

## The Sandra Castellano Frankum Tribute

January 23, 1977 – January 26, 2013



We were raised together. Everyone that knew us, knew we were more like siblings than cousins; my three sisters, Sandra, her brother, Raymond and me. Our mothers were sisters who were both widowed, so we were no strangers to tragedy and how cruel the fates could be. But we learned that together we were strong. We were tested again, when we lost Sandra and Raymond's mother, Kathy, to cancer; she was 56. We were still reeling from the loss; she was so important to our family chain. As a family, we held on tighter than ever. We thought, it can't get worse than this....

On January 26, 2013, my cousin, Sandra and her best friend, Michelle Miranda went out to celebrate Sandra's birthday, which was the 23rd. She had just lost the babysitter for her kids on her birthday, so being out with her friends was bittersweet. But both Sandra and Michelle were known for their infectious smiles and the happiness they brought to a crowd. So, together they met the rest of their friends to try to cheer up and have somewhat of a birthday party anyway.

Because Sandra had too much to drink, she would not drive. A very close friend of the family, who was in fact LIKE FAMILY, happened to be in the same bar at the time. She offered to drive Sandra and Michelle, claiming she was "okay to drive." When Saturday morning came and Sandra wasn't home yet to cook breakfast for her four kids, we knew something was wrong. It was out of character for her to not get in touch with someone in the family, if she had decided to spend the night at her friend's; be it a phone call or via a social network. We are a family in constant contact through message boards, phone calls and texts. So, we began to call her cell

phone, only to have it go directly to voicemail. We would find out bits and pieces of the story from people that were there, because in our town everybody knows everybody and this would touch the lives of so many. Everyone was connected to the families involved in one way or the other. We talked to several people that were with her and got the same story that she had left with my sister's best friend. We began to feel somewhat relieved, knowing that she and Michelle had left with a long time, trusted friend. We thought, perhaps they went to her house to sleep it off. Then we found out that the friend they supposedly left with was found walking near the expressway and was taken to the hospital, claiming to not remember anything. Two of my sisters, Sandra's brother, Raymond and his wife, went to look for Sandra. Hoping they'd find her...somewhere. Jail? Hospital? Anywhere but.....

That's when the sick feeling started to kick in. Someone posted on a social media that there was a crash with two fatalities. A blue van drove over the Harlem Bridge, at Interstate 55. Sandra had a blue van. The family friend was found walking on that same ramp. We began to put the pieces together. I thought about Sandra's four kids: Jianna, Jeffrey, Johnny, and Jacob, they were her babies. It seemed like Jacob had just had his third heart surgery and we were just breathing again from that! And that's when the sick feeling turned to numbness and all I wanted was for all of us to be together...ALL OF US.

OH, SANDRA!

DEAR SANDRA,

Our lives have changed dramatically.

Adjustment period? We will never be '*adjusted.*'

We do what we have to do...

***Jianna Joyce, Jeffrey George, Johnny Jay and Jacob Jude,***

Your legacy.

I see your smile,

Hear your voice and laughter.

Pieces of you...so many traces...

Where do I find them?

In your children's' faces,

***Jianna Joyce, Jeffrey George, Johnny Jay and Jacob Jude.***

I wonder about life and death.

Is it irony? Is it, a mean joke? Are we, 'fortune's fools?'

**Gianna Joyce-Fifteen** No one should have to bury their mother on their Sweet Sixteenth birthday. We won't. We DON'T. A party that you planned for her, never happened. Her birthday will never be the same. **Why should she have to go through this?**

**Jeffrey George-Twelve** About to become a teenager. "I keep trying," he tells me, "but I can't remember my mom's voice. I can't remember things...I WANT to remember her!" **Why can't he remember?**

**Johnny Jay-Seven** I know what it feels like...not sure HOW he is supposed to grieve. He's lost, confused, he hurts and he misses you...**Why is this happening?**

**Jacob Jude-Three** Not planned, born with a CHD. His heart is a symbol for this family. He loves you. He talks about you all the time. Wants to look at you. Wants to KNOW you. **Why did you have to go to Heaven?**

We will make sure that you will be there for every milestone. We will make sure they remember you...KNOW YOU...LOVE YOU. It doesn't seem right or fair. It's something that should never have happened. Could have been avoided. Instead of "WHAT IF?" we ask ourselves, "WHY?"

The Family of Sandra Dee Castellano