

From a Lullaby to Goodbye



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Comfort and Support for Grieving Parents

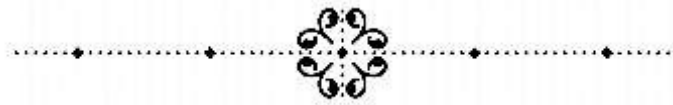


❧ *Patti McKenna* ❧

with Carrie Bower

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An Excerpt



The following story is an excerpt from the book From a Lullaby to Goodbye, Comfort and Support for Grieving Parents, by Patti McKenna.

To obtain a copy of the eBook, please visit:

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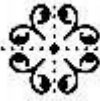
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Sometimes, it is the child we lost who helps us find our way

Following In Ian's Boots

Ron and Holly Miller



My husband's cell phone rang shortly after midnight on Saturday, January 16, 2010. It was the call in the middle of the night—every parent's worst nightmare—you know, the kind that happens to "other people." When Ron answered it, I heard the voice of our 12-year old son's scoutmaster. "Ian has been in an accident...we're at the hospital...here is the doctor..."

I thought, "*What did that goofball do? Break a leg?*" But then I heard the doctor's voice come over the cell phone, "Mr. Miller, are you sitting down?"

Ron and I had been card-carrying DINKs (Dual Income, No Kids) for 15 wonderful years of marriage when we found out that my recent case of the "flu" was actually morning sickness and we were going to be parents. We have said many times that God has a wonderful sense of humor. We could just hear Him say, "Buckle your seatbelts, you two, cause you're in for a ride!" On August 5, 1997, our beautiful, healthy baby boy, Ian Joshua Miller, came into our lives, and we would never be the same again.

Ian turned out to be quite a kid. Although he was an "A" student in school, he was also the class clown. Like an absent-minded professor, he was always losing his papers and forgetting his homework. He loved to go "outside the box" with assignments. We still laugh at the 4th grade biography book report assignment where the kids had to dress like the person who was the subject of their book. Ian chose Betsy Ross! We'll leave the rest to your imagination!

We felt it was important to raise a well-rounded child, and we did our best to expose him to diverse experiences. Although it's challenging to compact 12 years into a paragraph, suffice it to say that cooking, scuba diving, Boy Scouts, theater,

horseback riding, baseball, travel, piano, and saxophone were among his interests, but his true passion was soccer. He was his travel team's goalie, and in 2009, he was thrilled when he was accepted into the Olympic Development Program for goal keepers. We became champion taxi drivers and calendar shufflers.

Most importantly, faith has always been central in our family, and we taught our son about the Lord he came to love. Ian attended school at West-Mont Christian Academy, where God is integral to the curriculum. He was active in his church Sunday School and Youth Group. To Ian, Jesus was Friend and Savior, and loving Him was simply a way of life.

For so many reasons, we fell deeply, totally, and eternally in love with our child.

The weekend beginning Friday, January 15, 2010, was shaping up to be a great one. Ian was going on the annual skiing/snowboarding weekend with his Boy Scout troop, and Ron and I were going to my brother and sister-in-law's for the weekend. I dropped Ian off at the Boy Scout troop headquarters and kissed him goodbye. At the time, I had no idea how final that goodbye kiss would be.

After a six-hour bus ride to the ski resort, the scouts were permitted to sled on the bunny hill for a couple hours that evening. Although he had previously been sharing a toboggan with another scout, for the last run, he chose to go down alone on a plastic saucer. As he raced down the hill, the saucer rotated so that Ian was soaring down the hill backwards. Unable to see where he was going, Ian hit a ski lift tower at full speed and suffered fatal blunt force trauma to the brain.

During the phone conversation, the emergency room doctor told us that she had been working on Ian for over an hour and he was non-responsive. They were going to try for a little while longer, but the prospect was grim. Ron, my brother, Brad, and I left immediately and arrived at the hospital around 3 am. As we walked through the emergency room door, the doctor's face told us everything. We knew that our baby was gone.

The hospital staff was so very kind. They allowed us to spend as much time with Ian as we wished. Although he had suffered such a traumatic internal injury, externally, he was just perfect, simply appearing to be asleep. We held him and told him how much we loved him. Ron, Ian, and I had our last "family hug" that night.

