

**Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a pioneer in near-death studies** and inductee into the National Women's Hall of Fame once wrote:

"The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern.

When first I met Iris and Jay, it was at Heights Elementary the day that Michael's web and the new playground was dedicated. My heart went out to this family on that day as I took in the details of the tragic loss that brought them to this place. Iris and Jay had only recently suffered such a tragic loss of their son, without warning and out of the blue.

My mind traveled back to a time in my own life and in my own family when I was a child, and it seemed like insurmountable loss had overtaken any chance at my family's happiness. As a child of 6, I saw my younger cousin, Maureen, take ill and die within a few weeks. Every year or two after that, our family was hit with another tragic loss, my grandpa, my older sister who was only 19, and my father when I was only 11 and my nana. All these losses came at our family in the short span of 5-8 years. As the losses grew, our family grew smaller and we turned to my mother for strength and guidance. She was left to raise three daughters, alone.

Years later and late one night – long after I was married and at a time when I was the mother of two teenage sons, I found my mother sitting in our dining room, crying quietly as she looked out the window at the moon. I remember my surprise, not that she was heartbroken over the loss of my sister who had passed so many, many years before, but because it was, that night, causing her such terrible pain, sitting in that darkened dining room, some thirty years later.

She confided in me that the greatest loss of all was the loss of her child. She described the pain of that loss as clearly as if it had happened only the day before. She felt helpless and responsible that she could not save Judy no matter how hard she had tried. What if this... or what if that... would it have been different?

And that is the pain that is surely felt by Iris and Jay and a host of other parents who face these tragic losses that fly in the face of what seems right or natural.

From these tragic times come period of strength, innovation and searches for ways to honor those we love and have lost. Small memorials are created to honor the lives that have touched ours. This keeps them alive and remembered. I have little rose everything all over my house to honor the memory of my mother – rose handles on the cabinet, roses etched in windows, roses near her picture. Roses everywhere.

How many of you remember the television show Mr. Rogers? **Fred McFeely Rogers** was an Educator, minister, songwriter, and television host. He began

each program putting on his red sweater and welcoming viewers to his neighborhood. He believed that "One of the greatest gifts you can give anybody is the gift of your honest self.

During the 1997 Daytime Emmys when he went onstage to be receive the Lifetime Achievement Award, he stood in front of all the soap opera stars and talk show hosts, made a small bow and said into the microphone, "All of us have special ones who have loved us into being.

He said - Would you just take, along with me, ten seconds to think of the people who have helped you become who you are? Then he lifted his wrist, looked at the audience, looked at his watch, and said, "I'll watch the time." And then there was Ten seconds of silence."

Today, I can say that although my mother died 18 years ago this summer, I feel that pain as if it happened only yesterday. She loved me into being and she was truly the "Wind Beneath My Wings" who made me believe anything was possible.

Michael Craig Rothberg no doubt felt a similar thankfulness about his wonderful parents. They loved him and helped shape the person that he became. They are still loving Michael and bringing his memory into our lives as a lesson that carries positive energy along with the love of devoted parents.

So - Who has helped you become who you are? What turning points put you in the places that created the person that you are today? Do you think back to events that changed the course of your lives and brought you here to this place?

Each of you can look at your own lives and remember certain things that made you. My granddaughter lists our home as the "House that Made Her" on her Face book site. No doubt your memories float in and out and around parents, relatives, teachers, friends, husbands or wives -- those who helped you, those who hurt you, events that shaped the being that you are. Those who have **left us** caused events and emotions that have molded us and changed us.

For example, if my father wasn't taken from our family, would I have had the drive to go to college and push forward to earn a living and try to change the world of education?

If my stepfather hadn't fallen down those stairs in 1972 and died, would I have moved back to Sharon?

Do all things happen for a reason or do they just happen? Is there a manifest destiny for each of our lives? Were Jay and Iris meant to suffer their terrible loss to end up here tonight, helping another set of Sharon High School seniors find their way to college?

Was a little girl in Sharon who lined up teddy bears and dolls on her bed to teach them lessons, meant to become the Superintendent of one of the best school districts in Massachusetts? Does one wake up one day and determine their destiny or does it just happen along the way as life twists us around and around -- and hate-filled terrorists decide to fly airplanes into buildings?

My parents moved to Sharon when I was very young, for the sole reason that my older sister was sick and they were in search of clean air and good water to make her healthy. And then a series of events sends a life careening forward along a path. When I took up living in Branford, Connecticut as a young college student and wife, would I have moved back to Sharon to be with my mother if my stepfather didn't have that fateful fall?

