



Donna Mabe Brunson with her family: husband, Mark; son, Jason; and stepson, Benjamin.

## HEALING BROKEN HEARTS

Women use their own tragedies to help others

BY LAYLA FARMER  
THE CHRONICLE

It's a parent's worse nightmare — losing a child. But losing a child in a sudden and violent manner can be even more devastating.

"When somebody takes your loved one, it's just different," said Paula Hawkins, whose 19-year-old son Jonathan was murdered in 2006 in what police have told her was a "robbery gone wrong." He was robbed by two acquaintances and shot in the abdomen at point-blank range, just three houses down from the place where Hawkins still resides.

"That's not to minimize anybody else's loss, but it's different."

In addition to the varied raw emotions that accompany grieving, the families of murder victims must grapple with the legal system and try to make sense of a tragedy that was intentionally forced upon them. Jonathan's alleged assailants are still awaiting trial, his mother says.

"This death has caused ... sickness, spiritually, physically, mentally," Hawkins related. "It can be draining, and then dealing with the courts makes it worse. To be honest, I would have to say if it wasn't for God ... and my relationship with Him, I would have lost my mind."

The passing of time has afforded Hawkins some healing, she says, but she still encounters many rough patches along the way. Having lost her sister to a long illness just three months prior to her son's murder, Hawkins and her family have unfortunately seen grief from all angles. She has made her peace with her sister's death but to this day, she says she cannot reconcile the tragedy that was her son's final chapter. It is a very lonely feeling, she says.

Donna Mabe Brunson's 19-year-old daughter Ashley was murdered by her estranged husband, Jeff Neil Garner, two years ago.

"You want to scream, you want to — ooh! It hurts so bad. It's never been such an excruciating hurt," she said of the experience. "Someone who has not been through that, they don't understand."

The rage is overwhelming, says Brunson.

"I used to be a very happy go lucky person," she said. "I think now I have a lot more anger. I'm angry at him (Garner), but sometimes I get angry with God."

Brunson endured the agony of witnessing her daughter's brutal stabbing, which took place in the home she shared with her daughter and 20-month-old grandson. Brunson says she fought to protect the teen, but



Paula Hawkins

was unable to subdue an enraged Garner, who was sentenced to life in prison for the crime last spring.

"That is my guilt — that I could not save my baby," she related, tears welling in her eyes. "I still have that guilt; I probably will for a very long time."

Both Brunson and Hawkins participated in vigils for their children put on by Vigils for Healing, a local nonprofit that hosts vigils in memory of local murder victims at the scene of the crime. Sensing the commonality in their experiences, Vigils' Co-Director Tracey Maxwell introduced the two women, who became fast friends.

In talking about their own grief, Hawkins and Brunson say they found many common threads.

"We laughed, we cried, we showed each other pictures of our children," Hawkins remembered.

Talking about their heartache to someone who had been there was helpful, both women say. With the support of Vigils for Healing, the two mothers are now reaching out to others like them with the inception of Broken Hearts, Brighter Days, a support group for women who are mourning the murder of a loved one. Housed in Green Street Church, the bimonthly gathering is open to women of any, or no faith. The women say they are hopeful that the group will give others what they so needed in their darkest hours — a sympathetic, and knowing, ear — and hope that brighter days will someday come.

"I'm not 100 percent (healed); I can promise you that," Hawkins said. "But I knew through helping other people, I could be healed too."

"Broken Hearts, Better Days," will hold meetings on the second and fourth Tuesday of every month, beginning August 26. Meetings will be from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at Green Street United Methodist Church, 639 South Green Street, Winston-Salem,

27101. Free, light refreshments provided. Registration not required unless you have special needs.

For more information call Paula Hawkins at 749-4691 or go to [www.vigilsforhealing.org](http://www.vigilsforhealing.org).

## News Clips

### A&T homecoming applications available

Applications are now available for the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University annual homecoming parade. The parade is part of the university's homecoming activities and will be held Saturday, Oct. 11, at 8 a.m.

The cost for the parade is \$150 (non-refundable) and includes one float or vehicle; a walking unit; two horses; two cycles; and, two go-carts.

The cost for an additional entry is \$75 based on the above items and availability. All applications must be turned in by Wednesday, Sept. 24.

