



MISS Foundation

A COMMUNITY OF COMPASSION AND HOPE FOR GRIEVING FAMILIES

Brothers, Teddy & Leo

By Jim Greer, their dad

I had the most amazing conversation tonight with Leo my ten year old. While walking to the park for a little school night soccer, Leo was telling me how he was trying to explain to his friend at school that when he misses his little brother, he can be anywhere and ask him for a heart - and one will appear. On the ground, as a rock, as a piece of sidewalk, as a cloud, as a shape in the trees. He asks for the heart and the heart appears. His friend at school didn't understand at all, and he said he just kind of laughed. Not a mean friend, but he just doesn't understand. And Leo said he tried to explain to him how much he misses his brother and that this particular friend has a little sister that he is always making fun of and teasing - like a lot of kids would do. And Leo said he tried really hard to get him to understand that he shouldn't take his little sister for granted, and how much he wishes he had his brother back. That if he had someone to play with every day he would be "rockin it" as he put it. It just broke my heart, because it's true. He would be rockin it with Teddy.



Missing them ...

Brothers, Teddy & Leo

Kindness Walks

Selah Retreat

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Complicated Grief "Disorder"? Really?

Sandy Hook Cermony Recognizes Random Acts of Kindness

Acts of Kindness

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Painting Grief's Many Layers Fundraiser

submission guidelines

Want to contribute to the MISSing newsletter?
Send submissions to info@missfoundation.org for consideration. Thank you.

I had to take a step back and talk to Leo like I've never really talked to him before. I had to let him know that because of what he saw his brother go through, he was going to be very different from a lot of people. That he never should have had to go through it to begin with. That we all - in our family - have to work extra hard to keep our faith and happiness and be stronger and better people because of what we saw Teddy endure. He took the time on this walk to talk about this with me, and showed me a heart he had asked for and then found on a little path near where we live. It's strange, this bond we'll always have, those of us who went through this. I feel like we live in a different world. Maybe we do.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MISS Foundation Kindness Walks Coming Soon!

The MISS Foundation's **Kindness Walk: Remembering Those We Love** is an international memorial walk to remember all of the beloved children who are gone too soon, and to honor all of the mothers, fathers, families and communities by participating in Kindness Projects as a way to continue their child's legacy.

The **Richmond Chapter** of the MISS Foundation will hold their walk on May 16, 2015 at Innsbrook Picnic Area, 4222 Cox Rd, Richmond, Virginia. As part of their Kindness Project this year, the group will collect supplies for Child Life at Children's Hospital of Richmond. For more information, please contact Amy Mercurio, amy.mercurio@missfoundation.org.

To register, please visit: <http://www.firstgiving.com/missfoundation/kindnesswalkrichmondva2015>

The **3rd Annual MISS Foundation Kindness Walk NW Illinois Suburban Chapter** will be held Sunday, May 31, 2015 at 9:00 AM at Lake Arlington, 2201 N Windsor Dr, IL 60004, Arlington Heights, Illinois. To register, or for more information, please visit: <http://www.firstgiving.com/missfoundation/3rdAnnualWalkNWIllinoisChapter>

You won't want to miss **Iowa City's Kindness Walk** on June 13, 2015 in Lower City Park, Shelter # 9, Iowa City, Iowa. Contact Jennifer Correll for more info. jennifer.correll@missfoundation.org

To Register: Please visit: <http://www.firstgiving.com/missfoundation/kindness-walk-iowa-city-ia>

Thanks to all of our amazing MISS volunteers in our communities for organizing these meaningful events.



Selah: Pause, Reflect, Discover Meaning Retreat

April 30th - May 3rd 2015, Sedona
Mago Retreat Center

"...life changing, breath taking, heart wrenching, courageous, compassionate, connective, compelling...a path forward from deepest sorrow."

Dr. Joanne Cacciatore, Karla Helbert and Ashley Santi led this year's retreat —a profound and meaningful experience for so many of our bereaved families. Pictures will be posted on the MISS Foundation Facebook Page early next week.

<http://missfoundation.org/retreat>

They remain a part of us always.
That means grief remains a part of us, and so does love.
- Dr. Joanne Cacciatore



A MISS Picnic

On March 8, 2015, Branden's Mom, Michele Newton of the MISS Foundation's Phoenix Chapter, put together a MISS Picnic. MISS families came together for a BBQ, games, and togetherness on a beautiful day. Their children were remembered, rainbow babies were introduced, and love was given to everyone. Thank you Michele for organizing this event for MISS Foundation families.

