



**Thriving After the  
Death of a Child**

Cathy Cheshire

I want to drastically improve how the world typically thinks about anybody suffering after the death of a cherished child. Instead of a trauma they will never get over, they can enrich their life with one of the greatest lessons about love after natural grieving. I had a life filled with heartbreak and then my beloved only child died. I relay with painful honesty how I spiraled into a dark relentless depression and then learned to live again in a powerful way surprising even me.

A portion of all proceeds from this book are being donated to The Compassionate Friends, whose website is [compassionatefriends.org](http://compassionatefriends.org). This nonprofit resource is about transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope.

## About Cathy Cheshire



Cathy Cheshire has a Bachelor of Science Degree from Arizona State University. After retiring from 30 years in business where she held senior leadership positions, she now has a passion for helping anyone suffering the loss of a child. Her only child died in a car accident in 2007.

Cathy has lived in California, Arizona, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. She lives with her husband and their dogs Benji and Pete. She has an adult stepson. Cathy and her husband enjoy spending time with loved ones, traveling, snow skiing, and sightseeing on their Harley.

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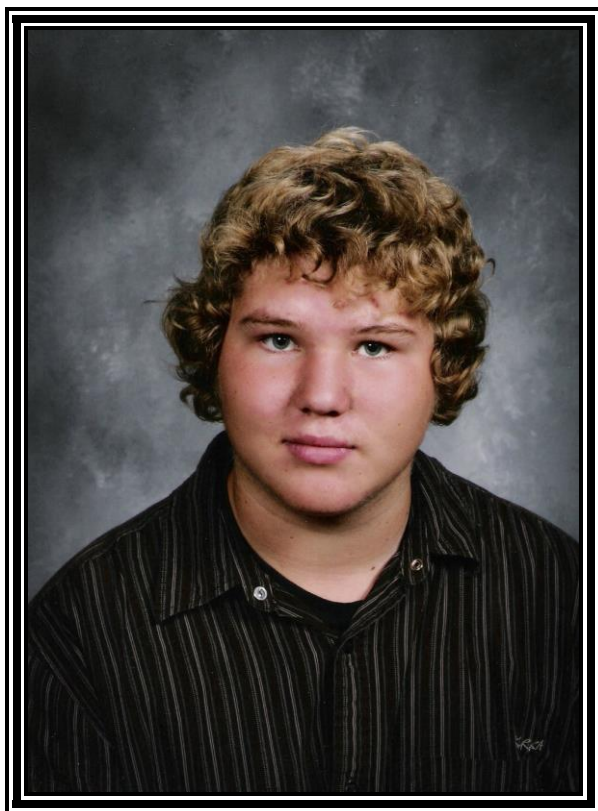
Cathy Cheshire

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**Jeremy**

1991 - 2007

# Dedication

I dedicate this book to my son Jeremy and my husband Drew. I am eternally thankful for the 16 years I shared such incredible love with Jeremy. Drew's love is patient, kind, honest, and real. He is my best friend always and all ways.

# Acknowledgements

No words can express my heartfelt thanks to the bereaved parents who reviewed this book.

Jeremy's friends, especially Butch, Justin, and Chris, allowed him to experience the joy of having awesome loving people in his life. I am forever grateful and will always love them.

It wouldn't have been possible to reach the level of thriving I have achieved without the wise counsel I received from Theresa Felix, Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist. Our conversations are therapeutic, healing, and validating. I admire her for doing work that uplifts people's lives. I greatly appreciate her taking the time to review this book.

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I cherish my dear fun friends Shelley, Marcia, Bev, Marj, Sheila, Liliana, Chris, and Beth. They cheered me on about writing this book, providing important feedback and suggestions. I love having them in my life.

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# 1. Death and Rebirth

I want to drastically improve how the world typically thinks about anybody suffering after the death of a cherished child. Instead of a trauma they will never get over, they can enrich their life by experiencing one of the greatest lessons about love after natural grieving. It feels taboo to say you have a fantastic life after a child you love dies because it dishonors them in some way. I believe this perspective shackles the bereaved to their grief.

I'm going to tirelessly share how I learned to thrive after the death of my child with anybody who will listen. I want to scream it from mountain tops so those who lose a child in the future remember and whisper it empathetically to those suffering now. If this book helps or gives hope to even one person who feels lost like I was after my child died, then it has been a worthwhile endeavor.

