

SURVIVING MULTIPLE LOSSES

A father's journey

Jeff's 20-year-old son Matthew died in a drowning accident in 2011

BY JEFF BALDWIN, adapted from the book, *Grief Diaries: Through the Eyes of Men*
ISBN: 978-1-944328-48-1

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I lost almost everyone in my family

Matthew had just turned twenty in June 2011, with ambitions of joining the military, and was working on losing twenty-five pounds in order to enlist. Matt had a strong desire to travel and see new places while serving in the military.

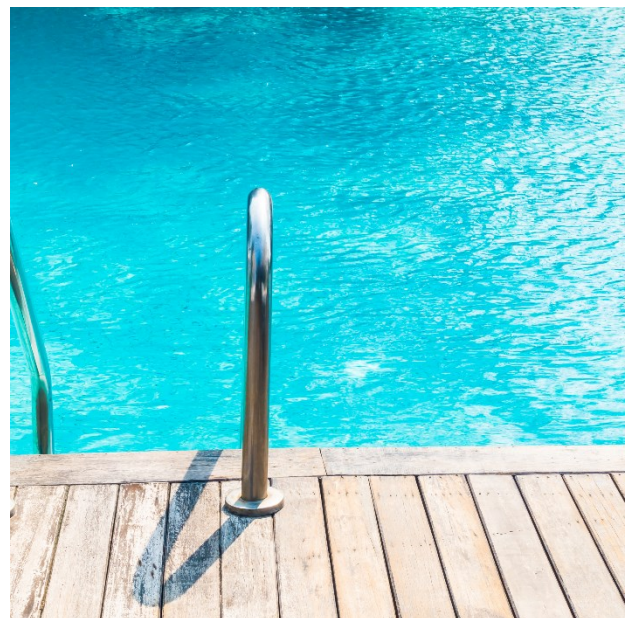
On July 28, 2011, one of Matt's friends came to the door to invite Matt to a party his friend was having at his house. The friend was home alone for an entire week while his mother vacationed on her honeymoon. I was later told by detectives that there were fourteen or more people at the party ranging from age thirteen to twenty.

Some of the kids brought prescription drugs they took from their parents' medicine cabinets. They called it a "pharm party," for pharmaceutical party. All the drugs were poured into a bowl and then mixed so when the kids take a pill from the bowl, they have no idea what kind of reaction they'll have. What a dangerous situation in the making. They also managed to get alcohol and marijuana.

The next morning just after 6 a.m., my son Matthew was found floating in an above-ground

swimming pool. He was a perfect swimmer and had spent summers at his grandparents who had a swimming pool, and was taught how to swim from a very early age.

Matt's death was listed as an accidental drowning. I knew I would have to wait until the toxicology report came back before I would know exactly what led to this deadly chain of events that claimed my son's life.



The autopsy showed that my son had taken a deadly combination of Xanax and a large volume

of alcohol which rendered him unconscious in the early hours of July 29, 2011. Essentially he passed out and slipped below the water surface.

My world was forever changed that day, and I couldn't understand why this was happening. You see, in February of that year I had lost my mother. She was my best friend and we shared a special bond, and then five short months later, while I am still grieving the loss of my mom, I lose my baby boy!

I had to put my grieving on hold for my mother and focus my attention on the loss of my son. Until this day I never grieved another moment for my mother because of my new loss.

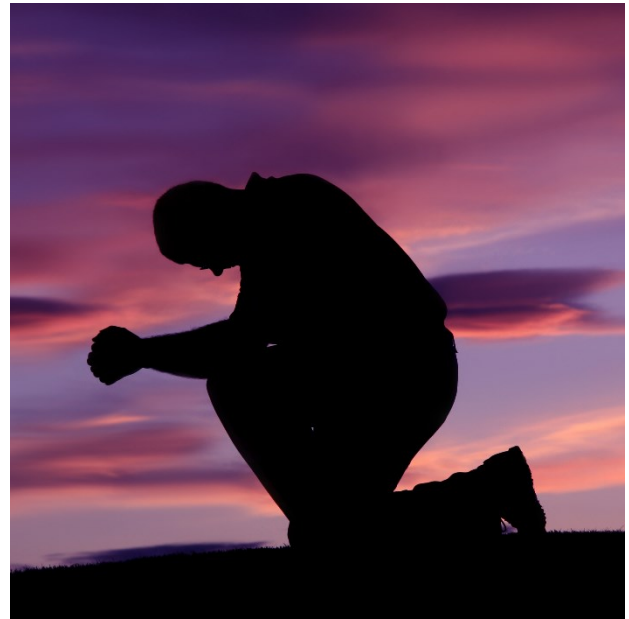
A short twenty-one months later I endured another tragic loss when my sister, who was only fifty-four, died from an accidental overdose of methadone prescribed by her doctor.



At this point I had lost everyone in my immediate family. I was the only one left aside from my daughter, who was now twenty.

I have so much anxiety thinking about all the what-ifs, and I'm constantly thinking that something could happen to her as well. I just don't think I could bury another child again.

The one constant I can say with a thousand percent certainty is that my faith in God is the only thing that has brought me this far in my journey.



I still have moments when I break into tears. Sometimes a song or a memory will trigger the sadness or pain. However, I have tried to do a lot of positive things like forming my own grief support groups on Facebook called Mending Hearts Grief Support Group, for parents who have lost a child.

I also created and contribute to a Facebook page that offers information and helps teens and adolescents gain a much needed awareness of the dangers of alcohol and all the drugs out there today. It's called New Outlook Drug and Alcohol Awareness. My ambition is to someday go into middle and high schools and share my story and spread the awareness to all these young adults in the making.

I plan to spend the rest of my journey helping others and hopefully saving some lives along the way. Bottom line, my life has become about helping others.