



The Will To Live Foundation, Inc.

For The Kids, Through The Kids, By The Kids



October 12, 2012

Approaching The “Ides of October”

It is with absolute amazement that I sit here writing a letter to all of you on the 2nd anniversary of the passing of my son Will. Some days it feels like 2 days, some days 2 months and others 2 decades. No matter how I look at it, I'm simply amazed. Two years since October 15, 2010.

- Amazed that I have not heard his voice or looked into his beautiful eyes in 2 years
- Amazed that I'm still standing after 2 years without him
- Amazed at the bounce in my step that continues to exist
- Amazed at the love in my life.
- Amazed at the strength of my wife and kids and how they inspire me to go on

So much has happened in that time, so much good, so much love and so much hope. I often say that I'm on the bottom and the top of this roller coaster ride all day every day – simultaneously... my new normal. The sadness of missing Will combined with the joy of so much love and hope and good is simply indescribable. But here I am, and here we are, and see how we've carried his light of love and hope and the Will To Live:

- We have given over 200 speeches about love and hope and life teammates, to kids, teams, youth groups, schools, churches, scouts, parents and coaches alike.
- The Foundation has funded the Signs of Suicide (SOS) program for all of Fulton County schools. Every high school, middle school and elementary school – 96 schools being trained, effecting over 93,000 students. All funding from fundraisers that were orchestrated by the kids of this community – Kids raising money to train the adults to better help the kids - an unprecedented “Circle of Hope”
- Forsyth County Schools are now getting involved in SOS as well as high schools in several other states across the union – courtesy of WTL
- Over 12,000 Life Teammate wrist bands & 10,000 Life Teammate stickers for baseball, football, lacrosse and now volleyball, soccer and wrestling will have been handed out by years end (Nationwide).
- Fabulous fund raising events orchestrated and implemented by the kids were again highlights of the year. The Where There's A Will There's A Way 5k generating \$35k and WillStock 12 generating \$18k were extremely well received as events of true love and hope and awareness.
- WTL bow ties were worn by Fox Sports TV announcers and major league baseball players
- Mentorship programs were established at Northview High School for Lacrosse, Baseball, Volleyball and Wrestling, where upperclassmen mentor the incoming freshman.
- The Life Teammate Scholarship was expanded from men's and woman's lacrosse to now also include baseball and woman's soccer teams.
- Will To Live Baseball and Lacrosse teams were formed to play the game and spread the message of loving your teammates on and off the field
- The WTL Foundation was an instrumental part of Johns Creek's city task force on suicide.
- For two years, we've carried Will's beautiful light of love, friendship, others before self in order to help improve all our Will To Live.

Just recently, for 7 straight days, I spoke about Life Teammates and Suicide Awareness at 7 different venues. 4 of them were local high schools where a “Suicide Awareness Task Force” presentation for the adults of the community was given. Each night at each school only 25 or so people came. I was the key note speaker along with a panel of depression, mental health and suicide awareness experts. Each night I said how disappointed I was that more people were not there learning about mental health and what to do and where to go. But I totally understood. All those people who didn't go were EXACTLY LIKE ME – just two years ago. “Depression, mental health and certainly



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suicide was not something I should be concerned about”- that was my approach 2 years ago. I would not have come to that meeting simply because I didn’t know I needed to. Thus, for all those people who didn’t attend, I’m not angry or upset or even surprised, they are all exactly like me back in September of 2010. I just don’t want them to ever be like me today – missing a loved one lost to suicide. What they don’t know, and what I didn’t know, is that families like mine – The Trautwein Family – are indeed the face of suicide in today’s world. But hope and help is indeed everywhere (just as it was two years ago for me – oh if I had only known)

Thus, I will keep talking and keep spreading our message. What I have learned, and what I want all adults to hear, is that the kids of today need us to understand what they are up against.

“A TRUSTED ADULT ‘KNOWS AND SHOWS!’”

A trusted adult **“knows”** that the world is a much younger place and the opportunities that our kids are presented today bring with them extreme pressures that we adults did not have face until we were much older. An even more importantly, a trusted adult **“shows”** to the kids of today that we understand this fact. What I’ve learned from the experts and from the kids is whether we agree with them or disagree, the kids of today will respond to the adults that they feel understand them.

I always thought that Will and I had a great relationship, but to be honest, I don’t know if I ever really “showed” that I understand just how hard life is for a teenager today. I showed that I loved him, I showed that I cared, but I never “showed” that I truly understood. Thus I don’t know if Will ever said to his friends “Yeah My Dad Gets Me!” In fact, I fear he didn’t, but maybe someday his brothers and sister will.

“Yeah My Dad Gets Me”



Thus on the 2nd anniversary of Will’s passing, I ask all of us to really think hard about this “Knows and Shows” concept. If nothing else it will improve the communication between us and our kids – perhaps it will improve our relationships, and the experts tell me that by showing understanding, it will improve the Will To Live of all of us.

One year ago I wrote this note to Will – it still rings so true:

“I love you Will – we carry your light. You have inspired me Will, for 15 years I thought it was my job to inspire you and to teach you, I now know that in reality, it was you who was teaching me. I’m proud to be your dad, I’m proud to carry your light, and I’m proud of you and what your life has taught me. Thank you for the new gift of life that you have given me – Love ya man! - Dad”

Wishing all of you love and hope and the Will To Live!

John Trautwein