

My name is Sandi Sagaser. I was born and raised in Gallatin the youngest of 4 children. I grew up in a wonderful Christian home where my parents loved me and loved the Lord! Life was good.

I was married at 20 years old and thought I was just about as old as I would ever be! After about 10 years of marriage, we decided to try to have a baby – but it just wasn't that easy!

Finally – 3 years later – in 1994 Samuel Vincent Sudduth came into this world – 7 lbs. 10 ozs. – I called him my sweet tiny angel! I don't know if it was my age or because I had wanted him so much, but he was absolutely the joy of my life!!

In 1998 Samuel was 3 years old. It was a day like so many others. I was cooking breakfast while Samuel played upstairs in his playroom. I heard him cry and ran upstairs. He was holding a place on his chest. There was no booboo, no blood – I held him until he quit crying. He wanted to show Daddy and then put a Winnie the Pooh band-aid on it though there was nothing there but a tiny red dot. It was all a familiar scene in the life of a 3 year old. The babysitter came, we went to work for the day and all seemed well. When I got home from work, his babysitter said he had not felt good after his long nap. She took his shirt off and showed me the place where he had hurt that morning. It had swollen like a mosquito bite. We went out to dinner with some friends and Samuel was just not himself. He didn't want to eat or play.

As we were eating, I noticed the place on his chest was bruising. After dinner we decided to take him to the emergency room just to make sure everything was okay. The nurse took his vital signs and all seemed to be okay though he did not want her to touch his chest. They sent us back out front to give insurance information. His Dad was holding Samuel when all of a sudden he had a seizure or heart attack that made him become stiff. Doctors and nurses were running everywhere. They made us lay Samuel on a bed and immediately ran us out of the room. The doctors and nurses worked on him for two hours trying to revive him. It was after midnight when the doctor in tears told us there was nothing they could do. They said that he had bled internally all day and that his blood would not clot. He said there was no way to know anything was wrong and he would not have even brought his child in when we did. I didn't realize at that moment, but later realized it was Mother's Day when Samuel was pronounced dead.

When Samuel died, my world stopped, it became very dark, it felt like the end - the end of my hopes, the end of my dreams, the end of the world that I lived for. The reality that he was gone was more than I could bear.

I thought of all the things I could never do again. I could never:

- hold him again
- Rock him to sleep
- Kiss his booboo
- Brush that baby fine hair
- Sing to him and teach him
- Watch cartoons or play outside
- Hear him call my name, though I still thought I did sometimes
- See his eyes sparkle

Comfort him when he was afraid
Clean up his messes and pick up toys
Wash his little clothes
Give him a bath or play with tub toys
Sing with him while getting him dressed
Praise him for going potty
Touch his soft skin
Know his sweet love
Go to birthday parties or day care
Read bed time stories
Watch him in school programs
And then the future realities of seeing him grow through kindergarten,
school, soccer, graduation, College and even having grandchildren

My arms were empty. The arms of my heart ached to hold him one more time – just once! All that was left to remind us of Samuel were his toys and clothes, his room, his friends, pictures, our memories and tiny handprints on the windows. All that really seemed left was the agony of empty arms.

I had never really thought about losing my child, losing my husband, losing my parents or my loved ones. Within a very short time I had lost my son, then my Mom died a year later with breast cancer, then my husband left. I found myself wondering “Who” I was. I was no longer a Mom to Samuel, a daughter to my Mom or a wife to my husband. My identity was gone – those roles seemed to determine who I was. Have you ever thought of that? Who would you be without your relationships? I was a Mom, a daughter, a sister, a granddaughter, a co-worker, a friend. Not only had my relationships changed forever, I felt I was no longer “really” needed. The roles I found most important no longer existed for me.

What I had valued as “normal” and “stable” were gone – never to return. Faced with this very painful reality, worse than any nightmare, I agonized deep within my soul. I was drained of part of me. Part of me was gone forever. Life would never be the same for our families. Life had changed FOREVER. Everyone’s roles changed, everyone trying to adjust to a “new normal”.

In looking for a “new normal” I realized I was actually looking for life to become calm and stable, peaceful, a sense of happiness to return, a “new normal”. I was setting very unrealistic expectations for this lifetime because life IS constant change. There will continue to be painful life experiences, unexpected changes, less than perfect relationships and changes in the roles I play. So the question became “Who AM I?” What was my role? Why am I here?

This was the first time I was really disappointed in God, thinking he had not taken care of me. You see, I was saved when I was 6 years old so I had always been confident that God was in me and with me, taking care of me. When people give their testimonies, they tell how their life was changed after they came to know Christ. Because I was saved at 6 – I don’t remember any BIG change – I mean – how bad could I have been in 6 years?!!! Instead, my testimony is about how I came to KNOW HIM MORE!!

Though I was disappointed in God, the Truth is that He never said that life would be fair. I felt cheated because the plans I had for my life were not His plans. We never really

knew what caused Samuel's death; my Mom's life was cut very short after a lot of suffering; and after 21 years of marriage, being divorced was definitely not in my plans.

When I could no longer answer my questions about who I was, what was my purpose was in being here, God answered them for me. I was at the end of my rope when I read Romans 8:26-27 "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

Indeed the Spirit did intercede for me because I was so emotionally exhausted, there were no words. When I could finally say to God, "All that I am and all that is mine are Yours". When I finally gave it all to Him, He began to renew my mind with His strength, his presence, compassion and grace. I had to be still and let Him overwhelm me with the reality that He is God. I had to be still and surrender my hopes and dreams to Him!

In looking for my "new normal", my safety, and stability, my equilibrium, God showed me that HE is the only stability in Life! He showed me through reading His word, through circumstances and through other people that He had a role for me, a purpose for Sandi long before I was Samuel's Mom or a wife. He knew me before I was born. He numbered my days and has a plan that will give Him glory. We can never grasp that the days, months or years that we walk through the valley of the shadow of death could be for anyone's good. God knows NOW and one day we will understand. II Corinthians 1:3-5 encourages me to press on – it says "I will praise the Lord, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

When Samuel died, my world stopped, it became very dark, it felt like the End. Now I know it was the beginning of a new journey to walk closer with my Lord, to walk in His peace, to fulfill my role and my purpose as a child of the King. He has sent me to be a messenger of hope and peace! It is because I KNOW that God will bring me THROUGH difficult times that I can experience pure joy in the midst of tremendous pain. I thank God for friends and family who have loved me through the hard times. THANK YOU for encouraging me – even when it was hard for you!! There are still days that life is a struggle and I cry deep within my soul – there are days that I long desperately to be at home in heaven with Samuel – days I long to climb up in God's lap and to hear Him say "Well done my child".

When I wrote this testimony I was 43 years old. Now I am 50 and I am so humbled to read it again. My journey has continued in the most amazing ways. God sent my husband Gary to love me and encourage me. I feel restored in so many ways! God's grace is always sufficient and though I miss my Samuel and my Mama, I am completely at peace. My favorite verse is "My Soul Finds Rest in God Alone" Psalm 62:1

.....and the journey continues! April 2, 2012