

Iowa View

Hannah's gift:

Love, memories, strength



ARTWORK BY MARK MARTURELLO



SHANDA GENESER of Des Moines writes about the death of her daughter, Hannah, 4, who died March 21 of injuries sustained when she tumbled through an upstairs window at her aunt and uncle's home. Contact: sboone74@gmail.com

It has been three months since Hannah, our 4½-year-old daughter, died from a tragic accident. We have survived Easter, Mother's Day, her dad's birthday, the anniversary of her baptism, and Father's Day.

We have embarked on the dreaded "firsts" — the holidays, anniversaries and monumental dates. Unfortunately, all the books we've read with suggestions on "how to survive the first year," failed to prepare us for the first trip down the toy aisle with the princess dresses, the first venture to the grocery store with a shorter list, the first sight of young girls playing jump rope or riding bikes down our street, or the look of a double stroller with only one child. Those are the "firsts" that hurt even worse. They penetrate deeper: They remind us of the unimaginable impact that losing Hannah has made in our lives — on a daily basis.

A while back, I stopped at a lemonade stand near our home, and as I sipped from my Dixie cup, I just stood and stared at the two beautiful and vibrant little girls who poured my drink with such care and enthusiasm, fluttering around free and happy — like butterflies in a gentle breeze. It crushed me. It was at that moment (and there are always moments) when I realized the depth of my pain and the magnitude of our loss. Tears welled in my eyes so I turned away and left before they noticed (a practice I am getting quite accustomed to these days).

Every day is a new challenge for our family. There are days where some of us are stronger than others, and days when Hannah's absence hits us all like a ton of bricks. Regardless, we are a closer family than before. We have witnessed each other's vulnerability, compassion, strength, weakness, anger, faith and grace, but most importantly, love. Love that can't be tainted, even in a time as excruciatingly trying as this.

Hannah gave us this gift, and so much more. Even greater, we have seen incredible, and I mean incredible, acts of kindness from this community. Friends, new and old, classmates we only see at reunions, business partners we only see at meetings, and neighbors we only see in passing. We have received gifts and letters from complete strangers. Some

parents who have lost children of their own and felt compelled to share their stories and tender empathy, some incarcerated women who were touched by Hannah's obituary, but mostly parents who graciously try to put themselves in our shoes and then express that heartache in eloquent words of love, hope, faith and prayer.

From the bottom of our broken hearts, we send our sincere gratitude for all of your generosity and goodness. We are in awe of the effect Hannah's death has made on all of you. We already knew the power of her love and extraordinary presence on this Earth, but to recognize the impact of her life and death on the rest of you is both astounding and gratifying. It nurtures our hearts in ways words cannot express. You have

shared stories with us about how this tragedy has changed you and made you better people, parents and humanitarians.

We are proud and abundantly blessed to be a part of this community and to know each and every one of you for your incredible efforts and inspiration.

Hannah's quirkiness, sense of humor, affection, zest for life, curiosity, playfulness, creativity, compassion, and most of all, love, lives on in all of us. We have been pushed to understand how precious life is, every minute of every day. I know I have learned the value and significance of each irreplaceable moment with our children, and it is imperative that we

don't let those moments pass us by.

Although Hannah's death brings great sadness and pain, I know she would insist that we live out the rest of our days to the fullest, with joy and vigor. She would want us to let go of that which will break us down, wear us out, or tear us apart. This I know. There is a quote by Vamik Volkan, a bereavement researcher who inspires me. It reads, "If we are unable to let go when death demands it, we are often unable to hang on when life requires it." Now think of all those things you have to live for. My list is long. Our amazing 2½-year-old daughter, Harper, is at the top of that list. She deserves the best parents imaginable, and nothing less.

As for the breathtaking artwork that accompanies this letter, it was my Father's Day gift to Jamie, my wonderful husband and ally in this lifelong battle with grief. It was masterfully created by Mark Marturello, a longtime colleague and friend of my father's. It is much more than I ever expected and an absolute treasure. Although Hannah was only 4½, Mark depicted her looking older — giving us a glimpse of the beautiful young lady we can now only imagine with our hearts.

We miss and love you so, Hannah, now and forever.



Hannah Geneser

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— Vamik Volkan, a bereavement researcher