

Thank you so much for allowing us to speak to you today regarding our daughters, Anna and Abigail.

This is Anna. When this photo was taken she was 6 years old and had just entered 1st grade at a new school. Her principal called me 3 weeks into school and shared with me what a great young lady Anna was and how grateful she was to have her be part of their school community. She wasn't telling me anything I didn't already know, I was and will forever will be very proud my girl. Anna was shy around those she didn't know but energetic and a risk taker around those she felt comfortable with. She was a nurturer to her core, always taking care of her dolls and the littles in our neighborhood. She was strong, courageous and extremely fast. The boys in our neighborhood loved challenging her to foot races, she smoked them every time. She rode horses, climbed trees and loved with her entire heart. She gave the best hugs, wrapping her arms around me and squeezing with all her mite. ~ She is my girl.



This is Abigail, my step-daughter although, in our family, we never used the word step. When this photo was taken Abigail was 11, a pre-teen, she had just started 6th grade and was looking forward to being a real teenager, driving and going to college ~ which she had already been saving up for. Abigail was a dreamer, always trying to figure out what the next phase of her life was going to be like. She protected those who couldn't protect themselves, she stood up when no one else would and she held tight to what she knew was right. She used her voice to not only share her ideas but also to entertain. She was a theater kid to her core and loved being on stage. She is my bright star.



On Oct. 20th 2013, not even a month after these photos were taken, my girls were involved in an accident in front of our house. Anna and Abigail, doing what many kids did that day, due to the odd dry weather we were having, were playing and hiding in a giant pile of leaves. At the same time, an 19 year old girl, driving South on our street drove through that pile of leaves after

being prompted by her passengers, her boyfriend and brother. She did not see my girls in the leaves prior to driving through them but did not stop after she knew she hit something. What happened in front of my house that day was a perfect storm that changed our lives and our hearts forever.

Anna, being little, went to Heaven instantly. Although it breaks my heart that I can no longer hold her I am grateful that she felt no pain that day. She was playing and then she was in Heaven. Abigail being a little bigger, and having one last job to do before she joined her sister, was life flighted to Randall Children's Hospital, where a team of doctors and nurses found perfect matches for her organs and tissue. She gave life to 4 people and sight to 1 with her organ and tissue donations.

I remember standing on the side of the road waiting to hold my Anna one last time. I was told initially that it was a possibility once they, the 30+ officers and firefighters, figured out what had happened. When the coroner arrived I remember having a conversation with her and one of the detectives. Because they didn't know what happened ~ there wasn't a car or a driver that had stopped ~ it was now a crime that needed to be solved. With that said, they informed me that Anna was evidence and I couldn't hold her or see her. I remember telling them that I wasn't going to press charges because I knew in my heart that it was an accident and the person that caused it was going to feel horrible when they found out what they had done. I remember my broken heart feeling bad for them.

A few days later we found out that wasn't the case. Approximately 5 min. after my girls were hit one of the passengers in the car rode his bike to the scene where he engaged with my husband who was frantic and in the process of calling 911. He rode his bike back home, not even a 1/2 block from the scene, and told the driver and the other passenger what had happened, they had hit two children. At that point they made a decision that impacted our family in a way that is immeasurable. They got in their car and left, went to Walmart, went and had ice cream, came back to their house (passing the scene once again) and went to bed. The next day they washed their car, attempting to get rid of any evidence that may have still been there.

With a tip from a neighbor, the driver and passengers were questioned by the police a couple days later and the truth was revealed. I remember thinking that I was grateful that we knew what had happened, I was devastated by the news, but at least now we knew. There were no unanswered questions. That part was over so I thought...

The driver of the car plead not guilty to the charge of hit and run for failing to identify herself as the driver in the deadly crash. There was to be a trial, where, over the course of many days we had to relive our worst nightmare again and again, in excruciating, stark detail, and in public. On Jan, 31st of 2014, the public, in the form of the jury, found her guilty with little deliberation of two counts of a felony hit and run for failing to identify herself as the driver in the deadly crash. The driver made a horrible decision on Oct. 20 and the consequences to that behavior was being found guilty by a jury on that day.

At the sentencing I forgave her and asked the judge for her to receive no jail time. She was young and I knew that if I didn't forgive her that I would be held hostage by anger and bitterness for the rest of my days. She said she was sorry and that she wished she would have made different decisions. I believed her. I wanted to believe that she would do good in this world in honor of my girls and she would remember them every moment of her life.

She was sentenced to three years of formal probation and 250 hours of community service.

