

Called to Ministry

After losing Kayla in 2003, my life took a dramatic turn. I laid in bed for days and nearly a month without getting up. My two remaining children, Cassandra and Connor really didn't need my care. Not like Kayla. They could feed themselves, and get off to school. I spent time with them but never left the house. I was depressed. I didn't feel needed and I had no idea what to do with myself. The life I had known for the past (nearly) 12 years was gone.

I prayed out to God in my loneliness and pain, asking him what next. What could I do? I had no idea where to start or what to even ask for. I knew I needed to do something but felt nothing but silence. It cut to my insides. About a month passed by, and I needed to go to the grocery store. I cleaned myself up and as I drove near town, it dawned on me. You know that feeling that everyone talks about when they lose a loved one. The feeling of wondering why and how everyone is carrying on when your world has come to a crashing halt? I was discovering it for myself. After going to the grocery store, I passed by our church and decided to go in to visit someone. Leah, our church secretary was busy working away but stopped to take time for me. She asked how I was doing and I told her that if I didn't find something to do, that I knew I probably wouldn't make it. But what? She had no idea but she said she would pray for me and I returned home.

That night, I received a call from a gentleman from our church, Henk Wapstra. I had heard him preach before, but really didn't remember too much about him. He said he wanted to meet me for coffee in the morning. I had no idea what it was about but he needed to talk to me right away.

Henk was the founder and executive director of a little non-profit called Eagle Wings. He had scheduled a Christmas Dinner at my church for adults with special needs. However, Henk was beyond retirement and suffering from serious burn-out. We met for coffee, and he said he had called the church the previous day to cancel the Christmas dinner, when Leah asked him to consider giving me a call. He didn't think I would help, because it had only been about a month since I had lost my daughter Kayla. When he told me about the little dinner in the church foyer for about 60 people, I gladly agreed. I couldn't wait to do something productive. It gave me a little momentary purpose.

We met a few more times and I set out to work. You see, I thought, "I've done women's ministry stuff for years. I've hosted baby showers and bridal showers for a hundred. I can do this dinner." I didn't really want to handle it alone though, so I asked a few more ladies in the church to help. Several graciously agreed and I thought, we could probably ask a few more people to come. I made pretty invitations and went door to door inviting group homes. Some welcomed the information, while others slammed their doors in my face. You know...HIPPA laws and all. :)

In a months time, I had recruited enough table hosts, cooks and servers to handle our 225 dinner reservations. WOW!! Throw in a request to the church ministry team's budget, finding a Santa Claus, collecting donations for stuffed animals and we were set to go.

What I didn't expect, was a transformation of my heart. I had asked our church pastor and wife to lead us in Christmas Carols. (His wife was the director of the Seattle Children's Chorus who taught my daughter Kayla to sing.) As they came up to the front, I remained against the back wall observing the festivities. There were two tables in the back whose guests were profoundly disabled. They couldn't walk or speak. They had very limited ranges of motion and were in wheelchairs. They sat lifeless and motionless throughout dinner, except while they were being fed. When John and Kris came up on that stage and began to play "joy to the world", I watched in bewilderment. These guests came to life. They began waving their arms in any way they could, and began making noises like nothing I had heard before. They groaned out of excitement. In that moment I knew...that although I had no clue what they were saying, there was no doubt in my mind that God knew. Of course they were singing "Joy to the World". Their mothers probably sang those very same songs to them as infants. Maybe it was a nurse in the institution, but they knew what was going on.

I stood in the back of that room, crying my eyes out and opened my heart to God. He called me to be a part of Eagle Wings disAbility Ministries, and I am forever grateful. I didn't go looking for it, and I wouldn't have known this was it without that experience.

I immediately began speaking in churches and grew that one annual event into 33 as of this year. It has been both healing and rewarding.

For the past 13 years I have served as Executive Director, and I hope you enjoy discovering the gift that people with special needs are. They are our teachers of patience, kindness, forgiveness, longsuffering, and unconditional love.

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