Parade application forms can be secured at <http://www.ncatedu/~newsinfo/homecoming/2008/> or from the Office of Student Development, located in Murphy Hall, room 104.

For additional information call 336-334-7792 or e-mail [osd@ncat.edu](mailto:osd@ncat.edu).

### Book details state's scenic routes

The N.C. Department of Transportation has released the fourth edition of the N.C. Scenic Byways Book, which provides readers with detailed maps, descriptions and photos of the 51 routes NCDOT has designated as N.C. Scenic Byways.

Scenic Byways are intended as alternative routes to traditional interstates and highways. Roads designated as Scenic Byways portray the diverse beauty, cultural and historical aspects of North Carolina. They take motorists through areas such as the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Outer Banks, along historic trails and by

waterfalls.

Byways are listed according to their location in the state's Mountain, Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions. This year's book also contains information on four routes recently designated as byways not included in previous editions. These routes include the Aversabro Battlefield Scenic Byway, Cape Fear Historic Byway, Pisgah Loop Scenic Byway and U.S. 421 Scenic Byway.

The book is free; however, a \$5 donation is requested to offset the costs for future publications and shipping.

To request your copy of the N.C. Scenic Byways Book, go to [www.ncdot.org/~scenic](http://www.ncdot.org/~scenic). Requests can also be made by visiting [www.ncdot.org](http://www.ncdot.org) then clicking on "Contact Us" and submitting a request, or by calling NCDOT's Customer Service office at 1-877-DOT-4-YOU (1-877-368-4968).

### West graduate completes airman training

Air Force Airman 1st Class Patrick M. Muckey has graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.

During the six weeks of training, the airman studied the Air Force mission, organization, and military customs and courtesies; performed drill and ceremony marches, and received physical training, rifle marksmanship, field training exercises, and special training in human relations.

In addition, airmen who complete basic training earn credits toward an associate degree through the Community College of the Air Force.

He is the son of Patricia Parker of Lewisville and the

brother of Maria Muckey of Asheville.

Muckey is a 2005 graduate of West Forsyth High School.

### Stephens makes Emory's Dean's List

Katherine Stephens of Winston-Salem, the daughter of Dr. Wayland Chad Stephens and Dr. Jane Stephens, was named to the Dean's List of Emory College, the undergraduate, liberal arts college of Emory University in Atlanta, for the 2008 spring semester.

Students must be in the top 20 percent of Emory College or have approximately a 3.859 grade point average or higher to be named to the Dean's List.

### Historic photos of kids on display at Old Salem

"Lasting Expressions of Childhood," an exhibit of 35 historical photographs, will be on display through Sept. 21 in the auditorium of Old Salem's Frank L. Horton Museum Center.

The exhibit is a project of The Children's Museum at Old Salem Museum and Gardens. The photos are from the Old Salem Collection and date back as far as the 1870s. They images of children taken here in Winston-Salem, and as far away as Alaska and Oklahoma.

The Old Salem Children's Museum will also offer a new puppet show premiering Sept. 20 starring Herr Kater.

Admission to the exhibit is free with a Children's Museum or an All-In-One ticket. For more information, call the Visitor's Center at Old Salem, at 336-721-7300, or visit [www.oldsalem.org](http://www.oldsalem.org).

### Guy makes Dean's List

Courtney Guy has been placed on the Dean's List at the University of West Georgia because of high scholastic achievement during the past semester.

She is the daughter of Cheryl Guy and the granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. James "Bunker Dee" Garner.



Muckey

We have an exceptional program for first-time homebuyers. So, all you have to worry about is where to put the grill.

Our First-Time Homebuyers Program is more than just a nice interest rate.

We eliminate frustrating fees and our loan officers don't work on commission, so you don't have to worry about getting put into the wrong loan. And since we don't sell our loans, you'll come directly to us with any questions you might have. It's all just another way we look out for our customers, and make sure they go through the financial side of life with peace of mind.

**Piedmont**  
FEDERAL  
SAVINGS BANK

MORTGAGES | SAVINGS | SOLUTIONS



WWW.PIEDMONTFEDERAL.COM • 336.770.1000 • MEMBER FDIC