

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

MY LIVING WILL

A Father's Story of Loss & Hope

John Trautwein

Westbow Press (240 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

In this debut memoir, a businessman details how he used the most excruciating experience of his life to help save others.

In the early hours of Oct. 15, 2010, Trautwein's oldest son, Will, a handsome, popular, beloved 15-year-old, wrapped his belt around his neck and hung himself from his bedroom closet door. He left behind his anguished parents, three younger siblings, and an enormous circle of grief-stricken extended family and friends. There were no obvious warning signs and no suicide note, only a penciled picture found in a folder on top of Will's backpack—a drawing of a boy holding a gun to his head, and then, lower on the page, “a smaller drawing of a man hanging himself.” How could this happen? Why?

There are no answers. But readers do learn that Will—so outgoing, so normal—is the very face of teenage suicide. Trautwein, a former professional baseball player and a businessman, knew he must find a way to carve a path for the living to bring himself and his family through the tragedy. His answer was to form The Will to Live Foundation, dedicated to teaching teenagers how to turn to one another for help when they are despondent. In part inspired by the angel Clarence in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, the foundation's mission is to encourage teenagers to find their own Clarence, that one friend they can turn to when they need a guide back from the precipice.

In this stirring account, the author brings readers into the horror of the moment of that terrible October morning: “My boy was hanging from the closet door. He was ghost white....Those beautiful blue eyes...were open, but lifeless...staring straight out at me, right through me.” Tears continually spill from the pages. But then they are dried by Trautwein's infectious optimism. He has found a way to honor his son and his own survival (“The day The Will to Live Foundation was formed, something extremely special, something truly good began! I felt alive again, really for the first time since Will died”). This skillful memoir is both devastatingly painful and surprisingly filled with hope.

Written with passion and honesty, this book shares each step of the author's journey, making an unbearable tale of suicide readable and inspirational.