

# Wetterling

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Everything about our lives, our friends, our children was put under a microscope.

All I could do was shake my head and try to shake out the scary, dark thoughts. I curled up in bed, pulling the covers over my head stating clearly that I can't do this. It hurts too much, I'm never going to get out of this bed... but then I saw Jacob curled up in a ball saying the same things "I can't do this. It hurts too much. They're never going to find me." And I sat up. "Hold on Jacob. Don't give up. We will find you, but you have to stay strong." I got up. I would learn whatever I could. Do whatever I could to find Jacob and bring him home. I owed it to him. It's a promise you make when your child is born that you will care for them. Protect them from harm. Keep them safe.

I hadn't done that. I started asking a lot of questions and finding other resources I didn't know existed, I talked to our case manager at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children who kept telling me to not give up. Kids come home. You need to stay strong. I asked,

"How? What has to happen?"

I collected stories of children who were recovered and came home alive. I studied how they got there and plotted out ways to make that happen for Jacob.

The more I learned, the more I needed to share with other parents to keep their children safe from those who would harm them. I spoke to everyone who would listen and shared the hope.

Jacob's strong spirit guided us.

I met hundreds of other searching parents and we helped one another stay strong and keep hope alive. It was good, meaningful life-saving work that I did mostly on the federal level finding gaps in what was there for parents. What gaps were there in the investigation? What else was needed to help law enforcement bring more of our missing children home?

I became chair of the Board of Directors for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. My work was so deeply personal and life changing. I lived on hope and shared it broadly to anybody who would listen until

August of 2016.

We heard from the US Attorney that a longtime suspect in Jacob's abduction was willing to plea bargain to tell us what happened on October 22, 1989 and lead investigators to Jacob.

No. This can't be the answer, I pleaded. We had prayed for answers and I so wanted Jacob to be one of those miracle cases of children who survived and be returned alive. I was disappointed in God, and the pain of learning what happened to Jacob was totally unbearable. Hearing his last words, his last living moments filled me with more than I could handle.

I felt guilty for not being there for him. I felt worthless as a parent. I felt inadequate with words to comfort our other children and the grandchildren who never knew Jacob. But I couldn't change the answers we got.

We made it through the hearings, carried once again by the support of so many.

Eventually, everyone went back to work but my work WAS finding Jacob and sharing HOPE.

Who are you now? Where

does one start to rebuild after 27 years of hope and a promise to Jacob. The law enforcement that I had talked to at least weekly were gone. I was afraid to reach out to the friends I had made who were still-searching parents. I had no hope to offer them. I represented the worst ending one could get. I was once again, totally lost.

My friend Alison called from the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center and said everyone's calling and wanting to know what they can do to help, is there anything I can tell them? I shook my head despondently and then shouted yes!

Tell them to hold hands, play with your children, Be with friends, say a prayer, light a candle, help your neighbor, create joy.

"Eat ice cream?" She asked "Yes. Eat ice cream."

I so craved the world that Jacob knew that was kinder and more caring. I needed to find it.

Writing and reflecting with my friend Joy on a memoir has helped me gain back my power and find my voice.

I know now that I can still fight for that world that Jacob knew and believed in. I can help to build it for Lili, Izzi, Maizie, Belle, Jake and Finn.

I can share lessons learned with law enforcement so they can run investigations quicker and more efficiently knowing about all of the resources and technology advancements.

I can find my spark again by listening with my heart.

I can strive to be a better person by making a world that is more caring and safe for children.

I can teach our grandchildren how to be kind and gentle with others.

I can still believe that together, we can build a better world.

Jacob taught me to love deeply, live fully and never

give up. I can still hear his voice in the gentle breeze, see his smile through the sunshine, sense his hopes and dreams in the eyes of our grandchildren

and know that Jacob is alive in my heart, and even in my starting over, nobody can ever take that away.

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### "Just passerine by..."

Photo by Terri Robichon

A white-breasted nuthatch paid a visit to the ever-busy birdfeeder of Hawick photographer Terri Robichon early Monday morning. Although a common year-round species, they can be a challenge to photograph, said Robichon. "Like most small birds, they move quickly." Females, like this one, she adds, can easily be distinguished from males based on the color of their caps - females' heads are grey, while males' are black.



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