

My husband, Jeff, and I had our first child in 2000. Shortly thereafter we began to consider where we would send our new baby daughter, Megan, to school whenever she reached age five. My husband insisted that our daughter attend a Christian school. Five years later we contacted Penn Christian Academy in Butler, PA and received information about the school. We were very interested in PCA, but my husband was a dairy farmer, and I had gone from full time to part time at the University of Pittsburgh whenever Megan was born. We did not believe we could send our child to the school of our choice, but when PCA followed up with us, and we expressed our concern about the cost of tuition, the administrative assistant assured us there were scholarships available for families making less than seventy five thousand dollars a year. Jeff and I eagerly applied and received an EITC scholarship and thus began our affiliation as a family with Penn Christian Academy.

Penn Christian Academy's philosophy of education is spelled out very clearly in their Parent-Student Handbook. "The school is dedicated to and passionately believes in the "whole child" concept of educating children, which is educating a child academically, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually." With this philosophy in mind Jeff and I experienced great peace in sending Megan off to kindergarten in the Fall of 2005. Fast forward two years, and Jeff and I were able to send our second and last child, our son, Jacob, to kindergarten at PCA. Our concerns about having two children in a Christian school simultaneously were relieved when we received another very generous EITC scholarship.

It was Wednesday, September 26, 2007, a very ordinary day for our family. Megan and Jacob were settled into school for the year, I was busy working and preparing to decorate for Fall on the farm, and also preparing for a church hayride at the farm that coming Saturday. Jeff was so busy with his Dad working on the family farm. They were chopping corn and filling the silo before the rain began. At 5:30 P.M. the kids and I were eating dinner when my sister-in-law delivered the news there had been a farming accident. The accident involved 41 year old Jeff. Ann drove me over to the barn where I was informed that my precious husband of 10 years had been killed instantly by a runaway silage wagon.

As you all can imagine we were devastated, and I was left alone as a widow to raise our two children, ages 5 and 7. I well remember Jeff's cousin, Rhonda, whose children also attend PCA, asking me the night of the accident if there was anything else she could do for me before she went home to her family. I asked her to pass on the news to all the families of PCA. And oh the peace I had knowing these friends would be supporting us in this terrible trial we were facing. The support was unbelievable: the mums, the stuffed animals, the cards, the tree dedication, the prayers, the food, the monetary gifts, the PCA families that came to the viewing along with the board, the principal and even the kids' bus driver, and the incredible donations to the children's education.

Several people asked me the week of my husband's funeral when I would be sending my children back to school. What a decision to make, but life really does go on, so four days after the funeral, my sister in law Ann and I accompanied the kids to school. I fully expected my children to cling to me the whole day, but PCA

was truly their comfort zone, and they sat with their classmates all day. This speaks volumes about the school, the children, the faculty and staff, because my children like to be at home, and they had just lost their Daddy, but they and I were at peace sitting there with all these wonderful people. Penn Christian Academy so acknowledged our loss and our pain. They grieved, cried, and prayed with us. You see it is hard to compartmentalize our lives as Christians. This all goes back to the school's philosophy of education. Penn Christian Academy acknowledges the whole person, our beliefs and all. My husband and I could not divide our lives into segments. Christianity explains all of life to me and all of tragedy. I have a broken heart, but I do not have a broken faith. PCA has been one of our family's major supporters in our grief journey. I have an incredible peace every school day about where my kids are, who they are with, and what they are learning.

My children are receiving so much more than an education at PCA. We do not have to leave our deepest beliefs and philosophy of life outside the walls of PCA. This is America, and I am so grateful for the opportunity and freedom to send my children to the school of our choice, a Christian school.

My Mom often comments to me what a legacy my husband left our children by insisting they attend a Christian school. Tragedies do happen, and they affect school children all over this country, and it is very hard for children to leave their emotions and hurts at the doors of their schools. I am so grateful God had our kids right in place at PCA when tragedy occurred in our family. PCA was able to freely address the concerns of my children and their classmates as well. Thank you.