

# “HELLO, AND GOODBYE.....”

In the blink of an eye

by Judy and Joe Micieli



Nick Micieli

**N**icky was our cherished son, our only child. He was a very special blessing. You see, it took some time before I was able to have a child; then, later in my pregnancy I developed toxemia and needed to be hospitalized. The concern was that Nicky might be born premature due to the toxicity, resulting in the possibility of his lungs not being fully developed (among other concerns). After 30 days of being hospitalized, in the early morning hours of May 24, 1990 I hemorrhaged and an emergency C-section needed to be performed. Thankfully, we both survived the trauma. Nicholas Joseph Micieli was born healthy, lungs fully developed. I knew he was a very special gift right from the start.

As a little boy, Nicky was his mother's son (yes, a mama's boy). He was quiet and loved to be cuddled and held. It seemed that he was always holding my hand, and tugging on my sleeve. He was my shadow, followed me everywhere. We were as close as a mother and son could possibly be, and that never changed.

One Mother's Day, Nick couldn't wait to give me "something." The Saturday before, he called me to his room, took me by the hand and sat me on his bed, handing me a small box. The look on his face was priceless – it brings me to tears just remembering the love and pride that beamed from his eyes, having bought his mom such a beautiful and special gift: a gold necklace with a small, delicate cross. A few weeks later, we were at one of Nick's soccer games, and the necklace broke off my neck. I was in tears, on my hands and knees, combing the grass in search of it. Other moms tried to help. I never did retrieve it, and I felt so bad. Nick was upset on the drive home, but later that

afternoon he playfully started wrestling with me to get me laughing. He knew how badly I felt.

Nicky loved to hang out with dad, too, working on his little bubble lawn mower and following daddy around the back yard, handing him his tools and helping him wash the car.

For Nick's fifth birthday we bought him a battery-operated jeep. He would only allow one person to ride with him in that jeep, and that was his friend, Danielle, who also was five. We joked that this is when he started dating, as he used to drive the jeep from our house to hers (just four doors down), park it in the driveway, walk to the door and "pick her up", and take her for a ride to the neighborhood park or our backyard. But if another child came running because he or she wanted a ride, Nick would get in his jeep and "drive away."

As Nick grew older, mom was the one who taught him about life, faith, God, relationships, friendship, selfless love, forgiveness

and all those very important life lessons. I helped him with homework, too, often chatting about what he might like to pursue in life, career, etc. He and dad shared the practical things in daily life: employment, saving money, cars, future goals, etc.

As Nick grew into manhood, as any parent probably does I often wondered if all of those life lessons that we discussed; if all of those stern and sometimes heated conversations we'd had for his own good actually sunk in. By the time Nick died at the young and untimely age of 22, I was certain that he had listened, and listened well.

Nick's heart was genuine, gentle, compassionate and selfless. His life was full of passion and purpose, yet so simple. To love and be loved was his deepest desire. Though he could be stubborn and temperamental, he was soft-spoken and kind. He was passionate in maintaining his convictions, and stood up for what he felt was right. He was proud of his Italian Canadian heritage and maintained a wonderful sense of humor.

Just a few weeks before Nick died, he purchased a sporty Infinity coupe. I co-signed for the loan. When we picked it up, I opened my arms to get a hug ... he opened his arms, walked right by me, and HUGGED THE SPORTS CAR!

Nick was quick to forgive, and he believed in second chance – countless chances. He wore his heart on his sleeve. We are so proud of the young man he had become.

I was at work that Monday morning. The sky was clear, the air was warm, there was no breeze, and the sun was shining brightly. I had been having a decent day so far. I remember glancing at my wristwatch on the way to having a bite to eat. It was 11:58 am on June 18th. My phone rang. The display read "urgent." (I felt this wave of PEACE come over me, as though God was with me.) It was my husband, Joe. He told me that he'd just received a phone call from Nick's boss saying that Nick was involved in a serious accident, and that he was on his way to Sunnybrook Hospital. I quickly hustled out of the building, and drove myself home to meet my husband. God must have been with me, because I managed to control my emotions as I drove. By the time I got to the house, the police had arrived. First, the officers said that Nick was being airlifted to Sunnybrook, then that he was being rerouted to Etobicoke General.

