

January 20, 2011

As another year passes, we continue to miss our precious Matt. It is hard to believe that it will be six years since he was taken from us so tragically. Everyday I hope that he is making a difference, everyday I hope that I am making a difference and honoring his memory. I strive to be strong for him in my attempt to bring awareness to the dangers of hazing. Sometimes the pain is just too great and I must take a step back, weep for my beloved son, take a deep breath, splash some cold water on my face, and then move forward. It's hard to believe that he has been gone for so long when the pain is still so intense.

I feel fortunate that I am able to correspond with so many people all over the country via email and phone, that find his story and write or call me telling me how they used it to write a class paper or how they used his story in their fraternities and sororities to educate their brothers and sisters. Asking questions, seeking more information or just telling me the difference Matt has made. Professors are telling his story in their classes, high school teachers are using his story to prepare their students for college life and what to expect.

I am happy and proud to see, that how Matt lived his life, and Matt's Law, are making a difference. And that in death Matt is saving lives. There were NO reported hazing deaths in the state of California in 2009 or 2010 and NONE in the entire US in 2010! This is wonderful news as there has been at least one death by hazing in the United States every year since 1970. This does not mean that we slow down our effort in any way when it comes to talking to and educating our young people, and adults about hazing. We cannot fool ourselves into believing that it has stopped, it is a regular occurrence and we need to do our best to remind people of that. We have to work at changing a mindset that has, for centuries, been conditioned into believing that this is a right of passage.

While the intent of Matt's Law was to work as a deterrent rather than having to actually prosecute our young people, we have had our first convictions in a criminal case this past year, the Starkey case in San Luis Obispo. Carson Starkey was our last hazing fatality in California, December 2, 2008. It saddens me because someone had to die for these young men to learn how dangerous and wrong hazing is. But they had to be held accountable for their actions and Matt's Law made that happen. Our attorneys tell us all facets of Matt's Law are working quite well. I am forever grateful for everyone that helped in getting it passed.

For the last five years we have headed up to Chico to remember Matt on February 1, the last day he was alive. We take flowers, light candles, put up posters and show a slides show of his life and the difference he has made. At this time I do not know if we will be making the trip, but if we do not I hope that those of you in Chico will remember him there. Maybe someone could go by and leave a candle or flowers in front of the frat house where he was killed at the corner of 4th and Chestnut, now the Jewish Center. We will however be showing our, Matt Makes a Difference slide show outside at our home on Wednesday, February 2nd at 7pm, the sixth anniversary of his death, in remembrance of him and his wonderful life. I hope that those of you in the area will come by and remember Matt with us.

As I did last year, and previous years, I would like to recommend an extremely informative book, **Protect Yourself In College** written by a wonderful author, Tom Kane. You don't have to be

going away to college to get a lot out of this book. I encourage you to pick one up or order online today.

Another book I would like to recommend this year is newly released **Crashing Augusta**, written by award winning author, Jon Littman. Mr. Littman wrote Matt's story in an 11 page article in the October 2006 issue of Playboy. This article depicted the most gruelingly accurate account of what happened to Matt, so much so that it was the most difficult read of my life. But it also helps you understand just what hazing is all about and what can and has happened when things are taken too far. Crashing Augusta is made up of five original Playboy stories of man at his strongest, swiftest and most dangerous. If you would like to review this book go to the following link, <http://amzn.to/crashingaugusta>

As I remember Matt these last days of his life six years ago, in my heart he will always be my baby, my first born son, my miracle child, and as many of you know my gift from God, whose life was taken way too soon. Matt made a difference in life, because of how he lived it, and in death because of how he lost it. As with most of you, I will always remember how genuinely sweet and kind he was, how he always put others before himself, and how he was loved by everyone, including those responsible for his death, because of that. While I will always feel the ache in my heart for my lost angel, a pain I struggle with daily, I am grateful to God for the difference he has made and time I had with him.

Thank you for remembering Matt in your prayers. If you think of it, light a candle on February 2nd in remembrance.

"Hug your children and tell them you love them everyday."

God bless.

Love,
Debbie, MM
www.wemissyoumatt.com