

MY SWEET JULIETTE, THE SEA BRINGS YOU CLOSER TO ME

By Lynn Evans

Many grandparents find themselves raising grandchildren when their own children are caught in the throes of addiction. The following journal excerpts detail the author's wish to memorialize and grieve for her daughter, as well as provide information for her grandchild when she is older.

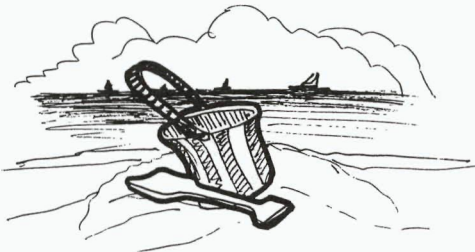
July 3, 2000:

I realize how much has changed

My beautiful daughter Juliette did not recover. She died in October of a drug overdose. She has lost her life, my sweet child, my Juliette, only twenty-nine years old. My hopes that she would recover and mother her daughter, Jordan, are gone. Hopes and dreams are gone, leaving me with responsibility for my granddaughter. I am Jordan's mother on earth and Juliette can be her mother only in heaven. It is so huge and overwhelming for me. Jordan is only six.

Addiction is deadly; believe me, I know. I lost my sweet and gorgeous daughter.

Saturdays will never be the same. We would pick her up at the bus every week when she came on visits from the recovery home. As soon as she was with me, no matter the cold weather, I rushed her to the boardwalk and the edge of the sea so she could breathe again. It was the best medicine for my addicted and recovering angel.



July 5, 2000:

Memories of you, Juliette

Summers at the beach with you are my most vivid memories. Sailboat and fishing boats in the background. You in that cute little green checkered two-piece bathing suit,

five years old. Suddenly in my memory you are a woman. We had collected sea glass and you and Jordan collected white stones. You are playing with Jordan.

You are the sea to me now, Juliette. You are with me all the time. The early morning sun rays stream down to the water, reminding me of you in your glory. Now, no more pain for my baby.

Just off the boardwalk, there is a new Memorial Park with many bricks but with a special memorial brick that Jordan has dedicated to you. It reads: "For my Mommy, Julie, from your Jordie." The brick is close to where the two of you played on the beach, collecting your stones. The brick reminds me of you. But more than the brick, the sometime stillness of the ocean, with only a few soft breakers, brings me thoughts of you, my lovely girl at peace.

For all the years to come, I want to keep walking by the sea remembering you, and with the aid of ginseng and vitamins, perhaps I will!

People on the boardwalk have tee shirts commemorating a 1998 event – it gets to me of course; it is the year you died.

July 19, 2000:

I can feel your goodbye

A beautiful beach day. All the kids playing in the water. I remember you as my baby girl, healthy and adorable in your little swimsuit. When the sun goes down by the bay, I can feel your good-bye. Your light and your life now gone.

I try to hear Our Lord telling you, "Now you are mine."

When the ocean shines like bright

diamonds I think of your smile that a million diamonds could never outshine. And when Jordan plays at the water's edge, I see you there instead. As the blue sky breaks through the heavy clouds after two days of rain, I try to revive my hopes and dreams, only now they will have to be for Jordan.

July 26, 2000:

Sandpipers in my path

I saw the sandpipers today. I love the way they move so swift and free. When I see them, I tell myself they are a gift from you. You knew my love of nature and wildlife. Thank you for these comical pipers in my path. They make me chuckle. Jordan also loves His creatures, and nature, flowers, music, and music, music, music.

I feel closer to you at the beach. You put the sandpipers in my path, and the dolphins in my view. The shells and stones touch me by their simple beauty. I think of you and Jordie collecting them in buckets and in little piles on the beach.

Jordie has problems in school and I need your help. I have come to talk to you about it. I see you and feel you near me at the ocean. When I feel tired, thinking of you helps me get over my weariness. When I feel sad, thinking of you certainly brings back my sense of humor. And when I am in a tailspin of confusion, or a funk, I smile thinking of your smile, and forge ahead with almost no effort at all.

July 29, 2000:

What we didn't say

The light gray skies and darker gray waters make me think of a grayish look your face sometimes had, my girl.

