



**HANNES SWARTZ**

4/7/88 – 16/1/07

*Written by his mother, Marita Swartz,  
for the AGM of The Compassionate Friends, 23 September 2010*

Hannes was our third child and only son. His smile was always his trade mark. He was an easy child, sensible, level-headed. He loved being with people and was loved by everybody. He was mad about sport – tennis, hockey, squash, jukskei (WP), athletics and chess, in which he also got his provincial colours. He was head boy of his school during his matric year and excelled academically with 6 A's at the end of matric. He prepared for his studies at Stellenbosch during the December holidays. One night, while he was out with friends, he received a very upsetting sms. A telephone conversation followed. He had a severe panic attack and jumped off a bridge.

We were totally unprepared for this. Hannes never had any symptoms of depression. He was in a good mood during the preceding weeks and was very excited about going to varsity. My daughters tried to speak to the people behind the sms and phone call the next day, but it was not possible.

My husband and I were called to the scene of the accident and for many months we suffered from post-traumatic stress. My biggest accomplishment every day was just to get up. Once I was on my feet, I aimed for lunch, then for supper and then for bed. I would wake up at night and relive the terrible night. Hannes did not leave a letter and this made it even more puzzling.

I kept on working, which in a way, was a good thing. But I was very absent-minded and found it very difficult to concentrate. I was on auto-pilot when I did my work, but longed to just lie on my bed. But to lie on my bed was even worse, because of all the thoughts going through my mind. I wished quite often that I could just “remove my head”, so that my thoughts would leave me alone.

I had always asked God to protect my children and it was unthinkable that Hannes would take his own life. I decided not to be angry with God, but He felt so far and for a long time I felt that I could never trust Him again. I kept a journal during my quiet time which was one way of pinning down my thoughts and moods. I found it difficult to examine and put my feelings into words. My husband and I were fortunate

in that we became closer and would comfort one another. We would talk about Hannes and remind one another that we were good parents and that Hannes had been the best son one could have.

My two daughters mourned differently. The one would speak openly about Hannes and tell me about her anger and how she struggled to forgive. The other one did not speak about him that much, but she would tell me about dreams she had of Hannes and that he had given her a message – to tell me that he was happy.

I and some of my broken-winged-friends, parents who had lost children, joined a new Compassionate Friends's Support Group in Kuils River. At first, it was very upsetting to hear about other parents and the death of their children, but I learned to look past the sadness and to build a special friendship with the parents. I started looking forward to the meetings and eventually became the chairperson of the Kuils River Support Group.

I also had a very difficult time to accept Hannes's behaviour leading to his death and for a long time thought that his calm presence every day in our house before that fateful night was just a dream and not real. But one night, as I was making his bed for a visitor to sleep over, I just became aware of his peaceful presence in the room and realised that on 16 January 2010 Hannes had been put in a situation which was just too overwhelming for him. For some or other reason he had decided that the only option was to put an end to his life.

I can remember a specific day almost 18 months after he died when I once again struck rock bottom and cried so hard that my husband came from the far end of the house to comfort me. I longed so much for God to be tangible and to be physically present so that I could look Him in the eye and ask Him for answers. But I realised that the only way I could feel his touch was to be touched by people. And the only way I could help other people was to touch them and be used by God.

A DVD by Loui Giglio, called Hope, made a big impression on me. I read many books, especially books by Barbara Johnson, which were very encouraging. A friend gave me a book by Ron Dunn titled *When Heaven is Silent*, and reading this book was such an eye-opener. I was surprised by the author's simple way of describing his own feelings and the way he wrote about familiar characters from the Bible and the purpose God had with their lives.

During the past almost four years I have spoken to so many parents who have lost their children. I realise that without my own experiences, I would never have had the compassion to help and encourage them. To lose a child to suicide means that you have to deal with even more issues, such as guilt, unforgiveness, "what if's" and rejection from people. You are hurting so much inside, and then all of a sudden someone's words or actions are like a knife pushed into your back and twisted in all directions. And you have to walk away and forgive them, for they know not what they are doing. I avoid negative, critical, condemning people, and try hard to be positive, encouraging and caring.

I have learned so much more from people who have suffered and gone through great tragedies than I have learned from people who are just successful and happy. I have so much admiration for my friends who have lost children, but especially for those who carry on after they have lost their children through self-inflicted death (suicide).

Our TCF Group has started a separate group for parents struggling to accept their children's self death. We meet once every 3 months.

Life is full of trials and tribulations. Some people go through divorce, some lose their parents when still young, some suffer financial losses, and some lose their

children. I believe that life is full of tests and that one can decide to become bitter or better. One can also decide to have a heart that is cold and hard, or a heart that is big and caring. Suffering makes you go far away from this world and brings you closer to God. Sometimes it feels as though you are beating against God's chest – just to realise that He is still embracing you with his loving arms.

I miss Hannes every day. I cry for him every day. I thank God for him every day. And I have decided not to long for that which I have lost, but to look forward to the day when I will hold him in my arms again and look into his smiling face.

