

# The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation

a nonprofit corporation

February 2007



[www.griefHaven.org](http://www.griefHaven.org)

## E-Haven Email (from griefHaven)

Where Hope Resides

## E-HAVEN EMAIL February 2007

### 2007 IS HERE WHAT ARE OUR CHOICES?



They say time is an illusion, and I know that is true in the larger scheme of things. Yet we use time to track our lives and reference what we need to do when. Pre-Erika's death, time felt like my friend. Post-Erika's death, it felt like my enemy, dragging along every day, stretching out in front of me as an endless series of tortuous moments to live through and paths leading endlessly on. And one of those moments in time that was very difficult in my initial grief was New Year's Eve, for it no longer held the meaning of "what ifs" and endless possibilities of what I might create "this year." Rather, New Year's felt like unending mile upon mile of pathways that **had** to be traveled—that **had** to be endured. After all, no one ever asked whether I was willing to endure such heartbreak. The heartbreak just happened, and then I found myself flailing around, trying to figure out how to endure the pain after-the-fact. "What an unfair price to pay for loving my daughter so deeply—for being a good mother," I often used to think. "How can life be so heartless and cruel?" I would wonder.

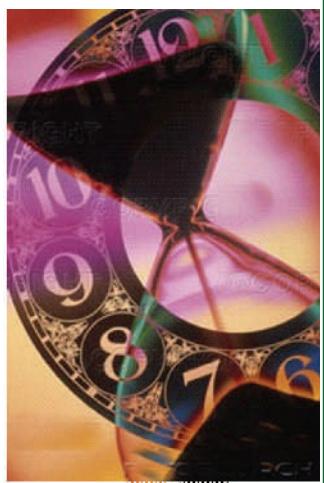
For parents who have lost a child and for those impacted by that child's death, including siblings, New Year's can take on challenges like never before. But

through the years, a surprising and beautiful revelation has inspired and shown me the way.

For me, the first two New Year's looked like nothing more than a whole bunch of time I had to figure out how to get through without Erika. Yet looking back now, I can see that my greatest concern was that there would be no end to the pain—that I would never experience true joy or happiness again. I was so afraid that all the pain, anguish, and grief I was going through would be completely in vain. I needed to believe that all that I would go through would lead somewhere positive and that I had some control over creating where that might be.

We all hear that healthy grieving is important in order to get on with life—that it is important to release the grief so it doesn't wreak havoc on us for the rest of our lives. Somehow I knew that was the truth. Yet I also knew there had to be more in store for me than just grieving for the sake of releasing the pain. I kept thinking, "Life can be difficult and challenging, but certainly it's not cruel. All of this has to be creating something positive. It just **has** to." Did I raise Erika with all the love I had, creating that beautiful bond with my only child—a child who eventually became my closest friend—only to see her die and leave me relegated to nothing but a life of endurance? That just was not possible. I refused to believe it. I refused to believe that the only thing to come out of all that pain would be the lessening of pain. There had to be more, and I began to watch, listen, and pay attention.

It didn't take long for me to realize that my life would never be the same as the life I had when Erika was



here sharing it with me. But in my mind and heart I eventually began to understand and feel that I was not to be relegated to a life without joy or happiness—that I was not victim to the terrible loss of my daughter. I just didn't know how to get beyond the pain and suffering to the experience of joy and happiness. I knew that Erika would never, ever want anything for me but the best in life and for me to live out the life that she would not be able to fulfill. Also, I had other parents ahead of me on that grief path assuring me that I was correct—that my grief and pain WAS rebuilding that life that would one day include new meaning and joy. And I could see that these parents had good lives that included joy and happiness.

Then things began to change. And . . .



## I turned a major corner

There I was again, standing on that path, looking at the new year in front of me when I realized, "You know what? I'm sick and tired of this pain. I **want** to feel joy in life again, and I will do whatever it takes to get there. I will show others that it can be done because I *will* do it. And, by God, I'm **going** to get there because I deserve it." I didn't know how, but I made that commitment. I knew the timing was right for me to actually turn that corner. I could only begin that turn because of all I had gone through those previous years—I had taken all the time I needed to intensely grieve, feel the sorrow and pain, and allow myself to naturally turn that corner. Somehow I had just known that in order to get "better" from my grief, I had to actually grieve—a lot! And that period of intense grief is different for all of us. You might say that I did make a resolution that year—a resolution that will be a theme song for the rest of my life.

So what did I realize?

