

## Moving Forward After Your Child Dies

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### Every Experience is Unique

Grief is unique to every person. Even people in the same household will experience grief differently. My experience is unique and will not be exactly like anyone else's. However, I hope that what I've learned as I move forward through the difficult experience of my daughter's passing, will help you as you move forward after the passing of your loved one.

### Similarities

There are at least five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages can appear in any order and can come and go as we move forward after the passing of a loved one. As a person moves in and out of these stages, they may feel intense grief, regrets, trauma, a desire to cope whether it be in positive ways or in destructive ways, anger, spiritual growth or loss of spiritual belief, mental strengthening or weakening, an increased ability to see the good or the bad, joy, guilt, regret, and many other emotions and desires. There is no right way to feel, there is no single right way to cope.

Grief is described in various ways. It's been described as a river ebbing and flowing, as an ocean undulating with small and large waves, and as a ball bouncing inside of a square, among other similes. I find that grief can fit all of these descriptions - it is ever-changing. One day I might feel guilty for not feeling sad, another day the grief is so intense that I cry all day. This is normal.

Accepting that grief is unique and incomprehensible was an important part for me to begin moving forward. At first, I asked others who were on the grief path ahead of me, how long it would take to start feeling better. Little did I realize that question was unanswerable. One of my *vilomah* friends told me that I had a long road ahead, and while I didn't like that answer, looking back, I realize that she was right. (*Vilomah* is a word which means *against a natural order* and is used to describe a parent who has lost a child.)

This is a long road. But it is a road that millions have traveled. Let's walk together and share our experiences. Here is mine.

### Britnee's Passing

My daughter, Britnee Rose Hatch, had a heart condition, Long QT Syndrome. She received an implanted cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) when she was six years old.

Britnee also had a tracheal web from a surgeon's mistake during a thyroid gland surgery when she was six. This mistake left her with permanently damaged vocal cords. When she spoke, she sounded like

she had a cold. It was really embarrassing for her, especially when people asked her if she was sick, and she wasn't. She just wanted to be normal, but she couldn't hide her hoarse voice, nor could she hide the large scar on her throat from the surgery.

Britnee also had something else which was never diagnosed, and I think it was the cause of her death. She had several grand mal seizures from two years old until she was six. She had several cardiac effusions (fluid around her heart) that would flare up after surgery on her device and at other random times. She'd be in excruciating pain and have to take ibuprofen for weeks, sleeping on a recliner to ease the pain until it subsided. No one ever explained what was causing these events, and it didn't occur to me that they were possibly connected, symptoms of yet another rare disease, still undiagnosed.

When she was eighteen, Britnee had an old ICD lead that we wanted to have removed. It was optional, not necessary. She wanted to have the surgery to attempt to remove the lead and felt good about going ahead with the surgery, and my husband and I felt good about it too. Her cardiologist did not want us to try to remove the lead, however, she sent us to a specialist at another hospital nearby. The specialist was eager to do the surgery and assured us he'd never had trouble with it in over twenty years.

Looking back, I can see that Britnee was preparing to go long before the surgery that took her life. The spring of 2020 she inexplicably changed her college plans. She had been planning to get a radiology tech degree so she could do echocardiograms; she'd had so many performed on her. She had looked into the program at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, and was going to apply for it when it was time. But she changed her mind that spring and didn't have any other college choices in mind. I thought it was odd but didn't think too much about it, I thought she'd start college that fall and figure it out like I had.

Britnee taught piano lessons at our home (she was extremely gifted at the piano) and didn't get a job outside of the home. This allowed her to be home a lot. She graduated from Roy High School in 2020, during the covid pandemic, but chose not to start college in August with kids her age. She continued to teach piano at home and spent a lot of time with our family. She didn't even sign up for Institute, a religious class held on campus, which she had shown interest in. She seemed a little unsure of what she was doing, and talked about preparing to go through the temple for the first time (something that she had to be eighteen to do) and serve a service mission to teach others about Jesus Christ.