Compassionate Bereavement Care Training for Providers

Compassionate Bereavement Care® Provider Certification. Changing How Bereaved Families Are Treated Worldwide. With so few providers who understand the depth and breadth of the death of a child, the MISS Foundation & Center for Loss & Trauma have partnered to present one of the most significant, timely, intensive training programs in traumatic grief to providers around the world.

This training is for therapists, counselors, first responders, clergy, medical staff, hospice workers and bereavement specialists interested in specializing in a mindfulness-based, non-medicalized, green approach (Cacciatore, 2010) to working with families suffering a traumatic loss such as the death of a child, including but not limited to perinatal death, suicide, homicide, terminal illness. The 30-hour continuing education program has been approved to provide CEU's through Alliant International University (AIU).

Our next training programs are **September 24-27th, 2015** in New York and **October 15-18, 2015** in beautiful Sedona, Arizona. Applications are currently being accepted. Space is limited.

Apply online at: <http://certification.missfoundation.org/upcoming-events>



Complicated Grief “Disorder”? Really?

Dr. Joanne Cacciatore

There is some hullabaloo going on about “prolonged grief disorder” aka ‘complicated grief.’ Yep, another grief-related ‘mental illness.’ According to a NEJM blog it is “condition is characterized by intense grief that lasts longer than would be expected according to social norms and that causes impairment in daily functioning.”

Ha! Social norms? Around grief? Talk about pathology! Western culture’s social norms around grief are as abnormal as you get. The average bereavement leave is three days, many bereaved parents are medicated within days or weeks after a traumatic loss (even in the presence of data to suggest these medications can be harmful and iatrogenic), and mourners are expected to get back to ‘life-as-usual’ often within weeks or mere months even after traumatic death.

The same blog continues:

“The hallmark of complicated grief is persistent, intense yearning, longing, and sadness; these symptoms are usually accompanied by insistent thoughts or images of the deceased and a sense of disbelief or an inability to accept the painful reality of the person’s death... the urge to hold onto the deceased person by constantly reminiscing or by viewing, touching, or smelling the deceased person’s belongings... often feel shocked, stunned, or emotionally numb, and they may become estranged from others because of the belief that happiness is inextricably tied to the person who died. They may have a diminished sense of self or discomfort with a changed social role and are often confused by their seemingly endless grief.”

I’ve had many emails and calls about this. So, I will say, and those who know me can predict this:

I think certain groups are at risk of - again - being diagnosed and “treated” for absolutely normal feelings and experiences after an excruciatingly painful and traumatic loss.

For example, I worked with a mother who lost her three children in a fire. Why would she not have persistent and intense yearning? Why would she not long for her children? Feel sadness? Experience an inability to accept their deaths? Why would she not feel shocked... emotionally numb? Why would she not experience a diminished sense of self? And let’s not underestimate the power of being surrounded by cruel and insensitive others while in our grief.

Please consider that when others promote ‘treatment’ for a ‘disorder’ related to grief, they are asserting that these are aberrant - somehow abnormal - reactions. They are medicalizing what it means to be human, to love and to, rightfully, mourn. Um, sorry, no.

When the overwhelming majority of a population feel the same way, experience the same emotions, and contradict what others, on the outside looking in, assert are “normative”, then I’m going to defer to the *real* experts to establish the Gaussian curve for that particular population.

I reject this idea that, somehow, a mother whose three children die in a fire or a mother whose two children are murdered or parents whose baby dies during birth or whose son died at three of cancer or whose daughter is raped and murdered are “disordered” for feeling the aforementioned symptoms. No way I will be convinced of that. Rather, a world wherein those horrific events can occur is deeply flawed and the tendency for our culture to pathologize the pain and suffering they expectedly would endure is a sickness. Of *course* they experience an ‘impairment in daily functioning’. No shit Sherlock. This is a NORMAL reaction to ABNORMAL tragedies. Come on, let’s use our hearts and our minds about this. What happened to basic common sense?

Do some people need support through traumatic grief? Oh yes, yes indeed. Many do.

And the best support we can offer is nonjudgmental loving, compassionate space to be with what is... others to remember and speak their names... unconditional respect for our emotional state... a place of safety... time to mourn a profoundly important and utterly irreplaceable relationship, time and space and kindness as we integrate the loss, and eventually, support without coercion, as we find meaning and purpose in life again if and when we are ever ready.