I believe the individual circumstances relating to the death of a child vary, but the devastating pain is very

similar. I think there is another level of horror when a child is murdered, commits suicide, dies of an illness, or disappears. My entire family turning their back on me for wanting to help my older sister struggling after severe abuse, and then the death of my only child was my double whammy. I had to learn to live without my entire biological family.

The loss of a child affects parents, family, and friends because it's so unexpected and seems so unfair. This book is for anybody who desires to learn from someone who has been there how to minimize suffering and to thrive instead of just exist. I am not a behavioral or medical professional but went to Hell and back after my child died. I believe what I did to recover will work for anybody. I'm thrilled about reaching out to those needlessly suffering like I had for several years.

There was a time when I didn't want to hear any encouragement and thought I would only ever feel sadness. If I had never tried with all my heart to rebuild my life, I may have felt depressed forever. I learned I couldn't imagine a better life until I created one. Looking back, it's so much easier to thrive than to check out of life. Time is precious and truly passes quickly. You can waste it or make every day meaningful.

If you aren't ready to let go of your pain then my words may mean nothing to you, and you may balk at what I have to say. I still then aspire to give you hope so if you are ever tired of being miserable you have a roadmap to unmitigated joy. Bearing ongoing worry, regret, and stress takes a heavy

toll on your mind and body.

When my child Jeremy died instantly in an accident, it felt like an ominous clingy darkness enveloped me and attempted to suck all that was good from my being. I immediately felt an indescribable howling pain I never knew existed or could imagine would ever touch me. My world as I knew it was broadsided by the force of an unseen tsunami of tormenting emotion. The aching waves of agony pounded me to my knees over and over again.

Nobody and nothing could make me feel better. I felt like I was pushed onto a terrifying roller coaster with no brakes, and someone forgot to buckle me in. I began struggling with all aspects of my life. I felt consumed with heartache, grief, disappointment, despair, and incredible confusion.

Throughout my life before my son died, I often rejoiced in moments of pure peace and happiness. While I felt emotionally neglected growing up, I still had so much hope for a bright future full of love and adventure. I felt certain I would have a great career, a happy family, and financial security. I was hopeful and eager to have a great life.

With wonderful times, I also experienced many disappointments including, estrangement from family, three divorces, and Jeremy's father abandoning him for most of his life. I loved being Jeremy's parent and thought my amazing child was a reward from life to make up for all that hadn't worked out for me. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Suddenly I found myself in the throes of a new chilling reality and couldn't find my way out. There would be no more watching my son enjoy life, which felt like life to me. He wouldn't be in my wedding with the man he admired and knew deeply loved us both. I finally found someone who shared my definition of love and would always be there for Jeremy, but it was too late.

I had so much love around me during those first most difficult days after my son died but let the incredibly heartless and rude behavior of some horrify and distract me. Amazingly, those lessons about how dysfunction can attack your life eventually played a big part in how I learned to thrive by carefully avoiding such negativity.

As I grieved, I thought I noticed spiritual signs that everything could be all right, and there was so much more to life than what I was choosing to see, but I initially made anger and sulking my primary focus because I was afraid I was wrong. I just didn't want to live anymore because my life felt too grueling and disappointing. I believed God had given me more than I could handle and kept wondering, "What is the point of so much suffering?"

I picked myself up and went back to work a week after the accident because I feared losing my job. I could focus, but instead of periodic breaks with friends, I had recurring spastic emotional breakdowns. During my first week back so many wonderful people stopped in to say they were sorry for my loss. They were so brave and kind, but I just felt awkward. I sensed the intended compassion as I opened every grief card, but the words were hazy. I didn't

want to be receiving sympathy.

I always strove for professional success so I could provide for my child, but I didn't need to do that anymore. I no longer felt it was important to climb the corporate ladder and make good money so I could give my child everything he needed. I suddenly could no longer tolerate devious office politics, bullies, and petty people. I believed they just didn't understand the monumental importance of love.