In the months before the surgery, Britnee bought several Christmas presents. I thought it was odd that she had it planned so far ahead and had already bought so many of the gifts, now I know why.

We were confused, and she seemed confused too, but it didn't seem to bother her too much. So when she felt good about the surgery, and my husband and I felt good about the surgery, we decided to let her do it.

On October 16, 2020, Britnee went in to have the surgeon attempt to remove the old ICD lead. As I sat in the prep room with Britnee, waiting for her to be taken back to surgery, I had the prompting to put my phone down and talk to her. I did, and while I don't remember everything we talked about, I'm glad I took that time to visit with her, because her time was limited.

The surgeon was unable to remove the lead and ended up putting a new ICD in, which was not the plan. This was in the midst of the covid restrictions, so my husband, Rowdy, and I weren't allowed to see Britnee in recovery. They finally let us see her in her room a few hours after the surgery. She was fine for the first few minutes, but was uncomfortable. I'm not sure how long it was, less than an hour after we

joined her, that her blood pressure started to drop. The nurse became concerned and suddenly the room filled with a lot of people. I was worried, but we'd been through a big scare before when she had almost lost her life after the botched throat surgery, and I figured this would pass too.

At one point I asked Britnee how she was feeling and she looked so peaceful and happy, and serenely replied, "Like death." I didn't say anything, thinking this was just going to be like the results of her other surgeries (she'd had about twenty) and that she'd be fine. I think about that moment though and I know that she was ready to go. She was happy to go. She knew that there was a plan, this was the plan, and she was going to a much happier place where she wouldn't have to battle her mortal body anymore and she could do greater, grander things!

The doctors decided to take Britnee to see if something was leaking or torn internally. The last thing I remember Britnee telling me was how beautiful I was, and Rowdy said she told us "You're good parents." I thought I'd talk to her again of course, but I didn't. She was put into an induced coma and was on a ventilator the next time I saw her in the ICU. With covid's awful restrictions, we saw her for a little while that night but weren't allowed to stay. She had a strange swelling in her neck. I pointed it out but the nurse brushed it off. I had seen Britnee on a ventilator before after her throat surgery, but it was still disconcerting. I remember touching her fingers, so still, those fingers that played the piano so well. I couldn't tell if her spirit was there or not. We weren't allowed to stay in the room for the night, so we got sent home to rest.

In the morning, the ICU doctor called and told us to get down there. She sounded very concerned and it scared us. Everything was a haze and unreal, as if it were a nightmare. I still thought that Britnee would get through this though, the doctor had been so nonchalant and unconcerned about this surgery. Surely it would be OK!

When we got to the hospital, a new doctor had relieved the night one. He seemed confident he'd figure it out and so we held on to that. Britnee had nearly died before, surely she would pull through.

We waited, and they did test after test and found nothing wrong. But something was wrong. Britnee's blood had become acidic, she was swelling up and not doing well. That afternoon we were sitting in the waiting room and an RPN came walking out and knelt in front of us. She told us that Britnee was receiving CPR and wanted us to come with her. We had some friends that were just bringing us lunch and had arrived in the parking lot. I texted them that Britnee was coding.

We went back and there was my daughter, receiving CPR, surrounded by a dozen or more people as the machines blared and screamed. It was a nightmare. And it was real. When they called out that she could not be revived, I broke. I couldn't do it. There's nothing to prepare a parent for that. I just broke. There's no better description than that. A heart truly can break, and mine did. I can't imagine anything being worse than that moment and the days that followed. I changed at that moment, and I'm not the same person I was before my beautiful, talented, kind, spiritual daughter died.

