

ABOUT JULIA
By Susan Pierpoint
Mother of a Classmate

Most of the time, when people say they share your loss, they mean they feel sorry that it happened. Sorry that someone they care about is hurting. This is the same and also different. There are children who don't really belong to us, they belong to a separate destiny (this much is true of all of them) so big that people almost strangers to the family begin to hope and plan for it. Julia was one of those, and I was the mom of a classmate, watching her on the soccer field when I saw it.

How could anyone that beautiful be that ferocious, I wondered. Looks like that are usually a disabling condition for young women. For her, it was only a medium-the outward manifestation of a spirited mind so keen, so lovely and, in a competitive moment so fierce that the opposition was daunted. Good tools for the world, I thought, and for the first time I wondered what she would do when she grew up. And I was glad, not incidentally, that she was on our team.

She was coming of age among a group of extraordinary youngsters, the kind who make you feel like there is hope for the world. She led with an unusual combination of verve and compassion, with a fearless devotion to her friends. She called me one day and pointed out, as tactfully as a determined fifteen-year old could manage, that it was two months after my daughter's birthday so she had decided to take matters in hand and give her a surprise birthday party, which she did. I was head over heels after that and more impressed than ever with the good fortune of having landed on the same team.

When I came to know her parents, the mystery of Julia's origin was solved. We spent a fair amount of time together, most of it in parking lots late at night or sitting on the edge of fields early in the morning. They are special people, full of grace and intelligence and gifted with remarkable political savvy. The last of several dreams unfolded itself and Julia's future started to look like leadership on a very large scale to at least one of the grownups savoring the view of her life.

Her work in debate was, it seemed to me, just the right preparation for the future leader of a nation losing its way. I didn't have a crystal ball, I was only watching and thinking about the possibilities for her and the wonderful people around her. What I never realized was just how full of hope, confident hope, I had become about the future.

So it seems different this time. There is more than feeling sorry about someone else's loss. More even than a loss of my own, though I feel that keenly too. More even than the added pain of seeing our children, her friends, hurting and trying so hard to figure out the unfathomable mystery of death. There is a code that won't get cracked, a problem that won't get solved, or at least not as soon, because we lost the promise of the extraordinary destiny of this young woman. We are bereft on a larger scale.

Still, however, she leads. In the days between the car accident and her death, I learned about breath prayer, about living in a state of prayer and, in a way I never expected, about answer to

the prayer for a miracle. The morning of the day she died, it became apparent that the miracle we yearned for all those days and nights had actually been among us for a little over sixteen years. I saw the young people who have known her best take it up and give it life, with respect and with love. I saw that they will claim the future still, now partly for her, in her name, in her memory, each of them changed forever by the miracle of her life. In their mourning, in their healing, the hope named Julia begins to live again.