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Classic Feature Article from the Wings magazine

I HOPE YOU DANCE

By: Maxine B. Russell

No parent should ever lose a child. Not only do you lose the present, but you lose your hopes, dreams, and your future. You lose a part of yourself. It can be compared to having your leg amputated. You are never the same person again.

It was almost as if my son had a premonition about going to China. The SARS epidemic has passed. He stayed to spend Thanksgiving with friends and family. Then he said to me, if something happens to me in China, there is a song I want played at my funeral. I told Darren he was morbid and he would outlive me by years. I told him his health was good. I refused to write down the name of the song.

I was so proud of Darren and his accomplishments. He earned a B.S. in Sociology and Recreation, took graduate courses and passed the CBEST for teaching, and got his amTEFL certification (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). He had so many unique qualities as well. He was compassionate, honest, generous, had a great work ethic; adored children; loved animals; had a great sense of humor; and was a very poetic writer. He loved nature and delighted in seeing a blue heron surrounded in a nest by baby blue herons. He took amazing photos of white pelicans and snowy white egrets. He brought me flowers weekly,

selecting each stem carefully. He would say, "You should be surrounded by beauty and bright colors." He knew I had severe osteoporosis and would say, "Don't worry. If you are ever in a wheelchair, I will get you the fastest electric wheelchair around."

I visited Darren in China and treasure those memories. He never wanted to take tours with foreigners, instead going with all Chinese locals. We visited an area with underground caves. They were old made with planks and heavy rope to hang on to. He held my hand and steadied me as he did at the Great Wall of China. He sent me a wonderful email showing his thoughts and dreams. He said, "I think life is just too short to contemplate what would or could be. It is about having an idea and getting out and following through with your innermost burning desires. When the school year resumes, I will walk into the classroom with a smile and hidden tears of joy, while my students will be introduced to Mr. Rabbit, who will be full of enthusiasm and optimism." This was sent to me on January 1, 2005.

On April 14, 2005, Darren was brutally murdered in Guangzhou, China. To this date, the Chinese government and police insist he was killed in a hit-and-run traffic

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After The Storm

Editor's Note: In writing this story, I wish to acknowledge that my analogy is only an observation and in no way is meant to minimize the devastating life changes to hundreds who were victimized by storms this spring/summer. Do not misinterpret this observation as insensitivity to another person's monumental loss.

This year was unusual...a spring and summer filled with thunderous storms, vicious winds, and heart breaking devastation left behind.

The cracking sound of lightening and thunderous booms passed, but in its wake was a scene that would surprise many neighbors upon waking. The eeriness of total darkness and the sound of voices in the middle of the night is all it takes to raise a signal of alarm. I was out of bed almost instantly, when it began to storm. There were no sirens to alarm anyone that the high winds were those of a tornado, so why not be lulled to sleep by the sounds of nature. The neighborhood went dark when the power shut down for a dozen blocks around us enveloping everyone in blackness.

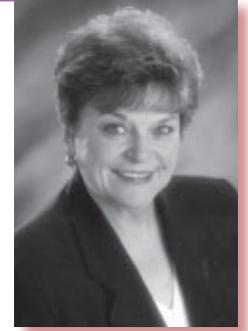
In the early morning hours, the echo of backup light bells rang through the darkness as village vehicles began the work to clear away the debris that littered the roads. Massive trees were uprooted, branches and leaves blanketed the green carpeted lawns, many freshly mowed.

When I looked out the window, I could see spotlights bouncing from limb to limb through the forest of trees, still standing. There was total darkness.... and a momentary sense of surreal fear. It was an uncomfortable feeling and one I recognized for other reasons unrelated to storms.

We were fortunate. No one was hurt and houses were intact though many were damaged by fallen trees and electric wires that came down. I couldn't help but think of the not-so-fortunate communities around us that weren't as lucky. Homesteads wiped out and lives stripped away in a few short moments of intense fear and devastation. Nature can be as destructive and cruel as it can be beautiful.

C.S. Lewis wrote, " I never knew that grief felt so much like fear." I recognized that surreal tinge of fear in the darkness of this night as a twin emotion to the fear I felt the night we received the phone call that our son, Chad, was dead. We had a mixture of

snow and rain that night, in early spring, which seemed so incongruent with the spring season. That moment set the stage for the darkness of the unknown...the thoughts of "What will the morning bring?"



On September 24, the Out of Darkness Walk for Suicide Prevention took place at Marathon Park. It was the first annual walk in Wausau. As members of the Marathon County Taskforce, Gary and I walked to show our support. In Wisconsin, nearly 750 people die every year as a result of suicide. It is the third leading cause of death among 15-24 year-olds and takes the lives of more military veterans than war itself.