### **Week Leading Up to the Viewing and Funeral**

I wouldn't wish this week on anyone. The crushing grief, agony, regrets, pressure, busyness, visitors, attention, silence, lack of support, support...it's indescribable. I leaned on my husband and children, some close friends, and Jesus Christ. I don't know what else to say. It's a week that I just had to get through. It's likely that you are reading this after your child's viewing and funeral are over. A week or two or more have already passed for you. So you'll know that the week after your child's passing is

dreadful. But there are moments of light as well. There were moments when Britnee's spirit was near. I knew she was OK. I knew she was happy. And I knew she was finally free of this mortal body that had given her so much grief.

If I can give any advice about that week leading up to the funeral (if you're reading this before the funeral), find moments of light and hold onto them. Appreciate whatever support you get from friends, family, and strangers. Turn to your Savior, He has suffered for you and knows your pain. Try not to focus on those who simply aren't there for you. There were too many family and friends who weren't there for us, likely because they had no idea what to do or say. But there were many who were there for us and reached out, and for them I am grateful.

### **The First Month**

You get to decide how you will face the future after your child dies. Will you sink into depression, curl up and give up, curse God and wish to die? Or will you seek out ways to constructively move forward, trusting in God and the fact that millions of other parents have somehow survived this very thing? Will you learn to smile again, knowing your child wants you to be happy? Will you make the best of the life you still have left to live?

The physical pain that first month was unbearable. It stabbed like a knife in the center of my chest. I cried, a lot. I reached out to others who had children pass away and who were willing to talk. I prayed. I sought Britnee's reassurance that she lived in heaven (and I received it!). I attended church, talked to friends, held on to my husband, children, and grandsons. I knew that there was hope. It helped to know that my vilomah friends had survived it and were doing OK months and years later.

It is possible to survive this and to move into the grief and find a strength and comfort you might not know is possible. I did it, you can do this!

That first month was the conduit into another life, a different mind, a different family, different friends, a different look on life and what it really meant. The life I had known before Britnee's passing didn't exist anymore. Instead, a life where I wouldn't watch Britnee go to college, be married, become a mother, and progress with her piano and violin skills, was my new reality.

At first I asked fellow vilomahs how long it would take to start feeling better. No one could answer that question. In my ignorance I thought there was a set amount of time. Now I know better. And I also know that the goal isn't to "get over" my child's passing, but instead to **"constructively, intentionally move forward."** Surely something good has to come from this agonizing grief, this loss of a precious daughter who can't be replaced. And much good has come. While I'm not glad that Britnee died, I am glad for what I've learned in the months and years since that dreadful day. I've had some life-changing experiences for the good. I know that life exists beyond this one. I know that my daughter is OK. I know that one day I'll be with her again. I don't believe, I know. And I'm grateful for that knowledge.

Once the funeral was over, I thought about returning to work. My work was very understanding and my boss told me that I could take off as long as I wanted, with pay. I gave it a couple of weeks and returned, knowing that I do better when facing things head-on and getting back into the normal routine than I do if I sit at home and wallow in my misery.

I'm glad I went back when I did. It made me move forward. And I was determined to constructively move forward, to find the techniques, hymns, scriptures, friends, family, books, and processes that I

knew would allow me to continue to live. I remembered something a church leader (her name eludes me) had written years ago about the passing of her son. She had written, "I didn't know how someone could go through so much pain and live." Her statement was spot on, but the key is **and live**, because yes, we still **can live** after such a traumatic and devastating event.

### **Support**

I'm an extremely spiritual person. While people who don't believe in a Higher Power can still survive the loss of a child, I have no idea how to help them along. My experience is heavily spiritual, as I know that my daughter's spirit continues to live and that one day I will be with her again!

I take a lot of hope from watching those around me. Reaching out to my vilomah friends has helped so much. I asked them questions, we shared stories, and offered each other support. I still reach out to them and have found great hope and strength through their experiences and willingness to be vulnerable and offer me advice. I pay it forward to others now, and it helps as we move forward. We can do this, whether we think we can, we can do this and make something good of something that's been so awful.

