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Chapters

turning the pages through grief

And so...
we keep going

**IN THEIR
OWN WORDS**
By Sue and
Jeff Brandes

...
The Brandes
live in
southern
Minnesota

Losing a child to suicide can trigger a range of intense and overwhelming emotions. In the beginning, we were drowning in sadness and didn't care about anything. There was this immense guilt for not knowing how bad things were or how Carter (pictured above) was drowning himself, and could not ask for help sooner. Our son was suffering from depression, so that he didn't even know what was happening to him. See, he knew he was loved, and we knew he loved us, but what we didn't understand is that Carter didn't feel worthy of that love.

Depression and mental health issues have a way of playing tricks on your brain. A chemical imbalance can come on so slowly sometimes, and by the time our son was asking for help, the spiral was so intense. We are finding that Carter most likely had depression for years, and what was working for him to manage it was no longer working. You have don't have to look

depressed to have things going on. There was so much fear, sadness, depression, anxiety, and trauma about everything, and yet we didn't even know what was really happening. All we knew was our son had died. What were we supposed to do with all that pain? How do we move forward?

Being parents was once a defining part of our identities, and now that role was split in two—parenting our living, grown adult children, and as bereaved parents of a 19-year-old son who is now in heaven, who died from suicide. As parents you get a lot of grace—as siblings, not so much. Our children were not only siblings, they were friends and watching them hurt, while we are hurting ourselves, was difficult. We were floundering, trying to fit back into an old life that none of us could return to. Nothing is the same, and you must find a different way to navigate through life. It is a balancing act with grief, and moving forward bringing Carter with us. You don't ever get over loss, but you do carry it differently, you can find joy



**"Lately nothing pleases
the court."**

continued...

**OCTOBER
2023**



I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers.
—Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Ann of Green Gables*

We try and focus on gratitude and find joy in the small things.

...continued from front

again, and you will always wish it was different.

Adjusting to a world without our son has been one of the hardest parts of the grief journey. We had to learn how to navigate life without him. Carter was loud and full of life. He taught us more in 19 years than anyone ever could. We have new routines

and rituals that honor Carter's memory. We try and focus on gratitude and find joy in the small things.

We have learned to give ourselves permission to feel all the emotions. We also found it helpful to talk to other parents who have experienced similar loss. We attended a grief loss weekend for other parents like us who lost a child to suicide. We were afraid to go, but for the first time we felt normal around people who were complete strangers. We didn't even know we needed this place but it helped us feel like we would be ok again.

Grief takes a toll on both mental and physical health. We have been consumed by physical symptoms such as loss of appetite, hair loss, blood pressure issues and insomnia, as well as mental health challenges including anxiety and other trauma-related issues. We have had to prioritize self-care. Grief groups, therapy, and exercise such as yoga and walking have helped. Gentle physical movements do so much for your body and moving around gently helps overall mental and physical health. Taking breaks and resting is just as important your mind is slower, and at first you are in such a fog, nothing really makes sense. The things you did easily before may take longer to do. Be gentle with yourself.

Losing a child can raise deep spiritual and existential questions. It's been hard to make sense of why this happened to our family. Why our child? Why didn't we understand better? These are questions we use to ask ourselves frequently. We had to dig deep into our faith and trust, and know Carter is in the hands of our Lord. We believe this with all our being.

One of our biggest fears is that the world will forget our son. We have started new traditions to honor him. We will never forget him, but the world keeps moving fast, and we want to bring him with us. We talk about Carter, and we have this village surrounding us that allows us to do so, and not feel awkward about it. We talk about Carter because it means he existed, he loved and his life mattered. Carter did so much in his short time and what we hear the most about him is that he took time for others, and he always made them feel important, no matter what was going on.

We have the best support system—family, friends and even people we don't know walk with us. We also have those friends Carter had in his life. They reach out, they show up for us in ways that make us smile and keep us going. We hope each one of them knows we wouldn't be where we are without all of them. We will continue to advocate for Carter for the life he lived with his huge heart. It can't be about how he died, but how he lived, how he made others feel and how he impacted those around him.

By acknowledging our emotions, staying connected with others, and finding ways to honor Carter's memory, we've learned to live with joy and purpose. We've learned it is ok to ask for help and to take things one day or one moment at a time. Don't be afraid to reach out, you are never alone. Grief is a journey. Some days it feels lighter, other days not so much. So we keep going. It is how we can honor our son and his life.

Sometimes the best advice is a break from advice. Enjoy your favorite beverage and these tidbits of this & that.



- The birthstones for October are tourmaline and opal. Tourmalines are believed to help you stay calm while under pressure, bring peace and tranquility, and defeat negative emotions like jealousy and anger. On the other hand, opal gemstones are believed to cure eye infections, strengthen memory, calm nerves, and enhance creativity.



- The traditional flower of October is the calendula — it symbolizes comfort, healing, protection, and grace.

- October is that it is considered a lucky month because it is associated with prosperity. October is also the beginning of harvest season.

**October glows on every cheek,
October shines in every eye, While
up the hill and down the dale, Her
Crimson banners fly.**

—Elaine Goodale Eastman

