

Reflecting on a Mother's Courage, Strength and Hope

In memory of Betty Jean Spencer

By Chris Harder

On February 14, 1977, four local boys broke into the Spencer home in Hollandsburg, Indiana, and killed Betty Jane Spencer's four sons, Greg 22, Ralph 14, Reeve 16 and Raymond 17. Greg was her son by birth, and the others were sons by marriage. Betty was also shot, but lay still, and the intruders thought she, too, was dead. After the shooters left, although severely injured, Betty was able to get up and ran through the cold winter snow to the neighbors to get help.



For weeks Betty begged God to let her die. She struggled with survivor's guilt and spent four years angry, her faith wavering. But one day Betty changed. She wanted to live. She wanted to take a stand for other victims. She was living through a hell and



wanted to change things. She stood up, took a breath and began the healing part of her grief journey. Talking, talking and more talking. She took her victim's rights crusade all the way to the White House, influencing changes in 56 Indiana laws. She met with President Ronald Reagan three times to receive awards for her tireless efforts on behalf of crime victims.

On April 29, 1992, Lee Ann Hutson's son Greg was born. While still in the hospital, the phone rang. It was Lee Ann's Aunt Betty. She was crying and said, "Thank you for making the name Greg no longer a bad word to say." For fifteen years she had longed to hear her son's name spoken. Lee Ann didn't realize the impact of that until after her own son, Greg, was dead and she, too, yearned to hear his name. So many bereaved parents have experienced this same feeling.

During the last few years of Betty's life, Lee Ann would sit with her aunt for hours and talk. Betty talked about what she had gone through, the trials, the grief and the tears. When Betty gave her last TV interview, it was about hope. Betty Jane Spencer died in 2004, but it wasn't until September 19, 2005, that Lee Ann understood what her Aunt was saying. In September 2005, Lee Ann's son Greg died and all of Betty's words began washing over her.



Gregory Hutson
4/29/1992-9/19/2005

To the end, Betty talked of HOPE. She showed everyone around her what Hope was. Finding Hope is not always easy, we each make a choice to seek it out for ourselves and to share it with others. Betty made the following comment when asked about her legislative experience at both state and national levels, "I didn't even know which door to use at the Statehouse," but Betty found her door and walked through it. Betty stepped through those thresholds and found hope for her and for so many others along the way. As bereaved parents, we also come to many doors. We open some, and decide that some should remain shut.

Aunt Betty said, "I have learned many valuable lessons since the boys were murdered. On the night of their death, I learned that I am not afraid to die, and since then the most important lesson learned is that I am not afraid to live." Lee Ann said, "I get up every morning and takes a step because Betty talked and I listened to her Hope. I am living, breathing, and learning more about grief and hope every day."



Bereaved Parents of the USA is a door of Hope that Lee Ann Hutson chose to open. In reaching out to other bereaved parents, her wish for other mothers is that they will experience small steps of healing and hope and that one day, they will see themselves passing it on to others.

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Included in this article are excerpts from Lee Ann Hutson's article that appeared in the Summer 2014 issue of the National Bereaved Parents of the USA Newsletter, as well as the on-line article entitled "Soul Survivor" on www.wthr.com about Betty Jane Spencer's courageous life and the gift of Hope she unknowingly gave to her family and many others.

Written in memory of Betty Jane Spencer, Greg Brooks, Ralph, Reeve and Raymond Spencer, and Gregory Hutson.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read Betty Jane Spencer's obituary. Her courage, strength and hope enabled her to accomplish so much in honor of her sons.