“Sandy Hook Ceremony Recognizes Random Acts Of Kindness”



“Newtown Kindness is an organization which was formed after 6-year-old Charlotte Bacon passed away in the Sandy Hook school shootings. Their mission is to keep her memory alive by promoting kindness as a guiding principle of humanity. Committed to fostering compassion in children and inspiring life-long contributors to society, the organization aims to facilitate acts of kindness within communities as well as raise awareness of kindness through education, sharing and recognition. HooplaHa attended the Kindness Awards to learn more about Charlotte and meet some of the most inspirational kids from all across the country and how they are making an impact in their communities and beyond!

Kids Are Awesome is just one of the entertaining and informative destinations in the HooplaHa – Life with a Smile programming network.

If you're sick of all the bad news in the media and looking for a dose of inspiration, HooplaHa will give you a reason to smile every day!

HooplaHa's mission, while a simple one, could not be more important: to make people smile as much as possible. Whether it be a bit of good news, an inspirational story, a fun video, a cute picture or a touching piece of music -- we want to put a smile on your face! Subscribe to any of our YouTube channel so you never miss our new videos.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CopGMDCW7j0&feature=youtu.be>

Acts of Kindness

Beautiful #KindnessProject in honor of a precious little boy and all the children gone too soon at their local hospital.

“We had this memorial tree created in loving memory of our son Jackson Rhys who was stillborn March 4, 2014. We donated the tree to the hospital & each butterfly will be engraved with the name & birth date of an angel baby. One of the flowers says “We will hold you in our hearts until we can hold you in heaven” & the rock at the bottom is titled “Our Angel Babies”. We thought this would be a beautiful way to remember the babies that are gone too soon & to help families begin to heal. Sending lots of love to all the angel babies”



Birthdays & Death Days

Bi-monthly Birthdays and Death Days are now online on the MISS website.

See the Birth Days

<http://www.missfoundation.org/newsevents/birthdaysthis-month>

See the Death Days

<http://www.missfoundation.org/newsevents/deathdaysthis-month>

Our Donors & Sponsors

We'd like to thank all of you who give so much to support the MISS Foundation

See our sponsors

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MISS Mom Shares Her Journey – Zoey, Jada and Jordan: “North Jersey mom becomes beacon for the grieving after her husband kills their children”

Written by Hannen Adely

Four and a half years ago, Zoey Mendoza walked her children into day care, wrapped them in hugs and said goodbye without a clue that they were in danger.



Zoey Mendoza with her son, Jordan, not long before the 3-year-old and his big sister, Jada, were slain in Ringwood by their father, Kurtis Birth, who then took his own life.

Hours later her children were gone, killed by their father in a murder-suicide in Ringwood that was unfathomable to friends, family, police and Mendoza herself. She couldn't grasp why he would hurt them and how she could go on without her family. The world she knew just stopped.

“I didn't know how the sun was going to rise the next day,” Mendoza said in an interview Friday. “I didn't know how to keep breathing.”

Over time, Mendoza learned to cope with her grief by talking about her experience, sharing stories and photos of her children, and bonding with others who have suffered loss. She has found a spiritual connection with her children and a purpose by helping others in grief, she said.

Today, her stories, online posts and inspirational messages are a beacon for grieving parents.

"I'm not running away from my family and children," said Mendoza, 41. "This is what happened to me. I feel I can provide some kind of hope and I can help other people in acute phases of grief."

Mendoza's life changed on Oct. 18, 2010. On that warm fall day, she drove 5-year-old Jada and 3-year-old Jordan from their home in Pompton Lakes to a day-care center in Wayne where they lingered in a goodbye embrace.

Her husband, Kurtis Birth, showed up hours early to pick up the children from day care, even though she had planned to get them. The couple were going through a separation and she grew concerned when Birth didn't respond to messages or bring the children home, so Mendoza called the police that evening.

She worried about Birth, she said, who was going through an "emotional roller coaster" — having attempted suicide seven weeks earlier. Still, it never crossed her mind that her children would be harmed.



A family photo of Zoey Mendoza's 5-year-old daughter, Jada, left, and 3-year-old son, Jordan.

Her husband was never violent or aggressive, she said. She had never even seen him hold a gun. Rather, she described Birth as an adoring father who captured his children's lives in hundreds of video recordings and thousands of photos. That evening, police checked Birth's abandoned Ringwood

home and found Jada lying near the front steps and Jordan in the doorway. Birth had shot them to death using his grandfather's 20-year-old rifle, then fatally shot himself.