For every suicide, a family, a friend, a whole community is affected. A major goal of this program is support for family and friends of over 35,000 Americans who die by suicide every year and the 20 million people who suffer from depression.

Thank you for all of those who supported our walk, and also for all those who walked with us!

Fall brings a whole new season of storms...the kind of storms that come with holidays when the bereaved choose to be alone, but families and friends try even harder to include them in activities and events that may be uncomfortable and even frightening. For those who are caring companions, respect the needs of your bereaved family member or friend. Be encouraging but not overbearing.

For those who grieve, give yourself permission to accept invitations and challenge your fears. There is a whole "crew of workers out there" cleaning up after the storm and making "roads" passable again; restoring light from your dark moments; and giving you access to recovery. We invite you to find hope.

Our holiday program How to Transform Holiday Grief into Joy...When the Holidays Hurt will be held Tuesday, December 6, 2011 at the Rose Garden, Wausau. Watch our website: www.wingsgrief.org for more information.

THE HOOP: IN HONOR OF LYLE

H. Alexander Tallitsch, Digital Media Consultant

(Editor's note: This story is reprinted with permission. Karen, in this story is my brother's second wife. Both of them lost their spouses tragically in May, 1987.)

I don't know much about basketball, but I did see a guy make a full court shot once.

Unfortunately, that will probably be the closest I will ever come to participating in the arena of major sporting history. It seems nearly everyone has some great sports moment to recall with the countless hours of reminiscing on times spent throwing around the ball or grinding it out on the high school football field. But for me, all I have is a basketball hoop that hung near our garage as a kid.

Once in a great while I still take a drive past my old house, and the last time I checked the rotted backboard still remained a fixture as it has since my father spent an entire day swearing it up over 20 years ago.

Our driveway, and the road in front of it, was prime real estate for a basketball court. We lived on the crest of a large hill, so the surface from the road to the hoop was perfectly level. You could back up completely across the street into the neighbor's front yard and overhand the ball as far as your childhood arms would allow you to chuck it.

There were of course plenty of epic battles of H.O.R.S.E in addition to the long ball played on this surface, but for the most part my brother and I could most often be found standing in the middle of the street and power arcing that orange sphere hundreds of feet skyward in an effort to finally make the world's longest and most incredible shot possible. Yet, trumping all these fond memories of heated sibling competition, that basketball hoop still reminds me of only one thing: my neighbor Lyle Kurtenbach.

Our family had always lived across the street from the Kurtenbach's. Lyle and his wife Karen, along with their daughter Dawn resided in the house that stood as a permanent fixture as you gazed out the large bay window that adorned the front of our homestead. The Kurtenbach family always had a remarkably well kept home, maintained for the most part by Lyle who also re-defined what it meant to be a 'lawn guy'.



Lyle's lawn was always perfect. Seriously, there was never a weed in the thing. He would attend to that lawn like a surgeon to a patient. He was absolutely relentless. That as it is, what still stands out the most to me, was the whole Don Johnson mustache thing that the man had going on at the same time. With his combination of khaki shorts, printed short-sleeved button-ups, sandals, and a classic eighties 'stache, watching Lyle was pretty close to what it would be like watching Magnum P.I. mow his lawn. As a kid the whole spectacle was absolutely fascinating.

Both my brother and I thought Lyle was beyond cool. He was hardcore into Indy car racing; and as a young man interested in everything that went zoom, Lyle for the most part topped the chart in the "that guy is pretty awesome" category. He would occasionally stop over and talk to us on the weekends for a minute or two and inevitably end up joining the game. Although he never said anything, I think he enjoyed heaving that basketball half a mile almost as much as we did.

This occasional tradition continued over the years as I slowly grew up with Lyle and his family through these brief exchanges on the blacktop. Sometimes you pass through life with your neighbors in blocks of one minute conversations. We maintained our lives with Lyle in one handed shots.

I guess there was nothing special about that Friday in late May of 1987. My brother and I were outside after school, unenthusiastically tossing up the basketball as we awaited a much dreaded five hour drive to our grandparent's house for the Memorial Day weekend. Lyle, who had been out in his yard as usual, happened to take a traditional brief moment to walk

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The Hoop ...

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across the street and say hello. The three of us stood in the middle of the road talking about our respective weekends as we took turns hurling the basketball the nearly forty yards to the garage.

