

MINUS ONE



In a moment everything can change. A knock on the door from a somber police officer with news of her 10 year old daughter's death did change everything for Julie Rubini and her family. The devastating and unexpected news brought Julie to her knees. The phone call to her husband Brad at work was unbearably difficult. His 20 minute drive home is unimaginable.

Claire Rubini was a delight to her family and friends with her "impish ways, her big smile and her feisty spirit. The oldest of three children, she took her role as big sister seriously. She enjoyed telling her siblings what to do, and was always concocting fun games to play. She loved to dance, sing loudly, play with friends.... and told the best stories to anyone who would listen," Julie reminisced, with tears brimming.

Claire and her sister Kyle had left the day before to go to summer camp for a few days of fun and learning. The first night in a tent, Claire died unexpectedly from a heart condition that had been diagnosed as non-life threatening. This is the story of how Julie and her family survived and thrived, despite this terrible loss.

The first days

"Losing a child is so unimaginable that you get lost in your own grief. You lose so much more than just a child.



Your family is forever changed," Julie said. "Claire's siblings, Kyle and Ian, were 8 and 6 at the time. I needed to find a way to be strong to ensure their well being."

A neighbor who had lost a child to juvenile diabetes was one of the first to come. She shared a book by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff called *The Bereaved Parent*, which helped Julie deal with many aspects of grief, including the bereavement and funeral, guilt, powerlessness, and the impact on her marriage and the other children. She found the book "helped me to get in touch with my feelings and emotions. It helped me to know that there is hope and life – not just survival – after such a tremendous loss."

Girlfriends camped out at their house "and stayed as long as I needed them." Friends, neighbors, and family

listened as Julie worked through her grief, creating a network of support. She questioned them about her concerns for her children – "is this a normal worry or is it because I'm a bereaved mom?"

"My children taught me that we all grieve in our own time and our own way. Kyle was private in her grief, but shared her story in college – writing about personal strength and the loss of Claire. Ian was very open and talked things through, like me," Julie said.

Finding our way

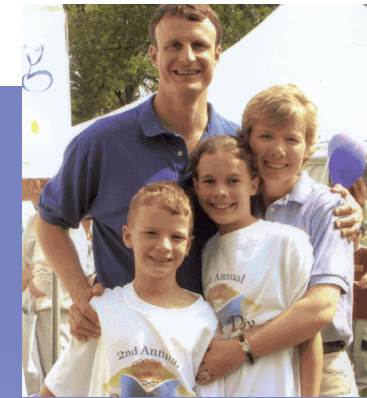
Soon after her death, the family resumed the camping experiences they had shared with Claire. Both Brad and Julie realized how precious time spent with your children is, and they made that a priority. They bought a motor home and traveled to 49 of the 50 states over the next twelve years. They know that they are honoring Claire by focusing on the family and spending time together.

Though it was difficult to let go at first and allow them to have fun again, Kyle and Ian were raised to be independent. They have grown to be loving and giving young adults. Through many "deep and philosophical discussions" they knew they were loved and protected. This summer, Ian joined Kyle for a two-week tour of Italy after she completed her Study Abroad program.

Honoring Claire

Six months after Claire was gone, while on a flight to a wedding, an article in TIME magazine gave Julie the inspiration that soon became Claire's Day. Laura Bush was involved with the Texas Book Festival as First Lady. Since Claire loved to read, and Julie had always turned to the back flap to read with her about the authors and illustrators, this could become a wonderful way to honor her memory.

With the strong support of Brad, and help from family and friends, Claire's Day was launched and now is Northwest Ohio's largest free family book festival. The programs and services embrace her favorite activities, including telling stories, dancing, making crafts, and most of all reading. Authors and illustrators visit every



Claire's day

year and participate in activities featuring their books. C.A.R.E. awards (Claire's Awards for Reading) are presented each year in recognition of children who are nominated as the most improved reader in their school. Last year, over 400 certificates and coupons were awarded during the festival, allowing them to choose their own book from the selection provided by Barnes & Noble.

But Julie didn't stop there. While caring for Kyle and Ian at home, she returned to her love of writing to sustain and challenge her. She wrote a children's book called *Hidden Ohio*, which was published by Mackinac Island Press. The whimsical book is for children, parents, teachers, and anyone who wants to learn more about the "just plain fun things to see and do" in Ohio.



Currently, Julie is working on the final draft of her memoir, tentatively titled *Borrowed*, and will be submitting it to agents soon. The book details their family’s loss, the creation of Claire’s Day and details of how they have moved forward. In addition, Julie is an active community volunteer, and along with Brad, were presented the Maumee River award by the Maumee Chamber of Commerce for contributing to the cultural and educational growth of the city. She currently is seated on Maumee City Council by appointment and is running for an elected seat.

Changed forever

Julie talks often about how she changed her own life. An admitted control freak, she has learned to not worry about things that could potentially happen. She doesn’t sweat the small stuff anymore. She finds things laughable that other people get worked up about.

Living a healthy lifestyle also became a priority. “Regrettably, I was a smoker. I never met a cigarette I couldn’t bum.” After Claire died, she was experiencing pain in her lungs, had bronchitis and sinus issues. With X-rays and a clean bill of health, Julie decided to quit. “I felt it was so selfish to continue smoking knowing that it would ultimately take me from my family sooner than my natural time. I stopped cold turkey.”

Now her focus is on balance and moderation, while enjoying life. After she lost her sister, a former high school track star, to hypertension as a result of the effects of an unhealthy lifestyle, Julie began running in her honor. With her younger brother, she ran a half marathon at Disney World and the Marine Corps



Marathon in Washington, DC. A torn meniscus has limited her recently, but she is back to running and paddle tennis. She also walks, bikes, plays golf and tennis, and loves cross country skiing.

Perhaps the best way to end this story is with the remark that Ian Rubini made as class president as he graduated two years ago from Maumee High School. “We shouldn’t let our dreams stay inside our head at night.... we need to make these dreams a reality.”

Julie and her family are certainly a reminder to us all that despite tragedy, it is still possible to move forward and make your dreams come true.

For more information about Claire’s Day, visit www.claresday.org. To learn more about Julie’s books, visit www.Julierubini.com.