After a neighbor called Mendoza to report a heavy police presence and crime-scene tape, she was frantic as her best friend drove her to the house. At the scene, police told her that her children were gone. "I just collapsed into my friend's lap," she recalled. "I just wept."

Mendoza spent the next year in intensive therapy, twice a week at three-hour sessions. As a licensed clinical social worker, she felt she was living the stages of grief that she knew and studied.

She read everything she could find about child loss and reached out to researchers, authors and bereaved parents. Facebook became a platform for her to connect and to share memories and photos of her kids. And she told her story in detail in an article that appeared on the Yahoo! Parenting forum.

"What I want people to know is that Jada and Jordan lived a beautiful, exciting life," Mendoza said Friday. "They lived and loved. Every night they went to bed secure and loved."

She added, "For me, the lives my children lived with me and the love we continue to share means so much more than the way they died."

Mendoza found peace after experiencing what she described as visits from her children from beyond, explaining to her that they were in heaven. In one visit, she said Jada told her she was "free of burden" and "never sad."

"I feel like one of the things meant to come from this was for me to develop relationships with my children through God and heaven and not be scared of death and to understand they are living more than we can ever dream of living here," she said. "They're living with love and no pain."

Listening to them, Mendoza said she developed a relationship with God and has come to see signs of her children in everyday life and to see beauty everywhere — in the sunrise, in the cardinal perched outside, in the Michael Jackson songs that her son loved to hear on the radio,

"When your babies die and they're not standing in front of you and you can't brush your daughter's hair or rub your son's back — I learned a long time ago to relate to them in

MISS Foundation Receives \$10,000 In Community Grant Competition

MISS Foundation has been named a recipient of a \$5,000 Sugarlands Distilling MoonShare Community Grant, along with a matching donation of \$5,000 from a very generous donor. We are so thankful for all of you! We received the grant after being selected from more than 150 non-profit applicants. Thousands of supporters of the MISS Foundation voted daily for one month to keep us as one of the Top 12 Nonprofits to receive the grant. Combined with the matching donation, these funds are being used for scholarships to attend the upcoming MISS Foundation Retreat for bereaved parents in Sedona, AZ.

<http://www.sugarlandsdistilling.com/moonshare/>



different ways," she said.

Mendoza remarried in 2013, has three stepchildren and lives in a small community in New York. She is a school social worker in New Jersey.

She hopes to spread the love that her children bring her and help others work through devastation and loss, giving people in the most dire of situations "a glimmer of hope." She plans to keep telling her story and hopes to one day write a book.

Over the years, Mendoza has struggled with her feelings toward Birth, her husband of eight years. She felt deeply betrayed, but has worked hard to forgive him.

"I felt I wouldn't be able to move forward in my life if I held that hate in my heart," Mendoza said, adding that forgiveness isn't black and white and has no finish line.

"I don't think about Kurtis now," she said. "I let him go."

Volunteers needed

MISS Foundation needs volunteer moderators for our online forums. This role is for bereaved parents or grandparents only. For more information, please contact Laurie-Beth Brennan at laurie-beth.brennan@missfoundation.org



Farley-Kluger Initiative Needs Your Help

Many MISS Foundation supporters have followed the Farley-Kluger Initiative to add loss of a child to The Family Medical Leave Act. On May 12, BOTH Houses of the United States Congress will introduce bi-partisan bills to effect this change. Now the real work begins, to convince other elected officials to join and urge Congress to hold hearings on this very important issue. You can help by going to www.farleykluger.com and signing the petition, as well as Tweeting and Facebooking your Representative and Senator to join the effort. Thank You!

Barry Kluger, Erika's Dad

Painting Grief's Many Layers Fundraiser

One of our MISS volunteers, Ashley, Mckenna's mom, from the Phoenix chapter is hosting an event to help raise funds for MISS. Please join us, invite friends and family for a fun night of painting. Please register as soon as possible. Thank you!

Paint Nite Event <http://www.paintnite.com/>

Location: 4163 W Thunderbird Rd, Phoenix, AZ, 85029

Artist: Coming Soon

Date: May 15, 2015

Start Time: 6:30 PM



Contact Us

1-602-279-MISS (6477)

1-888-455-MISS (6477)

Physical Address

77 E Thomas Rd #221

Phoenix, AZ 85012

Donations/Billing Address

Kelli Montgomery

c/o MISS Foundation

1700 Alcove Ct.

Austin TX 78757

Snail mail donations should be made payable to "MISS Foundation."

Email Contact

info@missfoundation.org



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MISSFoundation