I do remember being insanely jealous. Already upset to be traveling to visit the elders, the salt in the wound came when we heard the smartly dressed Kurtenbach inform of us of his departure that evening to take in the Indianapolis 500 live and in person that Sunday. We listened to his stories of the famed race and were emotionally crushed at each twist and turn as Lyle told stories of what our idols on the electric racetrack actually went through as they screamed around the breathing black beast at neck breaking speeds.

I was listening to his tales with such undivided attention that I nearly missed the entire thing. Somewhere between the rumble of engines, and the smell of gasoline, we still had been flinging the basketball almost as an afterthought. I don't know why I watched that particular lob, but in mid-sentence Lyle had chucked one towards the hoop, in fact, right at the hoop.

You always hear people talk about things happening in slow motion, and this was no different. You somehow knew right away, but you had to wait and watch it. The ball never wavered in its path. It flew like it was on a rope landing with a thunk on the square and loud, hard clank off the inside rim to the ground.

The perfect shot.

My brother and I were speechless. Yet for Lyle, the moment seemed pretty mundane. Although he had a slightly shocked look on his face, he simply muttered something about luck and proceeded to call it a night while leaving us to traipse back to the house, our shoes thoroughly soaked with the drool that had just poured out of the mouths connected to our chins that were sitting solidly on our chest.

I personally didn't let the subject rest the entire weekend. The minute we got home that Monday night, my brother and I immediately attempted to repeat the feat for the rest of the evening. We had hoped to run into Lyle and resume Friday's

conversation, but shortly after dark we gave in to the fact we would just have wait another day.

That day never came. Lyle Kurtenbach was dead.

The Kurtenbach family had made it to their annual outing at the Indy 500. Lyle was enjoying the race between his wife and daughter at the top of the grandstand when Tony Bettenhausen's race car lost a wheel in turn 3, and Roberto Guerrero hit it head-on at full speed with the nose cone of his machine. The loose wheel was thrown over the safety fence and struck Lyle in the head, killing him instantly. He was the first spectator killed at the race since 1960, and as of this moment is the last one as well. The race itself was nearly accident free.

Needless to say, things were never the same in the neighborhood after that day.

The lights at the Kurtenbach residence would never shine as they had before. There would be no more half court shots, no conversations, and as the house eventually emptied, the lawn repainted itself from green to brown.

I would never be the same either.

This would be the first time I would actually experience death and fully understand how the unknown always has a hand in your business.

This would be the first time I knew what it felt like to bring a casserole across the street as the sadness fully and truly manifested itself in front of me.

This was the first time I realized that life was so fragile.

One day you find yourself shooting hoops with a guy that seems invincible, and the next day he can simply be gone. It was the harsh reality that even a fifteen-year-old boy understood.

It was a lesson we all learn about love and loss, but still, even right at this moment, remains a painful one for me at best.

There are many old basketball hoops, on many homes, in many a neighborhood, in many a city.

Mine reminds me of Lyle Kurtenbach, and I hope somehow he knows that.



Be Good to Yourself A Care Tip

Have a Little Fun!

Sometimes grieving people won't allow themselves to laugh or have fun. Sharing a laugh over a funny movie, a pleasant cartoon, or someone's clowning antics is a great way to stretch your smile. Enjoy the company of friends who giggle. Chuckle over a playful kitten or frisky puppy. Watch children explore life and turn on the charm. You are not dishonoring the memory of you loved one by laughing. The truth is: laughter is the best medicine!

Announcement: *Create Your Story!* New Product available through Wings

In October, Wings became an authorized vendor for Memory Medallions.

This is an amazing way to permanently record any personal memorable event and can be accessed via the Internet. It's a beautiful way to share stories about loved ones, weddings, anniversaries, family genealogy, etc. These stories are accessible using the latest technology –QR codes. You've probably seen QR codes everywhere and didn't know what they were used for. In this case, they contain a story. You can also send a link to family and friends to access your story page. I'm so excited about this product.

I've already created Chad's story and a link to our website. I have yet to develop the Storybook which is a digital "scrapbook" of pictures and memories, but plan to do this soon.

Visit the Memory Medallion website to learn more about this. When you order your product and reserve your space to build and record your story, please use the PROMO CODE: WINGS. This gives Wings-a Grief Education Ministry credit for referring you.

To see Chad's story, follow this link: http://memorymedallion.com/view_medallion/view.php?id=544a4f59f691574154a60b8539ebf914

I Hope You Dance

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accident. For several years, the United States Government also believed this story. On March 14, 2007, we made the painful decision to have Darren's body exhumed and autopsied. The cause of death: Homicide - blunt force trauma to the head and brain; No possibility of any traffic accident. Darren was also beaten (though no external marks showed except a defensive wound and a fist mark on Darren's left cheek). He had three broken ribs and a hemorrhaged lung. I felt like my life was over.

