

Hello, NSW families. Roleen asked me to share with you a little bit about our family story. I'm Sheryn (6th year at NSW) and Beckett (EW) is my son and Julian Dautz, who just joined the Lily group in the WW, is my nephew. Julian and his 6 year old sister, Sofia, came to live with us this past December.

Julian's and Sofia's mom is my sister, Shelley, and she passed away suddenly and unexpectedly at 41 in October. Julian's father is a medic in the US Navy and was two months into a year and a half long deployment to Afghanistan. With my sister's death, he was pulled out of active duty and is being repositioned to Camp Pendleton within the next two months but right now still remains in Raleigh, NC. Shelley was a loving mother and raised two beautiful children and when their dad called Christian and I to ask if we could take custody until his affairs were in order, there was no hesitation. Shelley was not only my sister, but my best friend. Julian and Sofia have aunts, uncles, 7 cousins and an adoring Papa here in Southern California so this is a win-win situation for everyone, given with what we have to work.

Julian and Sofia miss their mom terribly and talk of her frequently. We're learning how the developmental stage and age of children defines how they grieve. In regards to Julian, we know that four year olds don't really understand the concept of death. It is a gradual, repetitive process of reminding them of the permanence and of the spirit that lives on within us. Julian has innocent questions and conversations of "missing" his mom. We talk of her daily, look at pictures and try to share in his grief at his level. The grieving process for both the children will occur over a lifetime, so we are addressing what they need now with love, hugs, affirmation, and above all else, simple honesty.

My mom passed away three years ago and Shelley frequently spoke of her and told the children that she was watching over all of us. Thus, the concept of "heaven" was introduced throughout their young lives. We reiterate to Julian that mommy is with Nana and he does connect with that as a concept.

Next Monday, Julian and Sofia will start at Our House, a grief support non-profit, and be with other children their age who have lost a parent. We will look to them for support and guidance in the months to come and possibly a visit to NSW. NSW, the teachers, and especially Roleen have been extremely supportive and have welcomed Julian with open arms. We are forever indebted to them for this.

Julian will talk of his mom and the fact that she "died" and so does Beckett and so it will come up in conversation amongst your children. I'm sure this brings up a lot of feelings

for all of us. Listening to them and allowing them to follow their curiosity is helpful. They don't internalize, understand or grieve like adults. They simply want to explore, have their questions answered, to be reassured, and to be hugged. Roleen has some great information about death and dying and is available to answer any questions you may have and we will share any resources we receive from Our House.

Thanks to all of you for your support in this most stressful, challenging time. Once again, we feel so lucky to be a part of this wonderful NSW community.

Thanks,
Sheryn