

A Tribute to Chad Eric Zastrow Dec. 4, 1971—April 16, 1993

Over the years, I've written many tributes to Chad in my articles. It's a mother's way of remembering a special part of her life created by loving someone very special. It's true that "love never dies." For all these years, that love has kept me going and given me meaning, purpose and HOPE. Many of Chad's stories of life

became analogies for my writing while I was growing through grief.

Chad's life, though short, was full and beautiful. He loved hunting, fishing, and sports. He was active, fun loving, and well-liked. Chad was an Eagle scout. At the time of his death, he was a member of the Army National Guards, a student enrolled in EMT training at a community college, and holding a full-time job.

Chad died at the age of 21 as a result of suicide. His fiancé, Jenny, took her life ten weeks later. Neither death made sense, and even as I write this, over 25 years later, we will never understand why. What we have learned is: It doesn't make any difference "why". The fact is that both have died, and no matter how they died, it wouldn't change anything. We lost the beauty and joy they brought into our lives.

In the excerpts below, I've included some of my most memorable moments as a tribute to my son.

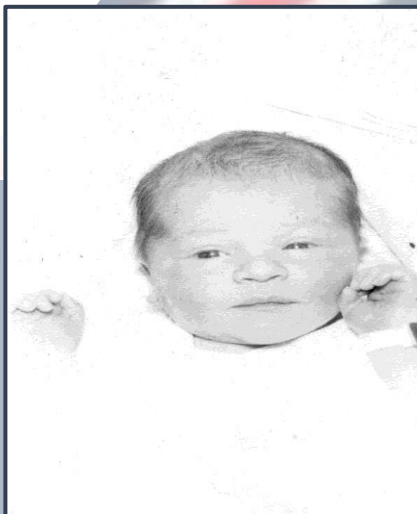
Excerpts of Memories—My Tribute to Chad

As a young child growing up, the stories of his antics were endless, both heartwarming and loving. I remember when:

- As a 7-year old boy, clutching a teddy bear when he played Joseph in a Sunday School Christmas program.

- I can still see him as a toddler in the barn with his grandpa and daddy...riding his ATV toy truck up and down the aisles and stuffing cats in the storage area to take them for a ride.
- I have a vivid, first-hand memory of him building his dune buggy and taking me for a ride (or race) through the corn stalk field...his high adventure.
- I remember the look on his face when he participated in an adult Halloween party in the barn, and grabbed the legs of unsuspecting friends who trekked through the walls of bales of hay, in our haunted barn.
- He had many cars. He loved Mustang cars and had several in a short span of time.
- His large-mouth trophy bass still hangs on our wall as a reminder of a day fishing with a friend when we were worried sick because we didn't know where he was.
- I remember a wedding he went to for the sister of his friend. It was his first experience with drinking, and he had a little too much. His friends delivered him home in his white jacket and pants, and I plopped him on his waterbed, anger at his condition. The waffling waves took over –and he spent the night on the lawn outside the back door.
- In his high school years, a neighbor gave him an experience of a lifetime. He asked us if Chad could ride with him in his 18-wheeler to California to deliver

*There are
two
things
we can give
our children,
one is roots
and the
other is
wings.*



a load. Of course, Mom hesitated, but Dad thought it would be a great experience. Our motive was that it would encourage him to attend college rather than take a job such as driving truck. Well, it backfired. Throughout the trip, he called home telling us the great sights he was seeing such as the mountains, the wildfires burning, a casino in Vegas and the shores of California. He also brought home his own coffee mug, at least a 32-ounce size! He learned to drink coffee and wanted a pot full every morning to refill his mug.



Patriotism

The events of 9-11-2001 brought back surging memories of Chad. He believed in America and was patriotic to the core. He served in the Army National Guards from his junior year in high school until his death. I remember his desire to enlist at what seemed like such an early age. He went to boot camp or basic training between his junior and senior year in high school. He came home from his 6 weeks training very fit, strong, and tough. He played football at the time and the coach reveled in his physical appearance and urged him to help “hype” up the team. While in basic training, he acquired a tattoo of a panther on his arm, and the coach told him to roll up his shirt sleeves and show it off.

Chad was engaged in Army Advanced Military Training in the Mohave Desert at the onset of Operation Desert Storm, in 1990. At the age of nineteen, his spirit and determination to be part of the military challenge was almost frightening.

I remember in high school how he mounted a 3 x 5-foot American flag on a pole in the box of his truck and proudly drove it to school. I remember when he drove a National Guard Jeep for the homecoming parade. He was dressed in Army fatigues, bloused at the ankles, looking so proud. These were the images of patriotism I'll always remember. The folded flag from his funeral still bring rushes of tears and pride.



Friendships

Chad's friends were a staple in his life. They camped, they cooked, they played, and they enjoyed their times together. At one time, our house was located on land that went to the Rib River. They spent weekends camping there with the grill, the tent, and half the kitchen cupboard of food.

When we moved and built a house on another spot near the Rib River (after Chad's death), we were amazed to learn we picked a spot Chad knew very well.

The land originally belonged to his friends' grandmother and on it was the hunting shack the boys used for several years. The shack had burned down when they were camping there one night and were burning candles that started the blaze. Chad lost his



wallet, hunting clothes, and his rifle in the blaze. We didn't know about this location or incident until after we purchased the land and after Chad's friend told us about the spot (after Chad's death). It held great significance to me—and still amazes me how we just happened to pick that piece of land.

A great four-some of Chad, Jenny, Rick and Jamie was a common occurrence around the house. It wasn't surprising that Chad and Jenny soon became more than friends and became engaged. We looked forward to the marriage...which wasn't meant to be.

Thank you for allowing me to share a few of stories about Chad. In grief sharing memories/stories, heal the grieving heart.

Because I love him, I remember.

Because I remember, he will never die!
