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Today is an incredibly difficult and bittersweet day. I am filled with pride as I remember and speak about what an amazing grandson we had, and grief-stricken at speaking about how devastated I am at his loss.

I stand here today, well, I sit here today, try and explain the immense pain that me and everyone in my family continues to endure daily. But how do I do that? What words carry the strength and impact to really ensure you feel the joy and love that JJ created and the impact of his death?

There aren't any. No words can truly describe and fully demonstrate the depth of pain his death has created in our hearts and our lives. The loss of a grandchild is immensely painful under normal circumstances for any grandparent. The death of a grandchild at the hands of another brings pain that is indescribable.

If you remember, JJ was born with the name Canaan Todd Trahan. He was born May 25, 2012. He would have celebrated his 12th birthday just a few short days ago. I will call him Canaan while I talk about his first year of life because that is who he was then. He was born a fighter, 10 weeks premature, weighing in at a tiny but mighty 2 pounds and 14 ounces. From minutes of being born, he was transferred to a hospital with a neonatal intensive care unit
where he spent weeks fighting to grow.

He was about two hours old when I saw him for the first time. Seeing him, I knew he was my grandson. He was the mirror image of my son Todd, his biological father. Todd has always loved him and always will. Canaan's death has changed his life forever. While he was in the NICU, I was only able to see him for a few minutes at a time until I was notified he would be released to us within days. 25 years since I had a new baby at home and never a preemie with all their special needs. Larry and I didn't hesitate. Immediately we said yes.

The only place we wanted him to be was home with us. The night before he was discharged, I spent the night in a little room next to the NICU talking to nurses and learning things that our little preemie grandbaby would need. The next day, it was time to leave. The nurse brought a wheelchair in and said, have a seat. We'll get you out of here. I looked at her, perplexed. I said, I don't need a wheelchair. I can walk. She let me know that it was hospital policy. I sat in the wheelchair, took Canaan in my arms, and was wheeled out of the hospital like a new mama.

I felt so much pride for this little baby who had not only overcome being born 10 weeks early, but also being born with illicit substance in his tiny little body. He was ready to come home well before he was expected and my pride in him knew no bounds. We knew then that he was a

champion and so special. That day began an amazing experience of raising our cherished little man.

While Canaan had been in the NICU, he spent much time hooked up to machines and monitors that he didn't get to get snuggled all day, every day, like a typical newborn. The noises and routines of the NICU were gone, and it was such a huge change for him. His first night home, I bathed him. He cried so hard, and I cried along with him. My heart was so heavy with the disadvantages he was experiencing through no choice of his own.

My husband, Larry, who is Pawpaw, asked me to give Canaan to him. He placed Cannaan on his bare chest and wrapped his robe around him, gently breathing on his head until he stopped crying and fell asleep. It became a daily occurrence, part of our routine. He would hold him for hours so Canaan would feel loved, comforted, and secure. I saw my husband in a new light, seeing what type of daddy he was to a newborn.

It was like Canaan made us young newlyweds. Larry jumped in, feet first, and did all the things a new father should and more. It made our relationship grow and gave us new strength. Canaan was our strength, and we were his comfort. His first six months, we went to countless doctor appointments for his host of medical problems. We went to appointments with doctors for his heart, kidney, urology problems, speech, occupational therapists, and regular pediatricians for the things that every baby does. We were always on the move, going from one doctor to another, constantly working to ensure he thrived and grew. That, along with loving him, was our number one priority.

At each appointment, it was pretty much guaranteed I would cry. It hurt so badly to see everything he was experiencing, not only from being born prematurely with drugs in his system. The decision was made to place Canaan with Charles and Lori after they approached us with their desire to have a child of their own. We agonized over the decision, but knew from our past interactions with them that it was the right one. Charles and Lori were granted custody a few short months later.

It was then Canaan became JJ. It was happy and devastating at the same time. We loved raising him. We gave all our love and energy, ensuring he grew, thrived, and knew unconditional love. That time was priceless, and his growth and milestones were evidence of our love for him. But we knew this was the best decision for his future, to have siblings and access to the types of schools and services we didn't have available in Lake Charles. When he left, I felt a grief that can only be compared to the grief of losing someone to death, which is now a feeling we all know too well.

We barely made it 30 days before we were standing on Charles' steps, ready to love on our baby. When the door opened, there he was in his little baby walker. I saw tears in his eyes at seeing us

right along with the huge toothless grin. It was clear that he missed us too. Before I could take a step, Larry swooped him up in his arms, and at 11 months old, he wrapped his tiny arms around Larry, laying his head on him. The connection was still so strong. We never lost that special connection with our sweet little man. And we were always his love, comfort, and safety. It is so crushing that his energy and adventures were [takes break due to crying.]

I made it a few months before I had to get to my JJ, so in November of 2014, I made my first trip to Hawaii, quickly returning once again in December with Larry. We would visit about every four to five months because it was such a long trip to Hawaii from Louisiana. One we were happy to make and we stayed for as long as possible, normally 10 to 14 days. We needed to soak up as much JJ time as we could.