I thought I could regularly put up a good front at work and home, but my brain was mush. I no longer cared about structured life, being organized, or constructive goal seeking. My insides were a snarled heap of indigestion and heartbreak. I wanted to change my outside appearance because I felt like a completely different person. I did two things I never ever thought I would do, coloring my dark brown hair blond and getting a tattoo.

While focusing on raising my child I hadn't dealt enough with the issues I had with my family, and unresolved negative feelings vomited forward like a ravenous disease. I had been so focused on the loving relationship with my child I had no idea what was lurking in the broken parts of my heart. I decided I would use whatever distraction from my pain I could get my hands on, and a resulting early untimely death would be welcomed.

I engaged in behavior I well knew was dysfunctional, but I didn't care. I buried myself in challenging jobs while righteously slaying arrogant dragons with little attention at

the time to the collateral damage. I mostly ate unhealthy food and drank whatever amount of alcohol I wanted in the evenings. I often used shopping as a distraction, going to numerous stores more than once to get the best deal. Then I decided to do it obsessively and surfed the internet for hours, often buying things I didn't need. I fixed up our home with a vengeance, painting rooms until tennis elbow set in and doing yard work until my muscles ached terribly the next day.

When I had no job, I binge watched TV shows and stayed in bed sleeping as long as I could every day. I would often open my eyes in the morning, check the time, and feel pleased if I missed breakfast before going back to sleep. I felt relieved when I slept through any morning. Eventually, I felt like the guy in the movie "Groundhog Day" who kept miserably repeating the same day over and over.

My only salvation was a small periodic feeling of hope and wanting the wonderful man I had finally found to still want me. I am amazed how he continued to love me while I sank so low. Although he has always been supportive, loving, and my best friend, I was initially determined not to live longer than him. He has turned out to be the second most wonderful love of my life.

The culmination of my reckless attitude resulted in anxiety, weight gain, high blood pressure, sluggish metabolism, and few good friends. I wasn't a good friend. Whenever I was awake, I felt stuck in fight or flight mode. I didn't get a terminal disease, but the relentless anxiety and

depression felt like being in Hell or dying. It was an attack on my spirit.

Although I didn't write down the date, I vividly remember how I felt the morning I woke up after twelve noon and agonized over the thought, "Why do I keep trying to sleep in because it only brings me closer to the evening where I have to struggle to get to sleep and stay asleep again?" I was fed up with suffering. I was pissed off I let myself go for so long. I felt bloated and unhealthy. I had occasionally thought about what I needed to do to change, but it felt daunting so I would drink some wine or go to sleep, or both. My soul finally rebelled, and something inside me resurrected the passionate part of me I had banished for so long. I decided to be happy again, no matter what.

With enthusiasm came my well known imperfection of trying to overachieve because I felt inadequate and afraid of failure. If I overshot my goal, hopefully I would end up somewhere acceptable. I would be happy, the wife my husband deserved, and the person I dreamed of being when I was a kid. Nothing would stand in my way, and I would try almost anything. I wouldn't make a small change but a gargantuan awakening, a rebirth. I would embrace a new beginning despite and because of the death of my child.

I couldn't find a book about thriving after the death of a child so I decided to figure it out myself. Most of the information was on grieving and surviving, and I was done with that. I made a mental list of what needed to change.

## Thriving After the Death of a Child

My most important goal was having all my thoughts about God be peaceful. The easiest part was recognizing I had developed bad habits. I had studied habits during my career when creating training programs and knew how to approach this otherwise daunting task. I knew I had to be mentally and physically healthy to really enjoy life. Even though I had mostly only talked to my husband about my child dying, I would follow the advice to talk more. I would read and learn from all kinds of nonfiction books again. I would nurture more loving relationships and go to counseling when I needed help.

My transformation happened over time, and I still have down days, but they are rare. I never lost momentum even when I made mistakes. One day, on the way to have lunch with my husband, I turned up the volume loud when the song “Back in Black” by AC/DC came on the radio. It was one of my favorite classic songs since high school. I used to do that every time I heard it or any other music I loved, but I hadn’t for years after my child died.

For the first time since that loss, the old familiar rush of joy danced through my veins. I felt my soul knew I was finally doing the right things. I have learned so much and will continue to be open to knowledge and experience. I’m passionate about living a life full of love, fun, and serving others. The part of my life not relating to my child is better than I ever imagined.





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