I began to see that the life I was to rebuild was something that I had to create. The hardest part was realizing that I had to create *everything* my new life was to be. I knew that my life wasn't just going to magically become happier and more joyful as time ticked on. I also realized that a life including joy, happiness and meaning was worth whatever hard work it might entail. I knew that I had to *make* that happen. THAT was a surprising truth for me. You see, the reason it was surprising was because, in the past, when I had experienced other painful losses, eventually with time and tears, my life just naturally went back to what I will call "normal," and I eventually felt

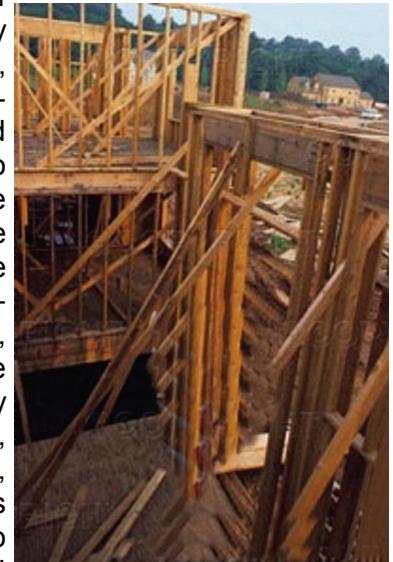
happy again. I didn't do a lot to make that happen except grieve. It just happened on its own. But this was different. The death of my child showed me that this was not like anything else, and I could not approach it the way I had other losses in the past. I knew it was time for



"Yea, mom! Go for it!"

me to begin looking at things differently and really focusing on finding *my* way to bring back the happiness and joy. I wanted it, I deserved it, and I was passionate about it. And could I have heard Erika at that moment, I'm sure she would have been gleefully exclaiming, "Yea, mom! Go for it!" It's not unusual for parents to tell me that they feel guilty being happy or feeling joy. Yet I know now that that is exactly what we are here to do, and I am positive that is what our children want for us.

One thing I've discovered is that, as I continue rebuilding my life with its new structure, I build it with all of the beautiful memories of Erika tucked neatly therein. In other words, even though we are building a new foundation and structure, we are also making a special place within it for our child. I see it like having my home torn apart by Mother Nature against my will. Sure, maybe everything inside was destroyed, but not my memories, not my heart, not my love for others, and not what truly matters in life. So wherever I go and whatever structure I build, with all its newness, Erika will come right along with me. In fact, I envision, as I rebuild my life, all of the new things I am building for her, and that includes *griefHaven* and all of you who are now in our lives. How appropriate it is that we call this organization a "foundation," since that is truly what we are all doing after we lose our children—creating a new foundation upon which we build the rest of our lives. If you are still in the early period of grief, this might be hard to fathom, so hold on to the sheer power of it, because it's truth will become evident.



As the years go by with each January 1st marking that new year, little by little life comes back alive, and we begin to enjoy those things that we never believed we would enjoy again. So know that one day

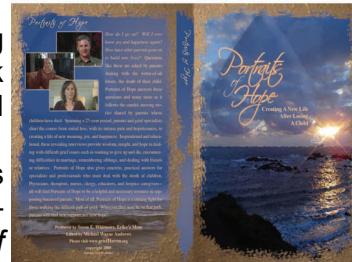
you will look ahead to the new year and not dread it.

As I've said over and over, if I can do it, if all those parents before you have done it, then so can you. Yes, you will. That is our promise to you.

So my 2007 vision for each of you is that you feel the easing up—a lessening—of the pain you lived with in

2006, even if it's but slight. I hope for you that you will feel the winter of your hearts thawing so you can reawaken the positive feelings you once knew. I hope for you to become aware that you have been planting the seeds of your future, little by little, and that it is your tears that are watering those seedlings. They say that raindrops are nature's tears. I say that our tears, then, are the raindrops of the soul, and you will one day see the sprouts that come from your

pain and sorrow peeking up through the earth of your life. You will begin to see the buds on those sprouts, and then the beautiful blossoms. I guess we could call it the **spring of your heart**. Then, one day, you will see that you have created an entire garden of blooms and colors that started with your willingness to take your grief and love for your child and allow your tears to gently flow into that new life—a life of new meaning and purpose. Because you, my friend, deserve it more than anyone I've ever known. Big Hugs, Erika's Mom



## Portraits of Hope

*Portraits of Hope* is circling the globe, and the feedback we are receiving is beyond our dreams!