Months later there was an appeal brought forth and I remember distinctly the sick feeling in my gut when Washington County prosecutor Bracken McKey called to let us know. We were once again heartbroken and couldn't understand how it was even possible that anyone would feel that justice wasn't served that day in the courtroom when she was found guilty. She knew she caused injury to someone minutes after the accident and made a conscious decision not to return. Bracken explained the "loophole" in the law ~ that because my girls weren't asking for help she had no obligation to return. That made no sense to me because they weren't able to ask for help. Anna was already in Heaven, she was no longer there. Abigail wasn't conscious nor did she ever regain consciousness. He went on to talk about the letter of the law vs. the nature of the law. I remember feeling so sad that the two didn't match up. Once again we had to relive our tragedy in the public light, with the news media outside our house.

We were in limbo for years wondering what would happen next.

On May 3rd of last year I once again received a call from Bracken letting me know that the conviction was overturned and the appeal won because Oregon law "does not require a defendant to return to the scene of the accident after he or she has left the scene and later learns that he or she was involved in an accident that injured or killed another person." This was the letter of the law and that was it.

I am not only a mother but have also been a teacher for the past 17 years and have worked with hundreds of children throughout my life. Two of the greatest lessons I feel we can teach our children is knowing how our actions impact others and to be empathetic to one another. You know this scenario, a child is running on the playground and runs into another child but instead of stopping they keep going with total disregard to the other child. Countless times I have guided my students and my own children through the process of checking in with those they “accidentally” hurt. When involved in an “accident,” whether on the playgrounds or with their siblings doing every day things, teaching kids to have empathy for others is so important. Teaching kids to own their behavior, whether it was an accident or not, is so important. The countless teachable moments that I have engaged in throughout my years of working with kids came to the forefront of my mind when learning of this “loophole” in the law.

Imagine if no one ever kept kids accountable for their actions out on the playground when bumps and bruises were caused by accidents. Imagine if there was no empathy amongst our kids with those around them.

I have no doubt that if the driver of the car came back to the scene that day I would have hugged her and we would have moved forward together. If she would have come back, I would have held my Anna one last time. Unfortunately that wasn't the case and the way the current law stands she had no obligation to identify herself as the person who was involved in the accident. This has caused our family a tremendous amount of added grief in a situation where our grief is already immeasurable.

My ask for all of you today is to consider what the right thing to do is after finding out you were involved in an accident and in that, consider closing the loophole in the current law. In making this change someone in the future, already trying to survive a perfect storm, will not be faced with what we have gone through the past 4 years. Years of reliving tragedy. If the law changes our girls will have had a small piece of making that happen and that will make us very proud. I can't go watch Abigail on the stage and I can't watch Anna ride her big horse Teva anymore, but what I could say is that my girls helped change a law that was broken.

Six months after our girls went to Heaven we decided that we did not want our girls lives to be marked by the tragedy but rather the love and joy they shared with those while they were here and were continuing to share now that they were in Heaven. We started a movement, begun by our girls at our marriage, of sharing Love Rocks - river rocks with fabric hearts on them. Love Rocks are found or given to people, when they least expect them and each rock shares a little bit of our daughters love and joy. They have been spread to all 7 continents over the past 4 years and, because of them (and many other reasons), when people say our girls names they smile.

We now live a life where our baseline emotion is sadness. Our hearts hurt every second of every day. Through making a choice to focus on our girls love and joy we have been able to see the light that their legacy has brought to so many. We are so grateful for this light because it, along with our faith and trust in God, has helped us to survive through our grief.

A perfect Fall day for me now is when I go the Farmer's Market in our town and a young child yells, "look it's Anna and Abby's mom." My girls will never be forgotten.

This past fall, Nov. 13 to be exact, Anna would have turned 11, a pre-teen as I'm sure she would have reminded us daily like her sister. This is the first year that it was hard for me to imagine what my girl would want for her special day. I'm sure baby dolls would be something of the past - or maybe not. This year we decided to celebrate by showing her little sister Alice all of Anna's favorite places ~ the zoo, our local coffee shop where we got her favorite treat and dinner with her best friends family where we toasted her with milkshakes ~ vanilla her favorite.

On Dec. 27th, Abigail would have turned 16. This is a big one for us because I have no doubt whatsoever that she would have been studying diligently and practicing every chance she got so that she could get her driver's license and be the "best driver ever." On Abigail's special day her dad, her oldest sister, 2 of her best friends and I spent the morning sharing her organ donation story with the employees of the DMV. I shared with them that I knew that I needed to be there on her 16th birthday because that is where I would be if she was here. We left a big basket of Love Rocks for all those who came in to get their license that day.

A few days later I received a message from a mom who knew our story well. She had gone to the DMV with her son on the 27th so he could take his test. She shared how excited he was when he was given one of Abigail's Love Rocks. He said it was sign and that he had to pass just for her. I have no doubt that my girl would have passed her test that day and taken the responsibility of driving very seriously.

Thank you so much for allowing us to share our story. No matter what happens after today, we will always continue to live a life that honors our girls by sharing love and joy. They have taught us, along with so many others, what it truly means to live a life that is love drenched. We are and will forever be extremely blessed to be Anna and Abigail's parents.