What brought the Rothbergs to Sharon and what terrible event sent them on path to help so many others, Sharon students at all levels, through their generosity and love to memorialize their son.

We do many things, large or small, to keep those we love, those who helped us become who we are, with us in our hearts.

Tonight is the 8<sup>th</sup> annual commemoration dinner that brings together friends and relatives to honor the memory of Michael Craig Rothberg. Tonight is about keeping memories alive and making lives count for something. We honor those who are dear to our hearts by looking for ways to create a piece of eternity, a memory that we can see or feel.

Iris and Jay Rothberg have set in motion many events in honor of their son. Through their generous gifts to this community, they have provided for play and fun at our schools and sent several of our best students off into the world, in the name of Michael, to do good things, to study hard, and to change the world into a better place.

Michael's memory is found at Battleship Cove, Fall River, name engraved on the 911 Memorial that gives honor to the victims of the September 11, 2001 surprise terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

The plaque reads, in part, "Let us pause for a moment, and each in our own manner and in our hearts remembers and pray for those who are no longer with us, that they rest in peace; for their relatives and loved ones, especially the children, that they have the support and strength to carry on; for our nation's leaders, that they have the wisdom and courage to invoke justice where justice is due; and for ourselves, that we will always deeply appreciate our country and the freedom we cherish."

The memory of Michael's short life is found ticking away on the clock on Main Street where the unused minutes of a life-lost count off time, rolling us into a future and marking the moments of our own lives.

The memory of a Sharon boyhood, happy laughter and friends is found in Michaels' web at the Heights Elementary School where children play and wonder at the complexity of the magnificent design. This play structure honors a boy who once lived and played in Sharon. It describes a person who was funny and kind, smart and athletic, and most importantly, a treasured part of the lives of his family and friends.

The memory of Michael's writing and leadership skills is etched into the dedication of our local Post Office, a major communication terminal, named in his honor last September 11, 2010. Many townspeople gathered around the Rothberg family to dedicate this wonderful memorial – and to thank the Rothbergs for their generosity to the Town. - Dave Clifton, Ben Puritz, Joe Roach, Bill Heitin, Richard Powell, Senators Brown and Kerry, Barney Frank and many others.

Those who knew Michael's describe him as organized and good with computers and finances. He stood up for what he thought was right, was down to earth, generous and easy going. His community knows him as a hero because of the way his life was taken from him, but he is a hero to his family because of the life he lived and the people who loved him.

A turning point in the Rothberg's life has brought us all together tonight. Michael's life caused such love in his family and pain in its loss that the Rothbergs strive to keep Michael's memory alive by giving and giving again to their community and reminding us all that Michael was here.

Michael's life has created a turning point for the students who are here tonight.

In my own life, I have always marked historical events through dates that relate to my life. The first world war began the year after my father was born and ended the year after my mother was born. When I was just a freshman in high school, Michael Rothberg was born. The year I started college at Bridgewater, Michael started kindergarten. Two years after I began my career here as a teacher, Michael graduated from Sharon High School. In 2001, when the terrorists did their terrible deed and Michael lost his life, he was the same age as my younger son is today and I was beginning my second year as the Assistant Superintendent of Sharon Public Schools.

Max Lerner, American politician and columnist once wrote **“The turning point in the process of growing up is when you discover the core of strength within you that survives all hurt.”**

Each of the students we will honor tonight has begun to make a mark that will impact not only one life, but many lives. Michael Rothberg made his mark and is still making a mark.

As we move along in our lives, we realize the one-ness we share with others who have gone before. Our turning points bring us together AND they set us apart. They make us who we are. We are connected to one another as a people, struggling to survive in a life that throws us

punches and that brings together a large web of events, and people, and things that just happen. Or do they – just happen I mean.

-----  
Iris and Jay, I will close with words by British poet, David Harkins. It is called, “Remember Me”. These words remind us of all you are doing and have been doing to honor Michael. You represent a model for all of us, showing us all that we must go on, even when faced with terrible loss.

**“You can shed tears that he is gone, or you can smile because he has lived.**

**You can close your eyes and pray that he'll come back or you can open your eyes and see that he has left.**

**Your heart can be empty because you can't see him or you can be full of the love you shared.**

**You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday, or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.**

**You can remember only that he is gone or you can cherish his memory and let it live on.**

**You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back or you can do what he'd want, smile, open your eyes, love, and go on.”**

I, for one, am proud to witness the legacy and positive energy you have created around the terrible loss of your son, Michael. God Bless you and your family.