For all of those parents who gave so much of themselves to make *Portraits of Hope*, telling again their stories of loss and rebuilding so you would have hope to hang onto, (Marc, Graham, Jennifer, Wayne, Anne, Joann, Chip, Beth, Misty, Gilda, Corinne, Dick, Genie, Wendell, and Susan) your emails describing how *Portraits of Hope* has impacted your life has meant SO much. What? You haven't seen *Portraits of Hope*? Or, you have it, but haven't yet watched it? Go to [www.griefHaven.org](http://www.griefHaven.org) and read what others are saying about *Portraits of Hope*. We know you'll want to view it immediately! Also, it makes a beautiful and loving gift for anyone who is grieving.

## griefHaven Has New Changes

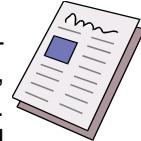
One of our goals at *The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation* and *griefHaven* is to consistently create new

items for you to view and participate in, whether on the website or in the mail. We are glad that being inside the *griefHaven* site is a comforting place for so many. This month we have added several new items.

- **Spanish Speaking Message Board . . .** for all of those who prefer or need to share in Spanish.

- **Music We Love . . .** and want to share with you has been added under the "Support" button. Please let us know when you have a special song you would like added.

- **Journal . . .** when Erika was first diagnosed with cancer, a dear friend, a writer, suggested that I begin a journal. I did that. These years later, that journal is filled with all that I have gone through and learned through the process of loss. Often people suggested I share parts of it, so I decided to do so, hoping that you might find parts that you relate to and that will help you along on your own journey. My dream is that you will begin journaling with me and share your wisdom as well.



- **Recommended Grief Therapists . . .** can now be found under the "resources" button. We regularly receive emails from people wanting to know if we can recommend someone specializing in grief therapy in a specific area. Please let us know whenever you have a grief specialist to recommend.

**R**emember that this is your website, so please keep sending your suggestions and ideas of what you would like to see on your site, and we'll do what we can to create it for you.



## Letters & Poems

As you know, we have a place on the website where we add letters and poetry. These are very meaningful to everyone who visits our website. Please send us your special emails, letters or poems, which can be added to the website.

## Newsletters

Our original goal when starting *The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation* was to create a newsletter and mail it to you on a regular basis. However, the cost of each newsletter, including printing and mailing, is about \$2,100. Because of the cost and other priorities of the foundation, we have been unable to publish and mail the newsletters on a regular basis. Yet because we consistently receive feedback from people regarding how much they look forward to receiving our newsletters, we have decided to continue



creating them twice a year and simply emailing them to you whenever we don't have the funds to actually print and mail them. That way you will continue to receive the newsletters on a regular schedule, whether by email or regular mail. Of course, you will also continue to receive the *E-Havens* via email.

## YOUR NEW ADDRESS OR EMAIL:

**PLEASE KEEP** in mind that our increased use of email in lieu of mailing makes it even more important for you to let us know when you change either your mailing or email address.



Those who do not have email addresses with us will not receive the email newsletters or *E-Havens*, so perhaps you might have us send them to you through someone else's email or come up with another way we can stay connected, such as having someone print them out for you.

Even though it is rare, we must admit that, when we receive a returned letter marked as "undeliverable, unable to forward," it breaks our hearts to think that we have no way to send you our love, support and hope. So please keep us in the loop.

## Grants and Corporate Donations

The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation and *griefHaven* have grown in leaps and bounds. Many wonderful people from all walks of life have been touched in some way by what we offer, and so they graciously donate.

This generosity has given us the necessary funds to continue giving you all the love and hope you need as you gain your strength and rebuild your life. All involved with the foundation donate their time, never receiving money for anything.



**This year is the year  
that we are going to apply  
for corporate grants  
and donations.**

We've reached that point where we've become so large and are assisting so many who regularly reach out for the

hope and support we provide that we now need to find those organizations and individuals who will grant large sums of money to a wonderful nonprofit like ours.

**Help Needed:** If you have any experience in grant writing (or know someone who does), or if you have a possible grant candidate, please contact Susan Whitmore at [swhitmore@griefhaven.org](mailto:swhitmore@griefhaven.org).

## Character Counts, KNX Radio, 1070 AM

In case you missed it, Michael Josephson, founder of *Character Counts*, KNX Radio 1070, and the Josephson Ethics Institute ([www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)), ran a beautiful piece about our foundation. If you would like to hear it or read the transcription, go to our website under the "media" button; click on "radio shows."

**Until next time . . . we send our love.**

From all of us, we remain dedicated to you and your journey . . .

Anne Roberts

Steve and Paul

Mabel M. B.

Dick Carlson

Wayne Keman

Wendell Whitmore

Judith

D. Roger Taylor

Bernice Wolf

James Putney

Linh Wong

Mark Klaas

Erika's Mom, Susan

Urt Klaas

Sue O'Farrell

Gerry Fellows

Sandy Godwin

Selby Goodman