

John J. Kreslin, Jr.
August 26, 1983 – August 30, 2002

I will be with you always.

MATTHEW 28:20

The "Broken heart" cliché has never meant anything more to me than what you would hear in a love song. Since the death of my son John, a broken heart has taken on a whole new meaning for me. Words and clichés do not begin to describe how devastating it is for a parent to lose a child. I wake up every morning in disbelief that my life has taken this turn.

The images from the night of August 30, 2002, as well as the days that followed remain very vivid in my memory. We woke to the dog barking just before midnight. When I opened the door, my husband knew something horrible had happened. I will never forget our son Kevin, (15 years old at the time), sitting at the top of the stairs listening to a police officer and a chaplain tell my husband and me that our son John had died in a car crash just before 10:00 PM that evening.

School had just started for John. We dropped him off only two days before (on August 26, John's 19th birthday) for the beginning of his sophomore year at Butler University in Indianapolis, where he was studying to become a pharmacist. Classes had begun a few days later with the crash happening on Friday night of that first week, which was the start of the Labor Day weekend.

John worked hard all summer with his uncle's moving company. He attended summer school with the

determination to conquer calculus. John was so excited about going back to school. He had such confidence, and shared with me his feelings of a great year. After singing "Happy Birthday" in his dorm room we said our goodbyes in the parking lot. Through a few tears was a kiss on my cheek and a promise to call in a couple days. He shook his brother's hand, the same for his dad along with a hug, "love you". No one ever thinks that when they say goodbye to someone that it could be the last time they ever see them.

John, his girlfriend, two other girls, and the driver of the car (20 years old at the time), went out for a ride to see an apartment some friends had moved into off campus. The driver took a short cut through a heavily wooded residential area, on a street that was poorly lit and a speed limit of 25 mph. The driver sped through the area losing control of the car and crashed into a tree. My son died instantly. Two of the girls and the driver were all seriously injured. Estimates from the police report indicate that the car was traveling at 65-75 mph, with skid marks measuring 185 feet long.

The driver had a BAC of .13. He was charged with 9 felony counts all pertaining to reckless homicide, recklessness causing bodily injuries, and driving under the influence. He pleaded guilty to reckless homicide and recklessness causing bodily injuries. The DUI charges were dropped due to a technicality. During sentencing, the State's Attorney was able to use medical records that contained what was found the night of the crash. The driver is now serving a six-year sentence one year in prison (six months for good behavior), one-year community corrections, and four years probation in which he has agreed to share his story in public forums. I could write pages of what this loss has done to my life as well as my family. I have searched my heart and soul trying to make sense of this horrible tragedy and of course there is no sense. Johnny was the type of person that genuinely cared about people and gave from his heart. He was bright and almost always had a cheerful disposition. He had the

ability to change your mood with just his smile. He was very driven and always seemed to find a lesson in all of his experiences. Today I still feel his spirit all around me and he continues to teach me something new every day. The loss of John's dreams and the dreams we had for him will leave emptiness in our hearts forever. I have great sadness for what this loss has meant to his only brother, friends and our families.

As our sons grew older there were many conversations in our home about drinking and driving, and about being accountable and responsible for everything you choose to do in life. It was just a given that you did not drive under the influence and that we were always just a phone call away. I will never understand why John got into that car that night, other than himself being under the influence, causing him not to make responsible decisions. John did not cause the crash; he was not the one speeding on that dark street. He was not the one putting anyone in danger. But John's character was strong enough to not get in that car, to know it was not the right thing to do, no matter what the influence, peer or alcohol. This is my struggle. John was a leader, John was a responsible individual, he was respectful, and in turn, had the respect of others. These are the qualities that I was so proud of for 19 years. There is nothing that could ever explain why those qualities did not shine through that night as they had so often in the past.

The anguish that I feel has made me determined not to have John's death be in vain. I struggle every day with the events that lead to his death and I am committed to sharing his story. Whatever it was in John's mind that allowed him to get into that car, needs to be explored, and needs to be discussed, need to be taught with as much importance as not being the driver. The research is over-whelming on automobile incidents of drivers of all ages under the influence of both drugs and alcohol. People think they are immortal, believing that tragedies happen to other people.

Our young people today are making horrible choices and not just behind the wheel of a car.

I do not expect my broken heart to ever mend, but if I can work to make others from breaking, then my son will continue to make positive differences in the lives of others. I grieve every day not just for my son, but for all the families that have lost someone they love in such a senseless manner.

GOD BLESS YOU JOHNNY.

Mom