The coroner was anxiously waiting for us when we came out from our time with Ian. He showed us a little piece of paper that they had found, of all places, in Ian's snow boot. Printed on the scrap of paper was a Bible verse, James 1:2-4, which said:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

All of us were aghast. Of all the pieces of scripture in the Bible, here was a message to us to persevere in the face of the greatest trial of our life, the loss of our precious son. It was extremely emotional for all of us, including the coroner, the scoutmasters, and the hospital staff. That night, in the midst of unspeakable tragedy, God had directly touched each one of us.

During those awful days following Ian's heaven going, we were amazed at the outpouring of love and support from so many people. It occurred to me then that I had lived a very happy life and had never known what it felt like to have a truly broken heart. I know now. I also know just how much the love from all those people sustained us during those dark days—from our church family, Ian's school family, our colleagues at work, friends, family, scouts, soccer friends, and so many people we didn't even know. As Ian's story hit the AP and the press began to circulate it, we felt the expanding network of so many wonderful people holding us up in prayer, like a warm embrace. They continue to do so, a year later. And Ron and I held onto each other.

How were we to go on without our child? Our mandate found in Ian's boot was to persevere. Persevere? How? We had lost our baby, our only child, the center of our lives. My stomach ached. Grief came washing over us in waves. We got physically sick. We would break down unexpectedly in places like the grocery store (to this day, I cannot look at a six-pack of IBC Root Beer without crying). Some people avoided us because they "just didn't know what to say." Others simply go on with life, but are uncomfortable talking about Ian. We watch his classmates and friends grow and mature, but our Ian is frozen forever at age twelve. And to me, the most painful thing is to know that as long as I'm on this earth, no one will ever again call me "Mom." *Persevere?*

Our very wise grief counselor gave us an "ah-ha" moment. Judy told us that for twelve years, we had focused all of our energy on one little person. The little

person was gone, but our energy was not. We needed to find an outlet for that energy. About a month later, Coventry Youth Soccer Association gave us the opportunity.

Ian's soccer club is comprised of wonderful kids and parents, all of whom have become dear friends. Ian's death rocked their world, and they responded with a wonderful tribute: The First Annual Ian Miller Celebration Soccer Tournament, which was held in July 2010. The tournament committee asked us how we would like part of the proceeds to be used. Initially, we considered a college scholarship fund for a boy and a girl in our community. Then, we realized that we had the opportunity to touch more than just two people. The answer was there all the time: God had left the message in Ian's boot. We would establish a non-profit focused on giving shoes and boots to those in need, wherever they may be. And, we would spread Ian's story of faith in Jesus. So our public charity was born: In Ian's Boots, A Mission for Soles.

At this writing, In Ian's Boots, Inc., is about six months old. In the few months since Ian's been gone, we have been able to ship 200 pairs of baby shoes to an orphanage for 'special needs' children in China and have supported several missions for impoverished families and shelters here in the States with hundreds of pairs of shoes. We are also hosting an annual soccer tournament in a very poor region of Honduras (giving away cleats, uniforms, etc.) and giving shoes to the folks in the villages where those kids live. Ian would love to know that we are spreading the word of his faith via the vehicle of soccer!

We have just passed the first anniversary of Ian's heaven going. We've done the cycle of holidays, Ian's birthday, and each season without our little one. It is still agony. We still cry ourselves to sleep. We still suffer physical pain. Sometimes it hurts more now than it did a year ago, since we were numbed with shock then. But, on the other hand, we know that Ian is alive. He is not suffering with brain trauma. And because we persevere, our faith really does grow stronger. Working for others through the vehicle of In Ian's Boots, Inc., helps us tremendously. Persevere? Yes. We will persevere, and I know I will see Ian again and I'll hear him call me Mom. And that will be "pure joy."

Holly Wastler-Miller and her husband, **Ron Miller**, are the parents of one son, in heaven. Holly is a Marketing Manager for a Fortune 500 communications company, and Ron is a consultant specializing in technology applications for high-end clients. They live in Southeastern Pennsylvania with Ian's beloved cat, Abby. They invite you to visit their website: www.iniansboots.org.