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E-Haven Email (from griefHaven)

Where Hope Resides

E-HAVEN EMAIL December 2006

MAY YOU HAVE PEACE OF HEART



The saying is "Hope never dies," but it's not always true, is it? For I remember when I briefly lost hope right after Erika first died. Yet, it seems there has to be some truth in that saying; otherwise, we would not be able to go on in life and live, love, and traverse all of the trials and tribulations this life brings our way. And that is what *griefHaven* is all about—**HOPE**. You have to have it. You need it like you need air, water and food. It is an essential part of life, and that's very true when a child dies.

I've been thinking a lot during this series of holidays about hope. I've read lots of quotes by various individuals who speak of hope. Until I lost Erika, I never realized how much that little four-letter word meant. So, as I was recently pondering that word and what it has meant to so many, this acronym popped into my mind.

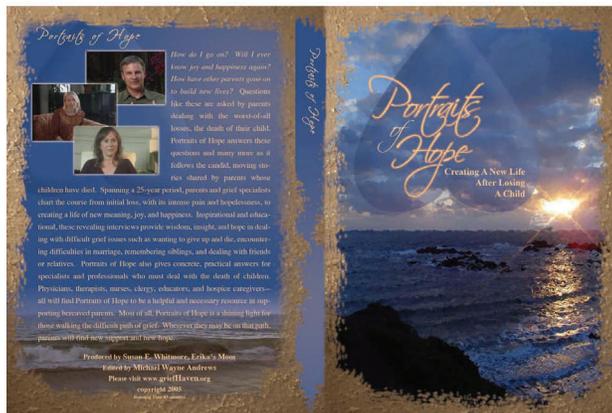
Hanging
Onto
Possible
Experiences

That's truly what we do and need to do. We need to hang onto the possibility that we **WILL** experience love in our lives again, we **WILL** know joy and happiness again, we **WILL** rebuild our lives without our child and find new meaning in life. And how do we get that hope? There are many avenues that bring hope to us, and one of the greatest and most "believable" is through other parents who have lost a child and gone on to create new and happy lives.

We at The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation and *griefHaven* want you to know that we are sending every possible ounce of love, support and hope your way that we can possibly muster. We hope that today, whether with family, friends or alone, will include at least moments where you experience true peace of heart. As hard as it is sometimes to recognize its presence, see if you can notice those periods where you truly feel a sense of quiet or peace within those places where you feel your grief and sorrow. That's all we can ask at difficult times like these holidays—for moments of peace and understanding and love and support.

I also wanted to share candidly with you that I cried myself to sleep last night. Even these years later, I miss Erika so deeply and profoundly at times that I still cry myself to sleep. I know I will do that the rest of my life. Yet I also wanted to impart to you at this time of the year that it's better, easier, and much more endurable than it used to be. Yes, I cried myself to sleep last night, but today I'm okay and enjoyed a lovely, quiet dinner with my sister-in-law (Judy Whitmore), brother-in-law (Wesley Whitmore, Wendell's twin brother), and mother-in-law (Francis Whitmore). We ordered lemon drop drinks in honor of Erika (that was her favorite mixed drink). We toasted those we love who were not there physically with us. And if that were not enough, our waiter came over to our table and said, "Hello, welcome to Savannah Restaurant and Merry Christmas. I will be your waiter tonight, and my name is (drum roll, please) . . . Erika! I kid you not! She even spells it the same way, which is an unusual spelling, since most spell it with a "c." So we decided that Erika was there with us, and that was her way of letting us know. OH! By the way. It took my brother-in-law many, many tries to find a restaurant at the last minute who would take us and who

had an opening. So, we ended up at that restaurant with that waiter with that name. Coincidence? We choose to think not.



PORTRAITS OF HOPE

By now most of you know that Portraits of Hope is completed. This incredible three-year project that started as a profound experience has finally been a dream come true.

A DVD has been mailed to every parent, and you should have all received yours by now, except for those in other countries. We were able to do that because one family in New York, the Vincent family, in honor of their beautiful daughter, Melissa, donated the money to have enough DVDs duplicated so you could all receive one.

I can't find the words to describe how it feels after all of these years of working on this project to open your emails and read how Portraits of Hope has given you hope, changed your life, made you know you are not alone, helped your marriage, helped others you love support you, and given you joy after having seen it. That is just some of the feedback we have received over the last two days. I've cried reading those emails. It just means so much, so please feel free to share with us.

And just in case you find yourself holding back from watching Portraits of Hope because you are afraid it will make you sad, please know that Portraits of Hope was edited in such a way as to bring you the utmost of love, compassion, understanding, a sense of connectedness to countless others, and, ultimately, hope. We promise that you will even laugh at certain points. Every minute was put together with you and your needs in mind. One parent told me yesterday that he was putting off watching it and finally decided to do it anyway. He said, "I'm so glad that I did, because I'm not exactly sure why, but I feel a joy right now that I haven't felt in so long." What I'm trying to say is please don't hold back from watching Portraits of Hope due to any kind of fear that you might cry or feel too sad. Give yourself that well-deserved gift.

We are here to bring you hope and comfort and love and help you rebuild your lives. We are here so you know you are never, ever alone—that we are with you and will be with you for the rest of your lives. We are here because we completely understand your pain and new plight in life—we "get it."

We are here because we are you, too. Our children are gone too, and we care so much.

So dear friends and lovely parents to all of our sons and daughters, we won't say Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah because those words just don't seem to work, and it feels strange and somewhat trite saying it. So we'll just say this straight from our hearts:

HAVE MERRY MOMENTS OF PEACE

And we'll give you this gentle reminder in case you forget—you are loved by your child, appreciated for all that you gave in whatever period of time you had together, and you are and always will be your son's or daughter's mother or father no matter how much time goes by. Nothing will ever change that.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and Advisory Board, I surround you with the warmest of hugs,

Your Friend and Erika's Mom,

Susan



Erika in Canada—Christmas 2000