

# 'Talking about my son helped me cope with my grief'



*Sarah and her son Josiah in 2008*

**Mum of four SARAH BERGER was devastated to say goodbye to her teenage son after he was in a fatal car accident. But, while she wrestled with sorrow, the hope of new life in Heaven gave her comfort and peace**

Interview by Claire Brine

**I**N the summer of 2009, Sarah Berger's teenage son, Josiah, was full of excitement at the thought of leaving the family home in Tennessee to begin the adventure of university life in a new city. Days before he was due to commence his freshman year, he arranged to go out for the evening with some friends who would be departing for their different colleges. As he prepared to head out, he gave his mum a quick kiss on the cheek, said his goodbyes, then grabbed the car keys and was out the front door.

Twenty minutes later Josiah was rushed to hospital after suffering a severe head injury in a car accident. For the next few days his family and the wider church community prayed for him to be healed. But on 14 August, Josiah's 19th birthday,

Sarah faced the news that her son had, as she says, 'gone to live in Heaven'.

'Seeing Josiah lying in that hospital bed was devastating,' Sarah tells me over a transatlantic call. 'Here was our beautiful son, looking perfect, with hardly any signs of injury. But he had been on life support, and right from the start, the doctors didn't give us a lot of hope that he would pull through. As a family, we prayed for his healing, but I also understood that, quite probably, my son would be going to his eternal home. I sat by his bedside, whispering in his ear: "Josiah, do what the Father is telling you to do." And in the end, God chose to take my son home.'

As Sarah faced the all-consuming grief of losing a child, she felt compelled to

*Seeing him lying in hospital was devastating*

Turn to page 10 ➔



From page 9

## *We will never know what happened*

cling on to hope wherever she could find it. Prompted by her Christian faith, she decided not to focus her attention on learning the details of Josiah's accident, but instead trusted that God would provide her with the healing comfort she needed.

'We know very little about what happened to Josiah,' she says. 'No other vehicles were involved in the accident

and he was the only person in his car. He was driving down a familiar yet foggy country road and hit a tree. He had his seatbelt on, he wasn't speeding and the airbag in the car inflated at the point of the crash. Maybe he hit a deer, as we have a lot of deer in this area. But we will never know what happened.

'Although I had limited information, I felt instructed by God not to look back over the accident in an attempt to find more answers. I felt him saying to me: "You don't need to know these things. What's important for you is to move forwards in the knowledge that your son is alive in Heaven."'

Though Sarah found peace and hope in the belief that Josiah was with his loving Father God, she still missed her son. Every morning, for 10 months, she wept 'bitter tears'. She prayed constantly for help to get through each day.

