

## Compassion Story of the Month

*With Brattleboro voting overwhelmingly to become part of the international Charter for Compassion, the Reformer and The Commons have agreed to publish a "compassion story of the month." This is the fourteenth. Information on submissions from Brattleboro area residents is offered below.*

### **Compassion Happenings that have Helped Ease the Pain**

**By Beverly Miller**

My son Nicholas Mattingley died four years ago of an overdose at the age of 35. It was, by a wide margin, the worst experience of my life – and I've had some bad ones. I asked myself at the time whether it's actually possible to survive such insufferable pain.

Since that time, I have been the recipient of some remarkable acts of compassion, and what might be called "compassionate happenings" – and it's those very acts and happenings that have allowed me to move forward with my life, while continuing to carry Nic's life and his memory deep in my heart.

Let me tell you about three of them that weren't at all predictable.

Some of you will remember the candlelight vigil organized on the Brattleboro Common one year ago by the Turning Point of Windham County Recovery Center, an organization helping persons struggling with addiction. I'd been invited to speak about what our community might do about the opioid epidemic, and to share any wisdom I might have acquired as a bereaved mother of a child who died from an overdose, with others who have experienced such a loss.

I remember leaving the vigil, still with such a heavy heart, having no idea that my words might have precipitated a truly remarkable gift. A week or so after the vigil, my daughter, Sarah, received a Facebook message from a woman who'd attended the vigil. Here's the core of the message:

*I'm writing to you, Sarah, because I want to tell you how amazing and brave your mom is. I attended the vigil on Saturday along with my 22 year old addicted son, Kody. A mom began speaking about the life and the loss of her son - - and I realized it was your mom! She spoke with so much love and kindness, such compassion and humanity. Your mom's words have played over and over in my mind since she spoke them, and, it turns out, in Kody's as well. Today he sat with me quietly, and then, after a long while turned to me and said "Mom I love you, and I'm sorry. I never want you to know that kind of pain and I'm now going to try my hardest to beat this demon."*

The message had an extraordinary effect on me. It allowed me to realize for the first time that, yes, there might be another way to understand my situation, that something good could, perhaps, emanate from my own suffering.

This was, in fact, the inspiration behind the founding of a group in Brattleboro for bereaved parents. It was from another grieving mother that I learned about “The Compassionate Friends,” a national organization devoted to bereaved parents. Our Brattleboro chapter of The Compassionate Friends now meets monthly at West Village Meeting House. Together we experience “the terrible comfort” of sharing our stories and our memories.

Compassion happening number 2 came from daughter Sarah’s friend, Alaina, who told me that she’d had a kind of “visitation” from Nic one day while driving to work. It came as music on the radio, the song “Wagon Wheel” by Old Crow Medicine Show which was the very last song she had heard Nic play, the song she never wanted to end. And then there it was on radio, and there was Nic, and it became clear to her that she had to do something in response. The same day, she started a “Go Fund Me” fundraising campaign to permit Sarah and myself to make a pilgrimage to Tennessee where Nic – and earlier his father, had died.

And this led directly to compassion happening number 3. One of the very first people to contribute to the fund was the therapist Alouette Iselin in Keene, well known for the very kind of guidance I needed. Her own daughter had died ten years earlier. Alouette has since become my guardian angel. Sometimes in our therapy sessions we just sat there and wept together. Sometimes she sang me songs that she had written or received from others who had known her daughter, songs of love and grief and healing. Alouette confirmed for me the wonder and beauty of what I call “moments of absolute illogic” – driving, for example, through Nic’s old neighborhood, and thinking I might just drop in for a visit.

And there have been other “compassion happenings”, among them the establishment of the Nicholas Mattingley Scholarship Award, funded by an anonymous benefactor, for BUHS students to attend the Vermont Jazz Center’s Summer Jazz Workshop; and then the truly amazing gift of my puppy, Lola, who arrived one year to the day after Nic died.

Four years later I can now express my gratitude for the love and compassion that have been offered to me since and because of Nic’s death. And I can’t help but feel that, watching this from the great beyond, Nic also is smiling.

*Submissions, from Brattleboro area residents, for future publication, not to exceed 650 words, should be emailed to: [compassionstory@gmail.com](mailto:compassionstory@gmail.com) or mailed to: Compassion Story of the Month, c/o Robert Oeser, PO Box 6001, Brattleboro, VT 05302. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address. Earlier submitted stories will automatically be considered in*

*subsequent months.*