I remember one trip in the winter of 2015, JJ stayed home with me while Charles and Lori went to church. I was making a big pot of gumbo. I had to bring a little bit of Louisiana to Charles and JJ was excited to help me. We pulled up a stool and he poured in ingredient after ingredient. I can still see him standing next to me intently pouring chicken broth in the pot. Afterwards, he climbed on the counter and just watched, taking it all in. It is a memory that I will always cherish and dearly hold on to.

During our visits, Charles and Lori would comment on how JJ would do things with us that were stark contrasts for them. He always awoke at the crack of dawn, never sleeping any later. When visiting, we would have JJ sleep with us. He would sleep until nine or 10 o'clock, which astonished them. There was never a doubt he had an innate and unbroken attachment to us.

Each visit, no matter where they live, Lori always expressed her deep appreciation that we gave them the greatest gift ever. That is just one part of why this causes so much pain. It is a betrayal that can't be explained. JJ was incredibly smart. He was reading on a middle school level by the time he was four. I remember being in a store with him on the aisle with eye drops and there he was reading off the labels, Visine, cysteine, antihistamine. One long word after another, I hadn't seen him do that before and I was blown away. He was brilliant. He would occasionally stumble on a syllable, but we took the time to go through and help him figure it out. But wow, the amount of awe I was in still makes me smile and feel the same pride I did that day.

As he got a little older, he was enrolled in a private academy in Arizona, which focused on every aspect of educating and empowering children like JJ. He loved his school and they loved him. It was there where it was discovered another level of brilliance JJ possessed. I remember when Charles told us he was a math savant. He could calculate anything.

I continually wonder what he would have become. What type of man would he have become? Not only was JJ smart, but he was also fun, a very contented child, healthy, compassionate, and

empathetic. JJ didn't show his empathy and compassion with hugs and kisses. In fact, you had to chase him down for those kisses. Instead, he showed his empathy and compassion with gentle touches and soft tones when he spoke. He would constantly stop to ask people if they were okay, if he could see they were hurt. His world was fascinating and exciting due to his huge imagination. He would put on concerts for his stuffed animals under our enormous tree, playing the drums on buckets, pots, and pans. The joy he exuded and shared can't be measured. I loved watching him, taking him in, and seeing how he approached the world. I never got enough of him. Now I've had all I will for the rest of my life and only have memories.

When Charles and Lori married, Tylee was three years old. She was the most precious, blonde-haired, blue-eyed little girl. Tylee was an absolute mama's girl, which there was never a doubt. I was thrilled to have a new niece, especially one as sweet as her. Larry and I were driving to Austin, Texas to visit them on one of many visits, and we passed a roadside stand selling swings made from old tires. I saw one that was a horse complete with a saddle and stirrups. I grabbed Larry's arm and said, stop, we have to get that for Tylee. Her brother Colby and stepbrothers Cole and Zach were always around her. She needed something just for her, and she loved it.

Tylee was nine years old when JJ became her little brother. She loved him so incredibly much, and he loved her right back. She doted on him, and he loved every minute of attention he got from his big sister. That love is displayed in the last photo taken of them together at Yellowstone, both grinning and hugging each other.

As a big sister, Tylee would put notes on her bedroom door, one being, do not enter. As you can assume, even though JJ could read and interpret words and their meanings, it didn't mean he listened. After all, isn't that what little brothers do? He would burst into her room. She would laugh, tease, and tell him to get out. I think she did it on purpose just to joke and play with them. It was hilarious to see them interact and warmed our hearts seeing them together.

JJ adored our niece, Maddie. On her eighth birthday in October of 2020, we were celebrating and singing Happy Birthday to her. The glow of the candles shining on her face, the huge grin that kids get during the singing hit me like a truck. I took the keys from Larry and went to the car and just bawled until I could compose myself enough to rejoin the party. It was the moment I knew that JJ didn't get his eighth birthday song, and it broke me. It was just so wrong. He didn't get to have that joy and feeling of love and celebration of his birthday.

It is now grief that we are confronted with yearly, a stark and blaring reminder that we are never going to be able to celebrate that joy with him again. We never know when one of those moments will hit, but I can tell you there have been too many situations in the past few years where we were slammed with the fact that JJ won't hit another milestone.

JJ loved school, loved his families, friends and cousins, especially his cousin, Braxy, Brandon Boudreaux's oldest son. Those two had such a special bond and love for each other. There were so many lives he touched that filled the immense pain and loss of him being gone. Four of our grandchildren near JJ's age often tell us how they love and miss him. It is heartbreaking to have a conversation with an 11 or 12 year old. How do you make them feel okay about it or safe?

So yes, this is our life now, trying to comfort our other grandchildren while they try to comfort us. The constant question remains, who would he have become? What kind of man would he have been? Would he be a famous scientist with incredible math skills? What would his amazing imagination have bloomed into? Would he have been the next Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs, Tim Burton, Elon Musk?

We will never know, but we do know how incredibly special he was to us and now to countless others just by looking around this room. I can't express just how much I wish I could have more time to create memories with him and with Charles.

There's a hole in my heart, in the hearts of every member of my family that can never be filled and will remain for the rest of my life.

Thank you.