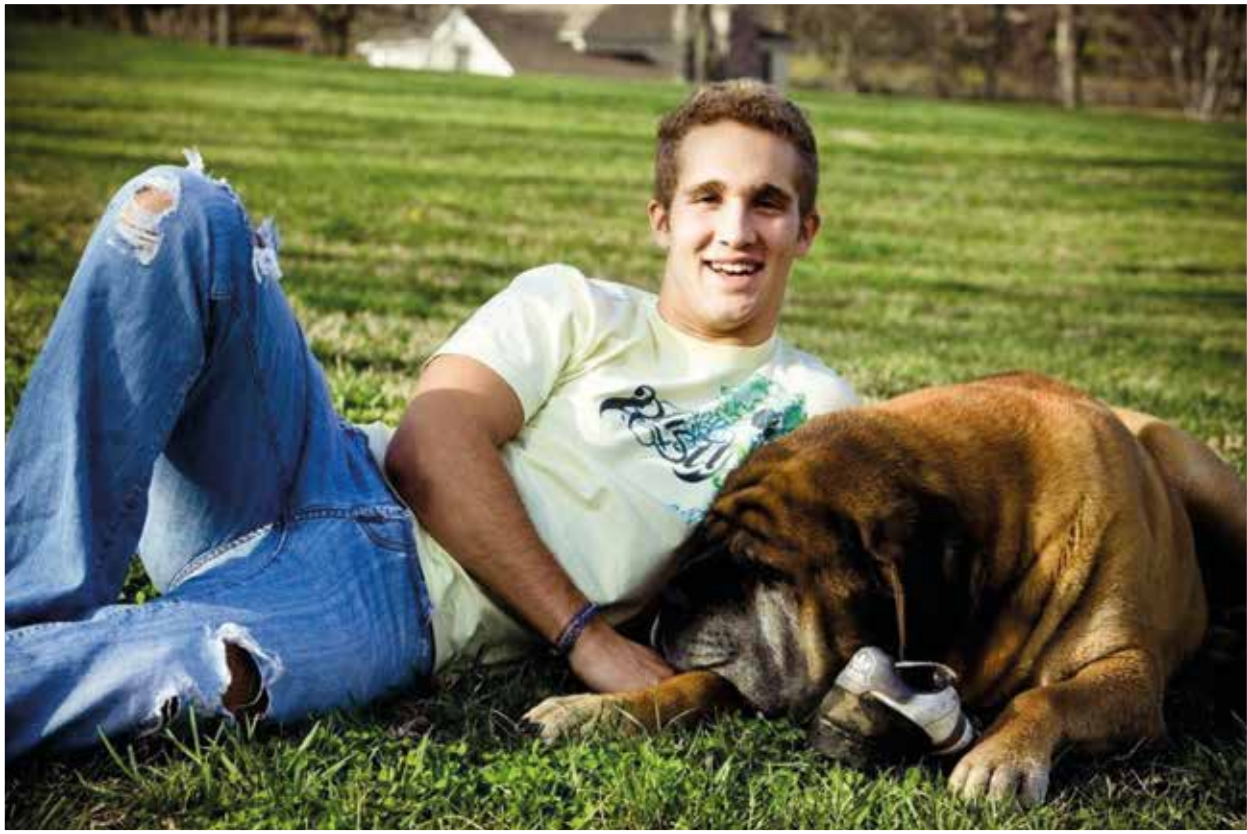
'What helped me to cope was talking about him,' she explains. 'It was so life-giving to hear Josiah's name spoken aloud. As a family, we talk about him all the time because he is still part of the family – not "was".

He is still hilarious, brilliant, the life and soul of the party, but he's just living on the other side of a very thin veil.'

**S**arah believes that the decision to refer to her son only in the present tense, and to talk about him as being 'alive in Heaven' rather than using the word 'dead', has been crucial in helping her to navigate her grief. In her book







*Sarah describes Josiah as ‘the life and soul of the party’*

*Hope in the Eleventh Hour*, she says that the language people use around the subject of death is important for those who are mourning. I ask her to explain.

‘Within days of Josiah going to Heaven, a verse from the Bible kept going round my head, and it talks about “the body of Christ”, which means the Church,’ she says. ‘The word of God is very explicit about there being just one body of Christ, and when I realised that, I understood that God was saying to me, “You are still connected to your son. He is still part of the body of Christ, and so are you.”’

‘Josiah may be on Heaven’s side of that body and we, as his family, are living on the earthly side – but he is still alive. Believing that we are all together in one body of Christ brought healing to the huge wound of grief and separation that I had.’

Over the next weeks and months, Sarah drew on her faith to help her cope with the most painful bereavement she had ever experienced. She found peace in God’s all-encompassing love. She took comfort from the Bible’s description

of Heaven, a place in which God ‘will wipe all the tears’ from people’s eyes. Today Sarah wants to encourage other bereaved parents to turn to God to find hope and joy through their pain.

‘It’s OK to be angry in grief and to tell God about it,’ she says. ‘God can handle that. But it’s also worth challenging God.’

‘The Bible talks about the importance of seeking God, asking for his help and “knocking on the door”. It’s about being relentless. You may not think you have the strength to go on when you’re grieving, but in Jesus Christ, you do. Maybe your prayer is just a groan, but eke it out. Beg God to help you. Knock. And watch him come through.’

Although 13 years have passed since her son’s accident, Sarah’s love for Josiah remains as tangible and strong as the love she has for her other three children. She enjoys talking openly about him and reflecting on precious memories the family shared together. She can recall with clarity the sound of Josiah’s voice. And, although she knows that she will never ‘get over’ her loss, she finds that

she is able to live each day with a heart full of joy.

‘Today the tears come far less frequently,’ she says. ‘Our culture suggests that I should, perhaps, feel guilty about that. But I believe that my tears come less frequently because I know that Josiah is linked to the body of Christ. He is alive in Heaven. One day, I know I’ll see him again in a place filled with joy, activity and peace.’

## ***Josiah is alive in Heaven***



● ***Hope in the Eleventh Hour*** is published by David C Cook