

IT JUST GOES TO SHOW YOU

By: Tom Wyatt
Bereaved Father
St. Louis, MO

Back in the '70's the late comedian Gilda Radner played a character by the name of Roseann Roseanna Danna on the television show "Saturday Night Live." Roseann Roseanna Danna would give a commentary that never ended with the same thought that it began with but at the end she'd tie it all together with..."It just goes to show you....it's always something."

That's so true where grief work is concerned. I've been at this since March 5, 1991 when my son Johnny was killed. I've written a lot of poems and articles about grief work and surviving the loss of a child. I've counseled quite a few folks and lent my shoulder to a lot more. I know the ins and outs, the ups and downs (how's that for stringing a couple of clichés?) and I know just how tough it is to pick up and keep going on. But we do it and if we keep at it we make positive progress. But my grief is unpredictable and shows no mercy when it steps out of the shadows and announces that it's come for a visit.

I've moved way down the road since that March afternoon fourteen years ago. Not every step has been forward but even when I would regress, I'd catch myself and move forward again. I'm a happy guy, for the most part, with the only caveat being the obvious one. Somewhere along the line I quit thinking in terms of, "I'm have a great time but it would be better if Johnny were here," heck, that's a given. Along the way there were the usual bumps and u-turns and some of them were the "*firsts*" as I call them. The first (pick a holiday), the first birthday, the first family vacation and so on were bad, but to be honest, I found the second's a lot worse because they drove home the permanence of his being dead. Some one who isn't in our position might be confused by that statement because they don't get it at first, and thank God that they don't.

When I went to my wife's school's open house in 1992 I watched the kindergarteners because that's the class that Johnny would have been in. I could see him in my minds eye. I looked at each kid and thought about who would have been that friend that he went all the way through school with? Would one of the little girls be his first crush? It was hard. When my son Blake was a senior back in '02-03 we had a great time at his high school. My wife, Ruth has taught in this district for 25 years and we are very active parents. There's a huge sense of pride to be a part of this district. Blake was very popular with everyone in his class. At the football games he led the senior cheers and was voted "most spirited." Heck, we watched him having fun more than we watched the football games. He was a varsity wrestler and I loved to sit there in the stands and cheer him on. I felt such joy as he walked across that stage and received his diploma. It was a great year.

The past year would have been Johnny's senior years. It really wasn't a conscious effort on my part but I didn't go to one football game, wrestling meet or any other high school function. It just always seemed that there was something else to do, but when the graduation announcement from a friend's son came in the mail it hit me like an Ali right to the chin and I crumbled. I felt so damn cheated. The anger that I thought that I'd dealt with came rushing back in spades. I was lost and I wasn't prepared for it. If this were 13 years ago I'd really be in trouble because this is definitely a case of "Thank God I know now what I didn't know then." I know that if I don't try and control this grief by shoving it down inside of myself that I'll be okay. I know that if I let it out in constructive ways and stop being destructive, I'll be okay. I'll try to not sit down with a half of a gallon of Blue Bunny. I'll cry when I need to and I'll find a way to let the anger out that doesn't make it tough on the ones around me. I'll let it all go and I know that I will survive this if I want to. Hopefully besides just surviving I'll learn something from this too. Because after 14 years, even though I know that the pain can resurface at any time, I had let myself be lulled into a false sense of security. I'd like to say, with great conviction in my voice, that I'll never let this happen to me again but as Roseann Roseanna Danna was fond of saying..."It just goes to show you.....it's always something." May we all find peace.
Shalom.