I had, and still have, expectations for how people would help me and my family after the passing of my daughter. In general, people have been very kind, thoughtful, compassionate, and helpful. Have there been some thoughtless comments and actions? Yes, there have been. But I try to remember that these people simply don't know what to say and all of them were just trying to help either me or themselves move forward.

Some vilomahs want to talk about their deceased child, others don't. I was very open on Facebook and with my friends and family about wanting to talk about Britnee. However, there are many vilomahs and others who don't want their child mentioned. I found that being open about the desire to talk about my daughter helped some people to be open about Britnee, and they continue to talk about her. However, some friends and family never have mentioned Britnee since her passing. I have some family and friends who have never once asked me how I'm doing. Some of them came to her funeral but not her viewing. Some of them offered no words of sympathy, support, or consolation. And they never have, years later.

It is what it is. A few dear friends have emerged from the pack and I have relied on them heavily for support. Other friends and family have not been supportive and I've tried to just accept their inability to help and to get over the hurt. We can help our friends and family know how to help us though. We can tell people what we need, and some people will respond.

### **When People Say or Do The Wrong Thing**

It's impressive how many people know how to say the *right* thing! Simply telling me, "I don't understand how you feel, but I'm here for you," made all of the difference! Many people were able to do that, and it helped immensely.

But there have been several times when people, even close friends, have said very insensitive things to me. None of these people have any idea how I feel, and I don't know how they feel! We all experience grief differently! Even those of us who have had children pass are on different paths. One might have a miscarriage, one might have a child commit suicide, one might have a child die a long and painful death from cancer, another might have an unexpected accident as a teen or adult, another might have an

adult child die of a heart attack, another might have a child murdered, and yet another might have a teen child die after a surgery that she was supposed to go home from the next day. We all come into this unasked for event with different backgrounds, mindsets, friends, family, beliefs, means to get proper help, and abilities to cope.

None of the ill-commented people meant ill though, and I realize that most of them were just trying their best to help me feel better. After all, unless they've had a child pass away, they would have absolutely no idea what it really feels like. Even if they have had a child pass away, they still don't know exactly what I'm feeling. I find that I'm more at peace when I forgive insensitive and absent people and give them the benefit of the doubt. We have enough to worry about and grieve over without adding anger and hurt to the mix.

### **What You Can Do to Move Forward**

I created a list of things that I did and continue to do so that I can constructively move forward. I want to make something more of my life, to honor Britnee, to learn from this difficult experience. After all, I know that Britnee doesn't want me wallowing in despair and giving up on the life that I still have to live. Britnee went ahead for a reason, and I'm going to do my best to work with her on the other side and accomplish as much good as I can until it's my time to go!

Here is what I've done, and continue to do, since Britnee's passing:

#### **Self-Love**

Be kind to yourself. Grief is something I never understood until now, and I don't know that I'd say that I understand it in full whatsoever. Grief affects us spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. It changes everything. It changes our worldviews, our views of God, our feelings, our thoughts, our interactions with others.

Say kind things to yourself, give yourself the kindness you give to others.

Take care of yourself. Don't allow yourself to lie in bed and get depressed. It's OK to have down time but moving forward and having purpose has been one of the keys for me. If I stay still too long and wallow in the misery, I spiral into a pit of depression and grief.

#### **Religious Services**

Go to religious services weekly. Go to the temple or other religious house of worship as often as time permits. This is where I truly feel at home and know that my daughter is happy to be with me there. For me, this has been one of the greatest comforts and I look forward to every visit! This has helped me significantly. Having an eternal perspective is everything to me!

#### **Get a Blessing**

Get a blessing from someone who holds the priesthood according to your religion. Record the blessing and type it up. I have a few blessings by my bed that I read through regularly. They give me great comfort through the Holy Spirit.

