

JOHN SWARTZENDRUBER

January 13, 1980 to August 26, 2001

I will never forget waking up to a beautiful Saturday morning August 25th, 2001 looking out over our meadow feeling so great about life and all it had to offer.

Our daughter Beth was in her junior year at Northwestern College in Minneapolis and our son John was starting his senior year at the University of Northern Iowa, soon to graduate and join Jeff and me at Image Pointe.

Yet, somehow it didn't seem like your typical Saturday to me but no way did I realize why. Nevertheless, Jeff and I felt like we wanted to call John and see if he wanted to spend the day with us. He had just purchased his first home and we knew for sure there would be something we could do to help fix it up. We soon were all together, worked on the house a bit and went to his favorite restaurant. Of course he just happened to need a new grill that dad helped purchase for a barbecue that night with friends. After setting up the grill we said our good byes and as always saying, "We love you so much son," and John's grateful spirit replying, "Thanks Dad and Mom, I had a really great day, I love you both so much."

We had an absolute fantastic day and when we left our son, we felt so blessed in our spirit to see what a great kid he turned out to be. Over and over the excitement would come over us realizing how soon John would be graduated with his business degree and would start helping us grow and run our company, Image Pointe. Wow, what family wouldn't look forward to that?

We found out the barbecue was a huge success and everyone had plenty of food and lots of fun. Soon the party was moved to another friend's home for a celebration of their last day before college classes. John never drank alcohol but always loved being with his friends, at times his friends even said they would not drink too much at their parties because if they did, John would leave and it seemed like once John left the party the fun was over.

John would often tell us, "*It's not what life can give to you; it's what you can give back to life.*" He would often come home because he hated seeing his friends drink, he would tell us he never understood why people had to drink to have fun in life.

As the evening grew longer John left the party only to get a call back that one of his buddies was very drunk and asked if John could take him home. They didn't feel he was able to make it home without a driver. Of course John did not hesitate to take his friend home. He went to pick his buddy up and was within 2 blocks of dropping his friend off at his home when they were struck head on by a 16 year old kid driving at a rate of 80 miles per hour in a 25 mph speed zone. The driver and his 17 year old passenger both had alcohol levels well over the Iowa limit.

The impact of the accident actually shoved the steering wheel into John's chest, both his legs were crushed and we soon found out John had internal bleeding which they could not stop.

Jeff and I got a call immediately and were able to make it to the accident scene, a scene which a mother and father never, would imagine coming upon with one of their children involved and for sure never hoped to.

John was transported to our local hospital and soon over 100 friends and family members came to pray for our son and support us.

But soon our doctor, who we knew for years came up to us, leaned his head against the wall, and said with a broken tone, "I did all I could do, but it just wasn't enough." Our son died six hours after the accident.

Accident? This seems odd to me to call it an accident when the other three kids, who were all totally drunk, knew full well the effects of drinking and driving could cause. All three of the other kids involved came away from this horrible scene with only minor injuries. And no, we are not bitter and no, we do not hate anyone. In fact if you would have known John you would know he would hate that if we did, yet you just wonder why people feel the need to drink?

John had over 1200 family members and friends attend his memorial service, to this very day people still mention how "life just isn't the same without John". Maybe John had a key to life we all can take hold of, *"It's not what you can take from life that matters it is what you can give back to life that makes life good."*

Life changed for our family that night and of course not all for the better, yet we have a greater heart for hurting families like never before.

You never know, our friends, what might be around that corner of your life, we sure didn't.

Jeff and Pat Swartzendruber

"It's not what life can give to you; it's what you can give back to life."

-John Swartzendruber