It seemed as though it took us an eternity to get to the hospital. When we arrived, we were literally pulled into a private room until moments later, when the attending physician came in to tell us that Nick had passed away. Of course, at this point, I completely lost control of my emotions, and I began crying out bible verses to draw comfort. I asked to see a pastor. This wonderful, caring person cried with us as we openly prayed the 23rd Psalm.

The drive home was solemn. We felt lonely and empty. We were completely broken, yet in shock. Our baby boy was gone.

Nick was attending college at the time, hoping to become a physiotherapist and work at Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto, Ontario (he loved kids, and was great with them). Between semesters, Nick accepted a summer position with a company that placed and removed traffic counters on regional roads. This concerned me for obvious reasons. I'd questioned Nick whether the company had an HR department (no), health and safety training (no), and all possible and pertinent safety measures in place while he was working on the roads ("mom, you worry too much...I'm fine"). I was assured that Nick's cube van had flashing lights as bright as an ambulance, bright orange caution cones were quickly set up around the van when working on the roads, and employees wore brightly-colored shirts with a fluorescent green and orange reflective vest at all times.

Nick had only worked for this particular employer for about six or seven weeks. He was promoted to a supervisor position within that very short period... which, again, I didn't feel comfortable with at all. At that point, Nick was introduced to a new employee, his new partner. Nick was 22. His partner was slightly younger. Having only worked seven weeks, and now training a new employee, just didn't sit well with me and my husband. We learned this after the accident. What employer in his/her right mind would set this up? Joe and I were angry, yet helpless. What was done was done.

Nick had just pulled to one side of Trafalgar Road, near Britannia, in Milton, Ontario. Caution signals were on, orange safety cones in place, and proper protective equipment worn. He and his partner had just been out of the work van approximately two minutes, one on each side of the van, when the van was hit by a pickup truck driven by a 61-year-old gentleman using his cell phone! Yes, a distracted driver was on his cell phone with his dog's groomer.

Later we learned that although the company had been in business more than 16

years, it had never been inspected by the Ministry of Labour. There had never been anyone checking in on the safety and well-being of employees working on regional roads!! Why??? Why had it taken the horrific death of my precious son? When I learned this, I began to shake, and sob and voiced what was in my heart at the time, and hung up the phone. I collapsed.

hearts to forgive those involved. However, moving forward, we trust that more stringent measures will and are being taken to reduce the probability of such a tragic end to a dear and valued life, and the devastation of yet another family.

Life is different now. Not only have we lost Nick, we've lost our identities, and our future. There will be no college graduation day, no

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Here we are, more than four years later, still struggling through this painful, never-ending journey of grief.

The company has since been charged and found guilty of failing to do everything they could have and should have done to ensure the safety and well-being of my Nick, his partner, and other employees. They were slapped with a "hefty" fine of \$125,000. They continue to be in business. However, it is now mandatory to have a second vehicle set up for safety purposes behind the work van, on roads with speed limits over 80 km/h.

The driver of the pickup was charged with careless driving and was placed on a driving curfew for about two years, and fined about \$2000.

I acknowledge that mistakes happen, and my husband and I have both found it in our

wedding day, no daughter-in-law, no grandchildren, no joyful pride in witnessing Nick as a loving, wonderful husband and dad. No more memories to be made. Time has stood still for us. It is difficult to move forward, but move forward we must.

Since 2013, Joe and I facilitate a bereavement support group for grieving parents known as "Walk with Me" in the Niagara area. Thankfully, it has proven to be a blessing to other moms and dads who are searching for help, yearning and longing for others to acknowledge that what they are feeling is "ok" ... and that they will be "ok." For us, we get more out of facilitating the group than we could ever give!

May God be with us as we try to live our lives purposefully, and in His strength.



Nick was a special gift right from the start