, but after she saw the devastation death brings to friends and family, she went to her parents and asked them to get her help.

Julie's death brought restored health to those who received her donation of organs and tissues.

Is this the way I would have written the script? Nope. All my life I had wanted to be a mom and was so happy to be blessed with the gift of four children. I loved all the craziness that came packaged with motherhood, and it was devastating to let them go so soon. One night as I was sobbing into the wee hours, I cried out, "But God, you just don't know how bad it hurts." Instantly I stopped crying as I realized the magnitude of my wailing. God certainly knew my pain. His Son, His blameless, perfect, sinless Son was sent to save us, to die for us. He could have left us in our miserable, sinful mess, but chose to make the sacrifice for us. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

God knew what He was doing when He sent that beautiful rainbow. Julie was totally healed by Sunday's service; not according to my blueprint, but His perfect plan.

Life on this earth hurts, but we can learn from our wounds when we turn to God and totally rely on His love and guidance to see us through. Until we submit

our lives to God's will for us, we cannot see the beauty or purpose in the scars that have shaped us, but the beauty is there.

Romans 5:3–5 reassures us: *We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance*

produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.

I doubt that I will ever get to the point that I'll let out a big cheer when life is crumbling around me, but what a precious gift we have been given in the hope and peace that only God can give. Q

Jeanne Leifheit can attest that even when the unthinkable happens, God will tenderly and patiently hold the broken pieces of our heart in His tender care. When we look beyond our brokenness, we find peace in the assurance that God has the perfect plan for us. She is from Yorkville, Illinois.



Jeanne's children, Jason, Julie, Becky, and Brad, with Fred the Wonder Dog taking center stage.