#### **Talk to Others**

Talk to others who are constructively moving forward after their child's passing. Emulate those who are positive and hopeful even in their grief. Avoid copying the negative coping habits of those who are miserable and not moving forward. Don't turn to numbing agents such as alcohol, drugs, over-eating,

allowing excessive and unrelenting grief (after some time has passed), and endlessly reliving the event. I've seen a difference in the coping abilities of people who have positive goals and those who employ negative coping habits or simply give up. The difference is striking. It is up to YOU to determine how you will move forward. You do have a choice, and there can be hope and happiness again, even if there will always be grief and longing for your beloved child.

### **Grief and Trauma Counseling**

Go to grief and trauma counseling. Find a counselor who specializes in trauma, grief, and if you're religious, adheres to similar spiritual beliefs. This helped me and my family limp forward in the months following Britnee's passing. Some of my children still go to counseling. My husband and I have both returned to counseling as needed. Don't wait to see if you, your spouse, or your children need help, be proactive and sign up as soon as possible! A good trauma and grief counselor will give you good resources to read and will also help you know that your reactions and feelings are not unusual and that the things you're feeling are normal for what you're going through.

### **Online Grief Groups**

Join uplifting grief groups online. Avoid negative, anti-religion, anti-Christ, and bitter groups. I found some good grief groups on Facebook, but there are some icky ones too. They were the most helpful in the first year or so but I gravitated away from them as time passed. I found it helpful to try to help other people as they grieved, and it was helpful to see that others were going through the same thing and feeling many of the same feelings that I was, it was normal. But as time has passed, I've found that I don't need the group discussions anymore.

### **Signs**

Look for indications that your child is nearby. I feel Britnee nearby daily. She is a great comfort. I know that she lives, that she is busy, happy, and always there during my joy and sorrow. She is at every musical performance that I participate in. She is the temple every time I go. I have come to know that she misses me and the rest of her family, and sometimes is sad about what we are going through, but she is at peace and has an eternal perspective now. One day this life will be the blink of an eye and we will be together as an eternal family. There is so much hope, so much to look forward to!

### **Journal**

Write your thoughts, your feelings, your experiences, your sorrows, and your joys! Writing is very cathartic! If you don't like writing, record yourself talking! You can go back and read or listen to your experiences if you want to. And if you don't, it just helps to get those thoughts and feelings out. There's something comforting and cleansing about verbalizing or writing your grief and hopes.

### **Record Dreams**

If you dream about your child, write those dreams down. If you don't dream about your child, that's OK! Some people do and some don't. Again, there is no normal! I dream about my daughter now and then, and some of those dreams have been extremely comforting.

### **Friends and Family**

Find friends and family who will listen without telling you what to do and pass judgment on you. Over time, some people will remain willing and loyal while others will drop out because they don't understand, think you should be over it by now, or just can't handle the situation. As I mentioned earlier, I've come to realize that many people simply can't comprehend what I am feeling and I must

have compassion on their lack of thoughtfulness or comprehension of my grief. The vast majority of people have been thoughtful and kind.

### **Books**

Even if you're not a reader, I highly recommend reading or listening to books! Some good ones are:

Moving forward after a loved one passes:

“How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies” by Therese A. Rando

“Sunset” by S. Michael Wilcox (this is specifically about a spouse's passing)

“Walking the Path of Grief” by Lori McMillan West (this is specifically about a spouse's passing)

Life after death:

“The Gateway We Call Death” by Russel M. Nelson

“Kory” by Kelly Paries

“What's On the Other Side” by Brent L. Top

“Glimpses Beyond Death's Door” by Brent L. & Wendy C. Top

The Lord's Second Coming and the Millennium:

“The Second Coming of the Lord” by Gerald Lund

### **Memorize Scriptures**

Memorize scriptures about the resurrection, peace, hope, etc. Some of my favorites

John 11:25-26

Isaiah 41:10

John 14:27

Doctrine & Covenants 88:96-98

Mosiah 16:6-8

2 Nephi 9:13

Listen to and memorize uplifting music. A few good ones:

“O My Father” (this was Britnee's favorite hymn)

“I Know That My Redeemer Lives”

“There is Sunshine in My Soul Today”

“You Say”

“Oh What Songs of the Heart”

“It is Well With My Soul”

### **Serve Others**

Brighten others' days. Find ways to help out. Serve at church. Volunteer to be in charge of or help with activities, perform musical numbers, etc. Smile at someone, let someone in line in traffic, be kind. You never know what someone else is dealing with, just like they don't know what you're dealing with. If you hear about a tragedy or struggle that someone else is going through, kindly reach out to them and let them know that you care and are there if they want to talk.

### **Social Media Posts**

If being open helps, be open! I post regularly on my social media page about my daughter. I tell people that I want to talk about her! I find great joy in posting about Britnee on my social media page. I've had

many people mention that they like seeing the posts about her. This also helps them feel more comfortable talking to me about Britnee, which I love!

### **Exercise**

I continued doing cardio three times a week like I had been doing before Britnee's passing and eventually added in yoga with some simple arms, abs, and leg exercises three times a week. Learning yoga has given me the ability to calm myself easier. I look forward to yoga, it makes my mind and body feel amazing!

Staying active makes a massive difference, especially if you're able to get outside and take walks, hike, ski, etc. , and enjoy the fresh air and sunshine. I hike during the summer and glory in feeling Britnee's presence as I spend time in nature. It's wonderful!

### **Nutrition**

A year and a half after Britnee's passed away, I tried out Noom. I'm not advocating for any particular "diet" (I don't believe in diets), but Noom helped redirect me into a much healthier eating lifestyle. I learned how to realistically eat whole foods, drink at least eight cups of water every day, and take care of my mental and physical health. This has changed my life and I feel far better physically and mentally when I am eating non-processed, low-fat, whole foods. I still eat some chocolate every day and eat out regularly, it's all about balance! It has to be a realistic lifestyle change.

It took me some effort to learn how to eat healthier, and it took years of convincing myself before I finally tried it, but I won't look back because of the astounding benefits from feeding my body what it needs. It's much like what you put into a car. If you put the cheapest gas, oil, and fluids into your car and never drive it or drive it too hard, it won't last as long and it won't drive well. The same goes for your body! And when your body feels good, your mind is more likely to feel good too!

### **Scrapbooks and Photo Albums**

Gather up pictures and memories and put them into scrapbooks. I have a couple dozen scrapbooks of Britnee from before she passed away. I also have scrapbooks for Britnee that contain pictures and mementos from after she passed away. I printed up her Instagram pictures and put them into her scrapbooks. I got on her Google drive pictures and printed them up. If you don't keep hard copies of photos, store your photos digitally. Be sure you have at least three back-up storage locations in case one or two become corrupted!

### **Videos**

Gather videos of your child into one place. Perhaps put them on a Youtube channel. Store them in multiple locations. I store my family videos on Google Drive (for a fee), Youtube (free) and on an external storage device. Keep the videos well-organized. I label them with the year first so the videos line up in order by year.

### **Maintain Cherished Routines**

Say goodnight to your child still, sing to them. I still sang to Britnee at night even when she was 18. I still sing to her now! I find that this routine is helpful and lets me remember her every day and show her I love her. It's a time for me to be still and know that she is near.

### **Packing Your Child's Room**

Don't pack your child's room if you don't want to (however, I counsel against making it a shrine or museum where no one can enter). There is no time frame for packing up your child's room if you don't need the room for other purposes. I find that objects remind me of my daughter and I love to have her possessions nearby. I made a list of Britnee's things and when we moved, I packed them into many tubs. This was very comforting to me. Other people find that they want to get rid of their child's things. I discourage this, at least keep some of your child's possessions. The day might come when you regret giving them all away.

### **Milestone Days**

My family and I chose to remember Britnee in special ways on her birthday, anniversary (the year-mark of her passing), and on holidays, especially Christmas and Easter.