I think of the words we left unsaid to each other. All the talk of illness and addiction and the hopes of your "going straight." How sad I am that this never came to pass!

You were a wonderful mother to Jordie, my sweet. You tried very hard, when you were able to be there for her. You taught her to ride her bike without training wheels. You played "dolls" and "kitchen." You told me to be careful of the cords on the window blinds—small children were strangling on

them. You had many talks with Jordie about doing the right thing, and being a good girl for Granny.

Thank you for the notes and letters you wrote to her and to me. I have them all. But much, much more, thank you for giving life to your child, this child of yours and mine. Happiness comes in my loving and caring for her. I delight in her and in seeing you in her—you as a child again. Watching her on the swings, I see you at seven.

August 1, 2000:

In and out of recovery

The beach is quiet today with the gray, rough, rolling clouds and sea. One box kite flying, hooded jackets on lifeguards, and only a smattering of people.

In the afternoon, it is lovely to see the bits of blue sky after three days of rain clouds. On my walks on the beach, I feel closest to you, yet I also miss you the most. I get a pretty good image of you in my mind and can talk to you, laugh with you, hear you saying, "Hi mom, it's me." But now, only the sea is here.

When the ocean is in turmoil, I think of the turmoil you endured—you would try, but you would slip in and out of recovery, in and out of recovery. I went through those slips with you, but mine was not as horrible a suffering as yours

August 15, 2000:

Two years later

Today is two years since I held you and hugged you for the last time. It was family day at the rehab. We did not know that your life would end soon. You looked like a little girl in your short denim overalls with your hair in a high ponytail one of the other girls in rehab fixed for you. At the end of the visit, you looked so sad. I murmured as we left you at 4:45 p.m.: "Please God, don't let this be the last time I see her." I knew you so well. How did I know you well enough to say that?

August 27, 2000:

Just like us, Honey

There is a downpour on the beach. It is Sunday afternoon in August, everything empty and deserted, just like my heart. This summer rain makes me think of you. You disliked heavy rain...you were never prepared...you always looked like a drowned rat, poor girl.

I struggle walking against the gusts. The flying gulls are struggling too. When the gulls are scarce, I search for those rascals and usually find a few. Two at a time is best, as if they are us, flying free and together again. One seagull, then a second one (me) flying so free! I say out loud, "Just like us, Honey."

I pass the place on the beach where you sat with me one August day in 1992, carrying your child in your belly. Now Jordie, already a young lady of six, is the only one here to share August days with me.

September 6, 2000:

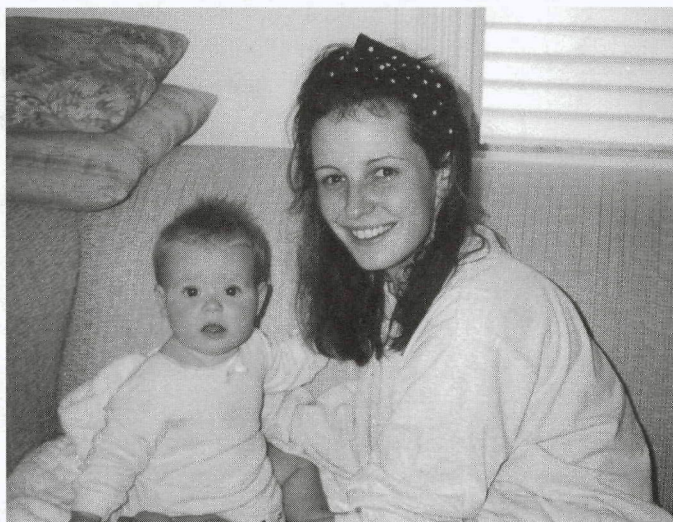
The sea brings you closer to me

Today, your baby girl begins second grade, a most promising beginning for us all. Instead of "Granny", I am "Mom-mom" now. Anything I plan for your baby girl (as you would call her), I do in your memory. I loved you so!

I need to walk on the beach and see and hear the waves. They turn, slide and crash, just like my life. I believe God placed me at the seashore. He knew I would need the sea when you were gone. He knew I would need the peace and strength of the sea to raise Jordie.

