

Jacob Wheeler Foundation

'I WONDER...' – I wonder what my boy would look like at 20. It seems so long ago yet also like yesterday when he died. Would he have short hair, long hair, a beard? Would he be carrying a little extra weight or would he be still working out like he did in high school? I wonder if he would have earned his seven varsity letters he dreamed of. I wonder if he would have a girlfriend and if she would be good to him as we had always hoped she would. I wonder if he would be going to school or working. I wonder if he would be living in Butte. I wonder if my memories have faded. I worry that I will forget how he smelled or how warm his hugs felt. I worry that I will forget the tenderness in his voice. I wonder if my wife's tears will ever subside. I wonder how I managed to fail him as a father. I too wonder what kind of lens he has from Heaven. I wonder if he can see what is going on in our lives or if he cares. I wonder if my dear friend Louise, who helped pull us up from the abyss after Jacob's death, scolded him as she promised after she entered Heaven's gates. I wonder if once in Heaven, a spirit can only see the good in our lives here on earth, and not the bad. I wonder, but I sure hope so. I would want Jacob to see how we've managed to live and find some joy in spite of our grieving but I wouldn't want him to know that we still suffer. I wonder if he would approve of how we've worked to have his memory live and try and raise awareness for those suffering from depression. I wonder what my life was like before this tragedy. I wonder.

This is my story, but from my experience, it shares a common theme for how parents that have lived through the death of a child feel in the years following their loss. I used to believe in the phrase 'God doesn't give you more than you can handle'. I now know how naive it was to think that way. This loss was more than I could handle. And really still is. The reality is, God doesn't give us these struggles and tragedies in our lives. God is present in our suffering by standing beside us and giving us the people with patience and understanding that teach and encourage us to continue to live life and be positive, in spite of the what happened.

I made the decision early on to hold my head up high, in spite of the rumors, comments in the newspaper articles, and judgmental looks from strangers and some who I thought were my friends. For me, it was critical to my survival. Besides, in the end, I was and am proud of the person my son was. It isn't easy to or fair to have your life's tragedies spilled all over the media. Why do they do that. I wonder.

Why so deep today. You may wonder. Well, tomorrow would be my son's 20th birthday. Today, we were already at the hospital and right now, my wife was having contractions. That was a long difficult day leading up to his birth tomorrow, just 20 years ago. When I saw him arrive, albeit really late, I wondered what his story would be. I wondered at the marvel of God's creation, I wondered what I did to be so fortunate. Jacob's story was cut short, but I am still very blessed. Even if only for 15 years, I still got to be his Dad. I wouldn't trade those 15 years with anyone for anything. And, I am still one of the luckiest men around. I have the wife of my dreams and a daughter that fills me with pride and love.

So I wonder, what does all this mean? I think it means that we should always count our blessings. We should spend more time showing love and compassion and A LOT less time judging others as they live their life story. I think it means to live in the present and not take the people you love for granted. I think this means to DARE to wonder what can be, in spite of and maybe because what you've been through. I wonder. ~Bill Wheeler