On her birthday, we go to the temple in the morning. Then we go to a local store and get a balloon bouquet that we take to her grave. We eat at one of her favorite places for lunch and dinner (Subways, Zupas, Olive Garden, Chick-Fil-A, Noodles and Company, Taco Bell, Wendy's, or Chilis). We get a Strawberry Cream Frappuccino or other drink at Starbucks, because Britnee loved some of those drinks. We also get a cake, sing to Britnee, and blow out the candles.

We spend time together, look at scrapbooks, watch family videos, and enjoy being together. And we cry and look forward to the future when we'll see her again.

We take what money we would have spent on Britnee's birthday gifts (we do this for Christmas and other holidays as well) and give it to someone in need or provide something for someone in need.

For Christmas, we buy a special puzzle, as well as a game. The gifts are put on Britnee's chair with her stocking. I write in the puzzle and game boxes the year and Britnee's name. We put the puzzle together and play the game. We have been thrilled to have one piece missing on some of the puzzles! We know that Britnee was there!

Some of us write notes for Britnee and put them into her stocking.

Holidays are hard, but we keep Britnee in them and make sure she knows she is remembered. And I know that she visits us on those days and celebrates with us.

### **Headstone**

Every Sunday, my husband and I go to Britnee's grave and clean up the headstone. We keep a dozen red cloth roses (we get them from Hobby Lobby) in her grave vase. In the summer we cut back the grass from the base of the headstone. We have come to find that the cemetery is truly a hallowed, sacred place. Going every week is comforting. I think about my daughter's earthly body resting in a beautiful casket underneath the ground, but I know that she isn't in that body anymore. Her spirit joins us at her grave sometimes.

### **Stay in touch with his/her friends.**

Some of Britnee's friends have been very kind and attentive. It is nice to stay in touch with them. They knew her in different ways than I did, and it's nice to hear their stories and see their pictures with her.

### **Plan Something to Look Forward To**

Plan something to look forward to such as a trip, an outing, a hike, etc. We were able to take a family trip to Hawaii after Britnee's passing. It's somewhere she had wanted to go. She had a small life insurance policy through my husband's work. Instead of using the money for other things, we used it to help pay for the trip.

The trip was hard and I missed her terribly, but having the family together was unforgettable. It was beautiful, calming, and Britnee was with us too!

### **Create**

Write songs, stories, poems, take pictures, or create art that honor your loved one.

### **Family History**

Do family history. Get to know your ancestors! After all, your child is up in heaven with them now!

A good app is Family Tree, or go to FamilySearch.org. It's free! I use it on my computer more than on my phone. You can post pictures, documents, and other memories on each family members' page.

Having my ancestors near gives me such strength and comfort. I know that I belong to a family, and I know that I am loved by so many beyond the veil. I rely on their support so much!

This quote has helped a lot: "We have more friends behind the veil than on this side, and they will hail us more joyfully than you were ever welcomed by your parents and friends in this world; and you will rejoice more when you meet them than you ever rejoiced to see a friend in this life; and then we shall go on from step to step, from rejoicing to rejoicing, and from one intelligence and power to another, our happiness becoming more and more exquisite and sensible as we proceed in the words and powers of life," (Brigham Young).

### **Trust in God**

Trust in the Lord that one day, if not soon, than later, you will understand why this happened. I have never been angry at God for this, but it is normal to be angry and wonder why. I trust in the Lord that I will see Britnee again. I know that we will be a family unit for eternity. I can't fathom going through the death of a child without having faith in God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ; faith that all will be well, faith that there is a purpose, faith that it is possible to feel joy and peace even during immense sorrow, and faith that because of Jesus Christ our loved ones live on and we will too!

### **It is Possible to Have Hope and Peace**

There is so much joy that we will feel with our loved ones in the eternities! There is so much hope through our Savior, Jesus Christ! As Britnee wrote in her journal a month before her passing, "I have been very blessed by the Lord, and I can't wait to see my Savior again!"

