

The Big Surprise – I SURVIVED!

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Prior to my son Cameron's death I thought that if something happened to one of my children I would just die or perhaps go insane. I'd heard other people say similar things, so I knew that other parents felt the same way. Now that I think about it, none of those parents had ever experienced the death of a child. I suppose all we were really saying was that we felt so much love for our children that we couldn't imagine living without them.

On June 4, 1999 I received the call all parents hope they never receive. I was informed that my sixteen-year-old son Cameron had been in an accident and that I should come to the hospital. It was there that I was informed that Cameron hadn't survived the accident.

During the next few days I was asked to make decisions at the worst time in my life and I made them with the help of my two surviving children and the man who is now my husband. I realized that these were the last things I would do for my son. I existed in a funny place. I was aware of picking out clothes for Cameron. It was strange because I hadn't picked out Cameron's clothes for him in several years. We picked out a casket for Cameron. How weird that felt. It didn't seem real, yet on some level I knew it was very real. I just couldn't believe what had happened, yet I knew it wasn't a nightmare. We planned the funeral. It was held at the high school gym where Cameron had played basketball and attended the homecoming and prom. We picked out songs for his funeral. His sister said we should play "Time of Your Life" by Greenday because she remembered her brother going through the house singing that song. We went to the visitation. I was not prepared to see my son in a casket. So many people came. It was comforting to know that so many people loved Cameron. The air in the gym was heavy with sadness. It was so painful, yet at the same time I felt numb. My daughter and I both spoke at Cameron's funeral. After all, we knew him better than any minister did. That night we went back to the cemetery by ourselves. As I looked at his grave I still couldn't believe he was dead. How could I live without Cameron? This was not how it was supposed to go. Children are supposed to bury their parents. My heart felt big and heavy and it hurt. Prior to Cameron's death I didn't realize your heart could physically hurt from mental and emotional pain. My heart was broken and the pain was mental as well as physical. I lived through the funeral because I had to attend to the task of burying Cameron, but I figured I would die soon. After all, that's what I'd always heard people say. **The big surprise-I survived!** Several months later I was standing in my kitchen when it felt as if my heart was being squeezed. I thought, "so I'm going to die in my kitchen." I waited, but I didn't die. I survived. Perhaps I just wanted to die to escape the pain. Time has passed and I have learned to live with the pain caused by the death of my child. I have learned that the heart can withstand far more pain than I would ever have thought possible and still keep beating. I have learned to love Cameron as much in death as I loved him in life. He is still my son and I am still his mom.

About four years after Cameron's death, I was at the cemetery cleaning around his grave when a lady I knew came over and started talking. We visited a little bit and then she said, "I'd just die if something happened to one of my children or my grandchildren." I responded by saying, "only people who have never experienced the death of their child say that." As I stood there watching her walk away I thought, **"I used to be one of those people."**

Martha Honn's journey through grief began on June 4, 1999 when her youngest child, sixteen-year-old Cameron Smith died instantly in an automobile accident. Cameron was a front seat passenger in a car driven by a friend on the first night of summer vacation. They encountered a severe rainstorm and the car hydroplaned and crashed into a concrete sign post.