After his murder I called radio stations, everyone of Darren's friends, and family members to ask if they knew his favorite song. I said all I could remember is that the words were very poignant and it had the word "dance" in the chorus. As I brought the six songs I selected the day before the funeral to the funeral director, he said the songs were lovely. I started to cry and said, "I can't remember Darren's favorite song. It meant so much to him. He asked me to describe it. When I gave the description he said, "I Hope You Dance" by LeeAnn Womack" I was shocked. That was it? He told me, "Do you know this song is supposed to be written from a child in heaven to his parents on earth?" When I heard the lyrics, they reminded me so much of Darren.

*"May you never take one single breath for granted
God forbid love ever leave you empty handed
I hope you still feel small when you stand
beside the ocean
Whenever one door closes, I hope
one more opens
Promise me that you'll give fate a fighting chance
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance
I hope you dance
I hope you dance"*

When we were sitting in Temple for the High Holidays and Yartsite (where we remember our dead), the Book of Remembrance was full of people that had died the past year. Most were very elderly and then there was Darren. Any death is a tragedy, but I kept thinking, "How I am going to keep on living?" At that point, the Rabbi addressed the congregation. He said, "I know those of you that lost loved ones probably wish you could be with them, but if that happens who would keep their memory alive?" That was the turning point in my grief and mourning. I remembered that Darren didn't want me to sit down, but rather get up and dance. I needed to honor his memory in positive ways.

Note:

In memory of her son, Maxine Russell has accomplished the following. This is only a sample of projects she has done. For more information, feel free to contact MaxineRussellBliss21@aol.com

- Care packages to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan with Care packages.
- Raises funds for Paws for Purple Hearts who train dogs for veterans with PTSD as service dogs
- Adopted a Marine Family from Camp Pendleton
- Starting a pet therapy at the Naval Hospital in San Diego with Wounded Warriors.
- Helped seven Chinese peasants attend high school.
- Has a Freedom of Information Lawsuit against the State Department for documents that are being withheld
- Initiated legislation with the House of Representatives and the Senate to make laws ensuring better protection and assistance for Americans abroad.

FROM THE ARCHIVES • *Stories worth repeating...*

Recently a long-time reader of the Wings magazine sent me a request for a past issue. The date was unknown and the subject was vague. I began searching my archives from 1993 through the present date and found what she was looking for. I thought about all the wonderful articles, reader contributions etc that were recorded over the years. These are timeless treasures and continue to interest people.

Going forward, I will be printing a column in my online Wings-newsletter titled FROM THE ARCHIVES. It will share thoughts, poems, articles, reader's responses etc. from the past that will still bring a tear to the eye, a smile to the face, or be a brilliant reminder of good advice. Enjoy!

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ONE

It's up to you

*One song can spark a moment,
One flower can wake a dream,
One tree can start a forest,
One bird can herald spring.
One smile begins a friendship,
One handclasp lifts a soul,
One star can guide a ship at sea,
One word can frame the goal.
One vote can change a nation,
One sunbeam lights a room.
One candle wipes out darkness,
One laugh will conquer gloom.
One step must start each journey,
One word must start each prayer.
One hope will raise our spirits,
One touch can show you care.
One voice can speak with wisdom,
One heart can know what's true,
One life can make a difference,
You see it's up to you!*

Author unknown

Create a Legacy... Create a Permanent Story...

Create a Memory Medallion

Celebrate and remember the special moments in your life with a permanent digital record. This page lives on the web and can contain vivid snapshots, videos, stories and messages.

Create a page to remember:

- Births, Weddings, Graduation
- Anniversaries
- Life of a Loved One
- Military service
- Family Genealogy
- Landmarks, charities, and tributes

How it works:

Your memory medallion contains a QR code that can be scanned by any smart phone and instantly links to your personalized memory page.



- Scan this image and see the Memory Page for *Chad E. Zastrow & the Legacy of Wings-a Grief Education Ministry*



- Scan this image and see the website for *Wings-a Grief Education Ministry*



Product:

- Your QR code is engraved on a coin size medallion, thicker medallion, a locket, or a dog tag. It may be attached to a tombstone, a picture frame, honor wall, or wear it. This is a one time purchase.
- Use the easy tutorial to create your story. Update it as often as you like. No other fees. Share your story or memory with others.
- Use this product code to order your Medallion as sponsored by Wings-a Grief Education Ministry. **PROMO CODE: WINGS**
- For more information about Memory Medallions, visit <http://www.memorymedallion.com/> or www.wingsgrief.org