I am lost in my own thoughts. Your death brings me to a transition. It feels spiritual to me and I am accepting of it. I have a job to do. I can bring comfort, security, and happiness to Jordan. Such a beautiful, innocent little girl. I can help her grow. But can I? Why me? Do I want this job? Is there no end to the jobs given to me?

The movement of the waves brings me peace. Looking at the sea, the endless horizon, the birds sailing to nowhere, I can imagine your face and I say to you, "No more frantic confusion of drug dependency, Honey, just infinite peace." It brings me a



vision of the heavenly place you are now. And thankfully, I can see you smiling.

About Juliette, Jordan and the author:

I can remember how peaceful and playful my Juliette was when not under the influence of drugs. She would show me in many ways her extreme caring and kind spirit. I saw her give her last cigarette and/or her last dollar so many times to many street people in Philadelphia.

So many times she would ask me, "Mom, why can't you get Jordan a Barbie jeep?" She was Jordie's best playmate because Juliette herself was always the child and, I believe, she wanted the jeep for herself. She never lost her childlike ways.

Together, we had our bouts of anger, depression, and helplessness and with it all, we knew each other's hearts. Juliette hated her addiction and she would say, "Do you think, mom, I like being addicted?" I understand, now that she is gone, how very painful this was for Juliette – her struggle and her loneliness.

Now, about Jordan, Juliette's daughter:

Jordan has so many unique qualities: features like her mom, beauty like her mom, and a feisty spirit like her mom. Jordan has high-risk fetal drug effects and is classified as a special education student. She gets all of my attention; however, she still craves a male role model (father) in her life, as it is just the two of us. This I know. Jordan is

funny and you know what she is thinking, because she tells all. She is open and honest, sometimes to the point of embarrassing me. Jordan is "quite active," very smart and precocious with an ADHD embrace of life. She loves animals and recently took a third place ribbon in a horse show. She participates in a horseback-riding program called Hippo therapy. Aside from chasing seagulls every chance she gets, she wants to belong in the world, always testing life and its creatures as well.

Now, about me:

I take one day at a time. My second home is the sea, the boardwalk, the bay, and the beach. The trunk of my car smells so gross, like dead fish, due to the assortment of stuff I have collected during my beach walks.

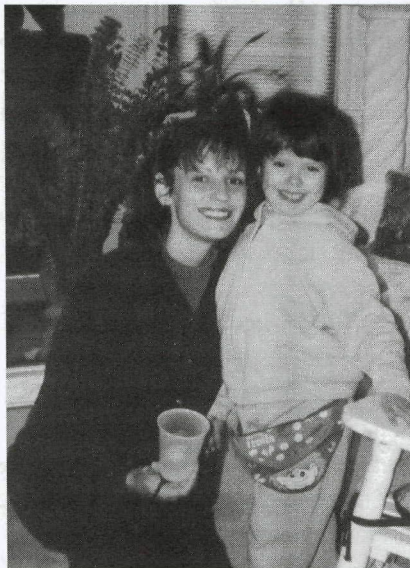
I have dedicated much of my recent life to advocating for grandparents raising their grandchildren and for children with special needs. Thankfully, I have many grandparent friends raising their grandchildren.

I love Jordan dearly, and I will never forget the miracle of life when Juliette gave birth to Jordan.

grieve. And my attraction for the sea, the ocean, the bay, and the beach is my communion and communication with Juliette.

I want to memorialize my sweet Juliette to the highest level. I feel that addiction is such an illness and no one, at that time, understood how seriously ill she was. I will always feel that Juliette died a useless death as so many drug abusers do. Other people write them off as losers. Juliette suffered a death no one should have to experience; she was alone, sick, and sad. And I want others, at least her family and friends, to take ownership for some of the loneliness that Juliette suffered to the end, that they could have been there for her, in some way, at some time, with some help in her desperate need for recovery.

If others can read this and reach out to help the drug abuser, then I have attained my goal in sharing my story about my sweet Juliette.



And why this style of journal writing?

I keep a journal for Jordan to have when she is ready for more information about her mom. I also journal for myself; it helps me to

Copyright of Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping is the property of Cleveland State University and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.