I wish you all the best as your move forward. My prayers, hope, and love go with you! You can do this!

### **Poems**

#### **"Gone From My Sight"**

By Rev. Luther F. Beecher or Henry Van Dyke

I am standing upon the seashore.  
A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze,  
and starts for the blue ocean.  
She is an object of beauty and strength,  
And I stand and watch her until she hangs like a speck of white cloud  
just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.

Then someone at my side says, "There! she is gone!"

Gone where?

Gone from my sight. That is all.

She is just as large in mast, hull and spar as she was when she left my side,  
and, just as able to bear her load of living freight  
to her destined port.  
Her diminished size is in me-not in her.

And just at the moment  
when someone says, "There! She is gone!"  
There are other eyes watching for her coming,  
and other voices ready to take up the glad shout,  
"Here she comes!"

And that is dying...

### **"The Dragonfly"**

Anonymous

Once, in a little pond, in the muddy water under the lily pads,  
There lived a little water beetle in a community of water beetles.  
They lived a simple and comfortable life in the pond  
With few disturbances and interruptions.

Once in a while, sadness would come to the community  
When one of their fellow beetles would climb the stem of a lily pad  
And would never be seen again.  
They knew when this happened; their friend was dead, gone forever.

Then, one day, one little water beetle felt an irresistible urge to climb up that stem.  
However, she was determined that she would not leave forever.  
She would come back and tell her friends what she had found at the top.

When she reached the top and climbed out of the water onto the surface of the lily pad,  
She was so tired, and the sun felt so warm,  
That she decided she must take a nap.  
As she slept, her body changed and when she woke up,

She had turned into a beautiful blue-tailed dragonfly  
With broad wings and a slender body designed for flying.

So, fly she did!  
And, as she soared she saw the beauty of a whole new world  
And a far superior way of life to what she had never known existed.

Then she remembered her beetle friends  
And how they were thinking by now she was dead.  
She wanted to go back to tell them,  
And explain to them that she was now more alive than she had ever been before.  
Her life had been fulfilled rather than ended.

But, her new body would not go down into the water.  
She could not get back to tell her friends the good news.  
Then she understood that their time would come,  
When they, too, would know what she now knew.  
So, she raised her wings and flew off into her joyous new life!

### **“You Were Prepared”**

For Britnee, love Mom, April 2023

You prepared to go Home,  
You knew the time was near.  
You weren't all alone,  
Your heart held no fear.

It was early for presents,  
You'd bought some for Christmas.  
Your knowledge was heaven sent,  
You even left us a list.

I bought the gifts on the list  
That you hadn't yet bought.  
You were sorely missed,  
In all of our thoughts.

We did your puzzle that day.  
It was missing a piece.  
You weren't so far away,  
Living with the Prince of Peace.

You're with us more than we know,  
You're our guardian angel.  
You tell us you love us so,  
You're happy, we can tell!

I look forward to the time  
When I get to see you again-  
As a child of mine,  
Eternity has just begun.

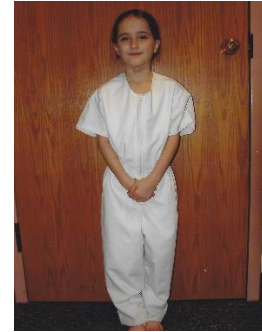
Because of our Savior,  
Jesus Christ, our Older Brother,  
We will live as a family forever,  
With Him, Father, and Mother!



Britnee after getting her first  
Internal Cardioverter Defibrillator  
Age 6



Britnee after the first  
throat surgeries, age 6



Baptism day  
Age 8



With Mr. Bones  
Age 8



Dancing at Disneyland  
Age 9



Britnee at her Make-a-Wish  
Age 16



Prom  
Age 16



Accompanying School Choir  
Age 16



Graduation  
Age 18