

## 'What My Boys Mean to Me'

With the birth of my only daughter, Kristen, in 1983, I immediately became aware of the importance of my role as a mother. Since her death in 1985, I have come to fully understand how **my evolving identity as a bereaved and healing mother has impacted my two boys, Kevin and Brian**. The road to that new role and identity has not been totally smooth. Over the course of my journey since her death nine years ago, I've struggled through a lot of hills and valleys. My family has also struggled with me through my 'identity crisis.'

Along with having a career, **all I ever wanted to be was a mother ~ not a bereaved mother, however**. I wouldn't wish that on anyone. I have never been the same since July 21, 1985. It's amazing how that one little word, bereaved, has had such an impact on me and how it has affected my relationships with my family, as well as with others.

After Kristen died, there were times that I wondered if I was even considered a mother anymore since we didn't have other children at the time. I felt stuck in the middle ~ asking myself "Who am I now?" In my heart I knew I was still a mother, but others didn't acknowledge it until the births of my sons. Society seemed to need an ongoing physical proof of one's parenthood ~ I didn't.

**Becoming a mother for the second and third time was filled with bittersweet emotions and fears**. Although I was excited that Kevin and Brian were here, I asked myself if I was even worthy enough to be entrusted with two more lives! Could I give them all that they needed, knowing that I felt like half a person at times? Was I going to be there for them when they needed me the most or was I going to 'fail' them as I failed Kristen? Those are pretty tough questions to ask, I realize, but **that's how I felt for a very long time ~ that I failed to protect my child**.

I'm ashamed to say that those feelings of failure have often kept me at a distance from others, as well as my two boys. Over the last several years, **at times, I have retreated within myself and left the boys 'emotionally abandoned.'** It's a feeling I am quite familiar with ~ having been **thrust into it at age three when my dad died suddenly**. His death left my mom with six children under the age of 10 to raise by herself. Without realizing it then, I must have felt not only physically abandoned, but also emotionally abandoned. My mom always told me that I was angry at the world for a very long time. **That's a hurt I have carried with me for just as long ~ a wound that was quickly reopened 27 years later, when Kristen died**.

It wasn't until I finished my graduate degree in December of 1993, that I finally began to fully tap into and work through a lot of my buried, yet outwardly expressed, anger and rage at being left behind. Unfortunately, my family has often been caught in the middle of this turbulence.

**I wanted so badly to have Kristen back**, that when I would look into the boys' eyes, I saw Kristen and not them. **I didn't see them for who they were ~ two loving boys that needed me, all of me, NOW ~ later may never come.** Their lives have been passing by and I have been missing out emotionally on a good portion of it. It was as if I was being pulled between two worlds ~ trying to move forward and give of myself, yet at the same time feeling 'tied up' as if Kristen wasn't ready to 'release' me.

In my mind, **I didn't feel that Kristen had given me permission to go on without her.** I hadn't completed my raising of her to be a giving, productive, healthy and happy adult ~ which was a special promise I made to myself the day I was married. I felt I broke that promise and I've spent the last nine years trying to forgive myself for that ~ up **until several months ago when I experienced a 'spiritual awakening' in which that forgiveness came.** Unrealistic as my thoughts and feelings may have been, it just goes to show how much we, as parents, emotionally invest in our children and how much that investment impacts our identity as a mother or father.

Since having another awakening experience a few months ago, when **Kristen 'released' me and gave me that blessing to move forward with my life,** I have opened my mind and my heart to my boys. **All of my children are the love and light of my life, whether they are here physically or not.** However, because Kevin and Brian are physically here, I need to be here, all here, for them now ~ cherishing them for who they are and for what they have brought to my life.

As my identity as a bereaved and healing mother continues to evolve, my boys are helping me move forward toward becoming more 'alive and loving.' Children have that special gift of opening our minds and hearts, even wounded ones. **I am proud to say that I love Kevin and Brian with all my heart and I am forever thankful for having them here to teach me once again to fully live and love.**

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